

- **Hope for the Jews I**
- **Espérance pour les Israélites I**
- **Hoffnung für die Juden I**

Sylvain Romerowski, Saints, France

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The following abstracts relate to the whole article, of which only the first part appears here. The second and final part will appear in the next issue of *EuroJTh*.

### RÉSUMÉ

*La première section de cet article traite du rôle d'Israël dans l'histoire de la rédemption. Israël a été choisi en vue de la bénédiction de toutes les nations. A cause de ses désobéissances, ce peuple a dû subir le jugement qui a pris la forme d'une destruction des deux royaumes israélites, et de l'exil. Les prophètes de l'AT ont promis de la part de Dieu un salut qui devait comporter deux aspects correspondant à deux étapes distinctes: le retour de l'exil et la conclusion d'une nouvelle alliance qui lui apporterait le pardon de ses fautes et une transformation intérieure. Ce n'est pas tout Israël qui devait bénéficier de ce salut, mais seulement un reste d'Israélites convertis. Dieu opèrerait un tri au sein de son peuple pour en éliminer les rebelles. Par contre, des gens des nations se tourneraient vers lui, et il les incorporerait au peuple de Dieu: ainsi, ceux-ci bénéficieraient des promesses faites à Israël.*

*Lorsque Jean-Baptiste annonce un baptême d'Esprit et de feu, il le présente comme l'oeuvre du Messie par laquelle il va opérer ce tri au sein du peuple d'Israël. Par conséquent, depuis la Pentecôte, le peuple de Dieu est Israël, dont les Juifs incrédules ont été retranchés, et dans lequel les non Juifs qui croient en Jésus-Christ ont été incorporés.*

*La deuxième section est consacrée à la question du rôle du pays d'Israël dans l'histoire du salut. Elle présente la thèse selon laquelle ce pays a joué un rôle semblable à celui du peuple: de même qu'Israël a été choisi en vue de la bénédiction de toutes les nations, son pays a été choisi en vue de la bénédiction de la terre entière. Car d'après les prophètes (et le NT reprend cette ligne de pensée), le pays du peuple de Dieu devait être agrandi, jusqu'à s'étendre à la terre entière. Par conséquent, ce n'est pas par la pos-*

*session d'un pays particulier que s'accomplissent les prophéties de l'AT, car le territoire qui revient à Israël ne se limite pas au pays de Canaan. Le rôle du pays d'Israël dans l'histoire du salut, et plus particulièrement de Jérusalem, s'est achevé lorsque les événements du salut se sont produits en ce lieu. L'espérance des croyants Israélites aujourd'hui, qu'ils partagent avec les croyants d'origine non-juive, est celle de régner avec Christ sur la terre entière renouvelée.*

*La troisième section aborde le sujet de l'espérance pour les Israélites à partir de l'épître aux Romains. L'ensemble du NT, et Paul en particulier, enseignent que les Israélites incroyants ne font plus partie du véritable Israël, le peuple de Dieu. L'auteur étudie le chapitre 11 de l'épître aux Romains, qui a pour but de répondre à la question de savoir si Dieu a rejeté son peuple. Aux yeux de l'auteur, la réponse de Paul comporte trois éléments : 1. Dieu n'a pas rejeté son peuple car il s'est conservé un reste d'Israélites pour les sauver. Dieu a seulement purifié son peuple en retranchant les Israélites incroyants. 2. La porte demeurait ouverte au temps de Paul (et l'est encore actuellement) pour les Israélites inconvertis : s'ils se tournent vers Christ avec foi, ils peuvent encore être sauvés et être réintégrés dans le peuple de Dieu. 3. Un jour, 'tout Israël sera sauvé'. Par là, il faut comprendre que Dieu va faire quelque chose de spécial pour le peuple d'Israël à la fin de l'ère présente : les Israélites qui seront alors en vie se tourneront vers Christ en tant que peuple et recevront le salut. Dieu agira de la sorte, non pas parce que les Israélites inconvertis auraient conservé un droit quelconque, mais en vertu de sa grâce envers un peuple qui a perdu tout droit à un quelconque privilège.*

