

DID JESUS COME TO BE THE MESSIAH?

A Response to John Hagee's new book, *In Defense of Israel*¹

by

Michael L. Brown, Ph.D.²

As a Jewish believer in Jesus, I have had a deep appreciation for Pastor John Hagee. He has tirelessly spoken out against the error of replacement theology. He has called for the Church to stand with the people of Israel through thick and thin and has provided real, material help for needy Jews in the Land, also encouraging *aliyah* (Jewish immigration to Israel). And he has emphasized the implications of God's covenantal promises to the patriarchs, recognizing that if God could revoke His promises to Israel, He could just as well revoke His promises to the Church. For all this, I am grateful. His zeal, his passion, and his unwavering commitment to my people are to be commended.

Over the years, Pastor Hagee has been accused of espousing dual covenant theology – that is, the teaching that God has made a way for Jews to be saved outside of Jesus – and he has consistently denied this charge, until this very day.³ In his newest book, however, he has introduced a new teaching, one that some Christians are calling heresy. Is there truth to this charge?

In his promotional video to *In Defense of Israel*, Pastor Hagee claims that his new book “will shake Christian theology.” This means that if his book does put forth serious error, we should understand this as intentional. In other words, if he claims to have a new insight and revelation that will upset the apple cart and, literally “shake Christian theology,” we cannot write it off as a slip of the pen or a careless statement. Rather, it must be seen as intentional.

¹ John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel: The Bible's Mandate for Supporting the Jewish State* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2007). Note that all scripture citations in this paper, aside from those quotes taken directly from Hagee's book, are from the NIV, unless otherwise noted. All emphasis within scripture quotes is mine, unless otherwise noted.

² For information about the author of this paper, see www.revolutionnow.org.

³ To quote him directly from email his office has sent out to those questioning his new teaching, “THERE IS NO DUAL COVENANT! The Bible says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).” The copy of the email that was forwarded to me was dated November 16, 2007 and it was entitled, “JESUS: MESSIAH OR SAVIOR?” Note, however, that the Foreword to the book was written by Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg, the same man who claimed that Hagee held to dual covenant theology for more than twenty-five years, and that Hagee subsequently convinced Jerry Falwell of the same (<http://www.ipost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull&cid=1139395509016>). Falwell immediately issued a very clear, yet gracious statement repudiating dual covenant theology and denying Rabbi Scheinberg's claims; Hagee also issued a statement, but it was not as strong as Falwell's. See <http://www.theconservativevoice.com/articles/article.html?id=12741>. For an even more recent update to this email, see the end of this paper.

Is there serious error in John Hagee's new book?

The question is: Does Pastor Hagee's book contain serious error? Without a doubt, it does. In fact, I cannot remember reading a book by an evangelical leader that contained a more fundamental denial of New Testament truth than what is found in *In Defense of Israel*, nor can I understand how this book could have been released by Front Line, a subdivision of Strang Communications, publishers of the most widely distributed Charismatic magazines and books. Christian integrity and love of the truth would call for Strang Communications to renounce the errors of this book, without ambiguity or waffling, and to refuse to reprint and distribute the book until it was thoroughly rewritten. (The rewriting of the book, of course, would call for Pastor Hagee to recognize and repudiate his errors. The repudiation of the book's false theology could be done immediately by Strang.)

Christian integrity and love of the truth would also call for Christian TV stations carrying Pastor Hagee's program – where he is now actively teaching this false doctrine – to remove his show if he refuses to renounce his views. And it would also call for Christian leaders involved in CUFI (Christians United for Israel) to resign from membership in Pastor Hagee's organization if he did not categorically renounce this new teaching.⁴

Assuredly, this is not merely a matter of semantics. The claims made in the book are quite clear, overt, and, to reiterate, quite intentional. Nor is this matter of concern only to a handful of Jewish believers – unless, by “Jewish believers” one means people like Peter and Paul! Indeed, what is at stake is a fundamental rewriting of one of the most foundational biblical truths and the removal of the very cornerstone of all witnessing to the Jewish people today.

Some of the specific claims of Pastor Hagee include:

- The Jewish people, as a whole, did not reject Jesus as Messiah.

⁴ Although the central errors addressed in this paper could be refuted in one paragraph or less (or, perhaps, with the citation of just one or two scriptures), I have taken time to refute them at length since: 1) Pastor Hagee is a significant, much-respected leader in the Body, and therefore it is fitting to take time to interact with such extreme, false teaching when it comes from a major leader. 2) Some believers (including leaders) are incredulous that he is actually teaching these things, and so, I lay out his main arguments in full. 3) There is an extraordinary amount of biblical ignorance these days, which is why many Christians get picked off by groups like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. This ignorance is reflected in the reviews of Hagee's book on Amazon.com, where some reviewers rightly expose and deplore these major errors, giving it the lowest possible rating, while others applaud it as a very important Christian work, giving it five stars! 4) As Hagee has been confronted with criticism of his new thesis, rather than renounce it, he has entrenched himself further, defending his indefensible concepts. For these reasons, and at the request of many leaders in the Body, I have taken the time to write out a detailed refutation. Having said that, I should note that there is much in Hagee's book that I agree with and commend, making this present task all the more unpleasant.

- Jesus did not come to earth to *be* the Messiah.
- Jesus refused by word and deed to be the Messiah.
- The Jews cannot be blamed for not accepting what was never offered.

