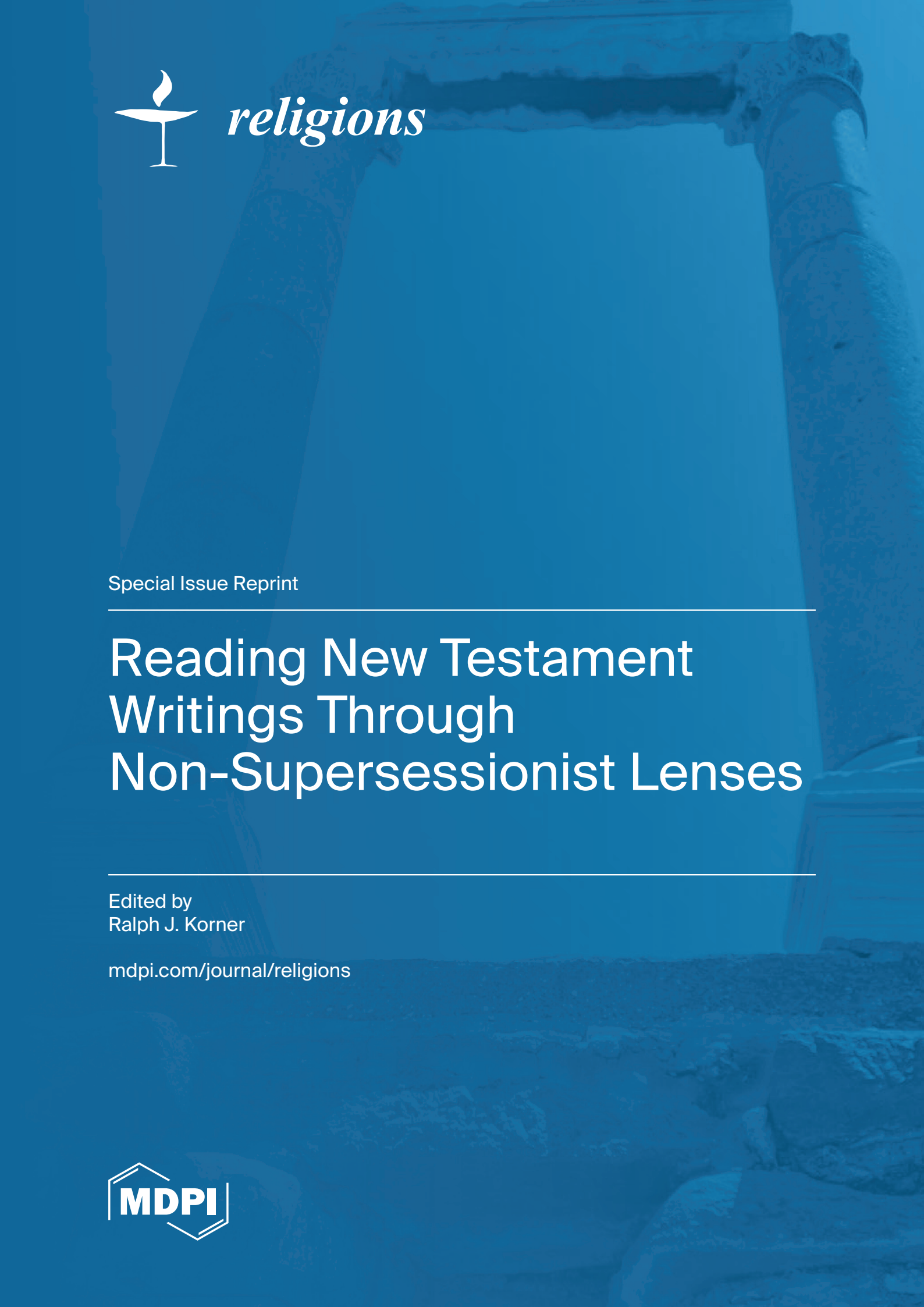

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Special Issue Reprint

Reading New Testament Writings Through Non-Supersessionist Lenses

Edited by
Ralph J. Korner

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Guest Editor

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Contents

About the Editor

Ralph J. Korner

Ralph J. Korner (Professor of Biblical Studies, Kairos University) has published two monographs (Brill, 2017; Cascade, 2020) and five essays (Brill 2015; *JJMJS* 2015, 2017; Baylor Press 2022; Fortress 2023) and has two forthcoming essays (Peeters 2025; Lexington Press 2026) on the counter-imperial and post-supersessionist implications of early Christ-follower associations self-identifying as *ekklēsiai* ("assembly/meeting/gathering"). An *ekklēsia* was a Greek city-state's official decision-making forum that comprised its citizenry (6th cent BCE to 3rd cent CE). Ralph also has published essays on the book of Revelation (*NovT* 2000; *ARC* 2011; *ASE* 2023a,b), on the book of Daniel (Eisenbrauns 2013), and has a forthcoming essay on LXX Isaiah 23–27 (Peeters 2025).

Preface

How we read texts in the New Testament to which we ascribe spiritual authority results in how we live out those readings in our lived contexts. This truism holds true not least with respect to how supersessionist readings have negatively impacted relationships between Christians and Jews since the first century CE. Supersessionism, as a reading strategy of the New Testament, serves to replace, displace, or supersede ethnocultural Israel in God's salvific economy with the multiethnic followers of Jesus the Jewish *Christos*, that is, with the universal "church" (NB: "church" is an anachronistic English translation of the Greek word *ekklēsia*). Post-supersessionist readings, on the other hand, explore how the New Testament text/book under consideration serves theologically, ideologically, socially, culturally, and/or politically to emplace Jews and Gentiles, who are followers of the Jewish *Christos*/Messiah, into God's eternal covenant with Israel. Thus, Post-Supersessionism, as an interpretive position, positions Christians well for the development of relationships of honor and respect with Jews who do not follow Jesus as their *Christos*. I wish to express my gratitude to this Special Issue's contributors for their insightful contributions to this ongoing conversation.

Ralph J. Korner
Guest Editor

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Editorial

Post-Supersessionism: Introduction, Terminology, Theology

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1. Introduction

This Special Issue of *Religions* is dedicated to exploring post-supersessionist readings of New Testament writings. As such, the key underlying assumption of contributors will be that the original writers wrote through non-supersessionist "lenses". As a guest editor, my priority in this editorial is to explore terminology and to offer and deconstruct definitions of that terminology within the context of post-supersessionist conversations.

Post-supersessionist readings, in their essence, explore how the New Testament text/book under consideration serves theologically, ideologically, socially, culturally, and/or politically to emplace Jews and Gentiles, who are followers of the Jewish *Christos*/Messiah, into God's eternal covenant with Israel.

Supersessionist readings, on the other hand, approach those same textual artifacts with the assumption that they are seeking to replace, displace, or supersede ethnocultural Israel with the multiethnic followers of Jesus the Jewish *Christos*, that is, with the universal "church". ("c/Church" is an anachronistic English translation of the Greek word *ekklēsia*).

This editorial serves as an introduction to this Special Issue and seeks to clarify terminology and theology relevant to the ensuing discussions on the interplay between Judaism(s) and early *Christos*-followers living in the Roman empire. Many of the contributors to this Special Issue are also contributors, along with me, to the series entitled New Testament After Supersessionism (Cascade Books; Eugene, OR, USA). Their articles comprise a distillation of their book project's key findings and arguments. The balance of this editorial represents a selective replication of material from the Introduction to my volume on *Reading Revelation After Supersessionism* (2020).[1]

2. Post-Supersessionism: Overview

While there are a variety of nuances scholars bring to a definition of post-supersessionism, the following is helpful given its breadth and succinctness:

> [A] family of theological perspectives that affirms God's irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people as a central and coherent part of ecclesial teaching. It rejects understandings of the new covenant that entail the abrogation or obsolescence of God's covenant with the Jewish people, of the Torah as a demarcator of Jewish communal identity, or of the Jewish people themselves . . . [which] address the question of ongoing Jewish particularity, and the relationship of interdependence and mutual blessing between Jew and gentile in Messiah.[2]

Thus, (as an irreducible minimum,) supporters of the post-supersessionist perspective contend that the "Church" does not displace or replace historic Israel but rather is emplaced within Israel. A variety of academic categories fit underneath the post-supersessionist theological "umbrella", so to speak. Those categories associated with studies of the apostle Paul's writings include the so-called "Radical Perspective on Paul" (for example, Ehrensperger 2004, p. 39; Zetterholm 2009, pp. 127–63; Eisenbaum 2009, p. 216), also known as the "Beyond the New Perspective on Paul" (BNP)[3] and, more recently, as the "Paul within Judaism Perspective" (see especially, Nanos 2015, pp. 1–29 but also Runesson 2015, pp. 53–78).

They each argue that, for Paul, Israel and the "Church", that is, the universal, multi-ethnic community of Christ-followers, are distinct yet covenantally related socio-religious entities.[4] As such, so the argument goes, by faith in the Jewish *Christos*, gentiles qua gentiles share with Torah observant Jews qua Jews in God's salvation history with historic Israel.[5]

William Campbell gives greater clarity as to how a post-supersessionist reading of Paul, in particular, lends itself to an affirmation of the continuation of social and ethnic identity among the diverse followers of the Jewish *Christos*. He states (Campbell 2006, p. 99) that "The church and Israel [are] related but separate entities which should not be dissolved or merged in such a way that the sub-group identity of the one is lost or unrecognized".[6]

With respect to Pauline Christ-followers, Campbell (2006, p. 99) argues that they would not have seen themselves as some sort of new, a-cultural, universal association which is disconnected from its Jewish roots. Rather, the multi-ethnic members of Paul's *ekklēsiai* ("assemblies/communities/congregations/"churches") would have viewed themselves as remaining Jews and other ethnicities who, while ethnically diverse, are united under the transforming influence of Christ and who express that diverse unity within their individual cultures.[7]

Campbell (2006, p. 66) contends, therefore, that Paul is a non-sectarian, Jewish reformist who sought to establish groups that were theologically united with yet socially distinct from the greater synagogue community, but who still accepted Jewish ethno-religious identity markers in their worship of the Jewish *Christos*.[8]

The need for a non-supersessionist re-reading of New Testament writings comes more clearly to the fore in Kendall Soulen's (1996, p. 1) observation that, "For most of the past two millennia, the church's posture toward the Jewish people has come to expression in the teaching known as supersessionism, also known as the theology of displacement".[9] A supersessionist posture is not simply a theological exercise, however. Supersessionist theology inevitably translates into attitudes and actions. Some of these attitudes and actions have resulted in anti-Judaistic and even anti-Semitic attacks against those of a Jewish heritage.

3. Supersessionism, Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism

Terrence Donaldson has succinctly identified the three-way interplay between text, action, and attitude not least through his analysis of three interrelated but distinct terms that are used in discussions on Christian self-definition(s): supersessionism, anti-Judaism, and anti-Semitism. Terrence Donaldson (2016, p. 6) provides some definitional clarification for these three terms:

> If anti-Semitism refers to hateful attitudes and actions directed toward Jewish people per se—that is, an ethnic, social, and often political phenomenon—and if anti-Judaism refers to statements and formulations designed to defend and bolster Christian claims about themselves by denouncing what were perceived as Jewish counter-claims—that is, a theological and socio-religious phenomenon—then supersessionism refers to the kind of Christian self-understanding that might be seen to undergird such anti-Judaic rhetoric and anti-Semitic activity.

Donaldson brings to the forefront the importance of understanding how throughout history the foundational and formative nature of supersessionist assumptions have informed and deformed Christian attitudes and actions towards their Jewish "cousins". Donaldson (2016, p. 6) gives helpful definition to the term supersessionism: "Supersession describes a situation where one entity, by virtue of its supposed superiority, comes to occupy a position that previously belonged to another, the displaced group becoming outmoded or obsolete in the process. The term thus properly applies to a completed process of (perceived) replacement". In other words, broadly defined, the term "supersessionism", which is otherwise known as "replacement theology" or "fulfillment theology", holds that the "promises and covenants that were made with the nation of Israel . . . now allegedly belong to another group that is not national Israel" (Vlach 2010, p. 10).

Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew (early second century CE) is one historical example of this replacement/supersessionist theology at work in anti-Judaistic ways. Justin comments that "you Jews" (11.2) no longer are foundational to the church since it is primarily a Gentile entity (11.7–23) and thus as the "the true spiritual Israel" (11.5), it no longer adheres to the old law and covenant since they have become "obsolete", and have been "abrogated" and replaced by a new law and covenant (11.2–4) reflected in the appended Scriptures, which are no longer "yours, but ours" (29.2). However, even Justin realizes that this supersessionist impulse inherently accedes priority of place to the Jews (Dial. 23, 30). Thus, rather than grant credibility to the first covenant, Justin undermines it by suggesting to Trypho the Jew that the old Israel and its institutions never had divinely authorized credibility in the first place since "your circumcision of the flesh, your Sabbath days, and, in a word, all your festivals . . . were imposed upon you, namely, because of your sins and your hardness of heart" (Dial. 18.2) (Donaldson 2016, p. 7).

3.1. Supersessionism: Interpretive Approaches

Chris Zoccali (2010, 23ff.) highlights two basic approaches taken by supersessionist interpreters. First is the approach represented by Ernst Käsemann who sees discontinuity between the "church" and historic Israel. Thus, Torah observance and faith in Jesus as Messiah are incompatible. Second is the general approach represented by J. D. G. Dunn (1998, p. 508) (see also, Wright (1991, p. 237) and Donaldson (1997, p. 306)). He champions the view that there is continuity in salvation history between the "church" and historic Israel. Thus, Torah observance and faith in Christ are compatible for Jews who have become Christ-followers.

There are some who would position N. T. Wright into the supersessionist camp. Wright would disagree, though. He (Wright 2013, 2.825–834) sees his approach as reflecting a "middle view", which he calls "incorporative christology". He (Wright 2013, 2.1212) argues that those Jews who do not believe in Jesus as their *Christos* "have not been 'replaced' or 'disinherited' or 'substituted'". His "incorporative christology" emphasizes that, for Paul, Jesus is the continuation of Israel in the latter days and that all Christ-followers, whether messianic Jews or gentiles, together compose latter-day Israel.[10] In this regard, Wright affirms that there is only one redeemed people of God/family of Abraham and that Jesus the Jewish *Christos*/messiah is the only eschatological mediator of salvation.[11] As such, he does not affirm a two covenant system (Torah and Jesus).[12]

Even if Wright is correct that technically his view is not supersessionist, it would still seem to hold socio-cultural ramifications. His "incorporative christology" raises the question as to the value that Jewish ethnic identity would have held not least within the multi-ethnic *ekklēsiai* of Paul's and John's Christ-followers. This question comes to the forefront in Wright's view that all ethnicities are incorporated into the Jewish national identity "Israel" through faith in the Jewish *Christos*, Jesus of Nazareth. However, I suggest that Paul in particular does not view the corporate identity "Israel" as being transferable to gentile communities of *Christos*-followers. Rather, it is his distinctive use of the term *ekklēsia* as a trans-local, corporate identity for his multi-ethnic communities (Jews and gentiles) that served to incorporate gentiles into the *qāhāl* (supra-local *Ekklēsia*) of Israel (during its desert wanderings) even though they are not part of the ethnic *'am* (nation/Israel) of the Jewish people.

3.2. Supersessionism, Anti-Judaism(s), Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?

The corpus of the New Testament in general has been tied to anti-Semitic (or anti-Judaic) interpretations throughout the ages, which some have claimed even formed interpretive foundations upon which were built theological justifications for the Holocaust. These are high interpretive stakes indeed. However, these stakes are not only planted within modern history. Ancient historical readings are also affected. Dunn (1999, p. 179) observes that if anti-Semitic "attitudes are already inseparable from the scriptures on which they are based . . . [then] does the attitude of post-70 NT documents indicate that the final

breach, the decisive parting of the ways between Christianity and (rabbinic) Judaism has already happened?" Any answer to Dunn's question requires a nuanced review of Jewish and "Christian" relations relative to region, historical era, source reliability (e.g., elite bias in literary artefacts) and in the avoidance of anachronistic terminology (e.g., Christian, Christianity).

4. Definitions: Religion, Judaism(s), Jew/ishness, Christianity, Christian, Church/*Ekklēsia*

4.1. Religion

Modern (re)constructions of ancient "Judaism" and "Christianity" imply some sort of cohesive social reality called "religion", which was somehow separable from one's ethnic, cultural, national, and familial value structures. This is an anachronistic historical reconstruction. With respect to the term "religious", Bruce Malina (2009, p. 170) states that "the social institutions known as religion and economics did not exist as discrete, self-standing, independent institutions in antiquity. In antiquity, there were only two focal, freestanding social institutions: kinship and politics, yielding domestic economy, domestic religion, political economy, and political religion". Anders Runesson (2012, p. 213) suggests three social levels upon which "religion" "played out" in antiquity: "a. Public level (civic/state/empire concerns); b. Semi-Public level/Association level (voluntary groups/cults and their concerns); c. Private level (domestic, familial concerns)". Steve Mason (2007, pp. 482–88) identifies six aspects of "religion" that apply to each of Runesson's three social levels, which were intrinsically interconnected in everyday life in early antiquity: *ethnos*, cult, philosophy, kinship traditions/domestic worship, astrology/magic and voluntary association (collegia/*thiasoi*)". Thus, unlike modern terminological usages, one can see the veracity in Brent Nongbri's (2013) claims that in antiquity there was no conceptual category that could be designated as "religious" as opposed to "secular"; all of ancient life was inextricably interwoven with religiosity. Thus, when speaking of first century realities, the terms "Judaism" and "Christianity" are reductionist and inappropriate.

4.2. Judaism(s)

If one does choose to speak of "Judaism", then the most one can intend thereby is the definition of "common Judaism" offered by E. P. Sanders (1992, pp. 11–12): "common Judaism [is] that of the ordinary priest and the ordinary people . . . Common is defined as what is agreed among the parties, and agreed among the populace as a whole". More specifically, Sanders (1992, p. 241) states that "common Judaism" is the convergence of four beliefs among first century CE Jews: "belief that their God was the only true God, that he had chosen them and had given them his law, and that they were required to obey it" and that "the temple was the visible, functioning symbol of God's presence with his people and it was also the basic rallying point of Jewish loyalties". John Barclay (1996, p. 430) claims that among Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora, "common Judaism" continued the "biblical demand for 'monolatry' . . . [that is,] Jews may worship God only according to Jewish traditions".

Notwithstanding the common belief structure that undergirded the various sects within "common Judaism", the elephant in the room still needs to be addressed: "What exactly are we talking about when we talk about 'Judaism'?" (Boyarin 2019, p. xi). I have already suggested that there was no such thing as a religion that could be separated from the three social levels that were interconnected in everyday life realities such as *ethnos*, cult, philosophy, kinship traditions/domestic worship, astrology/magic, and voluntary association (collegia/*thiasoi*).

However, the question still needs to be asked as to whether within the ethnic/cultural life of Jews/Judeans there was such a thing as a consistent, integrated religious/ritualistic category one could call "Judaism"? Many biblical studies scholars have shifted away from using the term "Judaism" and taken to talking about "Judaisms" instead. That there are "Judaisms" is true not least from a diachronic perspective on the development of Jewish

ethno-religious culture throughout the centuries (e.g., Second Temple Judaism, rabbinic Judaism, medieval Judaism). A synchronic analysis of the Second Temple period reveals sectarian diversity (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Theraputae) within the unity of what Sanders calls "common Judaism".

Despite this unified diversity, Boyarin (2019, p. xi) claims it is still problematic to use the term "Judaism": "There is no word in premodern Jewish parlance that means: 'Judaism' . . . [and that] when the term *Ioudaïsmos* appears in non-Christian Jewish writing—to my knowledge only in 2 Maccabees—it doesn't mean 'Judaism', the 'religion', but the entire complex of loyalties and practices, including dress, speech and also sacrifice, that mark off the people of Judea (what we now call 'Jewishness')". Boyarin (2019, p. xi) cites the apostle Paul as a prime example. He notes that "although [Paul nee Saul], for sure, [is] a *Ioudaios* and remaining one forever, he only uses *Ioudaïsmos* as something from which he has distanced himself, from which he is other as it is (now) other to him; it clearly no longer has for him quite the sense it had in Maccabees".

4.3. Jew/ish/ness

While Boyarin provides a succinct definition of "Jewishness" (as a definition of *Ioudaïsmos*), Mark Nanos offers a more expansive definition, one which integrates universal continuity with particularized diversity, as does Sanders in his definition of "common Judaism", that applies across the diversity of "Judaism(s)", so to speak. Nanos suggests that (Nanos 2014, pp. 27–28):

> [T]he adjective "Jewish" is used both to refer to those who are Jews ethnically and to the behavior generally associated with the way that Jews live, albeit variously defined, such as by different interpretations of Scripture and related traditions, different views of who represents legitimate authority, and different conclusions about what is appropriate for any specified time and place. The behavior can be referred to by the adverb "Jewishly", and as the expression of "Jewishness". In colloquial terms, one who practices a Jewish way of life according to the ancestral customs of the Jews, which is also referred to as practicing "Judaism", might be called a "good" Jew.

Throughout this study, I will use the term "Jew/Jewish" rather than "Judean", in contradistinction to Steve Mason's approach. Mason (2007, pp. 457–512) asserts that *Ioudaikos* is better translated as "Judean" rather than the traditional "Jewish". Mason applies the same rationale to his choice to translate *Ioudaios* as "Judean" rather than as "Jew". Anders Runesson (2008, pp. 64–70) provides a judicious critique of Mason's position, particularly as it relates to (1) Mason's "terminological distinction between ancient contexts . . . and the late antique and modern situation", and (2) "the name of the place associated with Jews", that is Judea.

4.4. Christian

Steve Friesen (2006, p. 142) speaks to the problem of using the term "Christian" anachronistically when reading John's Apocalypse: "Our use of 'Christian' to describe Revelation is a powerful and pervasive retrojection that warps our analysis of the first century by subtly redefining the churches as opposed to, and superior to, Judaism". Although his use of the anachronistic term "church" lessens the force of his critique, in another (earlier) article (Rudolph 2005, pp. 351–73), he enacts his critique by using John's own terminology such that he uses "saints" to talk about Christ-followers and "assemblies", rather than "church", when translating *ekklēsiai*.

In this book, the term "Christ-followers" (also known as followers of the Jewish *Christos*/messiah) functions as a technical designation for members of the Jesus movement during the first century CE. I have chosen to use "Christ-follower" rather than "Christ-believer" because it represents not just beliefs but also practice. I reserve use of the term "Christian" for Late Antique Christ-followers (most of whom no longer valued or understood their Jewish roots as followers of Jesus as the *Christos*/Jewish Messiah).

In this respect, I would also translate the four New Testament occurrences of the Greek term *Christianos* as "Christ-follower", rather than as "Christian" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16; Did. 12:4).[13] It is of interest to note that while both the book of Revelation and the epistle of 1 Peter are addressed to Christ-followers in Asia Minor, they do not use the same group identity terminology. 1 Peter uses the pluralistic identity *Christianoi* for his predominantly Jewish Christ-followers in diasporic Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Roman Asia and Bithynia (1 Pet 1:1). John uses the collective term *ekklēsia*, but never *Christianoi*, for his (predominantly Jewish) associations in Roman Asia (Rev 2–3). What might be a potential rationale for this social identity phenomenon?

While the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence, it is instructive to note that the term *Christianos* only occurs in the book of *Acts* when other ethnicities are depicted as being allowed entrance into a Jewish sub-group of Christ-followers whose apostolic loyalty lies with the apostles in Jerusalem (e.g., Greeks in Antioch, 11:26; Herod Agrippa (Idumean) and Festus (Roman) in Palestine; 26:28).[14] If this silence represents social reality, then one can see why Paul did not use *Christianos* as a social identity for his Christ-follower associations. He required a group identity moniker that had no socio-religious ties to the apostles in Jerusalem. The word *ekklēsia* would have allowed him to keep his multi-ethnic Christ-followers socio-religiously connected to the Jewish roots of Jerusalem-loyal Christ-followers, while at the same time implicitly tying them to his apostolic authority and to the fulfillment of his divinely mandated mission to those of non-Jewish ethnicity. If Paul is distinctive among the early apostles in having adopted *ekklēsia* as an ongoing group identity, then John's use of *ekklēsia* when addressing the seven Christ-follower associations in Roman Asia implies that those communities had existing socio-religious ties to the apostolic authority of Paul, rather than to Peter and/or James.[15]

To what do I attribute the above thesis? In *Acts*, we are told that the sub-group identity *Christianoi* originated in Antioch. Its genesis occurs only after the exodus of exclusively Jewish *Christos*-followers from Jerusalem to faraway regions such as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Cyrene. They were escaping the persecution in connection with Stephen's martyrdom. Of these, some Jewish *Christos*-followers from Cyprus and Cyrene stopped telling the Gospel only to Jews (11:19) and shared it with Greeks in Antioch, with the result being that "a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (11:20).

If that is the case, then what might have been the prior group identity of those Jewish *Christos*-followers from Jerusalem? Some scholars suggest that they self-designated pluralistically as *hoi hagioi* ("the holy ones").[16] However, it would seem that with the addition of Greeks (gentiles), their exclusively Jewish identity moniker (*hoi hagioi*) would no longer have been tenable for this newly formed multi-ethnic association of *Christos*-followers in Antioch. The term *Christianoi* would have been quite fitting given the new socio-ethnic realities of the Antiochean community. First, it maintained their indelible rootedness in a Jewish heritage (i.e., followers of the Jewish messiah/*Christos*). Second, its semantic range was broad enough to allow for gentile inclusion (i.e., *Christianos* indicates a follower of the Jewish *Christos*, while maintaining boundary permeability regarding the ethnicity of that *Christos*-follower).

However, as I have already suggested, *Christianoi* could not function universally as a group designation, especially for those *Christos*-followers committed to the gentile mission of Paul. This is true not least in respect of the fact that the *Christianoi* of Antioch held their primary apostolic allegiance with the apostles of Jerusalem (e.g., Acts 11:19; 1 Peter 4:16). Thus, Paul would have needed a new collective group identity for his gentile mission. Paul chose *ekklēsia*.[17]

If *ekklēsia* was "free" as a Jewish communal identity in the hellenized Diaspora, as Trebilco (2011, p. 456) suggests, then it would have served Paul's missional needs admirably given its roots within both Greek and Jewish civic cultures. Paul's use of *ekklēsia* as a sub-group designation appears to have gained traction by the late first century CE given its use by other Christ-follower sub-groups, such as the communities of Matthew (Matt 16:18; 18:17), the "elder" John (3 John 6, 9), and the "prophet" John (Rev 2–3). Given that John

also addresses his letter to *ekklēsia* associations, it would seem logical to assume that any scholarly findings relative to the social, political, and religious implications of Paul having designated his communities as *ekklēsiai* should also serve to inform our understandings of Greco-Roman and Jewish perceptions in Roman Asia of John's *ekklēsiai* to whom he addresses his "revelation of Jesus Christ".

4.5. Christianity

It is in late antiquity that we see the political mission of (the almost exclusively gentile) Christ-followers reach its pinnacle with the edict of Theodosius I that all subjects of the Roman empire should worship the Christian God (380 CE). Daniel Boyarin (2003, p. 77), among others,[18] claims that this formal decree represents the birth of "religion" as a separate social category and of a "religion" that is now known as "Christianity".[19] Institutional representation of this "religion" fell to "the Catholic Church" (*katholikē ekklēsia*),[20] with the religious rituals being enacted within purpose-built structures that also were called "churches" (*ekklēsiai*). This fourth century CE conception of *ekklēsia* as a religious organization and as religious buildings ("church"), however, was a far cry from how the word *ekklēsia* ("assembly") is used in the New Testament.

4.6. Church/Ekklēsia

As I have just noted, "church" is not a helpful translation for the Greek word *ekklēsia*. The late antique addition of the concepts of "organization" and "building" to the semantic domain of *ekklēsia*, which the English word "church" also includes, makes "church" an anachronistic term. As such, in this book, I will either transliterate the Greek word (*ekklēsia*) or translate *ekklēsia* as "assembly/gathering/meeting". The civic *ekklēsia* of Classical, Hellenistic, and Imperial timeframes was a regularly convened, juridically defined event during which members of the dēmos (the gathered citizenry)[21] assembled at a particular time (e.g., every 36 or 39 days (Classical Athens)) and location (e.g., agora (civic market place)) to carry out specific governmental functions as directed by the boulē (civic councilors). There is a long history of interaction between boulai and dēmoi within *ekklēsiai* as described in both literary and epigraphic sources. These date from the 5th century BCE into the Imperial period. Literary sources include but are not limited to Plato (429–347 BCE),[22] Xenophon (c. 430–355 BC),[23] and Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE).[24] Epigraphic sources that mention *ekklēsiai* i span the centuries (5th century BCE to the early 3rd century CE) and hail from geographically diverse regions such as the Aegean Islands (e.g., Delos),[25] central Greece (e.g., Delphi),[26] and Asia Minor (e.g., Pisidia[27] and Caria[28]).[29]

The English words "assembly/gathering/meeting" have a broad enough semantic domain to communicate the three primary meanings of *ekklēsia* found within Greek (epigraphic and literary), Jewish (literary), and Christ-follower (literary) sources: (1) a formal or informal assembly/gathering/meeting for discussion and decision-making purposes; (2) a temporary group designation (*ekklēsia*) during the duration of that group's gathering within an *ekklēsia* (assembly/gathering/meeting); and (3) only in Philo (Virt. 108) and in New Testament writings is *ekklēsia* used as a permanent, ongoing group designation even when they disperse at the conclusion of their *ekklēsia* ("assembly").[30] This third fact means that the Greek semantic domain for *ekklēsia* was insufficient by itself to fulfill Paul's need for a group identity by which to designate in an ongoing fashion his sub-group of Christos-followers. Only in Philo do we find extant evidence of an ancient precedent for Paul's *ekklēsia* identity project: a semi-public association that self-identified in an ongoing fashion as an *ekklēsia*.

However, one might ask what rhetorical end this third meaning of *ekklēsia* served relative to the mission of Christos-followers generally and the gentile/Greco-Roman mission of Paul specifically? *Ekklēsia* is used in Jewish sources as a supra-local descriptor (the "assembly/congregation" of Israel during their desert wanderings) and as a local descriptor (a Jewish sub-group/association, e.g., Philo, Virt. 108; cf. Hebrew equivalent

qāhāl in 4QMMT, the Damascus Document [CD 7:17, 11:22, 12:6]).[31] This reality suggests the possibility also of identifying *ekklēsia* as a Jewish synagogue/community term, not only as a Greek civic term.

The Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds for *ekklēsia* usage are both of equal importance in providing missional relevance for Paul's communities with Greco-Roman and Jewish outsiders (and insiders). However, the civic Greek *ekklēsia* in and of itself could not provide Paul with a sufficient precedent for permanently designating a non-civic group (e.g., an association) as an *ekklēsia*. This is because there is no extant example in the inscriptional, papyrological, or literary records of a non-Jewish association self-designating collectively as an *ekklēsia*.[32] There is only one source that holds promise in this regard, and it is a Jewish literary one (Virt. 108).

The above supra-local and local Jewish usages of the term *ekklēsia* gave Paul a ready-made solution for a key ethno-religious conundrum: If gentiles could not collectively assume the designation "Israel" yet, through faith in the Jewish *Christos*, could share in historic Israel's covenantal benefits, then Paul's designation of his multi-ethnic communities as *ekklēsiai* i provided them with an inherently Jewish collective identity other than "Israel" by which he could institutionally integrate gentiles qua gentiles into theological continuity with Torah observant Jews qua Jews.[33]

In other (Hebrew) words, in analogous fashion to the supra-local identity of God's people during the desert wanderings (i.e., the *Ekklēsia* of Israel), gentiles can become part of the qāhāl[34] (the socio-political *Ekklēsia* /assembly (of Israel)) but not part of the 'am (the ethnic people/nation of Israel).[35]

5. Conclusions

It was my intent in this editorial to provide an introduction to this Special Issue on post-supersessionist readings of New Testament writings. My key priority in this regard was to clarify terminology and theology that is relevant for discussions on the interplay between Judaism(s) and early *Christos*-followers in the 1st century Roman *imperium*. In order better to facilitate that end, I have replicated the appropriate sections on terminology from my volume *Reading Revelation After Supersessionism* that is published in the series New Testament After Supersessionism (Cascade Books). Specifically, it was my goal to explore how our terminological choices either assist or resist our ability theologically, ideologically, socially, culturally, and/or politically to emplace Jews and Gentiles, who are followers of the Jewish *Christos*/Messiah, into God's eternal covenant with Israel. It is my hope that one's ability more clearly to read New Testament texts through non-supersessionist "lenses" has been enhanced as a result of this introduction.

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Notes

1 The ensuing content is republished from Korner (2020, pp. 5–26) and is used with permission (www.wipfandstock.com).

2 Cited from the webpage of the Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology (spostst.org; accessed on 15 October 2019), which is also the definition of post-supersessionism cited for the Cascade book series, *New Testament After Supersessionism*.

3 For a discussion of the similarities and differences between scholars in the New Perspective and Beyond the New Perspective (BNP) "camps", see Tucker (2011, pp. 7–10). BNP scholars include but are not limited to William S. Campbell, Kathy Ehrensperger, Anders Runesson, Magnus Zetterholm, Mark Nanos, David Rudolph, Pamela Eisenbaum, John Gager, Stanley Kent Stowers, Lloyd Gaston, Krister Stendahl, Markus Barth, Markus Bockmuehl, and J. Brian Tucker (Tucker 2011, p. 8).

4 David Rudolph argues for the inclusion of a Messianic Jewish perspective in Christian theology (Rudolph 2005, pp. 58–84). Rudolph envisions a five-fold post-supersessionist perspective which Messianic Jews would bring to Christian theology: "(1) God's covenant fidelity to the Jewish people, (2) that Jesus was Israel's Messiah and participated in the unique identity of the God of Israel, (3) that the *besorah* (gospel) was for Jews and Gentiles, (4) that Jesus-believing Gentiles were full members of God's people without becoming Jews, and (5) that Jesus-believing Jews should continue to live as Jews in keeping with Israel's calling to be a distinct and enduring nation" (http://mjstudies.squarespace.com/about-post-supersessionist/; accessed 29 January 2012).

5 Zoccali states that Nanos and Campbell appear to presume that "while the church existed for Paul under the umbrella of Israel, in as much as it consists of Jewish and gentile Christ followers it can equally be seen as a larger entity encompassing both Israel and the nations" (Zoccali 2010, p. 135). See also Nanos (2000, p. 221) and Campbell (2006, p. 138). For a volume which extensively explores the inter-relationship between first century CE Jewish Christ-followers and a Jewish heritage, see Skarsaune and Hvalvik (2007, pp. 3–418).

6 Campbell notes that one cannot merely distinguish Israel from the Church in the conviction that God's purposes for historical Israel are not yet fully realized. One must rather establish to what degree Israel and the (predominantly gentile) church universal are mutually distinct entities in Paul's theology.

7 For an assessment of Campbell's argument, see Korner (2009) for an on-line review of Campbell (2006).

8 Campbell makes this point very clear in his analysis of Paul's discussion on the weak and the strong in Romans 14:1–15:13. Campbell (2010, p. 188) states that Paul "feels obliged to make it clear that accommodation to those living a Jewish way of life, far from being in conflict with his gospel, is demanded by it, if the conviction of fellow Christ-followers so requires".

9 Justin Martyr (second century CE) is one example. Justin promotes the view that his followers and their social and cultural identities supersede those of Trypho and his fellow Jews.

10 The importance of this topic to Wright is evident in the fact that he dedicates his largest chapter of his two-volume work to it (chapter 10, 268 pages) and a significant section of the next chapter (chapter 11, 225 pages) (Wright 2013, 2.774–1042 and 2.1043–1268, respectively).

11 Wright (2013, 2.830) claims that "Paul sees Jesus . . . [as] the True Jew, the one in whom Israel's vocation has been fulfilled".

12 For one example of a "two-covenant" perspective, see Eisenbaum (2009).

13 *Did.* 12:4 uses *Christianos* as insider terminology to instruct an itinerant preacher that he should live "as a *Christianos* . . . not idle" (πῶς μὴ ἀργὸς μεθ᾽ ὑμῶν ζήσεται Χριστιανός).

14 For an extensive review of the term *Christianos*, see Trebilco (2012, pp. 272–97).

15 For my rationale for claiming that Paul originated the use of the term *ekklēsia* as an ongoing group designation in the Jesus Movement, see Korner (2017a, pp. 156–73).

16 For a detailed discussion of the term *hoi hagioi* and its use as a group identity by early Christ-followers loyal to or associated with Jerusalem, see Trebilco (2012, pp. 104–37). *Acts* and some of the Pauline epistles both imply that *hoi hagioi* is an actual sub-group designation adopted by non-Pauline communities in the early Jesus Movement (e.g., Acts 9:13; Rom 15:25, 26, 31). Trebilco (2012, p. 134) argues that the Aramaic-speaking Christ-followers referenced in *Acts* originally chose to self-designate as *hoi hagioi* because of that term's historic association with the eschatological "people of the *hoi hagioi*" in Daniel 7.

17 This point becomes even more convincing if one grants the point that the use of *ekklēsia* in *Acts* is evidence of provincialism (not anachronism) on the part of the redactor (Luke?) for the sake of clearer regionally specific communication to his benefactor, Theophilus. Theophilus's potential residence was in Macedonia, which had provincially distinct ways of naming an *ekklēsia* (i.e., *ennomos ekklēsia*; cf. Acts 19:39). See a full discussion on the phrase *ennomos ekklēsia* and its connection to the Hellenic regions of Phokis and Thessaly, near Macedonia, in Korner (2017a, pp. 159–60).

18 Brent Nongbri (2013) argues that the absence of the "secular" in pre-modern, non-Western contexts makes "religion" a uniquely modern, Western concept. For a judicious critique of Nongbri's conceptual paradigm, see Laughlin and Zathureczky (2015, pp. 235–36).

19 Boyarin's argument for the birth of "religion" as a social category is not a social-scientific argument based on the differentiation of proscribed descriptive and prescribed redescriptive discourse (e.g., Nongbri). Rather, he bases it upon the historically specific context of the fourth century CE. See Daniel Schwartz (2014, pp. 91–99), however, who offers fourteen examples from Josephus, where the Greek word *threskia* is best translated as "religion" rather than as a religious activity such as "worship", "cult", or "ceremony".

20 Inscriptional occurrences of *katholikē ekklēsia* include references (1) to a building (*Pan du désert* 27; 340/1 CE: ὁ κατασκευάσας ἐνταῦθα καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν); (2) to an institutionalized organization (*IGLSyr* 5 2126; n.d.; [ὡς ἐνετύπωσεν(?) ὁ θεοτίμητος Γρηγόρι]ος ἡμῶν πατριά[ρχης], [κατὰ τοὺς ἱεροὺς κανόνας(?) τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκ]λησίας·); and (3) in the non-universal sense, to a regional community of Christians (*RIChrM* 235; Makedonia [Edonis], Philippoi; fourth century CE: τῆς καθολικῆς καὶ ἀποστολικῆς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας Φιλιππησίων).

21 When the term δῆμος (*dēmos*) occurs within an enactment formula (e.g., ἔδοξε δήμωι) that was motioned and approved before an ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), δῆμος always refers to the body of the full citizenry in Athens that was gathered for the purpose of conducting civic business (Rhodes and Lewis 1997, p. 93).

22 Plato writes about a civic *ekklēsia* thirteen times.

23 Xenophon mentions a civic *ekklēsia* twenty times.

24 Plutarch speaks of a civic *ekklēsia* 142 times.

25 For example, *IDelos* 1502 (Delos, 148/7 BCE) reads, δεδόχθαι τεῖ [βουλεῖ τοὺς λαχόν]τας προέδρους εἰς [τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν ἐκκλησίαν] χρηματίσαι περὶ [τούτων].

[26] For example, *FD* III 4:47 (Delphi, 98 CE).

[27] For example, *Mon. Ant.* 23.1914.259, 172 (Pisidia, Sagalassos, fourth/third century BCE).

[28] For example, *BCH* 1972, 435–36 (Caria, found at Aphrodisias, second/first century BCE).

[29] For discussion of *ekklēsia* mentions in Greek inscriptions, see esp. Korner (2017a, pp. 22–79).

[30] See my full analysis of how *ekklēsia* was used in Greek, Jewish, and Christ-follower contexts (Korner 2017a).

[31] Within CD, *qĕhal* occurs at 7.17 ("the King is the assembly"), 11.22 ("trumpets of the assembly"), and 12.6 ("he may enter the assembly").

[32] See my discussion in Korner (2017a, pp. 52–68).

[33] By "gentiles qua gentiles", I mean that gentiles could become fully constituted followers of the Jewish *Christos* without being required to become Jewish proselytes and/or take up any one, or all, of the Jewish covenantal identity markers such as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and festival observances.

[34] Within the ancient *qāhāl*/*ekklēsia* there were those who were not members of the people of Israel (*'am*). Not dissimilarly, Paul's *ekklēsiai* comprised individuals who belonged to the people of Israel (i.e., the ethnically defined *'am*) and individuals who did not belong to the *'am*/ethnic Israel. This provides at least one rationale for why *ekklēsia* functioned well as a group designation for Paul's communities: *ekklēsia* had the ability to create a collective entity (in the Jewish *Christos*) without erasing distinction between Israel and the nations.

[35] See further in Korner (2017b, p. 128).

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Article

Paradigms, Terminology, and Exegesis: Toward the Nonsupersessionist Reading of the New Testament

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Abstract: Interpretation of the New Testament (NT) in general and the Pauline corpus in particular still appears to be at a crossroads. Scholars continue to publish articles and monographs in binary opposition to one another. The terminology used to designate the overarching perspectives of these binary publications sharply contrasts a "traditional" perspective (Protestant in general, and Lutheran in particular) with a variously named "new" or "radical new" perspective. Most recently, beyond the imprecise "new" terminology, the non-traditional perspective is being referred to as the "post-supersessionist", "nonsupersessionist", or "within Judaism" perspective and is still strongly being contested. Historically speaking, these antithetical perspectives cannot both be completely correct. Arguably, then, the time has come to explore what the study of Kuhnian paradigms might reveal about this state of affairs in NT scholarship. Most important, in proffering a twofold hermeneutical way forward that is focused on better understanding the emic perspective of the texts that we interpret—to the extent humanly possible—it is hoped that we might become more keenly aware of the ethical implications of our paradigms, terminology, and exegesis for those who rely on our work for their understanding and appropriation of the Scriptures in their everyday living.

Keywords: paradigms; terminology; binary; exegesis; hermeneutical; new perspective(s); postsupersessionist; nonsupersessionist; within Judaism; ethical implications

1. Introduction

Recently, two collections of essays were published that essentially celebrate the decades-long emergence of what they explicitly refer to as the postsupersessionist[1] or within Judaism[2] reading of the New Testament in general, and the Pauline corpus in particular, as a corrective paradigm shift (Nanos and Zetterholm 2015; Boccaccini and Segovia 2016). However, shortly thereafter, Hagner, a senior scholar of these very same texts, published a monograph in which he acknowledges the unquestionable Jewishness of the NT and its underlying continuity with the OT[3] up front, but then emphatically argues against the within Judaism perspective throughout the rest of his monograph (Hagner 2018). Upon critiquing the a priori convictions of what he calls "the within-Judaism movement", Hagner's own starting presupposition is that "the preponderance of relatively clear texts favors the traditional understanding of Paul and indeed makes the Paul-within-Judaism reading of the NT far less than convincing" (Hagner 2018, p. 10).

Ironically, at the very end of his monograph, Hagner emphasizes that "an easy supersessionism is not an option" precisely because the very notion of supersessionism would have been considered as wholly inappropriate and unacceptable by the NT writers (Hagner 2018, p. 174). However, in his painstaking efforts to highlight the newness of the NT, he ultimately concludes that (1) there is "plenty in Romans that can raise the question of

whether Israel still has a role in God's purposes"; (2) Paul's "indictment not only of the Gentiles but also of the Jews in the opening chapters of Romans has the effect of demolishing the distinction between Jews and Gentiles (2:25–29; cf. Gal. 3:28)"; (3) "the new wine of Christianity cannot ultimately be contained within the framework of Judaism"; and (4) "Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism" (Hagner 2018, pp. 20–21, 115, 174, 179). Hagner goes so far as to acknowledge that his conclusion will be taken negatively by most Jews as both insensitive and potentially anti-Semitic, but speaking in the first person emphasizes that "to my mind this is the most accurate and effective way to describe the issue before us" and "I mean it, however, in a highly positive sense" (Hagner 2018, p. 21).

Given his long-term commitment to the so-called traditional perspective, I would suggest that Hagner is paradigmatically incapable of seeing that his conclusion is not highly positive but highly negative and clearly supersessionist, no matter how much he punctuates his work with qualified positive statements about Jews and Judaism. Rather, in its essence, his conclusion is virtually identical to that of Goppelt: "Christianity is the abolishing fulfillment of Judaism" (Goppelt 1954, p. 315 as cited in Räisänen [1983] 2010, p. 2). In fact, Hagner's aforementioned statement that the Jew–Gentile distinction is effectively demolished in the ekklēsia[4] contradicts the Scriptures' own portrayal of how God has only ever and always worked in history through Israelite and later Jewish particularism with an international horizon involving an eschatological outcome of reciprocal dependence (i.e., interdependence) and mutual blessing between Israel *as* Israel and the nations *as* the nations.[5] It must be emphasized here that I think Hagner's downplaying or erasure of the Jew–Gentile distinction in Messiah is, among other things, a result of his misinterpretation of Gal. 3:28 as an instance of absolute negation: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua. Thus, in my hermeneutical discussion of Gal. 3:28 at the end of this essay, I focus attention on dialectical negation as a hermeneutical key that not only provides a more profound understanding of Gal. 3:28 and select cognate passages but of Scripture in general and the NT in particular. All of this said, what I find most troubling in Hagner's monograph is his claim that the "the so-called 'historical' readings of the Paul-within-Judaism scholars can often make sense of the Pauline texts only by means of a tortuous exegesis" (Hagner 2018, p. 9).

Surely, such binary opposition and conflictual assertions between scholars warrants a deeper look to determine whether the exegesis associated with this paradigm shift is truly tortuous (i.e., self-convoluting to force the texts into the nonsupersessionist, within Judaism perspective), or whether the attempt to determine the plausibility of the nonsupersessionist, within Judaism paradigm by scholars inured to the traditional paradigm is torturous (i.e., self-engendering of painful cognitive dissonance leading to the pertinacious defense of the traditional paradigm). Moreover, it also appears apposite to determine the extent to which our choices of terminology contribute to our antithetical perspectives. At stake here are the ethical implications of our exegesis, for our exegetical work is humanly appropriated and expressed in theologies, biblical interpretations, sermons, and the everyday thought, speech, behavior, actions, modes of existence, and living of followers of Jesus Messiah.[6]

That this binary opposition is a persistent problem is evidenced by the fact that in the late 20th century, Räisänen had already rightly asked what one was to make of the fact that even in a time when all the historical–critical apparatus was available, learned scholars like, for example, Cranfield and Käsemann could propose diametrically opposed views of Paul's intentions. Räisänen was deeply disturbed by the fact that "each interpreter suggested that if you rejected *their way of seeing it* (emphasis mine), they were dangerously misusing Paul's theology" (Räisänen [1983] 2010, p. 3). But, what if the problem actually is the inability to see "another perspective" precisely because of one's resolute commitment

to an already long-established perspective?[7] As it turns out, this is precisely what the study of paradigms in other fields has revealed.

In that the term "paradigm shift" is rightly and often employed now to describe this state of affairs in NT scholarship, in this article, I provide a concise but comprehensive overview of Kuhn's insightful work on paradigms (Kuhn [1962] 2012, 1977)[8] with the aim that we might labor all the more assiduously in our exegesis "to enter and indwell the biblical author's optical space, learning to see" as they saw (Bockmuehl 2006, p. 21). This overview includes a concise but rather comprehensive definition and description of paradigms and paradigm shifts, an explanation of why we must understand and scrutinize our and others' paradigms, a discussion of our choices of terminology and how they might contribute to our competing perspectives, and a discussion of the priority of paradigms in theology and biblical studies. I then close out the article by proffering a twofold hermeneutical way forward toward the nonsupersessionist reading of the NT.[9] To ensure that this is not viewed as an idealistic theorization, I then demonstrate the actual praxis of this twofold hermeneutical way forward utilizing Gal. 3:28 as my example. This closing section of the article specifically includes the proffering of two coined hermeneutical terms and concepts, "The Primary Heschelian Hermeneutic" and "The Primary Torrancean Hermeneutic", as well as a discussion of dialectical negation as a hermeneutical key to a fuller and thus better contextual understanding of Gal. 3:28.

2. Definition and Description of Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts

The concise summary of Kuhn's theses about paradigms by Hacking in the introduction to the 50th edition of *Structure* makes for easy learning. It is therefore coupled with information from the original monograph in this essay in order better to represent the holistic nature of Kuhn's contribution.[10] It all begins with the notion of "normal science" being practiced by a community of scientists dedicated to "solving puzzles" according to an established (i.e., traditional) shared paradigm. Theologians and exegetes need simply replace the terms "normal science" and "community of scientists" with "normal theology/exegesis" and "community of theologians/exegetes" to appropriate this overview of Kuhnian paradigms and paradigm shifts. A shared paradigm might be simply understood as the entire constellation of conceptional, observational, and instrumental commitments of a group of scientists (Kuhn [1962] 2012, pp. 43, 181). To clarify this even further, Kuhn later explained that he meant the entire constellation of beliefs, values, practices, and concrete puzzle-solutions as examples or models shared by a group of scientists (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 174). Serious anomalies eventually arise when scientists recognize that something they are studying somehow violates the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 53).[11] This leads to a crisis in the field (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. xi). When a paradigm is threatened by a crisis, the community of practitioners enters a state of disarray (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. xxv). The crisis is resolved by the establishment of a new paradigm (i.e., a paradigm shift); but by ensuring that the traditional paradigm is not too easily surrendered, resistance guarantees that scientists will not be easily distracted, and that the profound anomalies that lead to paradigm change will penetrate existing knowledge down to the core (Kuhn [1962] 2012, pp. xi, 65).

It must be emphasized that "normal science" does not aim at novelty and tends to discover what it expects to discover. Practitioners have a tendency to see what they expect, even when it is not there. Conversely, they have a tendency not to see what does not fit their paradigm (Kuhn [1962] 2012, pp. xxvi, 24). In fact, in telling the detailed story about the history of the paradigm-shifting discovery of oxygen, Kuhn highlighted the fact that Lavoisier was able to see in Priestley's experiments a gas that Priestley himself had been unable to see. Employing good root-cause analysis, Kuhn rightly observed

that it was because a major paradigm revision was needed to see what Lavoisier saw. Sadly, Priestley died never having seen what Lavoisier saw (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 57).[12] This is precisely why the understanding and scrutiny of paradigms is so important. It is also precisely why Kuhn rightly emphasized Selye's critical point that the basic scientist "must lack prejudice to a degree where they can look at the most 'self-evident' facts or concepts without necessarily accepting them, and, conversely, allow their imagination to play with the most unlikely possibilities" (Kuhn 1977, p. 226). The decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and this involves making a comparison of both paradigms with each other and with the phenomena scientists are studying or observing (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. xxvii). Moreover, while a theory must seem better than its competitors to be accepted as a paradigm, it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts with which it can be confronted (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 18).

A paradigm shift is perceived as costly to those who were committed to the traditional paradigm because the gain is achieved only by replacing some previous elements of the constellation of conceptional, observational, and instrumental commitments of the group (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 66). It may cost some scientists the revision or replacement of textbooks, monographs, or articles that they wrote through the lens of the previous paradigm. In fact, when a paradigm is shifted, most of the books and articles in which the old paradigm had been embodied become a fit subject for professional scrutiny (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 166). As if to provide a balm to ease the pain of this situation, Kuhn wisely emphasized that the paradigm-shifting process is not a simple line leading to the truth. Rather, it is the real-life instance of progress away from less-adequate conceptions of and interactions with that which we are studying, as well as the world (Kuhn [1962] 2012, pp. xi, 205). Kuhn also wisely warned that "the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced". He then graciously asserted that lifelong resistance, particularly from those whose productive careers have committed them to an older tradition of normal science, should not be viewed as a violation of scientific standards, but as an index of scientific research itself. Though some scientists, particularly the older and more experienced, may resist a new paradigm indefinitely, Kuhn held that most of them may be reached in one way or another (Kuhn [1962] 2012, pp. 150–51).