*Dans la dernière section, l'auteur répond à ceux qui pensent que l'on ne devrait plus annoncer l'Évangile aux Juifs et affirme que cette activité demeure une obligation pour l'Église aujourd'hui.*

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Der erste Teil dieses Artikels behandelt die Rolle Israels in der Heilsgeschichte. Israel ist im Hinblick auf die Segnung aller Nationen auserwählt worden. Aufgrund seines Ungehorsams mußte das Volk das Gericht erdulden, das in der Vernichtung der beiden israelitischen Königreiche sowie im Exil bestand. Die Propheten des AT haben im Auftrag Gottes eine Rettung verheißen, die zwei Aspekte, mit zwei verschiedenen Etappen korrespondierend, aufweisen sollte: die Rückkehr aus dem Exil und den Schluß eines neuen Bundes, der den Israeliten die Vergebung ihrer Schuld und eine innerliche Umwandlung bringen werde. Doch nicht ganz Israel sollte von diesem Heil profitieren, sondern nur ein Rest bekehrter Israeliten. Gott wird im Innersten seines Volkes eine Auswahl vornehmen, um die Rebellen unter ihnen auszulöschen. Demgegenüber werden sich Leute aus den Nationen zu ihm wenden, und er wird sie dem Volk Gottes einverleiben, so daß erstere von den Verheißungen, die an Israel ergangen sind, profitieren werden.*

*Als Johannes der Täufer eine Taufe des Geistes und des Feuers ankündigte, präsentierte er sie als Werk des Messias, wodurch dieser die Auswahl im Innersten seines Volkes Israel vornehmen wird. Deshalb ist das Volk Gottes seit Pfingsten ein Israel, aus dem die ungläubigen Juden herausgeschnitten und in das die Nichtjuden, die an Jesus Christus glauben, einverleibt worden sind.*

*Der zweite Teil ist der Frage gewidmet, welche Rolle das Land Israels in der Heilsgeschichte spielt. Er unterbreitet die These, daß das Land eine ähnliche Rolle spielt wie das Volk: wie Israel im Hinblick auf die Segnung aller Nationen erwählt worden ist, so ist auch sein Land im Hinblick auf die Segnung der ganzen Erde erwählt worden. Denn nach den Propheten (und das NT nimmt diesen Gedankengang auf) sollte das Land des Volkes Gottes vergrößert werden, bis es sich über die gesamte Erde erstreckt. Aus diesem Grund bedeutet die Inbesitznahme eines bestimmten Landes nicht die Erfüllung der alttestamentlichen Weissagun-*

*gen, denn das Gebiet, das Israel zurückerhalten soll, ist nicht auf das Land Kanaan begrenzt. Die Rolle des Landes Israels, und vor allem Jerusalems, in der Heilsgeschichte ist vollendet, sobald sich die Heilsereignisse an diesem Ort vollzogen haben. Die heutige Hoffnung der gläubigen Israeliten, die sie mit den Gläubigen nicht-jüdischen Ursprungs teilen, besteht darin, daß sie mit Christus über die gesamte erneuerte Erde herrschen werden.*

*Der dritte Teil erörtert das Thema der den Israeliten sich bietenden Hoffnung ausgehend vom Römerbrief. Die Gesamtheit des NT, und vor allem Paulus, lehren, daß die ungläubigen Israeliten keinen Anteil mehr am wahren Israel, dem Volk Gottes, haben. Der Autor untersucht das 11. Kapitel des Römerbriefes, das eine Antwort auf die Frage geben will, ob Gott sein Volk verstoßen hat. Aus der Sicht des Autors enthält die Antwort des Paulus drei Elemente: 1.) Gott hat sein Volk nicht verworfen, da er sich einen Rest der Israeliten erhält, um sie zu retten. Gott hat sein Volk lediglich gereinigt, indem er die ungläubigen Israeliten herausgeschnitten hat. 2.) Die Tür blieb zur Zeit des Paulus für die unbekehrten Israeliten offen (und ist es auch noch heute): wenn sie im Glauben zu Christus umkehren, können sie noch gerettet und wieder in das Volk Gottes integriert werden. 3.) Eines Tages "wird ganz Israel gerettet werden". In diesem Zusammenhang gilt es zu verstehen, daß Gott am Ende der gegenwärtigen Ära etwas besonderes für das Volk Israel tun wird: die Israeliten, die dann noch am Leben sein werden, werden sich als Volk zu Christus wenden und das Heil empfangen. Gott wird auf diese Weise handeln, doch nicht, weil die unbekehrten Israeliten irgendein Anrecht darauf hätten, sondern aufgrund seiner Gnade einem Volk gegenüber, das jegliches Recht auf jedwede Begünstigung verloren hat.*

