

Ephesians: A Case Study in the New Testament Author's Interpretations of the Hebrew Prophets.

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Abstract

Many of the epistles in the New Testament quote the Hebrew prophets and rely upon these quotations to reinforce and shape the epistle's message. Often, these quotations can appear to be taken out of their initial context: reference to the Hebrew nations of Israel and/or Judah. Though the subject of the prophecy is typically one of these ancient nations, the writer of the epistle generally reads the prophecy as though it is about the church in the first century, leading to the possible interpretation that the writer believed that first-century Christians had replaced the Jews. Nevertheless, this article demonstrates, through a case study in the Epistle to the Ephesians and an application to the Epistle to the Hebrews, that rather than seeing Christians as a replacement for the Jews in the prophets, New Testament writers perhaps saw Christians as an additional fulfillment of the prophecies. This recognition prevents a belief in replacement theology, and allows Christians to read the Hebrew prophets with the understanding that they are not simply about either Jews or Christians, but about both—creating a better respect and relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

Keywords: Christian-Jewish relations, anti-Judaism, Ephesians, replacement theology, supersessionism

Introduction

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a letter that claims to be written by the apostle Paul to the believers in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1). Nevertheless, many modern scholars question this attribution¹—stating that the epistle heavily mimics letters that are indisputably Pauline²—and whether it was written to followers of Jesus in Ephesus, seeing that the address to Ephesus is omitted in a number of early Greek manuscripts.³ Despite these facts, the Church Fathers unanimously ascribe the letter to Paul.⁴

The epistle is not generally seen as particularly anti-Jewish—the word “Jew” is entirely absent from the letter, while “Israel” is used only once (Ephesians 2:12). The letter discusses both doctrine and lifestyle. Some of its major themes are predestination, unity, and morality, and these ethical precepts and ideas had a profound influence on Christianity in the coming centuries.

Because of this lack of anti-Judaism, the Epistle to the Ephesians provides an opportunity as a case study to focus on the way that early followers of Jesus understood and used the Old Testament, without the distraction of explaining verses that contain polemic against Jewish groups or institutions. In this way, the nuance of New Testament exegesis of the Old Testament can be clearly seen and appreciated—and can provide a Biblical context for

¹ David Kraemer, “Ephesians,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, eds. Amy Jill Levine & Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 388.

² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), lv.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴ David Malick, “Ephesians,” *Bible.org*, accessed March 7, 2018, <https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-ephesians>; G. H. P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 4.

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understanding the way that other books of the New Testament use the Old Testament.

This article will consider two Old Testament themes that run through Ephesians: the tabernacle and the temple, and the prophecy of Isaiah. The way that these two themes are used provides a framework for understanding the way that New Testament theology in the first century used the Old Testament. The Old Testament was not seen as *outdated* or *worn out*. Instead, it was recognized as prophetically powerful—both in reference to the followers of Jesus and the Jews. When the Old Testament was quoted in Ephesians, the writer did not attempt to *replace* the meaning that the Old Testament context gave to the quotation. Instead, the writer asserted this quotation as a *new interpretation* that pertained specifically to Jesus's followers. In other words, the plain meaning of the text was not superseded or negated by the application to Jesus's followers. The writer created a *new* and *additional* interpretation.

After following these two themes and seeing how the writer created a new interpretation, this article will apply this understanding to a portion of the Epistle to the Hebrews that is generally considered supersessionist—showing the value in recognizing the use of Jewish ideas, prophecies, and symbols, but creating an additional Christian interpretation to them, rather than replacing their Jewish meaning.

The Tabernacle and Temple Motif

In the Hebrew Bible, the tabernacle that moved throughout the wilderness and the land of Israel with the Israelites and the Temple in Jerusalem are crucial places in which the presence of God dwelt in the midst of His people (Exodus

25:8).⁵ That presence would never depart from the site of the Temple, as the psalmist wrote: “For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: This is my resting place forever” (Psalm 132:13–14). Thus, some sects of Judaism today believe that when *Moshiach* comes, the Third Temple will be built upon the site of the first and the second, and that temple “will remain for all time, an eternal testimony of G-d’s Presence within this world.”⁶

Nevertheless, although the Epistle to the Ephesians refers to the temple of God, it describes this temple in a much different way. The temple discussed in Ephesians appears to have no connection to Jerusalem, no specific connection to the Jewish people, and, perhaps most surprisingly—no links at all to a literal building. This temple is straightforwardly referenced only once in the epistle: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:19–21).

This one reference, however, is enough to show that the writer is not thinking of a brick and mortar building. This temple was located wherever followers of Jesus could be found, composed of both Jew and Gentile, and built upon Christ Jesus—not a literal place. However, despite these differences, the purpose of this temple was not all that different from the purpose of the Jewish tabernacle and temples: “In him you also are being built together into a

⁵ The same would appear to be the case in Orthodox Chassidic Judaism – Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, “The Ultimate Dwelling for G-d’s Presence,” *Chabad.org*, accessed February 13, 2018, https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/148184/jewish/The-Ultimate-Dwelling-For-G-ds-Presence.htm.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). As such, the believers to whom Ephesians was written were a spiritual temple, which could serve the same function as the temple in Jerusalem.

