

ON ISRAEL'S GOD AND GOD'S ISRAEL: ASSESSING SUPERSESSIONISM IN PAUL

Abstract

Contemporary interpretation of Paul continues to be enthralled by and entrenched within a debate about Paul and Judaism. Within that debate, the issue of supersessionism is of critical significance, lurking under every exegetical stone, whether or not it rises to the fore of any given scholar's work. Does the church replace ethnic Israel in Paul's thinking (as so many have imagined throughout the history of the Christian church)? Or is ethnic Israel on a separate salvific path by way of her covenant election (as many are currently advocating)? Or are there other dimensions to be considered? This essay outlines basic interpretative options on the issue of supersessionism in Paul, assessing the exegetical merits of 'two ways' and replacement scenarios, and offering reflections on the debate in its contemporary setting.

SOME in the past two millennia have imagined the Christian church to be a place where Jews have no place, since they are an irredeemable people. Often Paul has been thought to be the champion of such a view. On the other hand, some scholars in the past three decades have found Paul to champion another, quite different, view. In their estimate, Paul never imagined the Christian church to be a place where Jews *should* have a place; instead, with the Jews continuing to be the elect people of God, Paul maintained only that the gentile nations were meant to put their faith in Christ Jesus.

Underlying each perspective is the issue of 'supersessionism'—whether in Paul's view the Christian church has superseded the Jews in the affections of God. This is the overarching issue addressed in this essay, with two general positions being outlined and then assessed, after which further reflections are offered.

I. THE 'TWO WAYS' INTERPRETATIONS OF PAUL

The interpretation of Paul that resonates most obviously with the sensitivities of a postmodern world is the 'two ways' understanding of Paul. In this approach, Paul is thought to have been concerned with the offer of salvation through Israel's messiah to Gentiles only, not to Jews immersed in their traditional practices and beliefs; by way of her covenant position,

ethnic Israel continues to have a salvific avenue open to her apart from Christ.

In today's world, where tolerance and pluralism are frequently regarded as central pillars upon which healthy societies are to be founded, this interpretation offers an attractive Paul, with his Christian concerns being understood as having nothing in them that would necessarily be offensive to non-Christian Jews. And along these lines, it is helpful to hear the challenge that, in a dangerous world such as ours, interpreters of Paul are morally liable for their interpretative choices and positions. If nothing else, this charge is wholly in line with a reforming spirit that challenges interpreters to evaluate whether or not their interpretations might be the product of an interpretative tradition that, like a rolling snowball, has managed to collect momentum and critical mass but that has nothing solid at its centre.

But if a 'two ways' reading can claim to be the morally superior reading of Paul in today's complex world, it is not so clear that it offers an exegetically superior reading. A full defence of this view would probably require a monograph, but an indication of my own reasoning is called for in order for the argument of this essay to proceed. Towards this end, I will consider Stanley Stowers's stimulating and thought-provoking monograph *A Rereading of Romans*, and then entertain issues attendant on that consideration. From the growing number of 'two ways' contributions, Stowers's monograph embodies the most sustained and in-depth reading of a single Pauline text, so engaging with it by way of its argumentative foundations will indicate why a 'two ways' approach to Paul is ultimately unsatisfactory exegetically, despite its other attractions.

One of the main pillars of Stowers's argument is his reevaluation of Paul's portrait of all nations, both Jews and Gentiles, as enslaved to 'the cosmic power of Sin' (Rom. 3:9). To this end, Stowers (like other advocates of a 'two ways' reading) prioritizes Paul's claim in Rom. 9:4 that ethnic Israel has as one of its privileges δόξα, 'glory'. Stowers identifies this δόξα as the divine glory in the Jerusalem Temple. So when Paul writes that 'to Israelites belongs the glory', Stowers glosses this to mean that 'to Israelites belong the temple cultus and the glory' in the Temple. And this is clearly what is included in Paul's reference in 9:4 to Israel having 'the worship' (ἡ λατρεία). So, says Stowers, 'Rom 9:4 refers to the temple cultus as a central and continuing privilege of the Jews... Since Paul's communities are gentile and the concerns of his letters are gentile, he has little

opportunity to mention Jerusalem, the temple, and the Jewish situation. When he does refer to these institutions, however, he assumes their continuing validity.¹

Stowers then evaluates the rest of Paul's letter in the light of Rom. 9:4, including Paul's depiction of universal enslavement to the 'cosmic power of sin'. He claims that if Paul really had wanted to prove 'that Jews are under sin in the way that gentiles are, [he] would have had to argue that the Law's system of repentance and holiness was not working'—precisely something that is *not* evident in Paul's letter to the Romans.² Consequently Stowers seeks to redefine the force of Paul's critique of 'the Jew' who, like the Gentile, is 'under the cosmic power of Sin'. Gentile and Jew can be under sin in two different ways, with the Gentile being 'under sin' by being out of relationship with God, and the Jew being under sin whenever he opposes the Christian mission to the Gentiles.

