

## What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with “All Israel”? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25–27

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In Rom 11:25–27, Paul triumphantly concludes his discussion of Israel’s fate:

I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery (lest you become high-minded yourselves)<sup>1</sup> that a hardening has come upon a part of Israel<sup>2</sup> until the fullness of the nations [τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν] has come in—and thus [καὶ οὕτως]<sup>3</sup> all Israel will be saved, just as it is written: “The deliverer will come from

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<sup>1</sup> Echoing the LXX of Prov 3:7 (see Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 699). All translations throughout are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Gk. πᾶρωςις ἀπὸ μέρους τῶ Ἰσραήλ γέγονεν, which could also be rendered “a partial hardening has come upon Israel”; see Jewett, *Romans*, 699–700; Ernst Käsemann, *A Commentary on Romans* (trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 312–13; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:572–75.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear whether καὶ οὕτως is temporal or causal; see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 719–20; Pieter W. van der Horst, “‘Only Then Will All Israel Be Saved’: A Short Note on the Meaning of καὶ οὕτως in Romans 11:26,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 521–39; James M. Scott, “‘And Then All Israel Will Be Saved’ (Rom 11:26),” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (ed. James M. Scott; JSJSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 491–92.

Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

Most commentators have found Paul’s confident assertion that “all Israel will be saved” impenetrable; ironically, Paul’s explanation has been found to be as cryptic as the mystery, his cure worse than the disease. Four major interpretations have been put forward: (1) the “ecclesiastical” interpretation, (2) the “total national elect” view, (3) the “two-covenant” perspective, and (4) the “eschatological miracle” position.<sup>4</sup>

The “ecclesiastical” interpretation was the majority position in the patristic period.<sup>5</sup> This view equates Israel and the church, arguing against defining Israel on ethnic grounds—based largely on Paul’s apparent redefinition of Israel in 9:6. This view has largely fallen out of favor, with most modern interpreters resisting such a radical redefinition of Israel.<sup>6</sup> A “strong consensus” now insists that “Israel” must mean all “ethnic” or “empirical” Israel (i.e., all Jews), instead focusing the debate on what Paul means by “all” and on the timing and modality of the Jews’ salvation.<sup>7</sup>

The “total national elect” interpretation argues that “the complete number of elect from the historical/empirical nation” (i.e., all “elect” Jews) will be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles (i.e., through Christ).<sup>8</sup> Though it retains coherence with Paul’s statements about salvation elsewhere, this view seems to make what appears to be a climax of Paul’s argument into a mere truism.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The terms are borrowed from Christopher Zoccali’s outstanding history of recent scholarship (“‘And so all Israel will be saved’: Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship,” *JSNT* 30 [2008]: 289–318). Mark D. Nanos’s “Roman Mission” interpretation is a fifth option but has not gained a substantial following (*The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 239–88).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 623–24; Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (SP 6; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 354; but see Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 273 n. 104. N. T. Wright has become the chief proponent of the view today (*The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and Law in Pauline Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 248–51), while Karl Barth also held the ecclesiastical view (*The Epistle to the Romans* [trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968], 412–17).

<sup>6</sup> See Jewett, *Romans*, 701; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:576–77; Moo, *Romans*, 721.

<sup>7</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word, 1988), 681.

<sup>8</sup> See Zoccali, “Competing Interpretations,” 303–14; Ben L. Merkle, “Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 711–21; C. M. Horne, “The Meaning of the Phrase ‘And thus all Israel will be saved’ (Rom 11.26),” *JETS* 21 (1978): 329–34; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard DeWitt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 354–61; François Refoulé, ‘. . . Et ainsi tout Israël sera sauvés’: *Romans 11.25–32* (LD 117; Paris: Cerf, 1984), 181.

<sup>9</sup> See Zoccali, “Competing Interpretations,” 303–14; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:577; Jewett, *Romans*, 702.

A small contingent of scholars holding to a “two-covenant” perspective has argued that both the “all” and “Israel” should be taken at face value. In this view, every individual Jew will be saved by membership in the Jewish covenant—regardless of their reception of the Gospel.<sup>10</sup> Thus, when Paul says, “all Israel will be saved,” he means all Jews will be saved throughout history, regardless of their response to the gospel proclamation and Gentile mission.<sup>11</sup> Though appealing, this interpretation does not seem to cohere with Paul’s statements elsewhere (e.g., Rom 9:1–5; 11:17–24) and remains in the minority.<sup>12</sup>

The “eschatological miracle” interpretation, in which Paul envisions a future salvation of all Jews at or immediately prior to the eschaton, presently holds the majority.<sup>13</sup> After the “fullness of the Gentiles” (11:25) has come in, the Jews will finally be saved all at once,<sup>14</sup> probably through a mass conversion of all Jews to Christ, perhaps brought on by the jealousy sparked by the Gentile mission,<sup>15</sup> though there is some debate as to whether “all Israel” means every individual Jew will be saved or idiomatically represents ethnic Israel as a collective. The majority of scholars hold the latter view.<sup>16</sup> A minority advocate a larger, diachronic view of “all Israel”

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Occasionally the “eschatological miracle” position amounts to a *Sonderweg* position also (see Franz Mussner, “Ganz Israel wird gerettet werden (Röm 11,26): Versuch einer Auslegung,” *Kairos* 18 [1976]: 241–55). For a full critique of the two-covenant perspective, see Reidar Hvalvik, “A ‘Sonderweg’ for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11.25–27,” *JSNT* 38 (1990): 87–107.

<sup>11</sup> Gaston rightly connects Paul’s statement to the typical rabbinic belief in the salvation of all Israel (*Paul and the Torah*, 147); see also Gager, *Reinventing Paul*, 138–43; Alan F. Segal, “Paul’s Experience and Romans 9–11,” *PSB*, Supplementary Issue 1 (1990): 66.

<sup>12</sup> E. P. Sanders suggests that a post-Holocaust Paul might have held to a two-covenant perspective, though the historical Paul did not (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 197; idem, “Paul’s Attitude toward the Jewish People,” *USQR* 33 [1978]: 175–87).

<sup>13</sup> For a lengthy (though certainly not exhaustive) list of advocates of this interpretation, see Zoccali, “Competing Interpretations,” 290 n. 2.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν is interpreted as either some “predestined number of the elect [Gentiles] according to an apocalyptic scheme” (Jewett, *Romans*, 700; cf. Käsemann, *Romans*, 313; Dunn, *Romans*, 680; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 622; Moo, *Romans*, 718–19) or as representing the completion of the Gentile mission (Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9–11* [trans. Ingeborg Nixon; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], 135). This interpretation requires the οὔτως of 11:26 to be understood temporally, though this necessitates an inversion of the traditional eschatological order (cf. n. 77 below).

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Moo, *Romans*, 723; Käsemann, *Romans*, 314. Jewett sees a parallel to Paul’s own conversion, which followed his violent zeal against the church (*Romans*, 701; see also Dunn, *Romans*, 683; and Otfried Hofius, “‘All Israel will be saved’: Divine Salvation and Israel’s Deliverance in Romans 9–11,” *PSB*, Supplementary Issue 1 [1990]: 19–39, esp. 37).