Although this set of verses appears to be the only direct reference to the tabernacle or temple in the epistle, the believers as the tabernacle or temple appears to be one of this letter’s motifs. The following section of this article will examine, starting at the beginning of the epistle, a number of the allusions and possible references to the believers as the tabernacle or temple of God.

Ephesians 1 - According to

One of the first connections that this epistle makes between the believers and the Jewish tabernacle is quite subtle and hinges on the phrases “even as” (*kathos*) and “according to” (*kata*) being linked textually with phrases about God’s purpose. Repeatedly throughout the first chapter, it is stressed that God’s power was operating on the brothers and sisters according to God’s purpose. The references are as follows:

- “Even as (*kathos*) he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love . . .” (Ephesians 1:4).
- “He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to (*kata*) the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:5).
- “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to (*kata*) the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).
- “Making known to us the mystery of his will,

according to (*kata*) his purpose, which he set forth in Christ” (Ephesians 1:9).

- “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to (*kata*) the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).
- “And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to (*kata*) the working of his great might” (Ephesians 1:19).

The significance of the references above is found in the consistency with which the Torah emphasizes that the erection of the tabernacle, its fixtures, and its system of worship were created according to God’s plan (Exodus 25:40; 26:30; 31:6). The temple was the same. David gave Solomon detailed plans for the first temple (1 Chronicles 28:11–18), and as he gave them to his son, he stated: “All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan” (1 Chronicles 28:19).

As such, it would appear that it was not just in the treatise about Jews and Gentiles becoming one in Christ that the writer to the Ephesians sought to show the believers as the temple of God—but the emphasis that the Ephesians were being fashioned according to God’s purpose parallels the record of the building of the tabernacle.

Fullness of Him

With this possible tabernacle motif in chapter one of Ephesians, it should not be surprising to see another possible reference in that first chapter: the writer states that God will fill them. “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his

body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22–23).

This is the same event that took place at both the tabernacle and the temple on their inaugural day—the glory of God descended and filled the tent and the building, so much so that Moses could not enter the tabernacle, and the priests could not minister in the temple! “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34–35). And, “As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD’s house” (2 Chronicles 7:1–2).

The believers were spiritually experiencing what had literally happened to the tabernacle and temple.⁷ And, as the writer progressed through the epistle, he would make this theme increasingly plain.

Ephesians 3 - According to

Chapter two contains the treatise describing the believers as the spiritual temple, and chapter three continues to build on this idea. Just like chapter one, chapter two has a number of “according to” passages.

- “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to (*kata*) the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power” (Ephesians 3:7).

⁷ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 210; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 75.

- “This was according to (*kata*) the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11).
- “That according to (*kata*) the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being” (Ephesians 3:16).
- “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to (*kata*) the power at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Fullness of Him

And, again, it also contains references to being filled with God:⁸ “That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17–19).

Other Connections

But chapter three also brings in a few more connections. Within this chapter, the writer begins a prayer—and in writing about this prayer, he writes about the position he assumes in praying: “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father” (Ephesians 3:14).

In this kneeling position—and specifically, kneeling before the Father—the writer had the following request: “That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner

⁸ “Furthermore, the idea of being ‘filled with all the fulness of God’ (v. 19) may be an allusion to the fullness of God in that temple” – Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians & Colossians after Supersessionism* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 173.

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being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love . . .” (Ephesians 3:16–17).

The members of the believing community were to become a dwelling place for Christ! Once again, the tabernacle/temple motif has come to the fore. But even more, just consider that this was not merely the writer referring to the believers as God’s dwelling place. This was him, on his knees, praying that the believers would be God’s dwelling place.

The scene is reminiscent of one from the Jewish Bible:⁹ “Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer and plea to the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven” (1 Kings 8:54). Solomon had *knelt*, and he had knelt before God. And what had Solomon prayed? “And now arise, O LORD God, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your goodness.” (2 Chronicles 6:41).

Solomon had prayed that the temple—which he was dedicating at that time—would be God’s dwelling place (cp. 1 Kings 8:13)! And here, in dedicating the spiritual temple of the believers,¹⁰ the writer to the Ephesians was mimicking the scene!¹¹

⁹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 377.

¹⁰ Perhaps another echo to Solomon’s dedication of the temple can be found in the language of the first chapter of the epistle: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has...” (Ephesians 1:3). This is the same way that Solomon began his dedicatory prayer: “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who...” (1 Kings 8:15) – Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 10.

¹¹ *The New Interpreter’s Bible* also notes that Ephesians 3:17 is an echo of Ephesians 2:20–21—the passage about the community as the temple of God. – Pheme Perkins, “Ephesians,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 56.

Ephesians 4 - Psalm 68

Another piece of this tabernacle and temple motif in Ephesians is found in chapter four, just before the writer begins his quotation of Psalm 68. “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7). Although “grace” has a number of meanings in the Christian scriptures, here it would appear to be a reference to the inspiration and power of God working upon the members of the community¹²—a reference to the gifts of the Holy Spirit that they had been given.¹³ With these gifts in mind, it would seem this verse is perhaps the first allusion to the building of the tabernacle in this chapter of the epistle.

Just as there were gifts of the Holy Spirit in the first-century community, there were gifts of the Spirit of God during the time of the Exodus. Those gifts were given for a specific purpose:

‘See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability,

¹² Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 430; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 175–176.

