

# God's Learning Channel

*An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective of  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod  
September 2010*

## ***History, Beliefs, Practices***

### **Identity:**

“God’s Learning Channel” (GLC) is satellite network that produces television broadcasts for the southwestern United States and stations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Programming is also available on the GLC website. GLC is, in its own words, “dedicated to bringing the gospel of the kingdom” to the world and to teaching “about the Torah and the true roots of Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Founders:**

God’s Learning Channel was founded in 1982 by the husband and wife team Al and Tommie Cooper. Its programs were first produced in Roswell, New Mexico and later moved to Midland, Texas. Information on the Coopers can be found in Al Cooper’s autobiography, *Captain Video*, available for purchase at the GLC website.

### **Statistics:**

GLC programming reaches New Mexico, west Texas, Colorado, Utah, eastern Arizona, and Oklahoma. Its programs are available on its website and on cable stations across the United States and through satellite networks in Europe, India, China, Australia, North Africa, and the Middle East.

### **History:**

According to the GLC website, founders Al and Tommie Cooper received a vision in 1982 to build a television network that would reach the American Southwest with Christian programming. The first programs were broadcast from Roswell, New Mexico and later produced in Midland, Texas by Prime-Time Christian Broadcasting. Its 24 hour programming is available on cable channels and as streaming internet video. In 2006 GLC began providing satellite programming to India, Asia, eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, the Philippines, Israel, and the rest of the Middle East. In 2007 GLC provided direct-to-home satellite programming in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Russia.

GLC sponsors tours of Israel and fund drives for Israel and its armed forces. The GLC website bookstore offers commentaries on the Bible, Judaism, and current events, as well as devotional books, jewelry, and Jewish ceremonial items such as shofars and mezuzahs.

### **Texts:**

There are no founding texts for GLC. Its website bookstore offers titles such as *Captain Video*, an autobiography of founders Al and Tommie Cooper, *God’s War on Terror* by Walid Shoebat, *Radical*

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<sup>1</sup> GLC website, <http://www.godslearningchannel.com>

*Islam's War against Israel, Christianity, and the West* by Richard Booker, and *Prophecies for the Era of Muslim Terror* by Rabbi Menachem Kohen.

### **Beliefs and Practices:**

While GLC claims that it is dedicated to “bringing the gospel of the kingdom into the entire world,” it speaks more often of its mission to provide support for the nation of Israel. GLC actively denies “Replacement Theology,” described as any doctrine stating that the Church has replaced the Jews as God’s chosen people. GLC quotes God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” understanding this verse to refer to the Jewish people and to the modern political state of Israel. GLC leaders say that the land of Israel “was given by God to Abraham and his seed through Isaac and Jacob with an everlasting and unconditional covenant” and for this reason advocate prayer as well as political and financial support for the nation of Israel.<sup>2</sup> A GLC newsletter states that God “is in charge of GLC and He is behind the scenes orchestrating all the events to help GLC to bring the TRUTH which will lead Believers to gather together, pray and seek DELIVERANCE for Israel.”<sup>3</sup>

GLC opposes policies of the American government that deny support to Israel and speaks against the opinion that Islam is a religion of peace. GLC believes that biblical prophecies are being fulfilled as “the One World Order” tries to “crush Israel under the Islamic Dictatorships that started after World War One and the discovery of Arab Oil.”<sup>4</sup> The Iranian president and other Arab leaders are compared to the evil character Haman (from the book of Esther) who tried to destroy the Jewish people.

GLC teaches that Replacement Theology “undermines” Israel and denies the Jewish origins of the Christian faith. Many Christians, the GLC leaders believe, fail to remember that Jesus the Messiah was Jewish and that he obeyed the Torah. Replacement Theology is said to be an unbiblical and anti-Semitic doctrine. GLC states that Christians are “brothers and sisters of Israel” who been grafted into the family of Israel by Christ. For that reason they should support the modern nation of Israel and oppose any government policies that act against Israel.

### ***A Lutheran Response***

God’s Learning Channel testifies to Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, but uses this testimony as a starting point for its support for modern Israel, an advocacy that is a central purpose of the GLC ministry. GLC confuses the political state of Israel with God’s people in Christ, the Israel of faith, and opposes any teaching that suggests the Church replaces the Jews as the chosen people. As Lutherans we certainly confess Jesus to be God’s promised Messiah but we have very different beliefs concerning the relationship between Israel and the Church.

At Jacob’s well, the Samaritan woman told Jesus that her people worshiped on a mountain in Samaria but the Jews said that God must be worshiped in Jerusalem. Jesus told her that “the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:21–22).

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<sup>2</sup> GLC website, <http://www.godslearningchannel.com>

<sup>3</sup> *GLC Partner Newsletter* (September 2009), GLC website.

<sup>4</sup> *GLC Partner Newsletter Update* (March 2009), GLC website.

Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, the promised king born of David's royal line. The apostle Paul writes that Jesus, the Son of God, "was descended from David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3). Later Paul explains that to the Jews "belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 9:4–5).

