

‘A Remnant of Them Will Be Saved’ (Rom 9:27): Understanding Paul’s Conception of the Faithfulness of God to Israel¹

William S. Campbell

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, UK | w.s.campbell@uwtsd.ac.uk

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Introduction

The thesis of this paper is that, however imperfect at any period of history God’s people actually were, in Paul’s understanding a holy remnant in Israel was the means used by God via the Spirit to transmit the faith to the next generation, thus leading eventually to the consummation of his purpose. Though the term ὑπόλειμμα occurs only in Rom 9:27 in a citation from Isa 10,² and λείμμα again in 11:5, the theme of the remnant is important in Romans, particularly in chapters 9–11.

Primarily, it denotes God’s continuing purpose for Israel, despite the fact that “the rest”—i.e. those not part of the remnant—are unconvinced by Paul’s gospel. Any future for “all Israel” proceeds via “the remnant” to “the rest,” and any valid interpretation must do justice to both of these themes in Rom 9–11. This is simply to assert that for Paul, the remnant’s purpose is to serve a saving function toward “the rest” of Israel, and not merely for the ἐκκλησία.

There are two key aspects on which I will focus in this paper, firstly the role of the remnant in relation to the previous continuity of God’s faithful activity in history in relation to Israel, and secondly the relevance of this continuity for the ἐκκλησία of Jews and Gentiles. The issues guiding us here are the remnant as a remnant of Israel, excluding Gentiles; the remnant as a sign of divine providence; the extent of the remnant; the remnant as indicator and

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented as a short paper at the SNTS Annual Meeting 2014, in Szeged, Hungary.

² Paul has possibly conflated Isa 10:22–23 with a similar oracle in Isa 28:22b. For further discussion of the terminology and scriptural contexts, see J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 95–100.

evidence for the faithfulness of God to Israel and the relevance of this for understanding God's faithfulness.

The Remnant Is the Remnant of Israel

As noted above, the initial explicit reference to the remnant in Rom 9–11 occurs in 9:27, where we find Paul's citation stating, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, that "a remnant will be saved." And this is succeeded by the severe reminder, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us children (σπέρμα), we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah." Thus Paul recognizes in 9:29 that *the existence of a remnant of any size is due only to the mercy of the Lord,*³ *not to any qualities in Israel herself.* As Stanley Stowers states, "The Hebrew Bible tells many stories about times when the leaders and a large number of the people acted unfaithfully under particular conditions. These are always stories of salvation. Some of the faithful remain, and God finds a way to use the remnant to bring the people back to him. There is never a serious question of God abandoning the covenant and revoking his promises to Israel."⁴ In the next verse, 9:30, Paul contrasts the mission to Gentiles with that to his own people: "Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it." Yet despite mentioning Gentiles, this reference to them is only incidental here. Paul does not suggest that Gentiles in Christ might form part of the remnant.

An equal focus on both Jews and Gentiles might seem to receive support from the fact that the text we are focusing upon, Rom 9:27, follows shortly after Rom 9:24, where, for the first time in Rom 9, the Gentiles receive mention; the only other reference in this chapter to Gentiles is at 9:30, as we have just noted. If we were to proceed directly from 9:23 to 9:24 without a break, it might seem that Gentiles are equally or primarily the object of the divine purpose in this text, but in my view it is best to designate 9:24–29 as a subsection which may be titled "The Inclusion of Gentiles."⁵ Yet this is a subsection only,

³ Cf. Charles E. B. Cranfield, "[T]he preservation of even a remnant is a miracle of divine grace," *The Epistle to the Romans* Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 502.

⁴ *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 296.

⁵ Joseph Fitzmyer titles the subsection 9:24–29 as "God Does Not Act Arbitrarily." He is typical of commentators in that he sees Hosea's words as directed to the Northern Kingdom of Israel but freely adapted by Paul to illustrate God's election and the divine choice of those who were otherwise unworthy to become privileged ones; see *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 3; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 573. But see Heikki Räisänen, who titles the new subsection as "The Inclusion of Gentiles" in "Paul, God and Israel: Romans 9–11 in Recent Research," *The*

and it is clear from 9:27–29 that Paul's primary concern at this point (and in chapters 9–11 as a whole) is not Gentiles; the theme is Israel—"Isaiah cries out concerning Israel" (v. 27). Thus the remnant must be a *remnant of Israel*, and does not include Gentiles despite the brief earlier reference to them. The reason for my retaining the phrase "remnant of them" as in the RSV is because "of them," though absent in the Greek text, clearly indicates that the remnant is a remnant of Israel only, thus not including Gentiles.

C. H. Dodd⁶ and other commentators have criticized Paul for misusing citations that refer to Israel by arbitrarily applying these to Gentiles. As C. H. Dodd, Karl Barth⁷ and others all recognize, the scriptural references apply firstly and primarily to Israel. But does Paul actually recognize this? He certainly does. Paul uses the "not my people" citation⁸ of Hos 2:23 in 9:25, to refer not primarily to the inclusion of Gentiles but to the northern kingdom of Israel (as

Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee, ed. Jacob Neusner et. al, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1998), 178–226 (183).

⁶ Dodd comments, "It is rather strange that Paul has not observed that this prophecy referred to Israel, rejected for its sins, but destined to be restored, . . . strange because it would have fitted so admirably the doctrine of the restoration of Israel which he is to expound in chapter 11." *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 160.

⁷ Cf. Barth's comment, "To whom did these words originally apply? To the Israel of the kings of Samaria, which had been rejected by God and which had not been granted such a promise. And because these words have now been fulfilled in the calling of the Gentiles to the church of Jesus Christ, they obviously also speak with renewed force in their original sense; they also speak of the rejected disobedient Israel. Now that he has fulfilled it superabundantly among the rejected without, how could God's promise not apply also to the rejected within, to whom he had once addressed it?" *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM, 1959), 122–23.

⁸ As Robert Jewett notes, "Although the material from the book of Hosea is composite, it is introduced here as a single citation." For a thorough discussion of Paul's use of Scripture in this pericope see Jewett's *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia Series; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 598–605. A summary of Paul's creative and sometimes apparently loose rendering and combination of scriptural texts suggests a careful and focused use of these rather than a subversive or casual proof-texting. See Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scriptures in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and also Kathy Ehrensperger, "Paul and the Authority of Scripture: A Feminist Perspective," in *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 291–319.

the other two citations that follow it obviously do). “Not my people” did not initially mean Gentiles, but referred to the restoration of these particular tribes.

