

God's Covenant People:
What is Modern Israel?

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03/31/2026

Introduction

On October 9, 2023, Senator Ted Cruz appeared on Tucker Carlson's online program during a period of heightened public debate surrounding U.S. support for Israel following the outbreak of renewed violence in the region. As they spoke of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Cruz argued, "growing up in Sunday School, I was taught that those who bless Israel will be blessed, and those who curse Israel will be cursed." Carlson pushed back on this, asking him where specifically in the Bible this was, and more importantly, if he considered the nation of Israel today to have the same promises given to it as the nation of the Old Testament. Cruz defined his stance: the modern day nation of Israel is the same as the nation of Israel in Genesis, and nations around them are beholden to the same blessings and curses given to Israel in that time period. This exchange highlights the prevalent claim in modern Christendom that the nation of Israel has several promises given by God outside the New Covenant that are yet to be fulfilled. What makes this belief especially crucial is that it colors real-world foreign policy. Therefore it is of critical importance to evaluate whether Scripture actually assigns ongoing covenantal or territorial significance to present-day ethnic Israel. I will be arguing they do not.

Before we begin the case, let us first clarify a couple things. The doctrine that Israel has ongoing covenantal promises that persist to this day will be referred to as Restoration theology, or Restorationism; the doctrine that promises given to Israel are fulfilled in the church will be referred to as Fulfillment Theology.

An important piece of context for Fulfillment Theology is its history. Despite it being today almost controversial, it had emerged organically within early Christian interpretation as the church wrestled with how Old Testament promises relate to Christ and the multinational people of God. In the 2nd century, Justin Martyr argued explicitly that the Church is the true Israel, writing in *Dialogue with Trypho*, "the true spiritual Israel...are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ." This trajectory continued with Irenaeus of Lyons, who saw Christ recapitulating Israel's story, and was systematized more fully by Augustine of Hippo, who interpreted the

promises to Israel as fulfilled in the Church, stating in *The City of God*, “the Church...is itself the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven.” Medieval theology largely maintained this framework, with figures like Thomas Aquinas affirming that “the Old Law was a figure of the New Law,” indicating typological fulfillment in Christ. During the Reformation, John Calvin reinforced continuity between Israel and the Church, asserting in his *Institutes* that “all the promises made to Abraham are fulfilled in Christ,” and rejecting any radical discontinuity between the covenants. This fulfillment-oriented hermeneutic remained dominant in Protestant orthodoxy until the 19th century, when John Nelson Darby introduced a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, arguing that “the Church is a heavenly people...Israel an earthly people,” a framework later popularized in the Scofield Reference Bible, which codified dispensationalism and challenged the longstanding fulfillment paradigm by reasserting a future for national Israel distinct from the Church.

Dispensationalism, put simply, is a theology that asserts God works in different specific periods of human history, one of which being the Millennium, a thousand year period in which Jesus will return and reign over Earth before the final judgment. The argument for Restorationism within this system is put most eloquently by Charles Ryrie: “The Premillennial system rests on the consistent use of the normal or plain method of interpretation. If the promises made to Israel are not fulfilled literally to that nation, then there is no reason why the promises made to the Church should be fulfilled literally either. The issue is not merely eschatological but theological, for it concerns the faithfulness of God. If God has made unconditional covenants with Israel involving land, a nation, and a throne, and if these have not yet been fulfilled in the history of Israel, then they must be fulfilled in the future. This necessitates the restoration of Israel as a nation and the reestablishment of her in the land under the rule of the Messiah.” In other words, if Israel has promises that are unfulfilled, Premillennialism is a necessary corollary.

Before we make the case for Fulfillment Theology, let us first cover our stasis points. To begin, it can be easy to stop at any passage that refers to God’s people in the Old Testament and take it to mean national Israel, because most of the time, that is what it’s talking about in context. However, the fact of the matter is, when it comes to prophecies and promises, there is acknowledged ambiguity around Old Testament language across theological schools of thought. A famous example lies in Isaiah-”You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Isaiah 49:3) -which complicates the assumption that “Israel” must always refer strictly to the ethnic nation. In this case, “Israel” is applied to a singular Servant figure, widely understood to be the Messiah, showing that the term can function representationally rather than merely nationally.