*Im letzten Teil antwortet der Autor denen, die meinen, daß man den Juden das Evangelium nicht mehr verkünden solle, und bekräftigt, daß diese Tätigkeit ein Auftrag der heutigen Kirche bleibt.*

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The subject of hope for the Jews would not be dealt with uniformly by all Evangelicals. On the one hand, dispensationalists maintain that two peoples of God coexist up to the present time, namely Israel and

the Church, each of which has its own destiny. On the other hand, there are those who think that Israel as a nation or people no longer has a role to play in redemptive history that is any different from that of

other nations. There are also various viewpoints that fall between these two extremes.

Connected with these issues is the question whether the modern state of Israel has anything to do with biblical prophecies, especially those in the OT.

The terms in which one formulates the hope that lies in store for the Jews today depends on how one views the place and role of Israel in the history of salvation, the identity of the people of God in the Christian era, the interpretation of OT prophecies and the meaning of Romans 11.

Another set of problems is of immediate consequence for us, for they relate to our responsibility to preach the Gospel. Should we preach the Gospel to the Jews today? Some deny that we should, and appeal to specific Scriptures to justify their position. Conversely, others insist that the Gospel should be preached first to the Jews by today's Church, in obedience to Rom 1:16.

These questions must be addressed on a biblical basis, in order to attempt to assess correctly what kind of hope there is for the Jews today.

The first part of this paper deals with the role of Israel and its land in the history of salvation. A second part will raise various issues concerning what hope may be entertained concerning the Jewish people today and what responsibilities Christians have towards them.

## **I. The people of God in redemptive history**

### *1) The purpose of Israel's election*

The purpose of Israel's election was the blessing of all the nations. This is stated at the outset, in the context of God's call to Abram (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18)<sup>1</sup>. Israel was not chosen for its own sake, but with a view to the salvation of all nations.

### *2) The Abrahamic promise and its fulfilment in the old covenant*

God made a twofold promise to Abraham, which He sealed by a covenant: that of a numerous people descended from Abra-

ham through Isaac (Gen 12; 15; 17), and that of a land which would extend from the River Nile to the Euphrates (Gen 15:18-21).

The Mosaic covenant proceeded from the Abrahamic. For at Mount Sinai God took Israel, the people descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, as His own people, and He became their God. Furthermore, by this covenant, Yahweh the suzerain granted to His vassal people the land promised to Abraham.

The Chronicler highlighted the complete fulfilment of the twofold promise to Abraham under the reign of Solomon: concerning the people (2 Chr 1:9) and the land (2 Chr 9:26).

### *3) Israel's failure as a holy people*

The Sinaitic covenant also conferred upon Israel the status of a holy people, that is, a people whose vocation was to worship Yahweh in an appropriate cultic service (Ex 19:6).

In order to approach God for cultic service, Israel had to fulfil a number of conditions, both moral and ritual. The Lord gave them His law, which defined these holiness conditions. Israel was required to be holy, in the sense of meeting the holiness conditions defined by the law: this is the intent of the summons to 'be holy for the Lord is holy' in the book of Leviticus.

The law was not beyond the Israelites' reach: it was known, understandable and not beyond man's human capacities to obey it (Dt 30:11-14). But Moses foresaw that the people of God would not meet their obligations (Dt 31:16ff). For Israel was a 'stiff-necked people' (Dt 9:6,13), God had not yet given Israelites a mind that understands, eyes which see and ears that hear (Dt 29:4).