<sup>16</sup> See Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:576–77; Leander Keck, *Romans* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon,

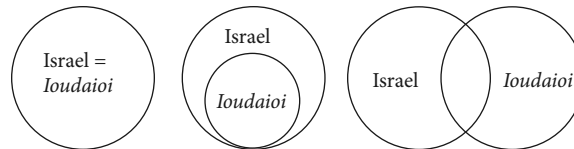
in which all Jews throughout history will be miraculously redeemed at the eschaton.<sup>17</sup>

It is therefore clear that to solve this passage one must satisfactorily answer three primary interpretive questions: (1) how Paul defines “all Israel,” (2) what Paul means by “the fullness of the nations,” and (3) how the salvation of “all Israel” is related to (σῦτῳς) the ingathering of “the fullness of the nations.” In short, the essential question can be framed as follows: What does the ingathering of “the fullness of the Gentiles” have to do with the salvation of “all Israel”? This article seeks to answer this question in a way that not only coheres with and illuminates Paul’s statements elsewhere but also confirms this passage as the climax of the central argument of Romans itself, concluding with a wholly new interpretive option.<sup>18</sup>

### I. A PROBLEM OF TERMINOLOGICAL PRECISION

Though it is often taken for granted that “Israel” can only mean “ethnic Jews,” there are in fact three possibilities for how “Israel” correlates to “the Jews” (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι):

TABLE 1. ISRAEL AND *IOUDAIOI*: THREE POSSIBILITIES



The first option illustrates the current consensus view: “Israel” is synonymous with “ethnic Jews.” In the other two options, the terms are not equivalents, though there is some overlap in meaning. The last options make a historically grounded distinction that is all too often forgotten or ignored in modern NT scholarship: Israel is an entity larger than (but including) the body of ethnic Jews. (The difference between the latter two options concerns the question of whether Israel includes all ethnic Jews or only some.) As Josephus informs us, the term Ἰουδαῖος

2005), 280; Friedrich W. Maier, *Israel in der Heilsgeschichte nach Röm 9–11* (Biblische Zeitfragen 12.11–12; Münster: Aschendorff, 1929), 140; Käsemann, *Romans*, 313; Nanos, *Mystery*, 276–77; Rainer Stuhlmann, *Das eschatologische Mass im Neuen Testament* (FRLANT 132; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 178–81. For collective uses of “all Israel,” see Josh 7:25; 1 Sam 7:5; 25:1; 2 Sam 16:22; 1 Kgs 12:1; 2 Chr 12:1; Dan 9:11; *Jub.* 50:9; 4Q164 frg. 1.1–8; 4Q521 2 iii 1–5; *T. Levi* 17:5; *T. Jos.* 20:5; *T. Benj.* 10:11; *L.A.B.* 22:1; 23:1; *m. Sanh.* 10:1 (notable in that the dictum “All Israel has a share in the age to come” is followed by exceptions).

<sup>17</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 701–2; see also Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Reading the New Testament; New York: Crossroad, 1997), 172.

<sup>18</sup> For Romans 9–11 as the letter’s climax, see Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:445–50.

(“Jew” or “Judean”) refers to a person descended from the southern kingdom of Judah, *which is only a part of the larger historical entity called Israel*.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of whether it refers to “Judeans” or “Jews” living outside Judea, the term Ἰουδαῖος is necessarily limited to descendants of the southern kingdom, which was exiled to Babylon and then returned (or to proselytes and their descendants, who are regarded as having become a part of this people).<sup>20</sup> In contrast, “Israel” is a polyvalent (often confusing) term, with several distinct references in the Hebrew Bible/LXX: (1) the patriarch Jacob/Israel; (2) “the nation composed of his descendants, that is, all twelve tribes of Israel, including Judah”; (3) the northern kingdom, the ten tribes of the “house of Israel,” excluding the southern kingdom, the “house of Judah”; and (4) the returnees from Judah after the Babylonian Exile.<sup>21</sup> To use a modern parallel, a Floridian would surely be called an American when being distinguished from an Australian, but not all Americans are Floridians. In the same manner, the term “Israel” may—and often does—refer to Jews, though its meaning is not limited to just the Jews.

The addition of the quantifier “all” (as in Rom 11:26) helpfully narrows the possibilities. As James M. Scott has shown, “In the OT the expression ‘all Israel’ relates exclusively to the *tribal structure* of the descendants of Jacob/Israel,” while also consistently referring to the twelve tribes in Jewish literature of the Second

<sup>19</sup> “From the day they went up from Babylon, they were called by that name [οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι], after the tribe of Judah, which was prominent coming to those places; both the people themselves and the land received that name” (Josephus, *A.J.* 11.173).

<sup>20</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen has concluded that, until the end of the second century B.C.E., the Greek Ἰουδαῖος had, unlike the English term “Jew,” an “ethnic-geographic” or political sense and was best translated as “Judean” (*The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* [Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999], 69–106). The waters are considerably muddier by the first century C.E., when the term often carries the geographic/political sense (i.e., “Judean”) but also often carries the ethnic or religious sense in reference to non-Judean “Jews,” typically as an “outsider” term to distinguish non-Gentiles from Gentiles. See John H. Elliot, “Jesus the Israelite Was Neither a ‘Jew’ Nor a ‘Christian’: On Correcting Misleading Nomenclature,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 5 (2007): 119–54; Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 63–68; Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512.

<sup>21</sup> John S. Bergsma, “Qumran Self-Identity: ‘Israel’ or ‘Judah?’” *DSD* 15 (2008): 172–89, here 173. That “Israel” is sometimes used of the Judahite returnees seems on first glance to counter my case for terminological precision. On the contrary, even those sources that sometimes conflate the terms still show an awareness of the distinction between them. For example, though Ezra-Nehemiah, Judith, and 1 Esdras sometimes refer to the returnees as “Israel” (e.g., Ezra 2:70; Neh 9:1–2), they still recognize the larger scope of “Israel” (e.g., offering twelve animals “for the number of the tribes of all Israel” [Ezra 6:17; 8:35; cf. also 1 Esdr 7:8; 8:63]), sometimes adding specifiers demonstrating a consciousness that not all of Israel had yet been restored (e.g., “children of Israel who had returned from exile” [Ezra 6:21; see also 1 Esdr 7:10]).

Temple period.<sup>22</sup> So, in a technical sense, “Israel” necessarily includes Jews but is not limited to the Jews, while “all Israel” more specifically refers to all twelve tribes as a whole.