This dynamic appears through the Book of Isaiah, where Jesus is referred to as the Servant. He is sometimes distinguished from Israel (e.g., called to restore Israel) and yet also identified with Israel. This dual usage suggests that “Israel” can operate on multiple levels: as a nation, as a faithful remnant, or as a representative individual who embodies the people.

Another example of language suggesting national Israel being used for Jesus can be found in Hosea, with the phrase “Out of Egypt I called my son”(Hosea 11:1). This language is a reference to national Israel, yet it is applied directly to Jesus in Matthew: “He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was* to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”” (Matthew 2:15)

We see that prophecies concerning Israel cannot be taken at face value, because the nation of Israel has inherent symbolic significance. Old Testament language—especially terms like “Israel,” “servant,” and “seed”—is not always used in a strictly one-dimensional way. As Geerhardus Vos once said, “It should be remembered that the name ‘Israel’ is not always used in the same sense in Scripture. Sometimes it denotes the nation as a whole, sometimes the spiritual kernel within the nation, and sometimes even finds its highest realization in the Servant of the Lord. The same holds true for the concept of the ‘seed’ of Abraham, which, while in one sense referring to his physical descendants, in another sense points forward to a more restricted, and ultimately to a single, Messianic fulfillment.” Instead, it often carries a layered significance that unfolds progressively across Scripture. In this case, it is clear prophecies regarding Israel should be examined closely.

The Abrahamic Covenant

To begin, are the promises God gave national Israel still in effect? It is worth noting that the land promise in the Abrahamic covenant is exclusively given after several other promises, including the blessing of the nations around them, and only a few times is the land promised. The Covenant God made with Abraham is repeated through Genesis, in chapter 12; “And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed...To your descendants I will give this land.” Chapter 13; “For all the land which you see, I will give to you and to your seed forever”, chapter 15; “To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the

Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.” Chapter 17; “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give the land to you in which you are a sojourner, and to your seed after you, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession”. And Chapter 22. “And said, “ ‘By Myself have I sworn,’ says the LORD, ‘because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son; That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Now through these passages there are three specific promises in the covenant, one, that Abraham's seed will multiply, two, that through his seed the nations will be blessed, and three, that the land of Canaan will be given to his descendants. The terms of the covenant that Restorationists point to are the eternity of the land promise and, to a lesser extent the fact that some of the land laid out in the promise was arguably never occupied. In the short term, it is clear the land covenant applies to his direct descendants, as they do inherit the land of Canaan. From this it is gathered the “seed of Abraham” is simply another way of referring to his natural descendants. However, the ethnic people of Israel did not bless the nations around them, as part of this covenant laid out; they did indirectly, by birthing Jesus, but Jesus was the one who blessed the nations of the Earth.

Furthermore, this assumption, that the seed of Abraham is a synonym for Abraham's descendants, is challenged by many passages in the New Testament. Take John 8:39-40: “They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus *said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.”” This passage indicates an understanding that the children of Abraham are covenantally defined not by lineage, but by devotion. Paul later expounds in Romans 11:17-24 that not all of Abraham are of Abraham, and that some branches will be removed and some grafted on. Now in the context of Romans, Paul isn’t talking about the nation of Israel, or promises given to it. He is speaking of followers of Christ, equating them to the seed of Abraham, subject to the promises given to Abraham in Genesis. Now this raises a question; why then does God promise to the seed of Abraham the land in the same breath as he pledges to be their God? (“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to

be God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give the land to you in which you are a sojourner, and to your seed after you, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession”(Gen 17:7-8)) In Romans 4:13, Paul brings up the promises given to Abraham, but he describes it as a promise to inherit the “world”. Now this specific promise, the way it is phrased, doesn’t appear in Genesis. Abraham is promised a plurality of descendants, who will bless the nations around them, but only the land they will inherit. Paul seems to interpret this land as the world.