The first generation, which had experienced the Exodus, had been rebellious, unbelieving and idolatrous (Ps 106; cf. Acts 7:39-43), and the Lord revealed to Moses that the Israelites would break the covenant again after his death (Dt 31:16-18). Joshua was not any more optimistic about his people (Jos 24:19).

Moses predicted the Exile as a result of Israel's unfaithfulness to his God. But God would not forsake His people. He would bring them back to his land. At the same time, He was not to leave Israel in their state of corruption: after the exile, He would circumcise the hearts of the Israelites so that they would obey His laws (Dt 30:1-10).

Israel's life in the promised land was a long history of unfaithfulness and disobedience to Yahweh. It is summarized in terms of idol worship and innocent blood shedding in Psalm 106. Stephen stated that Israelites had always resisted the Holy Spirit, persecuted the prophets, and that they never obeyed the law (Acts 7:51-53).

The sombre period of the so called 'judges' illustrates the fact that movements of repentance were not long lasting and probably superficial. Under the monarchy, the people always exhibited a deplorable moral and spiritual condition, even under the reign of the few good kings who occupied the throne of the united Kingdom and subsequently that of the kingdom of Judah. Even David's reign was tarnished by the rebellions of some of his sons as well as by the strong influence of wretched men, such as Joab, whom he could not restrain; this witnesses to a poor moral condition of the people. Solomon's life ended in grave sins. The Northern Kingdom did not produce one good king. In Judah, the reforms initiated by such kings as Hezekiah or Josiah had no lasting effect and remained superficial as far as the nation as a whole was concerned. And Judah is finally said to have been worse than Samaria (Ezek 16:47-52).

Jeremiah gives the reason for this: while the law was written on tablets of stone, sin was engraved on the hearts of the Israelites (Jer 17:1). Other prophets state that Israel was corrupt from its origins (Am 5:25; Ezek 16; 20) and Stephen later developed the same analysis (Acts 7).

Therefore, the preexilic prophets foretold first the destruction of Northern Israel, and then that of Judah and its temple, in accordance with the curses contained in

the sanction sections of the covenant treaty. And the Lord brought these words to fulfilment: the Northern kingdom disappeared in 722 B.C., its population was deported by the Assyrians; and Judah was destroyed in 587 B.C., its population exiled in Babylonia or scattered among neighbouring peoples as well as Egypt.

Such a failure on the part of Israel, such a failure of the old covenant, had been announced in advance by God, as we saw (Dt 30). Indeed, it was willed by God who made it happen (Is 6:10-12), for it had a function in His plan. God wanted to show by this means the incapacity of mankind to obey His laws, due to the presence of sin, and therefore its need of salvation. The law was intended to lead to Christ by revealing man's sinful state, his inability to attain justification by obedience to it. The law led to Christ by showing that we need a different *régime* from that of the law if we are to be justified (Gal 3). God's purpose was to provide a powerful and telling demonstration of these truths in the history of Israel.

#### 4) *The restoration announced by the prophets*

The prophets did not simply bring the message of the coming fulfilment of the covenant curses. They also envisaged a restoration which was to follow the judgement of the Exile. God would work in favor of the exiles, and reconstitute His people with them. He would bring them salvation.

The salvation announced by the prophets contained two elements: 1) The return of the Israelites to their land, and 2) the concluding of a new covenant which would bring forgiveness of sins (Jer 31:34; Mic 7:19) as well as inner transformation of the members of the people by the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29; Is 32:15ff; 59:21; Jer 31:31-33; Ezek 36:25-27; 37:9f,14; 39:29...). This would happen under the rule of the messianic king, a neo-David (Ezek 34:23-25).

These two elements of salvation are often associated in the prophetic oracles. However, as the history of revelation progresses, it is made known to prophets that time will elapse between the two.