Thus the three citations in this pericope all have the same theme, i.e. Israel. Unreceptive Israel, like the northern tribes, will be restored. What is asserted here is a restoration within Israel, rather than a displacement of Israel by Gentiles. It should come as no surprise that even in an incidental discussion of the mission to the Gentiles, the scriptures of Israel retain their primary reference to Israel. Only thus does the Hosea citation have implications for the inclusion of Gentiles, in that with the restoration of Israel, another “non-people,” the Gentiles, will also be blessed.⁹ Paul does use the scriptural citation in a secondary sense, typologically, to apply to Gentiles also, but only after he has first used it to apply to Israel. This understanding of Paul’s use of “not people” terminology, unlike Dodd’s interpretation, does not involve Paul in a confusion of the identity of Jews and Gentiles.¹⁰

But having demonstrated that the remnant is a remnant of Israel, and that this does not include Gentiles, it has still to be recognized that Paul grieves deeply because the majority of Israel, the rest, do not trust in Christ. Paul is not content with the fact that a holy remnant still exists. He resembles Moses in that he identifies with Israel, and contrasts Moses with Elijah, who stands over against Israel. Yet that fact does not diminish the remnant’s significance.

In Paul’s theological thought, the remnant sanctifies the whole of Israel, even though the majority are temporarily hardened—“If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump” (11:16)—this is precisely the same argument Paul uses about the children of wives with unbelieving husbands in 1 Cor 7:12–14.¹¹ *The importance of the remnant therefore for Paul is that, to a great extent, it preserves the identity of the whole people.* There can be no doubt that Paul recognizes and emphasizes the obstinacy of Israel in Rom 10 using the

⁹ Thus Fitzmyer translates Rom 15:8 as, “For I tell you, Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s fidelity, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, and Gentiles have glorified God for his mercy,” *Romans*, 704 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰ I have developed this new understanding of these verses in my essay “Divergent Images of Paul and his Mission,” *Reading Israel in Romans: The Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Readings*, ed. Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 187–211, now included in my *Unity and Diversity in Christ: Interpreting Paul in Context* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 67–90. Where relevant, I will draw upon some aspects of this essay.

¹¹ Thus it appears that Paul is aware of two categories of people—those following Christ and those not following Christ—but also of another group sanctified by association with the faithful.

words from Deut 32:21: "So I will make them jealous with a 'no people.'"¹² Here God severely disciplines Israel by means of the nations, but nevertheless the Deut 32 passage ends, as Philip F. Esler has noted, with the punishment of the nations and the vindication of Israel.¹³

The remnant in fact indicates that God has never completely deserted his people despite their failings, but that in and through this holy remnant he has declared and demonstrated his faithfulness up until now to the whole of Israel, and now in the present, according to Paul's scenario, Gentiles in Christ will thus also be blessed.

The Remnant Is a Sign of Divine Providence—"Chosen by Grace"

Paul describes the remnant as "chosen by grace" (Rom 11:5). This remnant is not a historical accident determined by the erratic events surrounding the first proclamation of the gospel, but exists by the purpose and power of God. Of course, the remnant, i.e. those Jews who followed Christ, were persuaded and empowered by the preaching of the gospel, not in a theological vacuum of absolute divine power but through normal human response in historical contexts. And yet Paul views this theologically as an election of grace, κατ' ἐκλογὴν χάριτος, indicating, I think, that he views this remnant as a necessary and inalienable link in the process of salvation.

Theoretically, in Paul's view, God could have raised up children from stones, but he chose not to do so and worked through the people Israel, imperfect as any other people, to achieve his purposes. Thus having chosen to work through human flesh in history, the purpose of God had to be realized through prophets and the faithful who lived the life of faith in historical contexts, and thus this was passed on to succeeding generations, *especially by the teaching of the children, so often stressed in Scripture*. Working thus within human history and with human vehicles in the transmission of faith across the centuries, continuity was ensured by a faithful remnant, necessary for *the social transmission of faith*. The remnant was the chosen vehicle for the eventual realization and consummation of God's promises for Israel and the nations.

¹² As Cranfield notes, following F. F. Bruce, Paul's familiarity with the Hebrew text would suggest a link between "no people" (*lo am*) here and "not my people" (*lo ammi*) in Hos 1:9f, a passage he has already cited; *Romans*, 539.

¹³ Cf. *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 293.

The problem, however, lies not in affirming the existence of a remnant but with its identification and historical description. Scholars are clear about the fact of a remnant, but often skeptical about its extent, or how to identify divine activity in history, as e.g. in Ernst Käsemann's assertion, "In its earthly course, it is discontinuous and cannot be calculated. . . . Its continuity is the power of God."¹⁴ I understand why Käsemann in his contemporary German context opposed an earthly continuity that developed into an ideology used as an alternative to the freedom and power of God, and an understanding of an immanent spirit that was not the Spirit of God. I also recognize that despite his opposition to existential interpretations of the gospel, he shared some of its limitations as regards historical claims.¹⁵

But though Käsemann was correct to oppose such ideologies at the time, and though his stance has some theological validity, *it is deficient in that it allows no space for the socio-historical transmission of faith.* It is a fact of life that the genesis and formation of Christ-followers in the first century as today emerges in a faith context, within the family and the social group, and then in relation to the wider social context. The weakness and imperfection of human beings do not justify a rejection of the normal pattern of faith that teaches "the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are far off, as many as the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39). Käsemann himself views God's

¹⁴ *Commentary on Romans* (ET; London: SCM, 1980), 217. Käsemann argues against "a category of salvation history running its course in chronological continuity" on the grounds that this is "inappropriate as a hermeneutical principle for the illumination of Paul's picture of Abraham." He notes that the idea of a holy remnant, so important for Jewish Christianity, in providing a verifiable transition from Israel according to the flesh to Christianity, plays no part in Paul's writings except for Rom 9:27–29; 11:4–5, 13–16. "The Faith of Abraham in Romans 4," *Perspectives on Paul* (London: SCM, 1971), 79–101 (87).

¹⁵ But it is worth noting that Käsemann was very critical of G. Klein's claim that Paul's theology radically profanes and paganizes the history of Israel ("radikal entheiligt und paganisiert . . . die Geschichte Israels") in "Römer iv und die Idee der Heilsgeschichte," *Evangelische Theologie*, 23:424–47. Käsemann deplores Klein's individualism in which Abraham becomes merely "the cipher of a contingent historical figure" (*Romans*, 125–27). Instead Käsemann emphasises Abraham and Israel as the bearer of the promise, opposing both the concepts of the church as "spiritual Israel" and as "ideal Israel." "For Paul the church does not simply replace Israel. It is not a new thing with no dimension of depth historically, which then becomes merely a historic entity" (*Romans*, 261–63). Käsemann goes as far as to ask, "Is there in fact a continuity of the promise in earthly Israel which, however, is not sustained or guaranteed by the people as such but solely by the acting God? If so, then God is in truth this continuity and Israel is simply the earthly sphere chosen by him" (263).

righteousness as his “sovereignty over the world revealing itself eschatologically in Jesus.”¹⁶ He notes that even though, according to Paul in Rom 4:11–12, everything depends on faith, not on becoming a proselyte, and thus “Judaism is robbed of both Abraham and circumcision,” Paul in 4:12 “hastens to qualify an exaggerated statement. An on-going relation of the patriarch to Judaism is now acknowledged. In fact the apostle is concerned to be able to call Abraham also the father of the circumcision, since any other course would take the promise away from Israel and contest its salvation history.”¹⁷ For our purposes here, it is sufficient to note that even Käsemann cannot avoid speaking at certain points about Israel’s salvation history.