This interpretation seems to display certain methodological and exegetical weaknesses. Methodologically, Stowers's interpretation suffers inadvertently from its own version of the so-called 'problem of essentialism', in which Judaism is anachronistically kept in one corner and Christianity in the other corner—precisely the thing that Stowers himself rightly polemicizes against.³ He seems to assume that Paul could not at one and the same time see Christ's death as salvifically effective for Jew and Gentile alike while at the same time recognizing some continuing role for the Jerusalem Temple and its glory. But Stowers's 'either-or' is not as forceful as it might seem. It is not inconsequential that his dichotomy runs contrary to the perceptions held by one of Paul's first interpreters—the author of Acts. In Acts 21 Paul is depicted as going to the Temple to undergo there the 'rite of purification'. That author depicts Paul's attitude towards the Temple in a far more complex manner than Stowers's discussion permits. So, on the one hand, the Paul of Acts 21 seems to recognize some kind of a continuing role for the Jerusalem Temple even after the death of Jesus. Whether or not this is a historically reliable incident is of no

¹ S. K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); all quotations are from pp. 130–1.

² *Ibid.* p. 129.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 22–9. For more on this, see P. Eisenbaum, 'Paul, Polemics, and the Problem of Essentialism', *Biblical Interpretation* 13 (2005), pp. 224–38; G. Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 21–4.

concern here. The point is simply that an early Christian writer found nothing problematical in thinking that Paul continued to maintain the Temple's significance for Christian Jews even 35 years or so after the death of Jesus. On the other hand, in Acts 13 we find Paul in a synagogue preaching to non-Christian Jews that 'through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you' (13:38) and that 'by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses' (13:39)—claims that peripheralize the Jerusalem Temple's significance even for non-Christian Jews. Evidently, then, the author of Acts imagined early Christian attitudes to the Temple to have been more nuanced than Stowers imagines to have been the case. Evidently, the author of Acts had no difficulty in envisaging that Paul held a Christian form of atonement theology on the one hand and continued to recognize the Jerusalem Temple to be of exceptional significance with regard to 'the rite of purification'. Consequently, the way that Stowers sets up the interpretative context for Romans seems, then, to evidence a mistaken form of modern 'essentialism', compartmentalizing 'Christian' and 'Jewish' attitudes to the Temple in anachronistic ways.⁴

There is no reason, then, to dispute Stowers's claims that 'Rom 9:4 refers to the temple cultus as a central and continuing privilege of the Jews' and that when Paul refers 'to these [cultic] institutions...he assumes their continuing validity'. What is not clear from this, however, is that the salvific dimension of Jesus' death must thereby be seen to pertain only to Gentiles and not to Jews. As Richard Bauckham has argued, sacrificial interpretations of Jesus' death need not have resulted in the complete cessation of sacrificial offerings by early Christian Jews, since a good number of sacrifices would be unaffected

⁴ In this regard, the notion of 'multiple identities in which individuals maintain several identities simultaneously and can move between them with relative ease' (C Johnson Hodge, 'Apostle to the Gentiles: Constructions of Paul's Identity', *Biblical Interpretation* 13 [2005], pp 270–88, at 271 and literature cited there) may help to shed light on Paul's christocentric atonement theology in relation to Paul's continuing allegiance to the Jerusalem temple. Alternatively, D Boyarin ('Semantic Differences, or, "Judaism"/"Christianity"', in A H Becker and A Y Reed [eds], *The Ways that Never Parted* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], p 74) has proposed a 'wave' analogy that might be helpful when considering the early Christian movement's relationship to/within Judaism. Boyarin suggests that religious 'innovations disseminate and interact like waves caused by stones thrown in a pond in which convergence [is] as possible as divergence'

by such an interpretation.⁵ These would have included the daily burnt offerings, the thank offerings, and other sacrificial offerings commanded in the Hebrew Bible, not least the purification offering that features in the narrative of Acts 21. The 'letter' to the Hebrews is probably the first Christian text to apply a sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death in such a fashion as to exclude the continuing validity of the Jerusalem Temple in all respects.⁶ In this regard, then, Stowers's own interpretative sensibilities seem to be informed by post-Pauline theological developments that are illegitimate when applied to Paul's own texts.

Exegetical peculiarities also cause me to hesitate in relation to Stowers's reading, although here I will restrict my comments to the text that forms a main pillar for Stowers's interpretation (i.e. Rom. 9:1-5). Stowers seems to sidestep the full force of Rom. 9:2-3, where Paul articulates his trauma and anguish in relation to his own people: 'I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed apart from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.' It is true that these verses do not expressly attribute Paul's sorrow to the lack of faith in Christ among his own people, and in this silence there is a foothold for seeing his sorrow only in relation to Jewish opposition to the gentile mission. But only the notion of a salvific deficiency among non-Christian Jews seems adequate to explain Paul's deeply rooted anxieties regarding non-Christian Jews. In 9:2-3 Paul sets up an envisaged exchange pattern in which one party's situation is articulated in relation to another party. His desire to become 'accursed apart from Christ' on behalf of non-Christian Jews illustrates at least one feature of what Paul takes to be the situation of non-Christian Jews. If Paul were to change places with them, as he wishes he could, he would find himself in a position of being cursed (although his later statements in Rom. 9-11 suggest that this bald statement requires some important qualification). Statements of this kind are not to be expected if Paul maintained that the problem of non-Christian Jews was simply their opposition to the gentile mission.