Ezekiel, in his famous 'dry bones' vision (ch. 37), distinguishes between two stages: first, the bones come together, tendons and flesh appear and skin covers them, but there is yet no breath in them (vv. 7f.). This is explained as the return from the Babylonian exile to the land of Israel (v. 12). Secondly, as Ezekiel prophesies again, breath enters the bodies and they come to life (vv. 9-10). This second stage is interpreted as the gift of the Spirit and parallels such passages as Ezek 36:25-27; 39:29, and also Jer 31:31-34 and Joel 2:28-29.

In the same way, at the end of the seventy years of the Babylonian exile, Daniel prays for the fulfilment of God's promises through the prophets (Dn 9:1-20). Though the return from exile is imminent, God reveals to His beloved servant that it will take some seventy times seven more years for the hope expressed by the prophets to be realized. Only then will an end be put to sin, wickedness be atoned for and everlasting righteousness be brought in (v. 24). We recognize in these the second aspect of the salvation envisaged by the prophets. Only then will the new covenant be concluded by the Messiah (v. 27).<sup>2</sup>

We conclude therefore that the first aspect of the salvation promised in the oracles of the prophets was fulfilled from 538 B.C. on, when Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Judeans to reestablish themselves in the land of Judah and to rebuild their temple.

Subsequently, in accordance with the extensive witness of the NT, the new covenant was established on the basis of Christ's work, his expiatory death, and His renewing of the people of God as a result of the gift of the Spirit He poured out at Pentecost.

##### *5) The beneficiaries of salvation according to the prophets*

Here another question arises in relation to our previous point: for whom did the prophets envisage salvation?

The remnant concept is a key to the answer. For the prophets' uniform message is that not all Israelites would be saved, but

only a small remnant of Israel.

According to Isaiah, the remnant principle was already operating in his time, for he mentions it in connection with the crisis of 701 B.C. The Assyrians had destroyed the Northern kingdom of Israel some twenty years before. Now, Sennacherib's armies have invaded the territory of Judah and the whole country is laid waste (Is 1:7). Only Jerusalem is left, like a hut in a melon field (1:8). The city is under siege but will be miraculously delivered. The survivors who have found refuge within her walls constitute a mere remnant of the people of Israel at that time and only this remnant will escape extermination and deportation (1:9).

Over a century later, according to the message of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, most of the population of Judah would perish either in warfare, or famine under siege, or pestilence, and the Babylonians would put an end to the Southern kingdom. Only a remnant of this population, those that had been or would be exiled, would return to their land (Jer 24; Ezek 11).

The eschatological salvation (the second aspect of salvation mentioned above) was also to benefit only a remnant of Israel (Is 10:22; Mi 2:12; 4:6f; 5:6f; 7:18; Zech 2:7,9; 3:12f...). God would sift His people: His judgement would eliminate some from Israel and He would purify the small remnant that would be left (Mic 2:12; 4:6f; 5:7; 7:18; Is 65:1-16; 66; Ezek 34:17-22).

After the return from the Babylonian exile, Zechariah and Malachi expose once again the double theme of judgement and purification. The Judeans who came back from Babylonia, or their descendants, are not yet the remnant that will share in the eschatological salvation. A sifting of Israel still is to take place and there will be a remnant of the remnant that returned from the exile (Zech 13:7-9; Mal 3:3-5; in my opinion, Zech 11:14 depicts this sorting process by recalling the schism under Rehoboam: a new schism will take place, while some of the Israelites will reject the son of David, the good Shepherd, and others will follow Him).

This sifting of the people is presented in connection with the messianic rule. Indeed, this was to be the work of the messianic king (Mi 4:6; 5:2,7-8; Eze 34:17-24; Zech 11; Mal 3:1ff).

The purpose of the Lord in that operation was to create a new people, whose members would all be His true disciples, forgiven and truly knowing Him, righteous (Is 54:13; Jer 31:34), in contrast to the Israel of old, unregenerate and unfaithful in its great majority.

