



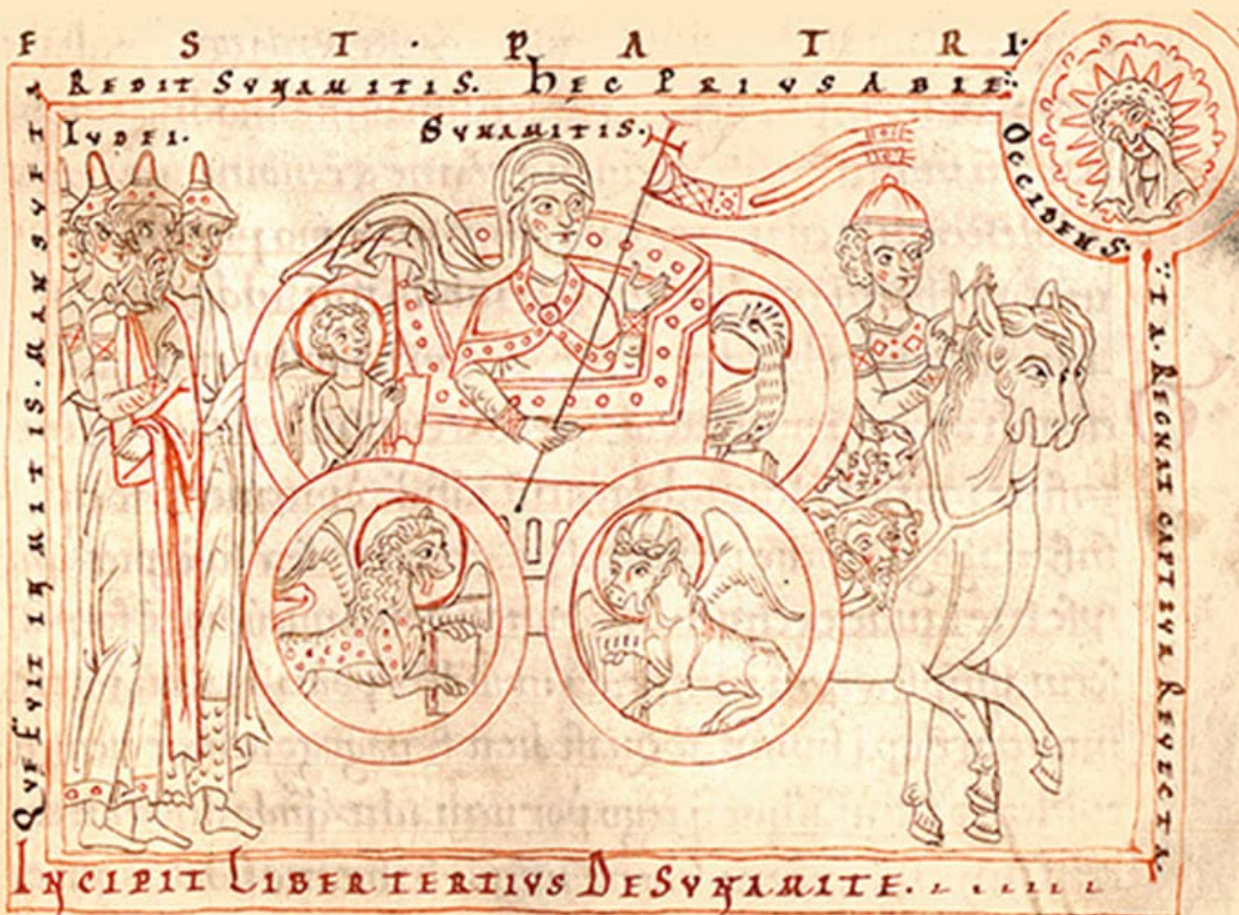
The Salvation of Israel

01.02.2024 | James Weatherford

Jeremy Cohen: The Salvation of Israel: Jews in Christian Eschatology from Paul to the Puritans Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022, hardcover, xiii+224pp

The SALVATION of ISRAEL

Jews in Christian Eschatology
from Paul to the Puritans



JEREMY COHEN

Perhaps no greater theological mystery fuels the fire of division between Christians and Jews than the New Testament understanding of the place of Jews in salvation history. At the center of the debate is a long interpretive tradition that argues supersessionism and replacement theology are the most biblically faithful positions. This is the idea that Christians have replaced Jews in God's redemptive plan. However, at least in the Pauline doctrine of the role of the Jews, he argues that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). According to this scenario, Jews will be saved at the eschaton, but exactly who these Jews are and how they will be saved is anything but clear. Nonetheless, Paul's words in Romans 9-11 lay the foundation, albeit confused and conflicted, for future Christian understanding of the Jews. In *The Salvation of Israel: Jews in Christian Eschatology from Paul to the Puritans*, Jeremy Cohen sets out to document the historical tradition of varied interpretations of Romans 9-11, the origins of the Antichrist myth, representations of the Jews and Antichrist in the humanities, and early modern / post-Reformation Puritan understandings of the Jews in the end times.