Of course there can be no objective identification within a historical context of groups/collectives as elect, but that does not mean that one cannot recognize within this pattern of thought faithful obedience wherever it is found. John Calvin’s pattern was probably wise in that whilst he refused to allow the specific identification of the elect, when he preached to his congregations he preached to them *as if they were the elect*. Not all Israel was ever faithful at any one time, but so too God never left himself without witnesses, as if there could have been a time when he was not fully present with his world. From a theological perspective, the birth of Christ took place within the divine purpose, but as Luke reminds us, within a people, some of whom at least were waiting and watching in age-long hope of redemption. Luke reminds us of what we might now term *the social capital of Israel*.¹⁸ But on the other hand, J. Louis Martyn asserts that in the gospel Christ steps onto the scene as if God had been entirely

¹⁶ “The Righteousness of God in Paul,” *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1980), 168–82 (184).

¹⁷ Cf. *Commentary on Romans*, 116. Similarly, when commenting on Rom 9:6–13 in relation to Rom 11:11–24, Käsemann asserts, “Previously the emphasis was on the selection which breaks the earthly continuity again and again. Now, conversely, the faithfulness which makes earthly continuity possible is underscored” (*Romans*, 308).

¹⁸ Adolf Schlatter, by no means uncritical of the Jews and Judaism, nevertheless asserted, “The entire teaching of Jesus, and therefore also the whole thought of the church, is built from materials that had been developed in Israel, which is why there is no New Testament concept without a model (Vorbildung) in the theology of the synagogue.” Cited in Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation from Herder to Semler and from Kittel to Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 257.

absent or never stepped on the scene previously!¹⁹ This is because Martyn's interest and focus is upon an "Israel of God" understood as the "church of Christ," and not the Israel of Rom 9–11 or of most recent careful interpretations of Gal 6:16.²⁰ What needs to be clearly affirmed is that for Paul, even in the

¹⁹ Martyn has a preference for the language of invasion in a form I am not familiar with in Käsemann, who is claimed as a forerunner of apocalyptic as Martyn understands this, e.g., "One who has been on the other side rips the curtain apart, steps through to our side, altering irrevocably our time and space"; "From Paul to Flannery O'Connor with the Power of Grace," *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 282. Cf. also Martyn's "Afterword: The Human Moral Dilemma," *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5–8*, ed. B. R. Gaventa (Waco: Baylor University, 2013), 156–66. Here Martyn refers to the "tectonic shift presently occurring in Pauline studies" which was "spawned originally and centrally by the work of Ernst Käsemann" (161). Cf. my essay "Ernst Käsemann on Romans: the Way Forward or the End of An Era?," *Modern Interpretations of Romans: Tracking Their Hermeneutical/Theological Trajectory*, ed. Daniel Patte and Christina Grenholm (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 161–86. In my view, Käsemann and Stendahl represent two distinct attitudes to Paulinism. Käsemann was content to modify Bultmann's existentialist approach but Stendahl wanted a fresh start. Stendahl was in fact seeking a new perspective, whereas Käsemann because of his concern for justification by faith was seeking to defend what for many was then the Pauline consensus. But Käsemann did not seek to found a school, and he was so critical of inadequate, uncritical scholarship that few doctoral students were brave enough to choose him as their Doktorvater. The historical roots of at least some of the current conceptions of Pauline apocalyptic thought are very mixed, more of doubtful, hybrid parentage than of Käsemann alone. For Käsemann, apocalyptic was his favorite weapon against a narrow South German pietism as well as an individualist existentialism that could not fully represent the breadth and depth of Paul's thought. His debate with Stendahl in reaction to Stendahl's famous 1963 essay "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" ("Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans," *New Testament Questions of Today* [London: SCM, 1971], 60–78), demonstrates the difficulty of relating his work to other contemporary strands of Pauline scholarship indebted also to Stendahl and Sanders, not to mention his blind spot in relation to "the pious Jew" ("Paul and Israel," *New Testament Questions of Today*, 183–87). This is not to deny Käsemann's enormous contribution to Pauline scholarship as e.g. in his emphasis upon concrete obedience to the lordship of Christ, his stress upon the "extra nos" and corporate aspects of salvation in opposition to individualism, his opposition to all forms of realized eschatology, his precise targeting of all earthly ideologies, and his unremitting stance on the social outworking of the gospel in the political scene—not commitments that all scholars interested in apocalyptic in Paul seem to have inherited!

²⁰ On this see my chapter "Self-Understanding and the People of God: Israel in Romans" in *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 121–39; also S. G. Eastman, "Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-Reading of Galatians 6:16

Christ-event God did not choose to work by magic or naked power. Even the “word of the cross” in Pauline thought does not operate by divine fiat. Jesus is depicted as refusing the easy way to success and working through the mean and lowly. In Paul’s perspective, the Resurrection did not introduce an entirely new miraculous gospel as if God had totally changed his way of relating to his creation, but in Christ he vindicated the way of the servant, already glimpsed in Isa 53, thus affirming the traditions and hopes of the people Israel as the way of righteousness in this world, and God’s faithfulness to the whole of Israel.

The Remnant Has Crucial Relevance for Gentiles in Christ

The relevance of the remnant for Christ-following Gentiles is not that it enables the remnant and the Gentiles to join forces, thus combining to take over the inheritance of Israel and to ignore the rest of Israel who do not trust in Christ. But the remnant does have genuine significance for Gentiles. *If Israel were completely rejected by God, the promises would not be available to Gentiles, since they are to the Jew first, and only available to Gentiles as a result of Israel’s prior receipt of them.*

On writing Romans to Gentile congregations, it could be anticipated that Paul might teach about a remnant of faithful Israelites as a prelude to understanding the arrival of the gospel. But Paul in Romans is not concerned merely about the remnant within the history of Israel in times past, a possible inference from his reference to ὑπόλειμμα in 9:27. We note that in 11:5, the second of his only two uses of the term, he stresses that just as there has always been a remnant within the history of Israel *so too there now exists a remnant in his own day*—ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ.²¹ The remnant has significance for God’s

and Romans 9–11,” *NTS* 2010, 367–95. See also J. B. Tucker, *Remain in Your Calling: Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 133 n. 83.