In support of these statements, most of which actually fly in the face of the entire message of the New Testament, Pastor Hagee writes (pp. 135-136, his emphasis):

1. Jesus had to live to be the Messiah.
2. If it was God's will for Jesus to die from the beginning . . .
3. If it was Jesus intention to be obedient unto death . . .
4. If there is not one verse of Scripture in the New Testament that says Jesus came to be the Messiah . . . [yes, this is a verbatim quote from the book]
5. And if Jesus refused by his words or actions to claim to be the Messiah to the Jews, then *how can the Jews be blamed for rejecting what was never offered?*

If Jesus did not come to be the Messiah, why do we call him Christ?

Honestly, it is hard to believe that an evangelical pastor could have written these words, words which either violently distort or completely ignore the heart and soul of the gospel, words which fundamentally undermine all gospel witness to the Jewish people, words which completely misunderstand the Messianic teachings of the Old Testament. In just fourteen pages (pp. 132-145), Pastor John Hagee has denied both the mission of Jesus and the meaning of Messiah. In fact, it is tempting to ask, "If Jesus did not come to be the Messiah, why do we call him *Christ*?" (For those who may have forgotten, Christ means Messiah!)

An entry in the Jewish Publication Society's *Dictionary of Words*, defining the term "Messianic Jews," notes that, "the central tenet of Messianic Jews – that Jesus is the Messiah – is diametrically opposed to the very foundations of Judaism"⁵ – meaning, of course, non-Messianic Judaism, the Judaism that rejects Jesus as Messiah. Yet Pastor Hagee, while continuing to preach that there is salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus (quoting Acts 4:12 in support),⁶ has actually sided with traditional Judaism in rejecting the central biblical truths that: 1) Jesus *is* the Messiah and that 2) the Messiah had to suffer

⁵ Joyce Eisenberg and Ellen Scolnic, *The JPS Dictionary of Jewish Words* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 100-101.

⁶ Quoting from his aforementioned email; see above, n. 2.

and die and rise from the dead. What was fundamental to Peter and John and Paul is now rejected as erroneous by John Hagee.

How did Pastor Hagee come up with such unbiblical notions? First, he claims that Jesus did not come to be the Messiah of Israel but rather the Savior of the world, making a clear distinction between the two. Second, since he is acutely aware of the Church's historic sins against the Jewish people, persecuting and even killing them as "Christ killers," he is eager to prove that the Jews did not, in fact, reject Jesus as Messiah and are therefore not guilty. Tragically, in his zeal to stand with Israel, he has failed to stand with the truth.

To help the reader get into Pastor Hagee's mind, I will review the most important pages of the book, ignoring minor misstatements and insignificant misinterpretations. Instead, I will major on the most serious statements.

The prayer of Simeon

On p. 133 Hagee states that "the sovereign purpose for Jesus' life was to be a *light to the Gentiles*," quoting Luke 2:27-32, the prayer of Simeon offered over the baby Jesus in the Temple, in support. Specifically, he cites v. 32 with this emphasis, ". . . for mine eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, *a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles*, and the glory of Your people Israel." He then argues that such a revelation would be shocking to the Jews, since they considered the Gentiles unclean, pointing out how hard it was for Peter to understand that God wanted him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. He states (p. 133), "The message of the gospel was from Israel, not to Israel!"

Remarkably, Pastor Hagee has misread the text at all key points:

1. According to Luke 2:26 (speaking of Simeon), "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ [i.e., Messiah]." So, Simeon was giving a prophetic word about *the Messiah*. He was saying that this child, Yeshua, was the Messiah who was destined by God to be a light to the nations.
2. In his citation, Pastor Hagee emphasizes the words "a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles" in Luke 2:32 yet ignores the very next words of this same sentence, even though he quotes them in his text: "a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, *and the glory of Your people Israel*." The one who will be a light to the Gentiles is the same one who will be the glory of Israel – Jesus the Messiah.
3. Pastor Hagee makes parenthetical reference to Isa 42:6 on p. 133, speaking of Jesus' mission to the Gentiles, ignoring the fact that Isa 42:6 is a Messianic prophecy.

4. Rather than the “message of the gospel [being] from Israel, not to Israel,” Jesus told his disciples that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem*” (Luke 24:47), reiterating this in Acts 1:8, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” That’s why Peter could say to his Jewish people in Jerusalem, “When God raised up his servant, he sent him *first to you* to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:26). That’s why Paul could write that the good news about Jesus the Messiah was “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16). The gospel is to Israel first!

A crucified King

On p. 134, Pastor Hagee writes, “It was God’s sovereign will for Jesus to die from the very dawning of time. Had Jesus permitted himself to become the reigning Messiah to the Jews, he would have missed the sovereign will for his life.” Once again, however, Pastor Hagee has grossly misunderstood the mission of the Messiah.

1. Jesus was, in fact, born as King of the Jews (fulfilling Micah 5:2; see Matt 2:1-6).
2. Nathaniel recognized who Jesus was, exclaiming, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel” (John 1:49; the larger context is also important; see 1:40-48, making it explicit that the one Nathaniel recognized as Son of God and King of Israel was the Messiah, the one spoken of in Moses and the Prophets).
3. Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey to fulfill Zech 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (see Matt 21:1-9).
4. Jesus was crucified as “King of the Jews” (see John 19:19).

This, however, is one of the key points that Pastor Hagee has missed, failing to understand that *the Messiah was to be a King who died for the sins of his people*. That’s why Matthew is careful to record the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1-17), tracing his royal lineage through King David, which then leads to the words of the Magi, mentioned above, in Matt 2:2, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” But for Matthew, the mission of the Messiah was to die. Note his words: “Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. . . . She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:18a, 21, NRSV).