Obviously the key question is whether first-century Jews (Paul in particular) continued to make this distinction. The evidence points to an answer in the affirmative. Josephus certainly upholds the distinction, using the terms Ἰσραηλίτης and Ἰσραήλος only in the first eleven books of the *Antiquities*—books dealing with the preexilic and exilic periods—and nowhere else in the Josephan corpus.<sup>23</sup> Ἰουδαῖος, on the other hand, occurs 1,190 times in the Josephan corpus—but only twenty-seven times in the first ten books of the *Antiquities*.<sup>24</sup> Once the northern tribes are off the scene, Josephus restricts himself to more precise terminology referring only to the southern tribes—he no longer speaks of “Israel,” but only “the Jews.” But when all twelve tribes are in play, Josephus clearly prefers the more comprehensive term “Israel.”<sup>25</sup>

The Qumran community maintains similar distinctions. As E. P. Sanders has observed, it is noteworthy that the sect “generally refrained from simply calling [itself] ‘Israel.’”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, “the members seem to have been conscious of their status as sectarians, chosen from out of Israel, and as being a *forerunner of the true Israel*, which God would establish to fight the decisive war,”<sup>27</sup> identifying themselves as a faithful subset within Israel (e.g., “the remnant of Israel,” “captives of Israel,” “house in Israel,” and “repentant of Israel”).<sup>28</sup> They likewise avoid calling themselves “Judah” or “Judahites” (יהודים), instead preferring precise tribal distinctions—Judah, Levi, and Benjamin (the three tribes of the southern kingdom)—

<sup>22</sup> Scott, “All Israel,” 507–19; quotation from 507.

<sup>23</sup> Josephus uses Ἰσραηλίτης 188 times in the first eleven books of the *Antiquities*, but does not use it elsewhere. He uses Ἰσραήλος only twice, in the first and fourth books (all word searches were made using *Accordance Bible Software 8.1* [Orlando: Oak Tree Software, Inc., 2008]).

<sup>24</sup> Although Ἰουδαῖος is anachronistic when applied to ancient Israel, it is not exactly incorrect (especially when one intends to emphasize the continuity of ancient Israel with modern Jews), since Judah was part of Israel. For my argument, what matters is that Josephus refrains from equating postexilic “Jews” with “Israel,” retaining that moniker for the northern tribes or all twelve tribes as a collective. Notably, after quoting Nicolaus of Damascus, who refers to “the Jews” of the preexilic northern kingdom, Josephus corrects the terminology to “Israel” in the next sentence (*A.J.* 7.103).

<sup>25</sup> Owing to the nature of his work, Philo presents data more difficult to mine for such distinctions than does Josephus. Nonetheless, although he uses Ἰσραήλ and Ἰσραηλιτικός 90 times across nineteen works and uses Ἰουδαῖος and Ἰουδαϊκός 112 times across nine works, Philo uses both terms in the same work only once—in *Legatio ad Gaium*, where the terms are separated by 111 lines. There is no indication that Philo regards the terms as synonymous.

<sup>26</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 247. “They do not call themselves simply ‘Israel’” (p. 246).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>28</sup> 4Q163 4–7 ii 10; CD 4:2; 6:5; IQS 8:9.

or using subset language as they do with Israel.<sup>29</sup> They are the faithful remnant of the southern tribes awaiting the return and restoration of Israel.<sup>30</sup>

4QNarrative and Poetic Composition provides an excellent example of the apocalyptic expectation of a “pan-Israelite restoration” evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In this fragmentary text, “Joseph” and his brothers are depicted as “cast into lands which he did not k[now], among unknown nations and scattered in all the world” and “given into the hands of foreigners who were devouring his strength and breaking all his bones until the time of the end.”<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, “fools” living in Joseph’s land are inciting “Judah, Benjamin, and Levi” to jealousy and anger.<sup>32</sup> But Joseph and his brothers will return and offer sacrifices and praise when God “will destroy [the foreigners] from the entire world” (4Q372 frg. 1.22). Similarly, the *War Scroll* expects the “sons of Levi, the sons of Judah, and the sons of Benjamin” to be joined by “the exiles of the sons of light” in the final apocalyptic battle when everything is set right (1QM 1:2–3). The Qumran community was not alone in anticipating a full restoration of the northern tribes; 4 Ezra 13:40–47 expects the eschatological restoration of the ten tribes still lost in exile, as does *T. Benj.* 10 (which connects this restoration with the resurrection and the Lord revealing “his salvation to all nations”).

Evidence from the early Jesus movement suggests similar expectations. Jesus’ selection of the Twelve and his promise that they would judge the twelve tribes clearly demonstrate anticipation of a pan-Israelite restoration, as does his promise that the Son of Man will gather the elect from the four winds.<sup>33</sup> The importance of

<sup>29</sup> See Bergsma, “Qumran,” 172–89; Matthew Thiessen, “4Q372 1 and the Continuation of Joseph’s Exile,” *DSD* 15 (2008): 380–95, esp. 389–95. For good examples of subset language, see CD 20:26–27; 1QP Hab 12:3–5; *שְׂרָאֵל* is used even with reference to the enemies of the sect—“the wicked in Israel” (4Q171 1–10 iii 12).

<sup>30</sup> “The *Yahad* is actively anticipating the *eschatological, pan-Israelite restoration of the twelve tribes*. They are the vanguard, the spearhead of the incoming of the lost tribes in the eschatological era” (Bergsma, “Qumran,” 188).

<sup>31</sup> 4Q372 frg. 1.10–11, 14–15, 19. See E. Schuller and M. Bernstein, “371–373. 4QNarrative and Poetic Composition (a), (b), (c),” in *Qumran Cave 4.XXVIII: Miscellanea, Part 2* (ed. Moshe Bernstein et al.; DJD 28; Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 151–204; Martin G. Abegg, Jr., “Exile and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (ed. James M. Scott; JSJSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 111–25; Thiessen, “4Q372 1,” 380–95.

<sup>32</sup> The Samaritan presence in “Joseph’s” land is a constant reminder that full restoration has not been achieved and still lies in the future (Thiessen, “4Q372 1,” 395). Thiessen persuasively connects the themes of jealousy in 4Q372 to Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 78, a similar trajectory to that of Rom 10:19 and 11:11–17.

<sup>33</sup> Craig A. Evans, “Jesus & the Continuing Exile of Israel,” in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God* (ed. Carey C. Newman; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 77–100; see also E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 98; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 430–31; and Brant Pitre, *Jesus, The Tribulation, and*

the Samaritans in Luke/Acts and John suggests a connection with the northern tribes, the Epistle of James is addressed “to the twelve tribes of Israel in the dispersion” (Jas 1:1), and Revelation 7 depicts the sealing of all twelve tribes of Israel—not just the three southern tribes.<sup>34</sup>

The present consensus notwithstanding, Paul also makes it abundantly clear in Rom 9:6 that when he says “Israel,” he does not restrict his meaning to ethnic Jews, nor does he think all who are born Jews are “Israel.”<sup>35</sup> When describing himself, Paul demonstrates precision on a par with that found at Qumran, preferring to identify himself as “of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Phil 3:5; Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22) rather than using the more generic term “Jew.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, Paul frames his ministry in “new covenant” language, suggesting the centrality of the restoration of all Israel to his gospel.<sup>37</sup>

## II. PAUL’S GOSPEL AS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

Paul’s allusions to the new covenant prophecy are often noted in individual passages (including Rom 11:27),<sup>38</sup> but its central importance to the Pauline proclamation has been underestimated, in part because of a widely held view that Paul does not operate within a covenantal framework.<sup>39</sup> Even general treatments that

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*the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of Atonement* (WUNT 2/204; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> That they are “sealed” in such a fashion parallels Paul’s concept of the Holy Spirit and the law written on the heart (cf. 2 Cor 1:22).

<sup>35</sup> See Segal, “Experience,” 58; Wright, *Climax*, 238.