While Kuhn always thought that the metaphor of seeing as applied to paradigms was inadequate and should be replaced by some more literal mode of discourse (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 196), he nevertheless found it to be, and it remains, the metaphor of choice to explain paradigms and paradigm shifts (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 117).[13] In the scientific revolution of a paradigm shift, scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have never looked before. It is as if the professional community has been "suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and joined by unfamiliar ones as well". They see the entire world of their research engagement differently (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 111). When a scientific revolution occurs, and the normative tradition changes, the scientist's perception of their environment must be re-educated, and in some familiar situations, they must allow for transformations of their perception in which they see anew (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 112).

These transformations in the way scientists see their world in a scientific revolution are precisely what led Kuhn to the analogy of a switch in visual gestalt (a conceptual or perceptional switch from seeing the world one way to another completely different way). They are also what led him to highlight the value of the pioneering inversion goggles experiment to illustrate the nature of the perceptual transformations associated with paradigms. A description of the inversion goggles experiment is instructive for us all. A person who puts on the inversion goggles sees the entire world upside down. At first, the person's visual perceptual capability functions as it was trained to function without the

goggles. "The result is extreme disorientation and an acute personal crisis". However, after the person has begun to deal with their new world in the intervening period of extreme disorientation, their entire visual field flips over and they see just like they saw before they put the goggles on. Thus, quite literally speaking, the person who puts on inversion goggles—and leaves them on long enough—undergoes a revolutionary transformation of vision. This is akin to how putting on a new paradigm works if one engages it long enough to receive the transformation of vision (Kuhn [1962] 2012, pp. 112–13).

3. Our Choices of Terminology and Their Contribution to Competing Paradigms

A final topic that must be addressed in this overview of paradigms is the terminology that we choose to use in our work, what it means to us and others, and the extent to which it may contribute to our competing perspectives.[14] Since new paradigms are born from old ones, they typically incorporate much of the vocabulary and apparatus, both conceptual and systematically arranged, that the traditional paradigm had chosen to use. However, they rarely utilize the borrowed vocabulary and apparatus in the traditional manner. Within the new paradigm, old terms, concepts, and the like form new relationships with one another, or are associated with the topic of study differently. The inevitable result is a "misunderstanding" of sorts between the two competing perspectives that is directly due to the fact that communication across the paradigmatic divide is always partial and sometimes laborious (Kuhn [1962] 2012, pp. 148, 176). This, in turn, is because only those who have undergone, or failed to have undergone, the transformation of perspective together are able to ascertain what they concurred or did not concur about (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 148). Two people who perceive the thing they are studying very differently, but utilize the same terminology in their discussions, must by definition be using terms differently. Thus, their viewpoints become what Kuhn called "incommensurable" (i.e., incapable of strict comparison due to changes in the meaning of terms and concepts) (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 199). Kuhn contended that those who hold incommensurable viewpoints are akin to members of different language communities whose communication problems will only be resolved by translation (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 175). Demonstrating seasoned wisdom yet again, Kuhn asserted that if these members of different language communities can sufficiently refrain from explaining the "anomalies" that led to the paradigm change as "mere error or madness", they may in time learn to translate each other's paradigm (Kuhn [1962] 2012, p. 201).

When it comes to terminology in the field of biblical studies, I laud Runesson for asking what would happen to our overall perception if we translated "christianoi" in Acts 11:26 and 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16 with "messianics" and understood the term in the same sociocultural manner as we do "Pharisaioi" (Runesson 2015, p. 68). Given our emphasis on the importance of paradigms, I also laud him for asserting the following: "New discoveries, new understanding, are therefore, and must inescapably be, the result of our *conscious efforts to disentangle what we have encountered from the familiar that we know* (emphasis his). New insights are thus dependent on our willingness to de-familiarize ourselves with the phenomena we seek to understand" (Runesson 2015, pp. 56–57). I concur with Runesson regarding the abandonment of the terms "Christian", "Christianity", and "Church" (Runesson 2015, pp. 65–77), as I think it would truly lead to progress away from less adequate conceptions of and interactions with the very texts and sociohistorical realities that we are studying, as well as the world.

While Nanos and Runesson proffer "Apostolic Judaism" as "a descriptive term applicable to the early Jesus movement, including with respect to Paul and his communities" (Runesson 2015, p. 67), I find it preferable to follow the proposed translation of "christianoi"

and employ the term "Messianic Judaism".[15] The term "Messianic" would then simply be understood as meaning "of or pertaining to Messiah Jesus". If "Judaism" was then properly understood as a worldview and way of life (i.e., the way of the LORD as articulated in Gen. 18:19) that became "Messianic" when Jesus came (i.e., "I am the way [of the LORD]" as articulated in John 14:6a), then we could speak of Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles, one in Messiah, who have different responsibilities and callings from God as clearly shown in Acts 15:1–21 and 1 Cor. 7:17–24. As to the latter term, "Gentiles", often denounced as anachronistic, I concur with Schwartz that "our modern western language is necessarily inadequate to describe the realities of a radically different culture. But our job is precisely to translate and explain, which necessarily requires that we make use of inherently misleading modern language to describe our subjects. There is simply no choice" (Schwartz 2011, p. 238). Moreover, I think that "Gentiles" is an acceptable anachronism in contemporary scholarship as a non-negative term that allows us to speak of God's economy as involving "Israel and the nations" or "Jews and Gentiles" in what Soulen rightly refers to as a relationship of reciprocal dependence (i.e., interdependence) and mutual blessing (Soulen 1996, p. 134).

If such changes in our terminology were to be adopted, we would no longer speak of a "Christianity" against a "Judaism", but of a Judaism that has become "Messianic" (of or pertaining to Messiah Jesus). This is a Judaism in which Israelite or Jewish particularism is not erased, but rather complemented by its intended eschatological and international horizon as the nations are turned to YHWH (see Levenson [1996] 2002, p. 164). Willitts demonstrates a correct understanding of this reality in the new creation when, in discussing Rev. 19:6–9, he observes that the bride is restored Israel and the invited wedding guests are the nations (Willitts 2013, p. 253).

Finally, in this regard, it is my contention that Thiessen's astute attention to the weightiness of our choices in terminology in the opening chapter of his latest monograph on Paul is worthy of emulation (Thiessen 2023). First, he simply but profoundly asserts that "words matter". He then immediately proceeds to explain that "sometimes the most common words matter the most because they carry with them hidden assumptions that bear serious ideological or, in the case of a figure like Paul, theological weight". He then goes on to further explain how many less-than-common words and expressions he uses in the monograph in place of common words that were the result of his former "unthinking following of conventions from which [he] was too lazy or too ignorant to break away". He goes so far as to "repent" of his previous use of these common words (e.g., "Christian", "Christianity", "church", "Christ", and "apostle"). He then proceeds to proffer terms that I agree are less anachronistic and more historically representative of Paul's "Jewish messianism" (e.g., "Messiah loyalists", "Jewish Jesus followers", "gentile Jesus followers", "assembly", "gathering", "meeting", "community", "herald", "envoy", and "ambassador"). His explicit and serious concern is that in all of our efforts to make Paul's letters intelligible, we would avoid the danger of remaking Paul in our own image. He is rightly, with this essay, not interested in a "radically new reading" of Paul, but rather a "long lost reading" of Paul (Thiessen 2023, pp. 12–16, 76).

4. The Priority of Paradigms in the Fields of Theology and Biblical Studies

In the postscript to his classic monograph *Structure*, Kuhn acknowledged his surprise that many had read the main theses of his work and found them applicable to other fields. While seeing no direct application of the paradigm concept beyond science in 1962, just seven years later Kuhn closed his postscript by drawing attention to the need for the comparative study of corresponding communities in other fields. It is my contention

that Kuhn's important work on paradigms should be wholly integrated into the fields of theology and biblical studies. To a great extent it already has, as the following two examples show. May our commitment to lifelong learning—and the lifelong study and scrutiny of our and others' paradigms—truly lead to progress away from less adequate conceptions of and interactions with the very things we are studying, as well as the world.

4.1. The Priority of Paradigms in the Field of Theology

Arguably, primacy of place belongs to Green for establishing the priority of paradigms in the field of theology (Green 1989). His holistic treatment of the topic is a model for the field of biblical studies, as he focused his attention on Kuhn's description of the "shared paradigm" common to a community of scientists and recovered Kuhn's original meaning of the concept as referring to the constitutive pattern according to which something (as a puzzle) is organized as an irreducible whole-in-parts (Green 1989, p. 52). Green rightly emphasized that "the pattern, the peculiar way in which the components are organized into a coherent whole, is the essential point, the sine qua non for the consensus on which scientific research depends" (Green 1989, p. 52). He further noted that, in response to criticism, Kuhn later referred to what is shared by a community of scientists as a "disciplinary matrix". Green refined Kuhn's description of the "exemplar" in the disciplinary matrix, calling it the "ideal type that shows a pattern, a coherent nexus of relations" (Green 1989, p. 53). He then rightly emphasized that exemplars "signal the 'gestalt in which the situation is to be seen' and are therefore the means of bringing about 'a time-tested and group-licensed *way of seeing* (emphasis mine)'" (Green 1989, p. 48). Finally, Green rightly concluded that the term "paradigm", not "exemplar", should be preserved to communicate Kuhn's concept. He, in fact, reminded us that Kuhn himself acknowledged that he would have liked to have retained the term and only chose the term "exemplar" because he thought he had lost control of the word "paradigm" (Green 1989, p. 158).

4.2. The Priority of Paradigms in Biblical Studies

Arguably, primacy of place belongs to Zetterholm for establishing the priority of paradigms in the field of biblical studies, particularly when it comes to evaluating the competing perspectives for the interpretation of Paul (Zetterholm 2009).[16] Explicitly describing the work of Kuhn and appropriating it to write his concise but thorough history of the interpretation of Paul, Zetterholm rightly showed that the traditional interpretation of Paul has been considered the normal scientific paradigm which has not only determined the boundaries of scholarship on Paul, but which scholars have painstakingly confirmed in their work (Zetterholm 2009, p. 234). In explicating this paradigm, he devoted thirty-two pages to the discussion of Paul and history, thirty-four pages to the emergence of the traditional paradigm (which is Protestant in general, and Lutheran in particular), and twenty-five pages to the formation of the standard view of Paul. He rightly emphasized how the normal theological paradigm of *Paul against Judaism* (emphasis mine) played a critical role in the rise of the traditional paradigm (Zetterholm 2009, p. 234).

Very importantly, Zetterholm then began to discuss the notion of the "framework of interpretation" (Zetterholm 2009, pp. 235–40). This is something which I address below in dialogue with Torrance ([1983] 1992) in my proffering of a hermeneutical way forward to the nonsupersessionist reading of the NT in general, and of Gal. 3:28 in particular. Zetterholm rightly emphasized that despite the fact that the world of ideas constituting the natural background for the original readers is only partially known to us, every attempt to understand what Paul meant must also include a reconstruction of the symbolic world to which the texts refer (Zetterholm 2009, p. 236). After explaining the difficulties, limitations,

and tentative nature of that reconstruction, Zetterholm rightly focused our attention on the plausibility of interpretations (Zetterholm 2009, pp. 236–37).

He emphasized the fact that when it comes to evaluating the plausibility of competing interpretations, the degree to which a particular interpretation recommends itself depends on three main factors. The first among equals, so to speak, is the overarching perspective to which the scholar adheres. That is the *paradigm* (emphasis Zetterholm's) that determines which questions are relevant to ask and what answers are scientifically and socially acceptable. Second among equals is the *interpretive framework*, which Zetterholm described as "the sum of all theories and presumptions (more or less valid) included in the interpretation and on which the interpretation is based". Again, I will address this topic at the end of the essay. Third among equals is the internal coherence of the interpretation itself. Zetterholm correctly observed that an interpretation may be critiqued at each one of these three levels (Zetterholm 2009, p. 238).

When it comes to evaluating the plausibility of the traditional perspective, Zetterholm rightly contended that the issues that have been seen as relevant and acceptable are bound up with rather specific interpretations of Christian theology in which the opposition of Paul to Judaism and between Christianity and Judaism are paramount (Zetterholm 2009, p. 238). Thus, Zetterholm remains right to have asserted that "*the real problem with the traditional paradigm is that it emerged as a theological solution to a theological problem*" (emphasis his) (Zetterholm 2009, p. 239). Moreover, he was right to conclude that it is highly implausible that the traditional paradigm on Paul qualifies as a valid point of departure for contemporary Pauline scholarship (Zetterholm 2009, p. 239). While I have avoided using the word "wrong" in this essay of any perspective, following Kuhn's cautions, perhaps given how concretized the traditional paradigm still is to this day, now might just be the time to ruminate on a very important principle from *Common Sense*: "A long habit of not thinking a thing WRONG, gives it a superficial appearance of being RIGHT" (emphasis Paine's) (Paine [1776] 1997, p. 1).

A careful reading of Zetterholm's entire monograph clearly reveals his awareness of the serious anomalies that have arisen which have violated the traditional paradigm-induced expectations that have governed the "normal exegesis" of the Pauline writings. In addition, he was not only aware of the crisis that it led to in the field, but concisely documented the early history of it on behalf of all exegetes. Most important, he seemed to have been intuitively clear at the time he wrote his monograph that the process would then proceed through the disarray of "various parallel and contradictory interpretations" to the resolution of the crisis by a paradigm shift to a new dominant paradigm (Zetterholm 2009, p. 240). In fact, anticipating that very paradigm shift, he then made what I think is one of his most important statements ever: "Such a perspective may prove highly interesting also for those interested in developing the theology of the Christian church, which in several ways seems to be in need of being rescued from itself" (Zetterholm 2009, p. 240). As the scrutiny of paradigms continues, one can only hope that the profound anomalies that have engendered the emerging nonsupersessionist, within Judaism paradigm will penetrate existing knowledge in the fields of biblical studies and theology down to the core.

Given that Zetterholm devoted an entire earlier monograph to explicating how highly implausible it is that the traditional paradigm on Paul qualifies as a valid point of departure for contemporary Pauline scholarship, it is striking that Hagner commended him for his "quite remarkable fair-minded comment" that "it is, of course, possible that the theological interpretation of Paul that has developed over the centuries represents an accurate reconstruction of the historical Paul's thought world" (Hagner 2018, p. 9). It is striking precisely because Zetterholm's very next statement is the following: "However, if the fundamental assumption in this reconstruction—the vile character of ancient Judaism—would turn out

to be mistaken, what would then happen to the reconstructions of Paul that were based on this assumption" (Zetterholm 2015, p. 42)? Hagner's only response was wholly ironically to state that "the traditional view of Paul, however, in no way requires such hostility toward Judaism" (Hagner 2018, p. 9).[17]

I would suggest that what we are seeing here in this binary opposition is exactly what Kuhn told us to expect, namely, two people with incommensurable viewpoints. One puts on the inversion goggles of the nonsupersessionist or within Judaism paradigm long enough to undergo the revolutionary transformation of their vision. The other puts on the inversion goggles of the nonsupersessionist or within Judaism paradigm, but while they were in the initial state of extreme disorientation and acute personal crisis from having their world turned upside down, they took the goggles off and did not undergo the revolutionary transformation of their vision. Thus, that scholar (i.e., Hagner) concluded that "the so-called "historical" readings of the Paul-within-Judaism scholars can often make sense of the Pauline texts only by means of a tortuous exegesis" (Hagner 2018, p. 9). This is why I made the following assertion in the Introduction: Surely, such binary opposition and conflictual assertions between scholars warrants a deeper look to determine whether the exegesis associated with this paradigm shift is truly tortuous (i.e., self-convoluting to force the texts into the nonsupersessionist, within Judaism perspective), or whether the attempt to determine the plausibility of the nonsupersessionist, within Judaism paradigm by scholars inured to the traditional paradigm is torturous (i.e., self-engendering of painful cognitive dissonance leading to the pertinacious defense of the traditional paradigm).

Zetterholm's commitment to the emerging nonsupersessionist paradigm is explicitly expressed starting in the earliest pages of his 2009 monograph. Having written an entire treatise on underlying assumptions, he was compelled to open his study with an account of his own underlying assumptions. First, he emphasized the fact that he is not affiliated with any religious community. Second, he emphasized that he generally lacks theological convictions and therefore has no theology to defend. He then rightly clarified that this does not guarantee scholarly objectivity or freedom from influencing biases, but that his biases would be of another kind. He then told readers to expect to find that he sides with those scholars who regard Paul as part of first-century Judaism, within, not against, it. While acknowledging a post-Holocaust perspective, he then emphasized that the most decisive reason for assuming a Jewish Paul was the history of Pauline scholarship itself. A comprehensive understanding of "the historical situation in which the Christian anti-Semitic discourse emerged and how this emergence led to a pattern of thought within western civilization that emphasized the opposition between Judaism and Christianity" made it hard for him to accept the traditional paradigm as the fundamental point of departure for historical study of the Pauline writings (Zetterholm 2009, p. x).

I myself was raised in the Roman Catholic paradigm. As a teenager, I then underwent a revolutionary transformation of vision in a "conversion" to the traditional Protestant paradigm (recall from above that Kuhn contended that the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a "conversion" experience). In my later graduate study of the Tanakh, Second Temple Jewish literature, and the New Covenant Writings, I underwent yet an even more revolutionary transformation of vision to the nonsupersessionist or within Judaism paradigm.[18] Thus, I now wholly concur with Zetterholm that the dogmatically motivated dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity is not the interpretive key to understanding the NT in general, or the Pauline writings in particular. We must adopt the inherently Israelite or later Jewish perspective of Paul and therefore of the rest of the Scriptures as the interpretive key (Zetterholm 2009, pp. x–xi). It is, in fact, the major hermeneutical way forward to another real-life instance of progress away from

less adequate conceptions of and interactions with the texts that we exegete, as well as the world.

5. A Twofold Hermeneutical Way Forward

As stated in the Introduction, I bring this essay to a close by proffering a twofold hermeneutical way forward toward the nonsupersessionist reading of the NT. To ensure that this is not viewed as an idealistic theorization, I then concisely demonstrate the actual praxis of this twofold hermeneutical way forward utilizing Gal. 3:28 as my example. To be clear, I do not exegete Gal. 3:28 per se, but rather point to a hermeneutical way forward that leads to a radically different understanding of this passage than that of Hagner. This closing section of the essay specifically includes the proffering of two coined hermeneutical terms and concepts: "The Primary Heschelian Hermeneutic" and "The Primary Torrancean Hermeneutic". This then issues forth in a discussion of dialectical negation as a hermeneutical key to a fuller contextual understanding of Gal. 3:28. Prior to doing this, I am compelled to provide a fresh composite definition of the term (and concept) "supersessionism" synthesized from the most recent work of Soulen (2022) with one additional major point from his much earlier monograph (Soulen 1996). It is my paraphrased and amplified non-linear composite definition. After all, Soulen opens chapter one of his latest monograph by asserting that "*supersessionism* is not an attractive word, but it can be a useful one if it is clearly defined" (Soulen 2022, p. 5).

5.1. A Fresh, Composite Definition of the Term (and Concept) "Supersessionism"

Supersessionism is any reading or understanding of the Scriptures, or overarching summational narrative thereof, such as the second-century "creation, fall, redemption, and consummation" narrative of Irenaeus, that (1) jumps directly from Genesis 1–3 to Jesus Messiah and the NT, thereby fracturing the canon of Scripture and rupturing the reciprocal relationship between the Tanakh and the New Covenant Writings, leading to "Israel-forgetfulness" and "YHWH-amnesia"; (2) contradicts the fact of Rom. 11:28b–29 that from the standpoint of God's election, Israel is beloved for the sake of the ancestors, and the gifts and the calling of YHWH to Israel are irrevocable; (3) views God's covenant with Israel after the coming of Messiah Jesus as a thing of the past, holding to "promise, fulfillment, and cancelation" instead of "promise, fulfillment, and confirmation"; (4) reduces Israel from God's unsubstitutable elect people, upon whom God set his love as explicitly stated in Deut 7:6–7, to an instrument of God akin to a utility company that God closes down after Jesus comes; or (5) contradicts the unerasable God-created and God-gifted distinction between Jews and Gentiles in a shalomic relationship of reciprocal dependence (i.e., interdependence) and mutual blessing, even into the new creation (Soulen 1996, p. 134; 2022, pp. 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 19, 64, 66).

5.2. The First Hermeneutical Way Forward: The Primary Heschelian Hermeneutic

Having provided this fresh composite definition of the term (and concept) "supersessionism", we may now proceed with the discussion of the twofold hermeneutical way forward beginning with Heschel and then moving on to Torrance. Heschel explicitly stated that his sole quest in his exegetical work on the prophets was to gain interpretive insight (Heschel [1962] 1969, p. xi). In light of our focus on the critical importance of paradigms to exegetical insight, I now proffer Heschel's articulation of his overall approach to gaining such insight as a first hermeneutical way forward. I have coined this first hermeneutical concept "The Primary Heschelian Hermeneutic". I find it advantageous to use Heschel's own words, albeit I have rearranged the order of the sentences for maximal impact. It is self-explanatory and should be practiced to the extent humanly possible. However, it must

be emphasized here that by "seeing the phenomenon from within", Heschel was referring to the emic perspective (Heschel [1962] 1969, p. xii).[19]

The procedure employed in an inquiry for gaining such insight is the method of pure reflection. Observation, inspection, tackling, and probing, the sheer seeing of what we face, serve to introduce us to the realness of the phenomenon and sharpen our ability to formulate questions conducive to the discovery of what is unique about it. Indeed, it requires much effort to learn which questions should not be asked and which claims must not be entertained.

Insight is the beginning of perceptions to come rather than the extension of perceptions gone by. Conventional seeing, operating as it does with patterns and coherences, is a way of seeing the present in the past tense. Insight is an attempt to think in the present. Insight is a breakthrough, requiring much intellectual dismantling and dislocation. It begins with a mental interim, with the cultivation of a feeling for the unfamiliar, unparalleled, incredible. It is in being involved with a phenomenon, being intimately engaged to it, courting it, as it were, that after much perplexity and embarrassment we come upon insight—upon a way of seeing the phenomenon from within. Insight is accompanied by a sense of surprise. What has been closed is suddenly disclosed. It entails genuine perception, seeing anew. What impairs our sight are habits of seeing as well as the mental concomitants of seeing. Our sight is suffused with knowing, instead of feeling painfully the lack of knowing what we see. Rather than blame things for being obscure, we should blame ourselves for being biased and prisoners of self-induced repetitiveness. *The principle to be kept in mind is to know what we see rather than to see what we know* (emphasis mine) (Heschel [1962] 1969, pp. xi–xii).

I think it is imperative that we allow Heschel's profound words to challenge our paradigms and exegetical praxis afresh. When we distill his words down to their essence, it is the principle to be kept in mind that I am proffering as "The Primary Heschelian Hermeneutic": to know what we see rather than to see what we know. Had I not slowed down and relooked at Gal. 3:28 and cognate passages, I would have missed seeing the beauty and importance of dialectical negation as evidenced in the Tanakh, the NT in general, and Gal. 3:28 and its cognates in particular.[20] Let us now proceed to discuss the second hermeneutical way forward that should be understood as a corollary to the first.

5.3. The Second Hermeneutical Way Forward: The Primary Torrancean Hermeneutic

As observed earlier, the concept of a paradigm may also be described as the overall "interpretive framework" to which a scholar adheres when exegeting the biblical texts. Recall that Zetterholm described a paradigm in this sense as "the sum of all theories and presumptions (more or less valid) included in the interpretation and on which the interpretation is based" (Zetterholm 2009, p. 238). Thus, I now proffer Torrance's decisively deeper, dynamic, relational, and holistic articulation of the overall epistemological approach that should be taken in our exegetical work as a second hermeneutical way forward (Torrance [1983] 1992, pp. 1–2).

Torrance, working from a similar scientific and philosophical perspective as Kuhn, emphasized that in the analytical tradition of thought, a detachment and abstraction of Jesus and the revelation mediated through him from the matrix of the natural or inherent Israelite relations in which he is found occurred. Thus, he proffered a far more holistic overall epistemological approach that is "more in accordance with the modes of connection and behaviour actually found in nature", to which he contended that we had been "directed to by the epoch-making work of James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein above all" (Torrance [1983] 1992, p. 2). He rightly emphasized that this approach involves finding the inherent interpretive framework that is revealed to us by the very texts or sociohistorical realities that we are studying. He further observed that this approach affords us a way to overcome

the damage that has been done by dichotomous ways of thinking when it comes to our understanding of God, Jesus Messiah, and the patterns of thought embodied in Israel in both the Tanakh and NT (Torrance [1983] 1992, pp. 1, 14–15, 19).[21]

Torrance rightly advised exegetes that in order to practice this approach "we must go to school with Israel" (Torrance [1983] 1992, p. 12). Having taken his own advice, his work clearly shows that he came to see the overall interpretive framework of the Scriptures as an inherently Israelite or Jewish framework. Runesson, also having gone to school with Israel, most recently rightly concludes that reading the NT "within Judaism" involves a hermeneutic that simultaneously "makes its content foreign *and* finds its authors' Jewish voices" (Runesson 2023, pp. 301, 311). Moreover, when it comes to Romans 11, Runesson rightly concludes that Paul's "invitation to non-Jews to share in the nourishment that comes from the olive tree whose roots extend back to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, privileges Judaism as the hermeneutical frame within which everything else is fitted" (Runesson 2023, p. 309).

I have coined this second hermeneutical concept that involves finding the inherent interpretive framework of the texts and sociohistorical realities that we study "The Primary Torrancean Hermeneutic". As with Heschel, I find it advantageous to use Torrance's own words and, again, have rearranged the order of the sentences for maximal impact. It is equally self-explanatory and should be practiced to the extent humanly possible.

> I sometimes liken the procedure that this involves to the sort of thing we do when we have solved a jig-saw puzzle. In the first instance we have to find out how to fit the scattered pieces together, when the picture which they conjointly make comes to view. But after that, when the picture is broken up and the various pieces have been thrown back into disarray, it is quite impossible for us to fit them all together again as though we did not know the picture that they made. Something like that happens in the process of scientific inquiry. Once we have got hold of the basic clue or gained some anticipatory insight into the pattern of things, we set about re-examining and reinterpreting all the data, putting them together under the guidance of the basic insight we have discovered until the full coherent pattern comes clearly to view. Now of course in a scientific inquiry the fundamental insight with which we work may have to be revised as all the pieces of evidence come together and throw light upon each other, but nevertheless it is under the direction of that insight that the discovery is made.
>
> When we adopt this kind of approach, whether in natural science or in theology, we develop a form of inquiry in which we allow some field of reality to disclose itself to us in the complex of its internal relations or its latent structure, and thus seek to understand it in the light of its own intrinsic intelligibility or logos. As we do that, we come up with a significant clue in the light of which all evidence is then re-examined and reinterpreted and found to fall into a coherent pattern of order. *Thus, we seek to understand something, not by schematising it to an external or alien framework of thought, but by operating with a framework of thought appropriate to it, one which it suggests to us out of its own inherent constitutive relations and which we are rationally constrained to adopt in faithful understanding and interpretation of it* (emphasis mine). (Torrance [1983] 1992, pp. 3–4)

I think it is imperative that we allow Torrance's profound words to challenge our paradigms and exegetical praxis afresh. When we distill his words down to their essence, it is the principle to be kept in mind that I am proffering as "The Primary Torrancean Hermeneutic": to understand the Scriptures from their own inherent framework. After "going to school with Israel", I now see that the overall inherent interpretive framework of the Scriptures is an Israelite, later Jewish, and even later Messianic Jewish framework.[22] In

asserting this, I am in no way arguing against Harrill's approach to the non-dichotomous integration of Jewish, Greek, and Roman materials into our exegesis of the NT (Harrill 2006, p. 2) as the discussion of dialectical negation as a hermeneutical key to the interpretation of Gal. 3:28 below shows. Had I not slowed down and relooked at Gal. 3:28 and cognate passages from this nonsupersessionist Messianic Jewish coign of vantage, I would have mistakenly continued to see Gal. 3:28 as a case of absolute negation of the three dyads like Hagner.[23]

6. Toward a Nonsupersessionist Reading of Gal. 3:28

As stated earlier, it is my contention that Hagner's downplaying of the Jew–Gentile distinction in Messiah, in the direction of erasure theology, is at the very least a result of his misinterpretation of Gal. 3:28 and cognate passages.[24] In his concise discussion of Romans, Hagner contends that "the indictment not only of the Gentiles but also of the Jews in the opening chapters of Romans has the effect of demolishing the distinction between Jews and Gentiles (2:25–29; cf. Gal. 3:28)" (Hagner 2018, p. 115).[25] Absent in Hagner's work is an understanding of the idiom of dialectical negation and the fact that unity or oneness in the new creation is dependent on differences, albeit a transformation in those differences is indeed a part of the new creation in Messiah. Thus, immediately following, I provide a concise overview of dialectical negation as a hermeneutical key that helps us to better know what we see when it comes to Gal. 3:28 and select cognate passages. I then provide a concise summary of what I consider to be a model of the exegesis of Gal. 3:28 by Gundry-Volf (2003), as a full-blown exegesis of this passage is beyond the scope of this article. This summary serves as an example of the actual praxis of the proffered twofold hermeneutical way forward.

6.1. Dialectical Negation as a Hermeneutical Key to Gal. 3:28

Arguably, primacy of place belongs to Kruse (1954) and Bartelt (2002) for bringing a clear understanding of dialectical negation to the field of biblical studies.[26] Bartelt, in dialogue with Kruse's essay, shows it to be a biblical motif that is "an idiomatical translational key" that is helpful for the exegesis of select texts. He also rightly shows it to be "a theological concept that is capable of providing a more profound understanding of all Scripture" (Bartelt 2002, p. 57).

Succinctly stated, dialectical negation "holds a negative and positive statement in a dialectical, but not essentially contradictory, tension" (Bartelt 2002, p. 59). The negative statement "is often striking and even contrary to what should be expected" (Bartelt 2002, p. 58). Most important, the negated side of the dialectical statement is not absolutely negated, but somehow "subordinated to or qualified by the positive statement" (Bartelt 2002, p. 59). In fact, misunderstanding dialectical negation as absolute negation is only possible if one understands the negative statement without its proper relationship to the positive statement (Bartelt 2002, p. 64). It is not a choice of one statement over the other, but an exegetical "both/and" idiom that is characterized and defined by the positive statement (Bartelt 2002, pp. 60, 65). In some instances, it might be translated as "not just A but especially B" or "not so much A but more importantly B" (Bartelt 2002, pp. 59–60). As Bartelt helpfully emphasizes, Kruse's "parade example" was Jer. 7:22, which may be understood in light of Jer. 7:23 as follows: "It was not just about offerings and sacrifices that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of Egypt, but much more about this, that they should listen to my voice, and I would be their God and they my people" (Bartelt 2002, pp. 58–59). Another classic example is Hos. 6:6, which is often translated something like, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God, not whole burnt offerings". However, the NET translation, for example, understands this passage as an

instance of dialectical negation and adds "not simply" in front of "sacrifice" and "whole burnt offerings".

When it comes to the interpretation of "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua" in Gal. 3:28 as an instance of dialectical negation, the most instructive parallel elsewhere in the Pauline corpus is 1 Cor 3:7 (NASB), "So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth." Clearly, "the one who plants" and "the one who waters" are not absolutely negated. They are essential! Thus, 1 Cor. 3:7 may be rightly understood as saying that it is not so much about the one who plants or the one who waters, but especially or more importantly about God who causes the growth.

Likewise, the "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" of Gal 5:6 and 6:15 cannot absolutely be negated, as Paul explicitly emphasized that both of these terms denote a divinely assigned, privileged, social gift, call, position in life, and responsibility before God in 1 Cor. 7:17–20. Hence, this bifurcation of humanity in Galatians is simply subordinated or qualified by the more important new covenant reality of keeping the commandments of God in the new creation. It follows then that the three social pairs of Gal. 3:28 are not absolutely negated, but subordinated to or qualified by the positive statement about the oneness of the new creation in Messiah Jesus. In this particular instance, I contend that the formulation of the idiom of dialectical negation that works best is "not A unless understood in light of B" (Bartelt 2002, p. 60). This formulation makes it very clear that anything in the three pairs that is not in step with the oneness of the inaugurated new creation (Gal. 6:15) must be transformed in the sense of being reprioritized or revalorized. Thus, Gal. 3:28 might best be understood as saying something like this: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, unless you understand these social distinctions or differences in their transformed, reprioritized, or revalorized sense in the unity or oneness of the new creation.

This understanding of Gal. 3:28 and cognate passages such as Gal. 5:6 and 6:15, as well as 1 Cor. 7:19, has been cogently explicated by Rudolph (2011, especially pp. 23–53), but my engagement with the work of Bartelt is intended to further clarify how the rhetorical device of dialectical negation as a form of hyperbole works in general, and then in regard to Gal. 3:28 in particular. Also insightful is the explanation of Paul's "theologizing"[27] of the transformation of social categories when it comes to in-Messiah identity by Campbell (2008, especially pp. 159–75). However, given the emphasis on the implications of our choices of terminology in this essay, I contend that Rudolph's use of "revalorization" is far more accurate than Campbell's choice of "relativization" when it comes to the transformation of social identities in the new creation. While Gundry-Volf uses the term "revalorization" of the dyads in Gal. 3:28, she concludes that the key to Paul's non-erasure language is adiaphorization (i.e., indifference to the differences). However, in citing 1 Cor. 11:11 to make her point regarding male and female in the new creation (in the Lord neither is woman independent of man nor man independent of woman), she actually makes the case for interdependence between the members of the dyads, not indifference (Gundry-Volf 2003, pp. 27–29). That said, Gundry-Volf's holistic approach to Gal. 3:28 is exemplary as shown below.

6.2. A Model of Detailed Exegesis of Gal. 3:28 as Dialectical Negation

Overall, I have found the approach of Gundry-Volf (2003) to be a model for the detailed exegesis of Gal. 3:28, though I find the case for Paul's use of dialectical negation more convincing than her case about Paul's adiaphorization of differences. Her sound hermeneutical approach seeks to understand Paul's theologizing not as a "free-floating tradition", but within the context of Galatians itself. Moreover, she rightly asserts that

the exegete must start with the meaning of the negation of the distinction between "Jew" and "Greek" and then extrapolate the meaning of the negation of the distinction between the other two dyads (Gundry-Volf 2003, pp. 17–18). Here, it must be noted that she treats the dyad of "Jew" and "Greek" as the equivalent of "Jew" and "Gentile". However, Wu's nuanced analysis of the dyad convincingly shows that Paul's deliberate choice of "Greek" was related to it being a stereotypical term of honor in the Roman Empire that represented wisdom and the epitome of civilized culture (Wu 2013, pp. 771–73). Hence, Wu rightly concludes that Paul's negation of the dyad was focused on overcoming any sense of boasting related to preconceived notions about cultural superiority as also seen in 1 Cor. 1:22–24 (Wu 2013, pp. 774–75). This is also the conclusion of Barclay who emphasizes that it is the superiority of one's social status, and the arrogance and competition associated with that status in the system of honor, that Paul desired his addressees to overcome (Barclay 2015, p. 435).

Gundry-Volf's exegesis is developed in dialogue with two scholars who strongly argue for absolute negation of differences in Gal. 3:28 (Wire 1990; Boyarin 1994). She shows how the approach of these two scholars falls in line with a comparative methodological trend first substantially developed by Meeks (1974), then followed by others, which locates Gal. 3:28 in the Hellenistic tradition of "unification" by the eradication of differences (Gundry-Volf 2003, pp. 9–22). While it is apposite to think that the cultural context provides a hermeneutical key to the interpretation of this passage, Gundry-Volf rightly questions whether the Hellenistic tradition of "reunification" through the erasure of differences is a plausible methodological starting point (Gundry-Volf 2003, p. 17). In answering this question, she examines Gal. 3:28 within the larger argumentative context of Gal. 3:6–29 in which it appears as the culmination, and in the broader framework of Paul's thought on similar issues elsewhere. She goes so far as to explore whether key terms and concepts that Paul utilized such as "being in Messiah", "belonging to Messiah", "being baptized into Messiah", "putting on Messiah", or "being one in Messiah" in any way entail the erasure of differences, and if so, in what sense.

Upon the completion of her analyses, Gundry-Volf astutely emphasizes that the immediate context of Gal 3:28 suggests that we conclude that "there is neither Jew nor Greek" is not about the erasure of differences but the revalorization of those differences in the new unity and equality of the new creation community (Gundry-Volf 2003, p. 21). She then shows how that conclusion analogically applies to the other two dyads of Gal. 3:28 in the remainder of her essay. Lopez, in an insightful discussion of the politics of the new creation, concurs that Paul was aiming at the overcoming of social stereotypes, especially involving domination, in the non-hegemonic new creation marked by solidarity and mutuality (Lopez 2010, p. 147).

Moreover, Lopez connects the dots between this conclusion and all of the following in the context of Galatians: (1) the contrast in Gal. 5:19–23 between the "works of the flesh" (related to divisions and sects, to which I add hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, and envying) and the "fruit of the spirit"; (2) the directive in Gal. 5:13 to "serve one another as slaves"; (3) the summational law of Lev. 19:18b cited in Gal. 5:14 "to love your neighbor as yourself"; (4) the directive in Gal. 5:25 not to provoke or envy one another; and (5) the exhortation in Gal. 5:15 not to bite and devour one another lest they be consumed by one another—because as Gal. 5:21 states, those who do not live according to the politics of the new creation will not inherit the kingdom of God (Lopez 2010, p. 152). Strikingly, Lopez emphasizes that Paul's goal was the "transformative exodus position of bringing forth a new creation where all the nations will enjoy the *shalom*. . . the one God of Israel provides" (Lopez 2010, p. 144). Her italicization of "shalom" should invoke not just "peace", but the entire semantic range of the term and concept as delineated in the

HALOT lexicon: wholeness, completeness, intactness, integrality, soundness, sufficiency, satisfaction, harmony, peace, or, in summation, holistic, communal wellbeing.

7. Conclusions

In this essay, I have labored to counteract the supersessionist reading of the New Testament in general, and Gal. 3:28 in particular. My intention has been especially to respond to Hagner's claims, cited above, that (1) "the so-called 'historical' readings of the Paul-within-Judaism scholars can often make sense of the Pauline texts only by means of a tortuous exegesis" and (2) Paul's "indictment not only of the Gentiles but also of the Jews in the opening chapters of Romans has the effect of demolishing the distinction between Jews and Gentiles." I have specifically attempted to show that the binary opposition between the "traditional" perspective and the "nonsupersessionist" or "within-Judaism" perspective is a result of paradigms. After providing a concise but comprehensive overview of Kuhn's insightful work on paradigms, and explaining why we must understand and scrutinize ours and others' paradigms, I discussed the importance of our choices of terminology and how they might contribute to our competing perspectives. I then closed the essay by proffering a twofold hermeneutical way forward toward the nonsupersessionist reading of the NT. To ensure that this would not be viewed as an idealistic theorization, I then demonstrated the actual praxis of this twofold hermeneutical way forward utilizing Gal. 3:28 as my example. This included the proffering of two coined hermeneutical terms and concepts, "The Primary Heschelian Hermeneutic" and "The Primary Torrancean Hermeneutic", as well as a discussion of dialectical negation as a hermeneutical key to a fuller and thus better contextual understanding of Gal. 3:28 in particular and the NT in general.

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Notes

1 As Hesslein rightly contends, the term "nonsupersessionist" is generally preferable to Soulen's earlier term "post-supersessionist" as the latter term leaves one with the impression that supersessionism is a thing of the past, whereas it continues to the present day (Hesslein [2015] 2018, p. 11). In fact, as of his 2022 work, Soulen himself now uses the dehyphenated form of 'nonsupersessionist'. For a detailed definition of supersessionism, and thus post- or non-supersessionism, please see page 10 below.

2 For an insightful, challenging, fresh discussion about reading the NT 'within Judaism', see Runesson (2023).

3 The Jewish term "Tanakh", an acronym derived from the three divisions of the Hebrew & Aramaic Scriptures (i.e., the Torah, the Nevi'im or Prophets, and the Ketuvim or Writings) found in the masorah magna of the medieval period is preferred as a nonsupersessionist term in contrast to the second-century term "Old Testament" which may be readily understood as supersessionist in problematic ways.

4 Following the corrective work of Runesson (2015) and Korner (2017), I concur that the term 'church' should no longer be used to translate 'ekklēsia'. This word should either remain untranslated, be transliterated, or be translated into English as "assembly", "congregation", or "community" and the like depending on the specific context. Moreover, Korner is correct to assert that "by adopting ekklēsia, with its linguistic roots both in the Jewish LXX and in Greek civic politics, as the collective designation for his Jewish/Gentile communities, Paul was able implicitly to affirm the continuation of the social and ethnic identities both of Jews and Gentiles (e.g., Scythian, Roman, Ionian)" without affirming "the continuation of socio-economic stratification. . . within the communal gatherings of his ekklēsiai (e.g., Gal. 3:28)" (Korner 2017, pp. 233–34).

5 For a holistic and rather comprehensive overview of how God works in history through Israelite and later Jewish particularism with an international horizon involving all nations, see especially Levenson ([1996] 2002); cf. Kinzer (2018). While Levenson is to be lauded for his rather comprehensive explication of the topic, arguably his handling of the Tanakh is superior to his handling of the NT. For the most recent and insightful discussion about how the unity of Israel and the nations, or Jews and Gentiles, in Messiah is dependent on their distinctions or differences and thus characterized by interdependence and mutual blessing—even

in the new creation—see Soulen (2022); cf. Soulen (1996); Lopez (2010); and Willitts (2013). For an understanding of non-nullified, reprioritized, and revalorized Jewish and Gentile identity in Messiah, see especially Rudolph (2010, 2011) and Tucker (2011). For a fresh, interdisciplinary, nonsupersessionist analysis of the unity of Jews *as* Jews and Gentiles *as* Gentiles in Messiah based on two-natures Christology, see Hesslein ([2015] 2018).

6 Here, I am following Thiessen, who in his paradigm shifting work on the portrayal of ritual purity and impurity in the Gospels rightly expresses deep concerns about the impact of the centuries old almost universal misconstrual of the Jewish ritual purity system on "theology, biblical interpretation, sermons, and the everyday thinking and language" of many followers of Jesus Messiah (Thiessen 2020, p. 4).

7 The term "another perspective" was utilized here instead of "the other perspective" in an effort to inoculate us from what Tannen calls "the argument culture", which is characterized among other things by viewing everything as a war or battle, reducing everything to two sides, and allowing debate to dominate over dialogue (Tannen 1998).

8 The 50th anniversary edition of Kuhn's *Structure*, as it is commonly referred to in scientific literature, was intentionally utilized in order that readers might benefit from the introductory essay by Hacking which serves to introduce Kuhn's work and orient people to his main theses. For an explanation of paradigms suitable for the general public, see Barker (1992).

9 I concur with Levine that "attempts to deny supersessionism in the New Testament must be based on hermeneutics" (Levine 2022, p. 1).

10 As Kuhn's original articulation of his theses has held up for over half a century, very little is mentioned in this essay about the critiques of Kuhn's work or his responses. For detailed information on that topic, see especially (Lakatos and Musgrave 1970) and (Richards and Daston 2016).

11 It cannot be overemphasized that Westerners will have to overcome their inherent tendency to see or hear the word 'anomalies' and immediately interpret it negatively. Here, they are what differs from the existing paradigm.

12 There are many such stories of scientific paradigm shifts in Kuhn's *Structure* that provide valuable lessons for virtually any field of study as well as ordinary life.

13 This essay is intentionally punctuated with the language of 'seeing' or 'looking' to help make this point.

14 When it comes to responding to the resounding clarion call to re-think our terminology in the field of biblical studies, I strongly recommend the reading of Schwartz (2011) and Runesson (2015) as insightful and challenging starting places. See also now Thiessen (2023, pp. 12–16).

15 On the suitability of the term "Messianic Judaism" for the New Testament period, see Rudolph (2013).

16 This section features the past tense, as Zetterholm's monograph was written more than a decade ago and many of the envisaged developments, including a major paradigm shift, are arguably well underway.

17 I say "ironically" here, because Hagner appears to somewhat understand just how hostile toward Judaism his entire thesis is when he says, "I am well aware that to speak of Christianity as 'the fulfillment of Judaism' will be taken negatively by most Jews as both insensitive and potentially anti-Semitic. I do so because, to my mind, this is the most accurate and effective way to describe the issue before us" (Hagner 2018, p. 21). From the perspective of this article, I take his words "to my mind" to mean "according to my paradigm".

18 Recall that, with Hesslein, I think the term "nonsupersessionist" is generally preferable to Soulen's term "post-supersessionist" as the latter term leaves one with the impression that supersessionism is a thing of the past, whereas it continues to the present day (Hesslein [2015] 2018, p. 11).

19 Succinctly stated for our purposes here, "emic" and "etic" are technical terms that linguist Kenneth Pike originally derived from the suffices of the words "phonemic" and "phonetic". The "emic" referred to any unit of significant vocal sound in a specific language, and the "etic" referred to the system of cross-cultural notations that were found useful in representing these sounds. When applied to the exegesis of biblical texts, the emic perspective is the exegete's attempt as an "outsider" to describe as faithfully as possible the "insider's" own descriptions or productions of thought, language, behavior, etc. The etic perspective is the exegete's subsequent attempt to take these descriptions and redescribe them in a system of their own making. It cannot be overemphasized that the exegete's attempt to reproduce the insider's own viewpoint is an acknowledgment that the exegete is a student of the phenomena under study and not to be confused with an actual "insider" (see, McCutcheon [1999] 2005, pp. 15, 17).

20 For an exemplary study of how hastily assuming that something is 'immediately evident', and how seeing what we know instead of knowing what we see is the exegete's enemy, see Welton (2022).

21 I am convinced that the scholarly debates regarding continuity and discontinuity between the Tanakh and NT, and between a "Judaism" and a "Christianity" in the NT, reveal an entrenchment in dichotomous paradigms that prevent the exegete from seeing a far more holistic (i.e., shalomic) reality.

22 Again, on the suitability of the term "Messianic Judaism" for the New Testament period, see Rudolph (2013).

23 For a monograph length defense of Gal. 3:28 as a case of absolute negation, see Neutel ([2015] 2016).

24 For a concise but rather comprehensive history of the tendencies in the interpretation of Gal. 3:28 since 1990, which includes a discussion of the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, see Tolmie (2014).

[25] For a recent concise analysis of Rom. 1:18–32 as a description of the condition of the Gentiles and not the universal human condition that includes the Jewish people, see chapter 5 "The Gentile Problem" in Thiessen (2023). For the latest analysis of Rom. 1:18–32 as pertaining to Israel, see Staples (2024).

[26] Bartelt expresses a debt of gratitude to Horace Hummel for having introduced him to the concept, and then throughout his essay credits Hummel and Kruse for all of their insights into the topic.

[27] The term "theologizing" proffered by Campbell is far more accurate than "theology" when it comes to the writings of Paul. As Campbell rightly contends, while Paul's writings are coherent and consistent, they are definitively occasional, unfinished products that are subject to an ever ongoing and dynamic process, and not theologies that are already a concretized set of systematic and static concepts or propositions of universal validity (see Campbell 2008, p. 159).

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Article

A Post-Supersessionist Reading of the Temple and Torah in Mark's Gospel: The Parable of the Vineyard

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Abstract: Most interpretations of the Temple and Torah in the Gospel of Mark have held a negative view toward the Jewish institutions, declaring that the old has been replaced by the new, meaning Jesus is the new Temple and the Church has replaced the Jewish people. This article presents a post-supersessionist reading of the Temple and Torah in Mark's Gospel, focusing on the Parable of the Vineyard (Mk 12:1–12) in the broader narrative context (11:1—13:1) and the canonical narrative, thereby maintaining the Gospel's connection with the Jewish people and their covenant relationship with God. These two contexts frame the parable and set parameters for its interpretation, thereby preventing anti-Torah and anti-Temple interpretations and the theological belief that Christians are Abraham's true and rightful heirs.

Keywords: Mark 11—12; Temple; Torah; priesthood; Jewish leaders; post-supersessionism; fig tree; prayer; authority; intercalation; Church

1. Introduction

From Wrede (1971) to Juel (1977), Telford (1980) to Waetjen (1989), and Evans (1989) to Gray (2010),[1] scholars have commonly depicted Mark's Gospel as anti-Torah and anti-Temple, concluding that the new—the Church and its institutions—replaced the old—the Jewish people, the Torah, and the Temple.[2] Such interpretations are supersessionist. Any interpretation that "claims or implies the abrogation or obsolescence of God's covenant with the Jewish people" is supersessionist (Soulen 2005b, p. 413). More recently, post-supersessionist interpretations of these themes have arisen that retain the continued validity of *Adonai*'s covenant with Israel "as a coherent and indispensable part of the larger body of Christian teaching" (Soulen 2005a, p. 350).[3] Three authors who address the two pillars of 2nd Temple Judaism, the Temple and the Torah, from a post-supersessionist view are Regev (2010, 2019), Watts Henderson (2018) and van Maaren (2017). Van Maaren explains that neither the replacement of the Temple or the priesthood nor the cessation of the sacrificial system is explicitly stated in Mark; instead, they are assumed at the narrative level (Van Maaren 2019, pp. 290–316). Regev purports that Jesus makes a positive use of the Temple setting to establish his authority (Regev 2019, p. 126), and Watts Henderson concludes that Mark's Gospel presents a complex and nuanced view of the Torah and Temple (Watts Henderson 2018, p. 163).

Similarly to the approaches of Van Maaren, Regev, and Watts Henderson, this article presents a post-supersessionist reading of the Torah and Temple in Mark, briefly addressing incidents demonstrating Jesus' attitude toward these two pillars, followed by a look at the Parable of the Vineyard (Mk 12:1–12) as an example. Although the Temple plays an essential role in the closing scenes of Mark's Gospel (chaps. 11—15), its function, which must be gleaned from the narrative, has been extensively debated. The enigmatic character of the Parable of the Vineyard compounds the issues.[4] This article makes no attempt to refute the numerous interpretations of the Parable of the Vineyard, investigate the historical or

redactional difficulties of the text, or provide a detailed exegesis. Instead, the parable is situated in its contextual pericope (11:1—13:1) and broader Markan narrative and anchored in the canonical narrative retaining the continuity with the Tanakh (Old Testament) and the People of Israel.

Three primary methodologies are used: (1) historical and contextual location to identify the communal identities, traditions, and practices of the author and the implied readers;[5] (2) narrative criticism to understand the literary context of Mark's Gospel and intra-relationships of its components; (3) a "hermeneutic of dialectical ecclesial continuity" in which Messianic Jews, "as part of the Jewish community with its tradition of interpretation, and as a partner to the Christian community with its tradition of interpretation" can draw from both communities to hear what each has said in the past and hear new things that "their mutual and unnatural isolation have prevented them from hearing" (Kinzer 2010, p. 33). I also distinguish between criticism of the Temple and the rejection of it because criticism can be a life-giving reproof (Prov 15:31) that disciplines, leading to righteousness and peace (Heb 12:11), and between condemnation as judgment, which can lead to repentance and restoration (Dt 30:1–10).

2. Jesus' Attitude in Mark toward the Torah and Temple

Unlike Matthew, Luke and John, which begin with birth stories and genealogies (Mt 1:1—2:12 and Lk 1:5—2:21; 3:23–38) or the pre-existent Word of God (Jn 1:1–14), Mark's Gospel begins in medias res, placing it in the middle of the canonical narrative, which begins at creation and looks to a future eschatological kingdom of God.[6] Jesus proclaims and initiates this eschatological kingdom (Mk 1:14–15; 14:22–26) through his teachings (Mk 4:30; 10:17–26) and actions (10:46–52).[7] The conflation of three verses attributed to Isaiah (Ex 23:20, Mal 3:1, and Is 40:3 [Mk 1:1–3])[8] connects back to the Tanakh and the story of Israel and forward to the future eschatological kingdom of David established by Jesus (cf. Mark 11:1–10). Throughout the Gospel, the author draws on texts from the Tanakh to establish continuity with Israel's past and connect God's actions in Israelite history with the events in the life of Jesus. These citations and direct or indirect references are not intended to replace the original verses in the Tanakh but to remind the audience of their source and, therefore, the context and background of their use in the gospel. Attributing the verses to Isaiah firmly places the Gospel in Isaiah's conceptual matrix, establishes its eschatological tenor (See, Marcus 1992, pp. 17–23; Hays 2016, p. 201), and alludes to two of Mark's dialectical themes—eschatological deliverance and restoration, and eschatological judgment. Similarly, instead of the word *νόμος* (law; Hebrew תורה), which, in contrast to Matthew, Luke, and John, is not present in Mark's Gospel, the author relies on related terms and events in the narrative to connect to the Tanakh (Van Maaren 2019, pp. 298–99, nn. 267–68).