Unfortunately, Pastor Hagee has bought into the traditional Jewish notion that the Messiah was only to be the reigning King of the Jews, and in yet another bizarre statement— this one in an email sent out in response to questions raised concerning his new book – he reinforces his argument with a quote from *Webster’s Dictionary*: “Fact: According to Webster’s Dictionary the word ‘Messiah’ means ‘the expected king who delivers from oppressors.’ A Messiah is one who rules and reigns over a given people.”

So, the meaning of Messiah is now defined by *Webster's Dictionary* rather than by the Word of God! Yet it is this limited and incomplete notion of "Messiah" which is completely refuted by the Gospels and Acts, not to mention by a right reading of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament, including classic passages like Isa 52:13-53:12. (Really, this is so fundamental that it is almost embarrassing to have to repeat, but given the level of scriptural ignorance in the Body today, it is, sadly, necessary.)

To reiterate, then, the mission of Jesus was to be the Messiah, and the first order of business for the Messiah was to die for the sins of Israel and the nations.

Was the Messiah destined to live or die?

On pp. 135-136, Pastor Hagee emphasizes again that Jesus' mission was to die, making the following five points that we quoted verbatim, above:

1. Jesus had to live to be the Messiah.
2. If it was God's will for Jesus to die from the beginning . . .
3. If it was Jesus intention to be obedient unto death . . .
4. If there is not one verse of Scripture in the New Testament that says Jesus came to be the Messiah . . .
5. And if Jesus refused by his words or actions to claim to be the Messiah to the Jews, then *how can the Jews be blamed for rejecting what was never offered?*

In point of fact:

1. Hagee states that, "Jesus had to live to be the Messiah." To the contrary, *Jesus had to die to be the Messiah*. What did he say to the disciples whom he met after his resurrection? "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! *Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?*" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27, NRSV). Yes, Jesus is saying that the Messiah *had to suffer* before entering his glory. That's what "Moses and all the prophets" taught about the Messiah!

Similarly, in Luke 24:44-47 (NRSV), Jesus said to his disciples, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that *everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.*" Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, '*Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*'"

To repeat once more: *The mission of the Messiah was to die and rise from the dead, making atonement for sin before returning one day to reign.* But make no mistake about this: If the Messiah did not die and rise, he would not and could not reign. This is the fundamental issue that was missed by most of the Jewish people in Jesus' day and it continues to be missed by most Jewish people today. They reject Jesus as Messiah because he did not come as a reigning king. Pastor Hagee has now officially endorsed this unbiblical – indeed, in the truest sense of the word, “unchristian” – theological understanding.

This is underscored in Peter's preaching in Acts 3:13-26. Peter is quite clear in stating that Israel's repentance will usher in the Messiah's return: “Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins maybe wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus” (3:19-20, NRSV). But he does not separate this from the death and resurrection of Jesus as Messiah, stating in the immediately preceding sentence, “God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer” (3:18, NRSV).

This is the consistent testimony of the New Testament, namely, that the Old Testament prophets were unanimous in their testimony that *the Messiah had to suffer and die.* How can this possibly be denied?

2. Hagee states that, “there is not one verse of Scripture in the New Testament that says Jesus came to be the Messiah.” To the contrary, *according to virtually every relevant verse in the New Testament, Jesus came to be the Messiah.* As just noted, the Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming of the Messiah in terms of his sufferings (see also 1 Pet 1:11, where it is stated that the prophets spoke of “about Christ's [Messiah's] suffering and his great glory afterward.”

To illustrate the absurdity of Hagee's statement, let's trace the use of the Greek word *christos*, which means Messiah, through the Gospels and Acts, beginning with the very first verse of the New Testament (I'll cite from the NRSV, since it rightly translates many of these verses with “Messiah”):

- *An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham* (Matt 1:1)
- *and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah* (Matt 1:16)
- *. . . from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations* (Matt 1:17b)
- *Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way* (Matt 1:18)
- *When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples* (Matt 11:2)
- *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”* (Matt 16:16; notice that Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this

to you, but my Father in heaven,” Matt 16:17; as to why he forbade the disciples from announcing it at this time in v. 20, see the discussion below)

- *“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.”* (Matt 22:42; he was challenging the faulty understanding of the religious leaders about the Messiah, with reference to himself)
- *Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.* (Matt 23:10)
- *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God* (Mark 1:1; notice this is how Mark begins his Gospel too: This is the good news about the Messiah!)
- *But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”* (Mark 14:61-62) Is any testimony needed other than this? Jesus explicitly said, “Yes, I am the Messiah!”
- *. . . to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.* (Luke 2:11) Now, remember Hagee’s statement: “Jesus did not come to be the Messiah”; and, “there is not one verse of Scripture in the New Testament that says Jesus came to be the Messiah.” This is absolutely remarkable. Or, to use a phrase borrowed from Pastor Hagee himself, “This is utter rubbish!” (p. 135)
- *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah* (Luke 2:26).
- *Demons also came out of many, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah.* (Luke 4:41)
- *Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?* (Luke 24:46)
- *and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day”* (Luke 24:46)
- *The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* (John 1:17)
- *He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed).* (John 1:41)
- *You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, “I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.”* (John 3:28, quoting the words of John the Immerser)
- *The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”* (John 4:25-26). Note once again: Jesus explicitly states that he is the Messiah! Remarkably, Pastor Hagee downplays this passage as well in his email, stating that Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah because the Samaritans were Gentiles. To the contrary, the Samaritans understood the concept of the Messiah – which was largely unknown to the Gentile world, hence John’s explanatory comment “who is called Christ,” for the sake of his Gentile readers – and the Samaritans understood the concept of Messiah because their roots went back to the kingdom of Israel (see 2 Kings 17:24-33). Note that Acts 8 also confirms that the

Samaritans were not considered Gentiles, since Philip went and preached to them freely, with none of the controversy that surrounded Peter's mission to the Gentiles in Acts 10.