<sup>36</sup> Paul’s rebuke of Peter in Gal 2:14 is the prominent exception, but Ἰουδαῖος is the appropriate outsider term in this context, emphasizing common non-Gentile status. In other (insider) contexts Paul distinguishes himself (as a Benjaminite) from descendants of the tribe of Judah. More importantly, Paul distinguishes himself and Peter from Gentiles not as “Israelites” but as Ἰουδαῖοι, thus avoiding an Israelite/Gentile dichotomy. For more on insider/outsider terminology, see Elliot, “Jesus the Israelite,” esp. 121–29.

<sup>37</sup> The new covenant prophecy is found in Jer 31:31–34 (38:31–34 LXX). Unless otherwise noted, references are to the MT throughout.

<sup>38</sup> It is commonly argued that the covenant in Rom 11:27 is the new covenant (see Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 625; Jewett, *Romans*, 705), while the foundational γράμμα/πνεῦμα dichotomy in 2 Corinthians is likewise connected with Jeremiah 31 (see Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989], 125–40).

<sup>39</sup> E. P. Sanders concludes that Paul rejects the covenantal Jewish system in favor of a non-covenantal participationist eschatology (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 543–56). Christopher D. Stanley observes that in the few places where Paul uses διαθήκη, the idea tends to be “presupposed” rather than developed, concluding that covenant plays a “surprisingly limited” role in Paul’s theology (*Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* [SNTSMS 74; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 169). Of course, Sanders’s argument about Judaism could easily be applied to Paul: “it is the *fundamental*



attempt to show Paul's interaction with new covenant concepts have tended to start from a traditional reading of Paul, only trotting out the new covenant in the service of a supersessionist reading (i.e., that the Pauline proclamation "terminates the Mosaic covenant") rather than examining its foundational implications for Paul's gospel.<sup>40</sup>

On the contrary, Paul's distinctive and unambiguous use of new covenant terminology in the institution narrative in 1 Corinthians (11:23–25) suggests a central role of the new covenant in his theology—it is embedded in the ritual most central to community identity.<sup>41</sup> Even more telling is that, when Paul frames his own ministry, he does so with clear echoes of Jeremiah's life and call.<sup>42</sup> His role as "apostle to the nations" (Rom 11:13) echoes Jeremiah's commission as "prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). Like Jeremiah, who was known, called, and set apart by God before birth (Jer 1:5), Paul was "set apart and called by [God's] grace even from [his] mother's womb" (Gal 1:15). Even better, when defending his message, Paul declares that he is a "servant of the new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6).

In considering the role of the new covenant in Paul's proclamation, it is critical to remember that Jeremiah's prophecy primarily concerns the reconstitution of all Israel—that is, that both Israel and Judah will be restored by means of God's writing the law on their hearts.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the prophecy is part of a larger section promising the return of the northern kingdom and the reunification of all twelve tribes, picking up with 30:3, "For, behold, days are coming," says יהוה, 'when I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel and Judah.'"<sup>44</sup>

That both Israel and Judah are called "my people" is particularly significant in light of Hosea's declaration that the northern kingdom is "not my people" (Hos 1:9), a declaration certainly known to Jeremiah (Jer 3:8) and to Paul (Rom 9:25–26).

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*nature of the covenant conception which largely accounts for the relative scarcity of appearances of the term 'covenant' (Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 420–21; his emphasis). For Paul as a covenantal thinker, see Morna D. Hooker, "Paul and 'Covenantal Nomism,'" in Paul and Paulinism: Essays in Honour of C. K. Barrett (ed. Morna D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982), 47–56.*

<sup>40</sup> For a signal example of this phenomenon, see William J. Dumbrell, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), ix.

<sup>41</sup> That none of the parallel institution narratives (aside from the Western non-interpolation in the longer reading of Luke) directly mentions ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη hurts Stanley's case that the Pauline reference merely "reflects traditional language" (*Paul and the Language of Scripture*, 169).

<sup>42</sup> Josephus also identifies with Jeremiah, who seems to have been a popular prophet in the first century (*B.J.* 5.391–93).

<sup>43</sup> The restoration of the northern tribes is arguably the main theme of Jeremiah 31 and is a major theme in the book of Jeremiah as a whole (e.g., 3:6–12; 16:14–16; 23:3–6; 30:3; 31:7–10, 20–21, 31–34).

<sup>44</sup> Jeremiah 30:1–33:26 is called "The Book of Consolation" because of its consistent message of restoration (John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* [2nd ed.; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 29). The Qumran sect also seems to regard the new covenant prophecy as foundational (CD 6:19; 8:21; 19:33; 20:12; 1QpHab 2:3).

Jeremiah 3 explains that Judah's "treachery" has proven "faithless Israel" more righteous than Judah, leading יהוה to call out to "faithless Israel," promising that he will restore even the faithless (divorced) northern kingdom because of the disobedience of Judah. Jeremiah 31 calls for Ephraim to return from among the nations (31:1–22)—this despite Jeremiah's recognition that Ephraim is "no more" (31:15). It is in this context that a new covenant is promised "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (31:31).

Significantly, Gentiles are not mentioned in Jeremiah's prophecy; the covenant will be made only with Israel and Judah.<sup>45</sup> Thus, if Paul thought that the new covenant was being fulfilled, he would have been expecting the miraculous return of the northern tribes. Instead, he strangely obsesses over the "mystery" of the circumcision-free justification of the Gentiles—while still insisting that he is preaching the fulfillment of the new covenant. It is in pondering this paradox that all the pieces snap together: Paul's "mystery" is that faithful Gentiles (those with "the law written on their hearts"; see Rom 2:14–15) *are* the returning remnant of the house of Israel, united with the faithful from the house of Judah (cf. the "inward Jews" of Rom 2:28–29).<sup>46</sup>

### III. HOSEA: "NOT MY PEOPLE"

Identifying faithful Gentiles with the returning house of Israel obviously assigns much more significance to Rom 9:24–26, where, after first declaring natural ancestry an insufficient criterion for covenant membership (9:6–13) and defending God's justice in election (vv. 14–23),<sup>47</sup> Paul quotes Hosea's words to the northern kingdom, demonstrating that God is calling his elect:

<sup>45</sup> This is a key point that is often missed when Gentile inclusion in the new covenant is addressed. Wright, for example, says, "the new covenant is emphatically not a covenant in which 'national righteousness' . . . is suddenly affirmed. It is the covenant in which sin is finally dealt with" (*Climax*, 251). But no rationale is given for why this (quite national) covenant suddenly applies to the Gentiles, raising an obvious question, given the terms stated in the covenant promise itself.

<sup>46</sup> Regardless of whether Paul actually imagines that *all* redeemed Gentiles are literal descendants of ancient Israelites, Gentile inclusion is the means of Israel's promised restoration, since Ephraim's seed was mixed among the Gentiles—thus God's promise to restore Israel has opened the door for Gentile inclusion in Israel's covenant. On the new covenant in Romans 2, see Akio Ito, "Romans 2: A Deuteronomistic Reading," *JSNT* 59 (1995): 21–37; N. T. Wright, "The Law in Romans 2," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; WUNT 89; Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 131–50; Timothy W. Berkley, *From a Broken Covenant to Circumcision of the Heart: Pauline Intertextual Exegesis in Romans 2:17–29* (SBLDS 175; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); against these, see Simon Gathercole, "A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14–15 Revisited," *JSNT* 85 (2002): 27–49.