⁵ R. J. Bauckham, 'The Parting of the Ways: What Really Happened and Why?', *Studia Theologica* 47 (1993), pp. 135-51.

⁶ See e.g. C. Mosser, 'No Lasting City: Rome, Jerusalem and the Place of Hebrews in the History of Earliest "Christianity"' (Ph.D. thesis, St Andrews University, 2005).

Instead, language of this kind seems better to point to what in Paul's view was some kind of a salvific deficit in the case of non-Christian Jews, and a deficit despite their covenant election and their 'possession' of the Temple and its cultus.

The impression that Paul sees a soteriological dimension in Israel's 'stumble' coheres with what he finds in Israel's scriptures ('the oracles of God', Rom. 3:2). So in Rom. 9:27 he recalls how Isaiah had cried out concerning Israel that 'only a remnant of them will be saved' (*σωθήσεται*). And precisely this salvific dimension is in view elsewhere in Romans 9-11. So in Romans 10:1, Paul says that his 'desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved' (*εἰς σωτηρίαν*), which is a curious desire and prayer if he really was convinced that non-Christian Jews are 'saved' apart from Christ. His discussion of salvation in relation to Israel extends into Romans 11, where he speaks of his hope 'to make my own people jealous, and thus to save [*σώσω*] some of them' (11:14). This concern for the salvation of ethnic Israel throughout Romans 9-11 would seem to have its gravitational centre in the concentrated verses of Rom. 10:6-13, where the verb 'to save' (*σώζω*) and the noun 'salvation' (*σωτηρία*) occur four times, in relation to their eight appearances in Romans 9-11 and their 13 times in the whole of Romans. And at the heart of those verses lies the affirmation of salvation that is thoroughly christocentric: 'if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (*σωθήσῃ*). Paul's audience might be forgiven for thinking that his concern for the salvation of Israel passes through the christocentric terrain exemplified in these verses concerning the nature of salvation.

Broadening out from a consideration of Romans alone, a similar conviction about salvation being offered to Jews through Jesus Christ appears in Galatians, where Paul depicts Christ as the one who was 'born under the law to redeem those under the law' (4:4-5). If the phrase 'those under the law' designates Jews, as is most likely, then Paul considered even Israel to be in need of a 'non-traditional' form of redemption—a redemption offered 'in Christ'.⁷ This would seem to correspond with Paul's claim

⁷ And typically Paul's discussion of the 'stoicheia' in Galatians has been thought to suggest, as in G. W. E. Nickelsburg's words, that in Paul's view 'the Jews were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe', with Paul using 'the same term to designate the spirit powers associated with the Galatians' [former] idolatry (4:8-10)' ('The Incarnation Paul's Solution to the Universal Human Predicament', in B. A. Pearson [ed.], *The Future of Early Christianity* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991], pp 348-57, at 351).

that 'the law was our caretaker until Christ came' (Gal. 3:24). If, as seems most likely, the pronoun 'our' is best taken as referring to the Jewish people, then here again Paul seems to be suggesting that the situation of the Jewish people has been directly affected with the coming of Christ in a fashion that goes beyond a 'two ways' interpretation.

At this point, however, we need to hear the cautions of Mark Nanos. Nanos suggests that Paul's real view of things differed from his situational rhetoric in Galatians—a rhetoric forced upon him by the heightened dynamics of the Galatian situation. In Nanos's estimate, Paul used extreme rhetorical strategies of ironic overstatement to blast away the influence of those persuading the Galatians, but no parties in the dispute would have taken his over-the-top discourse to be Paul's own view of non-Christian forms of Judaism. All parties in the Galatian dispute would have recognized that Paul's rhetoric in Galatians is exaggerated and overblown and is uncharacteristic of his own view. According to Nanos, the gentile Christians in Galatia 'knew the character of the speaker and [knew] the nature of the subject to be out of keeping with his words, and thus [knew] the intentions of the writer to be other than what he actually said'.⁸

In favour of Nanos's suggestion is the fact that some features of Paul's presentation in Galatians have more 'balance' in a letter like Romans, so that Nanos's differentiation of Paul's circumstantial rhetoric and his real view has semblance to the preference among some scholars for prejudicing Romans over Galatians when reconstructing Paul's theology. But apart from any merits that Nanos's differentiation might have in general, I have yet to be convinced that this distinction permits us to reformulate certain claims Paul makes in Galatians, such as the conviction that Christ was sent 'to redeem those under the law'. That claim falls well within an assortment of passages drawn from elsewhere within the Pauline corpus that evidence a similar conviction about a salvific need even among non-Christian Jews.