Another foundational aspect is the issue of Jesus' authority, especially as a point of contention with Jewish leaders, which runs throughout Mark from the narrator's comment that Jesus teaches "with authority" (1:21–22) to the confrontation of the chief priests, scribes and elders, who ask "By what authority?" and "who gave you this authority" (11:28).[9] Mark differentiates between power (*δυνάμαι*) and authority (*ἐξουσία*); power relates to Jesus' ability to heal (e.g., 1:23–28; 2:1–12; 5:1–20) and perform exorcisms (e.g., 1:23–28; 1:29—2:12; 3:1–6; 5:1–20, 22–43) and authority relates to the source of his right to carry out deeds of power (6:2; cf. 11:28), teach (e.g., 1:22, 27) and interpret Scripture (e.g., 1:16; 2:18, 23–24, 3:16 102; 12:14). This usage is exemplified in Jesus' first encounter with the scribes (2:1–12). The scribes question who has the power (*δυνάμαι*) to forgive sins (v. 7), and Jesus clarifies that the Son of Man has the authority (*ἐξουσία*) on Earth to forgive sins (Edwards 1994). The scribes also challenge the source of Jesus' power to heal when they attribute it to Beelzebul, the ruler of demons (3:22). The Pharisees, along with the scribes, confront Jesus about his authority to interpret the Scripture by questioning his actions and teachings (eating with tax collectors and sinners 2:15–17; on fasting 2:18–22, Shabbat 2:23–28; 3:1–6, divorce 10:2 and taxes 12:13). The most explicit confrontation of Jesus' authority is in 11:27–28,

where the Jerusalem leaders query him concerning the authority through which he performs "these things." The immediate context points to his actions in the Temple the day before (11:15–19). However, this is only the most recent provocative incident. In the broader Markan narrative, the question refers to all the previous things he has carried out. The question also indicates that the issue is not simply about what Jesus did but his right to do what he did. The second question explicitly enquires about the source of his authority, which also relates to earlier challenges (2:7).

2.1. Examples of Jesus' Affirmative Posture toward the Torah and Temple

Mark depicts Jesus as having a positive attitude toward the Torah in his interactions with the rich man (10:17–30) and a scribe (12:28–34). Both episodes associate obedience to God with the observance of the Torah. The rich man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded with the commandments from the second tablet of the Decalogue, which the rich man confessed he had carried out since his youth. Jesus looked at the man and loved him (v. 21). Jesus' reply invoking the commandments upholds the Jewish belief that obedience to the Torah in the manner God intended, through covenantal relationship and *hesed* (חסד; steadfast love, covenantal faithfulness, loyalty or grace), would result in eternal life.[10] Jesus points out that the rich man did not keep the Torah as "intended"; he loved his wealth more than he loved God. He chose not to "sell everything" and follow Jesus. Throughout the encounter, Jesus did not disparage the Torah or the rich man for following Torah; he expanded the Kingdom of God by calling the man to follow him.

In the second episode, a scribe approached Jesus and asked which commandment was first (12:28–34). Jesus replied with the double love command to love God (Dt 6:4–5) and one's neighbor (Lv 19:18). In the time of Jesus, the commands to love God and one's neighbor were commonly recognized as a summation of the entire Torah: the first governing relations between humans and God, and the second relationships among humans.[11] Those who obeyed the first five commandments were "lovers of God," and those who obeyed the final five were "lovers of people." Thus, the double love command (Dt 6:5 and Lv 19:18) epitomized these two divisions and obedience to the Torah.[12] The scribe affirmed Jesus' answer, adding that these commandments were more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (cf. Hos 6:6 LXX or 1 Sam 15:22 LXX). The scribe's additional statement does not necessarily indicate that the sacrifices should be abolished. The cross-references to Hosea and 1 Samuel suggest that obedience to Torah should be carried out without neglecting the sacrificial system. Fulfilling the sacrificial system did not negate obedience to the other aspects of the Torah. In this episode, Mark depicts Jesus affirming the Torah.

The first mention of the priesthood in Mark (1:40–44) demonstrates Jesus' view toward the priesthood and the sacrificial and Levitical purity systems. A leper approached Jesus, asking to be made clean.[13] Jesus touched the man and commanded him to be clean, and the leprosy left him. Immediately, Jesus sent the man away, sternly warning him not to say anything to anyone but to show himself to the priests as required by the Torah (lit. that Moses commanded; Lv 14:1–3). Only a priest could declare a person healed of skin disease ritually clean after they had completed the required purification process (Lv 14:1–31).[14] Jesus' instructions for the leper to show himself to the priest indicate Jesus' respect for the sacrificial and Levitical purity systems and that he functioned within them (e.g., Marcus 2000, p. 210).

2.2. Handwashing and Traditions of the Elders (Mk 7:1–23)

One of the most well-known events in Mark concerning Jesus' view toward the Torah is the Pharisees' confrontation with Jesus about ritual handwashing (7:1–23). In the Second Temple Period, handwashing before meals was widespread but not universally accepted, nor did it follow the same regulations.[15] The Tanakh requires that holy food (e.g., heave and fellowship offerings and portions of sin offerings (Lv 7:19–21; 21:1–8; Nu 18:8–19) be eaten in a state of priestly purity. Nevertheless, the concept of "non-priestly purity" or

"common holiness" was also prevalent, encompassing handwashing before meals, prayer and Torah reading.[16] Non-priestly purity is based on the Levitical purity system but was not uniform due to different interpretations. Mark demonstrates that he and Jesus understood the Jewish practice of his time by noting that "all Jews" (v. 3) ceremonially washed hands before eating.[17] However, Mark focuses the discussion (7:1–12) on the Pharisees' strict interpretation of the Torah according to the "traditions of the elders"[18] and Jesus' interpretation. Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees for forsaking the commandments of God instead of the traditions of men (v. 8) undergird this notion. In this, Mark delineates the two main issues of the pericope (7:1–23), defilement and the interpretation of the Torah, for the proper understanding and application of Levitical purity laws. Jesus' words to the crowd (v. 15) exemplify this point: "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile, but the things that come out of him are what defile." According to the Torah, it is not what goes into the body that makes it impure but what comes out of it—menstrual blood and semen, though not excrement. The Pharisees seem to have interpreted the biblical system more strictly, rendering a ruling that eating defiled food makes the eater impure (Boyarin 2012, p. 115). Most remarkable, however, is Jesus' interest in debating the issue of purity in the first place. Instead of dismissing the matter as unimportant, he assumes that the purity laws hold some relevance through his rejection of the Pharisees' interpretation of them, implying a positive view toward the purity system and the Torah (Boyarin 2012, pp. 102–28).

The Levitical purity system is complex. It delineates distinct types of impurity (moral and ritual) that are interrelated and use the same vocabulary.[19] Though the language is the same, food impurity is not the same as moral or ritual purity and is better categorized as permitted and prohibited according to Lv 11 and Dt 14:3–21 (Klawans 2000, pp. 31–32; Boyarin 2012, pp. 112–14; Thiessen 2020, pp. 187–95).[20] Thus, in his private teaching to his disciples (vv. 17–23), Jesus contrasts permitted food, which goes into and out of the body without defiling, with immoral acts that flow from the heart outward, causing defilement. Jesus' list of immoral acts that defile a person corresponds well to sins generally accepted as sources of moral defilement (Klawans 2000, p. 148). Yet, it also includes other grave sins that defile. Often, this verse is interpreted as Jesus' emphasis on moral purity over ritual purity. In contrast, Van Maaren notes that these verses do not juxtapose ritual and moral impurity (Van Maaren 2019, p. 311).[21] Instead, they are representative of impurities that include grave sins that defile.[22] In this context, Mark's parenthetical statement, "Thus he declared all foods clean" (v. 19), is better understood as "he purified all foods," showing that Jesus rejected the extra-stringent interpretation of defiled foods held by the Pharisees. The two issues of defilement and interpretation of the Torah are a thread through the pericope rendering the conclusion that Mark's Jesus does not reject the Levitical purity system but assumes it, "while contrasting his understanding of purity with that of the Pharisees and scribes" (Van Maaren 2019, p. 307). The confrontation also demonstrates the prominent 2nd Temple period controversy over who has the authority to interpret the Torah correctly for daily life. The issue was orthopraxy, not orthodoxy.

The above examples are not exhaustive in their exposition or representation of Mark's view of the Temple or Torah. However, they testify on the narrative level to Mark's presentation of Jesus as honoring, respecting, and participating in the Torah commandments, the purity and dietary systems and the Temple with its sacrificial system and priesthood.[23]

3. The Parable of the Vineyard

The Parable of the Vineyard is one of the most challenging and enigmatic parables in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 20:1–16; Mk 12:1–12; Lk 20:9–19; cf. Gospel of Thomas 65–66), [24] with a myriad of interpretations utilizing sundry methodologies generally asserting that Jesus and the Church have replaced the Jewish People and the Temple with its system of worship.[25] The following analysis of the parable heeds the admonitions of Drury (1985, pp. 1–3) and Gerhardsson (1991) on the importance of maintaining parables in their imme-

diate narrative and broader book context. Gerhardsson explains that parables (narrative *meshalim* in his terminology)[26] separated from their context are naked and wild texts with endless interpretations (Gerhardsson 1991, pp. 322, 325 and 335).

The narrative context of the Parable of the Vineyard in Mark is crucial due to its strategic arrangement through typical Markan techniques of intercalation (sandwich technique; Edwards 1989) and Scriptural allusions that create an interpretive framework. For instance, the insertion of the Temple confrontation (11:15–19) between the "cursing" and withering of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–25) creates a Markan sandwich that connects the two events. The allusion to Psalm 118:25–26 at the triumphal entry (11:1–11) and the quote of Psalm 118:22–23 at the end of the Parable of the Vineyard (12:10–11) frame the intercalated inner story of the fig tree and cleansing of the Temple, grouping the events. Thus, one's interpretation of the cleansing of the Temple and the unfruitful fig tree becomes the interpretive key for the Parable of the Vineyard. An understanding of the unfruitful fig tree as a portent of the destruction of the Temple and the sacrificial system engenders the conclusion that Jesus has replaced the Temple and the Church has replaced the Jewish people.[27] In a snowball effect, the interpretive key, strengthened by the interpretation of the Parable of the Vineyard, influences the interpretation of the Last Supper as the launch of a new Temple in which bread replaces animal sacrifice (Theissen and Merz 1996, pp. 432–36; Chilton 1992, pp. 150–54), and Jesus' death and resurrection are placed as the establishment of the Church as the new Temple (Wardle 2010, p. 223 n. 207). The following analysis of the narrative context presents a contrasting interpretive key.

3.1. Broader Narrative Context 11:1—13:1

The Parable of the Vineyard is woven into the end of Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The narrative context of the parable (11:1—13:1) covers a three-day sequence of events that occurred in or around the Temple: Jesus' triumphal entry and first visit to the Temple (11:1–11); the "cursing" of the fig tree, and the Temple confrontation (11:12–19); the withering of the fig tree, and Jesus' teaching in the Temple (11:20—13:1).

Mark sets the stage for Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and the Temple through the healing of Bartimaeus (10:46–52). Twice Bartimaeus called Jesus the Son of David (10:47, 48).[28] Although these verses are the only explicit use in Mark's gospel of the title Son of David, the concept is strewn throughout the Gospel. The underlying idea of the messiahship of the Son of David is expressed in 11:9–10, and Jesus briefly discusses its messianic import in 12:35–37 (cf. Pss Sol. 17:24, 35–37). In 12:35–37, Jesus responds to his interlocutors with two questions about the Son of David based on Ps 110:1 (LXX 109:1). The use of the word πῶς supports an interpretation of Jesus' question as rhetorical, leading to the conclusion that the interpretation of the scribes was incorrect; thus, Jesus is the Son of David (e.g., Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 577–81). The appeal to David's authority in 2:25 can be read as an implicit reference to Jesus' authority, as his actions coincide with the messianic expectations of the Son of David.[29] Mark's placement of the title on the lips of Bartimaeus introduces "Jesus' Son of David activity" (Smith 1996). It raises the readers' messianic expectations in anticipation of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the Temple.

Approaching Jerusalem, the crowd welcomed Jesus as a king, proclaiming him the one coming in the name of *Adonai* (alluding to Ps 118:25–26) and initiating the kingdom of David (cf. 10:47–48). Jesus' entry resembles the ceremonial entrances of kings into the city (Catchpole 1984), e.g., Solomon (1 Kgs 1:32–40) and the future eschatological king (Zec 9:9).[30] The parallels with Solomon and the eschatological king, along with reference to Psalm 118, reverberate with messianic expectations, and on the narrative level, imbue the crowd, and the reader, with the anticipation that Jesus would be installed as king upon his arrival in Jerusalem. However, upon entering the Temple, nothing happened; the leaders were silent. Jesus looked around and left. The contrasting silence of the leaders and the crowd's reception establishes a narrative tension between the two groups that continues to build until Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time (13:1).

Jesus' return to the Temple the following day continues the Markan theme of contention between the Jewish leaders and the question of authority to interpret the Torah correctly. On the way to the Temple from Bethany, Jesus saw a fig tree in the distance. Being hungry, he approached the tree looking for figs but found none because it was not the season (καιρός) of figs (11:13). Jesus addressed the tree, saying, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (11:14). While Jesus' statement is generally understood as a curse, it could also be an imprecatory prayer (cf. Acts 8:20; Jude 9), which is a prayer that invokes judgment, calamity, or curses as in Ps 35:6, 58:6 and 69:22–25 (Wallace 1996, p. 482, n. 88; cf. Wahlen 2007, pp. 250–53). As an imprecatory prayer, Jesus' words function as a harbinger of his teaching on prayer and faith after the disciples spot the withered fig tree the following day. This is not to say that Mark's audience would have substantially differentiated between a curse, magic and a negative prayer. In the Tanakh and New Testament, magic is determined by the perceived power through which the action is performed (Ricks 2001, esp. p. 143).[31] Mark has already established that Jesus' authority was from God (2:1–12). Thus, Jesus' actions, as the Son of David and anticipated messiah, would not be considered magic. Furthermore, for biblical writers, the difference between a prayer and a curse is the expected outcome rather than the formulation. The connection between Jesus' words spoken to the fig tree and his teaching on prayer upon seeing the results corroborate the interpretation of his words as an imprecatory prayer.

Jesus' hunger and fruitless search for figs are analogous to Micah's simile (Mi 7:1) of a hungry person searching for a cluster of grapes and early figs to show that searching for the godly in Jerusalem (v. 2) was akin to looking for summer fruit after the harvest had ended (v. 1). In the Markan context, Micah 7:1 is reminiscent of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (11:1–11) in that upon his entry into the Temple, he looked around but found no fruit and left (11:11). Though the crowds hailed him as the coming king, Mark presents the Temple leadership as silent. In contrast to the crowds, the Temple leadership did not welcome Jesus into the city as a king was traditionally welcomed (Catchpole 1984, pp. 319–24). In this analogy, the "leaves" on the fig tree can correspond to the crowd's acclamations and reception and the absence of fruit to the leaders' silence and lack of welcome (Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 525–26).

The tree having leaves but no fruit because "it was not the season (καιρός) of figs" (11:13) reflects the timing of the arrival of the kingdom of God as proclaimed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (1:15): "The time (καιρός) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near." The eschatological tone of the prologue (1:1–13), coupled with the verb usage, provides the context for understanding Jesus' proclamation as the prophetic hope for messianic deliverance has arrived and the time (καιρός) for the kingdom of God is about to be realized.[32] From this perspective, the tree having leaves but no fruit illustrates the idea of already but not yet. The messianic hope was already here; however, it was not yet the time (καιρός) for the complete fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. The crowd anticipated a messianic king who would restore the physical kingdom of David; however, the timing and interpretation of their expectations were flawed. Jesus was the coming king, but the time of his enthronement and rule as the eschatological messianic king and Son of David was not yet; he still had to suffer, die, rise from the dead and be exalted as the Son of Man (8:31, 38; 9:9, 31;10:33; 13:26; 14:62). In answer to the disciples' question about the timing of eschatological events and the coming of the Son of Man (13:4, 24–27), Jesus instructed them to learn from the fig tree. When it blossoms in season (καιρός), the eschatological king is near, at the door (13:28–31). The time of messianic deliverance had come in Jesus; however, it was not yet the time (καιρός) for the fulfillment of the fulness of God's kingdom.

The narrative tension continued to rise as Jesus entered the Temple and expelled those selling and buying, overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves and prohibited people from carrying objects through the Temple precincts (vv. 15–16); they were improper uses of the Temple, as indicated in his teaching that follows. The people were amazed at his teaching; however, the leaders became indignant. Standing in the court of the Gentiles, Jesus declared, "my house shall be called a house of prayer

for all nations (Is 56:7), but you have made it a den of robbers" (an allusion to Jer 7:11).[33] Notice that Jesus did not repudiate the Temple. He called the Temple "my house" and returned the next day to teach there (11:27—12:44). Jesus' actions were a criticism of the Temple leadership and how the Temple was being used, but not a rejection of the Temple.[34] As the prophets of old, Jesus' actions and words corrected the Temple leadership. Additionally, his words began the transformation and sanctification of the Temple courts into a place of prayer for both Jews and Gentiles, the nations (Noonan Sabin 2002, p. 79; Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 530–31). The scribes and chief priests were so incensed with Jesus' challenge of their authority in the Temple precinct that they conspired as to how they might destroy (assassinate) him (11:17–18). However, they took no action out of fear for the people. In Mark's narrative, this is Jesus' first encounter with the chief priests. Throughout the narrative, the scribes consistently question Jesus directly or through his disciples (2:6, 16; 3:22; 7:1, 5; 9:14; 11:18, 27; 12:28, 32; 14:1); however, the chief priests did not challenge Jesus until he entered the Temple where they had authority. On the narrative level, their dispute with Jesus about his authority progressively escalates until it climaxes in 14:53 and 15:1. The narrative tension continues to intensify on the two tracks, between the leaders and the crowd, and over authority.

On the way to the Temple the following day, the disciples saw the fig tree withered from its roots. Jesus, responding to Peter's astonishment at the sight, taught about faith and prayer (11:23–25). Based on the above interpretation of the leaves of the fig tree, the tree's withered leaves anticipate the leaders' rebellious behavior depicted in the Parable of the Vineyard (12:1–12; cf. Is 1:30). The tenants, similarly to the Temple leadership, were corrupt and needed to be replaced, not the Temple and its systems. The fig tree episode and the cleansing of the Temple criticize the Jewish leaders, not the Temple and its institutions or Israel as a people. Judgment was imminent, but judgment was intended to bring repentance leading to restoration, not replacement of the covenantal institutions (Dt 30:1–10). Upon entering the Temple, the chief priests, scribes, and elders began questioning Jesus about his authority (11:27–28). Instead of answering, Jesus asked the leaders about the source of John's authority. Feigning ignorance out of fear of the crowd, the leaders again remained silent. In response, Jesus told the Parable of the Vineyard.[35] The chief priests, scribes and elders understood that the parable was spoken about them (12:12) and wanted to arrest Jesus; however, their fear of the crowd once again stopped them from acting. The Jewish leaders persisted in inquiring about the source of Jesus' authority. They sent others to test him: Pharisees and Herodians (12:13–17), Sadducees (12:18–27), and a scribe (12:28–34). After the scribe's query, the Jewish leaders stopped directly confronting Jesus, who continued teaching until he departed the Temple for the last time (13:1).

3.2. Parable of the Vineyard

The above reading of the narrative context serves as the interpretive key of the Parable of the Vineyard. The narrative tension between the leaders and the crowds becomes secondary, and the issue of authority comes to the forefront: who has authority over the vineyard, the owner or the tenants? The imagery of the parable and the leaders' reaction to the parable (12:12) indicate that the vineyard owner has authority over the vineyard and the tenants. Though the parable foresees a leadership change, the vineyard and its owner remain the same.

The Parable of the Vineyard in Mark echoes the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1–7, with distinct Markan adaptations.[36] In the Song (Is 5:1–7), God prepared the soil, planted choice vines, built a tower, dug a wine vat and lovingly cared for his vineyard, which is explicitly identified as the house of Israel and the vine as the people of Judah (v. 7).[37] Despite such loving care, the vineyard only produced wild (sour) grapes (5:2, 4). After searching for justice and righteousness but finding only bloodshed and outcry, God removed the vineyard's protecting wall and withheld rain, allowing the vineyard to become a wasteland filled with thorns and briers where wild animals roamed. In Mark's parable, an unidentified man built a vineyard, a fence, a tower, and a wine vat, leased the vine-

yard to tenant vinedressers, and departed. The owner's departure, the introduction of the tenant vinedressers (v. 1) and the slaves (servants) sent to collect the owner's portion of the harvest (vv. 2–5) dramatically alter the situation addressed by Mark's parable from Isaiah's song. In Isaiah 5, God judged the vineyard (Israel) for their disobedience to the Torah, whereas in Mark's parable, nothing is spoken against the vineyard. Instead, the vineyard produced a bountiful crop. Judgment fell on the tenants, who behaved violently and rebelliously.

The tenants beat the first slave and sent him away empty-handed, struck the second on the head, and killed the third. All the other dispatched slaves were beaten or killed. The narrative tension rises with the violent treatment of each slave, until they kill the owner's one dear son (ἀγαπητός), whom he thought they would respect.[38] The haughty tenants tried to usurp the authority of the vineyard owner. At this point, Jesus asked the rhetorical question, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (cf. Is 5:4). He will come and declare judgment on the tenants. The owner's return, which is the climax of the parable, is reminiscent of the kingdom of God that has come in power (9:1) as both involve judgment (12:9). The current tenants, not the vineyard, would be destroyed, and its care would be given to others.

Mark explicitly identifies the tenants as the Jewish leaders (12:12), who, in the immediate context, are the chief priests, scribes, and elders (12:1, 12), Pharisees and Herodians (12:13; cf. 3:6), and Sadducees (12:18). In the broader biblical context, the owner's representatives correspond to the prophets of Israel who were *Adonai*'s representatives (cf. Jer 7:25–26). The tenants' actions escalated from abusing the owner's representatives and refusing to give him what he was owed to killing the owner's beloved son and tossing his body out of the vineyard where the corpse was exposed to wild animals and the forces of nature. The death of the owner's one dear son recognizably corresponds to the death of Jesus, as he predicted his death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33), the leaders' involvement in it (8:31; 10:33; 14:1) and their collusion to kill him (3:6; 11:18; 14:1; cf. 12:12). However, the parallels between the owner's son and Jesus stop at the son's death. Jesus was crucified outside the city, and his body was laid in a grave. The treatment of the son's body in the parable reflects the callous and rebellious attitude of the tenants, revealing their scandalous contempt for the owner and his beloved son.

Similarly to the divine speaker in Isaiah 5:4–5, Jesus both asked and answered the rhetorical question (12:9). Unlike Isaiah, where the protecting wall is removed, allowing the vineyard to become a wasteland, Mark's parable takes a shocking turn: the tenant vinedressers are put to death (12:9), and the vineyard is given to the care of others. The parable does not conclude as expected; Israel is not turned over to the nations as in Amos 5:16–18, Isaiah 47:6 or Jeremiah 2:29–37, nor is the vineyard (Israel) destroyed as in Isaiah 5:5 (cf. Is 5:18–26). The vineyard parable surprises and challenges the audience while shaking up and indicting the Jewish leaders.

The "others" to whom the care of the vineyard will be given are not explicitly stated in the text. It is unlikely that "others" refers to Gentile leadership in the church because, during Mark's time, the leadership of the Church was, for the most part, still Jewish.[39] However, in the broader narrative context of Mark's Gospel, the "others" can point to the expansion of the eschatological kingdom of God to include Gentiles (cf. 5:18; 7:24–30, 31–37; 8:1–9, 22–26; 9:14–29; Iverson 2012, esp. p. 334).[40] Such expansion does not indicate replacement but transformation and sanctification of the Temple, which corresponds explicitly to Jesus' passing on some of his authority to the twelve when he sent them out two by two (6:7) and implicitly to them in his teaching on prayer at the withered fig tree (11:23–25).

The position of the quotation of Psalms 11:22–23 (117 LXX) at the end of the Parable of the Vineyard anticipates the eventual judgment of the Jewish leaders for their rejection of the "stone the builders rejected" that became the cornerstone or keystone at the top of an arch (Marcus 2009, pp. 808–9). This metaphor of reversal (the rejected becomes the keystone) may be a pun on הבונים (the builders) from the root בנה and on בנים (the thinkers

or wise) from the root בין.[41] The latter fits the scribes as teachers of the Torah. Another play on words in Hebrew is בן (*bēn*; son) and אבן (*even;* stone). In rejecting the (corner)stone, the Jewish leaders (the caretakers of the vineyard) placed an indictment on themselves that confirmed their guilt as the rebellious tenants (Stern 1994, p. 67). The marvelous element mentioned in Psalm 118:23 (117 LXX) is the miraculous rescue of a person surrounded by enemies and near death. This rescue is an example of divine reversal wrought by the power of God. A similar divine reversal occurs in Mark; Jesus' status changed from rejection and shameful treatment to the cornerstone, the exalted Son of Man.

Jesus' teaching, especially the parable, infuriated the Jewish leaders as Jeremiah's message of *Adonai*'s impending judgment on the leaders, the Temple, and the city infuriated the priests and prophets of his day had (Jer 26:6–7, 11–15). As in Mark, the leaders in Jeremiah were judged for their lack of care for the people (Jer 23:1–2). However, *Adonai*'s judgment was meant as discipline, not rejection, because restoration was promised (Jer 26:13). *Adonai* promised to regather and restore Israel under the rule of a righteous branch, a descendant of David, whom Mark presents as Jesus. The broader context of Isaiah reveals the same theological thought. *Adonai* disciplined Israel for their sin as he warned (Dt 11:16–17, 28:15–46) but restored Israel as promised after repenting their disobedience (Dt 30:1–10). *Adonai* promised to reverse the vineyard's previous status of judgment and exile (Is 27:2–9) and make it a pleasant vineyard that fills the world with its fruit (27:6; cf. Is 65:21).[42] Thus, Israel's chastisement does not indicate *Adonai*'s rejection or replacement but alludes to eschatological reversal akin to Jesus' actions and teaching in the Gospel of Mark.

The same theology is seen in the Aramaic Targum of Isaiah (Chilton 1987, xiv–xviii).[43] The Song of the Vineyard in the Isaiah Targum only expresses a portion of the document's theology. When nested in the Targum's broader theological context, a more exhaustive reading emerges; just as Israel's apostasy engendered judgment and punishment resulting in exile, repentance brings restoration according to *Adonai*'s promises (Hillel 2023). Parallels have been drawn between Targum Isaiah 5 and 4Q500[44] to demonstrate that the fence, tower, and wine vat in Mark's Parable of the Vineyard refer to the Temple, engendering an interpretation that Israel and the Temple have been destroyed and replaced by Jesus and the church.[45] Such an interpretation is called into question by the very fragmented state of 4Q500 and its theme of the ideal temple, and by the addressees and main issues of the Song in Isaiah Targum, where Israel is judged for their sin and the vineyard destroyed, and the Targum's theological context. Furthermore, such parallels are unnecessary as Jesus' physical presence in the Temple precincts and conversations with the Temple leaders establish the parable's connection with the Temple. In Mark, the parable implicitly and explicitly applies to the Jewish leadership.

Summation of the Parable of the Vineyard

Reading the Parable of the Vineyard in its narrative framework (Mk 11:1—13:1) shows that the parable is about judgment on the Jewish leaders and divine reversals. The vineyard received new leadership; otherwise, however, it remained the same. From the triumphal entry (11:1–11) to the vineyard parable (12:1–12), Mark contrasts the crowds' reaction to that of the Jewish leaders and their confrontations with Jesus over his authority to carry out and teach what he does. This passage demonstrates well that Mark's fast-paced narrative is an interwoven tapestry comprising "multiple overlapping structures and sequences, forecasts of what is to come and echoes of what has already been said" (Dewey 1991, p. 224). The critical question in the parable is, "who has authority over the vineyard, the owner or the tenants?" When read in its Markan narrative and canonical narrative context, the answer is "the owner." He, *Adonai*, has the authority to choose those in authority over the vineyard. However, when excised from these parameters, the parable becomes a wild text that allows diverse, supersessionist interpretations that range from anti-Torah and anti-Temple sentiments to the Church's replacement of Israel.

4. Conclusions

In this article, I have presented a post-supersessionist reading of the Temple and Torah in the Gospel of Mark, using the Parable of the Vineyard as an example. This analysis has demonstrated that both Mark and Mark's Jesus respect and honor and participate in the Temple, its priesthood and sacrificial system, and the Mosaic Covenant (Torah). Jesus criticizes the Temple but does not reject it; he criticizes and judges the leaders, which results in their replacement. Jesus's healing of the leper and command to show himself to the priests (1:40–44) exemplify the positive attitude of Mark and Mark's Jesus toward the priesthood and sacrificial system. Jesus affirms the value of the Torah and the commandments in conversations with a rich man and a scribe: he loved the rich man because he kept the commandments (10:18–19) and answered the scribe's inquiry about the greatest commandment with the Shema (Dt 6:4) and the double love command to love God and one's neighbor (Dt 6:5; Lv 19:19). Moreover, Jesus' actions and words testify to his concern and respect for the physical Temple as a functioning institution and as an abstract symbol of Judaism at that time. His direct participation in the Temple, as seen in the narrative context of the Parable of the Vineyard, reinforces this respect and concern. The brief look at Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees over ritual handwashing reveals that Jesus and his disciples upheld the validity of the Torah's purity and dietary laws, though not as interpreted by the Pharisees and scribes.

Examining the Parable of the Vineyard demonstrates the importance of reading passages in their broader Markan narrative context and the canonical narrative to keep Mark's gospel firmly embedded in the biblical story that flows from creation through God's relationship with Israel to consummation. The broader narrative context of the vineyard parable establishes the interpretive key for the parable and sets the narrative's tone and pace. Each of the events and their narrative order—the triumphal entry, the "cursing" of the fig tree, the Temple confrontation, and the withering of the fig tree—establish the narrative tension between the crowd and the leaders, the timing of the fulfillment of the crowd's messianic expectations, and the Jewish leaders' struggle with Jesus' authority. The narrative climaxes in the Parable of the Vineyard, which portrays the judgment of the current Jewish leadership and the removal of their authority and care of the vineyard, which is given to others. The identity of the "others" is not stated in the parable. However, the broader context of Mark's Gospel and Jesus' proclamation that his house will be called a house of prayer for all nations point to the expanded eschatological kingdom that includes Gentile Jesus believers.

The theology of Isaiah (cf. Targum Isaiah) and God's treatment of leaders in Jeremiah support the conclusion that Jesus' criticism and judgment of the Jewish leaders did not indicate the permanent rejection or destruction of the priesthood or the Temple. God's judgment was to bring repentance and restoration. God promised Isaiah to reverse the vineyard's previous status and make it fruitful. This is a divine reversal. In Mark, a divine reversal occurs when Jesus' status changes from rejection and shame to the cornerstone the builders rejected. The reading of the Gospel of Mark presented in this article demonstrates a post-supersessionist interpretation of the Temple and Torah that maintains the continued validity of *Adonai*'s covenant with Israel and its institutions as an integral part of the teaching of Jesus and the *ekklesia*.

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Notes

1 Extreme emphasis on Christology (Wrede 1971; cf. Räisänen 1990); Jesus as the new Temple (Juel 1977); Eschatological judgment of the Temple (Telford 1980); Abolition of the Temple (Waetjen 1989); Anti-Temple and -priesthood (Evans 1989); Jesus as a new type of priest, thus replacing the Temple (Gray 2010).

2 E.g., (Chance 2007; Snow 2016, esp. pp. 115–22, 167–69; Joseph 2016, p. 166) and examples given in (Regev 2010, pp. 139–59, exp. pp. 139–40 and nn. 2–8; 2019, pp. 96–97 and nn. 1–5).

3 *Adonai* is used in this paper for the tetragrammaton, except in well-known phrases where Lord is used.

4 For a review of the history of research on the Parable of the Vineyard, see (Snodgrass 1998, pp. 187–216; Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 541–44).

5 This article proceeds on the premise that Mark's Gospel was written around 70 CE to an audience of Jewish and Gentile Yeshua believers in close proximity to the Land of Israel and should be read as a Jewish text (see Oliver 2013, pp. 32–33; Boyarin 2012) or at least within the boundaries of Jewishness (Van Maaren 2019, pp. 228–33). For convenience, I use the word "Mark" for both the author of the Gospel and the actual text of the Gospel. I am neither indicating the author's name nor the name of the text but using them as widely accepted attributions.

6 Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God is explained more fully in note 32 below.

7 Not all scholars agree that Mark refers to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Some hold that Mark is a Christian response to the Roman imperial cult (Kim 1998) or Roman propaganda (Winn 2007). For a comprehensive evaluation of Mark's use of the phrase "kingdom of God" within the boundaries of 2nd Temple Judaism, see (Van Maaren 2019, pp. 269–77).

8 Though the wording in Mark 1:2 has affinity to both Ex 23:20 (LXX) and Mal 3:1 (LXX), the Exodus passage has greater similarity in the wording and the Malachi passage in context. Thus, both verses are mentioned (Yarbro Collins 2007, p. 136).

9 To avoid a possible methodological conflict, I have not included the confrontation over handwashing in 7:1–23 or the events in 11:1—12:12 here, except for the confrontation in 11:27–33, which are addressed below.

10 Ruth and Boaz, in the Book of Ruth, exemplify living the Torah in *hesed* in everyday life. For the most part, the LXX translates חסד as ἔλεος (mercy or kindness) and δικαιοσύνην (righteousness, justice).

11 See, for example, (Allison 1994, pp. 270–78; 2005, pp. 153–60; Sanders 1992, pp. 257–60), especially the multiple Jewish sources cited there. Philo mentions the two-fold division of the Decalogue (Ex 20:2–17; Dt 5:7–21)—five commandments on each of the 'two tablets' (Ex 34:28; Philo, *Decal*. 50; cf. 106; cf. Ps.-Philo, LAB 12.10; Josephus, *Ant*. 3.101.)—as a summary of the Torah (*Heir* 168; cf. *Spec*. 2.63. Philo writes as though his interpretation of the Decalogue as a summary of the Torah is well-known or at least obvious *Decal*. 19–20; 154; cf. *Spec*. 1:1; cf. Tg. Ps.-J. on Ex 24:12.) On the Decalogue as a summary of the Law and the double love command as its representative, see (Baker 2017, pp. 9–11) and 34, fn. 7 that refers to (Hakala 2014, pp. 45–65) for a survey of Jewish literature on the Decalogue as a summary of the Law.

12 See, for example, Philo, *Decal*. 19–20, 50, 106, 108–110, 121, 154; *Spec*. 2.63; *Abr*. 208; Josephus, *Ant*. 3.101; *Wars*. 2.139; Jub. 7:20; 20:2–10; TIss 5.2; 7:6; TDan 5.3; *T*g. Ps.-J. Lv 19:18; Did. 1.2; Aris. 229; 1QH 7.13–14; b. Shabb. 31a; Cant. Rab. 5:14, Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 21:18.

13 Though the term leprosy in the Tanakh (צרעת) and New Testament (λέπρα) covers a wide array of skin conditions, leper and leprosy are used to coincide with the NRSV translation.

14 For information on leprosy in the Tanakh and New Testament and various opinions of Jesus' words and actions in Mark 1:40–44, see (Thiessen 2020, pp. 43–68, esp. pp. 54–64). On the complicated procedure of purification for skin disease, see (Fredricksen 2012, pp. 20–21).

15 Josephus, *Ant*. 13.297 states that the Sadducees did not obey this tradition and that it was not a command in the Torah. Rabbinic literature also states that not all Jews adhered to such handwashing, see Num Rab 20.21; b. Berahot 52b and Yoma 80b.

16 For information on non-priestly purity, see (Regev 2000) and (Poirier 2003). On the widespread use of handwashing before meals, see (Deines 1993, pp. 228–33).

17 The parenthetical statement "all the Jews" is probably Mark's tendancy for generalizing or hyperbole.

18 The Pharisees and their followers are most closely associated with the "tradition of the elders" (Josephus, *Ant*. 13.10.6; 13.16.2; cf. Furstenberg 2008, p. 178; Deines 2019).

19 One difference is that skin disease, bodily discharges and corpse contamination can be removed with time and water (in the case of corpse impurity, the ashes of the red heifer), but impurity of prohibited animals cannot be removed. On ritual and moral impurity in their biblical and 2nd Temple Jewish contexts, see (Klawans 2000, 2006) and in Christianity in light of Greek and Qumranic practices see (Regev 2004).

20 The language of permitted and prohibitted is taken up in Rabbinic literature.

21 "The dietary laws (Lev 11) are juxtaposed with the ritual purity laws (Lev 12—15) but their effects are juxtaposed with expulsion from the land (Lev 20:22–26), a characteristic of moral impurity" (Van Maaren 2019, p. 311).

22 On the defiling force of sin in the Levitical purity system, see (Van Maaren 2019, pp. 310–16).

23 For a more through and in-depth study of the Temple in the Gospel of Mark, see (Regev 2010, 2019, pp. 96–126; cf. Van Maaren 2019, pp. 290–316).

24 Much of this section is a broader reworking of my article "The Parable of the Vineyard in Mark 12:1–12 as Contested Authority" (Hillel 2023).

25 See, for example, (Hooker 1988, pp. 8–9; Moloney 2002, pp. 235–36; Gray 2010, pp. 75–76, 91). For a survey of historical issues and bibliography, see (Evans 2001, pp. 210–31).

26 Gerhardsson prefers the Hebrew term *mashal*/*meshalim* (משלים/משל) because it is broader than the Greek word *parabole* (παραβολή) and distinquishes between aphoristic *meshalim* and narrative *meshalim*. Hence, Mk 1:1–12 is a narrative *mashal* (1988).

27 Levenson (1993, pp. 227–29) explains how Christian readers have tended to understand this parable through a supersessionist lens, concluding that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree means that the Temple and the sacrificial system are cursed and will be destroyed (cf. Marcus 2009, p. 814).

28 Not all scholars concur that Mark presents Jesus as accepting the title of Son of David. For a brief survey of scholarly support for the varying opinions, see (Van Maaren 2019, p. 288, n. 227). Targum Jonathan the Psalms also interprets Psalm 118:22–29 as a reference to King David, apparently reading it against the narrative of 1 Samuel 16:1–13.

29 This understanding agrees with the well-attested acceptance of the Davidic descent of the Messiah in the Tanakh, 2nd Temple Tannaitic literature and later Christian literature, thereby showing continuity of tradition. For examples and explanations, see (Marcus 1992, pp. 139–45).

30 Catchpole (1984, pp. 319–21) gives examples of victorious leaders ceremoniously welcomed into different cities or military camps. In relation to Jerusalem, he mentions Alexander the Great (Josephus *Ant.* 11:325–39), Appolonius (2 Macc 4:21–22) Marcus Agrippa (Joephus *Ant.*16;12–15) and Simon Maccabeus (1 Macc 13:43–48). Gombis (2018) compares Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in Mark 11:1–11 with 1 Macc 12:43–48, concluding that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was subversive and not triumphant.

31 The view of magic and religion in the Greek and Roman worlds is much blurrier. See (Ogden 1999).

32 The use of an indicative perfect verb in the first statement, "the time is fulfilled" πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς, indicates that the decisive moment (καιρός) for the fulfillment of prophetic hope for messianic deliverance is not just imminent, but it is here. The second part of the proclamation ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ also uses an indicative perfect verb. However, considering the eschatological context and that ἐγγίζω is an action verb contra πληρόω, which is stative, the phrase does not necessarily mean that the action is completed. "Has come near" ἤγγικεν can mean that the result of its coming near is now near (France 2002, pp. 92–93).

33 Robbers (λῃστής) is a keyword in Mk 11–15. See (Regev 2019, pp. 107–9) and the sources listed there.

34 Criticism of the Temple leadership and Temple was rampant, e.g., Jer 8:8–13, Pss Sol, 1 En. 89–90. See Buth and Kvasnica (2006, p. 65), who among others, have noted that similar criticism of the Temple authorities exists without rejecting the Temple in various Jewish texts from the Tanakh through Rabbinic Literature.

35 Mark's Jesus typically responds to confrontation with parables (e.g., 2:17, 19–22; 3:27; chap. 4; 7:15). These parables evoke earlier stories and whisper to the audience to pay attention to what they hear (Levine 2014, p. 8; Hays 2016, p. 15).

36 Mark rarely explains the correspondence between the allusions and echoes to the Tanakh and Jesus. The reader is left to make the connections themselves. See (Hays 2016).

37 The vineyard/vine is a standard metaphor for Israel in the Tanakh (Ps 80:7–19 (HB 8–20); Is 5:1–7, 27:2–5; Jer 2:21, 5:10, 6:9, 8:13, 12:10; Hos 10:1; Ez 15:1–8, 17:5–10, 19:10–14) and early Judaism (LAB 12:8–9, 39:2; 4 Ezra 5:23–27; 2 Bar 36:3).

38 The language of the Akedah in the LXX, adjective ἀγαπητός/ον to describe Abraham's son, his only one, the one he loved, prefigures its use in Mark. God calls Jesus his ἀγαπητός twice in Mark, at his baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7) (Levenson 1993, pp. 30–31, 226–29; cf. pp. 200 & 207). (Yarbro Collins 2007, p. 150) suggests that Isa 42:1 is a more likely explanation for the phrase "beloved one."

39 Traditionally, it is believed that James was the leader of the Jerusalem *ekklēsia* until he was martyred in 62 or 69 CE.

40 Jesus' statement, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations," supports this interpretation, especially considering that the proclamation was made in the Court of the Gentiles, where the moneychangers and sellers were situated.

41 This wordplay is common in the Tanakh and New Testament, see (Snodgrass 2011, pp. 113–18). A similar *jeu de mots* is found in the famous midrash attributed to Rabbi Eleazer (b. Ber. 64a). It cannot be definitively stated that Mark's immediate audience would have understood this pun.

42 The restoration of Israel mentioned in Dt 30 and Is 27:6 are two examples among many in the Tanakh that denote the eternal election of Israel.

43 The exact date of the Targum is difficult to discern due to the interpretative layers. Bruce Chilton (1987, pp. xxiv–xxv) explains, "By taking into consideration the interpretative levels (and strata within those levels, . . . it is possible to arrive at a consistent picture of how the Targum took shape. During the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, it would appear, rabbis developed an interpretative translation of Isaiah. Successive generations took up the work of earlier interpreters until the coherent Targum we can now read emerged."

44 The Qumran text 4Q500 contains seven fragments, six of which are very small (Baumgarten 1989; Brooke 1995, p. 268).

[45] Implicit allusions to the Temple have been found in the correspondence between the tower that the owner built (Mk 12:2) with Targum of Isaiah 5:2, which identifies the tower with the sanctuary (de Moor 1998, pp. 70–71; cf. Evans 2016, pp. 289–302), and the "gate of the holy height" in 4Q500 (Brooke 1995, pp. 270–71), as well as between the fence and wine vat (Mk 12:2) with the removal (destruction) of the sanctuary and the altar in Targum Isaiah 5 (de Moor 1998, pp. 69–70; cf. Evans 2016, pp. 299–302).

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Article

"Children of the Prophets and the Covenant": A Post-Supersessionist Reading of Luke-Acts

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Abstract: Luke-Acts is a theocentric narrative. It tells how God in and through Jesus acts out of faithfulness to the covenant on behalf of Israel. This article uses this fundamental claim to offer a post-supersessionist reading of Luke-Acts. It contends that genealogical Israel (the Jewish people) remains God's people because of election. God turns to Israel offering forgiveness and salvation. The people struggle to respond. All Israel, including Jesus's disciples, stumbles. Some Jewish people are more faithful, others less. Together they comprise the less-than-faithful people of God to whom God is faithful. Luke's Jesus and Paul embody this dynamic. Jesus recapitulates Israel's history, acting faithfully on its behalf for its salvation. He dies in solidarity with the Jewish people, faithful and unfaithful alike. He is raised, proleptically guaranteeing their restoration. Paul embodies how God remains loyal to recalcitrant Israel. Apart from repentance from Paul, an encounter with the risen Lord transforms this "God-fighter" simply because he is a "chosen vessel". In Paul, Luke narrates God's radical fidelity to Israel. God will restore Israel, opening blind eyes to see Jesus as messiah. The article distills the author's forthcoming monograph *Reading Luke-Acts after Supersessionism: The Salvation of Israel and the Nations in Accordance with the Scriptures*.

Keywords: Christian; Christianity; covenant; God; Jesus; Israel; intertextuality; Jews; Jewish people; Judaism; post-supersessionism; repentance; replacement theology

1. Introduction: Luke-Acts and the People of God

Luke-Acts—Acts especially—have been loci of supersessionist interpretation and theology. Luke's writings have long been read as having an ambivalence toward Jews and Judaism.[1] Luke roots his narrative in Israel's scriptural history, values Torah, and highlights the Jewish origins of the Jesus movement. He narrates the opposition to Jesus and the persecution of his followers by "the Jews" with sharp language and describes the movement to the gentiles. Numerous interpreters conclude from this tension that Luke—presumed to be a gentile writing for gentiles—seeks to legitimize the Jesus movement as the true inheritors of Israel's tradition over and against the Jewish people. Luke, they argue, may like Jewish things, but not Jews. His writings (re)define *Israel* by eschewing the Jewish familial group as God's people while maintaining Israel's Scriptures and symbols. The "new" or "true" Israel is now Jesus's followers, Jewish and/or gentile. Objectors and alternative proposals have gained traction in recent years, causing a substantial shift in the landscape of Lukan studies. Nevertheless, reading Luke-Acts as evincing supersessionism remains the majority view (See the surveys in Jáuregui 1986; Tyson 1999; Bovon 2006, pp. 350–86; Moraff 2020).

Supersessionism boils down to whether the Jewish people are God's people, regardless of how or why replacement occurs (Soulen 1996; Donaldson 2016). A non-supersessionist reading of Luke-Acts must demonstrate Luke's commitment to the Jewish people, first and foremost, their identity, their covenant relationship with God, and expectations for their salvation. This article summarizes my attempt at a post-supersessionist reading of Luke-Acts (Moraff, forthcoming). In brief, I argue that Luke-Acts narrates Israel's God maintaining covenant faithfulness to the Jewish people by bringing salvation to Israel and

the nations through Jesus.[2] In extending Israel's story in continuity with the Scriptures, Luke presumes who Israel is, what Israel's hope is, and how Israel's God maintains loyalty and will bring salvation to Israel, regardless of Israel's fidelity. The ubiquitous themes of judgment and restoration affirm ethnic Israel's identity as God's chosen.[3] Amid calls for repentance and fidelity to Jesus as Israel's messiah, Luke-Acts constructs a non-competitive identity of Israel. "Faithful" and "unfaithful" Jewish people *together* constitute God's covenant family. Luke draws from Israel's sacred texts to affirm that Israel's identity is maintained by God's ongoing fidelity to them and the ancestral promises (Barth 1969, pp. 26–28; Wyschogrod 1989, pp. 173–223).

Israel, as usual, struggles to reciprocate. Everyone in Israel evinces degrees of (in)fidelity, including the disciples. Indeed, (un)faithfulness is a spectrum in Luke-Acts. All Israel sojourns on a communal journey of repentance that, for Luke, should be oriented toward Jesus, Israel's king. Nevertheless, Luke warns unrepentant Israelites that they will be "cut off" from the people by excluding themselves from the promised covenant life (Luke 3:9–17; Acts 3:17–26; 13:46). These cautions and consequences stand in continuity with Israel's Scriptures, are rooted in Israel's identity as God's people, and are not enacted in the narrative. Through its characters, Luke speaks among the Jewish people and in anticipation of their restoration.

Moreover, Luke's central characters Jesus and Paul are prototypical of God's relationship to Israel. They reenact Israel's communal story, demonstrate ongoing commitment to the Jewish people, and testify to the enduring expectation for national redemption amid judgment. Jesus and Paul embody the "recapitulation" and "historical recurrence" that runs throughout Luke's narrative (Reardon 2021, pp. 133–61). By *recapitulation*, I mean that Jesus encapsulates Israel's past, present, and future in his Jewish flesh: Israel's story is his story, and his story is Israel's (cf. Carter 2008, pp. 29–35; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.22.1–3). As Isaiah's loyal servant who brings salvation to all flesh and raises up Jacob's tribes (Isa 40:3–5), Jesus is faithful for the sake of corporate Israel, God's blind servant Israel in need of healing (42:1—43:13). His death reflects Israel's "fall"—Jerusalem's destruction in 70 CE. His resurrection likewise empowers and guarantees the hope for its "rise" (Luke 2:35; Acts 4:1; Kinzer 2018). Saul/Paul personifies Israel's Lord's engagement with unfaithful Israel. His narrative arc demonstrates how, even at its most rebellious, violent, and blind state, Israel's Lord can (and will) restore Israel. God will overcome their obstinacy, reorienting them toward the risen Jesus.[4] In the meantime, Paul ends in solidarity with the Jewish people, enchained in Rome, proclaiming Israel's hope for the kingdom of God (Acts 28:17–26). In short, Jesus takes Israel's judgment and restoration into himself, while Paul personifies God's ability to reorient intractable Israel.[5]

To draw these contours, I briefly discuss how recent efforts to frame Luke-Acts within Judaism undergird my theological approach. Next, I discuss how Luke 1—4 uses Israel's Scriptures to introduce Israel and God's relationship. Interconnected themes of judgment and restoration highlight God's faithfulness to the unfaithful covenant people. Israel remains a people chosen by God who continually struggle to respond to God rightly. I then discuss how Luke includes the disciples in Israel's repentance-journey. They reflect Israel's inability to be faithful. Israel's Lord must transform them. Then, I discuss how Jesus recapitulates Israel's story. The King of the Jews identifies with Israel in judgment and guarantees their restoration. Finally, I outline how the Paul of Acts is prototypical of God's dealings with recalcitrant Israel. Paul personifies how God can (and will) save Israel who opposes God's agents of salvation out of imperceptiveness out of God's own volition.

2. Theological Interpretation of Luke-Acts within Judaism

An emergent stream of scholars has attempted to map Luke-Acts on the variegated landscape of Second Temple Judaism. They explore themes of Torah, temple, Israel's salvation, engage Luke's ethnic reasoning, and compare Luke-Acts with early Jewish texts (Moraff 2020, pp. 76–80).[6] Such invaluable efforts have typically been historical-critical in orientation. These works tend to be primarily descriptive and comparative. The focus often

has more to do with the *Sitz im Leben* of Lukan texts and their (dis)similarities with roughly contemporaneous works. Those who categorize Luke's perspective as Jewish frame his works historically and culturally within the diverse world of early Judaism. They map Luke-Acts in antiquity and/or along the gradual parting of the ways.

My study is indebted to these projects but develops them in a unique direction: Framing Luke's writings within Judaism funds my avowedly *theological* interpretation of Luke-Acts (Hays 2007; Moberly 2009; cf. Kinzer 2018, pp. 7–10).[7] Resultant interpretive differences have more to do with posture and aim than method per se. For example, my project has descriptive and comparative dimensions. But these are integral to my asking: What does Luke-Acts say to the people of God about God and how God interacts with the world and God's people? The historical and socio-cultural framework informs my literary reading that seeks to unpack the theology of Luke's writings. The framing is essential, but it is not the end goal.

Luke-Acts is thoroughly theocentric: Israel's God is acting in Jesus on behalf of the covenant people and the entire world. Despite Israel's frequent infidelity, God remains faithful to them. Judgment may befall the nation. Some may be pruned from Israel. But the covenant cannot be annulled. It rests on God's faithfulness to his chosen people. Like God's past messengers, Jesus and his followers, even in their harshest words, extend God's faithfulness to God's people, calling them to reform and receive salvation. Luke-Acts' theocentricity invites a theological reading grounded in Israel's Scriptures.

My approach is a close reading of the text as a historically shaped, cultural product of the diverse world of Second Temple Judaism. By *Judaism*, I mean the ancestral tradition—the ways of life and patterns of thought—of the Jewish people. A few unifying elements enable one to identify subsets of Judaism: identification with the Jewish people by genealogy or conversion, loyalty to Israel's God, commitment to the temple (which allows for critique), and adherence to Torah (Schwartz 2009, pp. 49–100; Sanders 2016; Schwartz 2011). By framing Luke-Acts "within Judaism," then, I mean that these texts affirm the central, unifying elements of God, Torah, temple, and the people of Israel.[8] I consider the completed literary compositions as participating in the renegotiation of the Jewish ancestral tradition after the destruction of the temple, centering it on and orienting it towards Jesus the Messiah. My narrative approach holds the Jewishness of Luke-Acts as an indispensable feature of its textual makeup and theological agenda (cf. Bockmuehl 2006, pp. 189–228).