¹³ The list of gifts in Ephesians 4:11 are the same types of gifts that are mentioned in other lists of the Holy Spirit powers (Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:28–31) – Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 229.

that they may make all that I have commanded you (Exodus 31:2–6).

Filled with the Spirit of God, Bezalel, along with Oholiab and all of those to whom God had given the ability, could build the tabernacle. With that possible subtle allusion to the gifts given at the building of the tabernacle, the writer quoted Psalm 68—reinforcing the idea that his mind was on the tabernacle: “Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men’” (Ephesians 4:8).

There is a wide array of ideas as to when Psalm 68 was written.¹⁴ Thielman notes: “Ps. 68 is notoriously difficult both to outline and to place in any specific historical setting.”¹⁵ Thompson asserts that it was likely written after a king’s conquest of Jerusalem,¹⁶ Lincoln refers to a rabbinic tradition in which Psalm 68 was understood to be about Moses’s ascension to heaven when he received the Torah at Sinai,¹⁷ as does Schnackenburg.¹⁸ It would indeed appear that there are a number of references to the Exodus—and the verse quoted by the writer to the Ephesians is one of them. This idea is reinforced when the entirety of the verse quoted is considered: “You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even

¹⁴ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 473–474.

¹⁵ Frank S. Thielman, “Ephesians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 820.

¹⁶ G. H. P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 67.

¹⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 243.

¹⁸ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 177.

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among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there” (Psalm 68:18).

This language is reflective of the Exodus.¹⁹ The Israelite captives were freed from Egypt. They were given (as the writer of Ephesians quoted it) gifts for the construction of God’s house. And, the latter portion of this verse, which was not quoted in Ephesians, states that very reason: that God would dwell among them—the same theme to which the writer of Ephesians had brought the readers in chapter two. Thus, the very verse quoted by the writer is a verse about the erection of a house for God’s presence—and the writer appears to have been attempting to demonstrate that the same thing was occurring in his day. But what was the parallel? What house was being made? Hadn’t the writer explained in chapter two? The house was the believers themselves. And so the writer goes on to explain, once again, that it was the believers, the body of Christ, that was the new tabernacle: “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:10).

Here is the idea of filling once again, just as the glory of God filled the tabernacle. The next verse continues the tabernacle theme: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–12).

These gifts were given for a specific purpose: building,²⁰ just as it was when gifts were given to Bezalel and Oholiab. And, though each individual member of the community was a builder of the body of Christ, the writer shows that as

¹⁹ John Allfree, “The Father’s Gifts to His Children,” *The Bible Student* 5, no. 4 (1974): 111; John Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Birmingham: The Christadelphian, 1956), 102.

²⁰ Harry Whittaker, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Standish: Biblia, 1992), 46–47.

members of the community, they were also part of the body—or part of the tabernacle they were building. Thus, just a few verses later, the metaphor of the body is again mixed with the metaphor of the tabernacle: “From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

Once again, some of the language here is reminiscent of the tabernacle or temple.²¹ In the Greek, the word translated as “held together” is *συμβιβάζομενον*—and although this specific word occurs only a handful of times in the LXX (Septuagint) and appears to have very little to do with this verse, a related word, *συμβολήν*, occurs a number of times and is strongly connected to the tabernacle (Exodus 26:4, 5, 10, 24; Exodus 36:11, 13, 17, 29). Each of these times it is translated as “coupling.”²² And again, here the body is being built.

But why would the writer to the Ephesians return to this theme of the tabernacle here? The context of this reference to the gifts is a discussion about unity based on the oneness of the believers’ faith (Ephesians 4:3–6).²³ But there was a threat. Allfree explains, “There was a real danger that the Spirit gifts which they had received would detract from this unity”²⁴—the diverse nature of the gifts had introduced the possibility of division (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). In that context,

²¹ Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation – Paul’s Jewish Identity and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 208; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 156.

²² In the King James Version—newer translations appear to leave the word out, perhaps for the sake of simplicity. Young’s Literal Translation translates the word as “joining.”

²³ G. H. P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 61–62.

²⁴ John Allfree, “The Father’s Gifts to His Children,” *The Bible Student* 5, no. 4 (1974): 110.

the writer appears to introduce the tabernacle once again,²⁵ perhaps because the tabernacle was a project for which many diverse people, empowered by the Spirit of God, came together to produce one building. In the very section of the tabernacle that mentions the couplings, God stated, “And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole” (Exodus 26:6).

Lincoln refers to this section of Ephesians 4 as a “discussion of the diversity of gifts within the one body of the Church.”²⁶ Despite their diversity, the believers could work together as one. Thus: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:11–13a). *The New Interpreter’s Bible* summarizes: “The ‘one’ formula refers to bringing together in a single community, body, and temple building those who were formerly divided.”²⁷

Ephesians 5 - Filled with the Spirit

The next chapter has the final assertion of this idea: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Just like the previous two references, this is a possible connection back to the inauguration of the tabernacle and the temple.

²⁵ *The Interpreter’s Bible* notes a possible connection to the temple even within this section about unity itself. – Francis W. Beare, “The Epistle to the Ephesians – Exegesis,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 10 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 685–686.

²⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 229.

²⁷ PHEME PERKINS, “Ephesians,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 65.