²¹ In this emphasis, Paul is in keeping with other contemporary Jewish literature uses of the remnant concept as, e.g., in the Damascus Document and 4 Ezra. The use of this theme represents how in an intra-Jewish debate, an author handles the scriptural traditions of Israel to demonstrate that his version of Judaism is the authentic continuation of biblical tradition. Cf. Shayna Sheinfeld, “Who Is the Righteous Remnant in Romans 9–11?,” a paper read at the Third Nangeroni Meeting of the Enoch Seminar on “Paul as a Second Temple Jewish Author,” June 2014, to be published in the conference findings in 2016.

continuing purposes for Israel but also, though it does not include Gentiles, through Christ it provides a vital historical and theological link for them with the people of Israel. Without a remnant of the faithful, that is, human flesh and blood, there can be no transmission of the blessings of the promises to Gentiles. The blessings are mediated through Christ *but this good news is transmitted by the faithful*. In Paul's theology, Christ is depicted as the obedient one, the representative of the righteous, who overcomes the disobedience of Adam, the representative of sinful humanity. Is it not therefore legitimate to view Jesus Christ, the representative of all his faithful and obedient followers, as the only necessary and valid link with Judaism? On the contrary, a righteous remnant of people is a *sine qua non* for the purpose of God in history both for the people of Israel and for the Gentile ἐκκλησία's links with Israel. It is a gross misconception to view Paul as the founder of a new creation, a new religion without historical precedent, an ἐκκλησία with no necessary connection to the people Israel in the here and now. Christian identity is not a *creatio ex nihilo*; in Pauline theology some degree of Jewishness is absolutely essential for an adequate Christian self-understanding.

As J. C. Beker notes, "The salvation of Gentiles alongside the complete failure of the promise to Israel is ruled out. Such a rejection of Israel by God would simply cut the connection of the gospel to its foundation in the Hebrew Scriptures, and degrade the God of Jesus Christ into the God of Marcion—a new God who has no relation to creation or to Israel's salvation history."²²

On the other hand, should the Jewishness of Christianity not be perceived as only a foundational element soon to be relinquished as the developing ἐκκλησία leaves aside her childhood patterns? And then, of course, the question arises, as it does repeatedly throughout Paul's letter to the Romans: How much Jewishness is really necessary? That is the question repeatedly raised since the time of Marcion, whose stance appears to mark a crucial boundary in the limitation of Jewish influence in Christianity.

Just as in Israel's previous history, when the righteous remnant functioned as a link between the people punished and diminished because of their unfaithfulness, and their future restoration, so too in Paul's day, the righteous remnant functions as a bridge between the Jewish people and the incoming of the Gentiles; but it in itself does not and cannot include Gentiles. If this were so, it would mean that Gentiles are part of Israel, and thus may be

²² "The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried, rev. & exp. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 327–32 (330).

designated as Israelites. And if the promises are made to Israel, and Israel may also mean Gentiles, how many Israelites would necessarily be included in order for the title Israel still to retain any valid meaning as heir to the promises?²³ *By making Gentiles into Israelites, the meaning and significance of Israel's peculiar title and status is diluted*, and this results, as history has shown us, in a "church of Gentiles" arrogantly displacing Israel, and deliberately defining herself over against Israel.²⁴ For Paul, the people of Israel is a historical entity, and must first be considered historically, rather than merely theologically. It is not an abstract or purely symbolic theological term that can be redefined at will, though examples of this appear as early as the third century C.E. Israel for Paul remains a particular historical people.

We conclude, then, that for Paul the remnant refers only to part of his own historical people, and functions as a vehicle to transmit the gospel to the Gentiles, without any confusion of identity between the two. Thus, via the righteous remnant, there exists a real historical continuity for Paul between Israel and the ἐκκλησία of Jews and Gentiles.

The Extent of the Remnant: This Remnant Is Not Constituted by Christ Alone

The consideration of the remnant theme in Paul is closely intertwined with his understanding of Abraham's seed. In my opinion, Christ cannot legitimately be viewed as the one singular seed in Rom 4, as C. K. Barrett views him in his

²³ Cf. Karin H. Zetterholm's comment, "Sadly and paradoxically, the idea of the inclusion of Gentiles carried within it the seed of later Gentile Christian persecution of Jews. Most Jesus-oriented communities in antiquity seem to have been made up of a mixture of Jews and Gentiles and in those communities that embraced and developed the "remnant theology" position, emphasizing the continuity between biblical Israel and their own communities, the Gentile Jesus-adherents likely adopted this view from the Jews. As many of these communities became more and more dominated by Gentiles, and Jews increasingly identified with non-Jesus-oriented rabbinic Judaism, a formerly intra-Jewish debate turned into a conflict between Jews and non-Jews and an originally biblical/Jewish theology directed against the Jewish people." "Alternate Visions of Judaism and Their Impact on the Formation of Rabbinic Judaism," *JMJS* 1 (2014), 127–53 (145), also 142–43.

²⁴ "As long as Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures are regarded as simply preparatory to Christianity, then it is inevitable that the Gentile mission will be viewed as the *climax* of God's work, and the Christian church will continue to be confused with the kingdom of God." R. K. Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 19 (emphasis mine).

Romans commentary: “It is important to recall here that the seed of Abraham contracted till it became ultimately Christ, and was subsequently expanded to include those who were in Christ. . . . [Election] . . . takes place always and only *in Christ*.”²⁵ In Gal 3:16, Paul does deliberately argue on the basis of a singular σπέρμα. But in Rom 4:16, παντὶ τῷ σπέρματι is further defined, despite the collective term, as “not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham,” *clearly indicating a diversity and multiplicity of people*.²⁶ We note also that when Paul cites Isaiah in Rom 9:29, the term σπέρμα is cited again, referring not to an individual but *corporately* to the remaining faithful of the Northern Kingdom.²⁷ We have claimed already in this essay that it is inadequate to hold that for Paul Jesus Christ is the only necessary link between the ἐκκλησία and Judaism. That Paul views Jesus Christ as the representative of faithful obedience just as Adam represents humanity under the power of sin is certainly part of the apostle’s theological spectrum,²⁸ and thus can only be affirmed. But to claim that because Christ *represents* Israel, he *displaces* her by *becoming Israel* and taking over all the function of Israel without remainder, is by no means warranted by the term “representation.” Moreover, Rom 9:4 cannot refer to Christ but only to Israel and Israel’s inheritance. “They [plural], are Israelites, and to them belong [present tense] the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises. . . .”

