

**Widening the Discussion**  
**A Response by Mark Kinzer to Darrell Bock's**  
**"Messiah and Israel: The Implications of Promise and Inheritance"**  
**2015 Borough Park Symposium**  
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It is an honor to respond to a paper by Darrell Bock, whose contributions to the world of evangelical biblical scholarship have rightly placed him among the most authoritative voices in that sphere. One expects that a paper written by Darrell will be clearly presented, well-constructed, and forcefully argued, and those expectations in this case are not disappointed. His succinct discussion of Israel's eschatological inheritance of the land is balanced and persuasive, and offers insight for understanding and engaging with evangelicals whose perspective differs from his own. The decision to select one such thinker (i.e., Bruce Waltke), and to identify and respond to his particular views, removes the discussion from the realm of generality and gives it a concrete reality that is crucial for dealing with such contentious issues.

Darrell's distinction between "either/or" and "both/and" hermeneutical models proves immensely helpful in enabling us to see where Waltke and others go wrong, and his brief exegetical comments (based largely on Luke-Acts) point us in the right direction as we seek our own interpretive path. As Darrell states, "The land is not spiritualized, transcendentalized, eschatologized, transmuted, or even christofied. It is a token, a picture, a mirror, a microcosm of how heaven and earth are reconciled by Christ's saving work." In keeping with such a "both/and" perspective, we might well claim for Messianic Jewish use another term with a rich Christian past and wide ecumenical resonance, and say that the land in our current age fulfills the role of a *sacrament* – a visible, tangible sign which both points to and mediates contact with a reality beyond itself.

Darrell's paper thus has many strengths. However, like every paper, it also has its weaknesses or limitations. Two weaknesses struck me as especially noteworthy. The first derives from the constricted scope of the question it asks, and the second from the constricted range of answers to that question which it considers.

Darrell begins his paper by defining his topic in the form of a question: "The question this essay pursues is a seemingly simple one: Does Israel have a future in the program of God that includes not only her as a people but her as a state with a land?" This initial use of the term "state" may lead the reader to assume that Darrell will be addressing matters that relate to the contemporary "State of Israel." However, that is not the case. His sole aim will be to determine whether Israel has a *post-parousia* identity and inheritance of land. Later in the paper, he will rephrase the question in a manner that more accurately accords with his purpose, speaking of Israel as "a *people* with a land" rather than "a *state* with a land." Darrell's paper should more properly be entitled "Messiah and Israel: Promise and Inheritance," without mention of "The Implications," for discussion of those implications is nowhere to be found.

I can understand why Darrell may have decided to maintain such a narrow focus. The time and space allotted for his paper is minimal, and it would have been difficult to address both the eschatological question and its impact on contemporary affairs. However, given the challenges to Israel's legitimacy and to its theological claims to the land which set the stage for our current symposium, it would have been helpful if Darrell had adopted a more ambitious goal for his paper—a goal in line with the full title which his paper bears.

The second weakness or limitation in Darrell's paper, in my reading, concerns the overly constricted range of answers he presents to his already narrowly circumscribed question. But before I note the problem, let me state what I find helpful in his categorization of the possible answers.

Darrell introduces the body of his paper by stating "In the broadest outline three positions exist." The scope of the answers he will describe becomes clear later in the paper when he summarizes what all three positions hold in common.

It is important to note the points on which these distinct views agree. All see the locus of blessing as residing in Jesus who fulfills the promises of God and makes blessing available to people of all nations. Covenant realization flows through Christ and the positive response to him. There is no dual covenant idea in any of these views. Salvation's goal in part is to bring a reconciliation between God and people and between Israel and the nations. All three views claim that the Old Testament is realized in how they read the end. It is the different ways the three views get to that claim that is up for discussion.

In other words, these three positions all share in common a commitment to historical Christian orthodoxy, with its high Christology, its universal soteriological scope, and its affirmation of the enduring authority of the Old Testament. Darrell knows that other ways of answering his question exist among those who identify as Christians, but he recognizes that a consideration of answers which transgress Christian orthodoxy will serve little purpose at the Borough Park Symposium. This limitation which Darrell imposes upon the range of positions to be considered is reasonable in context, and enables him to maintain a sharp focus and a concise presentation.

In delineating positions #1 and #2 and emphasizing the distinction between them, Darrell attends to a theological nuance that many Messianic Jews ignore. Here he actually *broadens* our vision and guards against undue constriction. Position #1 denies any enduring theological significance to Jewish identity, whereas position #2 affirms an eschatological calling that remains valid for genealogical-Israel (though without any implications related to an inheritance of land). As Darrell states, "It is most important that those engaged in eschatological discussion appreciate this position [i.e. #2] and the distinction it has from the previous position. Strictly speaking it is not replacement theology in the fullest sense of that term." Darrell does our movement a service by calling us to distinguish carefully among those with whom we disagree, and to avoid characterizing them all with an unqualified negative epithet such as "supersessionist" or "replacement theologian." For example, we may disagree passionately with the theology and exegesis of Gary Burge (whose teaching falls within Darrell's second category), but we are unfair to him when we fail to distinguish his position from that of N.T. Wright (whose

teaching falls within Darrell's first category). When Gary denies being a "supersessionist," he does so on the basis of his understanding that Romans 11 speaks about the eschatological destiny of the Jewish people. We may think that Gary is in some sense a "supersessionist," but that term (without a suitable qualifying adjective) becomes a blunt instrument when it is unable to account for distinctions of the sort that Darrell here articulates. In this way Darrell enlarges our perspective and enables us to perceive important differences that we might otherwise ignore.