- *His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. (John 9:22)* That was the fundamental issue: Confessing Jesus as the Messiah. That remains the central issue today, especially in the Jewish community.
- *So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me. (John 10:24-25).* Once more, this is explicit.
- *She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." (John 11:27)*
- *And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)*
- *But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)* Perhaps John had his facts wrong? Perhaps he didn't realize that "Jesus did not come to be the Messiah" and that "there is not one verse of Scripture in the New Testament that says Jesus came to be the Messiah"?

At the risk of overkill – really, virtually any one of the verses listed above completely refutes Hagee's error – I will now cite every verse in Acts in which the NRSV renders *christos* with "Messiah."

- *Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, "He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption." (Acts 2:31)*
- *Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."(Acts 2:36)* Once again, I ask: Does anything else need to be said? Doesn't this single verse completely refute Pastor Hagee's whole thesis?
- *In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. (Acts 3:18)*
- *so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus (Acts 3:20)*
- *The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah. (Acts 4:26)*
- *And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. (Acts 5:42)*
- *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. (Acts 8:5)*

- *Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 9:22)*
- *And Paul went in [to the synagogue], as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.” (Acts 17:2-3) Now Paul adds his voice, teaching that Jesus the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.*
- *When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. (Acts 18:5)*
- *for he [Apollos] powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus. (Acts 18:28)*
- *“To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26:23) There it is again: The Messiah had to suffer! The Messiah had to die!*

As to the importance of the term *christos* in Luke-Acts, New Testament scholar Darrell Bock, commenting on Acts 2:36, notes that:

“Christ” is a key title for Luke (Luke 2:11, 26; 3:15; 4:41; 9:20; 20:41; 22:67; 23:3, 35, 39; 24:26, 46; Acts 2:31, 36, 38; 3:6, 18, 20; 4:10, 26; 5:42; 8:5, 12; 9:22, 34; 10:36, 48; 11:17; 15:26; 16:18; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 24:24; 26:23; 28:31 . . .). The Christ is the figure of deliverance. . . . The very one the Jewish leaders crucified is the unique, anointed one whom God placed at his side. This point is made to establish their guilt and their need to repent (vv. 37-38).⁷

3. Hagee finally asks, “if Jesus refused by his words or actions to claim to be the Messiah to the Jews, then *how can the Jews be blamed for rejecting what was never offered?*” The answer is that Jesus overwhelmingly demonstrated that he was the promised Messiah, exposing his people’s ignorance about his real mission and rebuking them for missing their time of visitation. That’s why the apostles in Acts held their people accountable for his death, although they recognized that they had sinned in ignorance; moreover, the apostles held the Jewish people responsible for rejecting Jesus the Messiah after his resurrection, when God himself testified to his Messiahship. Now, this does not mean that all Jews of all time are “Christ killers” – on that point Hagee is absolutely correct – but all Jews since the time of Jesus are responsible to repudiate what our forefathers did by recognizing Jesus as Messiah.⁸ Once again, I will simply

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p. 136.

⁸ I should point out here that I do not take issue with Pastor Hagee having a “non-proselytizing” policy in his special nights set aside to honor Israel, since it would be disingenuous to invite Jews to a pro-Israel as a covert means of evangelism. Having said this, however, I believe it is right and fitting that, even in such settings, Christian leaders

cite scriptures to back this point, not repeating most of the relevant verses that were already cited:

- *Jesus exposed his people's ignorance about his real mission:* "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! . . . Yet it isn't I who will accuse you before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, in whom you put your hopes. If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But since you don't believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?" (John 5:39, 45-47, NLT)
- *Jesus rebuked his people for missing their time of visitation, stating that the destruction of Jerusalem would be the result of their sin:* "But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. 'How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not accept your opportunity for salvation.'" (Luke 19:41-44, NLT)
- *The apostles in Acts held their people accountable for his death, although they recognized that they had sinned in ignorance:* "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. . . . Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and [Messiah]." (Acts 2:22-23, 36); "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. . . . Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders . . . Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:13-15, 17, 19); ". . . let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of *Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the*

state: "As followers of Jesus the Messiah, it is our desire to see all people come to faith in him, especially our Jewish friends. But whether you believe in him or not, we love and are standing with you. Our commitment is not conditional." It is also important that Jewish believers in Jesus not be excluded from such events, but to address that issue here is to digress.

builders; it has become the cornerstone.” (Acts 4:10-11); “The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.” (Acts 5:30); “Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers.” (Acts 7:52; several of the previous verses were directed to the entire Sanhedrin, meaning that God held the national leadership fully responsible for the death of his son); “Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him. Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed” (Acts 13:27-28).

- It is therefore with good reason that we read in John 1:12, “He came to his own people, but they didn’t want him” (*The Message*).

The “new revelation” of *In Defense of Israel* is simply indefensible

In summary, he can be safely said that Pastor Hagee’s theses are refuted in totality by the entire, complete, comprehensive, and unanimous testimony of the Gospels and Acts, upon which the rest of the New Testament revelation is built. But I have limited my citations here to the Gospels and Acts since it is there that Pastor Hagee claims to have found a new revelation.

Hopefully, you can better understand what I meant at the beginning of this paper when I stated, “I cannot remember reading a book by an evangelical leader that contained a more fundamental denial of New Testament truth than what is found in *In Defense of Israel*.” And, hopefully, you can appreciate more fully my shock that a book such as this could be published by an evangelical, Charismatic publisher. Is there no place for sacred truth in the Christian “industry” today?