Now while there is a problem with this view-it requires interpreting a direct promise of a real detailed plot of land as spiritual- I would argue the Restorationist view offers a deeper problem, in that it requires reading the phrase seed of Abraham two different ways in the same sentence and context.

Restorationists point to specific boundaries God lays out that Israel never fully reigned sovereign over, such as Genesis 15:18, (“To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates”). However, the Old Testament clearly treats these boundaries as fulfilled, in Joshua 21:43 Joshua states “the LORD gave to Israel all the land he swore his fathers,” and later Solomon reigned over all the literal boundaries set out in Genesis. The promise of land was fulfilled, the only question remaining is whether the literal land promise was meant to be eternal. In light of Romans 4:13, as well as verses like 1 Peter 2:9-10: “But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God’s* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.”, this verse gives followers of Christ the same titles as Israel were given. Old Testament covenant promises concerning the land were never unconditional. While the Abrahamic covenant guarantees blessing (Gen 12:1–3), the land component is administered through the Mosaic covenant, which is explicitly conditional. Deuteronomy 28 warns that disobedience will result in exile, and Deuteronomy 30:17–18 states that Israel will “perish” from the land if it turns away from the Lord. Israel’s later expulsion is attributed directly to covenant violation in 2 Kings 17:7–23. If land retention depends on obedience, and the covenant is broken, then the land promise cannot be claimed unconditionally by later generations.

The New Testament further clarifies that the promises given to Abraham concerning his “seed” apply to spiritual rather than merely biological descendants. Paul identifies Christ as the true

seed of Abraham in Galatians: “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ”.(Gal 3:16) He also states that all who belong to Christ—Jew or Gentile—are Abraham’s heirs (Gal 3:29). Romans 4:11–12 (“and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.”) teaches that Abraham is the father of all who believe, not of one ethnic lineage. If inheritance is defined spiritually in the New Testament, then ethnic lineage alone cannot claim covenantal entitlement.

Prophecies

In addition to promises given to Israel, we must also grapple with prophecies concerning them. Firstly, we find a prophecy in Deuteronomy 30, concerning what appears to be Israel: “So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. The LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the LORD AND observe all His commandments which I command you today. Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.” (Duet 30:1-10) In light of our previous section, how should we take this passage? Since prophetic texts can best be interpreted in light of corresponding texts, it is fortunate, this passage’s language is echoed through the Prophets.

For example, a related prophecy is found in Amos. Amos 9:11–12 foretells the restoration of “David’s fallen tent” and Israel’s renewed possession of the nations. At face value, this appears to describe a national revival with geopolitical implications. Once again, we must see how the New Testament interprets this passage. In Acts, at a time when there was great debate over the nature of Gentile inclusion, the Apostle James cites this passage in context of including Gentiles without making them adhere to the Mosaic Law. Rather than postponing Amos’s prophecy to a future national restoration, James explicitly identifies its fulfillment in the present mission to the Gentiles. The “rebuilding” of David’s tent is thus understood not as a political reconstitution of Israel, but as the establishment of a Messianic community in which Gentiles participate as equals. Similar prophecies are fulfilled through the New Testament.

Similar patterns appear in Acts 2, where Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled at Pentecost, and throughout Acts, where Old Testament promises are consistently interpreted as inaugurated realities rather than deferred expectations. As G. K. Beale observes, “James understands the prophecy of Amos as fulfilled in the present Gentile mission... not in a future restoration of national Israel” (*A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 2011, p. 731). Likewise, Richard B. Hays notes that early Christians read Israel’s restoration promises as fulfilled in the multinational people of God (*Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 2016). Jeremiah’s promise of a “new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah” is often cited as evidence for a future national restoration. However, Hebrews, particularly chapters 8–10, explicitly applies this covenant to the present Church, declaring that it has already been inaugurated through Christ’s priestly work. The relevant verses in these chapters are so numerous, I here offer a condensed version: “We have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens... a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man... for they serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things... but now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, as the mediator of a better covenant... ‘I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts... and they shall be My people’... When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He made the first obsolete...(Hebrews 8)