<sup>47</sup> Segal, "Experience," 58; Wright, *Climax*, 238; but see Gaston, *Paul*, 94.

... whom he called not only from Jews but also from Gentiles, as he also says in Hosea, “I will call my people those who were not my people, and she who was not beloved, I will call beloved. And it will be in the place where it was said to them, ‘you are not my people,’ there they will be called children of the living God.” (Rom 9:25–26)

The quotation initially appears haphazard, as if Paul has arbitrarily wrenched these Hosea passages from their historical application to Israel to apply them to Gentiles.<sup>48</sup> Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that Paul’s connection of elect Gentiles with the motif of “my people”/“not my people” stems from much reflection on the Hosea tradition itself.<sup>49</sup> The terrible message of Hosea is that God is cutting off the northern kingdom—it has “been mixed among the peoples” (Hos 7:8), the chosen people of יהוה no longer.<sup>50</sup> The house of Israel has intermingled, intermarried, among the nations, no longer having the distinction of being “elect.” Once a part of God’s elect nation, Ephraim has become “not my people,” indistinct from the non-chosen nations—that is, they have become “Gentiles” (what does “not my people” mean if not “Gentiles”?).<sup>51</sup> Hosea 8:8 sums up the situation: “Israel [the north] is swallowed up; they are now in the nations [Gentiles] like a worthless vessel [LXX: ὡς σκεῦος ἄχρηστον].”<sup>52</sup>

Paul appears to be subtly echoing this passage when he defends God’s choice to make some of the “lump” (= Israel) into worthless vessels (σκεῦος) for dishonor, leading to the inclusion of the Gentiles, citing Hosea’s promise of the restoration of

<sup>48</sup> E. Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Rom 9–11* (SBLDS 109; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 150; in contrast, Nils Alstrup Dahl observes that it is unlikely that Paul has overlooked the context of mercy toward Israel (*Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002], 146).

<sup>49</sup> William S. Campbell argues that Paul’s use of Hosea applies primarily to Israel and secondarily (and typologically) to Gentiles, but he stops short of identifying the two groups (“Divergent Images of Paul and His Mission,” in *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations* [ed. Cristina Greenholm and Daniel Patte; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000], 199); see also Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:499–500. Scott Hahn also has arrived at conclusions similar to my own, presenting them at the 2001 SBL International Meeting in Rome (a paper of which I was unaware until a helpful conversation with Hahn after my 2008 SBL presentation).

<sup>50</sup> In the LXX, the word for “mixed” is *συναναμίγνυμι*, a word carrying a sexual connotation (cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.64; Homer, *Il.* 21.143; *Od.* 1.73) in addition to meaning “become included among” (BDAG, 965, s.v. *συναναμίγνυμι*; LSJ, 1092, s.v. *μείγνυμι*; 1695, s.v. *συναναμίγνυμι*); in Hosea, the idea is clearly that of ethnic mixture.

<sup>51</sup> “Paul reads Hosea’s promise of Israel’s restored relationship to God as a promise that God will call those who are “not my people,” *that is, Gentiles*” (Hays, *Echoes*, 120; my emphasis).

<sup>52</sup> That Israel is here called *ἄχρηστον* (a homonym of *ἄχριστον*, “without Christ”) may have drawn attention to the verse.

“not my people” as proof.<sup>53</sup> So Paul takes the radical step of identifying faithful, uncircumcised Gentiles with the “not my people” being restored to Israel as promised in Hosea.<sup>54</sup> That is to say, as promised, Ephraim’s seed is being restored from among the nations, being redeemed from its cut-off, Gentile state, becoming “children of the living God” once again.

Moreover, in the process, God has provided for the salvation of the Gentiles by scattering Ephraim among the nations only to be restored. In saving Ephraim, God saves the nations; in saving the nations, God saves Ephraim. Thus, the new covenant not only restores Israel but also—in the unforeseen plan of God—fulfills the promises to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed, not “through” his seed (i.e., as outsiders) but by inclusion and incorporation *in his seed* (Gal 3:8). Paul insists that these faithful Gentiles are not to become Jews (that is, *Judah*) in order to become members of Israel—rather, they have already become Israelites through the new covenant. Thus, all persons should remain in the state in which they were called (1 Cor 7:17–20).

Before protesting that Paul would never have called Gentiles “Israelites,” one should remember that the circumcision controversy makes sense only if the debate is over full Israelite status. If Gentiles were to be saved simply as Gentiles (i.e., as the fulfillment of the nations flocking to Jerusalem at the eschaton),<sup>55</sup> circumcision—which marks a status transition from “Gentile” to “Israelite”—would have been entirely unnecessary.<sup>56</sup> Why would Gentiles ever need to be circumcised to worship the God of Israel, and on what basis would they be circumcised if not to become part of Israel? If uncircumcised Gentiles could already worship the Lord with somewhat secure status in non-Christian Judaism, there is little reason to think that such a thing would have been a problem in even the most conservative law-observant Christian circles.<sup>57</sup> Rather, the debate must have centered on the question of

<sup>53</sup> As the context involves God’s justice in dealing with Israel, not with humanity as a whole, the “lump” (φύραμα) more sensibly refers to Israel than to humanity as a whole. In addition to Hos 8:8, Paul’s “vessel” discussion appears to draw on Jer 50:25 (LXX 27:25); Hos 13:15; Pss 2:7–10; 31:12; Wis 15:7; Sir 27:4.

<sup>54</sup> “Paul extends the logic of reversal at work in the text well beyond the referential sense envisioned in the original” (Hays, *Echoes*, 120).

<sup>55</sup> See Dunn, *Romans*, 680; Moo, *Romans*, 716–17; and Jewett, *Romans*, 700–701.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Jdt 14:10, which equates circumcision with being joined to Israel. On circumcision as the mechanism for full conversion, see Cohen, *Beginnings*, 137–38, 156–58, 218–20; idem, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew” *HTR* 82 (1989): 26–33.

<sup>57</sup> The temple had a “court of the Gentiles” for this very purpose. On Gentile worshipers of יהודה in early Judaism, see Cohen, “Crossing,” 20–26; John G. Gager, “Jews, Gentiles, and Synagogues in the Book of Acts,” *HTR* 79 (1986): 91–99; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Lots of God-Fearers? Theosebeis in the Aphrodisias Inscription,” *RB* 99 (1992): 418–24; J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 438–39.

whether Gentile converts can acquire full Israelite status without circumcision, food laws, or any other visible marker of identification with the Torah or traditional Jewish identity. For Paul, Gentile converts are not saved “as Gentiles” but actually become equal members of Israel alongside their law-observant Jewish brothers.<sup>58</sup> It is this assertion that was so unbearable for Paul’s opponents. Gentiles saved *as Gentiles* are no concern; Gentiles *as Israel* are a shocking affront and a grave threat to traditional Israelite identity. The debate is therefore fundamentally over *status*—specifically the status and identity of the people of Israel.