We can even go one step further. Isaiah depicts the eschatological remnant of Israel as reduced to one individual, the Servant of the Lord, whom he calls 'Israel', and whom he identifies with Immanuel, the Messiah.<sup>3</sup> Israel's history therefore is that of a progressive narrowing of the People of God until it is reduced to a single individual. (This also sheds light on Paul's reduction of Abraham's offspring to the one Christ in Gal 3:16). However, the movement is then reversed. For the Servant of the Lord gathers around himself a community, which will benefit from his redemptive work. And not only will he gather a small remnant of Israelites, but also people from other nations, who will also benefit from his work of salvation (Is 42:6; 49:6), and who will be fully integrated into God's people.<sup>4</sup>

According to the OT prophets, whereas not all Israelites will have a part in eschatological salvation, some Gentiles will. There will also be a remnant of the nations which will be saved alongside the remnant of Israel.

Some people of the nations will receive the Spirit of the Lord (Is 44:3,5). The fact that those mentioned in v. 5 *take the name Israel* suggests that they did not previously bear it, thus testifying to their foreign origin. They are Gentiles who will join the people of Israel and receive the Spirit with him. They will also undergo the same kind of inner transformation as the eschatological remnant of Israel (Zeph 3:9 where the Hebrew stem *hpk* denotes radical change) and be converted to Yahweh so that they will bring their lives into conformity with

His law (Is 2:2-4; Mi 4:1-3). They will know the Lord (Is 19:21). These are the same promises as those addressed to Israel (Jer 31:31-33; Eze 36:25-27).

Other texts envision the entrance of these Gentiles into the people of God. Particularly strong and clear are Is 56:1-8 and Zech 2:11. But see Am 9:12; Is 19:24f; 65:1; 66:18-24; Zech 8:23; 9:7 as well.

The Isaianic imagery of Zion's posterity deserves special mention here (Is 49; 54). The children whom God gives her seem to be not all natural children directly born to her. This is suggested by the expression of amazement on the lips of Zion: 'Who bore me these?' (49.21). They are like adopted children. Furthermore, the image of the banner in verse 22 had been used in 11:10 to evoke the participation of gentiles in the new exodus led by the Messiah. The proximity of 56:1-8 also leads to think these adopted children of Zion are of gentile origin. The apostle Paul seems to have understood the text in this way. For quoting the parallel passage about Zion's child bearing in 54:1, he includes the Galatian Christians among the children of Zion (Gal 4:25)<sup>5</sup>.

The same theme was also found in Psalm 87, where people from all nations were said to be born in Zion.

To summarize then, the eschatological people who will benefit from salvation, according to the OT prophets, is Israel, but an Israel from which rebellious members will have been cut off, and into which a significant number of Gentiles will have been incorporated. It is a new Israel, exclusively composed of authentic disciples of the Lord, made up of a converted remnant of Israelites as well as converted Gentiles.

6) *When the time was fully come...*

When the time was fully come, John the Baptist appeared, the forerunner announced in Mal 3:1. John baptized with water and announced a baptism with Spirit and fire, which would be administered by the Messiah (Lk 3:16). The language of the Baptist echoes Mal 3, where we met the dual theme of judgement and purification. The metaphor of Spirit baptism also echoes

the prophets' imagery in Is 44:3 and Ezek 36:25-27 where the Lord's Spirit effects a purifying work. Fire also was a purifying agent in the OT (Zech 13:9; Mal 3:2-3). At the same time, both the Spirit (or wind, or breath: Hebrew *ruah*) and the fire were images evocative of judgement in the OT (Is 27:8; 30:28; Jer 51:1; Hos 3:15; Zech 6:5,8 and Is 31:9; Am 7:4; Mal 3:19; 4:1), a theme present in Lk 3:17. Isaiah had spoken of the Spirit of judgement and the Spirit of fire by which the Lord would bring judgement upon His people, but also purify them and cleanse them from their sins (Is 4:4 undoubtedly a text lying in the background of Lk 3).

The theme of a sifting of the people is present in the comment of John the Baptist in v. 17.