A representative operates on behalf of his or her clients, but what a strange business where the agent takes over all the heritage and functions of the corporation, and becomes instead the sole replacement for that body alongside another group of clients who formerly had nothing invested in the corporation. Thus I cannot agree with N. T. Wright’s view of Christ as embodying in himself all the heritage and responsibilities of Israel. I can concur with such claims as “all the promises of God find their yes in him.” Christ can well be described as the ideal Israelite fully dedicated to do the will of God, and thus the perfect exemplar for his people, but he and they remain as two related, though separate, entities.

²⁵ *The Epistle to the Romans* (BNTC, London: Black, 1961), 183, but see also 181 and 191–92.

²⁶ Cf. J. C. Beker, “Contrary to Galatians 3, Romans 4 maintains the distinctiveness of Jew and Gentile as Abraham’s seed (4:12–16)”; similarly, “Paul intends to stress not uniformity but unity in diversity. The pluralistic diversity of peoples in their ethnic and cultural variety is maintained, although in Christ this pluralism becomes nevertheless a unity.” “The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel,” 330–32.

²⁷ In 11:1, Paul does refer to himself as of the seed of Israel.

²⁸ Cf. Stephen Westerholm, “Righteousness, Cosmic and Microcosmic,” *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5–8*, ed. B. Gaventa (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 21–38 (36).

Even Paul's "in Christ" language, though it denotes believers in union with Christ and, to a lesser extent, Christ in them, does not indicate fusion or union so that the identity of either is displaced or eradicated without remainder.²⁹ I myself, being concerned to stress the corporate dimension in Pauline theology, find some attraction in the view that the people of the Messiah are included in him as one corporate entity,³⁰ but not in the sense that Israel as a whole is thereby swallowed up and can have no further *separate* existence or distinguishable identity.

Paul uses a scriptural basis in Rom 11:2–6 for his argument concerning the extent of the remnant. Using the example of the prophet Elijah who, in a moment of extreme despair and self-pity, complained against Israel, "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." Paul stresses the divine response to Elijah's mistaken perception of himself as the one and only faithful Israelite: "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." It is significant that these faithful 7,000 are depicted as "kept by God." The remnant has not been reduced to only one individual, as if God had deserted his wayward people³¹—there are still 7,000 faithful. The number 7,000 indicates the complete number of the faithful. It fits well with such references as "all Israel," using rounded numbers of people rather than a precise number of individuals. Nevertheless, 7,000 represents a substantial portion of the people, at least a remnant and not a minimal representation.³² It is small only by comparison with the sand of the sea—"only" [a remnant] is not in the Greek text.³³

²⁹ For a comprehensive investigation of all the uses of union with Christ language in Paul, see Constantine Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), esp. 310, 390–91, and 437–44.

³⁰ As, e.g., where N. T. Wright commences this discussion with reference to Philemon; *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 16–18.

³¹ If the term $\mu\eta\ \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\tau\omicron\tau\omicron$ (11:1, 11) represents, as many scholars believe, Paul's response to a misrepresentation of his gospel, then here Paul affirms his positive attitude to his own people and presents a hopeful, rather than negative, image of their response. Cf. Abraham J Malherbe, " $\mu\eta\ \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\tau\omicron\tau\omicron$ in the Diatribe and Paul," *HTR* 73 (1980), 232.

³² See John P. Heil, "From Remnant to Seed of Hope for Israel: Romans 9:27–29," *CBQ* 64 (2002), 703–20.

³³ Cf. Robert Jewett's comment, "Whilst most commentators take the remnant reference to be a threatening comment on Israel, even inserting the interpretive 'only' in their translations, a primarily positive interpretation is suggested by the link with 'will be

Thus, in Paul's view, *it is not by accident but by divine purposefulness that a faithful remnant has continued to exist* in Israel. Even after the golden calf incident, according to Paul, God's presence exists within Israel, and to suggest otherwise is simply to ignore the scriptural evidence to the contrary.³⁴ The use of the term election of grace—ἐκλογὴν χάριτος—and κατέλιπον, “kept by God,” indicates both the providence and necessity of a remnant in the history of Israel. The phrase “theirs is the worship” in Rom 9:4 indicates continuing divine presence; Israel's covenant with God remains intact, and even a period of exile could not destroy it or prevent the rebuilding and restoration of the temple, and, according to Paul, also the eventual re-ratification of the covenant through the death and resurrection of Christ.³⁵

For Paul in Romans, Israel exists in two forms, the remnant and the non-remnant—i.e. “the elect,” whom Paul identifies as those Jews who are already Christ-followers, and “the rest of Israel,” who have not responded positively to the claims about Jesus as the Christ. Yet Paul does not ignore “the rest” but sees a future hope of their salvation by means of the incoming of the Gentiles. But where a somewhat realized eschatology is adhered to, such as is suggested by Wright's use of the term “climax,” there can be no real future for the Jews who presently, in Paul's time, do not trust in Christ. The climax has arrived and they as a people are not included. But, as J. C. Beker has emphasized, “When futurist, cosmic eschatology is minimized or neutralized, the final triumph of God at the end of history becomes so identified with the triumph of

saved' as well as by the context established in vv. 6–8 and v. 24,” *Romans*, 602–3. Similarly, Wagner comments, “The language of ‘remnant’ and ‘seed’ resonates with promises of a future and a hope for Israel on the other side of judgement” (*Heralds of the Good News*, 94).

³⁴ Contra Wright's view of Israel as continuing to be in exile (even after the return from the exile); see John M. G. Barclay's critique that because Wright's notion of a narrative template based on Deut 27–30 is overstated, and poorly evidenced in Paul, “Without it the language of ‘exile’ becomes a general and potentially misleading metaphor for unfulfilled Jewish hopes of many different kinds.” “N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (SPCK 2013),” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2015, Durham Research Online (accessed March 20, 2015).

³⁵ On this see Thomas R. Blanton, “Paul's Covenantal Theology in 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4,” *Paul and Judaism: Cross-Currents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and Didier Pollefeyt (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 61–71; also my essay, “Covenantal Theology and Participation in Christ: Pauline Perspectives on Transformation in Christ,” in the same volume, 41–60.

God in the Christ-event that the theo-centric apocalyptic focus of Paul is absorbed into the Christocentric triumph of Christ."³⁶

In Wright's view, Christ represents Israel as the true Jew in Paul's thought; Israel and her vocation as light to the nations are taken over without remainder by Christ and the rest disappears because all Israel is thus redefined.³⁷

But if Christ is the true Jew, then why are those incorporated into Christ not Jewish by definition and in practice?³⁸ Surprisingly, although Christ represents the true Jew, the Jews are so incorporated that the rest of Israel disappears. They lose their social and historical embodiment as Jews and are theologized out of existence. Those Jews in Christ lose their Jewish identity and those Jews not in Christ, i.e. "the rest," disappear without trace, since according to Wright Christ was "Israel's representative Messiah who summed up the life and story of the people in himself [and] brought Israel's story to its disappointing but shocking and unexpected climax."³⁹ In effect this "solution" of the Israel problem represents a universalization of Gentile "in Christ" identity and a total repudiation of Jewish identity as such. This is a surprising outcome of the thesis that Jesus is the only true Jew.