...Christ appeared as high priest of the good things to come... He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle... not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood... cleansing our conscience from dead works... For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant.....He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself... For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come... can never make perfect... but ‘a

body You have prepared for Me'... 'Behold, I have come to do Your will'... By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...(Hebrews 9)

...But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God... For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified... 'I will remember their sins no more'... Therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus... by a new and living way... let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." (Hebrews 10)

The author of Hebrews not only applies the promise to a mixed audience but also insists that the old covenant is now obsolete (Heb. 8:13). This indicates that the new covenant is not awaiting a future national fulfillment but is already operative in the life of the Church. Moreover, Hebrews consistently reinterprets Israel's institutions—temple, priesthood, and sacrifice—as fulfilled and transformed in Christ. This broader theological framework makes it unlikely that the covenant itself would revert to a future ethnic or national form. O. Palmer Robertson concludes, "The New Testament makes explicit that the new covenant promised to Israel is fulfilled in the church" (*The Christ of the Covenants*, 1980, p. 289). Similarly, Anthony Hoekema writes, "The new covenant is not for a future Jewish nation but is now in effect for all believers" (*The Bible and the Future*, 1979, p. 197). Ezekiel's visions of restoration—including the promise of a new heart (ch. 36) and the valley of dry bones (ch. 37)—are often interpreted as predicting a future national revival of Israel. However, the internal logic of these passages, combined with their canonical development, suggests a different conclusion.

The central promise of Ezekiel 36 is the transformation of the human heart through the Spirit. This theme is directly taken up in the New Testament (e.g., John 3; Titus 3:5) as a description of spiritual regeneration. The imagery of resurrection in Ezekiel 37 likewise aligns with broader Biblical patterns in which resurrection language is used metaphorically for spiritual renewal (cf. Eph. 2:1–6). Furthermore, the surrounding context, especially Ezekiel's temple vision (chs. 40–48)—is widely interpreted symbolically, as it is never literally realized in Israel's history. The New Testament instead identifies Christ and the Church as the true temple (John 2:19–21; Eph. 2:21). Geerhardus Vos therefore argues that restoration prophecies "receive their final fulfillment in the new covenant community" (*Biblical Theology*, 1948, pp. 377–379). G. K. Beale similarly concludes that Ezekiel's temple and restoration imagery are fulfilled in the Church as God's dwelling (*The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 2004). Isaiah's prophetic vision increasingly expands the scope of God's people beyond ethnic Israel. In Isaiah 49:6, the Servant is

commissioned not only to restore Israel but also to be “a light to the nations.” Isaiah 56 goes further, explicitly including foreigners within the covenant community. This expansion is not peripheral but central to Isaiah’s theology.

Other passages (e.g., Isaiah 19:24–25) even describe traditional enemies such as Egypt and Assyria as “my people,” signaling a radical redefinition of covenant identity. N. T. Wright emphasizes that Israel’s vocation “was always to be the means of blessing the nations,” a mission fulfilled in the Messiah and his people (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2013). John Goldingay likewise notes that Isaiah envisions a community defined not ethnically but by relationship to Yahweh (*The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, 2014). Hosea’s prophecy that those once called “not my people” will be called “my people” originally refers to the restoration of apostate Israel. However, Paul directly applies this language to Gentiles in Romans 9:24–26. This is a clear case of a promise given to Israel is now fulfilled in those who were never ethnically part of Israel. This move is consistent with Paul’s broader argument that “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom. 9:6). Douglas Moo explains that Paul “applies to Gentiles a prophecy originally spoken of Israel,” indicating a redefinition of God’s people (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 1996, p. 624). Isaiah 10 introduces a crucial theological principle: only a remnant of Israel will be saved. Even when Israel is described as numerous “as the sand of the sea,” only a portion returns. This theme runs throughout the Old Testament and is explicitly taken up by Paul in Romans 9–11 to explain why many Israelites do not believe. In Romans 9:27-33, Paul uses Isaiah 10:22-3 and 28:16: “Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY... What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. Why? Because *they did* not *pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written,

“BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE,

AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

This passage demonstrates that prophetic expectation has always been selective rather than comprehensive. Thomas Schreiner notes, “The remnant theme shows that God never intended to save every ethnic Israelite” (*Romans*, 1998, p. 506). This significantly weakens claims that

prophecy guarantees a future salvation of the entire nation. The land promise, central to the Abrahamic covenant, is also reinterpreted in the New Testament. Romans 4:13 expands the promise so that Abraham becomes heir not merely of a specific territory but of “the world.” This reflects a broader biblical trajectory in which the land functions typologically, pointing forward to the new creation (cf. Isaiah 65–66). O. Palmer Robertson writes, “The land becomes a type of the ultimate inheritance—the world” (*The Israel of God*, 2000, p. 19), while Anthony Hoekema concludes that the promise is fulfilled in the new earth (*The Bible and the Future*, 1979, p. 199). Deuteronomy 30:1–10 presents a foundational “restoration” text, promising that Israel will return from exile and experience renewal. However, the passage is explicitly conditional: restoration occurs only “when you return to the Lord... and obey his voice.” The central promise—God will “circumcise your heart” (v. 6)—is later interpreted in the New Testament as spiritual regeneration (Rom. 2:28–29; Col. 2:11). Moreover, Paul directly cites Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10:6–8, applying it to the present proclamation of the gospel rather than a future national event. Christopher J. H. Wright emphasizes that the passage “does not guarantee automatic restoration but calls for repentance as the condition of return” (*Deuteronomy*, 1996). Peter Craigie similarly describes it as a covenantal possibility rather than an unconditional prophecy (*The Book of Deuteronomy*, 1976). Douglas Moo adds that Paul’s use shows the text is fulfilled in the present availability of salvation through Christ (*Romans*, 1996).

Premillennialism

Premillennialism, particularly in its dispensational form, has been one of the most influential eschatological systems in modern evangelicalism. It posits a future, earthly, thousand-year reign of Christ following His return, often accompanied by a two-stage second coming and a distinction between Israel and the Church. Premillennialism is intrinsically linked to Restorationism because without that framework, it is highly impractical to allow for an earthly fulfillment of land promises at the same time the old earth passes away. An indirect supporting pillar of Restorationism, this framework has been challenged extensively by theologians such as Kim Riddlebarger, Anthony A. Hoekema, G. K. Beale, and Herman Bavinck.

A central feature of many premillennial systems is the division of Christ’s return into two phases: a secret rapture and a later visible return. Critics argue that this bifurcation lacks clear biblical support.

Anthony A. Hoekema states: “The New Testament nowhere clearly teaches a two-stage second coming of Christ.” Similarly, Kim Riddlebarger argues that such a view is constructed from inference rather than explicit teaching: “The idea of a secret rapture followed by a later return of Christ is not derived from any single passage of Scripture, but from a system imposed upon the text.” Passages such as John 5:28–29 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 depict a single, climactic return in which resurrection and judgment occur simultaneously, undermining the premillennial framework. Premillennialism depends heavily on a literal interpretation of the “thousand years” in Revelation 20. However, this is inconsistent with the rest of Revelation, which is typically taken as apocalyptic and highly symbolic. G. K. Beale writes: “The number ‘thousand’ in Revelation 20 is figurative, signifying a long, complete period of time rather than a literal duration.” Likewise, Kim Riddlebarger emphasizes: “To insist that the thousand years must be taken literally, while the rest of the book is filled with symbols, is inconsistent.”