Temple Motif Conclusion

Throughout the epistle, the writer to the Ephesians connects the followers of Jesus with the tabernacle and the temple. Followers of Jesus were to be a spiritual temple for God. Just as the tabernacle and temple were made according to God's plans, so were the members of the community. Just like the tabernacle and the temple were filled with God's spirit and glory, so were the members of the community. Time and again, the writer reflects ideas and events associated with the tabernacle and the temple to the believers in Ephesus.

This use of the Hebrew Bible appears to lean heavily towards replacement theology. Ephesians could easily be read to be teaching that the Jewish temple no longer holds any significance, as it was simply replaced by the spiritual temple of believers. In fact, many scholars read this motif as being anti-Jewish.

For instance, Markus Barth wrote, "By the description of the spiritual temple of God which is now being built, or of the spiritual worship now offered, a certain polemic against the transitory glories of the stony temple and its cultus is made explicit."²⁸

Theodore Wedel, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, wrote unequivocally: "A striking change, however, must have occurred in the connotation of the word temple among the Gentile-Christian groups. They possessed no houses of worship. During the space of three hundred years, until the era of Constantine, Christians worshiped in private houses. The word temple became, perforce, a metaphor. 'The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands' (Acts 7:48). This truth became vivid experience. The Christian

²⁸ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 25.

congregation itself was now God's temple. He had no other habitation."²⁹

His colleague Francis Beare, who also wrote in *The Interpreter's Bible*, understood the epistle's use of the temple in a similar way: "This transformation . . . issues in the creation of a community of worship which is the true temple of God, incorporating Jews and Gentiles in a new humanity centering in Christ (2:11–22)."³⁰

Thus, according to the expositors above, the followers of Jesus were the true temple. Lincoln also agreed with this conclusion: "The readers are to be congratulated on the fact that through Christ's reconciling work they no longer have deprived status as compared with Israel in the outworking of God's plan of salvation, but have become fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. In fact, they should realize that they are now part of the new temple."³¹ By being part of a new temple, or a true temple, the implication is that any type of Jewish temple is old and outdated—that is, as long as the writing of this epistle is dated prior to 70 CE when the second temple was destroyed.

At the same time, however, it should be noted that this idea of a spiritual temple is certainly not foreign to Judaism. Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel translates "I will dwell among them" from the command to build the tabernacle as "I will dwell **within** them." He commented: "...in **them**, the people, not in **it**, the sanctuary. We are each to build a Tabernacle in our own heart for God to dwell in (emphasis in

²⁹ Theodore O. Wedel, "The Epistle to the Ephesians – Exposition," *The Interpreter's Bible*, 10 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 662.

³⁰ Francis W. Beare, "The Epistle to the Ephesians – Introduction," *The Interpreter's Bible*, 10 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 608.

³¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 132.

original).”³² Perhaps the same was hinted at by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote:

Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word’ (Isaiah 66:1–2)

Thus, despite the way that some commentators read this selection about a new temple in Ephesians as being written as a subtle polemic against the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, this assertion has its problems. Perhaps the greatest problem is the fact that Judaism does not preclude this concept of a spiritual temple, even a temple composed of people. Additionally, as has already been proven, the New Testament teaches that the followers of Jesus continued to worship at the Temple up until it was destroyed in 70 C.E.

If this temple motif, then, is not teaching supersessionism—that the Jews have been replaced in God’s purpose by the Christians—what is meant by it? Perhaps this theme demonstrates one of the ways in which the New Testament understands the Old Testament—spiritually. The themes and ideas of the Old Testament are understood in a metaphorical sense, thus, the believers are the tabernacle and the Temple. Yet at the same time—and this is crucial—the literal tabernacle and Temple are not negated. Faithful followers of Jesus worshiped the God of their fathers at the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, there is nothing in the epistle

³² Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, quoted in Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus, “A Place for God to Dwell,” [Reformjudaism.org](https://reformjudaism.org), accessed March 16, 2018, <https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/trumah/place-god-dwell>.

that attempts to say that the Temple does not exist (which would be absurd), or is not significant. Instead, the concept of the Temple is spiritualized, creating *an additional, spiritual temple*. In quoting Paul's description in First Corinthians of the believers as God's spiritual temple, Paula Fredriksen writes:

Theologians will sometimes point to these verses to argue that, for Paul, the physical, Jewish temple back in Jerusalem has been replaced or surpassed by this new, 'spiritual' and metaphorical 'temple,' the diaspora Christian communities. Given that, since 70 C.E., no temple in Jerusalem has stood, this claim can seem to be simple common sense.

But that is not what Paul says. Paul writes before 70. He never imagined a world without the temple. On the contrary: Paul praises his new communities by comparing them to this institution, which he valued supremely. Had he valued the temple less, he would not have used it as the defining image for his assemblies. Mid-first century, then, on the topic of the temple, Paul's thinking is not 'either/or' but 'both/and.' God's spirit dwells both in Jerusalem's temple and in the 'temple' of the believer and of the community.³³

While this is about Corinthians, the sentiment is the same—the figure of the believers as the temple did not take away from the Temple in Jerusalem, but *added* to it.

This is often the way that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. It does not attempt to remove the significance of the Old Testament. It does not negate the meaning of the Old Testament with the Jews. Instead, it creates an

³³ Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians were Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 27-28. While I believe that Paul did foresee the eventual destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, I agree with the overarching thrust of Fredriksen's point: Paul compared the congregations to the temple out of respect for the symbol, not out of a desire to replace what was in Jerusalem.