This extreme view of Wright is not entirely atypical of much of Christian theology of the past century. Wright has developed and perhaps even brought to its logical conclusion a particular strand of universalistic Christocentric theology. I would like to depict his view as isolated and extreme, but unfortunately I see so much commonality in *some* elements of his grand master narrative that many aspects he promotes *by themselves* are not unrepresentative of current scholarship.⁴⁰ Perhaps he has done scholarship a

³⁶ *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 356.

³⁷ *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 405, 815–16, 825–36, esp. 830–31.

³⁸ According to Wright, ". . . they are incorporated into the true Jew, the one in whom Israel's vocation has been fulfilled" (*Faithfulness*, 830).

³⁹ *Faithfulness*, 405.

⁴⁰ As e.g. in his emphasis upon Paul's political stance over against Roman imperialism, cf. *Faithfulness*, 1304–19. My interest here is only in how Wright depicts Christ as taking over the vocation of Israel, as e.g. "when Paul uses the word *Messiah* he evokes a word in which the Messiah, the king of Israel sums up his people and their story in himself" (*Faithfulness*, 17). It is how Wright proceeds to develop this theme that I find most unconvincing, especially as he candidly admits he cannot claim that the concept of the

favor by demonstrating where certain theological tendencies will proceed unless critical attention is devoted to this neat dismissal of the Jewish people and the Jewish heritage of Christianity.⁴¹

Christian theology inevitably arrives at conclusions not dissimilar to Wright's wherever Paul's view of being in Christ is not perceived as including the diversity of Jew as well as Gentile. There is differentiation/distinction in Christ: "the Jew first and also the Greek" (Rom 2:9–10; 10:12), but, as Paul emphasizes, there is no discrimination in Christ.⁴² *Attitudes toward ethnicity are transformed, but one's ethnicity is not thereby abolished.*⁴³ To be one in Christ is not to be or become the same,⁴⁴ but where this is not recognized then it is inevitable that Christians will perceive themselves as having a supernatural

binding together of the Messiah and his people was already well-known and widespread in Paul's day (827).

⁴¹ Wright himself is very critical of the views of J. L. Martyn because he regards them as being extremely anti-Jewish, cf. e.g. 480–83. I accord with some aspects of this criticism; however, it is not the avowed intention of Wright's depiction of Jews and Judaism that I oppose, but rather the effect and influence of what I view as a misinterpretation of Christ's relation to Israel, cf. his useful discussion of various scholars in relation to apocalyptic thought, pp. 1477–84.

⁴² There is no agreed New Testament interpretation meaning for the term διαστολή; see my essay "No Distinction or No Discrimination? The Translation of Διαστολή in Romans 3:22 and 10:12," *Erlesenes Jerusalem: Festschrift für Ekkehard W. Stegemann*, hrsg. Christina Tuor-Kurth and Lukas Kundert (Theologische Zeitschrift 69; Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2013), 353–71. My argument is that οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή (Rom 3:22; 20:12) has to be read in conjunction with οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν προσωποληψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ (Rom 2:11), thus designating this as a theological rather than an anthropological assertion.

⁴³ At this point Wright follows J. D. G. Dunn's view of ethnicity in his claim, "In the Messiah Jesus, God has launched his project of bringing the human race together into a new unity . . . in which their previous differences are transcended" (*Faithfulness*, 833). As Caroline Johnson Hodge has noted, "The choice to privilege 'belief' as central to Christianity results in a downplaying of features viewed as bodily, including ethnicity." *If Sons Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48.

⁴⁴ Cf. K. Ehrensperger's emphasis upon Israel and the nations as "Unity with a Difference" in "The Question(s) of Gender: Relocating Paul in Relation to Judaism," *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 245–76; also, "The Pauline Εκκλησία and Images of Community in Enoch Traditions," *Rereading Paul as a Second-Temple Jewish Author*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Minneapolis: Fortress; forthcoming, 2016).

identity transcending the normal ethnicities and identities of human beings, a new race of people, the third race of theological imagination.⁴⁵

In the end, in Wright's reading of Paul Jewish existence and identity disappear, if not because there is something intrinsically wrong with being Jewish then, in a seemingly more humane way, these are obliterated by a theology of being in Christ—different means of arriving at the same end through a process of universalization.⁴⁶ There unfortunately appears to be an ongoing tendency in Christian theology to denigrate the spirituality of Israel, and to deny the (saving) remnant any meaningful role toward Israel, as if the two faiths were in a competition that Christianity had to win. But this is only the case when

⁴⁵ As far as I am able to discern, in the modern era Markus Barth was the first scholar who explicitly emphasized that in the Pauline tradition Jews and Gentiles retain their historic distinction even within their communion in Christ: "the members of the church are not so equalized, leveled down, or straightjacketed as to become a 'genus tertium' that would be different from both Jews and Gentiles." *Ephesians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 310. Cf. also William Rader's Basel doctorate, *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of the Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1978). Rader holds that for the fathers of the first three centuries, Eph 2:11–22 witnessed primarily to the continuity of the church with Israel, but thereafter the church tended to understand herself as "the church of the Gentiles" rather than as "the church out of Jews and Gentiles." It was John Chrysostom in his commentary who, more than any other, stressed discontinuity between the church and Israel, and even though Augustine stressed continuity, in the East Chrysostom's interpretation prevailed. The concept of a third entity re-emerged in Adolf Harnack's *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4 Aufl. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924), 259–81; but von Harnack was careful to speak of a third "kind" rather than a third race, i.e. another group alongside Jews and Gentiles. Von Harnack himself, in line with his philosophy of history, regarded Christianity as the ultimate stage of humanity's development when the previous two forms were "aufgehoben." But in his historical studies, he noted that in the *Praedicatio Petri* (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.5.41) the term τρίτον γένος is used to refer to a third kind of worshipping which distinguishes Christians from Greeks and Jews. Von Harnack explicitly states that the first occurrence of τρίτον γένος means that "hier die Christen selbst noch nicht 'das dritte Geschlecht' heissen, sondern ihre Gottesverehrung als die dritte gilt. Nicht in drei Volker teilt unser Verfasser die Menschheit, sondern in drei Klassen von Gottesverehrern." Cf. Kathy Ehrensperger, "Paul, His People and Racial Terminology," *Journal of Early Christian History*, Vol. 3 no. 1 (2013), 17–32 (24–25).