So, for instance, Paul wrote several passages that envisage Jews as targets of Christian mission or as participants within Christian communities. He outlines, for instance, that the early Christian movement of which he was only a part supported a Christian mission to Jews, as in Gal. 2:7–9, the most natural interpretation of which is that Paul was charged to take the

⁸ M. D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 321.

Christian gospel to the 'uncircumcised' Gentiles and Peter to the 'circumcised' Jews. And he speaks in 1 Cor. 9:20 of not wanting to offend Jews by his lifestyle in order that he might 'win the Jews'. As we have seen, even as he develops his olive tree analogy of Romans 11 Paul says that his ministry to Gentiles is to serve the purpose of making non-Christian Jews jealous 'and in this way to save some of them' (11:14). And that Jews were included within (some of?) Paul's own Christian communities is a likely inference from what Paul calls his 'rule in all the churches', as outlined in 1 Cor. 7:17-18, which includes the instruction for Christian Jews to retain their marks of circumcision and to 'lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you' (cf. 7:20). And to this we might also add the evidence of Romans 14-15 which (most likely) recognizes the place of Christian Jews within Christian fellowship, even as Torah-observant members. Attempts to reinterpret some of these passages in a manner that accords with a 'two ways' interpretation usually look extremely unlikely—for instance, in suggesting that the circumcised mentioned in Galatians 2 to whom Peter is sent are not ethnic Jews but are simply Gentiles who have become circumcised for whatever reason.

For consideration of this matter, the text of 2 Corinthians 3 also presents itself. There the glory (*δόξα*) of the law given to the Jewish people is depicted as being salvifically effective only in relation to the Spirit of Christ, so that prior to Christ the Torah of glory operated within a context identified by Paul as 'the ministry of death/condemnation' (2 Cor. 3:7). Although Paul depicts the law's ministry prior to Christ as a glorious ministry, he nonetheless wrote to the Corinthians in supersessionist tones that would seem to go beyond the 'two ways' approach: 'If there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, how much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory' (3:9-11). There is nothing here about non-Christian Jews simply being guilty of opposing God's gestures towards Gentiles in Christ. The rhetoric is wholly other, shaped by Paul's apocalyptic timescale of the two ages—both of which have their respective glories, although one has been 'set aside' and the other is permanent. This is not really the language one would expect if Paul imagined the problem facing non-Christian Jews to simply be their opposition to the Christian mission to Gentiles.

Of course, it might be argued that Paul was writing all these passages with the hope that his readers would know that situational dynamics were forcing him to be ironic and to say things that everyone knew he didn't really mean to be taken literally, after the manner of Nanos's interpretation of Galatians. But then, the more the database of 'ironic' overstatement builds up, the less plausible it is to say that Paul's audiences knew that such statements were not actually Paul's own view.

Moreover, passages like 1 Cor. 8:6 (where Paul incorporates Jesus into his own reformulation of the Shema) suggest that Paul had heavily glossed traditional Jewish monotheism in relation to Christ, to such an extent that non-Christian understandings of God (even if they are embedded within the Shema recited daily by Jews) were themselves to be superseded since they failed to incorporate the most critical aspect of God—his christomorphic sovereignty. Here again, Paul's depiction of non-Christian Judaism includes dimensions that supersede a 'two ways' interpretation. And it is probably these dimensions, rather than simply his gentile mission, that explain the five occasions of Paul's synagogue stripping (2 Cor. 11:23).

I can neither reconstruct nor engage with the full complexities and nuances of 'two ways' interpretations of Paul in this essay, and I have managed to offer only a few reasons why such readings have yet to persuade me.⁹ In my view, Paul's theology included a type of supersessionism over against non-Christian forms of Judaism, maintaining in a number of his letters that non-Christian forms of Judaism were theologically underdeveloped and salvifically deficient in the face of the cosmic powers of Sin and Death—except for the eschatological

⁹ I have tried to do justice, however, to the main interpretative basis upon which Stowers reads Romans. He himself highlights the core of his argument along the lines I have outlined above, see Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, p. 134. Even if I remain unpersuaded of the 'two ways' approach, it has proved to be a helpful stimulus to interpretation, not least in forcing interpreters to articulate much more carefully that a letter like Galatians, with its depiction of the law as if it were one of the enslaving 'elemental spirits of the world', cannot be used in a simplistic fashion to bolster any residual Christian tendencies to denounce non-Christian forms of Judaism. For a fuller recent critique of the 'two ways' approach, see T. L. Donaldson, 'Jewish Christianity and the *Sonderweg* Reading of Paul', *JSTOT*, forthcoming. One of his points is that the 'two ways' approach fails to do justice to the phenomenon of Christian Jews in early Christianity, a point that features also in D. J. Rudolph's critique of Christian theology today ('Messianic Jews and Christian Theology: Restoring an Historical Voice to the Contemporary Discussion', *Pro Ecclesia* 14 [2005], pp. 58–84).

intervention of God on behalf of 'all Israel', which we hear about in one of Paul's late letters (Rom 11 26)—an issue on which more will need to be said below