It is precisely at this point that Paul is simultaneously most continuous and discontinuous with traditional Judaism. He continues to preach God’s special election of Israel, the lasting value of Israel’s covenant, and the restoration and ultimate salvation of Israel; but he extends this election to Gentiles without any requirement of circumcision, food laws, or any of the other external markers of covenantal membership—an unacceptable move in the eyes of his peers (both Jesus-followers and those who were not).<sup>59</sup> In this sense, Paul’s gospel could most accurately be called “messianic new covenant Israelitism”—not exactly Judaism but in no way something wholly “other.” Far from de-emphasizing the Torah and the Prophets, Paul sees the prophecies contained therein as being fulfilled in his own day and through his own ministry. Israel is indeed being restored “from the nations” through an internal transformation, just as the prophets foretold.

#### IV. THE OLIVE TREE

In Romans 11, Paul is at pains to clarify why some in Israel have not obtained the salvation they were seeking (11:7). He proceeds to explain that it is precisely Israel’s transgression that has brought salvation to the Gentiles in order to make Israel jealous/zealous (11:11–15). Not surprisingly, Paul’s theme again parallels Jeremiah, where God chastises “treacherous Judah” for being even worse than “faithless Israel” despite having seen what happened as a result of Israel’s disobedience: “Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, ‘Return, faithless Israel, declares יהוה; I will not cause my face to fall on you in anger’” (Jer 3:11–12). To shame Judah,

<sup>58</sup> Paul argues that Christian Gentiles are “Abraham’s seed” (Galatians 3 and Romans 4), includes them as descendants of the patriarchs (1 Cor 10:1), references them as non-Gentiles (1 Cor 12:2, “when you were Gentiles”), and probably includes them in “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16); see Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 345; Nils Dahl, “Der Name Israel: Zur Auslegung von Gal. 6.16,” *Jud 6* (1950): 161–70; Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians,” *NIB* 11:346.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Josephus’s account of Izates’ conversion in *A.J.* 20.34–48. Philo complains of Jews who recognize the allegorical truths of the law but neglect the literal, even seeing circumcision as unnecessary (*Migr.* 89–92; *QE* 2.2).

God chooses to restore Israel from divorce—all the while pleading with Judah to repent in order to be saved (Jer 3:6–12).<sup>60</sup>

Not only does Paul connect the restoration of Israel from the Gentiles with the disobedience of Judah (following Jeremiah); there is a double edge when he explains that the Gentiles are saved because of the hardening of part of Israel (11:7, 25). The transgression of the northern kingdom caused them to be intermingled among the nations, providing for the incorporation of the Gentiles when Israel is restored through the new covenant, but it is actually Judah's rebellion that sets the restoration of the house of Israel (and the Gentiles) in motion. Thus, Paul explains that the rebellion of both houses of Israel has been the agent of salvation for the Gentiles. It is the hardening not only of the Jews but also of their northern brothers (long ago) that has brought about Gentile salvation—both houses of Israel have indeed been hardened in order for the Gentiles to come in (11:25) and, ultimately, for “all Israel” to be saved.<sup>61</sup>

At this point, Paul warns the Gentiles not to glory in their newfound election, using the metaphor of branches being grafted onto an olive tree.<sup>62</sup> The metaphor recalls Jer 11:16–17, where God burns up the “evil branches” from the olive tree of Israel.<sup>63</sup> Again Paul stands firmly within prophetic tradition: since Israel has not “cut off” the unfaithful as the law prescribes,<sup>64</sup> God himself is cutting them off from Israel.<sup>65</sup> It is not that the rules have changed or that God has rejected his people. Quite the opposite, God is cutting off only those of Israel who have forfeited their standing through covenantal unfaithfulness—those from Judah who are indeed “inward Jews” (2:27–29) remain.<sup>66</sup> As Paul has already pointed out, this is not the first time the majority of Israel has rejected God, but God has always preserved a remnant through it all (11:2–5).

<sup>60</sup> See also n. 45 above.

<sup>61</sup> God even uses rebellion redemptively. Since Israel failed to be a “light to the nations” through obedience, God caused them to fulfill this mission through their disobedience. Thanks to Scott Hahn for this point.

<sup>62</sup> Romans 11:21–24 and 2:14–16 have some clever wordplay centering on the word φύσις. In 11:21, those cut off are branches *κατὰ φύσιν* (“according to nature”), while in 2:14 the Gentiles are doing the law *φύσει* (“by nature”); likewise, the reprobates of 1:28 act *παρὰ φύσιν* (“against nature”).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Hos 14:6, where Israel will again have “splendor like an olive tree.” Although the branches in Jeremiah's metaphor are “burned,” Paul holds out hope for the restoration of those being cut off.

<sup>64</sup> See Exod 12:15, 19; 30:33, 38; 31:14; Lev 7:20–21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9, 14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:5, 17–18; 22:3; 23:29; Num 9:13; 15:30–31; 19:13, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Not an uncommon prophetic motif: see Pss 37:9, 22, 28, 34, 38; 101:6–8; Prov 2:21–22; Isa 48:18–19; Jer 6:2; 44:7–12; Hos 8:1–4; 10:1–15; Nah 1:15; Zeph 1:4–6; Zech 13:8–9 See also 1 Kgs 9:7; 14:10, 14; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8; 10:32; 2 Chr 22:7.

<sup>66</sup> In no way does Paul think that true Israelites have been rejected (Rom 9:6); his defense centers on God cutting off only those who are unfaithful to the covenant. In addition, he is quick to remind the reader that anyone who has been cut off for unfaithfulness can be grafted back in.

Chilling as this passage is, the real force is directed against the newly engrafted Gentile, who stands in danger of boasting just like the Jews whom Paul chastises in Romans 2–3.<sup>67</sup> Paul warns that election is no guarantee of final salvation; one must remain faithful and dependent on God in order to be saved. In addition, he reminds his audience that even the branch that has been cut off remains elect “according to nature” and as such can easily be reincorporated into Israel. The Jewish branches are born into the tree by nature (i.e., elect from birth) and can only be cut off for unfaithfulness; the Gentiles, on the other hand, must come into the tree by an “unnatural” process (and can still be cut off for unfaithfulness). Paul’s reminder about God’s capacity to reincorporate cut-off branches is made even more poignant by the realization that the branches now being incorporated from the Gentiles are wild *olive* branches. That is, these branches are from the long-forgotten and uncultivated house of Israel, having been broken off and mixed among the Gentiles so long ago. So Paul points out that if God is restoring the previously cut-off branches of Israel from the nations, he can much more easily reincorporate the more recently removed branches. God is calling his people back, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles in which they had intermingled—both Gentile and Jewish branches must coexist equally in the olive tree, the whole of Israel.

#### V. THE FULLNESS OF THE NATIONS: PAUL’S MYSTERY REVEALED

Having laid the necessary groundwork, we are now prepared to return to Paul’s conclusion in 11:25–27, where he explains that Israel will be saved through the ingathering of “the fullness of the Gentiles.” Despite the terseness of Paul’s language, the passage becomes quite clear once the phrase τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν is recognized as an allusion to Gen 48:19,<sup>68</sup> where Jacob blesses Joseph’s sons, explaining that he is placing his right hand on the younger Ephraim’s head because “[Manasseh] will also become a people and he will also be great. However, his younger brother [Ephraim] will be greater than he, and *his seed will become the fullness of the nations.*”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> The motif of boasting recalls Jeremiah: “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, nor the mighty boast of his might, nor a rich man of his riches; but let him who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows me . . .” (Jer 9:22–23).