As Jesus himself said, "Salvation is from the Jews." Jesus, our Savior and the promised Messiah, was born a Jew. Gentiles who trust in Christ have been grafted into the olive tree of Israel, as Paul writes in Romans 11:17–18, explaining that Gentiles "although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share the nourishing root of the olive tree." As Lutherans, grafted by faith into that nourishing root, we believe that anti-Semitism must be rejected and that the Jewish people must be regarded with love as well as with sympathy for the suffering they have experienced. We want to share the Gospel with the Jews so they will come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah because "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 4:12).<sup>5</sup>

However, according to Scripture, the blessings promised to Abraham and his seed are not fulfilled in the modern political state of Israel but in Jesus Christ and in His Body, the Church. Lutheran theologian David Scaer writes that "Jesus is in Himself that faithful remnant of Israel from whom alone God constitutes a new nation. He is the seed. But He is that true seed not in isolation, but the seed from which God constitutes His new Israel . . . . The church has claim to the designation and promises of Israel not as a separate religious community, but only because they have become incorporated in Him. The church in Christ has become Abraham's promised seed."<sup>6</sup> The apostle Paul, himself a devout Jew, explains that membership in the Body of Christ is not a matter of race, Jewish religious observance, or obedience to the law: "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (Romans 2: 28–29).

The promise to Abraham, that all families of the earth would be blessed through him, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is only through faith in Christ that we receive the promised blessings of life and salvation. Paul writes in Galatians 3:7–9: "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." The promises of God are guaranteed not on the basis of ethnic ancestry or Israeli citizenship but on God's grace through faith in Christ. Romans 4:16 states that the inheritance of Abraham does not belong to "adherents of the law" but to those who share the faith of Abraham, "who is the father of us all." Again in Romans 9:6–7 Paul says, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise who are counted as offspring."

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<sup>5</sup> *The End Times*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1989), 38–39.

<sup>6</sup> David P. Scaer, "Lutheran Viewpoints on the Challenge of Fundamentalism: Eschatology" *Concordia Journal* 10:1 (January 1984): 10.

God's Learning Channel opposes "replacement theology," a teaching in which the Church replaces the Jews as the chosen people. The relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament people of God is not a matter of "replacement" but of continuity and the fulfillment of God's single offer of salvation by grace through faith in His promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states that "the church is not an interruption in the redemptive plan of God, but the fulfillment of His eternal purposes."<sup>7</sup>

God's Learning Channel confuses the political state of Israel with God's people in Christ, the Israel of faith. Jesus' own disciples shared a similar confusion. At His Ascension, they still understood the promises of God's Messianic kingdom to refer to the Jewish nation, asking Jesus, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, however, the disciples spoke differently about the inheritance of God's people. Peter writes about Christian hope, not as a nation or political state, but as an inheritance "that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). God has promised us an eternal home: "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwell" (2 Peter 3:13).<sup>8</sup>

Abraham and his descendants realized that the earthly promised land was not the fullness of their inheritance. Scripture says of Abraham: "By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise" (Hebrews 11:9). Abraham and his heirs longed for a "city that has foundations" (Hebrews 11:10), a homeland more lasting than a modern political state constantly under attack in a sinful world, a homeland granted only through faith in God's promises: "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. . . . But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:13–16).

GLC uses the blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12:3 to justify their political support for the land of Israel, but as Jesus told the Samaritan woman, it is not on one mountain or another that God is to be worshiped. The promises of God are not fulfilled in a modern nation but in Jesus Christ. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations states:

A biblically based response to the future of the Jews . . . is to join the apostle Paul in his earnest prayer for the salvation of his Jewish kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom (:1–3). There always has been and always will be a remnant of Jews who are saved (Rom 11:5) . . . . Since Jesus is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, all who bless Him and His people will be blessed and all who curse Him and His people will be cursed (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:7–8). These promises are not directed toward any particular ethnic group. The church, and not Jews or Israelis, is the true Israel of God (Rom 2:28–29; Phil 3:3; Gal 6:16).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *A Lutheran Response to the Left Behind Series*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2004), 10.

<sup>8</sup> *A Lutheran Response to the Left Behind Series*, 14–15.

<sup>9</sup> *A Lutheran Response to the Left Behind Series*, 10–12.

### ***For Further Reading***

Franzmann, Martin. *Romans: A Commentary*. St. Louis: CPH, 1986.

“God’s Unfailing Promise” and “Chosen in Christ,” page 1929, *The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. St. Louis: CPH, 2009.

Scaer, David P. “Lutheran Viewpoints on the Challenge of Fundamentalism: Eschatology” *Concordia Journal* 10:1 (January 1984): 4–11.

Schroeder, Roy P. “The Relationship between Israel and the Church” *Concordia Journal* 24:3 (July 1998): 250–67.

### ***Links***

God’s Learning Channel website

<http://www.godslearningchannel.com>

*A Lutheran Response to the ‘Left Behind’ Series* (Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2004)

<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/LeftBehind.pdf>

“A Bible Study Companion to *A Lutheran Response to the ‘Left Behind’ Series* (Commission on Theology and Church Relations, LCMS, 2006)

<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/BibleStdComp%20LeftBehind.pdf>

“Excursus Regarding the Jews” in *The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism* (Commission on Theology and Church Relations, LCMS, 1989)

<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/endtme-11.pdf>