The fact that numbers are symbolic in Revelation is hardly disputed. In Revelation 7 and 14, the number 144,000 is used interchangeably with the term multitude. The number is derived from the tribes of Israel (12000 from each tribe) yet that would be impossible if literal, as most modern Jews cannot trace back to a specific tribe, and do not confine themselves within a tribe in any sense, ethnic, geopolitical, or otherwise. According to Chabad.org, one of the most reputable Jewish organizations in the world, “For the most part, tribal identities have been lost through the generations, and the majority of Jews do not know which tribe they are from.” The number one thousand likewise is interpreted symbolically, not merely in Revelation, but also in Psalms (“For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills.” Psalm 50:10), Deuteronomy (“Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments;” Duet. 7:9), and 2 Peter (“But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” 2 Peter 3:8)

Premillennialism assumes chronological progression from Revelation 19 to 20. However, many scholars argue that Revelation employs recapitulation. G. K. Beale explains: “Revelation 20 does not follow Revelation 19 chronologically but recapitulates the same period from another perspective.” Kim Riddlebarger similarly notes: “The structure of Revelation is cyclical, not strictly linear.” This undermines the premillennial claim that the millennium necessarily follows Christ’s return in time.

Premillennialism typically places Satan's binding in the future, yet the New Testament speaks of it as a present reality. Anthony A. Hoekema writes: "The binding of Satan described in Revelation 20 began with the first coming of Christ." Kim Riddlebarger adds: "Satan is bound in the sense that he can no longer deceive the nations as he once did." This interpretation aligns with passages such as Matthew 12:28–29 (but if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.) and John 12:31 (Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out), which suggest that the millennium is already underway.

Premillennialism posits multiple resurrections, with some being raised on Jesus return and some on the final judgment, but Scripture consistently teaches a single, general resurrection. Herman Bavinck states: "Scripture knows of but one resurrection of the dead, not two separated by a thousand years." Anthony A. Hoekema concurs: "The Bible consistently speaks of the resurrection of believers and unbelievers as occurring at the same time." Texts such as John 5:28–29 and Acts 24:15 support this unified view.

Premillennialism emphasizes a future earthly kingdom wherein Israel will be restored, yet the New Testament teaches that the kingdom is already present. Matthew 12:28 implies the "kingdom of God begins with Jesus: "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." this idea is mirrored in Luke 17:20-21 ("The kingdom of God is in your midst.") and Mark 1:15 ("The time is fulfilled... the kingdom of God is at hand.") Kim Riddlebarger writes: "The kingdom of God is a present reality, inaugurated by Christ's first coming." G. K. Beale adds: "Believers are already reigning with Christ in a spiritual sense."

Dispensational Premillennialism distinguishes sharply between Israel and the Church, but critics argue for a unified people of God. Herman Bavinck states: "The New Testament knows of only one people of God, not two." Kim Riddlebarger similarly argues: "The dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been removed in Christ." This interpretation is supported by passages such as Ephesians 2:14–16 and Galatians 3:29.

Premillennialism teaches that Christ will reign physically on earth, yet rebellion still occurs at the end of the Millennium. Herman Bavinck critiques this tension: "It is difficult to reconcile a perfect reign of Christ with the presence of sin and rebellion." Indeed, nowhere is it suggested that Christ would ever reign over a world that still has sin.

One of the strongest critiques is that the millennium appears explicitly in only one passage, Revelation 20:1-8. The passage in question: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. and he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” It is theologically risky to base eschatological understanding on a single passage in a symbolic text, and major texts such as Matthew 24 and 1 Corinthians 15 make no mention of a future thousand-year reign.

Counterargument 1: Israel’s return

Now, there are common criticisms of Fulfillment Theology that, due to their nature, could not be addressed directly within the body. The first of these is this: why, if Israel is no longer God’s covenant people, have they survived for so long and maintained their culture, and why was the nation of Israel reestablished in 1948? While this argument may seem trivial- the premise only lends itself to induction- I believe it can and should be addressed. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that Israel’s survival from the time of 70 A.D. to their refounding is highly unlikely and without precedent, and that divine intervention serves as a likely explanation. However, it should be noted that if the restoration of Israel in 1948 was divinely brought about, it would only follow that Israel still has a covenantal relationship with God if the event were prophesied in a passage that claimed that (A) this would happen (B) because of a covenant relationship. However, instead of making this case, many Restorationists stop at the supernatural element of Israel’s restoration. This ignores the fact that God deals with nations and groups of people as though they are entities without there being a specific covenant between them throughout the Bible. In the prophets, God repeatedly passes judgment on nations that attack Israel; in