Luke's writings evince their Jewish character at a foundational level. They affirm core features of Judaism in their particularity and carnality. Luke-Acts depicts ongoing commitment to the one God of Israel (e.g., Luke 1:16; 4:8; 7:16; 9:43; Acts 3:13; 22:14). Jewish Jesus followers maintain fidelity to the Torah (e.g., Acts 15:1–29; 22:3; Jervell 1979, pp. 133–52; Oliver 2013, pp. 445–82) and participate in the temple amid harsh critiques (e.g., Luke 19:45–49; 24:53; Acts 2:46; 7:2–51; 21:26; 22:17; 24:12; 25:8). They express ongoing identification with and loyalty to the covenant people of Israel during dispute (e.g., Acts 13:15–17, 26; 28:17–20). The Way aligns with what is written in the Torah and the prophets (24:14). Innovations and conflict—Christology, gentile inclusion, interpretive disputes, etc.—do not necessarily undermine Jewishness. Innovation and conflict were common among early Jewish subgroups. Even with tensions and conflicts, they generally sought the flourishing of the people of Israel and its ancestral tradition, not their abandonment (Böttrich 2015). Likewise, Jesus and his followers identify with the Jewish people, seeking the people's and the tradition's reformation. Luke's truth claims about Jesus's messianic identity are depicted as being for the sake of Israel and their salvation. Therefore, I attempt to hear Luke-Act speaking from among and out of loyalty to the Jewish people and their tradition even when there is dissonance.

To illustrate the significance of my theological interpretive posture, the impact of reading Luke-Acts theologically within Judaism emerges with Lukan intertextuality and narrative portrayal of competing Jewish groups. Luke's narrative is a story embedded in a story (Green 1994). He wrote during a period when inheritors of Israel's story grappled with how to understand it and its significance for the present. Framed in this context, reading

Luke-Acts within Judaism presumes continuity between Luke's writings and Israel's Scriptures, even as it allows Israel's God to act in surprising, though not unprecedented, ways. It presumes God acts for God's people in covenant faithfulness. In extending Israel's sacred history, Luke begins with a particular understanding of who Israel is and what Israel's hope is. Redefinition of scriptural terms or alteration of expectations might occur, but they must be explicit.

Early Judaism and its literature were part and parcel of Luke's interpretive community. Understanding Luke-Acts within Judaism demands comparison with Second Temple Jewish literature. Luke-Acts inherits interpretive traditions, participates in conversations about how best to understand Israel's sacred texts, and therein argues that the Jewish ancestral tradition should be oriented toward Jesus. Early Judaism was replete with competing visions for Israel's future, each rooted in Israel's sacred texts (Wendel 2011). This historical context of conflict should caution interpreters from concluding too quickly that Luke's particular vision for Israel is supersessionist. Luke-Acts participates in this wider discourse among its Jewish compatriots. Early Christian interpreters of Luke-Acts, of course, remain a part of this interpretive discussion. They often provide language that encapsulates Luke's theological vision. Other times, like some early Jewish texts, they provide points of contrast with Luke's narrative aims. In short, I draw a larger interpretive community to foster a theological reading of Luke-Acts as an innately Jewish narrative.

3. God's Faithfulness to Unfaithful Israel

3.1. Who Is Israel? Election and Genealogy

Luke-Acts presupposes the story of God and Israel. Luke's narrative is predicated on God's acting on behalf of Israel, as well as the entire world, out of fidelity to his covenant promises to God's people. Notably, Luke never introduces *God* or *Israel*. He assumes the reader knows who they are. The God about whom Luke speaks is Israel's God (Acts 13:17). And Israel is this God's people (Luke 1:68; 2:32; 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:42). Israel is a people whose identity is rooted in God's choice to relate and be faithful to them, beginning with the Patriarchs.[9] The identity of the covenant people in the Scriptures continued genealogically, though its borders were typically porous and malleable (e.g., Exod 12:38; Ruth 1:16; Jud 14:10; cf. Ezra 9:1–4). The physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, faithful and unfaithful, inherited the covenant legacy (e.g., Deut 26:5; 29:14–28; Kaminsky 2016). Luke upholds the genealogical dimension of Israel's identity, highlighting God's faithfulness to Abraham's physical descendants.[10] Nevertheless, election, covenant, and promise ground Israel's identity; they *precede* genealogy. Israel's infidelity, then, cannot repudiate the corporate relationship with God. It rests on God's faithfulness alone (e.g., Jer 33:19–26; Ezek 36:22–32).[11] Israel is God's people because God has chosen them and upholds the covenant. Israel's identity is thus not reducible to genealogy. Descent from the Patriarchs is not primary for who Israel is. Election is.

Still, Israel for Luke is a particular familial group. Luke-Acts depicts the Jewish people as (at least a subset of) Israel (Dahl 1958; Neubrand 2006; cf. Staples 2021). The Jewish people are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the intended heirs of God's promises (e.g., Acts 2:39; 3:25–26; 13:23, 32–33; 26:6–7).[12] They are a nation with their own ancestral history, territory, language, temple cult, and customs. Luke ties his Jewish characters to this people group along these exact ethnic lines.[13] They continue to identify with and participate in the Jewish *ethnos* (Moraff 2021, pp. 49–101). The Twelve comprise the reconstituted core of Israel, but they do not redefine the people. They are a representative segment of the twelve tribes chosen by God (Luke 6:12–16; 22:30; Acts 1:12–26; 24:17; 26:4–8; 28:17–19; D. A. Smith 2018, pp. 67–123). Luke never grants the appellation *Israel* or *Israelites* to someone other than Jewish people. They are the people in covenant relationship with God for whom God is acting in Jesus (cf. Acts 13:16; 19:9). Even the unrepentant remain descendants of Abraham (e.g., Luke 1:55, 73; 16:30; Acts 3:13; 7:2; 13:26). As Peter tells his Jewish listeners, "You *are* (ὑμεῖς ἐστε) sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors" (Acts 3:25).[14] Their covenant status

remains intact. The Jewish people remain God's elect family. The narrative tension arises in whether Israel will repeat its history of failing to respond properly to their God.

3.2. Salvation and Judgment in Luke 1—2

Luke's opening chapters establish the deep link between how God is acting in Jesus for the forgiveness and restoration his people Israel (Oliver 2021, pp. 28–70; Reardon 2021, pp. 33–64). The angel Gabriel introduces Jesus as the anticipated Davidic king who "will reign over the house of Jacob forever" (1:32–33; cf. 2 Sam 7:13–14; 4Q246; 4Q174). Zachariah further describes how the Davidide's coming brings Israel's peace. The *Magnificat* and *Benedictus* use language reminiscent of Isaiah's new exodus, that is, Israel's redemption from the darkness of exile and oppression from enemies as God forgives the nation's sins (Luke 1:46–55, 67–79).[15] Faithful Simeon elaborates that this child will carry out the Isaianic vision of universal "salvation" by being "a light for revelation for the nations and glory to your [God's] people Israel" (Luke 2:25–32; cf. Isa 42:1–7; 43:1–13; 49:5–7; 51:4–8; 55:4–5; Bar 5:1–9).[16] The vision of gentiles coming alongside Israel to worship Israel's God will come to fruition in tandem with Israel's redemption (e.g., Isa 2:1–11; 19:19–25; Micah 4:1–5; Tob 14:6–7). The pious prophetess Anna of the tribe of Asher, one of the lost tribes, proclaims Jesus to all those looking for "Jerusalem's deliverance" (Luke 2:36–38; cf. 21:28; 24:21; Acts 26:27; Jdt 16:1–17).[17]

From the outset, Luke uses Israel's Scriptures to contend that Israel—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—will find national renewal in this promised son of David. In Jesus, God is acting in faithfulness to the everlasting covenant with Abraham's descendants (Luke 1:54–55, 68–79; cf. Isa 63:7–19; Sir. 5:6; Acts 3:17–26). Notably, salvation stems from the divine initiative alone. God has visited the people, turning toward them with forgiveness of sins. As throughout Israel's history, God's saving acts demands a response. The question is whether Israel will turn toward God. To paraphrase Luke's Jesus, when God brings about justice for God's chosen, will the Son of Man find faithfulness in the land (18:7–8)?

Luke-Acts narrates another call for Israel to repent in light of God's visitation. Should they fail to (re)align with God, they will fall into judgment (Luke 3:7–9, 17; 11:23; 13:1–9; 20:9–18; Acts 3:23; cf. 1QS 9.3–11). Coming salvation and potential judgment are again intertwined.[18] Indeed, harsh judgment for Israel's infidelity presupposes Israel's covenantal relationship with God (cf. Deut 30:1–10). Throughout Israel's history, people and groups have been removed from God's people. Nevertheless, the removal of some and centering of others does not negate Israel's corporate election (e.g., Gen 17:14; Exod 12:15, 19; Num 16:20–35; 25:1–9; Deut 4:3–4; 31–34; Isa 6:11–13; 9:13–17; 10:20—11:16). Luke's opening chapters reinscribe the historic tension of salvation and judgment intrinsic to calls to repent. The people must reorient their lives according to God's visitation in Jesus.

The elderly Simeon prefigures the bleak outlook for Israel's response. Simeon cryptically warns that Jesus "is set for the falling and rising (πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν) of many in Israel and a sign that is spoken against" (2:35). Israel will divide and, at least in part, oppose him (cf. 12:49–53). That God's messenger coincides with and provokes a crisis in Israel, particularly the failure of its leadership, is no surprise. Prophets often arise because the people are in a state of obstinacy.[19] As Stephen will recount and reenact, Israel has a long history of rejecting God's agents of redemption (Acts 7:2–60).[20] Israel repeatedly fails to turn back to God when God turns to them. Such failure often results from Israel's poor leadership. Jeremiah and Ezekiel juxtapose the Davidic shepherd-king's return to restore the flock of Israel against Israel's present cruel, disloyal shepherds who fail to herd justly and, as a result, have contributed to the flock's scattering (Jer 23:1–8; Ezek 34:25–31, esp. vv. 25, 28–29; cf. Luke 15:1–7; Acts 20:28). As the Third Gospel progresses, Jesus quarrels with Israel's leaders more than the people. The commonfolk are the battleground between Jesus and Israel's current shepherds—whom will Israel follow (Lohfink 1975, pp. 33–61; Brawley 1987, pp. 133–54)?[21]

Nevertheless, Simeon's foreboding words reinscribe the anticipation for redemption amidst division and opposition. "Falling and rising" (πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν) insinuates a sequential pattern. The "many in Israel"—the corporate entity with the potential exclusion of some of its members—fall then rise (Oliver 2021, p. 39). Simeon reinscribes the patterns of judgment and restoration envisioned by the prophets (e.g., Deut 30:1–10; Isa 28:13–22; Jer 32:26–44; Ezek 11:5–21; 36:22—37:28). Israel, in other words, would experience a type of death and resurrection. Judgment will not have the last word (Kinzer 2018, pp. 21–58, 129–59; Moraff 2021, pp. 184–87; cf. Levenson 2006).

3.3. The Call to Repentance (Luke 3—4)

John the Baptist's appearance is framed by salvific language taken from Isaiah (Luke 3:3–6; cf. Isa 40:3–5). John is the forerunner of the new exodus, sent to prepare the Lord's people for their visitation. The prophet's words, though, emphasize imminent judgment and the need for repentance (Luke 3:7–18). John describes the coming wrath that will purify the people should they fail to respond (3:7–9, 16–17; cf. Mal 3:19–24; Sir 48:1–10; 4Q521; Otten 2021, pp. 44–45).[22] The immerser's words are often cited as negating physical Abrahamic ancestry, marking the beginning of Luke's redefinition of Israel (e.g., Fox 2021, pp. 117–19). John does not sever the genealogical dimension, though. Instead, the immerser challenges the sufficiency of Abrahamic descent for participation in God's kingdom. The Jewish populace cannot rely on having Abraham as their father or on his merits (Levine and Witherington III 2018, pp. 86–88). They must produce "fruits worthy of repentance" to escape the wrath to come. Trees that do not bear "good fruit" will be cut down and thrown into the fire, burned as chaff (Luke 3:9, 17).[23] Simply being from Abraham's line is insufficient to participate in Israel's salvation, John warns. Indeed, the crowds do not interpret John's "offspring" metaphors ontologically but behaviorally. Their question "What, then, shall we do?" recognizes that John is exhorting them to change their behavior. John responds by calling them to economic justice (Luke 3:10–14). John, in other words, demands the people look like Abraham rather than vipers (cf. Sir 21:1–3). The people must pursue righteousness like their father Abraham, the rock from which Israel was originally hewn (Isa 51:1–3; Brawley 2020, pp. 55–56). Should they not, they will be cut off, excluded from the promised restoration.

The rest of Luke-Acts reiterates the tension that Abraham is father to the Jewish people and that lineage does not guarantee salvation (e.g., Luke 16:22–25, 30; Acts 5:30; 7:2; 13:17, 26). This is best seen in Peter's speech at the Beautiful Gate (3:12–26). Peter warns that those who do not listen to Jesus, the prophet like Moses, will be cut off from the people (3:23; cf. Lev 23:29; Deut 18:15–20). In his next breath, Peter reiterates that his Jewish listeners (who have not repented yet) are *presently* covenant members, descendants of Abraham on whose behalf God has acted in Jesus (Acts 3:25; cf. 13:16, 26). John the Baptist and Peter warn that those who fail to repent and bear good fruit will be excluded from the life of Israel (cf. 13:46). But this is a common prophetic warning to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The programmatic scene in Nazareth repeats the tension of salvation and judgment for Israel and prefigures the divided response Jesus will engender among his people. In the synagogue, Jesus proclaims that God's deliverance to captive Israel as envisioned by Isaiah is fulfilled (Luke 4:16–21; cf. Isa 58:6; 61:1–2;). God is acting in his anointed servant Jesus to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release from sin, and open unseeing eyes. The Lord's favorable year of deliverance is at hand.[24] Jesus informs the community that God is enacting the anticipated Jubilee release (ἄφεσις) for impoverished Israel (and, of course, the impoverished in Israel). Israel's long-awaited new exodus, its atonement for sin and liberation from exile, is at hand (Reardon 2021, pp. 65–98; cf. Lev 25:8–55; Ezek 46:17; Dan 9:3–27; 11Q13). Comfort and deliverance are coming to God's people (cf. Isa 40:1–11). The people's initial response to Jesus and his words is positive, yet incomplete. Those in the synagogue speak well of him. They do not recognize him, however (Luke 4:22).

In response, Jesus describes how Nazareth will miss out on experiencing comparable things done in Capernaum. His hometown will not receive him (4:22–24). Jesus reminds his listeners about how "many . . . in Israel" missed out on provision and healing during the times of Elijah and Elisha. These prophets healed gentiles instead (4:24–29). While his words foreshadow the gentile mission in Acts and comparable Jewish resistance to his followers, Jesus's reference to these prophets speaks more to Israel's disobedience. During the times of Elijah and Elisha, the people of Israel were recalcitrant. Their disloyalty to God, exemplified in their rulers, precipitated the ministries of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 17—19; 2 Kgs 2—8). The majority of Elijah's and Elisha's work was geared toward turning Israel back to its God. However, because of the obstinate state of the people, restoration went elsewhere. Israel failed to receive the power of God intended for them because of their obstinacy. The synagogue's sharp anger suggests they recognize that Jesus's words are a comment against them as much, if not more than, a statement about gentiles.

Israel's history repeats with Jesus (cf. Acts 7:2–53). A new Elijianic prophet has arisen because Israel again needs to return to God. The people once more risk rejecting God's prophet and, therefore, renewal, because of their obduracy (Brawley 1987, pp. 18–27; Denova 1997, pp. 138–46; Otten 2021, p. 67).[25] Saving acts and calls to repentance by God's agents coincide with warnings of judgment and the failure of God's people to receive healing. The people reenact the typical hostile response to a prophet in Israel; they are those in Israel who will disbelieve (cf. Luke 2:34–35). Notably, Jesus neither rejects them in response nor issues another prophetic warning (cf. Luke 9:5; 10:11; Acts 13:51; Brawley 2020, pp. 66–67).[26] He simply moves on to another (Jewish) city, Capernaum. Jesus ministers to others in Israel who may respond better than his hometown. Like Elijah and Elisha, God's Spirit-anointed servant continues to reach out to the covenant people.[27] Israel is thus divided over Jesus. They stand between the promise of restoration and the risk of judgment.

3.4. "This Generation"

Jesus's language of "this generation" provides a helpful analogy for the tension of salvation and judgment for God's people (9:41; 11:29–32, 50–51; 17:25; 21:32; Acts 2:40; cf. Moessner 1988). The phrase recalls the people delivered from slavery in Egypt yet barred from entering the promised land due to their infidelity (Deut 32:5, 20; Ps 78:8; cf. Jer 7:29; 1 En. 93:9). Second Temple literature uses this language in internecine polemic. Some Jewish subgroups refer to those whom they considered to be the unfaithful within Israel as "this generation".[28] Such subgroups conceived of themselves as the renewed core or faithful remnant within Israel. They are those who remained faithful to the covenant. These groups did not exhaust Israel, though. Some would be excluded, but ultimately corporate Israel would be restored as they turn and accept the group's vision of the ancestral tradition (Bergsma 2008; Staples 2021, pp. 259–338).[29] Luke-Acts' narration of Jesus, his disciples, and the broader Jewish world resembles this trend. Jesus's followers are portrayed as the faithful remnant of Israel who seeks repentance from the rest of Israel; they are the faithful *part* of Israel, not Israel in its totality. Nothing in Acts suggests that *Israel* becomes reduced to the remnant or redefined around the movement known as the Way. The remnant of Israel calls the rest of Israel to adhere to their form of Israel's tradition that is centered around Jesus as the Messiah. Notably, Jesus implicates his followers in "this wicked generation," even as they will exhort others to be saved from it (9:41; 11:29–32; Acts 2:40).

4. Israel's Infidelity and the Disciples

4.1. Repentance as a Journey

Israel must respond to God's actions in Jesus. All must repent. For Luke, repentance is the reorientation toward and realigning with God's kingdom and Israel's messiah. An initiatory turning takes place, but repentance cannot be reduced to a singular act in Luke-Acts.[30] Luke intertwines repentance with bearing fruits and movement along "the way" of the Lord (Luke 3:3–17; 13:1–9; cf. 8:4–15; 17:3–4; Acts 8:22). Repentance, then, is a process

that manifests in one's actions (Acts 26:20); it is about change in patterns of being (Nave 2002, p. 169). To use a different metaphor, then, repentance in Luke-Acts is a journey (Green 2015, pp. 50–122; Moraff 2021, pp. 106–9). It is walking along the way of the Lord (Isa 40:3–5; Luke 3:1–6).

For Luke, all Israel has historically been and is still on this journey of repentance as it sought to live faithfully to God (Acts 7:2–51; 13:16–41).[31] The prophets repeatedly called Israel to (re)turn to God when they departed from their God-given vocation. History is repeated in Luke-Acts. Corporate Israel again will struggle to respond rightly. In narrating this response, Luke-Acts blurs clean divisions between faithful and unfaithful in Israel, between "the disciples" and "the people" (6:17–20; 7:1; Lohfink 1975, pp. 73–77; Green 1997, pp. 262, 285). All are implicated in "this generation" and must reorient themselves. Fidelity and infidelity are spectrums. Some characters are more faithful, others are less so. Many fluctuate throughout the story. The journey of repentance inevitably requires frequent recalibration based on the word of the Lord.

4.2. The Disciples' Journey of Repentance

Jesus's own followers participate in Israel's journey of repentance. Unlike much of the Jewish populace, they are rightly oriented toward Jesus. They are further along on Israel's journey of repentance. Nevertheless, they, especially the apostles, evince a comparable struggle to be faithful and understand Jesus properly (D. A. Smith 2018, pp. 187–266; Moraff 2021, pp. 127–55). Jesus gives them insight to "the mysteries of the kingdom," yet they repeatedly misapprehend Jesus's teachings and kingdom mission (8:9–10; 9:20–22, 45; 12:1; 18:31–34; 22:39–46). The apostles, like the failed shepherds of "this generation," jockey for status as the greatest at the table (Luke 22:24–27; cf. 11:43; 14:7; 20:46; Moessner 1988, p. 41). The apostles evince unbelief (8:22–25). When Jesus is arrested, tried, and crucified, the disciples keep their distance (23:49; cf. Ps 38:11). They think the testimony of the resurrection given by Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary mother of James is nonsense (24:1–11). When they encounter the risen Lord, they disbelieve (24:36–43). Despite their privileged insight, they are blind like the rest of Israel (19:41–45; Acts 28:25–28; cf. Isa 42:18—43:13). The disciples need the risen Jesus to open their eyes and minds before they can perceive him properly (Luke 24:13–35, 44–53; cf. 10:21–24).

Even after the Spirit comes, Jesus's followers falter here and there.[32] The Way has dishonorable members who affect its external testimony (Acts 5:1–11; 8:9–24). The apostles are often slow to obey the calling Jesus entrusted to them and to recognize God's movements (1:6–11; 8:1, 14–15; 10:1—11:18; 15:1–28). They frequently see their Spirit-formed unity dissolve due to internal strife (6:1–7; 15:1–3; 15:36–40). Albeit to a lesser degree than in the third gospel, the restored core of Israel continues to move along and occasionally stumble with the rest of Israel on the way of repentance. They continue to (re)align with Israel's Lord.

4.3. Prototypical Peter

Simon Peter exemplifies how the disciples mirror Israel's corporate journey of repentance. Jesus's commissioning of Simon initiates his movement from misunderstanding and skepticism to recognition and obedience (5:1–11). Simon's first words in the narrative demonstrate his deficient posture toward one he knows is a miracle worker (4:38–39). He refers to Jesus as "master" (ἐπιστάτης) and balks at Jesus's request to let down their nets again. Luke reserves the title ἐπιστάτης for the mouths of characters—typically disciples—who evince incomplete understanding (5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13; Levine and Witherington III 2018, pp. 135–37).[33] Still, Simon acquiesces to Jesus's request. The subsequent abundant catch of fish reconfigures Simon Peter's perception of himself and Jesus. Simon properly identifies Jesus as "Lord" (κύριος) and calls himself as "a sinful man," unworthy to be in the Lord's presence (cf. Isa 6:5–6). Nevertheless, Jesus has selected him to be a witness to his own people and to the gentile nations.[34] A transformative encounter with Jesus prompts Peter's repentance journey, precipitating his gradual (re)alignment with God's kingdom.

Peter's progress ebbs and flows throughout Luke-Acts. Peter recognizes Jesus's messianic identity (9:20–22). Immediately after, Peter almost sleeps through the transfiguration. Even when he awakes, he speaks in ignorance. A heavenly voice interrupts and corrects him, reiterating that Peter and his companions must listen to Jesus (9:32–34). Like Judas, Peter betrays Jesus due to satanic influence. Peter denies Jesus before people (Luke 22:31–34, 54–62; cf. 12:9). Unlike Judas, Peter returns. And rather than denying Peter, Jesus has prayed for him and preemptively reinstated him to strengthen his brothers (22:32; cf. 22:3; 12:9). Indeed, he is the only of the eleven remaining apostles who investigates the empty tomb, though he seems to share their skepticism (24:11–12). The apostles Judas and Peter, then, reflect two options for the unfaithful in Israel. They can repent (again) and be forgiven (cf. 17:3–4), or they can depart further, to the point of removing themselves from the people of God (Acts 1:16–20; 3:23). One abdicates his position as a judge of the twelve tribes, the other returns to it (Luke 22:28–30). Indeed, Peter will emerge as a bold, Spirit-empowered leader. Nevertheless, the Lord continues to bring Peter into greater alignment and understanding of God's will (e.g., Acts 10:1—11:18). In sum, Luke narrates the disciples comparably to the rest of the Jewish people. Israel together struggles to align with God's kingdom and messianic king. Peter and all of Jesus's followers are fellow sojourners in Israel on the road of repentance with their fellow Jews.

5. Jesus as Israel in Luke's Gospel

5.1. Jesus as Israel, God's Faithful Servant

Luke depicts Jesus as an inclusive representative of Israel. Jesus is Israel in the flesh. Representatives in Israel's Scriptures do not reduce the corporate identity to themselves. A figurehead encapsulates the nation and its relationship to God, but it does not comprise the totality of the people of God or redefine Israel in or around themselves. They neither are nor construct a "new" or "true Israel" apart from the covenant family.[35] The servant in Isaiah illustrates this dynamic. Israel is God's servant. This servant is both corporate and individual. Corporate Israel is unfaithful and unseeing (Isa 42:18–19). Individual Israel is faithful *for the sake of the corporate servant(s)* and its (and the gentile nations') redemption.[36] The individual Israel(ite) represents corporate, unfaithful Israel. He acts on behalf of "worm Jacob" by granting sight to the people as God forgives and restores them (41:8–14; 42:6–7; 44:21–26). Luke depicts Jesus and Israel comparably. Israel is again called God's servant (Luke 1:54; cf. 1:69; 2:29; Acts 4:25), as is Jesus (Luke 2:45; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). Jesus acts out Israel's servant vocation faithfully for their sake, without redefining the people of God. To borrow Tommy Givens' term, Luke's Jesus is "catholic," that is, he maintains fidelity to the faithful and the unfaithful in Israel alike, holding them together in himself "with hope and forgiveness" (Givens 2014, p. 5).

Luke's Gospel highlights Jesus's Jewishness and identifies him with Israel early and often. While Luke's genealogy does not center David like Matthew's, Luke still notes that Jesus's Davidic descent (Luke 3:31; Strauss 1995, pp. 209–15). As its king, Jesus is Israel's representative who acts on the people's behalf (1:27, 32–33, 69; 2:4, 11). Luke is the only evangelist to record Jesus's circumcision, his entry into the covenant community (2:21). His parents present him in the temple for purification and redemption (2:22–24; cf. Exod. 13:12–15; Num 18:15–16; Thiessen 2012; Oliver 2013, pp. 421–27). Simeon identifies Jesus as the (individual) Isaianic servant who acts on Israel's behalf (Luke 2:32; cf. Acts 13:47; Lyons 2013; Beers 2015). At his baptism, the heavens are opened (ἀνοίγω; cf. LXX Isa 64:1), and the heavenly voice identifies Jesus as God's beloved son (3:22, 38; cf. Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1; Ps 2:7) as he immersed alongside "all the people" (Luke 3:21–22). He too participates in eschatological cleansing act that John summons all the nation to perform as indicative of repentance (cf. Ezek 36:22–36; 1QS 2.25–26, 3.6–9; Metcalf 2022, pp. 55–89). Jesus's forty-day wilderness temptation—while it may also resonate with the adamic temptation (Luke 3:38)—echoes Israel's forty-year wandering in the desert. Jesus remains loyal where corporate Israel was disobedient (4:1–13). He relives their history faithfully to God to enact

their restoration. Jesus takes Israel and its history into himself as part of his mission to bring release and renewal to the nation.

5.2. The Falling and Rising of Jesus the Messiah

Jesus's recapitulation of Israel for the sake of its renewal is best imaged in his trial and crucifixion. Jesus's condemnation as one (falsely) accused of inciting and misleading the people enables the release (ἀπολύω; cf. Luke 6:37; 13:12; 2 Macc 4:47; 6:22, 30; 12:45) of Barabbas, one guilty of comparable crimes, from prison (Luke 23:2–25). Luke twice notes that Barabbas was imprisoned for inciting revolt (στάσις; cf. Acts 15:2; 19:40; 23:7, 10; 24:5) and committing murder (φόνος; Luke 23:28, 25; cf. Acts 9:1). Jesus's being handed over to death provides freedom for a guilty Jewish-Israelite. Furthermore, Jesus's cryptic statement to the "daughters of Jerusalem" casts his death as a prefiguration of Israel's corporate fall (Luke 23:27–31; cf. Hos 10:8; Luke 2:34–35). He is the green wood that will be burned, warning the dry wood of its impending fate (cf. 12:49–50). Israel's king endures destruction at Roman hands in solidarity with his people (13:31–35; 19:41–44; 21:20–24; cf. 4 Ezra 1—3).[37]

Whereas Mark and Matthew place the title "the king of Israel" in the mouth of Jesus's accusers (Mark 15:32; Matt 27:42), in Luke, they call him "the messiah of God, his chosen one" (cf. 18:7), and "the king of the Jews" (23:2–3, 35–38, 42; cf. John 18:33, 39; 19:3, 14, 19, 21). The ironic taunt by Israel's leaders that he saved others but cannot save himself, then, shows Jesus's relevance for the Jewish people specifically (24:35–37). By not saving himself, the Jewish messiah and king is bringing salvation to his Jewish people. His fidelity to his messianic task is for the sake of those who failed to recognize their visitation (9:20–22, 44–45; 17:25; 18:31–34; 19:41–45). The king of the Jews requests forgiveness for those who oppose him, including his own (23:34). During his execution, Israel's Lord maintains a posture of love and forgiveness (Strahan 2012, pp. 69–87; Kuecker 2014).

Luke alone among the Gospels differentiates the responses to Jesus among the criminals (23:32, 39–42). One criminal joins Israel's leadership in deriding Jesus for not saving himself and them. The other vindicates Jesus, acknowledging him as king. The two reflect Israel's divided, sometimes antagonistic response to Jesus. While Jesus informs the latter criminal that he will be received into paradise—that is, Jesus extends the life provided for Israel that is available "today"—Jesus still dies in solidarity with both criminals. By their own admission, these criminals rightly suffer the same fate as Jesus. The crucified criminals are emblematic of Jerusalem's children who merit their punishment, a foretaste of what will happen to the dry wood (23:28–31). The just one dies with those who die justly (23:41, 47). This scene provides an analogy for Jesus's relationship with corporate Israel. The faithful messianic king endures his people's suffering with them. While the dry wood will burn, Jesus extends life "today" to those who recognize him as king, even to those suffering judgment.

If Jesus prefigures Israel's corporate fall in his crucifixion (Luke 23:27–31), he proleptically rises on their behalf. Luke's narration of Jesus's humiliation in death and exaltation to glory echoes Isaiah's depiction of Israel, especially Jerusalem, its head city. Israel was brought to shame through judgment and exile, yet God promised to restore glory to Israel when salvation comes (Isa 46:13; 51:4; 62:1–5). Jesus too had to suffer first before entering his glory (Luke 17:25; 24:26).[38] Jesus endured crucifixion to overcome the powers of darkness and liberate his people by offering repentance and forgiveness (Acts 5:31; 26:18). His death, resurrection, and exaltation enable "the times of refreshing" to come to a repentant people (Acts 3:18–21). Israel's national resurrection, their corporate rising, is rooted in Jesus's own (Anderson 2006). Jesus is "first from among the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 26:23). Indeed, Jesus's descriptions of Jerusalem's destruction gesture toward a future redemption for its city and people (13:34–35; 20:20–24, 27–28; cf. 19:41–44). The apostles proclaim Jesus as the one whose resurrection guarantees of Israel's hope.[39] Luke's Jesus, including his death and resurrection, faithfully reenacts Israel and its story for the sake of the covenant people's restoration.

6. Paul as Israel in Acts

6.1. God's Faithfulness to the God-Fighting Saul

Luke's Saul/Paul functions prototypically for unfaithful Israel and God's ability to reorient the people to carry out their vocation to be a light to the nations (Hamm 1990; Moraff 2021, pp. 180–262). Acts depicts him as the consummate "God-fighter," a figure who actively resists God's redeeming activity (5:38–39). Luke then uses Paul to illustrate God's ability to transform recalcitrant Israel. Luke introduces Saul while he is approving of Stephen's killing (7:58; 8:1; cf. 22:20). Saul is counted among those whom Jesus reproves for approving the killing of the prophets (Luke 11:48). Saul initiates and drives the persecution against Jesus's followers (Acts 8:1, 3; cf. 9:4–5; 22:4, 7–8; 26:11–14). He affiliates himself with the generation that kills and persecutes the prophets and apostles (Luke 11:49; cf. Acts 7:52). And this generation, Jesus warned, would be held to account with all the prophetic blood shed from the beginning (Luke 11:50–51). Saul is the epitome of Jewish resistance to God's messiah.

Despite these unseemly behaviors and associations, Saul is forgiven (cf. Acts 7:59), reoriented, and transformed. While Saul is still in a murderous rage against Jesus's followers (9:1; cf. 4:27–29; 26:10; 28:4), the risen Lord confronts and overcomes Saul. Nothing precipitates Jesus's reorientation of Saul. Saul neither received a call to repent nor performed any prior act of penance. The only apparent justification for Jesus's encounter with Saul is that he is a "chosen vessel" who participates in the task of bringing light to the nations (9:15–16).[40] Election and divine prerogative alone motivate Jesus to transform Saul. This God-fighter is "defeated" by direct encounter with Israel's risen Lord (Gaventa 1986, p. 65; Kuecker 2014, pp. 220–24). All Israel can be, too. Paul leverages his past God-fighting to persuade Jewish listeners about Jesus's messianic identity (22:1–15; 26:12–18; cf. 24:10–21) The Lukan Paul, in other words, leverages his violent behavior and reorienting encounter with the risen Lord to establish rapport with Jewish opposition and proclaim Jesus. He uses it to say he was "just like you all are today" (Acts 22:3–4). All Israel can become like him and be reoriented toward Israel's messiah.

6.2. The Falling and Rising of Paul

Luke's Paul also demonstrates that judgment and redemption can coexist in God's people. When the Lord visits Paul to reorient him, judgment and salvation follow. The light that flashes around him likely carries a double sense (Green 1997, p. 149). It connotes judgment (cf. e.g., Job 28:11; Isa 10:17; 51:4). This manifests tangibly as blindness.[41] Paul endures the blindness common to all Israel (Luke 19:42–44; Acts 28:26–28). Light also implies salvation and revelation.[42] His open-yet-unseeing eyes reflect his internal inability to perceive rightly (Acts 9:8; cf. Luke 2:30). An encounter with the risen Jesus moves Paul from darkness to light. He is given new sight (cf. Isa 29:18; 35:5–6). This occurs simply because Lord reveals himself to Paul (cf. Luke 10:21–24). Like Israel as a whole, Paul remains chosen by God and can be redeemed simply by the Lord's ability to open blind eyes.[43] When recounting this transformative encounter with the Jerusalem Jews, Paul uses language that echoes Isaiah's depiction of Israel's judgment and renewal when God overcomes the servant's blindness (Acts 26:6–11; Isa 59:7–10; 59:16—60:1). Paul embodies how God will restore sight to God's unfaithful people, reaffirming their election simply out of divine fiat so they might fulfill their calling (Isa 14:1–2; 19:3–10; 41:8–10; 45:4; cf. Acts 26:12–18).

In Simeon's words, Paul undergoes a representative "fall and rise," a type of death and resurrection, on the Damascus Road. The spatial movement captures this imagery. Paul "falls to the ground" (9:4; 22:7; 26:14). Luke frequently uses "falling" to describe judgment.[44] The LXX uses similar phrasing euphemistically for death and destruction (e.g., Exod 32:28; Amos 3:14; 2 Chr 6:13; 20:24; 1 Macc 6:46). Likewise, Jesus tells Saul to "rise" (ἀνάστηθι; 9:4–5; 22:10; 26:10), and Saul is then "raised (ἠγέρθη) from the ground" (9:8).

While Jesus commissions Paul as a prophet,[45] resurrection imagery resonates in Luke's word choice.[46] The risen Lord judges and restores the personification of recalcitrant Israel.

6.3. Paul at the End of Acts

The narrative's end reaffirms Paul's role as a representative of Israel (28:17–28). Paul arrives in Rome enchained. Reminiscent of Ezekiel and Jehoiachin, Paul is in an exilic state in a New Babylon, akin to that of the Jewish people after the destruction of Jerusalem (Litwak 2005, pp. 198–99; Schmidt 2007; Metcalf 2022, pp. 146–83). Paul declares how he has done nothing against the Jewish people or their ancestral customs. In fact, he is a prisoner *because of* Israel's national hopes. Paul continues to speak for the sake of Israel's salvation. When he declares a judgment of blindness on them (Isa 6:9–10), the reader recalls that blindness can be overcome by Jesus. Israel's inability to see, as it was in Isaiah's vision, will only be temporary; it will facilitate the transformation of the people, as it did with Paul (Isa 6:11–13; 39:18; 42:1—44:28; 58:6; 61:1–3). One day they will be brought from darkness to light (Fusco 1996). If one as hostile, unseeing, and unrepentant as Paul can be reoriented toward Jesus simply because God acts on behalf of a chosen vessel, how much more so the rest of elect Israel? It might require a direct encounter with the Risen Lord but hope for restoration persists. In the meantime, God continues to reach out to them (Acts 28:30–31; cf. Isa 65:2).

7. Conclusions

Luke's story continues the story of Israel and its God. This narrative is radically theocentric. Luke-Acts recounts how, in Jesus, God is acting on behalf of the covenant people to bring salvation to them and to the world. God turns to Israel (and the nations) in a posture of forgiveness, offering restoration. The people of Israel, as is typical in its history, offer a mixed response. Some repent, others do not. Regardless, God remains faithful to Israel. God alone maintains the covenant identity of and relationship with the Jewish people. Repentance and realignment with God's kingdom remain an ever-present possibility for all. To be sure, Luke indicates that some may be removed from God's people in the end (Tiede 1988; Tannehill 1986, pp. 56–57; Kinzer 2018, pp. 109–18). Some will not participate in Israel's restoration. For Luke, though, all Israel, faithful and unfaithful alike, continue along a journey of repentance in the meantime. The door to return stands open. Jesus's disciples continue to preach repentance to their fellow Jews and share in the fate of Jacob's house. Ultimately, God remains loyal to them, regardless of their fidelity. God will enact the salvific rising of all Israel when God opens unseeing eyes to recognize Jesus as messiah.

Attentive readers will recognize that my interpretation retains Lukan exclusivism regarding Jesus. Such a reading seems inevitable. Luke seemingly offers no *Sonderweg* for Israel outside of Jesus (e.g., Luke 20:17–18; Acts 3:23; 4:11–12; 5:31–32).[47] However, I offer two comments, one historical and one theological, that question categorizing Luke's exclusivism as supersessionist. First, when read within the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, Luke's exclusivism echoes other Jewish subgroups' claims to sole proper understanding of Israel's tradition. Calls to repent and accept a group's singular vision for Israel's future were common in Israel's Scriptures and early Judaism (e.g., LXX Deut 32:4–9, 19–27; LXX Ps 77:8; Josephus *J.W.* 4.163–192). These demands and their accompanying warnings of judgment did not redefine Israel; rather, they anticipated a renewal of corporate Israel, albeit with some members removed and judged (Staples 2021, pp. 259–89).[48] Read in this context, Luke-Acts is reminiscent of other Jewish groups vying for all the people to join its eschatological vision for Israel. It speaks the language of its contemporaries. By way of contrast, the supersessionist question is more about how Christian communities employ these exclusivist claims today.

Second, God remains faithful to Israel as the covenant people regardless of their reception of Jesus. The Jewish people *are* God's people (cf. Acts 3:17–26). Israel's salvation comes through Jesus for Luke, but it rests on God's election and faithfulness. *God* will save

Israel in and through Jesus, the king of the Jews. Jesus upholds God's relationship to them. The messiah acts faithfully on behalf of all Israel, sinful and repentant alike. Jesus endures death and is raised from the dead for their sake. As Givens phrases it, "rather than Jesus' supposedly disowning the violent, 'false' members of God's people," his radical solidarity with Israel "makes the cross the culmination of God's election of Israel and the way to the resurrection of the dead for the whole world by the Spirit, that is, the way to peace" (Givens 2014, p. 6). As in Israel's past, God can use one rejected by his brothers to redeem those who did not receive him (Acts 7:9–14, 23–39). God's unshakeable loyalty to Israel in Jesus is best seen in Luke's Paul. He represents the greatest hostility toward God's messengers due to inability to see correctly. But because Paul is the Lord's chosen vessel, Israel's Lord restores Paul, realigning him with the kingdom. God brings him from darkness to light through a direct encounter with the risen Lord. Luke's open-ended story retains hopeful anticipation for that day of refreshing for Israel and the whole world.

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Notes

1 I use the traditional appellation for the author for convenience rather than due to a priori historical conclusions. I presume a narrative unity of Luke and Acts. Translations are my own.

2 My understanding of *salvation* in Luke-Acts is indebted to Reardon (2021). Reardon argues "salvation, grounded in God's initiatory covenant fidelity and Israel's restoration, is a theopolitical reality that takes up space in the world, made present in Jesus and manifest in the political body of the church participating in God's kingdom. My thesis is that *Luke-Acts offers a complete, holistic, embodied, and political soteriology, cosmic in scope, that takes up space in the world and includes both the* what *and* how *of salvation, taking* Christus Victor *form*" (Reardon 2021, p. 3; emphasis original). Reardon contends *salvation* functions narratively; it has a beginning, middle, and end. Its beginning is rooted in the story of God and Israel, particularly the people's need for forgiveness and restoration from exile. The middle is salvation's unfolding in Luke-Acts and beyond. The *shalom* of salvation, then, is experienced "today" (Luke 2:11; 4:21; 19:9; 23:43), while it also looks forward to its consummation. The end is the full restoration of the world and especially Israel according to the promises made to them. On this latter point, see Oliver (2021). *Salvation* in Luke-Acts retains the vision of the prophets, especially Isa 40–66. It is present and eschatological in orientation.

3 Whether *the Jewish people* comprise the totality of *Israel* in Luke-Acts is unclear. Luke mentions Anna is "of the tribe of Asher," one of the ten "lost" tribes (Luke 2:36), and Paul maintains an ongoing hope for the twelve tribes (Acts 26:7; cf. Luke 22:30). Samaritans claimed Israelite identity, and some have argued Luke depicts their inclusion as the restoration of the northern tribes (e.g., Jervell 1979, pp. 113–32; Ravens 1995, pp. 98–105). Both suggest that *Israel* is a broader category to which *the Jewish people* belong. As in early Judaism generally (Staples 2021), *Israel* for Luke would be the overarching theo-political identity encompassing the twelve tribes, and *Jewish* a narrower socio-ethnic epithet. Still, Luke never disambiguates *Israel* from *the Jewish people*; they are inseparable. I therefore use *Israel* and *the Jewish people* somewhat interchangeably, acknowledging the latter is likely a subset of the former.
Of course, Luke also narrates gentile salvation. The monograph (Moraff, forthcoming) addresses gentile inclusion and the identity of Israel at length. Suffice to say at present that gentile inclusion does not redefine Israel. Luke stands in the stream of the prophets and early Judaism that anticipated that gentiles would come *alongside* Israel *as gentiles*. They join with Israel without becoming Israel (Acts 15:4; cf. e.g., Isa 19:16–24; 56:1–8; 66:18–24; Amos 9:7; Zech 2:10–13 [14–17 Heb.]; 8:20–23; 14:16–21). On this line of Jewish thought, see Simkovich (2016).

4 I use "Israel's Lord" ambiguously to retain Luke-Acts' implicit high Christology (Rowe 2009; Henrichs-Tarasenkova 2015).

5 Paul and Jesus are not equals in this regard. Jesus is God's agent of salvation, and Paul proclaims Jesus.

6 Since my article, more have emerged (e.g., Crabbe 2020; Oliver 2021; Moraff 2021; J. P. Smith 2021).

7 Amy-Jill Levine recently opined, "Theology and ethics, rather than historical-critical exegesis, is the best way of addressing supersessionist teachings" (Levine 2022). Theology and ethics are essential, perhaps even primary, for adjudicating readings for the church. Still, the NT is a cultural product and theological interpretation should be plausible in historical context (Green 2011).

8 Of course, Jews argued about how best to express loyalty to these features and approaches to the ancestral tradition varied. This does not undermine that there were agreed-on features that makes *Judaism* identifiable.

9 Luke 1:72; Acts 3:25; 7:8; 13:23, 32–33; 26:6–7; 28:17; cf. Luke 22:20.

10 Luke 1:55, 73; 13:16; 19:9; 20:37; Acts 3:25; 7:2, 8; 13:26; cf. Luke 3:8; 13:28.

11 Infidelity can prevent participation in God's intended *shalom*, however (e.g., Deut 29:14—30:20: Pss 95:6–11; 106:6–48). Israel's chastisement is a natural consequence of infidelity in the covenant relationship, as fidelity is linked to blessing (e.g., Lev 26; Deut

27—28 Hos 11:1–11). Their judgment presupposes the relationship. Judgment is also temporary; hope for restoration always lies on the other side (Schaefer 2012, pp. 37–101).

12 Luke 1:16, 54, 68; 2:25, 32, 34; 22:30; Acts 2:22, 36; 3:12; 5:21, 31, 35; 7:23, 37; 9:15; 10:36; 13:16–24; 21:28; 26:17.

13 E.g., Luke 1:5–6, 26; 2:21–24; Acts 10:28, 45; 11:12; 16:1; 18:2; 21:39; 22:3; 26:4–8; 28:17–20.

14 Of course, John states that Abrahamic descent does not guarantee inclusion in Israel's salvation (Luke 3:7–9; cf. Acts 3:17–26). Jesus warns that some will be thrown out of the kingdom while others come from all directions to recline with the Patriarchs (Luke 13:20–30). The latter could refer to exiles or gentiles. Regardless, they are not expressly identified as Abraham's children (cf. Simkovich 2016, pp. 27–45, 67–93). Luke also does not equate the ἐκκλησία with *Israel*. With one exception (Acts 7:38), ἐκκλησία refers to assemblies of Jesus-followers (5:11; 8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3–4, 22; 16:5; 18:22; 19:32, 39, 41; 20:17).

15 Cf. e.g., Isa 8:11—9:7; 40:1–11; 43:14; 48:17–20; 50:10; 51:4–16; 52:1–10; 59:1–21; 64:1–7; Ps 106 [105]; Ezek 36—37; Micah 7:1–20; Dan 9; Neh 9; Tob. 13:1—14:5; Pr Azar 1:3–22; Jub. 1:7; 11QMelch 2.7–9 (Reardon 2021, pp. 39, 73–76).

16 Simeon reinforces a genealogical definition of *Israel*. A Spirit-inspired speaker identifies Israel as God's people in distinction from the gentiles, while affirming gentile redemption in the same breath (cf. Acts 13:26).

17 For an interesting foray into Anna as a representative of Israel, see García Serrano (2014).

18 Judgement is not a binary in Israel's Scriptures or Luke-Acts. It ranges in severity, permanence, and purpose. Judgment can entail destruction or removal from the people. It is not always this harsh or punitive. In Israel's Scriptures, Israel's corporate judgment is always temporary and often fosters transformation. It can coexist with forgiveness and redemption. Still one of the most profound expositions of the interrelationship between judgment and salvation is Heschel (2001). In Luke-Acts, judgment and salvation coexist in individuals and the people (e.g., Zachariah, Peter, Paul, and Simon Magus; Moraff 2021, pp. 39–41). On the Deuteronomistic dimensions of Luke-Acts, see Moessner (2016, pp. 238–71); Schaefer (2012).

19 E.g., 1 Kgs 17:1; Isa 6:1–13; Jer 3:6–25; 7:25–26; 44:1–10; Zech 7:8–14.

20 Stephen's speech is central to claims of Lukan supersessionism. The monograph examines it at length. At present, two points about Joseph and Moses, the rejected agents of deliverance Stephen mentions, mitigate supersessionist claims: (1) Joseph and Moses retain kinship ties with those who reject them; they are persecuted and denounced by their own "brothers" (Acts 7:8–9, 13, 23, 26, 32). Denying God's agent does not dissolve the genealogical ties. (2) Joseph and Moses *redeem the people who reject them*. Suffering and judgment result for the people because of their opposition to the liberator and God (7:11–16, 30–43). Redemption comes to the kinship group through this agent, nevertheless. On the "rejected prophet" motif in Luke-Acts, see McWhirter (2014).

21 E.g., Luke 5:17–26; 9:10–45; 11:14–32; 19:47–48; 22:1–2; 23:1–5, 48. Jesus also calls Israel's leadership, at least the scribes and the Pharisees, to repent. They remain open characters. In other words, whether they will respond rightly to Jesus is left unanswered (e.g., Luke 15:1–3, 31–32).

22 Otten (2021) overstates that John and Jesus enact "removal" from Israel within the narrative. Exclusion is threatened but rarely enacted. When it does, *it occurs with Jesus's followers* (Judas, Ananias and Sapphira). All other characters are open-ended, even those whose prospect for repentance looks dim (e.g., Saul/Paul).

23 Cf. Luke 13:6–9; Isa 3:10; 10:33–34; 51:1–2; Ezek 15:1–8; Wis. Sol. 4:4–5; 10:6–7; 4 Ezra 3:20, 33.

24 The significance Luke's omission of "the day of recompense" has long divided interpreters. See Hays (2016, pp. 226–28). Even if one does not hear its echoes, Jesus's tone turns judgmental soon after.

25 The notion that anti-gentile sentiments motivated the hostility of these Jews is dubious. Luke-Acts includes positive Jew-gentile interactions and relations (e.g., Luke 7:1–17; Acts 10:22), including gentile participation in synagogues (e.g., Acts 14:1; 17:4).

26 Interestingly, Jesus continues to be linked to his hometown (Luke 18:37; Acts 10:38; 26:9).

27 Likewise, whenever Paul turns to the gentiles, he immediately returns to Jewish space or engages Jewish people (14:1; 18:6–8; 19:9–10; 28:30–31). See Moraff (2021, pp. 265–66).

28 E.g., 1QpHab 2.7–8; 7.1; CD 1.12–13; 1 En. 93:9–10; 94:1–2; Jub. 23:14–15. See Winn (2020) for additional references, albeit geared toward understanding Mark's use of this phrase.

29 E.g., 1QS 1.1–21; 5.1–20; 1QSa 1.1–6; 2.11–22; 1QM 1.1—2.15.

30 Luke 1:16–17; 15:7, 10; 17:31; 22:32; Acts 1:25; 2:38; 3:19, 26; 7:39–42; 9:35; 14:15; 15:19; 19:26; 26:20.

31 A related set of metaphors involve proper perception, specifically going "from darkness to light" (26:18) and from blindness to sight (Moraff 2021, pp. 222–68).

32 Here I find myself in the minority of Lukan interpreters, even the post-supersessionist inclined. For an elaboration of the Way's stumbling in Acts, see Moraff (2021, pp. 127–55).

33 Luke 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13.

34 Luke 5:10; 22:28–30; 24:46–49; Acts 1:6–8; 2:14–41; 3:1—4:12; 10:9—11:18; 15:7–11.

35 For comparable reflections about Jesus-as-Israel in Matthew's Gospel, see Schaser (2021). On notions of representative figures and the relationship between individuals and the corporate whole in the Hebrew Bible, see Kaminsky (1995); Mol (2009, pp. 114–208); Doak (2019). On early Jewish and rabbinic analogies, see Davies (1980, pp. 55–57); Jewett (2018, pp. 239–50). I am grateful to Ralph Korner for pointing me toward these sources.

[36] Isa 42:1–9, 18–22; 43:1–13; 44:1–8; 48:20; 49:1–13; 50:4–10; 52:13—53:12; 61:1–11cf. 54:17; 56:6; 59:20–21; 63:17; 65:8–9; 66:10; cf. Luke 1:54, 69; 2:29.

[37] For extended arguments, see Kinzer (2018, pp. 129–59; cf. Wright 2008, 2:569–70).

[38] Luke 2:31–35; 9:22; 17:25; Acts 3: cf. Isa 60:1–2, 19.

[39] Acts 2:29–40; 4:2, 33; 23:6–8; 24:15, 21; 26:5–8, 22–23; 28:20. For extended arguments, see Kinzer (2018, pp. 129–59); Oliver (2021, pp. 71–139). See also Reardon (2021, pp. 121–23).

[40] Cf. Acts 13:47; 26:23; Isa 41:8–16; 44:1–2; Pss. Sol. 18:5–16.

[41] Cf. Exod 4:11; Deut 28:28–29; Isa 6:9–10; Luke 1:20; Tob 5:10; CD 1.8–11.

[42] Cf. e.g., Isa 9:2; 10:17; 42:16; 50:10; 59:9; 60:1; Tob 3:17; 11:8; 14:10.

[43] Acts 5:38–39; 9:15; cf. Luke 4:16–21; 7:22; 18:41–43; 24:13–49.

[44] E.g., Luke 10:18; 11:17; 13:4; 17:16; 20:18; 21:24; 23:30; Acts 5:5, 9; 13:11; 15:16; 20:9.

[45] Cf. e.g., Jer 3:17; Ezek 3:22; Jon 1:2; Acts 8:26; 10:26; 14:10.

[46] E.g., Luke 7:14, 22; 9:7, 22; 16:31; 24:7, 46; Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30.

[47] While addressed in-depth in Moraff (forthcoming), Acts 4:12 merits brief discussion. In immediate context, Peter explains to Israel's leadership that it is by Jesus's name that "this sick man has been healed (σέσωται)" (4:9: cf. 3:1–16). This might suggest that the healing, not eschatological salvation, is the σωτηρία found exclusively in Jesus's name (4:12; cf. 3:6). Healing and eschatological salvation should not be bifurcated, however. This man's healing is representative of Israel's corporate healing (3:16–4:2; Bauckham 2001). Some of the prophets describe the nation's restoration using the analogy of being healed from the inability to walk (Isa 35:6; Mic 4:6–7; Zeph 3:19–20). Luke's overarching use of the σωτηρία word-group and vision of salvation is holistic, presently available, and eschatologically oriented (Reardon 2021). Therefore, Peter declares to Israel's leadership that the name of the Lord Jesus is the sole source of healing and eschatological salvation, both for this man and the nation (Acts 4:10–12; cf. 2:21).