It might be, as is sometimes insinuated, that interpreters like myself, who do not find enough exegetical rigour in 'two ways' interpretations of Paul, are morally culpable for that very reason. I am not persuaded by that form of argument, which looks like a not too subtle form of interpretative arm-twisting¹⁰ But moral culpability has a social dimension to it, and perhaps in the view of some constituencies within the discipline of Pauline scholarship I am guilty of perpetuating reprehensible readings of Paul¹¹ But even if that is the case, it is not necessarily the case that a student of Paul who fails to advocate a 'two-ways' approach thereby must thereby find himself or herself advocating a form of replacement theology, as will be demonstrated in the next section

II ASSESSING REPLACEMENT THEOLOGIES IN VIEW OF ROMANS 9–11

Replacement theologies are not uncommon in the history of the Christian church. They represent an extreme form of supersessionism, in which the Jewish people are thought to have been replaced by Christians in the affections of God.¹² The Jews

¹⁰ R. Jackall ('Re-Enchanting the World: Some Reflections on Postmodernism', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 8 [1994], pp. 183–92) notes the way in which postmodernism has heightened the moral rhetoric within the academy, so that a presenter's best course of action when influencing others is to convince an audience of his/her own moral zeal and rectitude and then to convince them of the moral (and political) correctness of his/her position. For similar points, see M. Edmundson, *Literature against Philosophy: Plato to Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 142; M. F. Brown, 'On Resisting Resistance', *American Anthropologist* 98 (1996), pp. 729–35.

¹¹ I would, of course, grant that all interpreters are located within a rich matrix of social, economic, gender, religious, and political factors that affects their interpretations to a significant extent. But this recognition does not necessarily mean that texts can be made to say whatever the ethical flavour of the day prescribes. The multifarious dimension of texts is countered to the extent that texts frequently can, it seems to me, exclude certain interpretative options, even if they can't dictate a single meaning.

¹² At times Christians have adopted a perspective related to replacement supersessionism but one that moves off the supersessionist spectrum altogether. In this perspective, the Jews were never the covenant people of God, and consequently their position has not been superseded by the church. Since there was no special place for the Jews to begin with, there was no supersessionism of the Jews in God's ways in Christ. I am grateful to Terry Donaldson for the point.

are no longer God's chosen people and they no longer have a special place in the unfolding plan of God. God has rejected them because of their rejection of Jesus, with ethnic Israel being abandoned by God in favour of the non-Jewish 'new Israel', the church.¹³ To be clear from the outset, theologies of this sort run contrary to the one and only passage in which Paul considers the issue of 'replacement theology' head on: Romans 9–11.

It is not possible or even desirable to engage with Paul's extensive case in Romans 9–11, other than to note the general flow of those chapters. Paul claims that God's word (to Israel) has not failed (9:6), and works this out initially in relation to claims that God has always been a God who hardens some and enlivens others, implying that this is precisely how God is working with ethnic Israel at present. Towards the end of Romans 9 and throughout Romans 10, God's hardening/enlivening is refracted through the contrastive lens of christocentric belief, with ethnic Israel depicted primarily in terms of unbelief and Gentiles (gentile Christians) depicted primarily in terms of belief. But in Romans 11 Paul picks up again on the theme of God's hardening/enlivening and works the other side of the street, noting that a remnant of ethnic Israel exists due to christocentric faith. So now Paul's reader knows that the way God has always worked in the past continues to be the case in the present—hardening some within Israel (the majority) and enlivening others (the remnant).

The second half of Romans 11 goes beyond anything that Paul has laid out in the previous chapters. In his olive tree analogy Paul distinguishes between the natural branches and the unnatural branches, with the natural branches being ethnic Israel indiscriminately and the unnatural branches being Gentiles indiscriminately. For Paul, if unnatural branches (= Gentiles) have been grafted in (by christocentric faith) to

¹³ A typical example is evident in the popular Christian novel *The Last Disciple* by H. Hanegraaff and S. Brouwer (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004). In the course explaining his faith to an antagonistic Jew and a conniving Roman, Zabad (a Christian apologist) explains to them: 'The covenant between God and Israel was broken with the rejection of His Son [i.e. by the Jews]'. Lines of continuity are drawn in this novel between scriptural prophecy in the Hebrew Bible and its fulfilment in the New Testament, but the election of the Jews is depicted as abrogated and no longer a part of God's interests. So the destruction of Jerusalem and its people in the war of 66–70 CE is used as evidence that God has abandoned the Jews (p. 217)—except, of course, for those who become Christians. A popular novelist with a different view is A. Rice; see below, n. 20.

something that they are not naturally part of, then it would not be surprising if natural branches (= ethnic Israel) that have been lopped off (by their lack of faith) were to be grafted back in again. In fact, this is what Paul imagines in his claim that 'all Israel will be saved'. He seems to imagine that both the hardened and the enlivened parts of ethnic Israel will enjoy God's salvation at the eschatological moment when the deliverer will come from Zion to banish 'Jacob's ungodliness' and 'take away their sins', all as an expression of 'my [God's] covenant with them'. In the eschatological activity of God, the hardening/enlivening distinction that has marked out God's activity throughout history will fall away, and God's dealings will only involve the enlivening of his covenant people, ethnic Israel. Paul recognizes that the hardened part of ethnic Israel might be considered to fall on the wrong side of the line with regard to the Christian gospel, writing 'as regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake'. But he also suggests that, when the full scope of salvation history is in view, another significant dimension comes into focus, with ethnic Israel as a whole being identified as 'beloved for the sake of their ancestors, for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable'.