Is there no accountability in the Body? What if Pastor Hagee had claimed that he had an exciting new revelation that Krishna was Lord? Would that have made it past the book’s editors and senior publishers?

The sign of the Messiah

Let’s look at the rest of Pastor Hagee’s claims. On pp. 136-138, Hagee claims that Jesus refused to give the Jewish people a sign that he was the Messiah, in contrast with past leaders like Moses. He writes, “Moses used . . . four signs to convince the children of Israel, who had been in slavery for four hundred years, that he was God’s anointed leader or messiah.” He then asks, “If God intended for Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel, why didn’t he authorize Jesus to use supernatural signs to prove he was God’s Messiah, just as Moses had done?” (p. 137)

The answer is simple: He did! Over and over again, Jesus pointed to the miracles he performed as providing sufficient evidence that he was the one his people were expecting. That's why Peter could declare to the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:21). Yes, the miracles were his divine accreditation!

And so, when the messengers from John the Immerser asked Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else," Luke records, "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.'" (Luke 7:20-23). In other words, "The Messianic miracles, as per the prophecies of Isaiah 35:5-6, are your answer! I'm the one!"

This is also confirmed in the preaching of the twelve and the seventy, who performed miracles and announced, "The kingdom of God is at hand!" (See Matt 10:8-7; Luke 9:1-2; 10:8-9), and this was the consistent answer of Jesus to his critics: "The miracles attest who I am." See especially John 10:22-27, where the context speaks specifically of the question of whether he is the Messiah:

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." (NRSV)

There it is! "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answers, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep." What more needs to be said?

To be completely candid, and with due respect for all the good that Pastor Hagee has done through the years, refuting his current false teaching is similar to proving that the ocean is wet. How can anyone possibly deny this?

In yet another bizarre twist of scripture, Hagee takes the most explicit sign given by Jesus, namely, "the sign of the prophet Jonah," that he would be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights, and changes its significance. First, in perhaps another attempt to remove all guilt from the Jews of Jesus' generation, he cites Matt 12:39 as, "No sign will be given . . . except the sign of the prophet Jonah," leaving out the important words, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign" (KJV). Yet it these words which explain why Jesus wouldn't give them the kind of sign *they* wanted.

This is made explicit in Mark 8:11-12, "Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.'" He would not give them the kind of sign *they* wanted. See also Luke 11:16, "Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven," which is then

followed by, “When the crowds increased, Jesus said, ‘This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.’” (Luke 11:29)

Remarkably – and I apologize for the overuse of that word in this paper, but words fail me here – Pastor Hagee actually stands these verses on their head, stating,

Jesus refused to give a sign. He only compared himself to the prophet Jonah, who carried the message of repentance from God to the Gentiles of Nineveh. Jesus was again saying, “I have come to carry a message from God to the Gentiles and will be in my grave for three days and nights as Jonah was in the whale’s belly for three days and nights.” (p. 138)

Jesus refused to give a sign? He only compared himself to the prophet Jonah? Not so! Jesus said, “This is the sign I’m giving you. I’m going to rise from the dead after three days!” As for the application of the book of Jonah, it is the opposite of what Pastor Hagee wrote, as Jesus explained in Matt 12:41, “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.” See also Luke 11:30, “For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.” Hagee has it completely backwards! As Jonah was a sign to the Gentiles, Jesus will be a sign to the Jews.

To repeat, then, Hagee completely ignores the myriad of miracles performed by Jesus which attested to his messiahship and then he turns the explicit sign of the resurrection into a comparison with the prophet Jonah explaining that Jesus didn’t come for the Jews but for the Gentiles. He even claims that in Matt 16:17, where Jesus refers to Peter as Simon bar Jonah, “He was not referring to Simon’s father but to the prophet Jonah, who, as a Jew, reluctantly carried God’s message to the Ninevites, who were Gentiles,” pointing then to Peter bringing the message of salvation to the Gentiles in Acts 10.⁹ But was not Peter recognized as an apostle to the Jews, in contrast with Paul, who was an apostle to the Gentiles? (See Galatians 2:9)

To be sure, elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus points to Gentiles receiving God’s message ahead of his people Israel (see, e.g., Luke 4:23-30 for Old Testament examples cited by Jesus; cf. also Matt 8:5-12), but the whole point is one of judgment: I have come as the Messiah of my people, and yet many of my own people will reject me while the Gentiles will receive me.

Why did Jesus say, “Don’t tell anyone that I’m the Messiah”?

Pastor Hagee’s next major argument is entitled “Tell No One!” He writes:

If Jesus wanted to be Messiah, why did he repeatedly tell his disciples and followers to “tell no one” about his supernatural accomplishments? Think about it! If the man were trying to gain national attention to

⁹ Most scholars believe that the name Jonah is a variant of the name John, since elsewhere Peter is known as the son of John (see John 1:42).

rally the support of the general public for the overthrow of mighty Rome, he would not go around the country saying, “Tell no one!” (p. 139)

Yes, that is an actual quote! Apparently, Pastor Hagee needed to hear the same message spoken by Yeshua to eleven disciples after his resurrection: “He told them, ‘This is what is written: *The [Messiah] will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day*, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:4-46). These verses have been cited already, but they must be cited again here, since Hagee has done nothing less than misunderstand the mission of Jesus the Messiah – just like so many of my Jewish people in Jesus’ day, and just like so many of my Jewish people through history. Hagee has now joined in their error.

Simply stated, *Jesus did not come “for the overthrow of mighty Rome” but to fulfill the role of a suffering Messiah*. Isn’t this New Testament Theology 101, or, perhaps more basically, Christian Lesson 101 in the new believers class?