Therefore, Baptism with Spirit and fire is that work of the Messiah by which he effects the eschatological sifting of Israel, by bringing judgement upon unbelieving Jews and cutting them off from the people of God, and by purifying the Jewish remnant, thereby bringing to fulfilment the OT prophecies. According to Luke, this event happened at Pentecost (Acts 1-2).

What follows the account of the Pentecost event in the rest of the book of Acts is the story of the formation of the messianic community. The Gospel is preached first to the Jews. Even Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, always turns to the Jews first. Some of them are converted. Yet, it gradually appears that most Jews reject the Messiah and thereby exclude themselves from the messianic community. On the other hand, The community progressively opens its doors to the Samaritans, then more broadly to the Gentiles; the Gospel is preached in a large part of the Roman empire and finally reaches Rome, the capital city of the pagan world.

The messianic community is constituted in response to the apostolic preaching of the Gospel. It is also by rejecting this proclamation that Israelites exclude themselves from the community. It is to be noticed that the foremost aspect of the work of the Spirit in the book of Acts'

presentation of Spirit Baptism is the equipping of the apostles for the task of witnessing to Christ (Acts 1:8; cf. Lk 24:46-49). Spirit baptism is given to the apostles to enable them to proclaim the Gospel of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ, of which they are witnesses. Therefore, the book of Acts demonstrates the fact that Christ's baptizing with the Spirit at Pentecost resulted in a sifting of Israel, in accordance with the words of John the Baptist. It also resulted in the constitution of the new people of God, with the remnant of Israel at its kernel and with the addition of Gentile converts.<sup>6</sup>

### 7) Conclusion : Israel and the Church

This presentation of the historical development of the people of God and of the nature of this people is in full agreement with the theology of the NT, and especially with Pauline theology.

The allegory of the good shepherd in Jn 10 borrows from the books of Micah, Ezekiel and Zechariah. In Micah, the eschatological people of God, who will benefit from eschatological salvation, is represented by the figure of sheep. The sheep are the remnant of Israel, gathered by the messianic king (Mic 2:12; 4:6f; 5:7; 7:18). In Ezek 34, the neo-David sorts out the Israelite sheep. As previously stated, the same theme is found in Zech 11. By presenting himself as the good shepherd, Jesus claimed to be fulfilling these prophecies. The theme of the sifting of Israel is present in the allegory, for among Israelites there are those who are his sheep and those who are not. Jesus also announces the inclusion of Gentiles in the flock in such a manner as that there will be only one flock (Jn 10:16). The oracle of Mic 4:1-4 had already announced such inclusion.

In Romans, the remnant concept operates in chapters 9 and 11. For Paul, faith makes Gentile believers become Israelites (Rom 2:26ff.). The theme of the inclusion of the Gentiles is clearly stated in Rom 4:9ff; 11:17 and Gal 3:29; Eph 2:12ff. The point is well stated in the image of the olive tree (Rom 11). The tree represents the

people of God, Israel, from which unbelieving Jews have been cut off. And Gentile believers are like branches grafted upon the tree.

There is therefore historical continuity between Israel and the Church. As a matter of fact, the Church is Israel. The application of Israel's titles (Ex 19:5-6) to NT Churches in 1 Peter 2:9 also implies it. And Paul can call the Church 'the Israel of God'.<sup>7</sup>

What we are saying here, is not that the Church has replaced Israel. But that the Church is Israel, the ancient people of God which has now been sifted, since unbelieving Jews have excluded themselves from it by rejecting Christ; and it is Israel into which Gentile believers have been incorporated. This does not mean that the Church has replaced Israel, but, as Henri Blocher states, that Gentile believers have replaced Jewish unbelievers within Israel (Rom 11:17ff.).<sup>8</sup>

Having stressed the Church's continuity with Israel, we must also point to a certain discontinuity. The Church is Israel, but baptism with the Holy Spirit has not left Israel in its former condition. A profound change has taken place, to the point that Jesus could even speak of *another nation* (Mt 21:43).

