

Book review

Paas, Steven (Ed.) 2018: ***Israelism and the Place of Christ. Christocentric Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy.*** Wien: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co.

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This collective bundle has already appeared in the Netherlands in 2017 under the title: *Het Israelisme en de plaats van Christus. Christocentrische interpretatie van Bijbelse profetie*, Utrecht: Boekencentrum. In order to make the publication even more international, it appears as Part 34 of the series *Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel*, edited by proff. Manfred Oeming and Gerd Theissen of Heidelberg in Germany. But still it's not the end. Dr Paas, a Dutchman, has amongst others, lectured church history in Malawi. He is a minister of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, a denomination with which our Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa has close ties. The more than a dozen employees also include, amongst others, Americans, Brits and even a South African.

The edition I read was printed and bound with German precision. Errors are absolutely minimal. In total, the content covers 273 pages. There are two preambles, one by prof. Wido van Peursen of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, and the other by the editor himself. Dr Paas explains what is meant by "Israelism". It is used as a collective name for all those Christian movements that today's contemporary Israel still regards as the chosen people of God. For them today, the so-called unfulfilled prophecies and special promises of God would still be valid. "Israelism" encompasses all kinds of chiliastic directions such as post and pre-millennialism, philosemitism, messianism and even Christian Zionism. In my view, a gap occurs, because the authors nowhere refer to what one can call "white Israelism." It is that extreme opinion that only the white Western nations would descend of ancient Israel. God's promises would therefore only apply to them. This deviant view is related to the so-called British Israelism of the 19th century.

The huge independent church in Southern Africa, the Zion Christian Church, is unfortunately also not discussed.

In his introductory chapter, Dr. Paas explained that in our time it became high fashion to go out of a Jewish canon behind the Christian canon. Then the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, will no longer be interpreted in the light of Christ, but in the light of Israel. The authors now intend to refute this theory and, mainly from the New Testament, to show that the whole Bible should be interpreted as Christocentric. Only then can current questions like the following be answered: What does the Bible teach us about modern-day Israel and its future? Should we expect an exceptional conversion to Christ in Israel? Is Israel the Jewish people of today, or vice versa, is the present-day Jewish people really Israel? What does Jesus being a Jew mean to us? In essence, the question is: Is it in the Bible about Israel and Christ, or is it about Christ alone? The answers to these questions are largely calculated exegetically in the bundle. It sometimes lacks a profound systematic reflection.

Different readers will probably be fascinated by various chapters of the book. To me it was especially interesting to learn how the Old Testament themes of Israel were fulfilled as chosen people with their own territory and a distinctive religion in Christ, and what meaning it has for us today (cf. p. 22 vv.) As the older theologians taught us that what was still "particular" in the Old Testament is now becoming "universal" in the New Testament. It follows that Christian believers, not only from one nation, e.g. the Jews, but out of 61 of the nations of the earth are called to be church. In Him, not only is one separate land holy but 61 of the countries of the World. And our Christian religion is not only connected to one nation, e.g. the culture of the Jews, but must become indigenous in every folk culture. Prof. Van Alten's chapter on Calvin and Israel (especially in the book of Acts) is also important. Because of his view of the unity of the covenant and the church in the Old and New Testament, Calvin does not have time for the so-called "unfulfilled prophecies" of the Old Testament. Without allegorizing or spiritualization, Calvin emphasizes that all the promises of God in Christ find their final fulfillment and thus have a lasting meaning for us.

I mention another chapter or two that was illuminating to me. Dr. Raymond Potgieter, attached to our own North-West University, writes about the connection between modern Israelism and ancient Gnosticism. He explains the origin of the state of Israel (1948) and the Zionist background. Dr. O.P. Robertson, who also has experience in the church in Africa (e.g. Uganda),

addresses the old issue of which Paul in Romans 11 meant as saying that "all Israel" will be saved.

The authors of the bundle are all conservative Scriptural researchers. The result of their research is therefore undeniably reformed, that is to say in accordance with the reformatory confession. Despite the variety of sub-themes discussed in the bundle, the authors fully agree on at least the following assumptions. They are convinced that the modern state of Israel and what happens there politically is absolutely not part of the salvation history. With this, every trace that Israel of today will be the continuation of the Old Testament Israel, is rejected. However, the authors also reject any form of anti-Semitism. According to them, it reveals an unfounded Western ("Jewish-Christian") ideology of superiority. Jewish religion (Judaism) in all its nuances of orthodox to modern is not the continuation of Old Testament faith but was designed by Jewish rabbis and recorded in non-Biblical writings.

In my opinion, in this bundle we have a learning and reliable guide in the dangerous minefield of "Israelism". Here, fundamental decisions are made that affect the whole theology and religious life. One could say: Tell me how you think about the relationship between Old and New Testament, and I will tell you what you think about the church, the Messiah and the end times. Finally, because the book is well documented, it inspires further and deepened study of the theme.