[48] E.g., CD 1–5; 4QMMT; 1QS 1–3, 8–9; 1QHab 12; 1 En. 85—90.

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Article

The Universal Light, or the Only Way to the Father? Universalism and Exclusivism in John's Provocative Christology

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Abstract: Among the most perplexing of John's theological riddles is question of salvific universalism and particularity. John is both the greatest biblical source of *Christian universalism* and the greatest source of *Christian exclusivity*. After all, the Johannine Overture affirms universal access to the saving–revealing Light of Christ, declaring: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world!" (Jn 1:9). What else could this mean, other than to affirm that every person has saving access to the divine Light of Christ? And yet, Jesus also declares in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me!" What could this mean, other than to assert that there is only one means of access to God, and that it involves saving belief in Jesus as the Christ? Sorting out the apparent contradictions within these tensions is the goal of the present essay.

Keywords: salvation; illumination; continuing revelation; inclusivity; exclusivity; supersessionism; evangelism; early Christianity

1. Introduction

John's theological tensions abound, but one of the most pressing in recent times is the issue of soteriology and related subjects. Is John's presentation of salvation through Christ universal or particular? Is John pro-Jewish, or anti-Jewish? Is the Fourth Evangelist's theology supersessionist or restorationist? More pointedly, if John 1:9 is true—that the Light of Christ is accessible to *all* humanity—how could it be that Jesus is *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life, through whom all who come to the Father do so, according to John 14:6–7? Are these two precepts inherently contradictory, or are they in some way both true if understood authentically? It could be that the evangelist is demented, or perhaps we have different literary sources here which disagree with each other.[1] Then again, if we ask *why* each of these precepts is asserted, that might help us appreciate what each of these verses is saying, and perhaps more importantly, what it is not. And, in addition to its relevance for John's soteriology, such an inquiry will have weighty implications for understanding John's perspectives on Judaism and so-called supersessionism.[2]

Of course, inferred meanings of John's theological statements hinge upon an understanding of the Johannine situation.[3] As the Gospel of John is written so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and, believing, to have life in his name (John 20:31), the witnesses, the signs, and the fulfilled word provide the bases for that belief.[4] Given this apologetic interest, those who believe in Jesus are accorded favor within the narrative, whereas those who reject the Revealer are described as the unbelieving world, who loved human praise rather than the glory of God. Often, they are numbered among the *Ioudaioi*, but is such a term a reference to Jews in general, or to Judeans in particular? If the former, why is Jesus presented as the quintessential Jewish Messiah? If the latter, is the presentation simply an account of the northern prophet rejected by the religious elite in Jerusalem and Judea, which is also confirmed by the Synoptics?

In either case, how does the move of the Johannine leadership from Palestine to Asia Minor around 70 CE also affect a contextual understanding of John's message, given

that Johannine believers were facing tensions with local Jewish communities and Gentile populations in the last three decades of the first century CE?[5] On one hand, if the parting of the ways has already been actualized, John's message might be seen as Christianity supplanting Judaism, and Jesus-adherents as God's chosen people. If, however, the debate is over the center of Judaism, with the evangelist self-identifying as embracing the heart of Judaism from his perspective, the Johannine evangel must be seen as a universalizing extension of the Abrahamic blessing (Gen 12:1–3; cf. John 1:11–13; 8:31–58) to include any and all who believe in the Jewish Messiah as an eschatological manifestation of God's love for the world: a manifestation which all are invited to receive in grace and truth (John 1:16–18).[6]

As the present analysis will show, the latter is clearly the most plausible way forward, critically.[7] Thus, God's eschatological manifestation of love in the work and witness of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah-Christ extends the blessings of Israel to the world, inviting a response of faith to the Divine Initiative. And, this universal gift of grace and truth (John 1:16–17) is extended to Samaritans, Greeks, and others. All who respond receptively to that gift in faith are welcomed into the divine family, and this was a scandal among the religious then, as it is now.

2. The Origins of John's Theological Tensions

The theological tensions of the Fourth Gospel are best understood as originating within at least four primary sources: the dialectical thinking of the evangelist (operating in both/and ways rather than either/or dichotomies); the Prophet-like-Moses agency schema (originating in Deut 18:15–22); the dialectical Johannine situation (involving at least seven crises over seven decades); and the literary artistry of the narrator (drawing emerging audiences into dialogical engagements with the protagonist, Jesus).[8] As John's account of Jesus and his ministry reflects a self-standing augmentation of and dialectical engagement with Mark, John's dialogical autonomy must be considered in addressing any of the three dozen Johannine riddles.[9] While the primary source of this particular theological tension involves the Mosaic-agency-schema, reflecting the imperative for humans to respond in faith to the Divine Initiative, the other three features are by no means absent.[10]

For instance, the dialectical thinking of the Fourth Evangelist is present in this particular subject, as a both/and approach to soteriological inclusivity and particularity allows these features to cohere around the conviction that God's saving-revealing work is accessible to all.[11] Interpreters failing to appreciate John's dialectical tensions fail to apprehend the overall thrust of the Johannine witness, leading to flawed judgments.[12] Thus, while God has acted eschatologically in the flesh-becoming Word, recognizable by those who have been responsive to the Light over and against religio-political investments, not all do so in faith, and the evangelist reflects upon why this is so. Second, the extension of the Jewish Messiah/Christ to the Hellenic populations of the Diaspora reflects a universal outreach of Judaism as an inclusive welcome extended to responsive Gentiles, inviting them into the familial blessings of Abraham. Third, the rhetorical crafting of the Johannine narrative presents positive and negative responses to the Revealer in ways that point the way forward for later audiences. Thus, within John's story of Jesus, commended and critiqued responses to the Revealer are presented rhetorically within the narrative—especially within the dialogues—typifying credited and flawed responses to Jesus as the divine agent of the Father.

As this particular set of theological tensions is considered within each of these features of the Johannine tradition's development, a fuller understanding of Johannine soteriology is availed in historical- and literary-critical perspective. That being the case, the cojoined universalism and particularity of Johannine Christology deserves a closer look.

3. The Universalism and Particularity of Johannine Christology

In taking John 1:9 seriously, some might see its content as affirming universal enlightenment: that all roads lead up the mountain, and that all people will be saved. Universal

access to the saving-revealing Light of Christ, however, does not imply that: (a) all people will apprehend it authentically (we tend to package our understandings of the Deity in our own images—as projections of our own interests and needs—which is why revelation is essential within the human–divine dialogue); and that (b) all people will respond in faith to the Divine Initiative (we tend to trust in our human-made platforms and scaffolds—those in darkness refused to come to the Light, lest it be exposed that their investments were in constructions of human origin rather than divine—failing to embrace what God has done and is doing; John 3:18–21).

Thus, while all humanity might have at least potential access to the saving-revealing Light of Christ—just as Heraclitus argued that the divine *Logos* as reason, or a divine spark, or a principle bringing order out of chaos by the illuminative power or truth, is accessible to all humans—this does not mean that all *will perceive* the Ground and Source of our Being correctly.[13] Nor does it ensure that all *will be receptive* to the truth, *will embrace* the Light, and *will walk* therein in the newness of life. Some clearly do not get it right, failing to respond to the Divine Initiative in faith; and in Johannine perspective, humanity's stance toward the Light of revelation is measured by their response to the Revealer: Jesus of Nazareth.[14] Thus, the sin of humanity is the failure to believe (3:36), and what gets in the way of glimpsing the truth of God at work in the ministry of Jesus is that humanity claims in blinded arrogance, "we see" (9:41).

While the Gospel of John has been taken by many to be the Gospel of Universalism, it is also seen by others as the Gospel of Particularity.[15] On one hand, the Christ-hymn of John 1:1–18 (vv. 1–5, 9–14, 16–18) declares that Jesus is the Pre-Existent Word, the Life of humanity, and the Light of the World, yielding a theology of God's inclusive welcoming of any who believe into the divine family. The Light of Christ apprehended inwardly is efficacious, whether or not one is familiar with the words and works of Jesus. On the other hand, John 14:6–7 declares that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, through which all who come to the Father do so.[16] Is this a divine recipe and requisite—one way, Jesus only—or is it descriptive of how things tend to work rather than prescriptive of how things must be? It could be that these thrusts are contradictory; both cannot be true. Or, do they represent two sets of realities held together in dialectical tension? Perhaps, if we ask *why* each set of claims is made, that might point the way forward.

3.1. Jesus as Word, the Life, and the Light

At the outset, it should be noted that both sets of these three terms in John 1:1–18 include the word "life" (in Greek, ζωή), and the Gospel of John is written so that people might believe that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, they might have Life in his name (20:31). The narrative constructs a compelling case for believing "in" Jesus—embracing and abiding in him as a relational reality. And yet, belief also implies content—believing *that* he is sent from the Father, and that he embodies God's love for the world (3:16).[17] Just as 1 John 1:1–3 reflects a community's response to hearing the evangelist preach and teach over the years, so the Christ-hymn of John 1 also reflects the community's response to the content delivered over the years (as does the prologue of 1 John 1:1–3): a response now packaged around the references to John the Baptist and his ministry (1:6–8, 15, 19–42), which served as the original beginning of John's story of Jesus, an apparent expansion upon Mark's account.

Thus, the Christ-hymn as a new beginning to the finalized edition of John's Gospel functions experientially and inclusively for its audiences. They might even have known the hymnic confession as it circulated among the churches of Asia Minor and beyond around the turn of the first century CE, but it now functioned to prepare hearers, as a transformative appetizer, bolstering their receptivity to the full account that follows. Thus, these three universalizing terms (*Word*, *Life*, *Light*) deserve to be seen within the literary form of worship material designed to engage audiences personally and transformingly in the content of the narrative itself.

3.1.1. Jesus as the Word

Again, the *Logos* theme in the Johannine literature is closer to 1 John 1:1–3 than the overall Johannine Gospel, and in both cases, it functioned to connect Hellenistic and Jewish audiences with the creative-redemptive work of God throughout the ages, eschatologically revealed in the words and works of Jesus of Nazareth. As the fifth-century BCE philosopher of Ephesus, Heraclitus, taught, the cosmos is ever in flux. One cannot step into a moving stream in the same place twice; the water has always flowed on. Life itself is a spark, making things happen in surprising and uncontrollable ways; and yet, despite the flux, the world does not fall apart. Why? In the view of Heraclitus, the divine *Logos*—the Word of God—is that which holds things together as an ordering divine principle—reason, truth, and light—which is available to every person. As people embrace the divine Word, problems are solved, order is achieved, and the ordered cosmos advances. Thus, the Christ-hymn of John 1 connects the universal, principled, reasoned, and revelational thought of Heraclitus—built upon by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Philo[18]—with the saving-revealing work of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

And yet, the Johannine Christ-hymn is also constructed upon Jewish understandings of the creative-revelational work of God, echoing Genesis 1 and the prophetic utterances of the Hebrew prophets.[19] From a Jewish perspective, God created the cosmos not by the violence of Marduk, as narrated in the Babylonian creation myth (*Enuma Elish*, Tablet 4), but by his Word (Gen 1:1–2:4; Psa 33:6–9). Thus, in celebrating God's creative Word—now become flesh in the mission of Jesus (John 1:14)—the divinity and humanity of Jesus as the creative-redemptive Word of God is celebrated. The Word of the Lord is also presented as a revelational medium and a prophetic action in Hebrew Scripture. The Word of the Lord promises a blessing to Abram (Gen 15:1–6) and instructs Moses in organizing the Levites (Nu 3:14–16). It also serves as the authoritative basis for prophetic addresses (Nu 24:11–14) and a source of guidance (2 Sam 7:4).

The Christological hymns of the New Testament also must be seen as Jewish pushback against the divinity claims of the Roman emperors, going back to the divinity claims of Caesar Augustus, and echoed later by Caligula and Domitian. The point is this: Caesar is not the Divine Son (*filius deus*); the Jewish Messiah is! Populace and authorities, take note.[20] God has acted in history, making all things new, not by means of a pagan governor, but via the Jewish Messiah/Christ, extending the blessings of grace and peace to the whole world. Also palpable within John's story of Jesus is the wisdom motif, as Proverbs 8:22–30 identifies Lady Wisdom—*Sophia*—as the divine agency of creation. In that sense, the *Logos*-motif of the Johannine Christ-hymn celebrates the conviction that the God who created and ordered the cosmos became flesh in the ministry of Christ Jesus. He is thus the creative-redeeming Savior of the World (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14), inviting a response of faith whereby any and all who believe in him receive the empowerment to become children of God (John 1:11–13).

3.1.2. Jesus as the Life of All Humanity

In this extending of Abrahamic blessing to the entire world, the Johannine Christ-hymn celebrates the conviction that the divine *Logos* is the source of life for all humanity. Nothing ever came into being apart from his creative work, and the *Logos* is the source of biological and spiritual life itself. Not only is the first miracle of Jesus the producing of wine at the Cana wedding—bolstering the celebrative life of the occasion—but Jesus also is the Water of Life and the Bread of Life, enabling people to be born again from above. As his culminative sign, Jesus raises Lazarus from the tomb after four days of entombed darkness, and Martha confesses climactically that Jesus is Christ, following his declaration of himself to be the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:26–27). While no one has seen God, the one and only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (1:18); he indeed is the Life of the world (1:3–4).

3.1.3. Jesus as the Light of the World

In the first verse of the Christ-hymn, these three themes (*Word*, *Light*, *Life*) are presented together, with each leading into the next. The Word was with God and was God; the Word was the Life of all humanity; the Life was the Light of the world (1:1–4). However, though the Light has shone in the darkness, the darkness has neither understood nor received it (v. 5). And yet, the Light that is accessible to all humanity has come into the world via Jesus—the Word become flesh, tenting among humanity—and Johannine believers confess that in the Incarnation, they have beheld and encountered divine glory (v. 14). As developed more fully in the narrative, Jesus is the Light of the World, and those who receive him do not walk in darkness but abide in the newness of Life (8:12; 9:5).

However, despite God's breaking into human history in the ministry of Jesus, not all received him. He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but those who did receive him were welcomed into the divine family, born not of human instrumentality or a man's desire, but born of God and the Divine Initiative (1:10–13). Thus, unevenness of reception is not a factor of divine selection; it is the result of humans' refusal to come to the Light, lest it be revealed that their lives are constructed upon platforms of human initiative, rather than the divine (3:18–21). John's witness to Jesus as the Word, Life, and Light therefore extends the mission of the Jewish Messiah/Christ to the Hellenic world as a universal manifestation of God's eschatological saving-revealing breaking into human history.

3.2. Jesus as Way, the Truth, and the Life

Conversely, some who take John 14:6 seriously see this passage as declaring that an explicit, knowing commitment to Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved; all other paths lead to perdition. Becoming children of God thus requires believing "in his name" as a particularistic requirement (1:12). Further, Jesus declares himself to be the singular gate for the sheep—those coming beforehand are thieves and bandits—and that those who enter through him find salvation and pasture (10:7–9). So these texts are often seen as requiring a knowing confession of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, if one is to also receive the gift of eternal Life availed to believers.

If that were the case, though, it would contradict the assertion that the saving-revealing Light of Christ is available, at least potentially, to all, whether or not they know the Christian story or get their confessions right. For indeed, the point of John 1:10–13 is that being welcomed into the Abrahamic family of God is rooted in a response of faith to the Divine Initiative—born of God, "not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man" (v. 13). Thus, believing "in his name" is not "*the* right answer" on a soteriological final exam; it is an acceptance of the Revealer's agency from the Father, which the words and works of Jesus make manifest. Likewise, the shepherding work of Jesus extends beyond Jewish (and even Christian?) flocks (John 10:16), and the work of Christ is to bring them all together into one sheepfold: a universal ingathering.

Therefore, in contrast to a dogmatic approach to confessional correctness, the central thrust of the Johannine witness holds that Jesus as the Revealer shows himself to be eschatologically sent from the Father, as attested by his decisive words and delivering deeds. The dozen or so explicit fulfillments of Scripture referencing Jesus as being the promised Messiah/Christ, as well as his implicit fulfillments of Scripture, show him to be fulfilling the typologies of the eschatological Prophet-like-Moses and that of Elijah/Elisha, posing proof that Jesus is indeed *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life.[21] Again, it could be that John's universal and particular themes are contradictory, but if we inquire as to *why* Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and *how so*, those tensions might be more adequately understood.

3.2.1. Jesus as the Way

While the above themes are sounded in the Johannine Christ-hymn, Jesus as the Way is presented in the teachings of Jesus within the narrative, as Jesus reflects upon his mission

in the first of the farewell discourses. Following his promise of heavenly dwelling-places prepared for his own in John 14:1–3, his followers fail to comprehend his meanings. Thomas asks how they will know the way to the Father, and Jesus responds that he himself *is* the Way, the Truth, and the Life (vv. 5–6). That being the case, what is meant by the assertion that Jesus is the Way? When compared with the Synoptics' presentations of Jesus and his teachings, in the latter he declares that the way is broad that leads to destruction, but the way is narrow that leads to eternal life (Matt 7:13–14).

In Matthean and Lukan perspective, Jesus is the rock upon which a solid house-project can be built, while other foundations are like shifting sands (Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:46–49). In Acts, the Jesus movement is described as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:23; 24:14, 22), and in Johannine perspective, Jesus as the Way serves as the bridge between humanity and God. In that sense, the Son's representation of the Father's love, character, and will are revealed to the world in time-changing ways, and as the eschatological manifestation of the Ground and Source of our Being (God), Jesus reveals the Father's love and grace in pivotal ways. Like the hourglass of time, God's saving-revealing work before Christ points to his coming, and God's saving-revealing activity after Jesus builds reflectively upon his ministry and work on the Cross for the rest of time. For indeed, the God who has spoken in many times and in many ways has now spoken in his Son, Jesus Christ, who is appointed the source and heir of all things (Heb 1:1–4; Col 1:15–20).

3.2.2. Jesus as the Truth

In addition to being the way that God has provided for humanity to envision God's transformative love and grace, Jesus also embodies God's truth in ways sacramental.[22] If a sacrament is an outward and physical expression of an inward and spiritual reality, the ultimate manifestation of God's loving character and gracious being is the Incarnation. In revealing God's love to the world, the Father did not send another book, or a sign, or a liturgical practice; he sent a *person*: his Son, Jesus Christ. While God's love and grace are revealed in the Ten Commandments, people too easily make them into legal codes. God's justice and righteousness are declared by Israel's prophets and the witness of John the Baptist, but people too easily construe them as heroes to be idolized or as pests to be resisted.

While religious practices seek to further the highest and most meaningful of spiritual encounters, they too easily become forms to be practiced rather than facilitators of spiritual vitality. Indeed, truth is always liberating (John 8:32), and Jesus not only reveals God's truth by his deeds and teachings; he *is* God's truth, manifesting the Father's love for the world in ways that no other manifestation has ever approximated. To come closer to the Truth is to come closer to Christ, and to come closer to Christ is to come closer to the Truth. In this modern age, where objective truth has reigned supreme though insufficiently, subjective and personal truth is also required, and such is what the Incarnation avails in liberating ways.[23]

3.2.3. Jesus as the Life

In addition to being the way to the Father and the truthful revelation of the Father's love, Jesus is also the giver of Life to the world. Not only is the Creator the source of physical Life,[24] but the Son also offers eternal Life to all who believe. In Johannine perspective, believing in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ empowers the believer to receive eternal Life in his name (20:31); and yet, Jesus has also come in order that humanity might experience abundant Life in the here and now (10:10). For indeed, as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, bringing healing to those who had been poisoned, all who look to the uplifted Son on the Cross are saved (3:14–16). For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (v. 17). Likewise, if Jesus be lifted up from the earth, he will draw all humanity to himself (12:32), a statement prefiguring his death on a Roman cross. If the wisdom of 1 Peter 2:20 can be drawn in here, undeserved suffering is always redemptive in its potentiality, and the

death of an innocent man on the Cross proved redemptive in its actuality. Therefore, in understanding the meanings of Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, all who come to the Father do so through him (14:7). Is their coming, however, a prescriptive matter or a descriptive reality, rooted in the human situation?

3.3. No One Can Come to the Father except Being Drawn by God

If the universal reach of the Light of Christ can be held in tension with Jesus being the singular way through whom all who come the Father do so, the answer may lie in John 6:44. Here we also see the declaration by Jesus of the universal accessibility of revelation, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 54:13: "They shall all be taught by God." This promise, however, is countered by the explanation that "No one can come except being drawn by the Father." Note that the text does not claim that no one *may* come—a matter of permission; it declares that no one *can* come—a factor of possibility (οὐδεὶς δύναταιἐλθεῖν). Again, the explanation is given that no one has seen the Father except the Son, and that in his revelation of the Father's love for humanity, the world is invited to receive the divine embrace of God's transforming love. For the Law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, who climactically revealed God's love for the world in time-changing ways (John 1:16-17).

Thus, interpreters get it wrong in claiming the gospel message to be one of God's "spiritual laws" requiring death to atone for humanity's sins. This would make God subject to the penal requirements of sin. Rather, in Johannine and Pauline perspective, humans live conventionally by deservedness, and in the light of God's loving deservedness—which is justice—all have sinned and come short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). However, God's undeserved love is also a reality, and such is what God has been communicating for ages before the coming of Christ, but it is *humans* that have failed to comprehend God's grace. Thus, the epoch-changing work of Christ on the Cross reveals God's undeserved love to the world—offered as a loving sacrifice for all humanity—to be received by faith as a gift of grace. And the reason that no one can come to the Father except by being drawn by the Divine Initiative is that humans cannot imagine God's undeserved love. Thus, the reason that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—the Father's gift of love in sending his own Son to die on behalf of his love for the world—is that no *one can come* except by being *drawn by God*, which Jesus eschatologically does and is.

So, are these theological thrusts contradictory? Do they reflect distinctive literary sources with different perspectives? Or do they reflect two sides of a single perspective, if we consider *how* a particular tenet is held to be true? Rudolf Bultmann saw John 14:6 as reflecting the Johannine evangelist's Christocentric and revelatory soteriology, and so, the so-called "instrumentalist sacramentology" of 6:51c-58 supposedly reflects an interpolation by the ecclesiastical redactor. In my view, though, that passage is calling for adherence to the Way of the Cross—calling for martyrological faithfulness if required by the Truth (note similar associations in Mark 10:38–39), so the theological tension is actually minimal.[25] In John 6:56, to embrace the incarnational reality of Jesus is to abide in him and to remain in his community, not to split off like those who never were really convinced of the Truth (1 John 2:19), but to remain with Christ and his community of followers (John 15:1–10). Thus, to receive the life-producing food is to respond to the Revealer in faith and to embrace his community in solidarity and faithfulness (John 6:17, 35, 48–58). It is not a ritual or cultic action that is required; it is corporate solidarity with Jesus and his fellowship that is expected if one also wishes to be raised with him on the Last Day.

In addition to the presentation of Jesus as the Word, the Light, and the Life in John 1:1–18, he is also presented as the Way, the Truth, and the Life within the larger chapter. In vv. 19–51, John the Baptist fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3, preparing "a *way* in the wilderness" (v. 23). And indeed, *grace* and *truth* come through Jesus Christ, the Word-become-flesh (vv. 14, 17). For in him was Life—the Light of all humanity (v. 4)—inviting a response of faith to the Divine Initiative, whereby any and all who believe become adopted into the divine family (vv. 10–13). Thus, John's universal outreach centers on

humanity's responses to the Divine Initiative, which Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ eschatologically is. However, while he came unto "his own," that reception was mixed, and the Judeans (not "the Jews" in general, as many of them believed, 8:31) are presented in the narrative as rejecting Jesus and plotting his death. Does this mean that the Fourth Gospel is anti-Jewish, or is it pro-Jewish?

4. Does the Gospel of John Supplant or Restore Judaism?

While some interpreters have seen the Johannine Jesus as supplanting Judaism with a new religion, a closer reading reflects the evangelist's seeing Jesus as restoring the heart of Judaism. Thus, it is not a matter of Christianity superseding Judaism as "the right religion" over and against "the wrong religion;" it reflects the God of Israel as eschatologically breaking into human history in ways that potentially transform Jewish faith and practice in fulfilling Israel's original vocation. In that sense, the Johannine Jesus is presented as furthering the prophetic mission of John the Baptist, performing signs rooted in justice and love, embodying the typologies of Elijah and Moses, and extending the blessings of Abraham to the larger world beyond first-century Judaism.

4.1. Furthering the Prophetic Mission of John the Baptist

As the Johannine Jesus is announced at the outset by John the Baptist, Jesus is presented as furthering John's prophetic work at the outset of his ministry. First, the original beginning of the Johannine narrative likely began with the witness of John (John 1:6–8 and 15):

> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. (He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.)
>
> John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."

As the Johannine Christ-hymn was added to the final version of the Fourth Gospel, the beginning of the initial Johannine narrative echoes the beginning of Mark 1:1–14. The narrator here explicitly clarifies that Jesus came ministering *before* John was thrown into prison (John 3:24 versus Mark 1:14), so the Gospel of John augments Mark chronologically, with the first two signs preceding those reported in Mark 1. Second, when the Baptist was asked if he were Elijah or the Eschatological Prophet, he denies being either (John 1:19–21; contra Mark 9:13). This clears the ground for Jesus to fulfill those two typologies, although historically, the Baptist was likely identified with Elijah's ministry by himself and by others, and Mark's connecting of John with Elijah possesses its own historical weight. Third, followers of John become followers of Jesus (John 1:35–51), and when John's own disciples come to him complaining that Jesus is garnering more followers than him, he declares the elevation of Jesus—at his own expense—to be the purpose of his mission (3:25–30). As John had said earlier, the reason he came baptizing was to point out Jesus. Fourth, the prophetic thrust of John's ministry is mirrored in the early presentation of the Johannine temple incident, as Jesus—like John—was comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable (2:13–22). Thus, the early placement of the temple demonstration in John fittingly stands alongside the prophetic ministry of the Baptist, joining their ministries together historically.

4.2. Prophetic Demonstrations of Justice, Truth, and Love

As John's story of Jesus continues, the early Johannine temple incident stands as an eschatological prophetic sign, in keeping with the prophetic-renewal ministry of John the Baptist. It calls for socioeconomic justice and repentance from merchandizing at the expense of authentic worship. This might also reflect a more chronologically plausible ordering, as John's Jesus travels to and from Jerusalem multiple times, in contrast to the singular climactic visit conjectured by Mark and followed by Matthew and Luke.[26] While some scholars imagine that John's chronology is ordered by theological interests,

the narrator expands upon engagements with the likes of Nicodemus in Jerusalem (John 3:1–21), presents him as traveling through Samaria on his way back to Galilee (4:3–4), and comments on people in Galilee having witnessed the signs Jesus had performed in Jerusalem (4:45). Thus, the narrator sees the events in John 2:13–22 as not only standing alongside the ministry of the Baptist in John 1, but also as having direct impacts on what follows in the next three chapters. Further, when Jesus visits Jerusalem a second time during an unnamed feast, the religious leaders already want to kill him, which would be odd if it were his first visit (5:18). Therefore, the Johannine presentation of Jesus ministering alongside John the Baptist presents his missional interest as rooted squarely in a prophetic restoration of Judaism to its own best expressions, not the supersessionist setting up of a new religion.

In contrast to the Matthean Jesus, who advises his followers to not travel among the Samaritans (Matt 10:5), the Johannine Jesus not only travels through Samaria, but he engages the woman at the well, who then becomes the apostle to the Samaritans. Upon her testimony and their own experience, many in the village believe in Jesus, and they even extend him and his disciples hospitality for two days, hailing him as "the Savior of the world" (John 4:4–42). When asked by the woman upon which mountain it is correct to offer worship—Jerusalem or Gerizim—Jesus replies that "Salvation is of the Jews," but also that authentic worship is dependent neither upon form nor place (v. 22). Further (vv. 23–24),

> But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

In addition to justice and truth, the ministry of Jesus is rooted in Love, as God's love for the world is the basis for the Son's mission (3:16). The Father's love for the Son is what empowers his healing ministry (3:35; 5:20), and the Father loves the Son because he is willing to lay down his life in order to take it up again (10:17). This love is what leads Jesus to heal the lame and the blind in Jerusalem, and also to call Lazarus forth from the tomb. Jesus loved Mary and Martha, and especially Lazarus (11:3, 5, 36). Jesus also loved his own unto the end (13:1) and calls his followers to love one another as he has loved them (13:34–35). "For indeed, no greater love is possible than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (15:12–17). However, these values of justice, truth, and love are not novelties within Judaism; they are central to the ministries of the Hebrew prophets, and Jesus is presented in the Gospel of John as embodying and restoring the highest of Jewish values.

4.3. Fulfilling Jewish Scriptures and Embracing the Typologies of Elijah and Moses

As a witness to the thoroughgoingly Jewish thrust of Jesus and his ministry, the Johannine Jesus fulfills Jewish Scriptures textually and typologically.

4.3.1. Biblical Motifs

First, Jesus cites half-a-dozen biblical motifs, referencing the lifting up of the bronze serpent (Num 21:9; John 3:14); Israel's people being taught by God (Isa. 54:13; John 6:45); living water being poured out in Jerusalem (Zech 14:8; Isa 44:3; John 7:38); people being called "gods" and children of the Most High (Psa 82:6; John 10:34); and the requirement of two witnesses when proof is to be ascertained (Deut 17:6; John 8:17). Thus, Jesus is presented as claiming biblical precedents for his words and works. Scriptures are also cited by others in the narrative, but these references often expose conventional misunderstandings of a Jewish biblical text.

4.3.2. Biblical Texts

Second, the narrator cites a dozen or so biblical texts as a means of pointing to Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ, fulfilling Scripture. John the Baptist prepares the way of the Lord in the wilderness (Isa 40:3; John 1:23); Jesus demonstrates zeal for God's house at the temple incident (Psa 69:9; John 2:17); disciples later come to understand the meaning of being raised up on the third day (Hos 6:2; John 2:22; 20:9); the crowd cites Psalm 118:26,

and the narrator cites Zechariah 9:9 as Jesus enters Jerusalem (John 12:13–15); Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9–10 reference the prophet's unbelieved report and people's not seeing, hearing, or comprehending (John 12:38, 40); the betrayal of Judas is anticipated by Psalm 41:9 (John 13:18; 17:12); people hate Jesus without cause (Psa 35:19; John 15:25); the clothes of Jesus are divided, and his robe is gambled over (Psa 22:18; John 19:24); the sour wine offered Jesus is like poison and vinegar (Psa 69:21; John 19:28–29); the bones of Jesus are not broken (Num 9:12; Exod 12:46; Psa 34:20; John 19:31–36); and people look on the one they have pierced (Zech 12:10; John 19:37). The Johannine Jesus thus fulfills Jewish Scripture explicitly, showing that he is indeed the Jewish Messiah/Christ.

4.3.3. Biblical Tyopologies

Third, in addition to explicit references to fulfilled Scriptures, Jesus fulfills numerous Jewish biblical typologies within the Johannine narrative.[27] Like angels on Jacob's ladder, the Son of Man ascends and descends (Gen 28:12; John 1:51; 3:13). A number of Moses typologies are also fulfilled, ranging from fulfilling the place of Moses to providing manna in the wilderness (Exod 20:1–17; 14:15–31; 16:1–36; 3:14; John 1:16; 6:19; 8:28; 12:32; 6:1–13, 16–21; 8:56), and as the Prophet-like-Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15–22, the word of Jesus tellingly comes true (John 1:45; 5:39; 8:28; 11:42; 13:19; 18:9, 32). Elijah and Elisha typologies are fulfilled in the raising of Lazarus and the feeding of the crowd with barley loaves (1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 2:8; 4:8–44; John 11:1–44; 6:1–21). Davidic typologies are fulfilled in the triumphal entry (Zech 9:9; John 12:14); and Yahweh's blessing of the nations by means of Abraham's lineage comes true in the Greeks' coming to Jesus (Gen 12:1–3; 12:20–21).

In addition to the explicit and typological fulfillments of Jewish Scripture in the Gospel of John, each of the "I-Am" themes and images connects a biblical image of Israel with the Johannine Jesus. While each of these themes is also present in the language of the Synoptic Jesus, the Johannine evangelist connects them centrally with the self-references of Jesus as a means of identifying in Jesus of Nazareth the restoration of historic Israel. Therefore, Jesus and his followers in John neither supersede nor supplant Judaism or Israel; rather, the Johannine Jesus is both the King of Israel and the Savior of the world (John 1:49; 12:13 and 4:42), restoring and fulfilling Israel's historic vocation. Therefore, not only does the Johannine Jesus further the prophetic mission of John the Baptist, but he is also presented as fulfilling the historic justice, truth, and love-concerns of Israel's prophets. It is precisely because Jesus of Nazareth and the Johannine evangelist challenge fellow Jewish audiences within an intra-religious set of engagements—not inter-faith polemics—that they both experience tensions with other Jewish leaders. In that sense, the originative Johannine offence was neither exclusivism nor supersessionism; it was continuing revelation within God's eschatological history of salvation.

5. The True Johannine Offence: Exclusivism, Supersessionism, or Continuing Revelation?

In the light of the above analysis, it is easy to see why the Gospel of John is and has been a controversial and polarizing text. Historically, when one of its "riddling poles"—ltheological, historical, or literary—gets leveraged by an individual or a group, alternative interpretations get offered from the other side. Thus, in the Early Church, advocates of the quasi-divinity of Jesus (*homoiousious*—Arius and his kin) were countered by advocates of his essential divinity (*homousious*—Athanasius and his kin); advocates of his subordinate relation to the Father were countered by advocates of his egalitarian relation to the Father; and statements of the Spirit proceeding from the Father were counterbalanced by the Son's also sending the Holy Spirit (hence, *Filioque* debates). Thus, theological challenges in early Christianity were successfully addressed by restoring the Johannine dialectical tensions that were there from the beginning, and the same must be done regarding Johannine soteriology and ecclesiology. So, is the real Johannine scandal its exclusivism, or its universalism; its anti-Judaism, or its pro-Judaism; its fundamentalist dogmatism, or its continuing revelation? Most often, a Johannine text is seen as problematic due to one-sided

interpretations that fail to note the larger, tensive features of John's dialectical theological, historical, and literary account.

5.1. Universalism versus Exclusivism

While some readers have interpreted John dogmatically and monologically on aspects of soteriology and religious particularity, the facts of the text also reflect a sustained universal thrust. Thus, while well-meaning Christians tend to cite John 14:6 as the only hope for heaven—"one way, Jesus"—and critics see such stances as hegemonic and exclusionary, the Light of Christ in John is also inclusive, universal, and welcoming, and the shepherding work of Jesus embraces the spiritually attentive from other flocks, as well (1:9; 10:17). Thus, these two theological trajectories must be held together, in tension. If one asks *why* Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, through whom all who come to the Father do so—as a descriptive reality, not a prescriptive regulation—helpful insights follow. It's not a new legal constriction, gifting some with heavenly rewards for the right answer, while damning others to hell for not being a Christian. The issue here is the gift of grace—the extension of God's unmerited love and its eschatological revelation in Christ Jesus—which cannot be garnered by human ingenuity, schemes, or initiatives. Here, *revelation*—the Divine Initiative—at times stands in opposition to *religion*—that which is of human initiative—as a creaturely attempt to garner God's grace and spiritual gifts.

Yes, understanding God's saving-revealing action in Christ Jesus reflectively can and will help, but the reach and impulse of the Light of Christ extends before and beyond such particular advances. Or, putting it in Pauline terms, Abraham believed God, and his faith was credited to him as righteousness (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6). Likewise, we are saved by grace through faith, not by religious works, nor by dogmatic platitudes (Acts 15:11; Eph 2:8). But, why is revelation required? Because humans live by conventional operations—by deservedness—and undeserved grace cannot be imagined in our workaday worlds. Grace does not "work" in merit-oriented life. Thus, the only possibility for grace to be glimpsed is for it to be revealed, which is what the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has been doing over the millennia and has been fully conveyed in the Incarnation and the Christ Events. Note how the scandal of grace as a universal gift is displayed by Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of faith, and the Gospel of John.

5.1.1. The Galilean Prophet and the Jerusalem Elite—Loving Concern as An Affront to Legal Observance

While the Synoptics have their own stories of Jesus to tell, John's narrative presents Jesus as extending gracious and inclusive outreach to those beyond the ethnocentric Judaism of his day. Whereas Matthew's Jesus advises his followers to go nowhere among the Gentiles or the Samaritans (Matt 10:5), Jesus not only befriends the Samaritan woman at the well, but she and her people believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the *Tahib*, in Samaritan tradition. They even offer Jesus and his disciples hospitality for two days and hail him as "the Savior of the world" (John 4:4–42). Again, the authentic worship God desires is neither in Jerusalem nor on Gerizim; it is in spirit and in truth—independent of cultic particularities, forms, or sites (vv. 21–24).[28]

The second sign of Jesus is performed from afar, in Capernaum, upon the son of a royal official, and he and his family believe, even though they are not Jewish (vv. 46–54). And, in Jerusalem, when Philip serves as a cross-cultural bridge to Greeks wishing to see Jesus, Jesus declares that his hour is fulfilled (12:20–23). While the hometown prophet is rejected in Nazareth according to Mark 6:5, in John, the Samaritans and Galileans received him, and his shepherding reach extends to sheep beyond particular folds (John 4:43–45; 10:16).

The provincial ethnocentrism of the Jerusalem elite is also challenged at several instances by the Johannine presentation of Jesus of Nazareth, as they refuse to believe in Jesus because he is from Galilee, requiring that the Messiah come from Bethlehem, David's city. When Nicodemus stands up for Jesus, they threaten him with the pejorative label, "Galilean," asserting that no prophet comes from Galilee (7:40–52). Despite Nathanael of

Cana's local provincialism about Nazareth, he nonetheless comes to believe in Jesus and is also present at the great catch of fish (1:46–49; 21:2). John's story of Jesus presents his ministry as expanding the universal reach of Jerusalem's festivals.[29] In addition to his offer to the woman at the well, Jesus promises Living Water flowing from within at the Festival of Booths, a reference to the universal fluency of the Spirit (4:10; 7:37–38; cf. Jer 2:23; 17:13; Zech 14:8). Likewise, while those who ate the manna in the wilderness died, the Bread that Jesus gives and is avails those who ingest it Eternal Life (6:27–58).

Another accounting of why the Jerusalem elite opposed Jesus and his healing on the Sabbath is that they did not have God's love in their hearts (5:41). The motivation for healing the man by the Pool of Bethzatha is the Father's love, which Jesus seeks to further in his ministry (v. 20), whereas the Jewish leaders are foremost concerned with keeping the Mosaic Law. Sabbath regulations versus the Father's love is the way that the Johannine evangelist presents the first contest of Jesus in Jerusalem over his signs, and this is why the religious leaders do not recognize his agency from the Father. God loves the world, and he sent his Son as his divinely commissioned agent of love and redemption (3:16). If people really knew God, they would love and appreciate the words and works of the Son (7:17; 8:42; 16:3); however, those rejecting the Son love the praise of humans more than the glory of God (12:43).

Ironically, in the contest between the religious authorities in Jerusalem and the Johannine Jesus, we have a contest of Deuteronomic midrashim. The Judeans cling to the work-prohibition of Deuteronomy 5:12–15; the Galilean prophet claims the commissioned agency of the Prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15–22, who speaks and acts solely on behalf the Father's divine commission. Further, his word comes true, showing that he is indeed the authentic Prophet, which is why he and the Father are one (John 2:22; 4:53; 11:42; 12:33; 13:11; 18:19, 32).[30] That claim, then, becomes a second offence among the Jerusalem elite, as they accuse Jesus of blasphemy in referencing his unity with the Father (10:33).

One more issue deserves to be clarified, which is the meaning of Jesus declaring the Judean leaders (*hoi Ioudaioi*) referenced in John 8:44 to be children of the Devil. Yes, this is strong language, but the issue is not Christianity versus Judaism. Johannine pejorative language always refers to particular behaviors and influences, not categories of being. First, in John 6:68–70, Peter's reference to Jesus being the Holy One of God—hence, a reference to his wondrous power to escape suffering and death (cf. Mark 1:24)—is described as being a devil (parallel to "Get behind me, Satan," in Mark 8:33).[31] And, the Devil, or Satan, had corrupted Judas in his betrayal of Jesus (John 13:2, 27). Further, in 1 John 3:8–10, the children of God and the children of the Devil are differentiated as those who do righteousness versus those who do evil: those who love brothers and sisters versus those who sin. Thus, the contentious issue in John 8 is that the (some, not all) religious leaders are refusing to believe the truth; they are siding with the Father of Lies (8:44), seeking to kill Jesus, as the Devil was a murderer from the beginning, with no truth in himself (vv. 37, 40, 44). While some of the Judean Jews *do* believe in Jesus (8:31), others refuse the truth in their ethnocentric dogmatism. That is the issue, not their religion or ethnicity; Moses, wrote of *Jesus* (5:46), according the Fourth Evangelist.

Thus, the rule-breaking love of Jesus in healing people on the Sabbath is what scandalizes the religious leaders of Jerusalem. They do not have God's love in their hearts, and they do not recognize the Father's loving agency through the Son, who carries out the will of the Father, not his own. He also declares and embodies the Truth, while the religious elite pressure the blind man and his parents to go against their discernment (9:13–34), leveraging human honor over and against the glory and truth of God. Loving concern thus scandalizes legal dogmatism, and the issue is not one religion against another; it is a love-oriented approach to the Divine and to humanity that motivates the mission of the Johannine Jesus, which the Synoptic Jesus also affirms and commands (cf. Matt 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–30; Luke 10:27–28).

5.1.2. Jewish Outreach in a Diaspora Context—Synagogue Conservatism versus the Liberalism of Gentile Believers

While the first generation of the Pauline mission to the Gentiles—welcoming them into the family of Abraham by their faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ, not as a factor of circumcision or becoming outwardly Jewish—raised consternation among Jewish leaders in the larger Mediterranean world, tensions did not cease in the post-Pauline Jesus movement. While circumcision might have eased as a required stipulation among believers following the missive from the Jerusalem Council—requiring abstinence from eating meat offered to idols, drinking the blood of strangled animals, and sexual immorality (Acts 15:28–29)—tensions did not cease. Conservative Jewish communities in the Diaspora continued to be concerned regarding Gentile believers in Jesus who did not embrace accepted outward codes of Jewish faith and practice.[32] Further, some of these issues might have varied in their expectations from one setting to another, but with the ascendency of Pharisaic Judaism following the destruction of Jerusalem and the decimation of its priestly leadership, emphases upon biblical codes of Jewish faith and practice likely increased in terms of expectation, as former residents of Judea and Galilee settled among Diaspora settings.

That being the case, tensions between the Jesus movement and synagogue leaders in post-70 CE Diaspora settings continued, especially around three issues. First, with regard to Social Identity Complexity Theory, Jewish communities within Hellenist-majority settings embraced a *Compartmentalization* stance with regards to matters of Jewish faith and practice, one visibly set apart from non-Jewish populations.[33] This would have included such physical and identifiable traits as circumcision, dress codes for men and women, observing some ceremonial washing practices, and attending sabbath worship. Likewise, being an upstanding Jew included refusals of dining with non-Jews, worshiping pagan gods or venerating idols (including Roman imperial cult participation), eating non-kosher food or foods offered to idols, and celebrating pagan festivals, together with abstaining from associated sexual practices. These and other outward codes of practice signified what it meant to be Jewish in a cosmopolitan setting, and in the post-Pauline mission to the Gentiles, as the Jesus movement grew, tensions with local Jewish communities likely increased.

From a Jewish rigorist standpoint, believers in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ ought to become circumcised, adopt Jewish practices in exchange for pagan ones, and attend synagogue Sabbath worship and related events. And, some probably did so. Most, however, met in house churches on First Day, and some more liberal Jews and more committed Gentile believers (including the Johannine leadership) likely worshiped in synagogues on the Sabbath and in house-churches on First Day.[34] Thus, the overall tensions between post-70 Jewish leaders and Johannine believers orbited around concerns that Gentile believers in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ would see themselves as inheriting the blessings of Abraham without needing to observe stipulations central to what it meant to be Jewish in terms of acceptable faith and practice (Gen 17 and Levitical codes, etc.).

In terms of faith issues, the Prophet-like-Moses agency schema of the Johannine Jesus—rooting his authorization for healing on the Sabbath in Deuteronomy 18:15–22—not only provoked consternation over apparent blasphemy during the actual ministry of Jesus, but now the concern extended to the elevated christological confessions of his followers, which bordered on ditheism.[35] Not only does the gospel narrative call for belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31), but the Christ-hymn of John 1:1-18—likely in use before it was added to the final edition of the Fourth Gospel by the compiler as an overture to the narrative that follows—would have been hard for local synagogue leaders to endorse, even if they thought highly of Jesus of Nazareth. Jewish monotheism was likely threatened by perceived Johannine ditheism. Thus, the secession of Jewish members from Johannine house churches referenced in 1 John 2:18–25 is countered by the Elder: if you reject Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ, you will lose the Father; however, if you receive the Son, you will retain good standing with the Father who sent him. On that score, John's high

Christology was seen as an offence to those embracing Deuteronomy 6:4 and the *Shema*. Israel's God is *one God*, not two.

An even greater offense, though, was likely the societal practices of Gentile Jesus-adherents, who refused to adopt observable trademarks of Jewish religious commitments, believing that they were saved by grace and not needing to follow accepted standards of Jewish faith and practice.[36] In the second-generation Pauline mission, perhaps referenced explicitly by the warning of 2 Peter 3:16 and Jude 4, some false teachers were distorting the teachings of Paul and makeing a mockery of grace, seeing it as license for continuing in what Jewish communities would regard as sinful. Especially under the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE), when public emperor-laud was expected of all subjects of the Roman Empire, those refusing to worship Caesar would have been subject to punishment, and perhaps even capital punishment. As the Pliny–Trajan correspondence two decades later shows (*Letters* 10.96–97), some Jesus-adherents refused to worship Caesar or to deny Christ—and were thus guilty of the name Christian—so the governor of Bithynia questioned whether he should put two virgins to death, despite having been warned thrice. Indeed, some brought to tribunal declared that they were *not* Christians, and that they only met with Christians on a certain day of the week, before dawn, eating common food and singing a hymn to Christ as though he were God; but they denied Christ and venerated the Emperor's image. They had been doing this for two decades or more, and Pliny even declares that such people cannot be considered Christians and are thus innocent of the crime.

Given that the last verse of 1 John (5:21) finally delivers a pointed demand that people stay away from idols, such is clearly the death-producing sin mentioned several verses earlier (v. 16). Thus the references to loving not the world and its enticements is clarified (2:12–17), as are the references to those who claim to be walking in the light while walking in darkness (1:5–10; 2:1–11). Worldly assimilation is also the likely ethical issue legitimating the traveling docetizing prophets of 1 John 4:1–3 and 2 John 7. If Jesus did not suffer or come in the flesh, Jesus-adherents need not risk suffering or death if commanded by Roman officials to worship Caesar, or if pressured by business and civic leaders to support local (pagan) festivals. Thus, while their primary teaching might have involved cheap grace and easy discipleship, when challenged as to the believer's willingness to suffer for Christ as he suffered for us (hence, the witness of the water and the blood: John 19:34–35; 1 John 5:6–8), they denied that Jesus came in the flesh or suffered physically—as the Divine Son—excusing his followers from the same.[37]

This ethical liberalism may also have provoked the departure of Jewish community members, causing them to abandon First Day worship and return to synagogue-only participation (1 John 2:18–25). Thus, the Antichrist-related labels in the Johannine Epistles reference two distinct issues: the abandonment of the community by Jewish former participants in First-Day worship (actualized) and the visitation of traveling Gentile-ministers teaching cultural, pagan assimilation (impending).[38] In their loving the world, the cheap-grace false prophets fail to love fellow believers, providing conservative synagogue leaders ample ammunition to disparage the Jesus movement, including his being referenced as the Jewish Messiah/Christ, let alone the Son of God. While the pre-existent and divinity-associative confessions of Jesus as the Divine Son in the New Testament's Christological hymns might have raised consternation among conservative Jewish groups, these confessions actually bolstered Jewish opposition to divinity claims by Caesar Augustus and his successors. The Jewish Messiah/Christ *is* the Son of God, *not* Caesar Tiberias, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, or Trajan. This juxtaposition of *Jesus versus the Caesars* was likely compelling to many Jewish residents in the Diaspora, but when Gentile believers in Jesus transgressed basic Jewish faith-and-practice codes, that evoked Jewish consternation over some all-too-liberal teachers in the emerging Jesus movement.

5.1.3. Offensive Christomorphic Universalism Today

While the Gospel of John is a favorite biblical text among many Christians today, it also provokes offense among both liberals and conservatives, on several levels. In terms

of its historical situation, it offends supersessionists and critics of Christianity alike, as Johannine Christianity had not yet individuated from first-century Judaism.[39] This is a historical fact, as the parting of the ways extended over centuries and differed from one locale to another, and Christians and Jews still regarded one another as siblings or at least cousins within a larger Judeo-Christian family for centuries, even to this day. Nonetheless, analyses of John and Judaism constitute one of the most pressing of religious issues in contemporary society.[40] Thus, John's presentations of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ continue to offend some Jewish audiences because of their departures from some Jewish values and the tragic history of religious antisemitism. Likewise, some supersessionist readers are baffled by John's thorough Jewishness, but more pressing are the ways that John's Christomorphic particularity and universalism continue to scandalize liberal *and* conservative audiences among contemporary readers of the text.

First, John's universalism scandalizes liberal, secular, and interreligious audiences, as the universally accessible Light of Christ is also tied to its eschatological manifestation in the historic work and mission of Christ Jesus. Thus, while the illuminative and salvific Light of Christ is at least potentially accessible across the bounds of culture, time, and space, the Divine Word became flesh in the life and witness of Jesus of Nazareth, and therein is God's glory revealed and encountered (John 1:9–14). That being the case, the recorded memory of who Jesus was and what he came to do in the New Testament becomes an objective referent by which to check and inform cultural and personal impressions of God's revealed truth, inviting modification and correction, as needed. Such impressions might also have been informed, or even distorted, by *how* Christ is represented—authentically or inauthentically—by his followers and adversaries. Thus, conforming one's impressions to the biblical presentations of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ becomes a refining process by which to purify one's impressions of the Light of Christ within. For instance, just because some fundamentalists or atheists seize upon a Johannine text unreflectively and dogmatically, without considering John's dialectical presentation of an issue, this does not mean that the evangelist would have agreed with their distorted representations. The evangelist was clearly a dialectical thinker, and unless interpreters demonstrate like capacities to hold dual Johannine tenets in tension, they are sure to get it wrong.

Here, though, another crucible is required. It is not "*my* Light," or a subjective infatuation with one's "brilliant notions" that is to be valued; it is *the* Light of *Christ*, apprehended inwardly, that poses the critical standard of measure. While the Son came not to judge the world but to save it (3:17; 5:19–38; 12:47), the Father has also extended judgment into his hands, because truth itself forces judgment in the hearts of minds of humans (3:18–21; 8:14–16; 9:39; 12:48). Thus, the revelation of truth itself forces one to take a stand for or against the Revealer. In that sense, God's liberating truth is never concentrically consonant with human conceptions of veracity. Bluntly, God's undeserved love—grace—is so totally counter-conventional that it requires a revelation from beyond for humans to even imagine it. If Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, truth itself is *Christomorphic*, rooted in the very form of the Word become flesh, and this is why it scandalizes subjective and self-oriented views of truth, demanding repentance. To see God's saving-revealing Truth and Light as centered in the person and work of Jesus as the Christ, who though he was equal with God, poured himself out, even unto death (Phil 2:6–11), inevitably also calls humanity to the Way of the Cross.

Or, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it: "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die".[41] Put further, "There are two ways possible of encountering Jesus: man must die (to self), or he must put Jesus to death".[42]

And yet, this is also precisely why knowing the truth of Christ is liberating (John 8:32). In seeing ourselves as we really are—via the convincing work of the Holy Spirit—we are convicted of both sin and of righteousness (16:8–11). Thus, one need not puff oneself up nor put oneself down; the Advocate-*Paraklētos* leads us into liberating truth, exposing what needs amending, and affirming what abides. And again, authentic worship is in spirit and in truth—regardless of time, form, and place; after such authentic worshipers, the Father

actively seeks (4:21–24). Indeed, to see the other in truth—as Christ sees them—leads us to rehumanize the other, whether they be Samaritan, Galilean, Judean, or Greek, empowering us to thus love one another as Christ has loved us (13:34–35; 15:12–17). Finally, the Risen Christ promises to lead the faithful by means of the Holy Spirit—sent by the Father and the Son—leading his followers into the truth they need for the day, keeping them in the world but not of the world (14:15–17, 26; 15:26; 16:8–15; 17:6–19). Thus, Christomorphic Truth challenges and scandalizes human conventionalities in ways liberating, calling for repentance and belief, leading into the newness of life.