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additional, spiritual interpretation in which the believers are seen as *spiritual* Israel and prophecies and concepts about Israel are applied to them in a flexible and metaphysical manner. The same will be seen in Ephesians's use of the prophecy of Isaiah.

The Use of Isaiah

In addition to its tabernacle/temple motif, the Epistle to the Ephesians has a strong relationship with the Hebrew prophecy of Isaiah. Qualls and Watts and Lincoln have noted dozens of possible allusions.³⁴ Time and again, the author of Ephesians draws upon Isaiah for themes, phrases, and ideas, so much so that the prophecy of Isaiah appears to provide a foundation for Ephesians. Yet, as will be noted, the Hebrew prophecy is used by the writer in a much different way from how it would have been initially understood by its Jewish audience.

This portion of the article will proceed through the epistle, noting those connections between Ephesians and Isaiah and considering the different interpretation given to the prophecy by the epistle. Ultimately, this different interpretation will have a bearing on the relationship that this epistle holds to the Jews and will demonstrate a similar process of exposition as the tabernacle/temple motif.

Ephesians 1 - The Beloved

Although there are a number of themes Ephesians shares with Isaiah,³⁵ for the sake of space, this exploration will look solely at words and phrases that appear to have been apprehended by the writer of Ephesians from Isaiah. One of

³⁴ Paula Fontana Qualls & John D.W. Watts, "Isaiah in Ephesians," *Review & Expositor* 93 (Spring 1996): 249-259; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), *passim*.

³⁵ Paula Fontana Qualls & John D.W. Watts, "Isaiah in Ephesians," *Review & Expositor* 93 (Spring 1996): 250-253, 255.

the first of these connections is the way in which the introduction describes Christ: “To the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).

Christ is called *to agapao*, or “the Beloved”—which both Allfree and Windsor see as a reference back to the “beloved” of Isaiah’s servant songs.³⁶ Nevertheless—and this is perhaps the principal piece for this study—though the author of Ephesians appears to have borrowed the term “the Beloved” from Isaiah, this is not just a mere appropriation. Nor is it a matter of simple fulfillment of prophecy, as some intertextuality is generally interpreted.³⁷ Rather, as many of this epistle’s references back to Isaiah, it would appear as though the author was attempting to show a new, inclusive interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah.

Accordingly, the assertion at the beginning of Ephesians about the Beloved and his relationship to the believers was that in the Beloved, the believers had received grace. Not only that, but through Christ, the believers had been predestined, or chosen before the foundation of the world. As the chosen of God via the Beloved, they had been given an inheritance: “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).

Yet, throughout Deutero-Isaiah, there appears to be a second beloved or chosen one in addition to the one mentioned in Isaiah 42:

³⁶ John Allfree, “In the Heavenlies in Christ,” *The Bible Student* 5, no. 1 (1974): 5–6; Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians & Colossians after Supersessionism* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 96.

³⁷ Brenda Deen Schildgen, “A Blind Promise: Mark’s Retrieval of Esther,” *Poetics Today* 15, no. 1 (1994): 117–118.

- “The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people” (Isaiah 43:20).
- “For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me” (Isaiah 45:4).
- “I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and from Judah possessors of my mountains; my chosen shall possess it, and my servants shall dwell there” (Isaiah 65:9).
- “They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isaiah 65:22).

Isaiah paints the Beloved, or the chosen, as two entities: the Messiah (as seen in Isaiah 42) and the people of Israel (as seen in the references above)—and the latter is given an inheritance. Nevertheless, though Ephesians alludes to Isaiah, Ephesians has a different view. The first Beloved in Ephesians is Christ, or the Messiah—but the second is not Israel. Instead, it is the community, which, through Christ, has also become *chosen* and given an inheritance. Lionel Windsor, in *Reading Ephesians & Colossians after Supersessionism* explained: “Thus, the naming of Christ as ‘the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of trespasses’ (vv. 6b–7) appears to be alluding to the role of the Isaianic Servant of the Lord. This is, significantly, a role that is intimately connected to Israel’s

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own special place in God’s plan for the world and for all the nations.”³⁸

Andrew Lincoln stated the same: “In the Pauline corpus this designation for Israel can be transferred to believers, frequently in close association with the concept of election . . . Ephesians reflects a transference of the title to Christ as well as to Christians.”³⁹ And so this term, the Beloved, sets the stage for the way that the writer to the Ephesians uses the prophecy of Isaiah—as a prophecy that describes the glories of the believers in Christ.

Be Enlightened

Soon after the reference to the Lord Jesus as “the Beloved,” the writer begins to further explain the blessings that the believers have been given while in God’s elect—and what those blessings mean for their behavior. Thus, the writer explains that:

1. The readers of the epistle had been dead because of their sins (Ephesians 2:1).
2. But, the redeemer had come (Ephesians 1:7).
3. And, as a covenant of this redemption, they had been given the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13–14).⁴⁰

³⁸ Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians & Colossians after Supersessionism* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), 96.

³⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 27.

⁴⁰ The *English Standard Version* contains two footnotes for this verse, both of which reinforce that the blessing of the Holy Spirit was connected specifically to their redemption: “guarantee”: “Or *down payment*”; “until we acquire possession of it”: “Or *until God redeems his possession*.”

4. And this transformation was a calling to them to shine forth God's light and cause others to praise His glory: (Ephesians 1:14).