Pastor Hagee writes that if Jesus had desired “to be Messiah” and to overthrow mighty Rome, “He would have conducted himself like any other politician who would do anything the mind of man could imagine to make the nightly news. The name of the game is to create public awareness. Let people know who you are and what you propose to do” (p. 139). To the contrary, Hagee points out, “There are sixty-four occasions in the four Gospels where Jesus threw a wet blanket over his popularity by instructing those who were excited about his being Messiah to ‘tell no one.’ The people wanted him to be their Messiah, but he absolutely refused” (p. 139). He then concludes, “The Jews were not rejecting Jesus as Messiah; it was Jesus who was refusing to be the Messiah to the Jews” (p. 140).

How astonishing! First, Hagee defines “Messiah” in political, not biblical terms; second, he expects Jesus to act like a worldly politician, getting attention through any possible means (what carnal thinking!);¹⁰ third, he fails to understand the strategy of Jesus, waiting for the proper time to reveal himself fully and not playing into the people’s false expectations (also, if he allowed all of his deeds to be publicized, it would have been impossible for him to move about to other places and preach the good news and announce the coming of the Messianic kingdom); and fourth, he forgets that, when the time was right, Jesus explicitly identified himself as Israel’s Messianic king as per Zech 9:9, making his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in strict accordance with the prophetic text.

And why was it that Jesus could openly declare to the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah but was slow to do in Jerusalem? Professor Robert Mounce explains, commenting on John 10:25 (cited and discussed, above):

¹⁰ As for the type of worldly, political thinking that Pastor Hagee thinks Jesus would have adopted had he actually come to be the Messiah, the Lord specifically rebukes this in John 7:1-8, where his unbelieving brothers counseled him, “No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world” (John 7:4). That was not the Messiah’s strategy!

Although Jesus had confessed to the Samaritan woman that he was in fact the Messiah ([John] 4:26; cf. 9:35-37), so far he had not openly made that claim in Jerusalem. The reason is obvious. For the Jews of that day the title carried all sorts of military and nationalist associations. To play into their hands as that sort of a Messiah would undoubtedly lead to a political rebellion counterproductive to Jesus' real mission as the suffering Messiah.

So, although Jesus had never openly declared his messiahship, there can be no question that the miraculous deeds he had done by his Father's authority (i.e., "in my Father's name") proved him to be the Christ.¹¹

Remarkably, Pastor Hagee defines "Messiah" in accordance with the *wrong* expectations of these first-century Jewish leaders and rejects the *biblical* description of the Messiah (Christ) as a suffering servant.

And yet there's more. Hagee writes:

The multiplied thousands [of Jews] who followed Jesus did not give up the idea that he would be their Messiah until they saw him hanging from a Roman cross. Even after his resurrection and his repeated denials that he would not be the Messiah [sic!], his disciples were still hanging on to the last thread of hope that he would now smash Rome (Acts 1:6). They wanted him to be their Messiah, but he flatly refused (p. 141).

To the contrary, as demonstrated in the many verses cited above from the Gospels and Acts, after his resurrection, he opened his disciples' minds to understand that the Messiah had to suffer and die, which is why they then preached with great fervor in Acts that Jesus indeed was the Jewish Messiah, calling on their fellow Jews to repent and receive him as Messiah and Lord.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus

Remarkably – yes, there's that word again – Hagee then points to Luke 24:17-21, the encounter Jesus had with the two disciples on the road to the village of Emmaus, in support of his point that Jesus did not come to be the Jewish Messiah. This, perhaps, is the most breathtaking misuse of Scripture in the entire book. He writes:

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus had not rejected Jesus as Messiah; their hopes were dashed!

It was not until Jesus entered their house for fellowship, as it was late in the evening, that they recognized him. When he sat at their table, lifting his hands to bless and break the bread, they saw the scars on his hands and recognized Jesus. He instantly disappeared (Luke 24:30-35). *He refused to be their Messiah, choosing instead to be the Savior of the world* (143, my emphasis).

¹¹ Robert H. Mounce, "John," in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 507.

If there was any one passage in the Bible, however, that refuted his new teaching, this would be it, since in these verses, Jesus explains to his disciples that they had *misunderstood the mission of the Messiah*. His words are well known to many believers, but for context, let's look at the whole story.

Jesus meets up with two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus, but they are kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." (Luke 24:17-24)

Now, according to Pastor Hagee, these two disciples had false expectations. They thought that Jesus "was the one who was going to redeem Israel," but Jesus dissuaded them of that misconception, explaining instead that he was the Savior of the world. Absolutely not! To the contrary, Jesus explained to them that they failed to understand the true mission of the Messiah.

In a single sentence that completely undercuts Hagee's false doctrine, emphasized here in the text that follows, Jesus said to them, "'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! *Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

What could possibly be more explicit? The Messiah had to suffer and die and rise and then enter his glory. *This* is how God will redeem Israel and the nations; this is how the Messiah will fulfill his God-ordained role as both Priest and King; this is how the words spoken by the angel to Joseph about his wife and soon-to-be-born baby would be realized: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus [Yeshua], because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).

Yet we are now to believe that Jesus came for the Gentiles, rather than to be the suffering Messiah of Israel, even though Matthew explicitly states that Yeshua mission is to *save his people* from their sins, and even though Luke explicitly tells us that the Messiah had to suffer and die, according to what was written in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Messiah is the Savior

Thus, to deny that Jesus came to be the Messiah is to deny: 1) the testimony of the Old Testament, as explained by Jesus and his disciples; 2) the testimony of every author of the New Testament who addresses the issue in any way (for another example, see 1 Pet 1:10-12, which speaks of the prophets predicting “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” – and I remind you again that “Christ” here means “Messiah”); 3) the basis for our whole witness to Jewish people today, in which we explain to them that they, like many of our forefathers in past generations, misunderstood the mission of the Messiah.