Further, God's saving-revealing Truth revealed in a person—Jesus Christ, which is also conveyed by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit—scandalizes even the most nuanced forms of Christian dogmatism. While one cannot imagine any of the theological tenets rejected as heretical over the ages being more adequate than the solid planks of the Ecumenical Councils' determinations of orthodoxy, this is not to say that Christomorphic Truth is limited to a set and static cluster of propositional tenets.[43] Indeed, following the Resurrected Lord, who continues to lead his followers into liberating truth via the timely workings of the Holy Spirit, puts into motion the biblically correct doctrine of illuminative revelation. As Professor Käsemann reminds us, though, the great irony of a closed canon is that it contains the Gospel of John, which teaches that Christ continues to speak and lead his followers directly and spiritually through the Holy Spirit, beyond the confines of a closed canon.[44] Thus, while aspiring to the best of exegetical inquiry and pursuing the best of faith-seeking-understanding, the Johannine Jesus claims that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide and lead his followers faithfully as they *attend*, *discern*, and *mind* his liberating truth for the day.

Finally, the tensive dialectic between individual and community must also be taken into consideration. Just as no one is deprived of access to the Light of Christ, so too does no one have total access. We need one another in the quest for truth, which advances within the tensive dialectic between the individual and the community. As individuals and community members alike are committed to seeking and minding truth above all else, they help each other advance its discernment. In the quest for truth, several queries advance the process. First, is a view consonant with God's revelation in Scripture? The Spirit who inspired the Scriptures will not lead contrary to their overall witness. Second, is a view coherent with reason and adequate for experience? Soundness requires validity of argument and veracity of particulars. Third, is a view informed by historical wisdom? Learning from the past alleviates the repeating of errors, although new ones are always on the horizon. Fourth, have all perspectives been welcomed and considered prayerfully and within community? Drawing in the "pros and cons" of an issue allows a more textured appreciation of the issues involved, facilitating more informed discernment. And finally, is the way of Christ and concern for others prioritized over and against personal gain, perceived or actual? A lot of good can get done when it matters not who gets the credit, and this "pentalateral" approach to individual and corporate discernment provides a practical way forward in the attending, discerning, and minding of Christomorphic Truth.[45]

6. Conclusions

While the Gospel of John poses the most inclusive and exclusive presentations of soteriology and life-producing access to the Deity, like nearly every other Johannine theological theme, these issues are held in dialectical tension within the narrative. The failure to hold John's universalism and particularity in tension is thus the bane of monological interpreters: fundamentalists and liberals alike. When asked why Jesus is the only way to the Father, given humanity's universal access to the saving-revealing Light of Christ, the Johannine answer is that *no one has seen God at any time*. Only the one and only Son who is at the Father's side has made God's grace and truth eschatologically known to the world, and whoever responds to the Divine Initiative in faith is welcomed into the divine family. Thus, one may potentially respond in faith to the illuminative spiritual work of Christ within the

individual, and even within non-Christian settings, but that response is aided, clarified, and bolstered by learning more about Jesus and his witness in the canonical Gospels.

John's presentation of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ, however, neither supersedes nor supplants Judaism; it asserts his fulfilment of the Jewish Scriptures explicitly and typologically, seeking to restore a faithful view of just and loving Judaism as heralded by John the Baptist and embodied by Jesus of Nazareth. In that sense, John is radically pro-Jewish, not anti-Jewish. Some (not all) religious leaders in Judea opposed the Galilean prophet, but this does not imply the parting of the ways just yet; it simply reflects early resistance to the unofficial charismatic leader by the Jerusalem religious elite, and such is attested independently in the Acts of the Apostles. That being the case, the Johannine Revealer scandalizes religious authorities on many levels.

To the rigorist Sabbath observers in Jerusalem, Jesus exercises the love of the Father in healing the lame and the blind. To the followers of Moses among the Diaspora synagogues, Jesus claims to embody the revelatory Prophet predicted by Moses. To dogmatic liberal and conservative interpreters of the present era, the Johannine Jesus poses the scandal of a dialectical presentation of universal and particular tensions in the light of continuing revelation by means of the Holy Spirit, who is sent forth from the Father and the Son. Or, another way of putting it is that if we are to understand exegetically the revelational character of Johannine soteriology, that would be fitting dogma and wisdom upon which to construct our understandings of the Johannine evangel.

Thus, in answer to the sharpened query of whether the Fourth Gospel is universal or exclusive, the answer is an unequivocal YES. It is a matter of both/and, not either/or biblical understanding. For indeed, if the Truth itself is Christomorphic—a living reality in the form of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ—to know the Truth is essentially a relational reality, involving a dynamic response of faith to the Divine Initiative. And, as the subject of the narrative declares in John 8:32, that promise is worth embracing: "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free".

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Notes

1 Source and redaction critics are known for inferring tensions within the Fourth Gospel as reflecting disagreements between alien sources, the evangelist, and an intrusive redactor, but evidence for such inferences is totally lacking. (Anderson 1996, 1997, 2010, pp. 48–136).

2 On supersessionism, see Donaldson (2016) and Vlach (2009). While the Gospel of John is not cited as extensively with relation to supersessionism, its primary relevance to the subject relates to issues of soteriology and its treatments of Jewish themes; cf. Korner (2020, 2022, pp. 1–5).

3 John Ashton described the genius of Bultmann's paradigm as addressing the two great Johannine riddles: the socio-religious character of the Johannine situation, introducing the Jewish Messiah to the Hellenistic world, and the evangelist's central theological thrust, revelation and its uneven responses by the world. Ashton (1991, pp. 62–66). In my view, we have six or seven issues faced within seven decades of the Johannine situation, four of which are also reflected in the Johannine Epistles and Apocalypse. Anderson (1997, 2006, 2007).

4 The witnesses, the signs, and the fulfilled word lead people to believe in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ and the Son of God: Anderson (2000).

5 On seven crises over seven decades within the Johannine situation, see Anderson (2007).

6 In that sense, the Johannine evangel is seen to be continuing the Pauline iteration of the gospel-message, that saving grace is attained by faith—as it as in the case of Abraham—a charism extended liberally to the world, not simply to an ethnic group or a particular religious movement. On John's universalism and exclusivism, see Culpepper (2002).

7 For an overall view of John's dialogical autonomy, see Anderson (2011, pp. 125–55).

8 John's key theological tensions include the humanity/divinity of Jesus as the Christ; the Son's egalitarian/subordinationist relation to the Father; the embellished/existentialist presentation of the signs; John's present/futuristic eschatology Anderson (1996, 1997, 2010, pp. 252–65).

9 Note the epistemological origins of each of John's thirty-six theological tensions, historical problems, and literary perplexities: Anderson (2011, pp. 157–69).

10 Anderson (1999). Note that in presenting Jesus as the Father's agent within the Mosaic agency schema, the Father–Son relationship is crafted rhetorically—exposing miscomprehending religious leaders as fallacious in their views—and John's apologetic thrust is targeted at emerging audiences—both Jewish and Gentile—within the larger Johannine situation.

11 For a clear overview of the Fourth Evangelist's dialectical thought and tensive presentation of most issues in the Gospel of John, see C. K. Barrett (1972). For an analysis of the Cognitive–Critical origins of the Johannine evangelist's dialectical thinking, see Anderson (2004).

12 For an overall analysis of John's polyvalent theological, historical, and literary dialectical features, see this extensive application of Bakhtin's dialogism: Anderson (2008). Conversely, the work of Ruth Sheridan (2013) suffers from reading only one feature of John's presentations of Judaism-related issues—the negative only—seeing the evangelist's narrative as Bakhtinian monologism rather than acknowledging any of John's theological tensions. See also Anderson (2007) for an overall view of the dialectical Johannine situation, applying Bakhtin's rhetorical analysis of narratological miscomprehension as a means of understanding a number of pressing issues in the first century, not simply one.

13 Heraclitus, *Frag.* pp. 1–2, 11–12, 34, 78, 90–91, 111–15.

14 In Bultmann's ([1970] 2014, pp. 45–83, 218–37) view, the existential crisis of humanity, as put forth in the Gospel of John, is that it forces persons to lay aside their religious and political platforms, responding in faith to the Divine Initiative, which Jesus as the divine emissary from the Father claims to be and is.

15 Note the particular texts that populate these tensions: Anderson (2011, pp. 34–35); Neyrey (2007). On departures from the inclusive ministry of Jesus among some proponents of exclusivist soteriologies, see Meeks (2005).

16 For an analysis of the dialectical features of Johannine universalism and particularism, see Anderson (2011, pp. 183–86). See also: Quimby (1947), Reker (1964), and Siliezar (2019).

17 For an overall analysis of the purpose of the Fourth Gospel, see Van Unnik (1959).

18 Plato, *Crat.* 402; Symp.187; Aristotle, *Rhet.* iii. 5; Philo, *Leg. Alleg. iii. 3*.

19 "The Word of the Lord" effects changes in its wake: Gen 15:1–6; Nu 24:11–14; 1 Ki 13:1–2; Amos 3:1. On the connecting of the creative power of God's Word in Creation and in John 1, see Brown (1966), "Appendix II: 'The Word,'" pp. 518–24; and Kubiś (2020).

20 Note the Priene calendar inscription, citing "the birthday of the god Augustus" as "the beginning of the gospel" in Smyrna. Later, Domitian (81–96 CE) required people to reference him as "Lord and God" (Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.4.7; 67.13.4; Suetonius, *Life of Domitian* 13.3). For the acutely political functions of the Christ-hymns of the New Testament in cross-cultural perspective, see Anderson (2016).

21 The Lord's ways are made known to Moses (Psa 103:7); Elisha shows the way to the Arameans (2 Kings 6:19), Anderson (2018).

22 Thus, not only is the word of God's prophet the Lord's truth (1 Kings 17:24; 22:16), but to know God's ways is to be instructed in the Lord's truth (Psa 25:4–5).

23 So argues Parker Palmer (1983), as truth is personal as well as factual, and subjective as well as objective. See also the works of Gadamer (1989) and Polanyi (1974) on the personal character of transformative truth.

24 God breathes life into humans (Gen 2:7; Job 33:4; Sirach 1:12), and God's promise gives life (Psa 119:50).

25 In Bultmann's view, the reference to eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus in John 6:51c-58 must have been an interpolation by the "ecclesiastical redactor," as an instrumentalist form of theophagy—the eating of divine food—as a ritualistic requirement for salvation, citing Ignatius. However, for a historically contextual analysis of the "medicine of immortality" (Ignatius, *Ephesians* 20.2) as an appeal for corporate unity under the single worship service and leader, rather than Egyptian theophagy (partaking of *one* loaf versus *a* loaf), casting historical light on the martyrological thrust of John 6: Anderson (1996, 1997, 2010, pp. 119–36).

26 Rightly, McGrath (2001) and Vistar (2018) both see the Johannine temple incident as reflecting an early prophetic confrontation, rather than a later one.

27 On Jesus fulfilling the typology of the Eschatological Prophet in John, see Anderson (2018) and Larsen (2018), and Fowler and Srickland (2018).

28 Jojko (2012) expands helpfully on the authenticity of Spirit-led worship in the Gospel of John.

29 On the presentation of Jewish festivals fulfilled by the Johannine Jesus, see Yee (1988) and Daise (2007).

30 On the Prophet like Moses agency schema in the Gospel of John, rooted in Deuteronomy 18:15-222, see Borgen ([1968] 1997) and Reinhartz (1992).

[31] For a close analysis of John 6:67–71, see Anderson (1996, 1997, 2010, pp. 221–50). On the identity of *hoi Ioudaoi* in John 8:44, cf. Wróbel (2005), and Blumhofer (2020), where the issue is the failure to embrace the truth rather than being the wrong religion.

[32] For a number of observable markers of first-century Jewish identity, Casey (1991).

[33] For information on Social Identity Complexity Theory, see Roccas and Brewer (2002).

[34] See the work of Robert J. Banks (2020), who builds a compelling case regarding house churches as constituting the primary sociological setting of early Pauline believers in the Diaspora; those settings likely continued within the second-generation Pauline mission, within which Johannine communities developed between 70 and 100 CE in Asia Minor or elsewhere.

[35] On views of the highly dialectical Johannine situation, see Brown (1979), Kobel (2011), Martyn (1996, 2003), Meeks ([1967] 2017, 1972), and Smith (1984).

[36] Thus, those denying that Jesus came in the flesh in 1 John 4:1–3 and 2 John 7 were not Gnostics; they refused to believe that Jesus suffered, so as to excuse themselves from the Way of the Cross under the new requirements of Domitian's imperial cult. Cassidy ([1992] 2015), Carter (2008), Thatcher (2008).

[37] This also is the issue addressed in John 6:51–58; cf. Anderson (1996, 1997, 2010, pp. 194–220).

[38] For an in-depth analysis of the two Antichrist-related threats in the Johannine situation—the first being Jewish secessions back into local synagogues, and the second representing the threat of Hellenizing traveling ministers teaching cheap grace and assimilation to Greco-Roman cultures, see Anderson (2007).

[39] On different views regarding the parting of the ways between Christianity and Judaism—with regards to the Johannine churches in particular—see Becker and Reed (2007), Blumhofer (2020), Charlesworth (2013), Cirafesi (2022), Byers (2021), Katz (1984), Martyn (1968, 1978, 2003), and Meeks (1972). In my judgment, the Johannine Jesus movement seeks to be centered within Judaism and has not departed by the end of the first century CE, and that is why there are tensions with local Jewish family and friends. Anderson (2017). Territoriality exists only between members of the same species.

[40] For the spectrum of treatments of John and Judaism, see the full slate of issues in Anderson and Culpepper (2017, esp. 265–311). See also Barrett (1975), Bauckham (2008), Beck (1994), Becker and Reed (2007), Blumhofer (2020), Bratcher (1974), Byers (2021), Charlesworth (2013), Cirafesi (2022), Davies (1996), Dodd (1953), Fortes (2021), Freyne (1985), Friesen (2006), Gager (1983), Johnson (1989), Knight (1968), Leibig (1983), Lieu (2008), Mason (2007), Motyer (2008), Moxnes (2015), Reinhartz (2001, 2017, 2020), and Sheridan (2012).

[41] On the cost of discipleship, see Bonhoeffer ([1948] 2001, p. 44).

[42] On Christ the center, see Bonhoeffer (1978, p. 35).

[43] Note, for sure, the polyvalent aspect of the Johannine presentation of Jesus and his mission, as represented within the dialectical and transformative thinking of the Johannine evangelist, designed also to create such in the experiential lives of the Johannine audiences: Anderson (2004, 2008). See also Kluska (2020).

[44] In Käsemann ([1968] 2017)'s terms, "...the Fourth Gospel itself has no conception of closed revelation, but rather advocates, even against itself, the ongoing operation of the Spirit's witness." *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, The Johannine Monograph Series 6, translated by Gerhard Krodel, edited by Paul N. Anderson, p. 76.

[45] And, as typified in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, such is the goal of authentic Christian leadership from one generation to the next. As an addition to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, the addition of corporate discernment adds the conciliar work of Acts 15 to the process (Anderson 2006).

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Essay

"Remain in the Calling in Which You Were Called" (1 Cor 7:20): A Post Supersessionist Reading of 1 Corinthians

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Abstract: This essay explores how Paul negotiates and constructs social identity for the *Christos*-followers in Corinth from a post-supersessionist perspective by using the Social Identity Theory. Focusing on a close reading of two controversial passages taken from 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 7:17–24 and 9:19–23), this essay argues that there is continuation of existing social identities of both the Jewish and gentile *Christos*-followers. In the *Christos*-movement, Jews were not expected to give up their place of belonging in order to become *Christos*-followers. Likewise, gentiles were not expected to leave behind their previous identity and embrace Jewish practices in order to become the people of God who worship the God of Israel. While the existing social identities continue, Paul also creatively transforms them. Reflection on the implication of this reading for contemporary ethnic Chinese *Christos*-followers in Muslim-majority Malaysia is also offered.

Keywords: post-supersessionism; 1 Corinthians; Jews; gentiles; social identity

1. Introduction: Continuation of Social Identities in Christ?

In the early twentieth century, Western missionaries came to Malaysia, converted many locals, and urged them to abandon their cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions perceived to be incompatible with their new faith. It was also fashionable for these new converts to adopt Christian names within their social circles and stop using their original ethnic names. Because of this, I (an ethnic Chinese Christian living in Muslim-majority Malaysia) grew up hearing many of my kinfolk describing Christianity as a *xi yang jiao* (Western religion). When someone became a Christian, a common unfortunate reaction was: "One more Christian, one fewer Chinese." This raised the issue of one's identity in Christ: could I still be a Chinese Christian—continuing to observe some of the cultural practices that defined my identity and maintaining my given names without adopting a "Christian" name—or should I abandon these practices and embrace a type of Christianity that was culturally Western in nature?

These questions are not new. In the first century, similar issues were addressed by Paul in his letters. Rooted in his Jewish tradition and identity, Paul was instrumental in bringing his understanding of the gospel of Christ to nations with their own distinctive cultures, traditions, and practices. Yet at the same time, he had to negotiate the complexity of welcoming the gentiles into the family of God. Must gentiles give up their identity? Must Jews cease to be Torah observant after following Jesus the Messiah? In this essay, I will explore how Paul negotiates and constructs social identity for the *Christos*-followers from a post-supersessionist perspective by focusing on two significant passages where Paul addresses the continuation of both Jewish and non-Jewish identities: 1 Cor 7:17–24 and 9:19–23.[1]

One helpful approach to aid our understanding of group dynamics seen in the *ekklēsia* in Corinth is Social Identity Theory.[2] Social identity refers to a person's knowledge of belonging to a particular social group or groups, and this includes values and emotional significance attached to the group or groups. Belonging to groups provides a set of norms governing one's behavior, and, at the same time, serves as a basis of evaluating others

outside the groups. Labels are often used to define group memberships such as ethnicity, gender, citizenship, relationship status, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation. Social identity is not static throughout one's life. There are constant negotiations of group identity during the process of interaction with other groups and the changing allegiance of group membership. When Paul forms a new *ekklēsia* as part of the *Christos*-movement comprising Jews and gentiles, slaves and free, and rich and poor in Corinth, he provides direction on how the *Christos*-followers should reorient their lives in Christ. Inevitably, negotiations of existing social identities and whether they are to continue, discontinue, or be transformed in Christ are deliberated, thus allowing a new in-Christ group identity to develop.

2. The Continuation of Social Identities: 1 Cor 7:17–24

First Corinthians 7:17–24 appears within the larger context where Paul deals with various familial relationships in response to questions the Corinthians raised in a letter to him (1 Cor 7:1, and possibly also 7:25).[3] In 1 Cor 7:1–16, Paul deals with issues concerning marriage, divorce, singleness, and widowhood. Subsequently, in 1 Cor 7:25–40, he emphasizes the advantages of singleness to the unmarried and widowed, although there is nothing wrong should one decide to change one's marital status.

2.1. Paul's Rule for All the Ekklēsiai

In the middle of dealing with the issues of the married and unmarried, Paul connects the notion of remaining in one's social position to the call of God in 1 Cor 7:17–24.[4] In this passage, Paul lays down his rule for "all the *ekklēsiai*" (ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις πάσαις; 1 Cor 7:17). Three times elsewhere in 1 Corinthians (4:17; 11:16; 16:1; cf. 14:33) Paul also refers to what he instructed all the *ekklēsiai* to do. When Paul speaks in this manner, he wishes to, "emphasize his apostolic authority of his teaching" (Gardner 2018, p. 326). In 1 Cor 7:17–24, Paul underscores that the *Christos*-followers, both Jews and gentiles, are to remain in whatever situation that God has assigned them when they are called and walk (περιπατείτω)[5] according to that divine calling. The overall flow of 1 Cor 7:17–24 is constructed in three almost parallel statements interconnected with two illustrations drawn from ethnic identities and social positions as follows:

> 1 Cor 7:17: each person should walk in the way (περιπατείτω) that the Lord assigned (ἐμέρισεν), to which God called (κέκληκεν) him/her.
>
> 1 Cor 7:18–19: illustration drawn from ethnic identities.
>
> 1 Cor 7:20: each person should remain (μενέτω) in the calling (κλήσει) in which he/she was called (ἐκλήθη).
>
> 1 Cor 7:21–23: illustration drawn from social positions.
>
> 1 Cor 7:24: each person wherein he/she was called (ἐκλήθη) should remain (μενέτω) there with God.

What can be seen is that throughout the entirety of Chapter 7, Paul deals with people in different social locations. Within the complexities of such group dynamics, remaining in one's social position is frequently stressed (1 Cor 7:2, 8, 10–11, 12–16, 26–27, 37–38, 40).

2.2. Two Illustrations: Remain in Your Calling

Paul provides two illustrations on how remaining in the calling that God called works out in the context of the Corinthians. In the first illustration, he addresses the continuation of both the Jewish and gentile identities (1 Cor 7:18–19). Paul insists that Jews who were circumcised when they were called should not remove or hide (ἐπισπάσθω) the mark of circumcision.[6] The process of *epispasm* could possibly refer to actions related to the removal of signs of circumcision taken by some young Jewish men exercising in the gymnasium or participating in athletic games during the Hellenistic period. Removing the marks of circumcision is mentioned negatively in 1 Macc 1:11–15[7] where it is synonymous with

abandoning the holy covenant of God and assimilating with the gentiles by doing evil (1 Macc 1:15). In recounting the same event, Josephus not only brings out this connection but goes further by stating that the Jews appeared to be gentiles, "left off all the customs that belonged to their own country, and imitated the practices of the other nations" (Josephus *Antiquities* 12.241) when they removed the mark of circumcision.[8]

Any attempt to remove the mark of circumcision was viewed not only as a serious attempt to abandon one's social identity, but also tantamount to violating the Torah. Drawing from this tradition, Paul's imperative not to become uncircumcised in 1 Cor 7:18 is to highlight to the gentile *Christos*-followers that the Jews were to remain Torah observant and faithful to the custom of their forefathers by ensuring that they, as paraphrased by Rudolph, "do not assimilate or Gentilise" (Rudolph 2011, p. 80) themselves. The continuation of the social identity of the Jews at the point of their calling remains.

Likewise, as Jewish *Christos*-followers should not erase their circumcision, Paul also asserts that the gentile *Christos*-followers who were not circumcised when they were called should not seek to be circumcised (1 Cor 7:18). Similarly, in Galatians Paul is adamant that the gentiles should not be circumcised (Gal 6:12–13; see also 2:3; 5:2–3) or even observe certain special Jewish days, seasons, months, and years (Gal 4:10). Just as Jews should not be "gentilised," likewise, gentiles in Christ should not be made Jews in Christ.

These exhortations by Paul demonstrate that the ethnic identity of both Jews and gentiles remains distinctive. Paul reiterates this in 1 Cor 7:20: each person should remain (μενέτω) in the calling (κλήσει) in which he/she was called (ἐκλήθη). It is unfortunate that most English translations do not fully capture Paul's nuance in this verse by translating the word κλήσει as "condition" (NRSV, NASB, ESV) or "situation" (NET, NIV 2011). This is probably done to avoid confusion with the two cognate words carrying the same meaning as "calling", that are used in the same verse (Gardner 2018, p. 328 n12). While the choice of "condition" or "situation" in these translations is not inherently wrong, it misses Paul's point. The phrase "remain in the calling" echoes God's election of Israel out of the nations to be his treasured possession, a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation (Exod 19:5–6).[9] It could also be seen as a reflection of Paul's assertion in Rom 11:28–29 where he uses the word κλῆσις to refer to the "irrevocable call" of the Jewish nation.

In using the language of calling, Paul not only affirms that God calls both Jews and gentiles, but also establishes the continuation of one's unique ethnic identity and the importance of maintaining these fundamental significant identities, rather than obliterating them once a person is in Christ. Jews must not be ashamed of their boundary markers, and gentiles must not remove their foreskins. When one is in Christ, Jews remain Jews and gentiles remain gentiles as God has called them all.

Following this, Paul draws on a second illustration from the socio-economic situation of those who were called, whether slave or free. One should also remain in that situation when called, unless an opportunity presented itself for one to be manumitted from slavery (1 Cor 7:21–24).[10] Paul affirms that a slave (δοῦλος) is a freedperson in the Lord (ἀπελεύθεροςκυρίου) and a freedperson (ὁ ἐλεύθερος) is a slave (δοῦλος) of Christ (1 Cor 7:22). Even if one's social position as a slave has been reversed to be a freedperson, one's identity as *Christos*-follower remains. Paul also asserts that one's economic position is irrelevant to one's calling, just as one's ethnic identity is irrelevant. What is important is that all should remain in God (μενέτω παρὰ θεῷ) in whatever condition that one is called.

2.3. Both Circumcision and Uncircumcision Have No Value?

There are two further issues that need to be addressed in 1 Cor 7:17–24. First of all, in 1 Cor 7:19, Paul appears to contradict himself when he says that, "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing." This statement seems to suggest that Paul seeks to erase key social identity by describing it in this manner. What needs to be emphasized here is that Paul is dealing not with the erasure of ethnic identity, but this is said within the context of the calling of God, a key theme in 1 Cor 7:17–24. Campbell argues that Paul's statement here is not a comparison between circumcision or uncircumcision, but a comparison of both

circumcision and uncircumcision with the call of God (Campbell 2013, pp. 205–6; see also Gardner 2018, p. 325).[11] At the same time, references to circumcision/uncircumcision also point to the state of being circumcised and uncircumcised, metonymically referring to Jews and gentiles, respectively.[12] In this respect, it would be wrong to consider circumcision as good and foreskin as bad, and vice versa. Rudolph argues that both circumcision and foreskin, "have God's authorization and seal of approval. Both callings are consistent with the believing life" (Rudolph 2011, p. 86).

Seen within the larger context of 1 Cor 7, the picture becomes clearer. Whether one is married to a *Christos*-follower, married to a non-*Christos*-follower, unmarried, enslave, free, circumcised or uncircumcised, one should not be particularly concerned with changing one's social situation at the point when one is called by God to be in Christ. Each of these social locations have the Lord's approval, and the Corinthian *Christos*-followers are called to remain in that condition with God (παρὰ θεῷ) in 1 Cor 7:24. Gardner rightly says, "the Lord's grace is sufficient for them to continue in whatever their social circumstances. They do not need to make changes in their marital relations or social status to 'remain there at God's side'" (Gardner 2018, p. 326).[13]

2.4. Obeying the Commandments of God

The second issue we need to consider is where Paul declares, "obeying the commandments of God is everything" (1 Cor 7:19). What Paul meant by the phrase "commandments of God," has attracted considerable discussion. Some see this to mean keeping God's commandments in a more general sense as likened to obeying the will of God (Barrett 1971, p. 169; Fee 2014, p. 347), or as in its ethical sense (Garland 2003, p. 306; Gardner 2018, pp. 327–28).[14] Others see this as referring to the universal Noachian law (Tomson 1990, pp. 271–72; 1996, pp. 263–69).[15]

The phrase "obeying the commandments of God" is a "technical term" (Fitzmyer 2008, p. 308) frequently used to refer to keeping the Law of Moses in Jewish and biblical writings. For example, Sir 32:23 contains this exhortation: "Guard yourself in every act for this also is the keeping of the commandments" (see also Sir 29:1; Wis 6:18). Jesus, in his reply to a rich, young man's question on how to obtain eternal life, says, "Keep the commandments" (Matt 19:17). This is a clear reference to the Law of Moses as Jesus subsequently cites the Decalogue (Exod 20:12–16; Deut 5:16–20) and Lev 19:18 in Matt 19:18–19. In LXX Ezra 9:4, the phrase "commandments of God" is used as a clear reference to the Law of Moses. Likewise, similar use of the phrase can also be found in Rev 12:17 and 14:12.[16] Elsewhere in Paul's letters, the word "commandments" is used to refer to the Torah (see Rom 13:9). Thielman is right to argue, "The phrase Paul has chosen to refer to God's commandments, therefore is one that in his cultural context clearly referred to the Mosaic Law" (Thielman 1995, p. 101). What is unmistakable here is that Paul's teaching has a strong Jewish element. Gardner argues that this phrase "obeying the commandments of God" is added to Paul's flow of thought, "lest the Corinthians should imagine that Paul was abrogating God's law by saying circumcision does not matter" (Gardner 2018, p. 327).[17]

What is also significant in this passage is the use of imperatives in 1 Cor 7:17, 20, and 24. The *Christos*-followers are exhorted to "walk" (7:17; περιπατείτω) and "remain" (7:20, 24; μενέτω) in their calling. Both these imperatives echo God's instruction to the nation of Israel to walk in his ways (for example, see Exod 18:20; Psalm 25:4; Deut 26:17; 28:9) and to remain loyal to God (Deut 18:13). The imperative "to walk" evokes the Hebrew word *halakh* carrying the meaning "to walk" in obedience to the halakhah, the exposition of the Torah. Because of the close association of περιπατείτω to the halakhah, Ciampa and Rosner view the use of the imperative "to walk" as a, "thoroughly Jewish metaphor" (Ciampa and Rosner 2010, p. 310). To a Jew, one has to "walk" or conduct one's life according to the teachings of the Law of Moses.

In addressing the gentile *Christos*-followers in Corinth, the language of obeying God's commandment and the use of imperatives reflecting Jewish metaphor presuppose that the teaching of Torah not only plays a significant role for the gentiles for their growth in

Christ, but it also becomes an ethical framework and an identity formation instrument to shape and transform the gentiles who are now in Christ.[18] This can be seen, for example, in matters related to idol food where Paul prohibits the gentiles from eating such meals in the temple where participation in the worship of deities would have entailed. This is tantamount to idolatry according to the Torah. In view of this, Paul insists that the gentiles must adhere to the Torah, especially in their worship of God by abandoning idolatry. However, when it comes to social meals within the home of unbelievers, Paul allows the gentile *Christos*-followers to consume food that has been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8—11:1; see discussion in Section 3 below). Seen from this perspective, gentiles are required to keep what is applicable for them from the Torah. Therefore, Bockmuehl argues that for Paul the rule for all churches is, "for Jews to keep the Torah . . . and for Gentiles to keep what pertains to them—and only that. In either case, what matters are the applicable commandments of God" (Bockmuehl 2000, p. 171).[19]

The ethnic identity of the *Christos*-followers and their social-economic status as framed by the discussion on circumcision/uncircumcision and slave/free, respectively, are transformed and reevaluated in Christ (Campbell 2013, pp. 89–93) where they now belong to the family of God as evidenced by Paul's use of sibling language, brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί), in addressing them (1 Cor 7:24). As brothers and sisters, they are to treat one another with respect and build up one another as a family and close-knit group. Within this family where the *Christos*-followers belong together as ἀδελφοί, "blood is thicker than water" (Lim 2017, p. 92).[20]

3. Paul's Mission to Jews and Gentiles: 1 Cor 9:19–23

I have argued from 1 Cor 7:17–24 that Paul's rule in all the churches was for Jews to remain as Jews and gentiles as gentiles. This has implications for our understanding of 1 Cor 9:19–23, a passage that is often used to support the argument that Paul abandoned his Jewish identity and was no longer Torah observant based on his statements: "To the Jews I became as a Jew"; "though I myself am not under the law"; and "to those outside the Law, I become as one outside the Law" (1 Cor 9:20–21). Can this argument be sustained?

3.1. The Context: Idol Food and Rights to Give Up Eating Such Food

The passage 1 Cor 9:19–23 appears within the wider context of 1 Cor 8:1—11:1 where Paul deals with the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols.[21] It is almost certain that those who raised this issue were gentile *Christos*-followers as it was unlikely for a Jewish *Christos*-follower to participate in such meals.

In 1 Cor 8:1–13, Paul provides a theological understanding rooted in his Jewish perspective that an idol does not exist and there is only one God. Because of this, Paul adopts a general view that food itself is neutral and could be consumed by gentile *Christos*-followers. Yet, out of consideration for others, Paul instructs them to be careful not to exercise their freedom in consuming such food, lest they cause some weak brothers and sisters to stumble. He then offers himself as an example where he gave up his rights for the sake of others (1 Cor 9:4–6, 12, 18). Following this, Paul provides specific practical situations when one could or could not eat idol food (1 Cor 10:1–33). He draws from the scriptures of Israel in his instructions forbidding the consumption of such food within the temple precinct where there were clear associations with idolatry (1 Cor 10:1–22). When it comes to consuming food bought from a meat market or during a fellowship meal within a private home, it was permissible as there was no participation in the rituals of offering food to idols (1 Cor 10:23–33). However, if an informant present during the meal points out the food served had been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 10:27), Paul advises that it would be good to abstain from it for the sake of the conscience of the informant. For Paul, the reason for exercising one's liberty in eating or not eating such food is for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31).

3.2. Paul's Adaptability

From the context of 1 Cor 8:1—11:1, we see Paul's theologizing at work in providing instructions to the *Christos*-followers concerning consuming idol food. There are debates as to why Paul permits the eating of food from the meat market or in private homes. One strong argument is that there may be sufficient ambiguity about the origin of the meat from the market as Paul would not allow gentiles to knowingly consume idol food.[22] However, in 1 Cor 7:12–16, Paul insists that a believing spouse who has an unbelieving (ἄπιστος) spouse should not dissolve the marriage unless the unbelieving spouse is the one initiating the separation. Within such a situation where pagans and *Christos*-followers lived together within a household, there would inevitably be occasions where consuming food sacrificed to idols could not be avoided. Paul seems to want the gentile *Christos*-followers to remain well-integrated in the gentile society.

By allowing the Corinthians to consume idol food, it has been argued that Paul abandons his Jewish identity and is no longer Torah observant. The passage in 1 Cor 9:19–23 has often been used to support this traditional view. Based on 1 Cor 9:20, Barrett argues that Paul, "could *become* a Jew only if, having been a Jew, he had ceased to be one and become something else. His Judaism was no longer of his very being, but a guise he could adopt or discard at will" (Barrett 1971, p. 211). In fact, Paul was, "ready . . . to cease to be a Jew" (Barrett 1971, p. 211).

D. A. Carson further argues that Paul's concern is only to position himself for evangelism, and, because of this, the apostle thinks of himself as neither Jew nor gentile, but adopts a third position described as, "a distinctively Christian position, needing to flex one way in the evangelization of Jews, and needing to flex another in the evangelization of Gentiles" (Carson 2004, p. 403). If Paul observes the Torah at all, it is merely for expediency's sake.[23] Carson also sees limited sense of continuity between what he describes as Paul's, "pre-Christian beliefs and his beliefs as a Christian" (Carson 2004, p. 398). The continuity of Torah relevance is only limited to unchanged beliefs about God, moral and ethical prescriptions, and passages dealing with predictions, typological and salvation history fulfilments (Carson 2004, pp. 398–412).

This traditional interpretation, according to Tucker, summarizes three ideas: Paul keeps Torah as merely a matter of expediency; Paul views the consumption of idol food as being in conflict with Torah observance; and Paul renounces the Mosaic Law when he claims that he is no longer under the law (Tucker 2011, p. 91).

Since the main thrust of the traditional interpretation lies on a few statements by Paul in 1 Cor 9:20–22 ("to the Jews I become as a Jew"; "though I myself am not under the law"; and "to those outside the Law, I become as one outside the Law"), it is necessary to take a closer look at the flow of this passage as depicted below (Table 1).

Table 1. The Flow of Paul's Argument in 1 Cor 9:20–22.

Paul's Adaptability to Different Groups	Paul's Purpose
To the Jews I became as a Jew,	in order to win Jews.
To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law)	so that I might win those under the law.
To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law)	so that I might win those outside the law.
To the weak I became weak,	so that I might win the weak.

Several comments on this passage are in order. First of all, by way of illustration, Paul describes how he adapts himself to different groups of people: the Jews, those under the Law, those outside the Law, and the weak.[24] Paul describes the Jews in two different categories: "Jews" and "those under the law." If both refer to the same group of people, the

latter appears to be redundant. Most likely, Paul has two groups of Jews in mind with the former referring to diaspora Jews and the latter referring to a subgroup of Jews holding on to a strict interpretation of the law such as the Pharisees (Bockmuehl 2000, p. 171; Rudolph 2011, pp. 153–59; and Tucker 2011, pp. 103–5).[25] That this group of Pharisees are to be distinguished from the rest of "the Jews" finds support elsewhere in the New Testament where such distinction is maintained.[26] The Pharisees kept strict observance with whom they had table fellowship by avoiding any fellowship with Jewish "tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 15:1–2), let alone with the gentiles. By describing himself as one that is not under the law, Paul claims that he is no longer following the strict halakhic interpretation of the Pharisees, especially when it comes to table fellowship with the gentiles when the state of ritual purity of the food may be questioned.[27]

Secondly, Paul qualifies his accommodation to "those under the law" as being "not under the law." He also qualifies that to "those outside the law" he is "not free from God's law." As we have argued earlier, "those under the law" refers to a specific subgroup of the Jews with strict halakhic interpretation of the law which Paul no longer follows, hence Paul could claim that he is "not under the law." The description of "those outside the law" refers to the gentiles, and Paul qualifies that he was "not free from God's law" as a Jew. Paul makes it clear that he remains Torah observant. It is significant that out of the four different groups of people that Paul mentions in 1 Cor 9:20–22, he only explicitly states the negative qualifications for these two groups, emphasizing that he does not see himself as part of these groups. Yet for the two other groups, "the Jews" and "the weak," there are no such negative qualifications. Paul does not say: "To the Jews I became as a Jew (though I am not a Jew)" (Tucker 2011, pp. 100–2; Rudolph 2011, p. 203). This indicates that Paul saw his Jewish identity was still salient as a *Christos*-follower. This reading makes sense as Paul refers to himself as one "not free from God's law" when he accommodates the gentile *Christos*-followers, though, "not to the extent that he ceases to be Torah-observant" (Tucker 2011, p. 107). Paul also does not say, "To the weak I became weak (though I am not weak)." This is because Paul often claims himself to be weak elsewhere.[28] In the context of 1 Cor 9:20–22, Paul sides with the weak whose consciences were defiled, who stumbled and were destroyed (1 Cor 8:7–13) when they saw others consuming idol meat in a temple.

Finally, another statement of Paul further puzzles interpreters: "I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law" (1 Cor 9:21). What does Paul mean by "Christ's law"? It is important to note that Paul is not saying that there is now a new "Christian law" (Gardner 2018, p. 408). What Paul has been insisting thus far is that he is not beyond the law and the law continues to matter to him. Yet, Paul also concerns himself with the paradigmatic example of Christ, which he declares at the end of the section dealing with idol food: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Paul models his life after the example of Jesus who ate with tax collectors and sinners, reached out to gentiles, and yet remained Torah observant (see Matt 5:17–20; Luke 10:8).[29] He depicts Christ's life and death as an example in self-giving (Phil 2:5–8) where one is to look not to one's own interest but to the interest of others (Phil 2:4). In this regard, Rudolph argues that the actions of Jesus eating with sinners, Pharisees, and other ordinary Jews are examples of being "all things to all people" (Rudolph 2011, pp. 181–82). Being aware of the Jesus tradition, Paul would most likely view the sinners that Jesus welcomed as "paradigmatic of Gentile sinners" (Rudolph 2011, p. 183).[30] This rule of adaptation concerning commensality, where Jesus adapted to different standards of Torah observance at table fellowship with different groups of people, is one that Paul is most likely aware of. This is especially true when Paul advises the Corinthians to, "eat whatever is set before you" (1 Cor 10:27) as an echo of Jesus' own exhortation to his disciples to, "eat what is set before you" (Luke 10:18).[31] It provides Paul with a framework to negotiate the complexity of encountering a variety of food-related customs in both Jewish and gentile homes. Therefore, by following the example of Christ, Paul maintains a flexible halakhah within the context of 1 Corinthians, and this is likely what Paul means by "Christ's Law."

3.3. Paul's Mission: To Win or To Win Over People?

Within 1 Cor 9:19–23, the word κερδαίνω typically translated as "to win" appears five times (9:19, 20 [twice], 21, 22). Much of the discussion on this word is deeply influenced by the work of David Daube who examines the background of the meaning of κερδαίνω and comes to the conclusion that this word refers to, "to win over an unbeliever to one's faith" (Daube 1947, p. 109).[32] However, Daube also notes that the other possible meaning of κερδαίνω is, "to win back a sinner to the way of life required by his and your faith" (Daube 1947, p. 109).

To understand κερδαίνω as act of evangelism has been questioned by Gardner (Gardner 2018, pp. 404–6).[33] First of all, the meaning of the κερδαίνω is "to gain"[34] such as to make a profit, an accounting language. Within the context of 1 Cor 8:1—11:1, Paul is dealing with *Christos*-followers and not those outside the community. He warns about the behavior of some who insisted on eating idol food in temple that caused others to stumble and fall away, an action described as a "sin" (1 Cor 8:12–13). Therefore, it is necessary for those who have fallen away to be gained back for Christ. Gardner is right to state, "*It was thus the behavior required of all Christians to ensure that those who were falling away were won back for Christ*" (Gardner 2018, p. 404; italics his). Hence, Paul is not talking about winning over those outside the community for Christ. What he is concerned with here is to *win back* the weak whose conscience had fallen away (1 Cor 8:10–13); to *win back* those who by their action of eating idol food in the temple caused others to stumble (1 Cor 8:9–12); to *win back* those who participated in idolatry while consuming idol food (1 Cor 10:1–22); to *win back* the Jews who were offended by the practices of the gentiles(1 Cor 10:32); and to *win back* those "under the law" who possibly frowned upon others having table fellowship served with idol food (1 Cor 10:25–31).

This idea of winning back those who have fallen away can be further supported from Matt 18:15 where κερδαίνω is used by Jesus in pointing out one's faults in order to "gain" that person back. Furthermore, in 1 Cor 10:32 Paul warns about behaving in a manner that might give, "offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the *ekklēsia* of God."[35] He presents himself as an example where he does not seek his own advantage so that many "may be saved" (1 Cor 10:33). The language of salvation in 1 Cor 10:33 (and also in 9:22) need not be seen narrowly in terms of conversion, but more broadly in ensuring the people of God remain within the covenant community in Christ. Here we see Paul's desire in wanting to win back Jews as Jews and gentiles as gentiles. This is in line with what Paul has been advocating for: the continuation of social identities of those who are in Christ and their behavior being one that would mutually build each other up in Christ.[36] It is fitting, therefore, that Paul wraps up his argument in 1 Cor 9:19–23 with these words: "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings" (9:23).

4. Implications of the Continuation of Social Identities in Christ

We have seen from 1 Cor 7:17–24 and 9:19–23 that there is continuation of social identities of both the Jews and gentiles in Christ, and their transformation as *Christos*-followers, "does not lead to a mutual assimilation into some generic undifferentiated humanity" (Ehrensperger 2016, p. 200). When individuals perceive that they are a part of a group, it creates social identity with a positive sense of belonging which is important for the cohesiveness of and the growth of the group. When this occurs, it creates a strong mission impetus where the continuation of the social identity of the group not only provides discursive bridges to invite outsiders into the communal gatherings,[37] but also creates an inhabited space for the *Christos*-followers, both Jews and gentiles, to negotiate their various social identities that may mutually benefit and build up one another so that this may further advance Paul's mission to the nations (Tucker 2011, pp. 64–68).[38]

This reading has significant implications today. I mentioned in the beginning of this essay that Christianity in my part of the world was viewed as a "Western religion." When I was growing up, it was not unusual to hear stories of families disowning their children for

embracing Christianity or objecting them to be baptized. As a collectivist society, embracing Christianity was seen as betraying one's culture, identity, and community.

A major part of the Chinese traditional belief is the veneration of our ancestors as an expression of filial piety and paying respect to our ancestors.[39] The families and extended families are obligated to carry out continued obeisance to the ancestors by placing ancestral tablets on a household altar where daily prayers are offered and incense lit. Sacrifices and offerings of food are also carried out on a regular basis, such as bi-monthly, and on special occasions, such as *Qing Ming* Festival,[40] Hungry Ghost or *Zhong Yuan* Festival, and the death anniversary of the ancestors. After the rituals of offering food to the ancestor are completed, both immediate and extended family members near and far will come together and consume the same food. Within such a context, there will be occasions where family members who are *Christos*-followers would be present.[41]

The issue of consuming such food by *Christos*-followers has been widely debated. Western missionaries, often without appropriate understanding of the local culture, particularly the significance of a communal meal for familial ties within Asian context, had discouraged local Christians to participate in such meals based on their erroneous understanding of 1 Cor 8, leading to divisions in the family. Such divisions are even more severe if the eldest son, who is often tasked with carrying out the rituals of ancestor veneration in a Chinese tradition, is a *Christos*-follower. Failing to participate in such meals is tantamount to dishonoring the ancestors, especially where filial piety is the foundation of Chinese beliefs, hence the statement, "one more Christian, one fewer Chinese." This statement shows that Christianity is incompatible with the Chinese cultural norms, and one has to abandon one's culture in order to express Christ devotion. This negatively impacts the mission of the Church. It is, therefore, not surprising that despite centuries and decades of the gospel taking root in this region, the development of indigenous theology remains slow.[42]

Based on our reading of 1 Cor 8:1—11:1, proper contextualization is necessary. If there is a continuation of the social identity of Chinese *Christos*-followers, then the consumption of such food is not an issue. What is needful is a proper contextualized ritual in offering one's filial piety to one's ancestor without challenging our loyalty to Christ. While participating in the rituals of ancestral worship might be against "obeying the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19), it does not preclude honoring the ancestors by bowing in respect and participation in communal meals. Our reading of 1 Cor 8:1—11:1 also means that it is important to *win back* those who have stumbled and fallen away because of previous misappropriation of Paul's teaching. Perhaps the face of Asian mission might have taken on a different shape if we had properly understood that the continuation of social identities is part of what Paul is advocating for in his gentile mission.

5. Conclusions

In this essay, we have argued from 1 Cor 7:17–24 and 9:19–23 that there is continuation of social identities of both the Jews and gentiles in Christ. In the *Christos*-movement, Jews were not expected to give up their place of belonging in order to become *Christos*-followers. Likewise, gentiles were not expected to leave behind the previous identity and embrace Jewish practices in order to become the people of God who worship the God of Israel. At the same time, while allowing gentile social identity to continue, Paul also ensures that the gentiles are not completely outside the Law. Paul insisted the gentiles must give up their associations with the deities that they had previously worshipped. While the existing social identities continue, Paul also creatively transforms them. Ultimately, Paul reminds the *Christos*-followers that what is most important is that whatever one does, it is for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

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Notes

1 The audience addressed in 1 Corinthians were likely gentile *Christos*-followers (see 1 Cor 12:2). This does not mean there were no Jewish *Christos*-followers in Corinth. Paul mentions that he baptized Crispus (1 Cor 1:14), and if this was the same person named in Acts 18:8, he was a leader of the Corinthian synagogue. Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1) could possibly be another named Jewish *Christos*-follower (Acts 18:7).

2 For an overview of Social Identity Theory, see (Lim 2017, pp. 26–48). On the use of Social Identity Theory in New Testament studies, see (Tucker and Baker 2014; and Tucker and Kuecker 2020).

3 The phrase "now concerning" (περὶ δὲ), appearing six times in 1 Corinthians (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12), may indicate that these were issues the Corinthians raised in a letter to Paul, taking the cue from 7:1: "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote." See (Mitchell 1989, pp. 229–56) who disputes the assumption that περὶ δὲ used in 1 Corinthians always refers to the letter Paul received.

4 Ciampa and Rosner (2010, p. 307) sees 1 Cor 7:17–24 functioning to, "reinforce Paul's advice to be content in one's situation." The notion of calling features prominently in this passage, appearing a total of nine times. See 1 Cor 7:17, 18 [twice], 20 [twice], 21, 22 [twice], and 24.

5 Most English translations paraphrase the Greek word περιπατείτω as "live" (NIV, NET) or "lead the life" (ESV, NRSV). The KJV and NASB translations retain the meaning "walk". See Section 2.4 below on how περιπατείτω may have evoked the Jewish understanding of the halakhah where the Hebrew word *halakh* means "to walk."

6 Contra Fredriksen (2022, pp. 75–105). Fredriksen argues that in 1 Cor 7:17–19, Paul is addressing two different groups of gentiles: those were circumcised when they became proselytes, and those who had not been circumcised (89–90).

7 See 1 Macc 1:11–15: "In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us." This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and *removed the marks of circumcision*, and *abandoned the holy covenant*. They *joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil* (author's emphasis)." The literature of 1 Maccabees reflects the ideological movement of a family of Jewish priests in purging the Hellenistic influence in Judea during the latter half of the second century BCE.

8 See Josephus *Antiquities* 12.240–41: " . . . they were desirous to leave the laws of their country, and the Jewish way of living according to them, and to follow the king's laws, and the Grecian way of living. Wherefore they desired his permission to build them a Gymnasium at Jerusalem. And when he had given them leave, they also hid the circumcision of their genitals, that even when they were naked *they might appear to be Greeks*. Accordingly, they *left off all the customs that belonged to their own country*, and *imitated the practices of the other nations*" (author's emphasis).

9 See also Deut 7:6, 14:2; 26:18. For further discussion, see (Rudolph 2011, pp. 79–80).

10 Elsewhere in 1 Cor 1:26–29, Paul reminds the gentile *Christos*-followers to consider their own κλῆσιν that not many of them were, "wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor 1:26) and yet God chose the foolish to shame the wise; the weak to shame the strong; the lowly and despised to nullify the things that are, so that boasting is excluded (1 Cor 1:27–29). This suggests that Paul is not against upward social mobility in one's socioeconomic situation if such an opportunity is present.

11 Cf. (Collman 2021, pp. 41–42) where he compares circumcision/uncircumcision to keeping the commandments of God.

12 For example, see Gal 2:7; Eph 2:11; and Acts 11:13. For further discussion, see (Thiessen 2016, pp. 8–11; Campbell 2013, pp. 205–9; and Collman 2021, pp. 39–44).

13 See also (Collins 1999, p. 274): "With respect to salvation, no social situation is more advantageous than another." Likewise, Fitzmyer (2008, p. 307): "There is no need to deny that ethnic background. One's physical condition has no bearing on the grace of vocation; to try to alter that condition would be a misunderstanding of God's election."

14 References are often made to Gal 5:14 where Paul expresses that the Law is fulfilled in loving one's neighbor as oneself.

15 For further discussion on the relationship between Noachide commandments and New Testament ethics, see (Bockmuehl 2000, pp. 145–73).

16 Scholars are divided as to the what the phrase "the commandments of God" means in Rev 12:17 and 14:12. Aune argues that it, "must be regarded as referring to the ethical requirements of the Torah" (Aune 1998, p. 712, see also p. 837), which specifically refers to the second table of the Decalogue (Aune 1998, pp. 710–12). Osborne takes this phrase to include, "all the commandments, especially the ethical requirements of the commandments" (Osborne 2002, pp. 486, 543). The main focus of these two passages is to remain faithful and steadfast to Christ even in unfavorable conditions. Korner argues that faithfulness to Christ in Revelation entails, "Jewish-like lifestyle of worship, humble submission, obedience to Torah/commandments, of public testimony by the

faithful (chs. 4–5; 7:9–12; 12:17), of praise of God, and of repentance from activities that are *anathema* to Jews by the faithless" (Korner 2020, p. 237). In view of this, it probably makes more sense to take the phrase "the commandments of God" as pointing to the Torah.

17 Cf. 1 Cor 15:56 where Paul seems to negate the Law by stating that, "the power of sin is the ὁ νόμος." For further discussion, see (Vlachos 2009, pp. 73–86) where he argues that the use of νόμος here refers to divine law in general with the Edenic Fall account in view. See also (Rudolph 2011, pp. 156–57).

18 For further discussion, see (Tomes 2009, pp. 209–17).

19 Cf. (Rudolph 2011, pp. 84–85): " . . . with respect to status before God and eschatological blessing, being Jewish or Gentile is irrelevant. What is important in God's eyes, what pleases him, is that Jews and Gentiles keep their respective commandments." See also (Tomson 1990, pp. 271–74). Contra Collins who believes that keeping the commandments of God is only "appropriate conduct for the Jews" (Collins 1999, p. 284).

20 For further discussion on how Paul uses sibling language drawn from Greco-Roman philosophical discourse and fictive kinship language of the ancient associations in identity formation, see (Lim 2017, pp. 51–92).

21 In 1 Cor 8: 1, Paul uses the phrase "now concerning" (περὶ δὲ) for the third time (1 Cor 7:1, 25), possibly indicating that he is responding to a letter written by the Corinthians to him. See also footnote 3 above.

22 For example, see (Ehrensperger 2022, pp. 34–46). See also (Ehrensperger 2013, pp. 189–209; and Rudolph 2011, pp. 93–101).