These blessings and their commensurate effect on behavior share close similarities with Isaiah's description of Israel's blessings and the implications of those blessings upon behavior in Isaiah 59–60.⁴¹

1. Israel was “like dead men” because of their sins (Isaiah 59:10, 12).
2. But, the redeemer would come (Isaiah 59:20).
3. The redeemer would make a covenant with Israel—that His spirit would not depart from them (Isaiah 59:21).
4. This transformation was a calling to them to shine forth God's light and cause others to praise His glory (Isaiah 60:1–3).

The parallels become even stronger when it is noted that the writer very specifically appears to connect the followers of Jesus and the enlightened Israel when he describes his prayer for the believers in Ephesus: “Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18).

They were to be enlightened (root word: *photizo*). In that regard, the Septuagint version's description of the redeemed Israel reads: “Be enlightened [*photizo*], be enlightened [*photizo*], O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of

⁴¹ Jonathan M. Lunde and John Anthony Dunne, “Paul's Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah in Ephesians 5:14,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 1 (2012): 98, 100.

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the Lord is risen upon thee” (Isaiah 60:1, LXX). And thus the prophecy of Israel’s glory had been apprehended for the followers of Jesus.

Ephesians 2 - Far Off and Near

Ephesians 2 focuses on the bringing together of the Jews and the Gentiles in Christ. Though they had historically been separate, in the community, Jews and Gentiles could be made one—and thus together they formed a new temple of God. In backing up this assertion, the writer to the Ephesians alluded again to the prophecy of Isaiah: “And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (Ephesians 2:17). This was an allusion to “‘Creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will heal him’” (Isaiah 57:19).

That the words of the epistle are loosely based on this portion of the prophecy of Isaiah is well established.⁴² The more difficult question to answer is why the writer chose to allude here to the prophecy of Isaiah.

Marcus Barth explains why this is such a perplexing question: “The original prophetic text referred not to Jews and Gentiles, but to Jews in exile and Jews at home in the

⁴² G. H. P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 50–51; Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 260; Pheme Perkins, “Ephesians,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 44; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 126.

promised land!”⁴³ Thielman notes that this discrepancy has been “frequently” noted by scholars.⁴⁴

What then was the author attempting to do? Marcus Barth explains again: “When Paul in both verses [vs. 13] (or the pre-Pauline hymn in vs. 17) used only fragments of Isa 57:19 and added new words to the quotation, he probably assumed that such changes would offer an authentic interpretation of the prophetic text.”⁴⁵

And thus, Isaiah 59, though originally being about Jews uniting with Jews who had been removed from the land, was taken to be about Jews uniting with Gentiles—and specifically the Gentile believers. The writer of Ephesians was creating a new interpretation of the prophet.

Ephesians 4 - Grieve Not the Holy Spirit

Perhaps this reinterpretation of Isaiah can be seen most clearly in a very brief quotation that occurs in the fourth chapter of the epistle—with the writer of the epistle stating: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Ephesians 4:30). These words are a direct reference to what was stated of beloved Israel at the end of Isaiah: “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit” (Isaiah 63:10).⁴⁶ The beloved now includes the followers of Jesus. And in fact, as the latter portion of Isaiah 63 is a reflection upon Israel in the wilderness during the

⁴³ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 276.

⁴⁴ Frank S. Thielman, “Ephesians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 817.

⁴⁵ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 276.

⁴⁶ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 205; Frank S. Thielman, “Ephesians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 825.

time of the Exodus,⁴⁷ perhaps it could even be said that the history of Israel—the history of the Exodus—is now also being understood in terms of the believers. Hence the quotation of Psalm 68, already considered, just a few verses prior. This cannot be seen as replacement theology, as Israel's history has already happened. Instead, it is a new, additional interpretation.

Ephesians 5 - Arise, O Sleeper

Another instance of this reinterpretation of Isaiah appears in Ephesians 5. There, the writer makes it clear that he is quoting from a passage of Scripture, yet the quotation is rather elusive: “Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (Ephesians 5:14b).

Despite the “Therefore it says,” the words that follow are absent from the Hebrew Bible. Qualls and Watts explain, “Many scholars understand this verse as a fragment from a Christian baptismal hymn.” However, they add, “Its Isaianic roots cannot be denied.”⁴⁸ Therefore, it is perhaps possible that rather than this being a direct quotation, the reference is more of a summary of a set of verses from Isaiah—with the major emphasis coming from Isaiah 60:1–2.⁴⁹ Thus, in the preceding chapter, Isaiah 59, the prophet spoke of the people as though they were dead: “We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at

⁴⁷ Harry Whittaker, *Isaiah* (Staffordshire: Biblia, 1988), 532.

⁴⁸ Paula Fontana Qualls & John D.W. Watts, “Isaiah in Ephesians,” *Review & Expositor* 93 (Spring 1996): 250–253, 254.

⁴⁹ David Kraemer, “Ephesians,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, eds. Amy Jill-Levine & Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 395; Jonathan M. Lunde and John Anthony Dunne, “Paul’s Creative and Contextual Use of Isaiah in Ephesians 5:14,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 1 (2012): 98–99.

noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men” (Isaiah 59:10).