Three things need to be noted in this

1 As my outline of Romans 11 indicates, Paul's christocentrism applies even when he imagines the salvation of both parts of Israel, so that the future elimination of Israel's 'ungodliness' is a cipher envisaging Israel's complete adoption of christocentric faith.¹⁴

2 The fact that many Jews do not share a christocentric faith with some gentile Christians is not for Paul a sign that God has cast off ethnic Israel, his covenant people (And in this he differs from Christians throughout the centuries who have peddled replacement theologies). Instead, for Paul the lack of christocentric faith among the majority of Jews is a result of God working in the world specifically (albeit ironically) *through* his covenant people. So his point in 11 25-6 has to be underlined: 'a hardening has come upon a part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all

¹⁴ This aspect of Paul's thinking is inherent in his conviction that the remnant within Israel are themselves marked out by christocentric faith, and it is inherent in Paul's olive tree analogy, one component by which that analogy operates being faith (i.e. remaining in and being grafted in are both by christocentric faith, being extracted is by lack of [christocentric] faith).

Israel will be saved' It is precisely because the Jews are God's covenant people that a part of them has experienced hardening, since God works now, as God always has worked, through both hardening and enlivenment For Paul, God's calling is not always a glorious honour, for just as he did not spare his own son in order that others would be benefited (8 32),¹⁵ so too he did not spare his own people (11 21),¹⁶ some of whom he has called to be hardened in order that others might benefit by being grafted into the cultivated olive tree among the 'natural branches'. Paul maintains that both the enlivened and the hardened 'parts' within Israel are playing a role in the extension of God's salvation to universal proportions¹⁷

3. Discussion has sometimes been given to the issue of whether the second half of Romans 11 emerges simply from within Paul's own discursive terms of reference or in order to counter a real, on-the-ground form of pseudo-replacement theology among gentile Christians in Rome. But the either-or can distract us from the more pressing fact that Paul felt the urgency to counter an early form of Christian replacement theology, whether or not that kind of theology was actually held by gentile Christians in Rome

Much more could be said, of course, but it is enough to notice that throughout the whole of Romans 9-11 Paul's deep theological currents show no hint of a replacement virus, and in fact are intended to attack precisely such a virus.

III ASSESSING SUPERSESSIONISM IN PAUL

Paul evidences a supersessionism that stands opposed as much to the 'two ways' approach that has gained some recent popularity as it stands in opposition to the replacement interpretations that have marked out Christian theology at various points throughout Christian history The 'two ways' and replacement interpretations stand together in the shared belief that, for Paul, salvation in Christ is of little relevance to the

¹⁵ ος γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο

¹⁶ ὁ θεὸς τῶν κατὰ φύσιν κλάδων οὐκ ἐφείσατο

¹⁷ This argument can be found more fully in B W Longenecker, 'Different Answers to Different Questions Israel, the Gentiles and Salvation History in Romans 9-11', *JSTNT* 36 (1989), pp 95-123, *idem*, 'The Ethnic Component of Christocentric Covenantalism', in my *Eschatology and the Covenant A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11* (Sheffield Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp 251-65

Jewish people. We have seen reason to believe that, in fact, Paul maintained a form of supersessionism whereby the Christian gospel was thought to be of key relevance to the Jewish people, offering the way of salvation not only for Gentiles but also for Jews. But in this conviction Paul also studiously avoided (at least in Romans 9–11) any suggestion that God's covenant with Israel has been abrogated. Similarly, just as he fiercely fought against forcing gentile Christians to adopt Jewish identity (e.g. Galatians), so too he fought against any attempts to 'gentilize' the church (e.g. Romans 11 and 14–15).¹⁸ And this dimension of Paul's conviction goes to the very heart of his ethics. For Paul, the power of the creator God is evident in and advertised by communities of diversity of all kinds, where needs of others are met regardless of the differences in identity of its members. To 'gentilize' or to 'Judaize' Christian communities would be to undermine the proclamation of God's invasive power, a power that transcends all normal expectations of social cohesion.