It is when Darrell formulates position #3 that problems arise. This third answer to his opening question is the one that Darrell himself advocates, and which he assumes is broad enough to cover all those who are orthodox in their faith and who dissent from the first two answers. (Darrell realizes that variations will exist among those who fall within each of the three positions he describes, as is evident when he introduces them with the phrase "in the broadest outline"; nevertheless, this language suggests that that he considers his formulations sufficiently general to encompass those variations.) Does Darrell's third answer, as he articulates it, succeed in accounting for all the responses to his question which participants in the Borough Park Symposium might reasonably offer? I think not.

The first two sentences of Darrell's description of position #3 are as follows: "The church now inherits salvation and covenant promises through Christ. The church is the institution through which Christ works in this era to bless." I think we would all agree with the first statement. We would also all agree with the second if the definite article ("*the* institution") were changed to an indefinite article ("*an* institution"). However, as currently formulated this sentence implies that the risen Messiah does *not* "work in this era to bless" through the institutions of the Jewish people. Darrell is thus failing to account for one of the major points of contention within the Messianic Jewish world, and also between post-liberal and Catholic theologians (on the one hand) and their conservative evangelical colleagues (on the other). Traditionally-oriented Messianic Jews (such as myself), post-liberal Protestant thinkers (such as those examined in Peter Och's *Another Reformation*), and many Catholic theologians (such as Pope John Paul II) combine an adherence to the historically orthodox Christian views described by Darrell with a positive view of historical Judaism as an expression of God's gracious action through the Messiah. Any attempt to present a general category that encompasses all orthodox believers in Yeshua who disagree with positions #1 and #2 must be broad enough to include such a view of Jewish tradition and religious life.

This view of Jewish life has tremendous consequences for the question which Darrell decided to leave *unaddressed*—namely, the *implications* of Israel's eschatological inheritance for our contemporary situation. If genealogical-Israel is even today (and not only in the eschaton) an expression of God's revelatory, redemptive, and sanctifying work in the world, that fact has a profound impact on our perspective on Israel's bond to the land of promise in this age before the *parousia*. Thus, I would argue for adding a fourth position to Darrell's list, or for rephrasing the third answer with greater generality that allows for the inclusion of this view.

Another problem with Darrell's formulation of position #3 surfaces as we read the next sentence: "However a day is coming when Jesus returns to consummate his rule in an intermediate kingdom that precedes the new heaven and earth." With this statement Darrell subsumes all positions that affirm Israel's eschatological inheritance of land under the heading of

*pre-millennialism*. Is it truly the case that all arguments for the eschatological significance of Jew-gentile differentiation, and for the land of Israel as the eschatological heritage of the people of Israel, are inseparable from a pre-millennial eschatological scheme? If so, those who reject this vision of eschatology will be justified in turning aside from position #3 without further debate.

In fact, however, a pre-millennial eschatology (which distinguishes between an “intermediate [millennial] kingdom” and “the new heaven and earth”) is not a necessary condition for identifying a distinctive eschatological inheritance for genealogical-Israel. While we may dispute N.T. Wright’s interpretation of the role of the Jewish people in this world and the next, there is much to admire in his revisionist eschatology in which the new earth retains its “earthiness” — that is, its authentic continuity with the world in which we now live. Though this runs counter to his purpose, Wright’s eschatological vision makes room for a distinctive Jewish inheritance of land in a glorified creation that is the ultimate rather than merely the pen-ultimate goal of the divine plan. Taking advantage of this newly opened theological space, Joel Willitts offers a reading of the final chapters of the book of Revelation that works with an eschatological vision akin to that of Wright and assigns a special place within that vision to the Jewish people and its inheritance of land (see his article in Rudolph and Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*).

Let us not give our Christian friends who reject a pre-millennial eschatology an excuse to depart prematurely from the debate about Israel’s promised inheritance. We must articulate the theological options with a breadth that challenges all who are serious about their faith in the Messiah to rethink their reading of the biblical text in light of God’s enduring purposes for the Jewish people. Once again, Darrell should either add a new position to his list, or restate position #3 in a way that does not identify it exclusively with pre-millennialism.

My proposals for expanding the range of answers to the question which frames Darrell’s paper would require only small modifications in his text. My proposal to expand the range of the question itself, on the other hand, would demand more substantial changes. In any case, what Darrell has already offered us is of great value, and will hopefully stimulate the type of discussion on this topic which our movement sorely needs.