Despite Israel’s spiritual deadness, the nation would undergo a miracle: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you” (Isaiah 60:1). And how is it that this resurrection was to take place upon God’s people? “‘And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,’ declares the LORD” (Isaiah 59:20). Therefore, it is the Messiah who will give the nation light.

Isaiah creates a picture of Israel that is filled with darkness—yet, the nation can come to the light if is willing to turn to God. Nevertheless, the writer to the Ephesians shows something different: he shows that this is the pattern that the community of believers has already undergone. Once again, a passage specifically about the redemption of Israel has been used to describe the transformation of Jesus’s followers.

The Use of the Quotations

Through sustained references to Isaiah, the writer to the Ephesians creates a new interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah—taking passages that were originally about Israel and reinterpreting them to be about the redemption of the believers. However, this motif could easily be taken as supersessionism (similarly to how the spiritual temple could be seen as replacing the physical temple).⁵⁰ Nevertheless, rather than replacing the Jewish interpretation of Isaiah, the writer to the Ephesians sought to create an additional interpretation. The Jewish interpretations therefore were not discounted, nor was Jewish history negated. Rather, Jewish

⁵⁰ Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 131.

interpretations and Jewish history were simply enlarged. This is the same hermeneutic as seen with the Temple motif.

This enlargement is further evident by the fact that a number of the Isaiah allusions within the Epistle to the Ephesians specifically apply prophecies of either the Messiah, or of God Himself to the believers—divine persons whom the writer would certainly not want to supplant with the community of believers. The following are a few examples.

The Spirit of Wisdom

Near the end of chapter one of the epistle, the writer prayed for the community's understanding: "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians 1:16–17).

"The Spirit of wisdom and of revelation" strongly parallels a phrase used by the prophet: "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding."⁵¹ Yet, unlike the other connections to Isaiah that have been explored, this allusion is not a phrase about Israel. Instead, the context of the reference is the work of the Messiah: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:1–2).

It would seem absurd to think that the writer was attempting to say that the believers had *replaced* the Messiah. Thus, the apprehension of a particular scripture does not necessarily mean that the writer has discounted the initial Jewish

⁵¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible Commentary, 34A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 163.

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interpretation of that scripture. Rather, as is the case here, the writer was making an additional interpretation.

The Armor of God

The same can be seen at the end of the letter. Another of Ephesians' well-known passages finds its roots in Isaiah, yet, as with the last passage, it is not a quotation of a prophecy about Israel:

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:14–17).

This armor of God would appear to be an amalgamation of a number of Isaiatic sources. Regarding the “belt of truth,” a similar phrase is found in Isaiah’s description of the Messiah:⁵² “Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins” (Isaiah 11:5).

Once again, the members of the community are told to fulfill a prophecy about the Messiah. Nevertheless, a much more interesting use of Isaiah is found in two of the other pieces of the armor of God: the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. Both of these items find their basis in Isaiah’s description of God: “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on

⁵² Paula Fontana Qualls & John D.W. Watts, "Isaiah in Ephesians," *Review & Expositor* 93 (Spring 1996): 255; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 436.

garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak” (Isaiah 59:17).

Finally, the “feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,” sound very similar to another of Isaiah’s passages.⁵³ There, the prophet praises the one whose feet bring the gospel of peace: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Isaiah 52:7).

This armor of God, which the believers were told to wear, is an amalgamation of pieces of the prophecy of Isaiah—some of which are about the Messiah and some of which are about God. This is not to say that the followers of Jesus have somehow replaced the Messiah or that they have replaced God. Instead, the Ephesians are an additional fulfillment of the prophecy. Qualls and Watts state it eloquently: “It would have been a non-existent thing for the Christian Jew to divorce the message of Ephesians from Israel’s prophetic Isaianic heritage. The reality of God’s current work necessitated that God’s work in the past be appropriated into the present. Isaiah had to be understood in light of the new mystery revealed.”⁵⁴

Isaiah Motif Conclusion

The Epistle to the Ephesians does not appear to teach anti-Judaism. According to it, Israel has not been replaced by the community of believers. Instead, the community has been *added into* Israel’s prophetic scriptures—with the Jewish interpretation of those scriptures still being viewed as valid. Ultimately, this is what the writer appears to assert when

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Paula Fontana Qualls & John D.W. Watts, "Isaiah in Ephesians," *Review & Expositor* 93 (Spring 1996): 256.

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discussing the conversion of the Gentiles: “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12–13). The followers of Jesus had joined the commonwealth of Israel. It was not that the commonwealth of Israel had been cast away, but just as Irenaeus had interpreted it, Japheth had come to worship in the tents of Shem.⁵⁵

Applying the Hermeneutic - Hebrews 8 and the New Covenant

When read at face value, the words of Hebrews 8 about the new covenant resound with supersessionism:

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each

⁵⁵ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers – Volume 1*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885), 1067.

one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.' In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Quoting from Jeremiah 31, the writer argues that there will be a new covenant made with the followers of Jesus as opposed to the old covenant that was “becoming obsolete,” or no longer used, and “ready to vanish away.” Of this *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* states: “A supersessionist theology.”⁵⁶ Perhaps it is—or, perhaps a consideration of the context, as well as the hermeneutic developed from Ephesians can shed greater light on another possible understanding of this passage.