In addition to this, it is Jesus the Christ, Yeshua the Messiah, who is the Savior of the world, as Paul stated so clearly: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15a). Or, as rendered in the *Jewish New Testament*, “So here is a statement you can trust, one that fully deserves to be accepted: the Messiah came into the world to save sinners” Praise God that he did! Otherwise, all of us would be lost to this day, with no hope, and without God. That is the work of the Messiah!

But Pastor Hagee, perhaps in a misplaced solidarity with Israel – the Lord alone knows – has adopted a non-biblical, political view of the Messiah and has thereby endorsed one of the great errors that has kept the Jewish people from acknowledging Yeshua as Messiah – specifically that the Messiah had to suffer and die. Thus, Hagee could not be more wrong in arguing, “Jesus Himself stated in Mark 14:8, Luke 24:46 and Mark 10:33-34 that He had come to die for the sins of the world as Savior. Again, you must live to be Messiah. You cannot be both Messiah and Savior!”¹² How striking it is that one of the very passages he cites, namely, Luke 24:46, refers to the mission of *the Messiah*, who *is* the Savior.

The four cups of wine

There is one more argument marshaled by Hagee, this one based primarily on later Jewish tradition, but for the sake of completeness, I will address it as well. Without getting into a discussion of Pastor Hagee’s views about Jesus’ final meals and the Passover, suffice it to say that he argues that the Last Supper recorded in Luke 22 was the Passover celebration. (I would agree with this.) And, Hagee notes, based on something he learned while attending a Passover celebration at a local synagogue, “Four cups of wine are served as the Passover with a meal that symbolized the tears and suffering of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. . . . The fourth cup is the cup of the Messiah” (p. 144). Hagee argues that it was this fourth cup that Jesus refused to drink (“*Jesus refused to drink the Messiah’s cup*” – his emphasis, p. 144, referring to Luke 22:17-18).

Where does one start in refuting this? Let’s say we accept the premise that there were four cups of wine that were drunk at the Passover meal (called a Seder) in Jesus’ day, the Jewish custom is that two of the

¹² Quoting from his email; see above, n. 2.

cups preceded the meal and two followed the meal. As Jewish professor Samuel Tobias Lachs explained: “At the Seder service four cups of wine were drunk, each representing a redemptive word connected with the Exodus, two before the meal and two after the meal.”¹³

Why is this important? It is because Pastor Hagee refers to the cup of Luke 22:17-18 as “the final cup . . . of the Passover,” but he completely ignores v. 20, which speaks of the cup that Jesus took *after the meal*. That was the last cup! As Luke writes, “In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” So, the cup that Jesus allegedly refused to drink was not even the fourth cup, it was either the first or second (since it preceded the meal). Take a moment and read Luke 22:14-20: first the cup (v. 17), then the unleavened bread (v. 19), then the cup after the meal (v. 20). Yet, to repeat, Hagee makes reference to the cup of v. 17 as “the final cup,” the so-called cup of the Messiah (this too is an overstatement), whereas it was either the first or second up.

As for the cup Jesus drank after the meal, Messianic Jewish scholar David Stern notes that it was “the third of the four cups . . . corresponding to Exodus 6:6, ‘I will redeem you.’ Thus Yeshua used the ‘cup of redemption,’ as the third cup is called, to inaugurate the new covenant, which redeems from the ‘Egypt’ of bondage to sin all who trust in God and his Messiah.”¹⁴

Jesus certainly drank of that cup – be it spiritually or literally – the cup of the new covenant, the cup of his blood, just as he ate of the bread, which signified the braking of his body for us. So, not only was there no fourth, Messianic cup that Yeshua refused to drink, but the text never even says that he refused to drink any of the cups. It simply records that Jesus said, “I will not drink *again* of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18). And at the risk of “piling on,” I should also note that Hagee incorrectly describes the four Passover cups as: the first cup, Remembrance; the second cup, Redemption; the third cup, Salvation; the fourth cup, Messiah (p. 144). Rather, the four cups symbolize, respectively, sanctification, deliverance, redemption, restoration (based on Exod 6:6-7, thus: 1) “I removed you”; 2) “and I rescued you”; 3) “and I redeemed you”; 4) “and I took you”).

The Jewish did reject the Messiah

To put it plainly, Hagee’s final argument is wrong on each and every point it makes, yet based on it, he concludes: “In refusing to drink the cup, Jesus rejected to the last detail the role of the Messiah in word or deed. The Jews did not reject Jesus as Messiah; it was Jesus who rejected the Jewish desire for him to be their Messiah” (pp. 144-145).

¹³ Samuel Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1987), pp. 407-408.

¹⁴ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, Md.: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 144.