Genesis, God curses the descendants of Ham; also in Genesis, God passes judgement on Sodom. Of course these judgments don't negate the chances the individuals with the group have of receiving Christ, it just goes to show that God works on several levels, and the fact that national Israel is not his covenant people does not mean God sees Israel the same as any other nation. Paul speaks of how God sees Israel in Romans: "say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice."(Romans 11:1-5). What's important about this passage is that Paul does not use the promises God made to Abraham to explain why God has not abandoned Israel. He rather references Elijah, and explains that by God's grace Israel is saved for the sake of the remnant. This is consistent with God's dialogue with Abraham concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, wherein he explains that for the sake of a faithful remnant, they would be spared.

Counterargument 2: Antisemitism

Additionally, another counterargument must be addressed, if not for its strength then for its sheer prevalence: fulfillment theology leads to antisemitism. The antisemitism comes in two points, one, that fulfillment theology delegitimizes the value of Jewish identity. To this, I must agree, to the extent that "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" delegitimizes all identities to an extent. However, it is true that throughout history, many so-called Christians have taken the extreme of fulfillment theology to exclude from salvific doctrine the Jews. Now, it must be noted, this view simply does not logically follow from the Bible, no matter the doctrine, for the simple fact that the twelve Apostles, Paul, and nearly all the early church leaders were Jews. How then do we reconcile this with the words of those such as Martin Luther, who said "*What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews?... I advise that their synagogues be set*

on fire...". An important note to make is that antisemitism, and bigotry of all kinds, has existed outside of Christianity for all time. It has existed since before Augustine popularized Fulfillment Theology in the 4th century, and it has existed without the aid of Fulfillment theology throughout the world. It seems more likely that people with antisemitic inclinations took Fulfillment Theology as an excuse to be antisemitic than otherwise neutral people were led to antisemitism through Fulfillment Theology. In the 18th and 19th century, the American South used the story of the cursing of Ham in Genesis to justify chattel slavery of specifically the black race. This doctrine of racial superiority contradicts the teaching of Paul in Galatians—"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28) You could say that interpretations surrounding the curse of Ham are dangerous due to its wording—"Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brothers." but if someone came to the conclusion from this that certain groups of people are inferior to others, they would have to ignore the rest of the Bible. This passage is only as problematic as the preconceived notions of those interpreting it. Likewise, Fulfillment Theology cannot be held responsible for any antisemitism that may have existed under its umbrella, when the theology doesn't logically allow for antisemitism in the first place.

Conclusion

Now we return to our original question: how should we see the modern nation of Israel? Ultimately, the promises given to Abraham were fulfilled in Jesus and continued through the Church. Prophecies use Israel as an allusion to God's people, his followers, in terms of blessing. A literal fulfillment of prophecy in which national Israel becomes the dominant world power makes little sense considering the fact Jesus' return signals the final judgment, and a thousand-year period in which he reigns in Jerusalem is highly contextually unlikely. In short, they are not God's covenant people. This is not to say aiding them is unjustified, for we are called to serve, as the Bible teaches us not to turn from a stranger in need of aid. However, if we help Israel, there must be an understanding that there is no specific promise of blessing that

comes with aiding them, and if anything, helping our fellows in Christ is to be prioritized over helping entire ethnic blocs of people (So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Gal 6:10). It is also important that we, as Christians, separate our actions and accountabilities from our government's foreign policy. Large-scale war-related operations should not be decisions informed by a skewed perception of Covenantal theology and instead should be left as national affairs. Second, we should not blind ourselves to the suffering of other people in the area and let Israel be judged fairly by the standards set by the powers-that-be, for Jesus said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.

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[Cruz, Ted. Interview by Tucker Carlson. Tucker Carlson Network, October 9, 2023.](#)