Undergirding Paul's complex and nuanced view of Israel's God and God's Israel in Romans 9–11 is his understanding of salvation history. From the perspective of (what might be called) 'christo-theocentric faith', Paul considered the solely theocentric faith of mainstream forms of Judaism to be underdeveloped, unenlightened, and salvifically deficient, and therein lies his supersessionism. But from the perspective of the grand sweep of God's acts in history, Paul imagined ethnic Israel, whether hardened or enlivened, to play the role of God's specially chosen instrument in the course of salvation history.¹⁹ And in this Paul sees the intransience of God's covenant with the Jews.²⁰

¹⁸ If Paul would have rejoiced when James and the Jerusalem elders told him that there are 'many thousands of believers among the Jews' (Acts 21 20), he similarly would not have been disheartened in the least when James and the elders told him in the same breath that Christian Jews 'are all zealous for the law' Paul did not have the kind of supersessionism that despised all things Jewish, as in some later Christian theologies, and nor did he think that Christian Jews were inevitably to stop observing the law

¹⁹ I doubt that Paul would concede Alan Segal's view that 'Paul seems unwilling to allow the Jews any significant part in the salvation of mankind until the fulfilment of history' (*Rebecca's Children Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* [Cambridge, Mass Harvard University Press, 1986], p 172)

²⁰ The intransience of God's covenant with the Jews has impressed itself on other Christians in other ways. So, for instance, the 'survival of the Jews' played a significant role in the novelist Anne Rice's return to the Catholic church and the Christian faith. Her published 'testimony' involves a poignant inversion of Paul's hopes that gentile salvation in Christ would make the Jews jealous and so save them, and might be considered anecdotal evidence of the continuing role of the Jewish people in 'salvation history', not least in being a 'light to the nations'

For Paul, the greatest indicator of the permanence of this covenant relationship lies in his belief that any non-christocentric faith that abides within the hardened part of ethnic Israel will be transformed into christocentric faith in the eschatology activity of God

And this brings us to a critical point Early christocentric supersessionism was not necessarily and inevitably a form of anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism—although it clearly can be one or both, and all too often has been But there is no justification in seeing Paul's supersessionism as anti-Jewish simply because it is supersessionism If we were to imagine that supersessionism *per se* is anti-Jewish, then perhaps whole swaths of Early Jewish literature would need to be similarly characterised—a bizarre result, itself indicating that something is wrong in the house of supersessionist studies But as the academy has increasingly recognized, Judaism was an overarching genus containing a variety of species within it, of which 'early Christianity' was only one species The charge of anti-Judaism simply does not fit in this context The point has been well made by Daniel Boyarin He notes that there is a supersessionist dimension in Paul's thinking, but also insists that 'Paul's [supersessionistic] doctrine is *not anti-Judaic*', maintaining that 'Paul's discourse [is] indigenously Jewish'²¹

Boyarin's claim correlates well with Paul's mention in 2 Cor 11 23 of five occasions on which he was beaten with stripes in the synagogue The striping of offenders was a synagogal punishment performed on members of the synagogue, even if they were also considered to be severely erring members In both the Torah and the Mishnah (*Makkoth*), discussion of striping operates on this basis Evidently, then, those who striped Paul considered him to be troublesome for synagogue communities, but despite his bothersome gospel they

by means of their very survival So, Rice claims to have 'stumbled on a mystery without a solution, a mystery so immense that I gave up trying to find an explanation because the whole mystery defied belief The mystery was the survival of the Jews I couldn't understand how these people had endured as the great people who they were It was this mystery that drew me back to God It set into motion the idea that there may in fact be God [*sic*] And when that happened there grew in me for whatever reason an immense desire to return to the banquet table In 1998 I went back to the Catholic Church' (*Lord Jesus Christ Out of Egypt* [New York Alfred A Knopf, 2005], pp 308–9)

²¹ D Boyarin, *A Radical Jew Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley University of California Press, 1994), p 205

still considered him a member of that extended community and worthy of its corrective treatment

And in this, I wonder whether we can afford to ignore the handful of Jewish interpreters who have seen Paul's supersessionism as something of a laudable development in one way or another within the context of first-century Judaism/Judaisms? Is there scope for seeing Paul's supersessionism as in some sense a positive development in some of its goals—regardless of the veracity of its truth claims? Can we afford not to listen to the views of some Jewish scholars who find in Paul a positive model of one who broke free from unhealthy fundamentalisms of his day and was engaged in a reform project analogous to more recent reform movements within Judaism? So, for instance, Claude Montefiore commended Paul for finding a way to introduce a workable (albeit flawed) universalism onto the scene of Early Judaism. Hans Joachim Schoeps virtually depicted Paul as a forerunner of Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen—all three were to be lauded for identifying 'the law within the law'. For Schoeps, modern Judaism was to be reformed in the spirit of Paul himself, even if Paul's own Christian solution was itself unacceptable. And similar cases have more recently been mounted from within Jewish circles by the reconstructionist rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer and by Boyarin. So Fuchs-Kreimer applauds Paul's attempt to overcome the domestication of God within Early Judaism by postulating a God who acted in surprising ways, even in relation to the law.²² And Boyarin states²³

I read [Paul] as a Jewish cultural critic, and I ask what it was in Jewish culture that led him to produce a discourse of radical reform of that culture. I ask also in what ways his critique is important and valid for Jews today, and indeed in what ways the questions that Paul raises about culture are important and valid for everyone today.