<sup>68</sup> It is surprising that the echo of such an odd phrase has been missed or ignored even by those focusing on the use of scripture in the New Testament, going unmentioned in E. Earle Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (1957; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985); and Mark Seifrid’s discussion of this passage in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 672–78.

<sup>69</sup> Following John Skinner’s translation of מלא־הגוים, “a peculiar expression for populousness” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2nd ed., ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark,

That Paul's wording differs from the LXX in using *πλήρωμα* rather than *πλήθος* probably accounts for so many commentators' having overlooked this connection.<sup>70</sup> Paul's translation renders the Hebrew more precisely than does the LXX, which renders the odd Hebrew phrase מלא־הגוים in the same way as it does the המון גוים ("multitude/tumult of nations") promised to Abraham in Gen 17:4 (itself a passage that Paul cites in a similar context in Gal 3:7–8).<sup>71</sup> Paul's use of *πλήρωμα* accords with the usual LXX translation for מלא elsewhere,<sup>72</sup> while the LXX nowhere else translates מלא as *πλήθος*.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, Paul's quotations often differ from the LXX in Romans 9–11,<sup>74</sup> while the unique character and context of this phrase (a *hapax legomenon* and interpretive puzzle in each testament) militate against accidental coincidence of language.<sup>75</sup> It is more likely that Paul either had a different Greek version or made the change intentionally, since *πλήρωμα* is a word that often carries a special apocalyptic or eschatological connotation both in Paul and elsewhere, fitting nicely into the apocalyptic context of this passage.<sup>76</sup>

1930], 506). Philo (*Leg.* 3.88–94) interprets Gen 48:19 together with the Jacob/Esau story of Gen 25:21–23 (cf. Rom 9:10–13); likewise, *Barn.* 13 connects these two Genesis passages (to show that the covenant is "ours" and not "theirs"), suggesting an early tradition of interpreting these passages together.

<sup>70</sup> *Romans 11:25b*

ὅτι πᾶρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῶ  
Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρι οὗ τὸ  
πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ

*Genesis 48:19b MT*

ואולם אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו  
וזרעו יהיה מלא־הגוים

*Genesis 48:19b LXX*

ἀλλὰ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ  
νεώτερος μείζων αὐτοῦ ἔσται  
καὶ τὸ σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἔσται  
εἰς πλήθος ἐθνῶν

<sup>71</sup> That the LXX uses the same phrase to translate both passages suggests that a tradition connecting Gen 48:19 to Gen 17:4 likely existed before Paul.

<sup>72</sup> E.g., 1 Chr 16:32; Pss 23:1; 49:12 [50:12 MT]; 88:12 [89:12 MT]; 95:11; 97:7; Eccl 4:6; Jer 8:16; 29:2 [47:2 MT]; Ezek 12:19; 19:7; 30:12.

<sup>73</sup> Greek *πλήθος* typically translates רבב (e.g., Gen 16:4; 27:28; 30:30; 32:12; 36:7; 48:16; Exod 1:9; 15:7; 19:21; 23:2) and occasionally המון (Gen 17:4; Judg 4:7; 2 Sam 18:29).

<sup>74</sup> The citations in Rom 9:9, 13, 17, 20, 25, 27, 28, 33; 10:5, 7, 11, 15, 19, 20; 11:2, 3, 8, 9–10, 25a, and 26b–27 all differ from the LXX, while those in Rom 9:7, 20, and 11:2 (see Jewett, *Romans*, 654) appear without introductory formulas. For more on Romans' use of Scripture and the LXX, see Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture*, 83–184; and J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul "In Concert" in the Letter to the Romans* (NovTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2002), esp. 341–51.

<sup>75</sup> The oddity and distinctiveness of the phrase give the echo a high intertextual volume (borrowing the term from Hays, *Echoes*, 30).

<sup>76</sup> Our LXX versions were not sitting before first-century writers; for example, Stanley has shown that the "Lucianic" family of LXX texts stands closer to Paul's quotation of Isa 52:7 than the "standard" versions of the LXX (*Paul and the Language of Scripture*, 135–37; cf. Jewett, *Romans*, 639). On the significance of *πλήρωμα* as a specialized apocalyptic term, see Jewett, *Romans*, 677–78, 700–701; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 206; Stuhlmann, *Eschatologische Mass*, 164–78;



By citing this prophecy at the climax of his argument, Paul has placed his cards on the table in grand style: the Gentiles now receiving the Spirit are the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy—they are Ephraim's seed, they are Israel, restored through the new covenant. God had planned all along that Ephraim's seed would become “the fullness of the nations,” so that when Ephraim was restored, it would result also in the redemption of the Gentiles in Abraham's seed. Paul's triumphant conclusion, “καὶ οὕτως *all* Israel will be saved,” seizes his opponents' territory, claiming it for the Pauline gospel. “Yes, all Israel will be saved,” he says, “but ‘*all* Israel’ is more than you realize”; Israel's redemption is not limited to the Jews alone. God has promised to restore *all* Israel, and Ephraim—that is, “the fullness of the nations/Gentiles”—must be reincorporated into Israel and reunited with his Jewish brothers. All Israel can be saved only through the ingathering of the nations. The puzzling connection between the ingathering of τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν and the salvation of “all Israel” suddenly makes sense, since “all Israel” must include Ephraim's seed. Romans 11:25–27 is thus entirely coherent:

Verse 25: *A hardening has happened to part of Israel.* Paul starts from the original hardening of the northern kingdom, which caused them to be exiled by the Assyrians and intermingled with the nations. Judah's partial hardening then leads to the restoration of these lost tribes, necessarily opening the door to the Gentiles (since Ephraim is no longer ethnically distinct)—the Gentiles are gathered in as the result of this twofold hardening that has occurred in both houses of Israel. Nonetheless, Paul insists that even those branches presently being cut off for unfaithfulness can be grafted on again—the mercy being shown to the northern house is the guarantor of mercy toward disobedient Jews. They can (Paul seems to hold more than a little hope that they will) be restored, and this ultimate reincorporation and reunification are the greatest of all—life from the dead (Rom 11:15).

*Until τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν comes in . . .* This is, as we have already seen, also a double reference. It refers to the ingathering of the Gentiles into Israel,<sup>77</sup> but in their new identity as the reconstituted “Ephraim.” The forgotten, uncultivated olive

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Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (HTKNT 6; Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 340–41; and Hans Hübner, “πλήρωμα,” *EDNT* 3:110–11.