As far as literary context, the main argument in Hebrews is that the Torah was good—but Jesus is better, in that the law was designed to reflect both the role and position of Jesus.⁵⁷ W.H. Boulton describes this emphasis:

The constant reiteration of the word [better] is striking and arrests attention. Around it the argument turns. Generally the comparison is between the Mosaic and the new, or everlasting, covenant, the object being to show that in every respect the latter is the better—better in its hopes and rewards, better in its sacrifices, its Mediator, its priesthood, and its channels of communication, even though the former

⁵⁶ Pamela Eisenbaum, “8.6-7,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, eds. Amy Jill-Levine & Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 388.

⁵⁷ Graeham E. Mansfield, *The Book of Hebrews: Verse by Verse Exposition* (West Beach, SA: Logos Publications, 2009), 10.

covenant was made known by angels (chap.ii, 2).⁵⁸

Thus, as the priests worked in the tabernacle and the temple, both of these were based upon the divine pattern the Moses was shown on the mount—the divine pattern of heaven into which Jesus came after his death (Hebrews 8:5). Yet, stating that Jesus brought something *better* does not necessarily annul what came before. Rather, the author’s argument is much more nuanced.

In quoting Jeremiah 31, the author of Hebrews makes a clear statement: “I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah”—thus, the quotation proves the author’s point that there was a need for *another* covenant, but at the same, also backs up the idea that God’s new covenant is not about *Gentiles*, but is about the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Israel has not been replaced by the Gentiles. Rather, there were two covenants in force at the time—the old covenant and the new covenant. The old covenant was about to be made obsolete *because* the new covenant was one for Jews *and* for Gentiles, which taught the same thing as the Torah, but, according to the author’s reasoning in chapters 1-7, was more effective at teaching those principles than the Torah was. The suggestion was not that the Jews were being cast away, but instead, brought into a better covenant (which is also what Jeremiah seems to say). Even further, it would appear as though the author was anticipating 70 C.E. (Hebrews 12:25-27) and the way in which temple sacrifices and a complete following of the Torah would be rendered impossible (without the changes proscribed by the Mishnah)—and thus, the old covenant was obsolete in the sense that it was replaced by a new covenant, and also in the sense that it could no longer be followed

⁵⁸ W.H. Boulton, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Samson Low, Marston & Co., LTD.), 6.

exactly in the way it was given. In other words, the author was not *replacing* Jeremiah's interpretation. He was creating a new one—an interpretation that applied to the Jewish followers of Jesus in the first century.

This can be further seen when simply considering Jeremiah's prophecy—his words don't fit the circumstances of the community of believers in the first century. In his prophecy, Jeremiah envisions an entirely new set of circumstances. One of the key pieces here is that Jeremiah sees both Israel and Judah restored: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast" (Jeremiah 31:27). And, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (v. 31). At the same time, God promises that not only will the people be brought back to their land after having been scattered to "the farthest parts of the earth" and "the north country," but that the people will return to Him in complete faithfulness: "At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people" (v. 1). Again, "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (v. 34). It sounds like perfection, particularly in Jeremiah's context—with the northern kingdom having been destroyed for decades, where the people refuse to listen to him, and when the Babylonians have taken one group after another captive. And, Jeremiah's words are not qualified. He doesn't say that most of the people will follow God—but that all of the tribes of Israel will worship in truth. This wasn't something that was happening in the first century—clearly, Israel and Judah were not being restored.

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Finally, in this very chapter, God, through Jeremiah also goes on to make a promise: His relationship with Israel will never end (v. 37). This is a clear indicator that Israel cannot be written out of their scriptures.

All together, it is clear that the writer to the Hebrews isn't attempting to replace the Jewish interpretation, but is instead adding an additional interpretation onto the scriptures. He believes that Jesus did not replace everything that was Jewish, but instead that Jesus was *better*. Jewish history has not been negated. It was simply being performed *again* in another way. And thus, just before quoting from Jeremiah 31, the writer to the Hebrews wrote: "But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises" (Hebrews 8:6). This is the same hermeneutic that was used in Ephesians, and here, it can take a passage that sounds clearly supersessionist and instead create an interpretation that keeps the Jewish integrity of the Old Testament and yet still allows for an additional reinterpretation in the New Testament.

Conclusion

A consideration of the tabernacle and temple motif in Ephesians, as well as the use of Isaiah in Ephesians has demonstrated a new hermeneutic for approaching the way that the New Testament uses the Old Testament and Jewish concepts in general. The New Testament does not teach supersessionism—instead, it creates an additional interpretation in which the believers in Jesus are seen as *another* fulfillment of prophecies and ideas about Israel. This can also be seen in the way that the Epistle to the Hebrews discusses the new covenant.

This hermeneutic is endorsed by the New Testament itself. It was seen here in Ephesians, it is used in Hebrews, it is seen

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in the way that the New Testament describes Jesus's Passover meal: he wasn't replacing items in the Passover. Instead, He was creating a *new*, symbolic interpretation of Passover. Hence, Luke records him stating that he desires to celebrate *this* Passover—as opposed to the traditional Passover. He was creating an additional, new interpretation in which the rituals and items of Passover became spiritualized. Thus the concept of a new Exodus is also apprehended, with Peter using this language to describe a spiritual Exodus when believers in Jesus become new people.⁵⁹ This is how the New Testament interprets the Old—and when this is understood, much of the anti-Judaism that has been read into the New Testament via replacement theology disappears.

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