23 Examples that are often cited are taken from Acts 16:3 and 21:17–26 where Paul's actions of Torah observance have been interpreted as a matter of expediency on account of the Jews and to fulfill a vow of appeasing the accusation of those who were zealous of the law. It is as if Paul caves in under pressure to be a Torah observant Jew whenever it suits him.

24 See the discussion of Nanos and his view on Paul's use of rhetorical adaptability where Paul varies his speech to different audiences by reasoning from the premises of the audience in 1 Cor 9:19–23 (Nanos 2012, pp. 122–28). See also (Nanos 2013, pp. 596–607). This approach of Nanos excludes lifestyle adaptability where Paul varies his conduct to adapt to the lifestyle of his audiences when he is among them. However, Rudolph is of the view that lifestyle adaptability is included, based on the example of Jesus (Rudolph 2011, pp. 14–17, 180–90) as Paul's concern for both Jews and gentiles *Christos*-followers go beyond mere rhetoric.

25 On the possibility of strong Pharisaic influence among the diaspora Jews, see (Dunn 1990, pp. 138–41; and Rudolph 2011, pp. 194–96).

26 For example, see Mark 7:3 where the Pharisees and the rest of the Jews are described in two categories: "the Pharisees, and all the Jews."

27 Rudolph describes Paul as adapting to the gentiles by presumably, "visiting Gentile homes, sharing table-fellowship with Gentiles and conforming to the customs of his Gentile host" (Rudolph 2011, p. 204). For further discussion, see (Tucker 2011, pp. 104–5; and Rudolph 2011, pp. 196–201). See also Gal 2:11–14 where Paul opposed Peter after Peter withdrew from having table fellowship with the gentiles.

28 For example, see 1 Cor 2:1–5; 4:10; 2 Cor: 11:21, 29–30; 12:5, 9–10; 13:4, 9.

29 While there is no evidence that Paul knew the historical Jesus, there are indications that Paul was aware of the Jesus tradition. For example, in 1 Cor 11:23 and 15:3, Paul talks about receiving and handing on what he knew about the Jesus tradition. Horsley argues that the language of receiving and handing on, "were virtually technical terms in Jewish culture for the transmission of important traditions such as customs, rituals, and ethical teachings" (Horsley 1998, p. 160).

30 Wedderburn argues that the early church was more open to the inclusion of gentiles based on the tradition of Jesus welcoming sinners. " . . . if Jesus was a friend . . . of 'sinners' (Matt 11.19/Luke 7.34) then he was also a friend of Gentiles who were also classed among 'sinners'" (Wedderburn 1989, p. 136).

31 For further discussion, see (Rudolph 2011, pp. 187–90; and Tucker 2011, pp. 110–14).

32 Although Daube's work is slightly dated, it has been influential and cited approvingly by many scholars in recent years. See, for example, (Ciampa and Rosner 2010, 423 n141; Garland 2003, 429 n12; Thiselton 2000, p. 701; and Fitzmyer 2008, p. 369). Daube suggests that idea of κερδαίνω as a missionary term carrying the meaning of drawing in those outside the faith can be traced to a number of Hebrew words in rabbinic writings. It is interesting to note that Daube acknowledges that there is lack of evidence of any rabbinic background implying winning over the outsiders to the faith, such as proselyting the gentiles. He states, "I cannot, indeed, affirm that the Rabbis used their term of 'proselytizing.' I have not found it in that field; it is certainly not frequent there" (Daube 1947, p. 117). He concedes, "the masses which God 'gains' in the chain texts examined are Israelites condemned and reprieved, 'won back,' not Gentiles 'won over'" (Daube 1947, p. 117). Notwithstanding this conclusion, Daube maintains that the meaning of κερδαίνω in the sense of winning back a Jewish sinner as used in Matt 18:15 can, by extension, be applied to mean winning over the gentiles as used by Paul. He concludes, "it is most unlikely that the writer using κερδαίνω in Matt. 18.15, with reference to the 'winning back of a sinner,' would have hesitated to use it, as Paul and 1 Peter do, with reference to actual 'proselytising'" (Daube 1947, p. 118). Daube's conclusion is problematic and this is rightly criticized by Gardner. Gardner states that Daube does not offer clear evidence of rabbinic background to κερδαίνω that implies winning over outsiders (Gardner 2018, p. 405).

[33] Gardner argues that, "the idea of 'winning' or 'gaining *back*' has been too quickly dismissed" (Gardner 2018, p. 406, author's emphasis).

[34] See BDAG. See also the usage of this word in Mark 8:36; Matt 16:26; 25:16, 20, 22; Luke 9:25; Phil 3:8; and James 4:13.

[35] See also Rom 14 where Paul exhorts both the Jewish and gentile *Christos*-followers not to judge one another or put hindrances or obstacles in the way of one another concerning food and observance of certain days (Rom 14:13). What is important is to build up one another (Rom 14:19).

[36] See also (Tomes 2009, pp. 215–16) where he argues the New Testament writers are more concerned with giving advice for appropriate ethical behavior rather than drawing up rules in ensuring that the gentiles would not cause offense to the Jews and vice versa. See also Rom 14:19–21.

[37] See 1 Cor 10:27–28 and 14:23–25.

[38] See the discussion that diversity rather than uniformity is the norm in early Christianity in (Campbell 2018, pp. 107–19).

[39] For further discussion, see (Yao and Zhao 2010, pp. 103–21).

[40] *Quing Ming* Festival observed annually in April is similar to All Souls' Day commemorated on 2 November in the Western Christian liturgical calendar.

[41] I grew up participating in such meals a number of times where we ate food that had been offered in the rituals of ancestral worship.

[42] For example, I have struggled to find a suitable textbook for an introductory course in the New Testament written by Asians for Asian context. It is only in 2022 that a full-scale textbook was finally published. See (Thomaskutty 2022).

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Article

Israel and the Apostolic Mission: A Post-Supersessionist Reading of Ephesians and Colossians

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Abstract: Interpretation of Ephesians and Colossians has often proceeded on the basis that the stance of the original authors and recipients towards Israel is supersessionist, i.e., that the church has entirely replaced or superseded Israel as the locus of divine scriptural promises. By contrast, this article presents a post-supersessionist reading of Ephesians and Colossians. The reading strategy seeks to read the letters as situated within the dynamics of the apostolic mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus as the Jewish *christos*/messiah to the nations. This mission is envisaged in Acts as a priestly dynamic in which the blessings of salvation in the *christos*/messiah began within a distinctly Israelite original community and proceeded to the nations without necessarily negating Jewish distinctiveness. The reading highlights key instances of this Israel-centered missionary dynamic in Ephesians and Colossians. It also seeks to demonstrate how this dynamic helps to provide satisfactory answers to key exegetical questions in the letters. Furthermore, it offers alternative non-supersessionist readings of critical passages concerning circumcision, law, and Jewish identity in the two letters. The article is a distillation and summary of research in the author's previously published book *Reading Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism: Christ's Mission through Israel to the Nations*.

Keywords: Ephesians; Colossians; post-supersessionism; replacement theology; mission; Israel; Jew/Judean; Judaism/s; Christian/ity; New Testament

Interpreters of New Testament documents, including Ephesians and Colossians, have often proceeded on the assumption that the situation of the original authors and readers vis-à-vis Israel is identical to that of the later Christian church. In this view, the church, comprising mainly non-Jewish Christ-believers, is regarded as an entity separate from ethnocultural Israel that has entirely replaced or superseded Israel as the locus of divine scriptural promises. At times, such supersessionist views have contributed towards disastrously hostile Christian attitudes towards Jewish people (Barth 1969, pp. 45–54; Rader 1978, pp. 95–96, 203–4). Furthermore, such views risk downplaying the redemptive-historical shape of Christian origins, impoverishing contemporary Christian self-reflection.

In this article, I present a *post-supersessionist* reading of Ephesians and Colossians.[1] I am distilling and summarizing research presented in more detail in my book *Reading Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism: Christ's Mission through Israel to the Nations* (Windsor 2017).[2] While my reading is essentially exegetical, I seek to avoid the common tendency to rely on supersessionist assumptions when determining the most probable answers to key exegetical questions. Instead, I argue exegetically for alternative readings that are not informed or controlled by such supersessionist assumptions.

Existing non-supersessionist readings of the New Testament, Ephesians and Colossians in particular,[3] have arisen in various disciplines, contexts, and conversations. These include progressive dispensationalist interpretation (e.g., Hoch 1992), constructive biblical theology (e.g., Robinson 1996, pp. 113–15; 2008, pp. 105–8; cf. Goldsworthy 2012, pp. 164–65, 201–6), theologically oriented commentary (e.g., Barth 1974; Fowl 2012),[4] scholarship informed by the New Perspective on Paul (e.g., Yee 2004), scholarship informed by the Paul within Judaism perspective (e.g., Allen 2018; Campbell 2008), Messianic Jewish interpretation (e.g., Kinzer 2005, pp. 165–71; 2015, pp. 65–82), and explicit post-supersessionist theological reflection

(e.g., Soulen 1996). Several insights from these existing interpretations inform my reading. I recognize that Ephesians and Colossians exhibit a non-totalizing vision of unity in the *christos*/messiah that allows for ongoing diversity, assume that Jewish distinctiveness is assigned a positive value despite the existence of Jew-gentile hostility, take the letters as allowing for an ongoing priority for Israel within God's purposes through Jesus as the *christos*/messiah, and affirm a gentile *christos*-believing identity that is both distinct from and connected to Israel. Nevertheless, I do not temper the strongly Christocentric focus apparent in Ephesians and Colossians nor downplay its implications for the present transformation of both Jewish and gentile identity in Jesus.

In particular, my post-supersessionist reading is informed by the recognition that in Ephesians (explicitly) and Colossians (implicitly), Israel's distinct identity is conceived in terms of a priestly vocation towards the world, which is inextricably linked to the apostolic mission to preach Jesus as the Jewish *christos*/messiah to the nations (see esp. Kinzer 2015, pp. 65–82; Robinson 2008, pp. 84–85).

1. An Evangelical Post-Supersessionist Reading Strategy

My method is an "evangelical post-supersessionist reading" (Windsor 2017, p. 3). This label is intended to indicate both a positive and negative aspect of the reading strategy.[5] Positively, I am seeking to read the letters as situated within the dynamics of the apostolic mission to "proclaim the evangel" or gospel (εὐαγγελίζω/εὐαγγέλιον) of Jesus as the Jewish *christos*/messiah to the nations.[6] In both Acts and Romans, this apostolic mission is explicitly framed in terms of blessings proceeding from or through Israel to others (e.g., Acts 1:8; Rom 1:16). My reading strategy entails being alert to the existence of this dynamic in Ephesians and Colossians. As a result—negatively—I deliberately call into question readings of Ephesians and Colossians that assume that Jewish distinctiveness is always a problem that needs to be overcome. Distinctiveness need not always imply hostility and exclusion; it may be understood in terms of a positive vocation towards others. Thus, Jewish distinctiveness may be connected closely with the apostolic mission in Ephesians and Colossians.

The approach may be illustrated by contrast with Lincoln's reading of Ephesians (Lincoln 1987, 1990). Lincoln strongly rejects the view that Ephesians should be located amid the Pauline mission. Instead, Lincoln argues, the primary concerns of Ephesians are situated after the dynamics of the Pauline mission have settled. Thus, the author of Ephesians envisages the issues surrounding this mission, including its concrete struggles over Jewish and gentile identity, as past issues which have largely been resolved in favor of an overarching unity in Christ (Lincoln 1987, p. 619). This means, for Lincoln, that Ephesians contains a supersessionist viewpoint in which "Israel's role is replaced by that of the church" (Lincoln 1987, p. 621). By contrast, my approach situates the concerns of Ephesians (and Colossians) *within* the Pauline mission, which allows for issues concerning Jewish distinctiveness to be more dynamic and complex.[7]

1.1. Positively: Situating Ephesians and Colossians within the Apostolic Mission

There is significant warrant for situating the concerns of Ephesians and Colossians within, rather than outside, the apostolic mission. Various features of the letters provide this warrant. These include explicit references to a global gospel mission of which the readers are both beneficiaries (Eph 3:1–13; Col 1:6, 23) and participants (Eph 6:18–19; Col 4:2–6); authorial self-descriptions of Paul as a missionary presently struggling and suffering to bring divine revelation to others (Eph 3:1–13; 4:1; 6:19–20; Col 1:24–29); references to the concrete communication of a message, described using the terms "gospel" (Eph 1:13; 3:6; 6:15, 19; Col 1:5, 23), "evangelize" (Eph 2:17; 3:8; cf. 4:11), and "teach" (Eph 4:21; Col 1:28; 2:7); references to "apostles" along with "prophets" as foundational missionaries (Eph 2:20; 3:5), linked with other evangelists and teachers (Eph 4:11–12; cf. Col 1:7; 4:10–11); narrative-like descriptions locating the readers within an unfolding account of the progress of the gospel mission over time using aorist indicative verbs (Eph 2:13, 17; 3:2–8; 4:11; Col 1:5–7,

23, 25; 2:7);[8] and marked descriptions of divine blessings proceeding from writer and/or associates ("we" or "I") to recipients ("you [also]") (Eph 1:12–13, 2:22; 3:2; Col 1:25–27).

The connection of these letters with the Israel-centric dynamic in the book of Acts is also evident.[9] Several lexical and structural features of Ephesians and Colossians are aligned with significant features of the description of the apostolic mission in Acts. These include narrative-like depictions of the progress of the apostolic mission in which blessings move temporally from an original group to others (Eph 1:13–14; Col 1:4–6, 23), utilizing a cluster of terminology also found in Acts to describe the progress of the gospel from Israel to the nations (Acts 10:1—11:18);[10] explicit descriptions of Israel's blessings being shared with non-Israelites (Eph 2:11–22; 3:5–6), explicitly labeled in Israel-centric terms as "the nations/gentiles" (τὰ ἔθνη) (Eph 2:11; 3:1, 6, 8; Col 1:27; cf. Acts 10:45; 11:1–3, 18);[11] marked attention drawn to the fact that gentiles can enjoy the benefits of holiness and the Spirit by faith in Jesus as the *christos alongside* Jews (Eph 2:18–22; Col 1:26–27; cf. Acts 10:45, 47; 11:17–18; 15:7–9; 26:17–18); descriptions of Jewish hostility towards gentiles linked to issues surrounding access to temple worship (Eph 2:11–22; cf. Acts 21:27–29); and the mention of "decrees" (δόγματα) in relation to the law of Moses and gentiles (Eph 2:15; cf. Acts 16:4).[12]

In addition, the mention of "apostles and prophets" in Ephesians suggests a close connection between the apostolic mission and Israelite identity. In Ephesians, "the apostles and prophets" (τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν) (Eph 2:20; cf. 3:5) are foundational figures in relation to the gospel-preaching mission (cf. 2:17; 3:8).[13] In Acts, the apostles and the prophets—including Paul—are consistently connected with the original apostolic community at Jerusalem and portrayed as distinctly Israelite figures, even as they take part in the gentile mission (Acts 8:14; 11:1, 27; 12:25—13:1; 15:2, 4, 27, 32; 21:10, 17–26).

These features and parallels provide sufficient warrant to approach Ephesians and Colossians on the basis that Jewish distinctiveness may have a positive value in relation to the apostolic mission, rather than assuming that it necessarily represents a problem that must be overcome.

1.2. Negatively: Questioning Supersessionist Over-Readings

The negative aspect of this reading strategy involves questioning common supersessionist interpretations of specific passages in Ephesians and Colossians. I have designated these interpretations "supersessionist over-readings" because they "extrapolate from the explicit statements found in the texts to make further conclusions about race, ethnicity, or Jewish practice—conclusions that are not necessary implications of the texts themselves" (Windsor 2017, p. 29). These over-readings explain the meaning of these passages in Ephesians and Colossians in a way that resembles the clear supersessionist views found in later decades (e.g., Barnabas).[14] There are three main categories.

The first category of over-reading concerns physical circumcision. Ephesians 2:11 mentions physical circumcision while describing hostility and alienation between Jews and gentiles. Colossians 2:11–13 affirms a spiritual circumcision given to gentile believers in the *christos*. Supersessionist over-readings interpret these passages to mean that physical circumcision is entirely devoid of value for Jewish believers. Physical circumcision, in these readings, is not merely invalid for gentiles (cf. Gal 2:3); it is a marker of opposition to Christ and so invalid for Jews also (Boyarin 1994, p. 27; Bruce 1984, pp. 103–4; Calvin 1965, [ca. 1548], pp. 331–32; Lincoln 1987, pp. 609–10; 1990, p. 136).

The second category of over-reading concerns Jewish law-observance more broadly. Ephesians 2:14–15a describes how the blood of the *christos* ends Jew-gentile hostility "by abolishing the law of the commandments in ordinances." Colossians 2:13–23 describes the death of the *christos* in opposition to various entities that some interpreters link with the Mosaic law. Supersessionist over-readings interpret these passages to mean that Christ has abolished the concrete Jewish observance of the Mosaic law. This is described in various ways. Some regard the "ceremonial" aspect of the law as abolished for all, including for Jews (Aquinas 1966, pp. 105–7; Calvin 1965, [ca. 1548], pp. 151, 334–37). Others regard the

boundary-marking function of the law—i.e., Jewish social practices such as circumcision and Sabbaths that highlight Jewish distinctiveness—as abolished (Dunn 1996, pp. 171–75; Bevere 2009; Wright 1986, p. 119). Others see the entire Mosaic law as abolished, meaning that the Mosaic covenant is canceled and has no binding force on either gentiles or Jews in any sense (Arnold 2010, p. 163; Lincoln 1987, pp. 611–12; 1990, p. 142; Perkins 2000, pp. 399–400).

The third category of over-reading concerns Jewish identity itself. Ephesians 2:14–16 describes the peace-making activity of the *christos* in terms of "creat[ing] the two …into one new humanity" (2:15). Colossians 3:9–11 advocates a "new" kind of "humanity" in which "there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision" (3:11). Supersessionist over-readings interpret these passages to mean that Christ has negated all forms of distinct Jewish identity. Various rationales are given. Chrysostom (1840, [ca. 390], pp. 148–52) regards Jewish distinctiveness as an obstacle to peace. Calvin (1965, [ca. 1548], pp. 151–52, 350), because of his opposition to "ceremonies," regards Paul as urging Jews to give up their distinct identity because it is an "external" condition alien to Christ. Many twentieth-century interpreters use overtly racial terms to argue that Christianity represents a "third race," replacing old ethnic identities (Best 1955, pp. 152–54; 1998, p. 269; Bruce 1984, pp. 295–96; Dunning 2006, p. 14; Gnilka 1977, p. 139; Von Harnack 1908, pp. 240–65; Hoehner 2002, pp. 379–80; Lincoln 1987, pp. 612, 616; 1990, pp. 144, 163; Martin 1991, p. 31; Talbert 2007, p. 82).[15] This view appears to be reflected in the addition of the supersessionist phrase "in place of" in the 1946 RSV translation of Eph 2:15 (retained by NRSV, ESV).[16] Other scholars state that any form of social "distinction" is regarded as a negative factor opposed to peace and freedom (Dunn 1996, p. 223; Foster 2016, pp. 48, 110; Lohse 1971, pp. 143–44).

These interpretations may appear self-evident from the perspective of later supersessionist forms of Christian theology. However, they are not obvious when viewed from an earlier perspective within the progress of the apostolic mission. As we have seen, this mission was understood as proceeding from a distinctively Israelite core to the surrounding nations without necessarily negating all forms of Jewish distinctiveness. In the rest of the article, I will present the key features of my reading of Ephesians and Colossians, seeking to demonstrate that locating the concerns of the letters within the apostolic mission progressing from Israel to the nations provides satisfactory non-supersessionist answers to key exegetical questions.

2. The Framing of Ephesians: A Priestly Dynamic (Ephesians 1:1, 3)

2.1. The Original Designation for the Addressees (1:1)

The first issue that arises in Ephesians is a textual issue concerning the original designation for the addressees (Eph 1:1). Several key witnesses read "to the holy ones who are indeed/also believers/faithful in the *christos* Jesus" (τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).[17] Other witnesses include "in Ephesus" (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ) after "who are" (οὖσιν),[18] which brings the form closer to other canonical Pauline epistles with addressees in named cities.[19] This suggests that the first reading is original since it is easy to see why a later scribe would insert "in Ephesus" but quite challenging to see why a scribe would omit the phrase.[20] However, interpreters often regard the first reading as impossible, because it appears incomprehensible. The issue is not simply the unusual syntax but the meaning itself, since "almost by definition the saints are those who are faithful in Christ Jesus" (Best 1997a, p. 5). Since it appears impossible from a modern viewpoint to explain why the author would write in such a strange and tautological way, interpreters normally either reject this reading in favor of the inclusion of "in Ephesus" (e.g., Hoehner 2002, pp. 144–48) or suggest complex prior stages in the textual history (e.g., Best 1997b; Lincoln 1990, pp. 1–4).

However, by locating the concerns of Ephesians within the apostolic mission from Israel to the nations, an evangelical post-supersessionist perspective can make sense of the first reading and explain why it may well be original (cf. Caird 1976, pp. 30–31). As Trebilco (2012, pp. 122–63) demonstrates, the phrase "the holy ones" (οἱ ἅγιοι) was most likely an eschatological self-designation for the original Israelite community in Jerusalem.

As the gentile mission proceeded, the designation was also used to refer to gentile believers in Christ. However, such usage would have been conspicuous. As we have seen, both in Acts and elsewhere in Ephesians, the idea that gentiles, not just Jews, can enjoy the benefits of holiness through faith in Jesus as the Jewish *christos* is not merely an unremarkable background assumption; instead, it is the focus of marked attention (Eph 2:18–22; Acts 10:45, 47; 11:17–18; 15:7–9; 26:17–18). So the expression "to the holy ones who are indeed/also believers in in the *christos* Jesus" need not be dismissed as tautological; instead, it may be regarded as drawing the readers' attention from the outset to the *remarkable* fact that gentiles who believe in the *christos* are included in Israel's eschatological holiness. Thus, there is no reason to reject it as the most likely original reading. The exclusion of "in Ephesus" would also imply that the letter was originally intended for a wider gentile believing audience beyond Ephesus, which is consistent with the lack of concrete details in the author's description of the recipients' situation (3:2; 4:21; 6:22).[21]

2.2. A Priestly Dynamic of Blessing (1:3)

The expression "Blessed be the God …" (εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεός) (Eph 1:3) introduces a form that is frequently identified as a "blessing" or *berakhah* (בְּרָכָה). This Jewish form often appears in the Scriptures and other Second Temple literature in expressions of praise to God for salvation and protection (Lincoln 1990, pp. 10–11). In Jewish *berakhoth*, God is commonly named "the God of Israel" or Israel's ancestors.[22] However, in Eph 1:3, God is named "the God and father of our lord Jesus *christos*" (ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ). While the markedly christological focus of the phrase is often discussed (e.g., Lincoln 1990, p. 11), a less-discussed feature of the passage is also worthy of attention (Fowl 2012, pp. 39–41). God is described as "the one who has blessed us …in [the] *christos*" (ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ...ἐν χριστῷ). In the Jewish Scriptures, the expression "they will be blessed in …" (וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ ב/וְנִבְרְכוּ ב/ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν) is concentrated almost exclusively in the Genesis narratives. It is used to foreshadow a priestly dynamic in which all the nations of the earth "will be blessed in" Abraham/Isaac/Jacob and their "offspring" (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; cf. Sir 44:21). This phrase from Genesis is applied to the apostolic mission in both the undisputed Pauline epistles (Gal 3:8, 14, 28–29) and Acts (Acts 3:25). Therefore, the use of such "blessed in" language in Eph 1:3 also suggests an allusion to this scriptural priestly dynamic grounded in the Abraham narratives. It depicts the *christos* as Abraham's "seed." In this understanding, Jesus as the *christos* does not replace Israel; instead, he fulfills scriptural promises that Israel would be the channel of God's blessing to the nations.

3. The Apostolic Mission in Focus (Ephesians 1:11–14)

This identification of a priestly dynamic from the outset of Ephesians leads to a further question concerning the variation between the first-person plural "we"/"us" and the second-person plural "you" in Eph 1, especially in the transition from "we" (ἡμᾶς) (1:12) to "also you" (καὶ ὑμεῖς) (1:13).[23]

Some interpreters argue that the transition is merely stylistic (e.g., Best 1998, p. 148). However, this does not account for the markedly temporal nature of the transition: it is not simply from "we" to "you" but from "we who first hoped in the *christos*" (ἡμᾶς ...τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ χριστῷ) (1:12) to "also you, having heard" (καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες) (1:13). This implies that the author at this point is deliberately drawing attention to a temporal progression from one group to another.

Other interpreters see 1:13 as marking a transition from Israel or Jewish believers (1:11–12) to gentile believers (1:13–14) (e.g., Barth 1974, vol. 1, pp. 130–33).[24] In favor of this view is the fact that "you" (ὑμεῖς) are later explicitly designated as "the gentiles/nations" (τὰ ἔθνη) as distinct from Israel (2:11). Furthermore, as we have seen, it is likely that there is already a Jew-gentile priestly dynamic implicit in the *berakhah* beginning in 1:3. However, the Jew-gentile distinction is not explicitly in the foreground at this point in the discourse. This suggests that more explanation is necessary.

An earlier view advocated by Aquinas (1966, p. 64) is worth considering. Aquinas sees 1:13 as marking a transition from "we," the apostles, to "you," the recipients. At least two features of the passage support this view. Firstly, 1:9 refers to the revelation of a "mystery" (μυστήριον) "to us" (ἡμῖν), while later in the letter, the "mystery" (μυστήριον) (3:4) is explicitly described as having been revealed "to his holy apostles and prophets" (3:5).[25] Secondly, as we have already seen, 1:13–14 contains an explicit description of the reception of the apostolic mission, employing a cluster of terminology also found in Acts 10:1—11:18. This strongly suggests that "we" denotes the original apostolic community from whom the gospel came, and "you" denotes the recipients of the apostolic gospel.

This does not mean we are forced to choose between a Jew-gentile dynamic and an apostolic missionary dynamic since the two are related (cf. Kinzer 2015, pp. 70–72). According to Acts, the original apostolic community—including Paul—represented a renewed Israel through whom blessing came to the nations. This implies that, while the progress of the apostolic mission to preach the gospel of Jesus as the *christos* to others is in the *foreground* of Eph 1:11–14, this mission is undergirded by a priestly dynamic in which blessings progress from Israel to the nations. While this Jew-gentile progression is in the *background* in Eph 1, it becomes more prominent in the subsequent discourse.

4. Israel and the Nations in Focus (Ephesians 2:11–22)

4.1. Reconciliation between Israel and the Nations as a Distinct Topic

Ephesians 2 comprises two halves (2:1–10; 2:11–22). Both halves depict a former plight for the readers that has now been resolved. In each case, the *christos* Jesus is the focus of the resolution. In 2:1–10, the plight primarily concerns spiritual death, wrath, and alienation from God; it is resolved through being raised together to life and saved by grace. In 2:11–22, the plight primarily concerns alienation and hostility between two groups, explicitly named "the nations" and "Israel"; it is resolved through proximity, peace, and reconciliation with both God and one another. Lincoln (1990, pp. 608–10) regards the first half as the author's primary focus and the second half—which explicitly mentions Israel and the nations—as illustrative of the first and therefore subsidiary to the author's purposes. This is a crucial plank of Lincoln's argument that Israel's role in Ephesians is temporary and superseded by Christ.

However, this view does not consider critical differences between the two halves of the chapter. In the first half, the plight is described as *common* to both "you" (2:1–2) and "also we" (2:3). In the second half, the plight is described as *different* for the two groups: it is only "you, the nations" (2:11) who were "far off," whereas others were "near" (2:13, 17). Hence, the vision of the *christos*'s reconciling work in the two halves of Eph 2 cannot be reduced to a single dimension. While believers from Israel and the nations share a common history when it comes to the nature of their reconciliation with God (cf. Ezek 36—37) (Starling 2011, pp. 191–92), they have different histories when it comes to their respective paths of reconciliation with one another. While both "you" and "we" need to be made alive with the *christos*, it is only "you, the nations" who need to be "brought near" (2:11, 13). This multidimensional vision of unity-in-distinction means we should be cautious about assuming too quickly that the author regards the work of the *christos* as abolishing all distinctions entirely.

4.2. Circumcision (2:11)

Ephesians 2:11 includes physical circumcision in a description of Jew-gentile alienation. As we have seen, this has led some interpreters to infer that the author regards physical Jewish circumcision and the distinctiveness it implies in an entirely negative light. However, this is an unnecessary over-reading.

The problem being addressed here is not distinctiveness per se, but hostility (cf. 2:14). Many of the terms in 2:12—"*christos*" (χριστοῦ), "alienated" (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι), "commonwealth" (πολιτείας), "covenants" (διαθηκῶν), "promise" (ἐπαγγελίας), and "hope" (ἐλπίδα)—or their cognates have parallels in Second Temple Jewish descriptions of overt hostility

between Israel and the nations (e.g., Pss. Sol. 17.3, 5, 13, 15, 32; 2 Macc 13:14). This hostility was at times expressed on both sides using derogatory comments about circumcision. Gentiles used "circumcision" as a term of derision for Jews (e.g., Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.2; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.137) (Barclay 1996, pp. 438–39). Correspondingly, Jews used "foreskin" (ἀκροβυστία) as a term of distancing and derision against gentiles (e.g., Gen 34:14; Acts 11:3). This use of derisive terms is consistent with the phrasing used in Ephesians. The problem being highlighted here is not circumcision itself but the name-calling often associated with it: gentiles were "those **called** 'foreskin' by those **called** 'circumcision'" (οἱ **λεγόμενοι** ἀκροβυστία ὑπὸ τῆς **λεγομένης** περιτομῆς) (2:11). While this depicts circumcision as a feature used to support hostile attitudes, it does not necessarily imply that circumcision itself is being viewed negatively.

Furthermore, the description of circumcision as "in the flesh, hand-produced" (ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου, 2:11) does not empty circumcision of any value whatsoever. Rather, it forms a contrast with believers' salvation as the "product" (ποίημα) of God in the previous clause (2:10). The phrase simply highlights the fact that circumcision by itself is unable to bring about the kind of change needed to overcome the hostility since what is required is a work of God to destroy the enmity.

4.3. The Mosaic Law (2:14–15)

Ephesians 2:15 describes the *christos*, by his blood/cross, as "having broken down the dividing wall of the fence, the hostility, by abolishing the law of the commandments in decrees" (τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας). As we have seen, this has led some interpreters to infer that concrete Jewish observance of the Mosaic law has been abolished. Again, however, this is an unnecessary over-reading.

The term "the law" (τὸν νόμον) should not be made central to interpretation (contra Shkul 2009, pp. 79–141). This is the only place where the term appears in Ephesians, and it is qualified with genitive and prepositional modifiers (Campbell 2008, p. 16). Furthermore, the participial phrase in which it appears is syntactically subordinate to the previous phrase concerning breaking down of the dividing wall (2:14) (Yee 2004, pp. 147–48). Hence, the reference to "the law" can only be interpreted in light of the broader discourse concerning the breaking down of the dividing wall.

The architectural term used for the dividing wall (μεσότοιχον) (2:14) refers to a wall internal to a building. This implies that the author is alluding to something concrete and specific. Given the temple imagery elsewhere in the letter (e.g., 2:21–22), several interpreters see it as a reference to the balustrade in the Jerusalem temple that fenced off gentiles from the more sacred precincts reserved for Jews (Campbell 2008, p. 16; Cohick 2010, pp. 76–77; MacDonald 2004, p. 434; cf. Yee 2004, pp. 148–49). A written decree accompanied the balustrade that any gentile who passed through would be liable to a death sentence (Josephus, *Ant*. 15.417; *J.W.* 5.193–94, 6.124–26). This decree was based on commandments from the Mosaic law (see, e.g., Num 1:51).

This helps to explain the formulation: "the law of the commandments in decrees" (Kinzer 2015, p. 77). A "decree" (δόγμα) is "a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed" in a specific situation (Bauer et al. 2000). The use of the term in Eph 2:15 is unlikely to be redundant; accordingly, the phrase is not to be seen as a reference to the Jewish observance of the Mosaic law per se. Instead, it is a more precise reference to specific applications of the Mosaic law by contemporary Jewish authorities through "decrees" that reinforced Jew-gentile hostility, especially in relation to the temple (cf. Acts 21:27–29). Thus, Eph 2:14–15a can be understood as follows: the death of the Jewish *christos*, by rendering gentiles holy (cf. 2:19, 21), has rendered invalid the law *as interpreted by decrees promoting Jew-gentile hostility*. Hence, it has metaphorically broken down the dividing wall in the temple. The literal meaning of this metaphor is that the death of the Jewish *christos* has removed Jew-gentile hostility.[26]

A parallel may be seen in Acts 15. Acts 15:1–5 describes attempts by "some" (τινες) (15:1, 5) Jews to impose strict directives concerning gentile circumcision. Presumably, they

were attempting or wishing to have decrees to this effect issued. In response, the apostles issued their own "decrees" (δόγματα) (Acts 16:4) to the gentile *ekklēsiai*. These decrees were grounded in the understanding that God had cleansed the gentiles by faith (15:9). Accordingly, the apostolic decrees promoted Jew-gentile fellowship (15:19–29). At no point in the narrative is it suggested that Jews must abandon their own law-observance, since this is not the issue.[27]

4.4. Jewish Identity (2:14–16)

Ephesians 2:15 describes the peace-making activity of the *christos* as "creat[ing] the two, in himself, into one new humanity" (τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον). As we have seen, this has led some interpreters to infer that Christ has negated all forms of distinct Jewish identity. Yet again, however, this is an over-reading. The expression does not necessarily imply the eradication of distinctions. The term "one" (εἷς) is often used to describe a unity in which distinctions continue to co-exist (see, e.g., Eph 5:31) (Woods 2014, pp. 105–13). Furthermore, while the concept of "new creation" implies renewal and transformation, it does not necessarily mean the destruction of all features of the old (e.g., Eph 4:23–24) (Woods 2014, pp. 113–22). Indeed, critical features in Eph 2:11–22 suggest that distinctions continue to characterize the new humanity, albeit in a transformed manner.

Firstly, at the start of 2:11–22, the readers are urged to "remember" their past gentile identity from an Israelite perspective, thus conceiving of themselves not simply as believers but as gentiles who have been brought near to Israel (2:11) (Fowl 2012, pp. 85–90). This is reinforced by the marked reference to the gentile believers as "also you" (καὶ ὑμεῖς) who are being built together into a dwelling-place for God (2:22).

Secondly, the repeated use of the term "both" (ἀμφότεροι) implies that duality is significant within the new humanity. This duality is not simply a feature of the readers' hostile past but of their peaceful and united present since "both" is used as the subject of a present-tense verb: "for through him *we both have* (ἔχομεν ...οἱ ἀμφότεροι) access in one spirit to the Father" (2:18).

Thirdly, three *syn*-compounds—i.e., terms beginning with the prefix "with" (σύν)—are used in the passage to describe gentile believers (Campbell 2008, pp. 21–22; Hoch 1982, p. 180; Kinzer 2015, pp. 78–79). The prefix implies that gentile believers share benefits *alongside* Israel rather than being merged with or replacing Israel (cf. 2:5–6).[28] They are "fellow-citizens (συμπολῖται) of the holy ones" (2:19),[29] every construction is "being joined together" (συναρμολογουμένη) (2:21), and so they are "being built together" (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) into God's dwelling (2:22).

Hence, the focus of Eph 2 is not on the destruction of all distinctions between Israel and the nations. Instead, it is on the messianic renewal and transformation of the relationship between Israel and the nations in such a way that peace replaces hostility so that the two groups can worship God together. This conclusion is reinforced when we observe the many parallels between Ezek 37 and Eph 2 (Suh 2007).[30] Ezekiel anticipates that the two divided tribally defined kingdoms—Ephraim and Judah—will be united in worship under the peace-making activity of the messianic king, without ever suggesting that they lose their distinct identities (Ezek 37:15–28) (Suh 2007, p. 731). The unity of Jew and gentile in Eph 2:11–22 parallels this vision. It suggests that gentile believers are presented here not as replacing Israel but as fulfilling prophetic promises concerning Israel's eschatological salvation.[31]

5. The Apostolic Mission as a Priestly Dynamic (Ephesians 2:17–3:21)

5.1. Jew-Gentile Contours to the Apostolic Mission (2:17–22)

We have seen that in Eph 1:11–14, the topic of the apostolic mission to preach the gospel of Jesus as the Jewish *christos* to others was in the foreground, whereas the idea of a priestly dynamic in which blessings progress from Israel to the nations, while present, was in the background. In Eph 2:11–22, the reverse is true: the priestly dynamic in which the nations join Israel in worship becomes a topic in the foreground. Nevertheless, the theme

of the apostolic mission to preach the gospel of Jesus as the Jewish *christos* to the nations continues to be present in the background. Indeed, this theme becomes more prominent as the discourse progresses.

The apostolic mission becomes explicit in 2:17 through the description of the peacemaking activity of the *christos* in terms of a missionary dynamic (Sandnes 1991, pp. 227–29). The *christos*, through the apostolic mission, "came and preached the gospel" (ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο) (2:17). This missionary work undertaken by the "apostles and prophets"—key figures in the original Israelite apostolic community—is foundational for the inclusion of gentile believers in Israel's privileges and the establishment of temple worship (2:20).[32] The current progress of the apostolic mission is also implied by the present tense verb describing the gentile believers as "being built together" (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) into a dwelling-place for God (2:22).

5.2. The Pauline Mission as a Priestly Dynamic (3:1–21)

In Eph 3, the discourse shifts to address the topic of *Paul's own* activity in relation to the apostolic mission. Rather than seeing this as an "excursus" (so Barth 1974, vol. 1, p. 327) or an exercise in social identity formation for a later generation (so Esler 2007; Shkul 2009, pp. 142–72), the reading presented here enables us to regard the concerns of 3:1–13 as naturally integrated into the prior discourse. The author here takes two significant themes from the letter so far—the apostolic mission to preach Jesus as the Jewish *christos* to others and the priestly dynamic of blessing progressing from Israel to the nations—and brings them together in relation to the Pauline mission (Kinzer 2015, pp. 79–81). This can be seen in several ways.

Firstly, the beneficiaries of Paul's apostolic ministry are explicitly designated in Israel-centric terms as "the nations" (τὰ ἔθνη) (3:1, 8).[33]

Secondly, the content of "mystery" that was previously described as revealed and communicated through the apostolic mission (1:9) (see above) is now specified with three *syn*-compounds that emphasize gentile participation in Israel's benefits (Hoch 1982, pp. 180–81; Kinzer 2015, p. 80). The mystery is "that the nations are fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body, and fellow-participants of the promise in the *christos* Jesus" (εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμέτοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) (3:6). This sharing of blessing takes place "through the gospel" (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) (3:6), i.e., the message proclaimed in the apostolic mission (1:13; 2:17). Furthermore, there is a prayer that the recipients may have a share in knowledge "with all the holy ones" (σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις) (3:14).

Thirdly, Paul is identified with the apostolic community using the term "holy" (ἅγιον), which, as we have seen above, carries connotations of an eschatological priestly dynamic of blessing proceeding from Israel to the nations. The mystery has been revealed "to his [God's] *holy* apostles and prophets" (τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις) (3:5). Correspondingly, Paul, who elsewhere describes himself as "the least of the apostles" (ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων) (1 Cor 15:9), is here described more pointedly as "the very least of all [the] *holy ones*" (τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων ἁγίων) (Eph 3:8).

Finally, Paul's apostolic ministry to the nations is depicted in cosmic priestly terms, with frequent allusions to temple imagery. These include the use of words and phrases such as "access" (προσαγωγή) (3:12; cf. 2:18); the *christos*'s "dwelling" (κατοικῆσαι) (3:17; cf. 2:22); and "the breadth and length and height and depth" (τὸ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος) (3:18; cf. Ezek 43:13–17 LXX) (Foster 2007).

6. Implications for Gentile Readers (Ephesians 4—6)

The evangelical post-supersessionist reading presented here can help to elucidate significant features of the second half of Ephesians (Eph 4—6). In this section, I will highlight two such features.

6.1. Ephesians 4:9–12 and the Narrative of Acts

The material in Eph 4:1—6:20 is frequently categorized as "paraenesis" in contrast with the "doctrinal" material in 1:3—3:21 (e.g., Best 1998, p. 353). While this description is broadly appropriate, it does not explain every feature of 4:1—6:20. Most significantly, 4:4–16 seems to break away from the paraenetic form to introduce new material concerning the "body" of the *christos*, i.e., the church/*ekklēsia* (cf. 1:22–23) (Best 1998, p. 354). What is the purpose of this non-paraenetic description of the body of the *christos*?

As several interpreters argue, the "descent" (4:9–10) may refer to Jesus' coming to his people at Pentecost in the person of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Caird 1976, pp. 73–75; Fowl 2012, pp. 138–40; Lincoln 1990, pp. 244–47).[34] This view is sometimes rejected because the Holy Spirit is not mentioned explicitly (Best 1998, p. 386). However, the focus of the discourse at this point is on the *christos* as the ascended and descended giver of gifts (4:7–10). Furthermore, the ascended *christos* has previously been described as the primary actor in the apostolic mission (2:17, cf. 2:6). Hence, it is entirely plausible that the ascended *christos* would also be described here as the primary actor in the redemptive-historical moment at which the apostolic mission began—i.e., Pentecost.

This suggests that Eph 4:9–12 may be read coherently as a descriptive narrative recalling concrete events surrounding the progress of the apostolic mission from Israel to the nations. At Pentecost, the victorious ascended *christos* Jesus descended to his people in the person of the Spirit (4:9–10; cf. Acts 2, esp. 2:38). The *christos*, through the Spirit, gave key figures (apostles, prophets, etc.) to the original Israelite apostolic community (4:11). Consequently, these Israelite "holy ones" were restored and equipped with a ministry towards the more expansive "body" of the *christos* (4:12).[35] Following this, 4:13–16 depicts the projected future goal of the *ekklēsia* as a mature "body" (cf. 1:22–23; 3:10, 21). As Korner (2017) has argued, since the term *ekklēsia* was used by Jews as both a supra-local national identity (the *ekklēsia* of Israel in the desert wanderings) and a local group designation in Alexandria (Philo, *Virt*. 108), Pauline use of this term along with associated metaphors such as "body" would have served to bind Pauline *christos*-followers more closely with the Jerusalem apostolic community.

Thus, 4:7–16 is not simply paraenetic material providing an ideal blueprint for church structures in every generation. Instead, it is descriptive material narrating *how* the ascended Jewish *christos*, through the apostolic mission from Israel to the nations, has built and is building his body, the church/*ekklēsia* (cf. 1:20–23). Nevertheless, the descriptive material serves a paraenetic purpose, emphasized at the beginning and end of the section: it affirms that in the body of the *christos*, diversity—including Jew-gentile diversity—remains a positive element supporting and enabling unity through the mutual sharing of blessings (4:7, 16).

6.2. Gentile Halakhah in the Jewish Christos/Messiah

Another question concerns the basis for the paraenesis in Eph 4—6. While much of the material is christologically grounded (e.g., 4:20, 32; 5:2, 14, 21–32; 6:5), the Mosaic law also features, both implicitly (e.g., 4:24; cf. Gen 1:26–28) and explicitly (e.g., 5:31, 6:2–3; cf. Gen 2:24; Exod 20:12). What is the relationship of the paraenetic material to the Mosaic law? Two considerations help to answer this question. Firstly, in Eph 1—3, the readers are depicted as "gentiles" who have been included in the holiness of Israel. Secondly, the term "walk" (περιπατέω) is prominent as a description of the paraenesis (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15; cf. 2:2, 10). This is a distinctly Pauline usage deriving from the Hebrew scriptural term *halakh* (הָלַךְ) (Seesemann and Bertram 1967). This suggests that the paraenesis of Eph 4:1—6:20 is being framed as a christologically grounded form of gentile *halakhah*. Its purpose is to apply key elements of Israel's law to the readers' situation as gentiles redeemed in the Jewish *christos*. These gentiles are "no longer to walk as the gentiles walk" (4:17) but rather to "walk" in light of their calling to be united with Israel in the *christos* (4:1–6).

7. An Evangelical Post-Supersessionist Reading of Colossians

While Jewish elements are present in Colossians, they are less prominent than in Ephesians. Hence, the discussion of Colossians presented here will be briefer.

7.1. Colossians and the Apostolic Mission

Several features of Colossians are similar to those found in Ephesians and can be understood on the basis that the letter is situated within the apostolic mission proceeding from Israel to the nations. These features include the situating of the Colossians' faith within the worldwide apostolic gospel mission (Col 1:5–7; cf. Eph 1:13–14), the depiction of the recipients as being qualified "for the portion of the inheritance of the holy ones" (εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων) (Col 1:12; cf. Eph 1:11, 14, 18), and the depiction of Paul's ministry in terms of a "mystery" (μυστήριον) which was "revealed to his [God's] holy ones" (ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ) (Col 1:26; cf. Eph 3:3–5) and whose riches are shared "among the nations" (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) (Col 1:27; cf. Eph 3:6). There is also a marked reference to the Jewish identity of Paul's fellow-workers in the apostolic mission, who are singled out because they are "from the circumcision" (ἐκ περιτομῆς) (Col 4:11).

7.2. The Nature of the Threat

However, there is a difference in focus between Ephesians and Colossians. Whereas Ephesians often highlights the broad scope of the apostolic mission from Israel to the nations, Colossians is more focused on an immediate threat to its readers. The nature of the threat, and its relation to possible Jewish elements, has been the subject of much debate. Many interpreters regard the threat as arising from concrete Jewish rivals (e.g., Bevere 2003, pp. 53–147; Bird 2009, pp. 15–26; Dunn 1996, pp. 29–33; Wright 1986, pp. 23–33). Although this may account for some elements, such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11) and sabbaths (2:16), many of the issues addressed in Colossians are not easily confined to a specifically Jewish setting. Hence, other interpreters see an entirely non-Jewish threat arising from an ascetic Hellenistic philosophy (e.g., Allen 2018; Martin 1996). While this accounts for much of the data, it does not explain the mention of circumcision in 2:11. It is best, therefore, to follow those interpreters who regard the threat as arising from a combination of Hellenistic and apocalyptic Jewish thought with a focus on ascetic mysticism (e.g., Arnold 1996; Beale 2019, pp. 12–16; Foster 2016, pp. 10–16). In this view, negative references to Jewish elements do not necessarily constitute opposition to Judaism per se; they are simply part of the broader opposition to the ascetic mystical ideas threatening the Colossians' faith. Therefore, the presence of a negative evaluation of a Jewish element in Colossians does not necessarily entail a supersessionist viewpoint. Instead, each reference should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

7.3. Circumcision (Colossians 2:11–13)

Colossians 2:11–13 affirms a "non-hand-made circumcision" (περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ) (2:11) given to gentiles who believe in Jesus as the *christos* (cf. 2:6). As we have seen, this has led some interpreters to infer that the author regards physical circumcision as entirely devoid of value, even for Jewish believers. This conclusion arises from the view that there is an implicit contrast between physical circumcision and non-physical circumcision. However, this is simply an assumption since physical circumcision is not explicitly mentioned in this passage. It is entirely plausible that the implicit contrast is with an *alternative non-physical circumcision* offered by the ascetic religious philosophy. The idea of a non-physical circumcision for gentiles is found elsewhere (Philo, *QE* 2.2), so it may have been a feature of the religious philosophy in Colossae. If so, the problem addressed in 2:11–13 is not physicality; instead, the issue is that the alternative spiritual experience is not grounded in the *christos*. While this cannot be demonstrated with certainty, it does show that it is unnecessary to assume that Col 2:11–13 opposes physical circumcision for Jews.

7.4. The Mosaic Law (Colossians 2:13–23)

Colossians 2:13–23 describes the death of the *christos* in opposition to various entities that some interpreters have linked with the Mosaic law. As we have seen, this has led these interpreters to infer that the author regards the *christos* as having abolished any concrete Jewish observance of the Mosaic law.

The first entity is "the handwritten record in/with the decrees" (τὸ ...χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν) that is canceled (2:14). This is almost certainly an eschatological record of debt arising from the recipients' "trespasses" (παραπτώματα) (2:13). While these "trespasses" may (or may not) have been against the Mosaic law, there is no need to regard the *christos* here as abolishing the law itself. Bevere (2009) argues that this passage should be understood in light of the parallel in Eph 2:15, which refers to the abolition of "the law of the commandments in decrees." However, even if the parallel is valid, as we have seen, Ephesians does not imply the abolition of concrete Jewish observance of the Mosaic law (see above).

The second entity is "the elements of the world" (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) that threaten to regulate the recipients' lives (2:8, 20). The term "elements" has a range of meanings in ancient texts (Martin 2018). In this context, the phrase most likely refers to religious observances associated with the natural world (Foster 2016, pp. 252–54). Dunn (1996, pp. 150–51) argues that this may be linked to the festivals of the Mosaic law, citing the parallel expression in Gal 4:3, 9. However, even in Galatians, the association between the "elements of the world" and the calendrical observances of the Mosaic law is at most indirect (De Boer 2007). Hence, the parallel is insufficient grounds to see a clear reference to the Mosaic law in Colossians. Indeed, the phrase may be grounded in Jewish critiques of Stoic or other Hellenistic notions of deity (cf. Wis 13:1–4) (Engberg-Pedersen 2010, pp. 90–92).

The third entity is food and calendrical observances including "festival[s]," "new moon[s]," and "Sabbaths" (2:16) that are described as a "shadow of the coming things" (σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων), seemingly opposed to the "body [which is] of the *christos*" (τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ) (2:17). Several interpreters (e.g., Dunn 1996, pp. 176–77) see the "shadow"-"body" metaphor as a reference to a salvation-historical supersession. In this view, the "shadow" denotes Jewish law-observances in the time before the *christos* (cf. Heb 10:1), while the "body" is the fulfillment of the law that has now arrived in the *christos*. Since the shadow was only an outline designed to prefigure the *christos*, it is now superseded. However, in Colossians, the "shadow"-"body" metaphor is used in a far more oppositional sense (cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.28; Philo, *Heir* 72). The "shadow" is not assigned any positive value, even as an outline or pointer to the *christos*; instead, the metaphor seems to denote an insubstantial and ineffective mimicry. Furthermore, "the coming things" (τῶν μελλόντων) most likely has a more thoroughgoing eschatological referent; i.e., it refers not to the present but the future appearing of the *christos* (3:4; cf. Rom 8:18, 38; 1 Cor 3:22; Eph 1:21; 1 Tim 4:8; 6:19; 2 Tim 4:1). Hence, it is best to understand this passage simply to be claiming that the ascetic religious practices that promised spiritual experiences are at best an ineffective mimicry of believers' future glory in the *christos* and so should be abandoned (Foster 2016, pp. 283–85). Again, while the ascetic practices may have incorporated Jewish elements, it is unnecessary to assume that the author is opposing Jewish practices per se.[36]

7.5. Jewish Identity (Colossians 3:9–11)

Colossians 3:9–11 describes a "new" kind of "humanity" in which "there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but all things and in all things [is] *christos*" (οὐκ ἔνι Ἕλλην καὶ Ἰουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθης, δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν χριστός) (3:11). As we have seen, this has led some interpreters to infer that the author regards Christ as having negated all forms of distinct Jewish identity. However, this passage may be understood similarly to our reading of the "one new humanity" in Eph 2:15 (see above). The point is that there is a new sphere of existence brought about by the *christos* in which human social distinctions are no longer the basis for enmity or divisiveness (cf. Col 3:8). This does not imply that distinct social

identities are entirely invalid. Indeed, given the positive reference to the circumcision of Paul's missionary co-workers in 4:11, it would be an illegitimate over-reading to regard 3:11 this way.

8. Conclusions and Implications

In this article, I have presented a post-supersessionist reading of Ephesians and Colossians, summarizing the arguments from my book *Reading Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism* (Windsor 2017). My reading strategy involves seeking to read the letters as situated within the dynamics of the apostolic mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus as the Jewish *christos*/messiah to the nations. In Acts, this apostolic mission is described as a dynamic in which the blessings of salvation in the *christos* begin within a distinctly Israelite original community and proceed to the nations. While these blessings fundamentally transform the nature of Jewish and gentile identity, they do not entirely negate the value of Israelite distinctiveness. I have argued that there is a strong warrant for situating Ephesians and Colossians within a similar dynamic. I have highlighted significant instances where this "priestly" dynamic appears in the letters. I have also sought to demonstrate how this dynamic provides satisfactory answers to specific exegetical questions. Furthermore, I have offered alternative non-supersessionist readings of critical passages concerning circumcision, the Mosaic law, and Jewish identity that do not negate the value of Jewish distinctiveness in the *christos*.