This is totally false, and despite Hagee's attempts to deny that the Jewish people were guilty of rejecting Jesus as Messiah, the New Testament witness again is categorical and clear:

- As noted above, where many verses from Acts were cited, the apostles held their people responsible for rejecting Jesus as Messiah, first by some of the leadership being complicit with his death, and second, by rejecting the apostolic witness of the risen Messiah. Luke is quite explicit, tracing this back to the Jewish leaders who rejected John: "But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John" (Luke 7:30).
- Jesus in the Gospels held his Jewish contemporaries responsible for rejecting him, saying that if they believed Moses they would believe him (John 5:39-47), stating that Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Gomorrah and, as just noted, Nineveh, would rise up in judgment against that generation (Matt 11:20-24; 12:39-42), and then weeping over Jerusalem because it failed to recognize the time of God's visitation – as a result of which, it was destroyed one generation later (Luke 19:41-44). This is quite serious!
- Many of Yeshua's parables emphasized this very point (see, e.g., Matt 21:33-46; 22:1-14), leading to his climactic words of judgment: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!" (Matt 23:29-32)
- The seriousness of this Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah was felt deeply by Paul, who was in constant spiritual pain because of it (Rom 9:1-5). According to Paul, "Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it" (Rom 9:31), and, "since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (10:3). Yes, "What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened" (11:7). And so, the unbelieving branches "were broken off because of unbelief" (Rom 11:20). Thus, Paul can speak of Israel's "stumbling" (11:11), "transgression" (11:11-12), and "rejection" (11:15) – always, of course, with the hope and assurance of their future salvation. But to minimize the hardening, the breaking off, the stumbling, the transgression, and the rejection is to ignore Paul's words – and, to repeat, to ignore the consistent witness of the entire New Testament.

Yeshua's return

And what will be the key to the Messiah's return? It will be when the Jewish people, represented corporately by Jerusalem, acknowledge him as Messiah – in Zechariah's words, looking at the one they

pierced (Zech 12:10) – undoing their error committed 2,000 years ago. At that time, Jerusalem welcomed him as King Messiah, quoting the words of Ps 118:26, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt 21:9), before a Jewish crowd called for his crucifixion. He will return when Jerusalem welcomes him with those same words: “For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt 23:39) In other words, *Jerusalem will not see him again until it recognizes the sin of rejecting him as Messiah when he first came.*

Was this rejection part of God’s plan, since Jesus was a lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8)? Of course! As the believers prayed in Acts 4:27-28, “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” Did they sin? Yes. Were they guilty and held accountable? Absolutely. Did their sin ultimately carry out God’s pre-ordained plan of the crucifixion of his Son? Without a doubt. Yet Pastor Hagee fails to appreciate these spiritual realities, instead claiming that God never intended Jesus to be the Messiah when he came to earth, arguing that if the Jewish people had welcomed him, he would not have died for our sins, hence leaving us all damned. How sad that this wonderful biblical truth seems to evade Pastor Hagee, namely, that it is through the Messiah being rejected and dying and rising that the world will be saved (1 Cor 2:7-8).

As for the alleged new revelation found in *In Defense of Israel*, a revelation that will supposedly shake Christian theology, it is simply indefensible, and the sooner Christian leaders and publishers and media outlets call our dear brother to account, taking appropriation action on their end to distance themselves from his very serious errors, the better. We need this man on the front lines, standing tall for Israel, but only as he stands tall for Jesus the Messiah.

I therefore urge Pastor Hagee to renounce his current teaching and to join with his Jewish brothers who stood up to the threats of the Sanhedrin, joyfully took a whipping, and “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house . . . they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (Acts 5:42). We cannot do any less.

* * *

No sooner had I completed this paper (November 29, 2007) than I received an email from a close friend who is also a pastor involved with Christians United for Israel. He wanted me to see the latest email sent out by Pastor Hagee to CUFI leaders in which he wrote, “There have been requests for more information on the concept of Jesus, the ‘Suffering Messiah’ and Jesus, the ‘Reigning Messiah’. I have given additional explanation for your edification.”

He then writes:

JESUS CHRIST: SUFFERING SERVANT AND REIGNING MESSIAH

As many witness the tragedies of this world, Christians are often asked the question, "If the Messiah has come, why is there still war, poverty, disease, and man's inhumanity to man?"

ANSWER: Scripture presents differing pictures of the Messiah, who is sometimes described as the "Suffering Servant" and at other times as the "Reigning King".

Jesus came first as the "Suffering Servant" and men received Him into their hearts as Savior and Lord,

"He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3).

We now await His Second Coming in Revelation 19 as our "Reigning Messiah", riding on the White horse followed by the armies that are in heaven and the Church Triumphant.

He closes by saying,

I trust this simple explanation will clarify any concerns you might have concerning Jesus the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah, as "Suffering Savior and Reigning Messiah!"

Let us prepare for the soon coming of King Jesus, our Deliverer and Reigning Messiah! It will be very soon!

Of course, it is positive to hear Pastor Hagee affirm what all of us have always known to be true, namely, that Jesus first came as the suffering Messiah. And had he written this, there would have been no controversy. But how in the world do these statements undo what Hagee wrote in his book? He has simply taken the first small step in retracting his errors, but nothing more, and the pastor who sent this email to me was, quite rightly, dissatisfied with this answer, especially since the rest of the email primarily restated the same position espoused in the book and previous email, beginning with the Webster's Dictionary definition of "Messiah."

Am I being too critical? Hardly! Remember that it was Pastor Hagee who boldly announced that his new book "will shake Christian theology," with explicit reference to his teaching that the Jewish people, as a whole, did not reject Jesus as Messiah and that Jesus did not come to earth to be the Messiah. Now that he is getting flack for the outrageous statements in the book, he is slowly retreating from these statements (at least, in part). Again, if his main point was that Jesus came to be the suffering Messiah rather than the reigning Messiah, what is new about that? Why would that "shake Christian theology"? Rather, it was his new teaching, backed by a terrible misuse of the Scriptures, that was supposed to "shake Christian theology."

I therefore repeat my fervent hope that he would renounce every detail of this false teaching, completely removing it from his book, and that Strang would immediately issue a strong corrective statement and take appropriate action. Anything less than that is an insult to the gospel.