In the discourse of these Jewish scholars, Paul's supersessionism is not necessarily to be seen as an embarrassing and offensive phenomenon of religious history but is, despite its particular

²² On these and other examples of Jewish scholars finding merit in Paul's supersessionism, see especially D. R. Langton, 'Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish Ideological Battleground', *JSTOT* 28 (2005-6), pp. 217-58. On Paul in Jewish-Christian relations see his 'The Myth of the "Traditional View of Paul" and the Role of the Apostle in Modern Jewish-Christian Polemics', *JSTOT* 28 (2005-6), pp. 69-104.

²³ Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, pp. 2-3.

deficiencies, a laudable and helpful model for the formation of cultural and religious identity in the present world.

IV. FURTHER ISSUES

If I have erred on the side of brevity in the discussion above,²⁴ the same error will characterize three further issues to be outlined in this consideration of Paul and supersessionism.

First, in this presentation I have spoken simply of 'Paul' when considering issues of supersessionism. A consequent impression of discussing Paul's view so baldly is that one might come away with the impression that, throughout the whole course of his Christian ministry, Paul maintained a well-established position in relation to replacement forms of supersessionism. But this view of things is not necessarily self-evident. Scholarship on Paul is usually different in tone and content when considering Paul's theology or theologizing in general than when it considers his supersessionism. When discussing Paul's theology, scholars frequently speak of development within his views, or of Paul's tendency to 'theologize' in relation to specific contexts, and such like. But when discussing supersessionism in Paul, and when the argument follows along the lines argued here, such nuances usually disappear from view, resulting in the impression that the complexities of Paul's anti-replacement theology in Romans 9-11 had been fixed bedrock virtually from the time of his christophanic experience. Such may not have been the case, of course. Paul may have been able to get by without a well-articulated view of Israel in some respects. Perhaps he had always been certain about where important theological parameters lay and had been careful not to transgress those parameters. But this does not necessarily mean that Paul explored the fine details of things within those parameters in the manner of complexity evident in Romans 9-11. It may even have been that Romans 9-11 represents Paul's first attempt at a thorough-going analysis of certain issues pertaining to ethnic Israel, whereas earlier contexts might have permitted him to operate with a more amorphous and less clear-cut view of Israel's place in salvation history. These are important issues

²⁴ A fuller treatment of the issue would inevitably include consideration of Paul's soteriology and ethic, as well as other texts within the Pauline corpus (e.g. Rom. 2:28-9; Gal. 4:24-5; 6:16; 1 Thess. 2:14-16; Phil. 3:4-11).

that, if they need to be highlighted, nonetheless cannot be adjudicated here.²⁵

Second, could it be that Paul found the corporate practices of early Christian Judaism, more so than the corporate practices of his former 'life in Judaism' (to use the language of Gal. 1:13–14), to be conducive in the imitation of, and perhaps the subtle critique of, the claims of the Roman imperial order? The Roman empire was depicted by its promoters and enthusiasts as gathering together the nations of the world that mattered within one common harmony of nations, living together in peace and security in an age of plenty and moral regeneration. Perhaps Paul found the movement of Christians better suited to imitate and (in a contrastive fashion) to defy imperial unification theology than non-Christian forms of Jewish theology and practice.

Third, and finally, if participants in Jewish–Christian dialogue need to incorporate Paul into their discussions, perhaps the Pauline contribution lies less in the area of 'theology' and more in the area of practice—especially in relation to his concern for the poor. Although significantly undervalued in generations of scholarship on Paul, Paul's own concern for the poor was, I believe, integral to his mission project.²⁶ This concern was itself part of deeply rooted Jewish traditions, in general contrast to a general intransigence towards the poor in Greco-Roman traditions. In the context of our own 21st-century world, itself caught in the grips of staunch globalization on the one hand and entrenched poverty on the other, Jewish–Christian relations might benefit not so much from an appreciation of Pauline (supersessionistic) *theology*, but from an appreciation of Paul's concern for the poor and his expectation that gentile Christians would follow the lead of Jesus the Jew in his concern for the poor.²⁷ In this component of Paul's gospel to gentile Christians

²⁵ For explorations of these issues, see B W Longenecker, 'Sharing in their Spiritual Blessings? The Stories of Israel in Galatians and Romans', in *idem* (ed.), *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp 58–84, and the reply by M D Hooker, "'Heirs of Abraham": The Gentiles' Role in Israel's Story: A Response to Bruce W Longenecker', *Narrative Dynamics*, pp 85–96

²⁶ See my defence of this in B W Longenecker, 'Good News to the Poor Jesus, Paul and Jerusalem', in T Still (ed.), *Jesus and Paul Reconnected: Fresh Pathways to an Old Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2006)

²⁷ And hopefully the discussion (and collaboration) could be extended to include all monotheistic religions, and others beyond them as well

there is not a trace of supersessionism, only a Judaism spawning other forms of Judaism to offset a deep-rooted need in the name of the gracious and just God of Israel. It might even be that one of Judaism's greatest contributions to a needy world throughout the past twenty centuries has been the extension of its entrenched social activism into the gentile world in the name of a single Jewish Galilean.

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