



# The Two Covenant Theory Exposed

By Steve Cohen

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## **Are there two Ways to God: One Jewish and One Gentile?**

Numerous questions exist today in the field of comparative religions and missiology. This is especially true when it comes to discussions concerning Christianity and Judaism. Many question the need to share the gospel with Jewish people. In fact, many consider attempts to do this as being insensitive and judgmental.

Indicative of this is a quote from Eric Gritsch in a publication of the Lutheran Council in the USA, distributed by the ELCA. In it Gritsch states: There really is no need for any Christian mission to the Jews. They are and remain the people of God, even if they do not accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

## **Franz Rosenzweig and the Origins of Two Covenant Theology**

In virtually every historical work examining the factors which have influenced modern Jewish-Christian relations, the person of Franz Rosenzweig is discussed. The two covenant theory, as it is commonly referred to today, was first put forth by Franz Rosenzweig just after the First World War in a work entitled *The Star of Redemption*. His theology of the two covenants came about through a long series of discussions with a friend of his, a Hebrew Christian philosopher of religion, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy.

The two covenant theory of salvation which Rosenzweig developed basically states that God has established two different, but equally valid covenants: one with His people Israel and the other with the Gentiles.

He contends that the Covenant in Moses and the Covenant in Jesus are complementary to each other:

*Christianity acknowledges the God of the Jews, not as God but as "the Father of Jesus Christ." Christianity itself cleaves to the "Lord" because it knows that the Father can be reached only through him...*

We are all wholly agreed as to what Christ and his church mean to the world: no one can reach the Father save through him. No one can reach the Father!

But the situation is quite different for one who does not have to reach the Father because he is already with him. And this is true of the people of Israel (though not of individual Jews).

## **What Others Have Said**

Many Catholic theologians have taken the pronouncements of Vatican II and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (1991) to their logical conclusion, viz. that religious dialogue with members of other religions is to replace actual missionary efforts. Former Christian considerations of Judaism (as well as of other religions) encouraged proselytism. That is, Christians believed it not only legitimate but raise worthy to exert economic, psychological, or spiritual pressure on non-Christians in order to gain new members for the Church. The dialogical position, however, is one in which the parties accept one another as mutually equal partners.



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This position, however, also is increasingly being found among Christians who accept and believe in the Bible as the Word of God. For example, George Sheridan, who at the time was the East Coast Regional Director for the Southern Baptist department of Interfaith Witness, asserted that God's bond with the Jewish people was never superseded with the coming of Jesus: "The Jews of today, as ever, receive salvation through their having been chosen by God in covenant with Abraham, Moses, and the prophets...My position is that the Jews do not require evangelization."

But what did Paul mean when he stated in Romans 1:16 that the gospel was the power of God "for the salvation of everyone who believes?" Perhaps an illustration will help us understand this more fully.

A number of years ago an evangelical attempt at piquing people's curiosity, and thus enabling Christians to share the Gospel message with non-Christians, was developed by putting bumper stickers on cars which simply said: "I Found It!" When people saw this they were supposed to ask what it was that the driver "found." In response to this some Jewish groups countered with their own bumper sticker which stated: "We Never Lost It!"

This is of course, the crux of the problem. Who is Jesus, and how is one "saved"? I believe that for many, if not most, Christians today the entire concept of our salvation has dulled. That is, it is almost as if we take this for granted. The urgency of our salvation and the unspeakable eternal consequences of being cut off from God are not spoken of very often, or are not understood very well.

In Romans 9:1-5 Paul eloquently writes of how the Jewish people were elected by God in the past, and yet the adoption, the covenants, the Law, the temple worship, and the promises were all to no avail – for they rejected their own Messiah.

Paul again urges that prayers be made for them (apparently unaware of any "two covenant" theory):

*Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge" (Rom. 10:1- 2).*

He concludes that although the Jewish people are cut off for now, that God still has plans for them. That is, that God has not totally rejected them and that they would yet receive Jesus (Romans 11).

### **A Concluding Biblical Rejoinder**

As much as one might like to agree with those promulgating a theology of two covenants, it simply is not a biblical doctrine.

Quite the contrary, it goes against everything that we find in the New Testament relating to missions. In fact this is the quintessential form of anti-Semitism, for in promoting this false doctrine the only way of salvation is closed to the Jewish person (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12). Nothing could be more dangerous, racist, or pernicious than this.

The Apostle Paul boldly affirmed: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom.1:16).



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We are not to be ashamed of sharing the good news of the gospel with anyone. And in that this good news came through the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and in that “*salvation is of the Jewish*” (Jn.4:22), this message was “*for the Jew first.*”

It seems that this is completely forgotten today. This gospel of Jesus Christ was first and foremost to go to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Christians owe a great debt to the Jews, for our entire spiritual heritage is derived from them. Indeed, we have been grafted into the olive tree of Israel, not the reverse (Rom.11:11).

This issue was extracted from Dr. Joseph Gudel’s work entitled *The Two Covenant Theory*.

*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. -- Acts 4:11-12*



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