Cohen is at his best as a historian. His methodology is refined, and he approaches the Christian texts with acumen and clarity. He self-identifies as a Jew and a scholar with particular interest in the history of Christian-Jewish relations, referring to his own historical interpretations throughout the text, but his approach remains quite objective (24). In terms of biblical scholarship, Cohen's approach to the Christian Scriptures gives an air of postmodern interpretation. Part one of the book does not attempt to answer questions about where the Jews belong in Christian theology. Rather, he sets out to deconstruct dogmatically-held interpretations of Romans 9-11, raising more questions than he answers. However, this illustrates the theological conundrums at hand. For example, a consistent theme throughout the first three chapters is apparent in his continual use of words like "ambiguity" (7, 10, 15, 19, 27), "confusion" (14, 28, 41, 44), "untenable" (47), and "obscure" (9, 10, 26, 28). After his close analysis of Romans 9-11, there is a need for more clarity about Paul's and later interpreters' views of the place of the Jews in Christian salvation history. In fact, it becomes obvious that the confusion ultimately lies in Paul's own words; it thus becomes understandable why so many interpretations exist throughout history.

In part one of the book, a survey of early biblical commentaries on Romans 9-11, Cohen is thorough and detailed. It was a pleasant surprise to see some lesser-known writers included in the analysis. In addition to the well-known writers Origen and Chrysostom, he fortifies his discussion with analyses of Ambrosiaster and Theodore of Mopsuestia. He also includes Pelagius's interpretation of Romans 9-11, which yields valuable insights. In chapter four of part two, Cohen's impressively demonstrates the Jewish roots of the Antichrist myth. He further shows the continuing linkage between Jews and the Antichrist in chapter five. In chapter six his scholarly breadth and depth is demonstrated in a thoughtful and insightful analysis of a collection of visual artifacts such as Christian manuscripts and art. Likewise, in chapter seven Cohen delves deeply into a unique 12th century commentary on the Song of Songs by Honorius Augustodunensis. This text contains a relatively more positive view of Jews than other medieval texts and supports Cohen's thesis that scholarship is generally lacking in this area. He notes, "The spirit of Honorius's commentary on the Song may well reflect...an alternative for situating the 'eschatological Jew' in a Christian plan for salvation history" (186). This theme of recovering little-known and diverse views is found throughout the book. This diversity makes for a murky and something confusing study of the interpretive history.

While moving forward in time, Cohen neglects the Reformation era. He only briefly mentions Luther and Calvin and concludes his book with a discussion of the Puritans. Granting that there is a wealth of content from this period, Cohen nonetheless decided to "bypass the volatile religious history of the Reformation" (200). He acknowledges that it is awkward to leap from Medieval Europe to sixteenth and seventeenth century England and New England, something most readers will pre-sumably agree with.

Cohen is a proficient historian but skirts some exegetical and expository opportunities. For

example, a hermeneutical evaluation could be useful for Abelard's claim that Jesus is referring to the Antichrist in John 5:43 (56): "Another will come in his own name, and you will receive him." While a historian's role differs from a theologian's, and it is not necessarily a historian's responsibility to interrogate the legitimacy of a medieval scholar's interpretation of a verse, some reflection on the soundness of Abelard's comment might prove helpful to the reader. Some scholars translate John 5:43 in the plural to refer to others coming in their own name rather than the Antichrist coming in a singular sense. Abelard's eisegesis is a weak proof-text that he uses to argue that the Jews will be deceived by the Antichrist. Cohen does not question this interpretation: "Abelard evidently maintains that all of Israel to be saved includes representatives of all twelve Israelite tribes but not the twelve tribes in their entirety. Otherwise, how could one understand Jesus's own prediction that the Jews will ultimately join the ranks of the Antichrist?" (56). Cohen does well to scrutinize the logic of Abelard's reasoning but does little to question the validity of Abelard's interpretation of John 5:43.

Cohen is clear at the outset that his task is historical, and he carefully avoids taking a moral position as he crafts a narrative about interpretations of Romans, biblical hermeneutics, and biblical exegesis. Overall, this text is an excellent work of historical scholarship that uses interpretations of Romans to outline Christians' perspectives on the salvation of the Jews, a topic deserving more attention. It is weaker on theological nuances of supersessionism. This monograph will be helpful for anyone interested in understanding the trajectory that connects the writings of Paul to later (typically ambivalent, often hostile) theological views of Jews.

Source: [Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations 18](#), no. 1 (2023).