The nature of the people of God has become fundamentally different. Isaiah even could present this change as the making of a new creation (chs 40-66) and of a new Jerusalem, newly created (65:17). For Israel was a nation, whereas the Church is not properly speaking a nation, but rather international. Israel, when considered as a whole, was an unregenerate people (only a remnant was regenerate among Israelites under the old covenant) whereas the people of God in the new covenant is exclusively composed of regenerate members.

When Peter applies to the Church the old covenant titles of Israel (1 Peter 2:9), they no longer have the same meaning: the Church is not a nation in the sense that Israel was; and it is holy in a deeper sense than Israel was. We have argued elsewhere that Israel was a typological people of God,

offering a typological worship to Yahweh (according to Hebrews 8-10), whereas the Church is the true people of God, offering true worship in the Spirit (Jn 4:21,23), just as circumcision in the flesh was a type of heart circumcision (Rom 2:28f).<sup>9</sup>

To conclude this point, we will make one last remark. Our analysis diverges from both dispensationalism and covenant theology. It differs from the former because dispensationalism denies the continuity between Israel and the Church, and maintains that there are still today two peoples of God, with two distinct destinies. Such a view is in blatant contradiction to the message of OT prophets and with Pauline theology. And it differs from the latter because it tends to deny the discontinuity between Israel and the Church, as if old covenant Israel were already the Church. According to the NT, the Church was founded at Pentecost by the baptism in the Holy Spirit which radically altered the nature of Israel.<sup>10</sup> Covenant theologians tend to ignore that the sifting of Israel has taken place so that only true disciples of the Lord have a place in the Church.<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Some would translate : 'all nations will bless themselves through you', i.e. they will use such blessing formulae as: 'May God bless you as He blessed Abraham/the descendants of Abraham'. The translation problem is not easy to settle. Without entering into the discussion here, we simply note that the NT understands these texts, or at least some of them, as meaning that all nations shall be blessed through Abraham's offspring. In my view, the NT interpretation of the OT is to be received as normative.
- 2 This interpretation is not accepted by all, to say the least. It is favoured by two considerations. First, as we said, v. 25 mentions the double theme of forgiveness of sin and inner purification associated with the new covenant, for instance in Jer 31:31-34. Second, this interpretation is required by the structure of vv. 25-27. Each of these verses consists of two parts. In each verse, the first part is about an anointed person and mentions a number of sevens, whereas the second part is about the town and the sanctuary and uses the Hebrew root *hṣ*. These elements manifest an intended parallelism between the three verses and imply that the one who concludes the cove-



- nant in the first part of v. 27 is to be identified with the anointed one, the Messiah, of the previous verses.
- 3 See my *L'oeuvre du Saint-Esprit ancienne et nouvelle*, Mulhouse, 1989, pp. 48ff for a demonstration of this.
  - 4 On this point, see also Klaas Runia, *Reformation Today*, London, Banner of Truth, 1968, pp. 93-94.
  - 5 Despite first impressions, Paul's exegesis was not in the least arbitrary, but based on the data we have just pointed to in the book of Isaiah.
  - 6 See *L'oeuvre du Saint-Esprit ancienne et nouvelle*, pp. 69-90 for a fuller development of this argument.
  - 7 One could take the Israel of God as referring to Jewish believers only. The immediate context does not permit us to determine whether it is to be taken as the whole Church or as the Jewish part of it only. However, what Paul wrote in Gal3:28-29; 4:26-31, and in the above passages in Romans, makes his intent in Gal 6:16 clear.
  - 8 'Israel is not replaced by the Church, since believing Jews form the kernel of the Church and since there is only one olive tree; but the branches which have been cut off are replaced by the ingrafted branches (the Christians of pagan origin, Rom 11.19)'. See 'L'oecuménisme et les Juifs', Review of *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People, Statements of the World Council of Churches and its Member Churches, Fac Réflexion* 13 (July 1989), p. 30.
  - 9 See *L'oeuvre du Saint-Esprit ancienne et nouvelle*, pp. 103-108.
  - 10 Some more about this point in *ibid.*, pp. 109-129.
  - 11 See *L'oeuvre du Saint-Esprit ancienne et nouvelle*, chs. 5-6.

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