<sup>77</sup> Most commentators see εἰσέλθῃ as referring to either Gentile pilgrimage to Jerusalem or Gentiles entering the kingdom of God (as distinct from Israel), inverting the anticipated order of Israel's restoration followed by the salvation of the nations—an order Paul appears to uphold in Rom 1:16 (e.g., Jewett, *Romans*, 698–701; Dunn, *Romans*, 680–82). If the Gentiles are understood as incorporated into Israel, however, these difficulties disappear, with εἰσέλθῃ denoting inclusion of Gentiles into Israel in keeping with the engrafting metaphor immediately preceding. J. Christiaan Beker's observation, “Paul does not envision Israel's eschatological salvation as its absorption into the Gentile-Christian church” (*Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], 334–35), is thus absolutely true, since Paul's vision is exactly the opposite: the Gentiles are participants in *Israel's* salvation through incorporation into Israel, not vice versa.

branches that had long been cut off are now being grafted onto the olive tree of Israel. Paul is simultaneously proclaiming the salvation of the Gentiles and the return of the northern kingdom—as the same event.

Verse 26: *And thus (καὶ οὕτως) all Israel will be saved.* Since “all Israel” includes both houses of Israel and the northern house is indistinct from the nations, “all Israel” must include both Jews and Gentiles. There is a causal relation between the ingathering of the Gentiles and the salvation of “all Israel,” because the latter necessarily involves the restoration of “Ephraim’s seed,” which has become the “fullness of the Gentiles.”

*Just as it is written, “the deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. [27] And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”* This is the mechanism of Israel’s salvation: the new covenant. All those who have the “law written on the heart” (Jew or Gentile) are Israelites (cf. Romans 2). Paul follows with the reminder that even unbelieving Jews have in no way lost their elect status—they remain God’s elect in every sense that a faithful Gentile is, despite their opposition to the gospel. God has not made a mistake—he has not turned back from his promises, nor does he regret his choices.<sup>78</sup> There is no cause for boasting but only love and an attitude of brotherhood toward the fellow elect, along with hope for their ultimate reconciliation and participation in the new covenant, leading to their salvation (cf. 9:1–5).<sup>79</sup>

A major payoff of this reading is that it makes sense of Paul’s argument in the context of apocalyptic early Judaism while simultaneously providing a reasonable explanation for the emergence of the supersessionist patristic perspective on Israel. In full Jewish sectarian fashion, Paul sees the *ἐκκλησία* in full continuity with Israel—in fact as the righteous remnant of Israel (see Rom 9:27–29; 11:6). Much like those at Qumran, Paul sees Jews who have not yet joined the remnant as still being Israelites (though disobedient); and, so long as time remains, these others can still join the righteous remnant and be saved. The entire discussion is framed by the apocalyptic expectation of the restoration of all Israel as promised by the prophets; Paul is at pains to explain how the ingathering of the Gentiles relates to this anticipated restoration. Thus, when Paul asks, “Has God forgotten his people?” he is not addressing the fate of the Jews alone but a larger question concerning the promised Israelite restoration. He asks, in effect, “Has God abandoned his promises through the prophets to restore all Israel, rejecting his people and turning to the Gentiles?”

<sup>78</sup> Recall, however, that election is insufficient for salvation in Paul’s understanding unless it is maintained through faithfulness (see pp. 383–85 above).

<sup>79</sup> In the immediately following verses (28–32) Paul concludes that, although the hardened among Israel (not all Israel; the distinction is not between Israel and faithful Gentiles; cf. 11:1–5) have become “enemies for your sake,” neither have they lost their elect status nor are they beyond redemption.

Paul rejects this, showing how the incorporation of Gentiles into the eschatological ἐκκλησία of new covenant Israel is in fact a fulfillment of God's promise to redeem "all Israel."

Unlike later patristic writers, Paul does not advocate a primarily Gentile church (which did not yet exist) as the "new" or "true" Israel replacing "the Jews," nor is he teaching a "third race" perspective.<sup>80</sup> On the contrary, the ἐκκλησία (comprising both Jews and Gentiles) is the קהל יהוה,<sup>81</sup> in direct continuity with ancient Israel. Gentiles coming into the body of Christ indeed become members of Israel, but they are in no way replacements—they are restorations and additions. Ἰουδαῖοι remain Israel by nature; the engrafting of Gentiles does not threaten or diminish their Israelite status. Both Jews and Gentiles, however, can find themselves cut off from Israel because of unfaithfulness, though restoration is possible even then. Paul envisions the expansion of Israel by restoration and addition, not a transfer of Israelite status from one group to another. Even Gentile inclusion itself is in continuity with ancient Israel, since Israel has been ethnically intermingled among the nations, requiring Gentile inclusion for Israelite restoration. For Paul, salvation is always about God's faithfulness to his people Israel.

That having been said, the patristic perspective did not emerge from thin air; it is in continuity with Paul's equation of the church and (the remnant of) Israel and Paul's assertions that faithful Gentiles are Israelites. But as the context of early Christianity changed, the nuance and subtlety of Paul's argument were lost, succeeded by the blunt replacement theology (or "third race" notion) of the patristic period.<sup>82</sup> When Paul wrote Romans, a church led by and primarily composed of Jews was still grappling with the question of Gentile inclusion. But within a generation that problem had long been resolved, and the church was increasingly composed of Gentiles. In this new Gentile-dominated context, Romans 9–11 was (and has continued to be) read nearly exactly backwards, from the perspective of the present situation in the church as opposed to looking forward from the perspective of early Judaism into the situation of Paul's day—Romans 9–11 has been so misunderstood because interpreters have approached it asking the wrong (often anachronistic) questions. Thus, Paul's discussion of the promised restoration of Israel in light of Gentile incorporation—a discussion rooted in apocalyptic Jewish concerns—was misinterpreted as a thesis on the fate of the Jews in light of their rejection of the gospel. Likewise, Paul's argument that Gentiles were being incorporated into Israel (the church itself being the remnant of Israel in continuity with the promises to ancient Israel) was misconstrued as meaning that the Jews had

<sup>80</sup> On ethnic reasoning in early Christianity, including the "third race" idea, see Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>81</sup> Deuteronomy 23:1; etc.; cf. also קהל ישראל, Deut 31:30; 1 Kgs 8:14; etc.

<sup>82</sup> E.g., the sloppy argument for replacement theology in *Barn.* 13; see n. 69 above.

been replaced as Israel by the Gentiles, who by then constituted the majority of the Christian church.

In Rom 11:25–27 (and Romans 9–11 as a whole), the apostle has turned the question of God’s rejection of Israel on its head by reminding the reader that “all Israel” is a larger entity than just the Jews. God has neither been unfaithful to Israel nor rejected his people. In fact, God’s plan goes far beyond saving only Judah but extends to the house of Israel as well—*all* Israel will be saved, Paul insists, not just one part. Far from rejecting Israel, God has reached out and saved more of Israel than anyone could have imagined. In fact, God desired to save all Israel so much that he is even incorporating the Gentiles to do it. God’s faithfulness to Israel is so great that he has provided to save all—even Gentiles—in Israel. God has not moved to a new people but is gathering, restoring, and reconciling even those who were thought to be irretrievably lost. Paul argues that God’s covenant-keeping power extends beyond the grave, capable even of bringing life from the dead (Rom 11:15), of producing Israelites from the Gentiles. It is no wonder that Paul breaks off in praise at this point, expressing his wonder at the hidden wisdom, the unsearchable and unfathomable plan of God. The mystery has been revealed, and God’s purposes are far deeper than anyone ever imagined—even God’s rejections prove salvific.