⁴⁶ By this, I mean the making of Gentile identity the preferred norm for Paul, to which all Christ-followers ought now, or in the near future, begin to conform.

supersessionism is regarded as compatible with Paul, for which there is no solid evidence.⁴⁷ To deny to Jews as Jews any place in the on-going purpose of God may seem a small matter. Some Pauline scholars have been critical or negative toward the function and future of Israel in previous generations, as e.g. C. H. Dodd.⁴⁸ But the particular thesis that Christ is Israel in person⁴⁹ is not just another theological doctrine in the milieu of those that continue to proliferate in the academy. It strikes at the heart of Christian understanding of the Jewish people and their ongoing role in the purpose of God ἡ κατ' ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις (Rom 9:11, cf. 8:28). Plainly put, their function has been served in the birth and flourishing of Christianity, and they are now, as a people, superfluous to God's plans. That represents their close association with Christians as only a temporary phenomenon in the history of the people of God. This people to whom the promises were originally given are now relegated to a non-identity, "non-people," as the former people of God. They have, in such Christian theological perspective, lost that significance that Paul described as "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 10:12).

According to this perception, it is not just that Christianity has outgrown its Jewish connections, but rather that the divine purpose no longer includes this people in any special sense. As individuals, they can give up their Jewishness, but as a people the Jews no longer have any salvatory significance. The fact that individual Jews may join the Christ movement but not as part of the Jewish people, only as individuals, proclaims to all that it is Jewish identity as such that is being abrogated, a whole tradition and way of life repudiated en

⁴⁷ Despite Wright's useful discussion of this issue (cf. *Faithfulness*, 403–04, 417), I am not convinced that his view allows any meaningful future for Israel as Israel, since he claims that Jesus the Messiah is "Israel in person" (857–8, 890). See also his claim that "those Jews who do not embrace Jesus Christ as their Messiah are thereby embracing an identity marked out by blood and soil, by ancestry and territory, in other words by the works of the 'flesh'" ("Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. R. Horsley [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000], 160–83 [176]).

⁴⁸ Dodd is critical of Paul's deep concern for the salvation of his fellow Jews, viewing it variously as due to patriotic sentiment, etc. He also claimed, "Therefore, even if the entire Israelite nation is rejected, the promise has not been broken. It has been fulfilled by God in his own way," (*Romans*, 154–55 and 183). Dodd tended to regard the election of Israel as a sign of divine favoritism, cf. 43, 63, 179–83.

⁴⁹ Cf. "the-Messiah-as-Israel-in-person" (*Faithfulness*, 842), and "He was . . . the vindicated-Israel-in-person" (930).

bloc!⁵⁰ My question is this: how can such a denigration not severely affect the status and image of those who continue to practice Judaism? The presumption in this view is that, after Christ, God deals only with individuals, not peoples. This modern perception fails to note that Paul does not deal with individuals only, despite saying “and thus save some of them” (Rom 11:14). Even though individual Jews may follow Christ, for Paul this does not represent the faithfulness of God to Israel, and he still seeks the salvation of “all Israel” (Rom 11:26). This is simply to assert that God does not deal with “homo generalis” but with peoples in their appropriate contexts.

The Faithfulness of God Means Faithfulness to Israel

The attraction for Christian theology of the view of Christ as Israel, or similarly, the church as “new Israel,” stems from the fact that there has been from the second century onward a recurring tendency among Christian theologians to claim the title and heritage of Israel. To incorporate Israel into Christ might seem to finally get rid of this dilemma. Israel is not eliminated, just taken over. From a Christian perspective, Israel now has only past history and, as Israel, no future of any kind. Israel is necessary only for the period of “Christian” origins, not for its continuance. But the implication of this is that henceforth God is no longer the God of Jews and Gentiles, but of Gentiles only, contrary to what Paul is arguing. More significantly, the complete final severing of the church’s destiny from that of Israel means that the church can claim uniqueness without concerns about rivalry with Judaism. The church is the sole claimant to the promises. Christians, in this perspective, appear to be granted a license for triumphalism. But this is never Paul’s view. Jew and Gentile, the Christ-movement and Israel—despite the latter not being convinced that Jesus could be the Messiah—are still tied in an intertwined purposeful destiny under God that

⁵⁰This unfortunately resonates with the Nazi theologians’ attempt to de-Judaize Christianity. Cf. Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*. Gerdmar notes that Johann Salomo Semler was the first Protestant writer to call for a de-Judaizing of Christian theology for theological reasons, a strand in tradition that emerged again with the work of Walter Grundmann et. al. in the Third Reich. Semler held that religion must be universal and cosmopolitan, that Christianity is therefore something new and different, in essence no continuation of Judaism, and the redemption of Christ annuls Judaism (39–41). Cf. also Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

will not allow a consummation in which the one finds salvation without reference to the other.

Thus, in stressing the incoming of the Gentiles, Paul does not forget about Israel. Many have thought the three chapters of Rom 9–11 are an unnecessary appendage to Paul’s theologizing in the letter.⁵¹ Far from it: Paul seeks to determine how the incoming of the Gentiles affects the salvation of Israel. Instead of rejoicing in the blessings that have come to Gentiles, he immediately relates this to what he sees as a possible influence in relation to Israel’s restoration. Paul’s hope is that they will make Israel jealous, and thus affect her future. It then emerges that the restoration includes both Jews and Gentiles, the incoming of the Gentiles being not the final but rather the first step in the eventual restoration of Israel. Surprisingly, the apostle to the Gentiles has his gaze fixed not on the increasing number of Gentile Christ-followers but rather on a future for Israel. “The rest” remain significant for Paul, because unless they are included in some manner at some time, God cannot be said to be faithful to Israel.

For Paul, God’s faithfulness is not a blank check, the recipient of which can be adjusted in changed circumstances. Anyone who makes such an offer is naive or thoughtless, but not faithful. This is not to allow a deterministic claim upon God by Israel that denies the possibility of Israel’s failure. The prophets and psalmists of Israel are witnesses that Israel only has security in obedience and in calling upon her God. Presumption has fatal consequences and judgment is the correlative of mercy, as Walter Brueggemann so clearly demonstrates.⁵²

⁵¹ See e.g. Dodd’s view that Rom 12:1ff. seems to be the sequel to 8:39, rather than chapters 9–11, which are a somewhat self-contained unit, a treatise or sermon possibly in existence prior to the writing of Romans (*Romans*, 148). Käsemann, in line with most scholarship since Johannes Munck’s *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959) is well aware of the significance of Rom 9–11, and notes that the great F. C. Baur’s emphasis on these chapters, which brought to light the Reformation’s failure to integrate 9–11 with the message of justification, would have had a much stronger impact upon subsequent scholarship had he not been so concerned with his mistaken presupposition of Jewish Christian dominance at Rome (Käsemann, *Romans*, 253–55 and 403).

⁵² See e.g. *A Biblical Theology of Provocation: Ice-Axes for Frozen Seas* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 124–30. Cf. also Martha Himmelfarb, “The Parting of the Ways Reconsidered: Diversity in Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations: ‘A Jewish Perspective,’” *Interwoven Destinies: Jews and Christians Through the Ages*, ed. E. J. Fisher (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 47–61, esp. 56–57.

For Paul, divine freedom always accompanies divine faithfulness.⁵³ To assert the freedom of God is to claim that he is not subject to a system of retributive justice in which he is obliged to save one group and condemn another.⁵⁴ Rather, he will oppose and overcome all unrighteousness, but in his own way and in his own time. God is resourceful enough to use the nations to discipline Israel as required, and thus to achieve his desired outcome even with people often recalcitrant and weak, as is usual with human beings. Israel may fail, but God's purpose for both her and the nations is not finally frustrated.⁵⁵

Concluding Reflections: Hermeneutical Implications of Paul's Use of the "Remnant" Concept

Paul is the earliest, most explicit, and in my view most important witness to the fact that, alongside a successful mission to the Gentiles, the God of Israel still retains an ongoing role for the people Israel. Paul's emphasis on the function of the remnant, his clearly expressed hope for the salvation of "all Israel," and his prayers on their behalf in Rom 9–11 provide the historical evidence for this positive theological perspective. In my view, the message of Paul about a remnant of Israel is a positive hope that refuses to allow the weakness of human beings to ultimately frustrate God's purpose for all people. *The remnant theme in*

⁵³ Cf. my essay "The Freedom and Faithfulness of God in Relation to Israel," in my *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context: Jew and Gentile in the Letter to the Romans* (Frankfurt/Berne: Peter Lang, 1991), 43–59.

⁵⁴ Cf. K. Barth's assertion, "We are concerned with the new creation, and not with the sequence of cause and effect." *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. E. C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 364.

⁵⁵ Cf. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 94. The remnant is not to be equated with Israel itself, as if that were the totality of Israel that find salvation, but points beyond itself as a bridge to Christ-following Gentiles and a sign and pledge that "all Israel" will be saved. See Terence L. Donaldson, "Jewish Christianity, Israel's Stumbling and the Sonderweg Reading of Paul," *JSNT* 29.1 (2006): 27–54 (51). On Jeremiah's negative use of the olive tree metaphor, see Mark Reasoner's essay "The Redemptive Inversions of Jeremiah in Romans 9–11," *Biblica* vol. 95 (3) (2014), 388–404, in which he argues that there are seven points of focused dissonance between Jeremiah's judgment language against Judah and Paul's use of the olive tree image in Rom 9–11. Paul, like Deutero-Isaiah, performs inversions on the negative judgments of Jeremiah, and the inversions thus highlight these chapters' positive stance toward ethnic Israel and provide another argument against interpreting "all Israel" in Rom 11:26 as the church (404).

Paul is pivotal within the ongoing relation of Jews and Gentiles in this divine purpose. As such, it is not only hopeful with reference to both of these entities but implies, moreover, both the present and ultimate significance of reconciliation, keeping on center stage the plurality of God's creation. Paul envisaged the inauguration of a new era in Jesus of Nazareth, whom he came to recognize as the Messiah of Israel. However, a view that interprets Paul as essentially equating Jesus Christ with Israel is not an adequate understanding of Paul in his first century historical context. There is no text in the Pauline letters on which such an interpretation can be fully justified. As argued above, to conflate Israel with Christ effectively allows no future for Israel *as Israel* in Christian theology. Nor does such a view take account of the recent reception history of Romans in relation to supersessionism, as indicated in the revised statements of many mainline churches, most notably the *Nostra Aetate* of Vatican II.

Biblical interpreters always address an implied audience, and therefore a contextual situation. If biblical interpretations are to have the intended effect of making biblical perspectives available today, then exegetes and interpreters must seek to ensure that the outcome of their work adequately represents those perspectives, and is in fact the outcome they had anticipated. But, unfortunately, the history of biblical—especially New Testament—interpretation demonstrates that in many instances this interpretation has continued, despite the Holocaust, to transmit an ongoing negative image of Jews and Judaism that lacks any historical relationship to Paul's writings, yet serves as a foil for the construction of Christian identity.

If we did not live in a world in which anti-Judaism is almost endemic in some countries, and if there had not been a tendency to denigrate Jews in Christian tradition throughout its history, then theological statements about Israel in Christian theology would not be quite so dangerous. But anti-Semitism is on the increase throughout Europe, and continues to necessitate police guard on synagogues in Berlin, Brussels, Paris, and elsewhere.⁵⁶ Biblical scholars are responsible for the effects of their interpretations even though these may not be foreseen or intended.⁵⁷ Where there is any doubt, they must be careful not to be the instigators of prejudice or of the perpetuation of an evil that cost the lives of millions of people across the world within the last century. The negative symbolic representation of a people is never neutral, since such symbolic

⁵⁶ Note that this was first written in June 2014, prior to the Paris and other shootings!

⁵⁷ See Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

representation often precedes hostile action that confirms its negative import, from Chrysostom to the Holocaust. What I am advocating is socially responsible interpretation that assesses the potential effect of one's theological opinions before presenting them publicly. My considered view is that any theological opinion that negates the place of the people of Israel in the divine purpose, wittingly or unwittingly, adds fuel to the smoldering fires of inter-ethnic and other kinds of prejudice. Such prejudice cannot be shown to be attributable to Paul; as such it is lacking a historical foundation and can only be regarded as problematic theology.

Moreover, it is indeed equally serious that such a perspective represents and promotes an inadequate Christian self-understanding. Historically, there can be no denying the fact that Jews and Christians share historical roots, as is clearly evidenced in the scriptures of the two Testaments. Any view that fails fully to acknowledge or promote such a view of the intertwined history of these twin entities fails to produce or to allow the emergence of an adequate expression of Christian identity. To permit or promote negative images of Jews and Judaism merely as foils in the construction of Christian identity is a sectarian attitude foreign to the Pauline self-understanding, whereby he was able both to engage in a mission to Gentiles and still be willing to anathematize himself for the sake of Israel. The existence of an unreceptive majority in Israel did not pose any threat to Paul or his understanding of God's purpose for the world. If this pluralistic vision of God's purpose is to be acknowledged, then it demands that Christianity not define itself in such a manner as to in any way denigrate Judaism or suggest that the divine plan for the world is limited to Christians only. Such a narrow, exclusivist vision is inadequate both for understanding Paul *historically* and likewise for the *theological* understanding of Christian identity today. The faithfulness of God as symbolized by the motif of the remnant is basic to theological understanding, but in order to maintain the separate existence and identity of Israel as envisaged by Paul, and also in order for this faithfulness to become an adequate foundation for Christian faith, that faithfulness must mean faithfulness to Israel.