The focus of this study is exegetical. Hence, the study does not address contemporary religious, theological, missiological, ecclesiological, and hermeneutical questions in detail. Nevertheless, the reading is offered in the hope that highlighting aspects of these letters that are often neglected will stimulate further reflection in these areas. Rather than simply viewing the letters as compendiums of abstract theological and ethical pronouncements, this reading highlights the dynamic salvation-historical contours that provide a rich setting and rationale for their theological and ethical expressions. Rather than viewing the concept of "unity" as a totalizing concept that seeks to eradicate all distinctions, this reading highlights various ways in which an appropriate affirmation of differences and distinctions, especially ethnic distinctions, can perform a profoundly positive function in relation to unity in Jesus as the *christos* (cf. 1 Cor 7:17–24) (Tucker 2011). Rather than seeing ethnic difference only as a cause for hostility, this reading highlights how ethnic difference—in particular, here, the distinctiveness of Jew and gentile—can be an instrument for mutual service through the communication of divine blessing, grounded in the gospel of Jesus as the Jewish *christos* for the nations.

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Notes

1 The term "post-supersessionism" is defined in Soulen (2005).

2 The ensuing content in its revised form is used with permission (www.wipfandstock.com, accessed on 19 October 2022). I have also included some more recent scholarship and made some minor updates.

3 Compared with Ephesians, there is less explicit post-supersessionist interpretation of Colossians. Allen (2018) is an exception.

4 See also other works by Barth (1960; 1969, pp. 79–117; 1983, pp. 45–49).

5 In this context, "evangelical" does not denote a confessional commitment, although the interpretive approach outlined is consistent with such a commitment.

6 This does not necessarily assume historical Pauline authorship of the letters. I am approaching Colossians and Ephesians as documents aligned with concerns evident in Acts—which was not written by Paul—and in Romans—which was written by Paul. Nevertheless, the findings presented here are consistent with historical Pauline authorship and might provide evidence in its favor.

7 Cf. Campbell (2014, pp. 254–338), who provocatively argues for an early (50 CE) date for Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians and locates them within the historical contingencies of Paul's mission. According to Campbell, Paul wrote all three letters during an imprisonment in Asia near the east of the Lycus valley. Ephesians was originally the letter to the Laodiceans (so Marcion's text

of Eph 1:1; cf. Col 4:16). Paul wrote it to new converts whom he knew about but had not met, for the purpose of "construction" of their "Christian identity" (p. 325). Viewed this way, Ephesians (or "Laodiceans") provides "a relatively straightforward account of Paul's missionary agenda in relation to pagan conversion" (p. 314). The material on Jew-gentile relations in the letter fits the issues raised just previously in meetings at Syrian Antioch and Jerusalem (pp. 329–30). Even if we do not accept all of Campbell's (controversial) conclusions, his argument exemplifies how many details of both Colossians and Ephesians can be read in a way that is plausibly consistent with a location within Paul's missionary endeavors rather than outside them.

8 The aorist indicative (i.e., past tense) is the default verbal form for narratives. The existence of such narrative constructions in Ephesians and Colossians suggests that the author is not simply describing timeless theological truths but locating the readers within a shared history.

9 This argument does not depend on an early date for Acts, Ephesians, or Colossians. Acts, whether written early or late, *portrays* the progress of the apostolic mission as an Israel-centric dynamic. Ephesians and Colossians, whether authentically Pauline or deutero-Pauline, display a range of features that align with this perspective found in Acts. This is evidence that the non-supersessionist perspective in Acts is shared by the author(s) of Ephesians and Colossians.

10 The terminology includes "the word" (ὁ λόγος) (Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; Acts 10:36, 44; 11:1) "gospel"/"evangelize" (εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγελίζω) (Eph 1:13; Col 1:5, 23; Acts 10:36), "hear" (ἀκούω) (Eph 1:13; Col 1:6, 23; Acts 10:22, 33, 44), "faith"/"believe" (πίστις/πιστεύω) (Eph 1:13; Col 1:4, 23; Acts 10:43; 11:17), "salvation"/"save" (σωτηρία/σῴζω) (Eph 1:13; Acts 11:14), "the Holy Spirit" (τὸ πνεῦμα ...τὸ ἅγιον) (Eph 1:13; Acts 10:44–45, 47; 11:15), and "glorify"/"glory" (δοξάζω/δόξα) (Eph 1:14; Acts 11:18).

11 While Lopez (2008) presents an impressive array of evidence that the phrase "the nations" would have been understood by the average inhabitant of the Roman Empire as a reference to people groups violently conquered by the Empire, Ephesians pointedly defines the phrase with reference to Israel and explicitly calls on readers to consider themselves from that viewpoint (Eph 2:11–13). Colossians also describes "the nations" in relation to "the holy ones" (Col 1:26). Thus, the usage in Ephesians and Colossians is more consistent with the Israel-centric use of the term in Acts than with the political understanding highlighted by Lopez.

12 Several of these commonalities between Ephesians and Acts were noted earlier by Käsemann (1968). Käsemann saw these connections as demonstrating that Ephesians "most clearly marks the transition from the Pauline tradition to the perspectives of the early Catholic era" (288). Interestingly, over the last half-century, prevailing views concerning the differences between Ephesians and the undisputed Pauline epistles on supersessionism have reversed. Käsemann (1968) argued that the historical Paul was supersessionist, but the author of Ephesians, along with Acts, was non-supersessionist (pp. 296–97). By contrast, Lincoln (1990) argues that the historical Paul was non-supersessionist, but the author of Ephesians was supersessionist (xcii–xciii). The fact that these views are opposed highlights the extent to which prevailing presuppositions can influence scholarly pronouncements concerning supersessionism in disputed and undisputed Pauline epistles, underlining the need for careful and nuanced reading.

13 Korner (2020, pp. 185–87) observes that the phrases used in Eph 2:20 (τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν) and 3:5 (τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις) do not include the article before the second noun and so may be read as a hendiadys: "apostle-prophets." Conversely, the expression used in Eph 4:11 (τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας) includes both an article (τούς) and a development marker (δέ) before the second noun and so must be referring to two separate groups "the apostles, the prophets, etc." Korner suggests that there are two groups: "Ephesians presents the first group ('apostle-prophets') as being foundational to the universal *ekklēsia* (2:20; 3:5) while the second set [i.e., apostles and prophets] (4:11) fulfill similar functions but for regional *ekklēsiai* without the attendant spiritual authority characteristic of the first" (p. 187). I follow a different line of interpretation regarding Eph 4:11, seeing it as a further reference to key figures in the original Israelite apostolic community (see below). Hence, following Sandnes (1991, pp. 234–36), I regard the "apostles" and "prophets" in all three places (Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11) as non-identical yet closely related—and possibly overlapping—groups who are foundational to the apostolic mission. Nevertheless, on either understanding, Eph 2:20 highlights the prophetic authority of the apostles and the ongoing foundational relevance of the original Israelite apostolic community for the gentile *ekklēsiai*.

14 I have made a more detailed comparison of Ephesians and Barnabas elsewhere (Windsor 2018).

15 Buell (2005) surveys racial/ethnic reasoning in early Christian theology, demonstrating that it was far more complex and multi-faceted than the modern idea of "replacement" might suggest.

16 The KJV translates the original of Eph 2:15 (ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον) fairly literally as "for to make in himself *of twain* one new man." The RSV updates this to read: "that he might create in himself one new man *in place of the two*."

17 $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ (which omits τοῖς), ℵ*, B*, 6, 424^{c}, 1739, etc.

18 ℵ^{2}, A, B^{2}, D, F, G, 33, 81, etc.

19 Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1.

20 The suggestions listed by Best (1997a, pp. 4–5) do not explain the resulting grammatical awkwardness. The suggestion that this was originally a circular letter with a space to write different destinations is "conjectural" and has "considerable difficulties" along with other conjectures (Best 1997a, p. 10).

21 Cf. Campbell's (2014, pp. 309–38) argument that the letter was originally intended for Laodicea (see above).

22 See Gen 9:26; 24:27; 1 Sam 25:32; 1 Kgs 1:48; 8:15; 1 Chr 16:36; 29:10; 2 Chr 2:12; 6:4; Ezra 7:27; Pss 41:13; 68:35; 72:18; 106:48; Tob 8:5; 1 Macc 4:30; 3 Macc 7:23; 1QM 13.2; Luke 1:68.

23 There is also a transition from "you" (ὑμῖν) to "us" (ἡμᾶς) in 1:2–3.

24 See also (Caird 1976, p. 41; Cohick 2010, p. 52; Starling 2011, pp. 186–89). Kinzer (2015, pp. 69–73) and Campbell (2008, p. 22) regard the reference to Israel as extending as far back as the beginning of the blessing (1:3).

25 On the close connection (if not identity) between apostles and prophets, see note 13.

26 The grammatical apposition of "the dividing wall" (τὸ μεσότοιχον) and "the hostility" (τὴν ἔχθραν) implies that the two phrases have the same referent. The simplest explanation for this is that the dividing wall is a metaphor for the hostility.

27 The reference to the "yoke that neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10) is difficult, but it need not be understood as circumcision per se. The issue in this context is not circumcision itself, but *gentile* circumcision as a requirement for *eschatological salvation*. Hence the "yoke" may simply be a reference to an impossibly strict interpretation of the Law requiring gentile circumcision.

28 In 2:5–6, the readers are described as "made alive together" (συνεζωοποίησεν), "raised together" (συνήγειρεν), and "seated together" (συνεκάθισεν) with the *christos*. The use of the *syn*-compounds indicates that believers share in the status of the risen *christos*, not that they have merged with or replaced the *christos*.

29 Elsewhere, depending on the context, the phrase "the holy ones"/"the saints" (οἱ ἅγιοι) can refer either to the original apostolic community in Jerusalem (Acts 9:13; Rom 15:25–26, 31; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12) or to all believers (e.g., Phil 1:1) (cf. Trebilco 2012, pp. 122–63). Since the point here is that gentile believers *share* in the holiness of the original apostolic community, it is difficult to decide which meaning fits best here.

30 I am grateful to Kennedy (2018), who in reviewing my published book noted that I had missed this allusion.

31 Cf. Staples (2011) who argues similarly concerning Rom 11:25–27.

32 The genitive construction "the foundation *of* the apostles and prophets" (τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν) is best understood as a genitive of source, i.e., the foundation *laid by* the apostles and prophets through their gospel preaching (Sandnes 1991, pp. 227–29).

33 This phrase has previously been defined in explicitly Israel-centric terms (2:11–13); cf. note 11.

34 An early interpretation regards this as a reference to Jesus' post-crucifixion descent to Hades, either to conquer Satan, to proclaim the gospel to the dead, or to draw faithful departed Israelites to himself before ascending (e.g., Tertullian, *An.* 55.2; cf. the addition of "first" (πρῶτον) after "he descended" (κατέβη) in several witnesses such as ℵ^2, B, C^3, K, L) (see Thielman 2010, pp. 268–72). Calvin (1965, p. 176) saw it as Jesus' incarnation, leading to his humility death; this is followed by many modern interpreters (e.g., Barth 1974, vol. 2, pp. 433–34; Best 1998, pp. 383–86; Hoehner 2002, pp. 533–36). While these possibilities have an impressive pedigree, the reading presented in this article also has significant support, with the added benefit that it is more closely integrated with the concerns of the discourse concerning gift-giving and the *ekklēsia* as the "body" of Christ in Eph 4.

35 As noted above, depending on the context, the phrase "the holy ones"/"the saints" (οἱ ἅγιοι) can refer either to the original apostolic community in Jerusalem or to all believers who share in their holiness.

36 Allen (2018) has offered an alternative post-supersessionist interpretation worthy of careful consideration. In Allen's view, the author has a positive view of specifically *Jewish* food practices and calendrical observances (cf. Martin 1996, pp. 124–34). The author urges the recipients not to allow adherents of non-Jewish ascetic religion to judge them for following such observances. This is because these observances are a (positive) shadow/outline of the future eschatological kingdom. Rather than being judged by others for their participation in the Jewish festivals, the recipients should pay due regard to "the corporate body of messiah" (p. 143). While this interpretation is possible, it does not fully explain the very close grammatical parallel between "shadow" and "body" (2:17). This parallel appears to be invoking a common double-sided metaphor. Furthermore, it does not easily account for the negative mention of "circumcision" in 2:11 which suggests that there were at least some Jewish elements in the religious philosophy.

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Essay

Jews, Gentiles, and "in Christ" Identity: A Post-Supersessionist Reading of Philippians

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Abstract: Interpretations of Philippians have commonly suggested that the letter seeks to demonstrate the worthlessness of Paul's own (former) Jewish identity, and thus that the Philippians should not be led astray by those who would persuade them to adopt the Jewish Law. Accordingly, it is assumed that Paul understands Judaism to have been superseded by Christianity and, moreover, that Christian identity has superseded all other identities that persons may have possessed upon entrance into the Christ community. In contrast to this long-standing interpretive tradition, this article contends that, for Paul, the ethnic distinction between Jew and gentile within the greater Christ community remains intact, along with a continued role for the Torah for both subgroups. Rather than advancing a supersessionist agenda, Paul fundamentally seeks in this letter to strengthen the Philippians' identity as members of the nations who have, alongside those in Israel, become members of God's holy, multiethnic people.

Keywords: Philippians; identity; covenant; Judaism; Israel; circumcision; mercy; righteous/ness; faithful/ness; supersession/ism

1. Introduction

In presenting a post-supersessionist interpretation of Paul's letter to the Philippians, this article will largely provide a condensed version of the arguments from my book, *Reading Philippians After Supersessionism: Jews, Gentiles, and Covenant Identity* (Zoccali 2017).[1] On the surface, Philippians easily lends itself to a supersessionist understanding of Paul's theology and missionary agenda. As I define it, "supersessionism" is the notion that "Christian" or "in Christ" identity is ultimately irreconcilable with Jewish identity. By extension, it can also indicate that all prior social identities are to be abandoned upon entrance into the Christ community.

So is Paul, in one way or another, indicating in Philippians that "in Christ" identity wholly supplants traditional Jewish identity[2] or, indeed, any other social identity members may possess?

Insights from contemporary social-psychological theory, including Social Identity and Self-Categorization theories (SIT and SCT, respectively) are useful in addressing the issue at hand. Simply stated, SIT is a theory that seeks to predict intergroup behavior vis-à-vis social identity. SCT is a related theory that concerns the matter of how individuals understand themselves and others in relation to groups to which they, respectively, belong (Turner 1987). "Social identity" is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his [sic] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1978). The importance of social groups is especially significant to the study of the New Testament given the general collectivist culture of the ancient Mediterranean world (Nebreda 2011, pp. 109–10).

An aspect of SIT/SCT that is integral to my reading of Paul concerns the role of superordinate social identities. A superordinate identity is a higher aggregate identity category to which persons may belong in addition to possessing other group affiliations.

Such larger social identifications serve to create a common in-group social identity, which may, in turn, reduce intergroup bias, and thus promote greater harmony and a basis for unified action among subordinate groups. Contemporary social-scientific research demonstrates that a common in-group social identity can be most successfully established if it simultaneously allows (in some fashion) for group members' continued identification with and commitment to their respective subordinate group affiliations (Stone and Crisp 2007, pp. 493–513).[3]

It is my contention that Paul understood "in Christ" identity in precisely these terms—a superordinate identity that allowed for the continuing saliency, however transformed, of subgroup identities, particularly that of Jew and gentile. In keeping with this observation, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul seeks to intensify the saliency of the Philippians' "in Christ" identity. Yet he does so in such a fashion that their prior ethnic identities—though subordinated, relativized, and transformed—nevertheless remain salient and enduring in light of the Philippians' allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and consequent entrance into the people of God.

2. Paul's Theological Rationale for Gentile Qua Gentile Inclusion

In Phil 1:1, Paul refers to his addressees as "holy ones." This is a designation that he almost certainly understood to point to the apocalyptic vision of Dan 7:13–27, in which the holy ones of the most high receive the kingdom of God. When applied to human beings, the title exclusively refers to Israel in the LXX and extrabiblical Jewish literature of the period. However, Paul uses this title not merely in reference to Jewish Christ allegiants but to gentiles as well. For many scholars, this move on his part is indicative of his conviction that the Christ community represents a "new Israel" that serves as a replacement for the Jewish people as traditionally defined. However, I contend that the title of "holy ones" functions as a superordinate identity descriptor and is thus deliberately used to include both Jews qua Jews and gentiles qua gentiles—Israel and the nations together—in the people of God. The question remains: what is Paul's theological rationale for the entrance of gentiles, as remaining distinct from Jews, into this group who are destined for the kingdom of God?

Three interrelated premises provide Paul with precisely such a rationale: (1) the seminal basis of covenant identity; (2) covenant and creation renewal; and (3) the eschatological restoration of Israel and consequent pilgrimage of the nations.

2.1. The Seminal Basis of Covenant Identity

In Phil 3:3a, Paul asserts, "For we are the circumcision." By making such an assertion, he is clearly claiming that the multiethnic Christ community is the covenant people of God.[4] So, again, how would it be possible for Paul to locate gentile Christ allegiants in God's covenant with Israel?

In short, Paul locates Christ allegiants in the covenant on the fundamental basis of God's *ḥesed.* Though always requiring the appropriate response of faithfulness to God (see, e.g., Mic 6:8; Hos 6:6–7), God's *ḥesed*, or covenant love and faithfulness manifest in God's sovereign mercy and grace, is primary to the covenant relationship rather than in the first place one's submission to Torah, including the rite of circumcision (see esp. Rom 3:3–5; 4:4–8).[5] The term *eleos* (mercy) is the normal translation in the LXX of *ḥesed*, and petitions for divine mercy predicated on God's *ḥesed* are otherwise ubiquitous. In both Galatians and Romans, letters that especially concern the relationship of Jews and gentiles, we find Paul explicitly predicating membership among God's people on God's mercy (Gal 6:15–16; 9:11–16; 11:28–32). The parallel concept of God's grace (*charis*) functions similarly for him (see esp. Rom 11:5–6).[6] The primacy of God's *ḥesed* is reflected here in Phil 1:2–11 and 2:12–13.

The central point of disagreement between the Pauline mission and Jews outside the Christ movement would lie strictly in the matter of how God's *ḥesed* is presently being revealed, and what faithful response is now required for those in covenant relationship with God as a result of this revelation. Non-Christ-allegiant Jews would have observed

no change in either the content of God's faithfulness or that of the faithfulness required on the part of God's people. In contrast, for Paul, the Christ event signals a dramatic and culminating shift in both: as the ultimate expression of God's *ḥesed*, the coming of Jesus Christ makes possible an expression of faithfulness indicative of covenant membership that does not require full Torah submission,[7] that is, Jewish identity as traditionally defined.

But it is one thing to claim that being a Jew does not in itself secure covenant identity (which would clearly not be a point of controversy). It is quite another thing to claim that God has, in fact, expanded covenant identity such that it is no longer coextensive with normative Jewish identity, as especially signified in first-century Judaism by the rite of circumcision. Understanding how Paul is able to connect the necessity of gentile inclusion in the covenant, and thus their identity alongside Jews as holy ones, with God's *ḥesed* revealed in Jesus Christ calls for an investigation into Paul's eschatological worldview as both informed by and informative to his reading of Scripture.

2.2. Covenant and Creation Renewal

It is, in my view, overwhelmingly clear that Paul's theology rests on a promise and fulfillment schema, in which the Christ event fulfills the promises of God to his people made in the Hebrew Scriptures (see esp. 1 Cor 10:11; 15:3–4; 2 Cor 1:20; 3:14–16; Gal 3:22). Accordingly, in Phil 3:3b he continues that the Philippian Christ community "serve/worship (*latreuō*) by the Spirit of God and claim honor (*kauxaomai*) in Christ Jesus." Integral to Paul's theology and apostolic mission is the belief that, as the very basis for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing and promises, the renewal of Israel's covenant[8] along with the entire created order[9] has now been inaugurated "in Christ."[10] In this eschatological renewal, the Spirit implants the Torah within God's people, giving them a new capacity for faithfulness.[11] It is this phenomenon of renewal that Scripture had prophesied would happen as a result of a fresh act of divine intervention motivated by God's *ḥesed* toward God's people.

As a derivative of the inauguration of the (re)new(ed) covenant and creation, Paul further understands the Torah's potential outcomes of "life" or "death" for God's people as being subsumed under God's final judgment, and as therefore centered on Jesus Christ (see esp. Deut 30:15–20 with Rom 6:23). In Paul's eschatological reading of Scripture, then, the experience of blessing or curse set in motion by obedience or disobedience to God's covenantal commands ultimately remained an open matter that would be settled once and for all in the *eschaton* when God would again intervene to redeem God's people. Thus, *the gospel and its acceptance have become for Paul the final substance and import of the call to obedience in the Torah, and thereby the means to life—interpreted by him in terms of resurrection or eternal life—for all people* (Rom 1:5; 8:1–4; 10:5–13). Failure to properly respond to the final expression of God's faithfulness/righteousness in Jesus Christ will ultimately mean death/destruction; an eschatological dynamic that is explicitly demonstrated in Phil 1:27–28 and 3:18–21.

2.3. The Eschatological Restoration of Israel and Consequent Pilgrimage of the Nations

The universal salvation wrought by the Christ event follows for Paul a particularly salvation-historical pattern, commonly referred to in contemporary New Testament scholarship as the "eschatological pilgrimage tradition."[12] There are a number of texts in the Hebrew Bible/LXX as well as the relevant extrabiblical Jewish literature that portray the eventual salvation of the nations as being triggered by Israel's restoration following God's judgment of exile and as inextricable from the restoration of the rest of creation. This dynamic is especially seen in the book of Isaiah.[13]

James A. Ware has importantly asserted that, as indicated by the frequency with which it is cited throughout the New Testament, the book of Isaiah was of particular importance to the early Christ movement, and not least to the Pauline mission. This is likely because of "the attention which that book devotes to the place of the nations in God's salvation. The relationship of the God of Israel to the nations is in Isaiah, to a greater degree than in any

other book of the Old Testament, a prominent and consistent theme" (Ware 2011, p. 59). Representing a programmatic oracle for the book as a literary whole is Isa 2:2–5, which envisages the nations streaming to Zion to learn Torah following Israel's final restoration.

Passages reflecting this eschatological pilgrimage concept are not only numerous and integral to the theological import of Isaiah as a whole, but they are generally associated with future expectations regarding the Davidic dynasty, which are, in turn, integral to the messianic expectations that Paul associates with Jesus Christ. Further demonstrative of this concept's import to Paul, it should be observed that the servant songs in Isaiah strongly resonate with the eschatological pilgrimage tradition and do so in a way that emphasizes the vocational dimension of God's election of Israel on behalf of the rest of creation—a vocation that is, for Paul, taken up and fulfilled by Jesus Christ and, by extension, the body of Christ allegiants. It is abundantly clear that Paul was heavily influenced by the Isaianic servant songs, particularly the fourth song in Isa 52:13—53:12 (Wagner 1998, pp. 193–222; Hofius 2004, pp. 175–83; Watson 2007). As many scholars suggest, the Christ hymn in Phil 2:6–11 is dependent upon the fourth song as its primary source, even perhaps representing "a conscious interpretation of the passage" (Ware 2011, p. 224). Moreover, Paul's exclamation in Phil 2:10–11, based on Isa 45:23, assumes the eschatological pilgrimage tradition that forms the greater context of the Isaiah passage, which he most probably knew well.

Thus, the Christ-allegiant gentiles in Philippi, as members of the nations living in the eschatological age, in embracing Paul's gospel are envisaged by him as those anticipated throughout Isaiah and elsewhere in the relevant Jewish literature. Namely, they are the recipients of God's redemptive work consequent to Israel's restoration, whereby the other nations of the earth would be brought into the "holy ones" of God, in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham of a multiethnic family (Rom 4; Gal 3).[14]

2.4. Implications of Paul's Theological Premises

There are at least four interrelated implications that stem from Paul's (1) understanding of the seminal basis of covenant identity, (2) conviction regarding covenant and creation renewal, and (3) appropriation of the eschatological pilgrimage tradition. First, because the seminal basis of covenant identity has always been God's faithfulness to God's people, it is only the content of the appropriate faithful response to God that has changed for Paul because of the climax of God's *ḥesed* in the Christ event; it is now allegiance to Jesus Christ (Phil 2:9–11; Rom 1:2–5, 16–17). Second, the Christ event is the very mechanism in which God's promises in Torah to his people are fulfilled. It is in this light that Paul can understand the identity of his gentile converts: they are participants in covenant and creation renewal and, as such, have had Torah written on their hearts via the Spirit (Rom 2:15, 29; 2 Cor 3:3). Third, contrary to common assumptions in both scholarly and lay circles, perfect obedience to God's Torah is not an obstacle Paul's gospel overcomes, but a goal that is thereby obtained and characteristic of the life that God promised to God's people (Phil 3:10–14; Rom 6:1–14). Accordingly, the term *pistis* and its cognates throughout the Pauline corpus, including here in Philippians (1:25, 27, 29; 2:17; 3:9), necessarily reflect this idea of "faithfulness," "fidelity," or "allegiance," rather than mere "faith" or "belief" (see esp. Phil 1:10–11, 27; 2:12–15; Campbell 2005, pp. 178–88). Indeed, as evident in his moral exhortations to the communities he addresses in his letters, Paul poses strict obedience to God as being part and parcel of salvation in Christ.[15]

Fourth, the way in which the Torah may be obeyed is not univocal, as Paul unmistakably suggests elsewhere.[16] All covenant members must submit as empowered by the Spirit to the overarching ethical vision of Torah—that is, the doing of justice and righteousness, which are inextricable to the commandment regarding love of neighbor (Lev 19:18). This Jew and gentile Torah-based praxis, which is fulfilled in the (re)new(-ed) covenant and creation, is referred to by Paul as "Christ's Torah" in his letters to the Galatians and Corinthians (Gal 6:2; 1 Cor 9:21; cf. Rom 3:27). The nonnegotiable commitment of the multiethnic Christ community to Christ's Torah is indicated in 1 Cor 7:19. Yet, Paul naturally expects Jewish Christ allegiants to continue in full Torah submission, which therefore includes

those specific laws that continue to distinguish Jewish from gentile identity, preeminently circumcision and also, e.g., kashrut and Sabbath observance, as he indicates in 1 Cor 7:17, 20.[17] In all, as explicitly demonstrated in several places,[18] Paul continues to differentiate between Jews and gentiles within the Christ movement, and this differentiation makes best sense in terms of the eschatological pilgrimage tradition that sees the nations qua nations joining a restored Israel in the eschaton.

3. Communal Threat Part 1: The Danger of Jewish Over-Identification

The issue of Jewish identity in relation to the Christ movement is particularly pertinent to Phil 3. Contemporary scholars have largely understood Phil 3:1–9 as representing, at least in some respect, an anti-Jewish polemic, in which Judaism is presented as the necessary foil to Paul's "Christian" claims. By contrast, there are, in my view, two interrelated groups that are likely targets for Paul's rhetoric in this section of the letter.

It is highly improbable that Paul is here warning the Philippians of individuals or groups who would not have some form of intimate contact with the Christ community. He has already pointed to those oppositional forces who clearly stand wholly outside the community (Phil 1:27–30; 2:15) and who pose an unambiguous present threat to them. It is incomprehensible that he would then assert that it is a "safeguard" to implore the community to "beware" of these same persons. This sort of warning strongly implies a certain perceived ambiguity and influence on the community that, however attractive or pragmatic for them, Paul finds to be problematic and, ultimately, inconsistent with the implications of his gospel. In short, the passage suggests a (potential) *danger from within*, which Paul finds necessary to expose.

Building especially off Mark D. Nanos's work on Galatians (Nanos 2002), it is my suggestion that one of those potential influences that he may have in mind are those who would advocate that the members of the Philippian Christ community undergo proselyte conversion to Judaism. Paul's entire discourse in Phil 3:1–9 assumes that his audience would readily accept the high value of his Jewish background. The Philippian Christ community was founded by a Jewish apostle, had given allegiance to a Jewish messiah, worshipped the God of Israel, observed Jewish ethics, provided financial aid to Jewish groups in Judea, and, in all, adopted the Jewish symbolic universe. However, they did all this while remaining members of the nations, and not by becoming Jews. This situation was an entirely unique phenomenon, with no precedent outside of the fledgling Christ movement. It differed significantly from the experience of gentile synagogue associates who, despite sympathizing in various degrees with Judaism, did not, as a rule, abandon their participation in the local *polis*, which involved pagan activities that would be irreconcilable with membership in the Christ community.[19] Although there was likely only a small Jewish population in Philippi (as most scholars conclude), there nevertheless may have existed at least a perception among some within the Christ community that there was inherent value found in possessing normative Jewish identity.

Although not uniformly observed or accepted by all first-century Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora, the ritual process of proselyte conversion to Judaism would mean departure from one's non-Jewish communal network and full immersion into the local Jewish community. Culminating this process for men was the rite of circumcision. The possibility of proselytizing to Judaism may have been potentially compelling to gentile Christ allegiants in Philippi as both a remedy for their perceived social ambiguity, possessing neither "pagan" nor Jewish identity, and for their experience of persecution and suffering as a result of their newly acquired and socially subversive praxis as members of the Christ community—abstention from certain activities of the *polis* that would have been deemed as idolatrous, especially as these activities related to the imperial cult.

While there may have been varying degrees of assimilation among Jews throughout the Diaspora, it is unquestionably the case that there were certain activities from which Jewish groups generally refrained by permission from the Empire, including participation in the imperial cult.[20] Official legislation enforcing participation in the imperial cult did

not exist, but significant social pressure likely would have been exerted on all members of the *polis*, including noncitizens, for failure to venerate the cult (a failure that would have been demonstrated through neglect of local civic cults and various other aspects of public life), which could have been perceived as endangering the greater community (Tellbe 2001, pp. 35, 59; Harland 2003, p. 243).

A connected, perhaps even primary, form of social pressure experienced by gentile Christ allegiants in Philippi may have been economic in nature, as such relationships with those outside the Christ community would have largely broken down (Oakes 2007, pp. 89–100). In light of these strained economic relations, Paul's gentile converts may have sought entrance into the Jewish communal network, which could have significantly mitigated potential difficulties that arose from their praxis and general theological/ideological commitments. Accordingly, the potential influx of migrant service workers into the Philippian Christ community, some of whom may have been Jewish sympathizers (Keener 2012, p. 2396), could have provided a partial basis for Paul's concern that such influences might spur at least a perception among some members that becoming a Jewish proselyte could open up the possibility of relief from the opposition they encountered, given that the Jewish community elsewhere did not seem to experience the same sort of difficulties, despite quite similar praxis and ideological commitments.

However, for Paul, given the fulfillment of the promises in the dispensation[21] of Christ, the rite of circumcision in accordance with the process of proselyte conversion is irreconcilable with membership in the Christ community. It should be viewed, therefore, as no more than mutilation (Phil 3:2). The gentile Philippians are to accept, rather, any consequent marginality, social death, or even persecution, as Paul himself had endured (Phil 1:13–17, 27–30; 2:17; 3:10; see also 1 Thess 1:6; 2:1–2; 14–16; 3:1–10; Gal 5:11; 6:12, 14, 17; 2 Cor 4:7–12; 7:5; 11:22–25) and as demonstrated by Christ himself (Phil 2:6–8; see also 2 Cor 8:9). In this light, Phil 3:1–9 may seek, at least in part, to dissuade gentile Christ allegiants from what Paul understands as a de facto departure from the Christ movement—proselyte conversion to Judaism, which for him is no better than a reversion to paganism (Gal 4:8–11). It would be, in effect, to deny the faithfulness of God and to posit oneself outside the sphere of salvation that God has made possible (Gal 2:15–21; 3:10–14). In other words, *for gentiles to pursue proselyte conversion (or for them to be inspired to do so) is to live as though nothing had in fact happened in Christ—that Israel's restoration had not been inaugurated, and the nations qua nations are not now being brought into the people of God* (Zoccali 2015).

4. Communal Threat Part 2: The Danger of Gentile Over-Identification

As Paul suggests in 1 Thess 4:5; 1 Cor 5:1, 9–13; 6; 10; and 12:2, Christ allegiants from the nations have ceased being members of the nations estranged from the God of Israel and separated from God's covenant people—i.e., "pagans" (Gal 2:15; Eph 2:11–22). Their praxis must uncompromisingly reflect this new status, regardless of any conflict that might result—conflict that would be inevitable because, although inaugurated, the eschatological age is not yet fully consummated.

4.1. Dogs and Evil Workers

After his exhortation to "rejoice" in Phil 3:1, Paul launches into his warning to the Philippian Christ community. It should initially be observed that precise referents to the first two epithets, "dogs" (*kunas*) and "evil workers" (*kakous ergatas*), are not prima facie warranted. The language could readily apply to any individuals or groups who from Paul's perspective should properly stand outside the community (cf. esp. Rev 22:15) and may pose some element of harm for them. Nanos (2009, pp. 448–92) has demonstrated that the virtually unanimous scholarly assumption that "dogs" was a common Jewish invective toward gentiles is without merit. It is therefore highly unlikely that Paul is simply reversing this invective in condemnation of Jews. The literary evidence from the period demonstrates it to be, rather, a general slur.

It is also commonly supposed that the reference to "evil workers" points to so-called Judaizers, as *ergatai* ("workers") is a term frequently used for missionaries.[22] However, it seems to me that "evil workers" (*kakous ergatas*) simply refers to those whose actions are the antithesis of that which should characterize the Christ community—i.e., those who do evil (cf. Luke 13:27).[23] In keeping with this observation, Steven E. Fowl (2005, p. 145) has pointed out that Paul may have in mind the phrase frequently employed in the Psalter, "workers of iniquity."[24]

4.2. The Mutilation

The first two invectives, even if perhaps not strictly referring to the same group in synonymous fashion, at minimum overlap with the referent of the third epithet, "the mutilation" (*tēn katatouēn*). Given his rhetoric in Phil 1:14–17; 2:20–21; and 3:18–20, as well as his claim that the Philippian Christ community represents "the circumcision" who "worship/serve by the Spirit of God," "the mutilation," as with the other two epithets, likely represents potential entrants into the covenant community who would join under false pretenses, and/or internal influences of some sort that would likewise misrepresent or otherwise skew the implications of "in Christ" identity.

That is, while demonstrating a pretense of commitment to the gospel, they would be seeking their own interests or gain (Phil 3:7; cf. 2:3–4), as generally consistent with the social values of the greater Greco-Roman world, but in contradistinction to the implications of covenant and creation renewal. In doing so, they would invariably be placing confidence in the "flesh," attempting to manipulate circumstances according to their own power, sensibilities, and personal advantage (as indicative of the present/old order; Phil 3:19; Gal 1:4), rather than placing complete trust in and reliance upon God's act in Christ and the concomitant empowering of the Spirit (as indicative of the dawning eschatological age; Phil 3:20; 2 Cor 4:16–18), regardless of the consequences—i.e., "the sharing of [Christ's] sufferings" (Phil 3:10; see also 2 Cor 4:7–11; 1 Cor 4:8–13; cf. Mark 13:9–13). As J. B. Tyson aptly suggests, Paul makes an implicit comparison here between "two groups." They "differ in that one has confidence in the flesh, and the other expects transformation of the flesh" (Tyson 1976, p. 93).[25]

Thus, as far as Paul is concerned, "the mutilation" are (or would be) individuals who have not authentically given allegiance to Jesus Christ, and whose praxis does not ultimately accord with that which should characterize the Christ community, and therefore the first two epithets. Because they place trust in their own devices and/or relative status vis-à-vis the larger Greco-Roman world rather than in God's act in Christ, such individuals represent a distortion of the true covenant people and are therefore representatives of "the mutilation" rather than "the circumcision."

In keeping with this reading, Fowl makes the interesting observation "that in Lev 21:5 those sons of Aaron who have 'mutilated' themselves are barred from performing service in the Temple" (Fowl 2005, p. 148). I would additionally note here Deut 23:1 LXX, which forbids anyone with mutilated genitals from entering the *ekklēsia* of the Lord. Particularly in this light, Paul may not be (strictly) using "mutilation" in an ironic sense indicative of the rite of physical circumcision, as per the process of proselyte conversion to Judaism, or, for that matter, in a literal sense, as per the castration practices of local pagan cults. He may instead be employing the epithet more generally, as metaphorically representative of those who should be excluded from the (re)new(ed) covenant and creation multiethnic worshiping/serving assembly, to the extent that they remain committed to a mindset and course of action that prove to be fundamentally out of step with the teaching the community has received from Paul, and thus failing to embody the will of God (Rom 12:1–2).

It may very well be, then, that he also has in mind here those advocating a compromised disposition toward the greater civic community, including preeminently a laxer position on idolatry. Those proposing such a course of action might include individuals possessing a higher socioeconomic status than most of the Philippian Christ community, and/or were imperial slaves, *liberti*, or even Roman citizens who may have had some level

of influence to mitigate any civic or socioeconomic oppression community members were facing, though not without some alteration of community praxis.

5. Intensifying In-Group Saliency

Research drawing together insights from SIT/SCT has demonstrated that prototypical group members tend to demonstrate greater loyalty to the group when it is under significant threat, whereas peripheral members are far more unpredictable in their response (Jetten et al. 1997, pp. 635–57)—a social-psychological reality that Paul surely understood intuitively. While he may have been confident that the core members of the Philippian Christ community would ultimately "stand firm/in one spirit" (Phil 1:27; 4:1) amid pressures to conform their identity and praxis in ways that would contradict the implications of the gospel, he likely would have had far less certainty about new entrants, whose negative influence could then spread to the whole community, placing it at risk (Cinnirella 1998, p. 241).[26]

As Paul pointed out to the Corinthian and Galatian Christ communities, "a little yeast leavens the whole batch" (Gal 5:9; 1 Cor 5:6). Perhaps it was his own lens of suspicion regarding such peripheral members that compelled him to warn the entire community in this passage. Philippians 3:2 may not point to precise individuals who could be named by Paul, or even perhaps by the Philippians themselves. Rather, it may point more generally to a potential group (however actual in terms of the larger Christ movement; Phil 3:18) serving as the foil for Paul's rhetorical goal of inhibiting any who might ultimately fall into this category of "out-group" threat (i.e., "the mutilation") by simultaneously promoting a common in-group identity (i.e., "the circumcision") and thereby encouraging peripheral members toward the center (Phil 1:27). Throughout the letter, Paul utilizes stereotyping to draw a sharp contrast between the character of the Christ community (i.e., in-group) and that of the greater Philippian/Greco-Roman society (i.e., out-group) (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Stereotypes.

Philippians 2:14; 3:2, 17–21	
Out-Group	**In-Group**
Crooked and perverse	Blameless and innocent
Dogs	Children of God without blemish
Evil workers	Shining like stars in the world
The mutilation	The circumcision
Glory in their shame	Who worship by the Spirit of God
Enemies of the cross	Boast in Christ Jesus
God is their belly	No confidence in the flesh
Minds set on earthly things	Citizenship is in heaven
End is destruction	Will experience a transformation into glory

His rhetoric here may therefore be understood as negotiating the underlying sociocognitive processes of social categorization and social comparison. These processes serve to strengthen intergroup boundaries, and they provide for self-evaluation and self-enhancement of group members in the assumption "that people have a basic need to see themselves in a positive light in relation to relevant others (i.e., to have an evaluatively positive self-concept), and that self-enhancement can be achieved in groups by making comparisons between the in-group and relevant out-groups in ways that favor the in-group" (Hogg et al. 1995, p. 260).

Accordingly, Phil 3:2–3 would seem to function as a means of clarifying for the Christ community who genuinely represents "us" over against "them," with the purpose of instigating conformity to the implications of his gospel among group members, particularly

those on the periphery, against pressures working to distort this shared identity (Phil 2:15). The passage read purely in terms of Paul's concerns about the Philippians' sense of intragroup solidarity, and his attempt to make the Philippians' "in Christ" identity more salient over against either their prior (non-Jewish) social identities or the prospect of Jewish proselyte status, finds more immediate correspondence with several of his appeals to the community throughout the letter (1:27; 2:5; 3:15).

As is also well established in social-psychological research, affective states influence social cognition. Positive affective states have been shown to signal familiarity (Garcia-Marques et al. 2004, pp. 585–93), as well as reduce racial bias (Ito et al. 2006, pp. 256–61), indicating that collective emotional positivity is vital for improving the perception of a common social identity among group members and the attainment, then, of intragroup unity. Particularly given Paul's awareness of the community's precarious circumstances, his prohibitions against "grumblings and arguments" (Phil 2:14) and "anxiety" (Phil 4:6), his emphasis on positive thinking (Phil 4:8), and his frequent exhortations to "rejoice" in the midst of, and even (in a certain sense) as a response to, opposition and suffering (Phil 2:17–18; 3:1; 4:4; cf. Matt 5:11–12) can similarly be understood as a concerted attempt to encourage social cohesion among the Philippian Christ allegiants.

Moreover, Paul's assertions regarding the surety of God's sovereign purposes being accomplished in and through the community (Phil 1:5–6) and the provision of divine empowerment (Phil 2:13), in combination with his *koinōnia* language regarding the community's sharing in the gospel (Phil 1:5), God's grace (Phil 1:7), the activity of the Spirit (Phil 2:1), and especially (by extension) the sufferings of Christ (Phil 3:10; 1:29–30), represent no less his aim to strengthen in-group identity salience and solidarity through sheer discursive power. In all, Paul was a seeming realist who understood well the challenges inherent to intra- and intergroup dynamics and who made every effort to ensure the continued viability of the Christ community, especially in light of what was in this case a community experiencing intense external pressures, and likely internal ones as a result.

6. "In Christ" Identity and the Rhetoric of Comparison

But given that Paul has offered a resume of his past achievement in Judaism only to then declare it to be "crap" (Phil 3:8), it is important for any post-supersessionist reading to explain how Paul could maintain the importance and abiding salience of his Jewish identity while also regarding his "in Christ" identity to be exceedingly more important.

It has been proposed that Paul's self-description as an archetypal Jew serves merely as a rhetorical mechanism, in which he ascribes to himself the highest authority within Judaism to then denounce Judaism and Jewish identity in favor of a "Christian" identity—a reading that goes back at least as far as John Chrysostom.[27] Integral to this reading is the assumption that Judaism is an inherently flawed religion, which, at least as it came to be practiced by the late Second Temple period, precipitated a collective attitude among Jews of self-righteousness and presumption toward God. An immediate problem with this view is that it fundamentally mischaracterizes Judaism as a religion of "work-righteousness," rather than an ethnicity whose religious elements were predicated first upon God's merciful and gracious activity on behalf of Israel. This divine activity centrally included the giving of Torah, to which obedience was understood as the only appropriate response to God's faithfulness shown to Israel, as well as being indicative of the very deliverance God had provided them.

Since Paul's teaching to the Philippians (as well as to the other Christ communities he addresses in his extant letters) presupposes this same covenantal dynamic, which was operative in at least most strands of late Second Temple Judaism, it is difficult to believe that Paul could be suggesting that there was something problematic with Jewish identity in and of itself. Rather, Paul's contention with non-Christ-allegiant Judaism is fundamentally centered on the question of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth—whether he is the Christ, and therefore Lord and Savior.

Thus, the intra-Jewish debate in which Paul was involved had first and foremost to do with his conviction concerning Jesus—that he is the ultimate means of reconciliation and right standing with God, and, by virtue of his resurrection from the dead, that the new age has now dawned, resulting in the ingathering of gentiles qua gentiles into the people of God on the singular basis of their allegiance to Israel's Christ. In light of this conviction, I suggest that what is found in Paul's autobiographical account is not the abandoning but rather the subordination and alteration of his Pharisaic-Jewish identity to the new superordinate identity he has attained "in Christ"—and this precisely in the context of the culmination of salvation history, according to which the promises to the Jewish ancestors are now being fulfilled (Rom 11:25–28; 15:8–9). Elsewhere, Paul is quite clear that Jewish identity and praxis are of much value (Rom 3:1). What Paul is suggesting in Phil 3, then, is that *in comparison to knowing Christ even the most highly regarded things infinitely pale in significance* (Campbell 2013, p. 213).

Where I believe a great deal of scholarship has gone wrong on this issue is confusing the salvation-historical contrast that Paul presupposes between the dispensations before and after Christ, particularly in terms of the implications for gentiles, and how the Torah itself may continue to function in the dispensation of Christ. Understanding Paul's underlying convictions regarding the relationship of Christ and Torah provides the proper context for interpreting Paul's autobiography in Phil 3:4–9.

It should initially be observed that although Israel's failure to abide by the covenant is portrayed as fully anticipated by God (Deut 30:1; 31:16–22), there is no hint anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures that God's standard of obedience is an impossible one. Rather, obedience to God is consistently portrayed as humanly achievable,[28] and this perception is generally presupposed in the relevant extrabiblical Jewish literature of the period. Thus, when Paul reflects upon his life in Judaism here and claims to have been "blameless" under the Torah (v. 6), he is claiming that he was faithful to the stipulations of God's merciful and gracious election of Israel, including his appropriate participation in the temple cult and active repentance from sin, according to which his covenant standing was sustained (Pss 32; 51). But what could he be indicating in Phil 3:9: "and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own—the one from Torah"?

Paul came to believe that righteous status under the terms of the former dispensation of Torah[29] was always intended by God to be merely provisional and requiring all along confirmation through a fresh act of divine intervention in fulfillment of the promises (2 Cor 3:7–11). In Phil 3:4–9, Paul is making clear that in the eschatological age one's covenant membership and right standing with God cannot be secured by any other means than Christ and the Spirit. Any such attempt has become merely a "righteous status" of one's own estimation (i.e., of the "flesh," or old order of things), rather than the single means to righteousness that God has *now* made possible (Rom 3:20–26; 9:30—10:4; see also esp. Isa 45:22–25 LXX). *It is therefore ineffectual.*

Verses 4–9 are decidedly not a denunciation of human achievement and desire to merit favor with God. Indeed, Paul instructs the Philippians (as he does every Christ community he addresses in his letters) to strive for greater faithfulness to God, as manifest in their obedient actions (Phil 1:6–11; 2:12–13), and he appeals to his own striving for resurrection life in the present time as an example to be emulated by the community (Phil 3:10–14; see also 1 Cor 9:24–27). Nor is Paul likely expressing here a rejection of "automatic national privilege," as suggested by N. T. Wright (Wright 1993, pp. 239–41) and Markus Bockmuehl (Bockmuehl 1998, p. 203). Rather, these verses are exactly an affirmation of God's faithfulness in once and for all redeeming Israel and all creation—that is, the (apocalyptic) culmination of salvation history in God's act in Christ (Phil 3:12b).

God's faithfulness in bringing about the fulfillment of the promises, securing redemption for both Israel and the nations, is to be answered by the Philippians' continued faithfulness to God vis-à-vis the gospel of the Jesus Christ. This eschatological and covenantal dynamic is fully summarized in the phrase appearing in Phil 3:9, *pisteōs christou*, which I translate: "faithfulness realized in Christ"—that is, the culmination of God's faithfulness

in the Christ event that calls for and enables the faithfulness of God's people (Phil 2:12–13; 3:12; see also Rom 1:17; 3:27).[30]

The phenomenon of faithfulness, both human and divine, is central to and ultimately inseparable from the question of identity for the Philippians. To illustrate the point, Paul uses the interrelated examples of himself and Jesus Christ. They each voluntarily subordinated this respective identity to another, which resulted in their original identity having undergone a (radical) transformation, but not, in any way, a negation. That is, neither Jesus Christ nor the apostle Paul fundamentally ceased being what they once were. However, both Jesus and Paul placed God's purposes above the rights, privileges, and immediate self-interests that were properly their own (2 Cor 8:9; Rom 15:3; 1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 4:8–12; 11:23—12:10). Having become a Jewish peasant ultimately crucified by the Empire, Jesus chose not to exploit his identity as being "equal with God" (Phil 2:6–8). For Paul, the subordination of his Pharisaic-Jewish identity to that which he now possessed in Christ meant that, not only as a Christ allegiant but also an apostle, he was now suffering in prison as a result.[31] But, like Christ's wrongful execution on the cross, even this was interpreted by Paul as ultimately serving God's good purposes on behalf of all creation, including both Israel and the other nations (Phil 1:12–14).

Paul's autobiography, shaped here by the story of Jesus Christ, provides, in turn, precedence, pattern, and motivation for the Philippian Christ allegiants to live true to the identity that they now possess as members of the Christ community, no matter what the cost. As gentiles who have turned to the God of Israel through the risen Christ (i.e., as righteous gentiles), they must refrain from any praxis that conflicts with the full implications of the gospel. They are no longer pagan idolaters but have been brought into God's covenant people alongside Israel, and they must live and act accordingly, even if this means further marginalization, social death, economic loss, civic persecution, and/or suffering of any sort. Such is the immensely difficult challenge posed by Paul to the Philippian Christ community, though he hopes that his own willingness to sacrifice everything for the cause of the gospel, along with that of the other exemplars to which he points (Timothy, Epaphroditus), will encourage the whole community to stand firm in their allegiance to Jesus Christ, the chief exemplar of a cruciform life in service to the other.

7. Conclusions

I have argued that Paul's letter to the Philippians is best understood through a post-supersessionist lens, in which Paul's gospel of Jesus Christ in no way represents the supersession of Jewish identity, Torah-shaped praxis, or, further still, any ethnic identity upon entrance into the Christ community. Although Phil 3 has been commonly read as an invective against Judaism, which has now been replaced by "Christianity," it has been suggested here that the passage is best understood as an exhortation to the Philippians to remain as they are, that is, members of the nations who have given allegiance to Jesus Christ. This phenomenon was understood by Paul to be in fulfillment of the prophetic hope of the inclusion of the nations among God's people following Israel's restoration, in accordance with God's faithfulness to the promises of covenant and creation renewal. Thus, together with the faithful among Israel, they are the "holy ones" who will receive the kingdom as foreseen in the book of Daniel, and, as such, they have become part of a decidedly Jewish movement embedded within the spectrum of views contained within first-century Judaism.

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Notes

1 The ensuing content in its revised form is used with permission (www.wipfandstock.com accessed on 2 December 2022).

2 Judaism in the first century represented not foremost a "religion" (especially not one in competition with a religion called "Christianity"), but what perhaps can best be described (however in etic fashion) as an ethnicity defined by various cultural

indicia, including a shared myth of ancestry, geographic origins, history, beliefs, customs, etc., which thus functioned to demarcate Jews from other social groups of the period. Despite the ambiguities it presented for women, the primary marker of Jewish identity by this time was circumcision, either on the eighth day for native-born Jews, or, for those communities who accepted the legitimacy of it, as the culmination of the course of proselyte conversion to Judaism.

3 As a Diaspora Jew at home in both the Jewish and non-Jewish world, and a seasoned missionary who had already founded a number of ethnically mixed communities, it would not be surprising for Paul to have recognized and appreciated this social dynamic that seems to be constitutive of the human condition.

4 It might be suggested that the first-person plural "we" is a reference not to the community but to Paul and the Jewish members of the Pauline mission. However, in my view, such an understanding fails in light of the presence of the first-person plural in Phil 3:16, 20–21, where it unambiguously refers to the whole community and not the Pauline mission in particular.

5 See (Routledge 1995). God's *ḥesed* is inextricable from the notion of God's own righteousness and is what ultimately secures one's righteous status among God's people (e.g., Pss 33:4–5; 36:5–10; 40:4–13; 85:4–13; 89:14–37; 98:1–3; 103; 1 Kgs 8:23; Jer 9:23–24; Hos 10:12; see also the LXX's translation of *ḥesed* as *dikaiosunē* in Gen 24:27; 32:11; Exod 15:13; 34:7) (Routledge 1995, pp. 188–95). It is, accordingly, the basis for redemption and reconciliation (Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–19; 2 Tim 2:13; Exod 15:13; 34:6–7; Num 14:18–19; Pss 25:7–10; 89; 107; 136; 143; Isa 54:8–10; Jer 31:3; 33:11; Lam 3:22–32; Dan 9:4–19; Hos 2:19–23; Joel 2:12–13; Mic 7:18–20; Jonah 4:2).

6 For a discussion on the close connection of *ḥesed* with *raḥamim* (mercy) and *ḥen* (grace) in the MT, see (Routledge 1995, pp. 190–93).

7 Note that "full Torah submission" does not mean "perfect obedience." Rather, in view is the full body of ordinances contained in the Torah, thereby including those laws that, for Paul, continue to distinguish Jewish identity from gentile identity, including preeminently circumcision.

8 E.g., Deut 30:1–6; Isa 59:21; Jer 31:31–40; Ezek 36:22–32; Bar 2:30–35; Jub 1:21–24; CD 3.10–20; 1QS 1.16—2.25.

9 E.g., Isa 65:17–25; Zech 9:10; Sir 44:19–21; 1 QH 13.15–18; 17.15; 1 En. 5.6–7.

10 Rom 11:27; 1 Cor 11:23–26; 2 Cor 3:3–18; Gal 4:24–28; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11; Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Cor 3:21–23; 6:2; 15:20–28; Col 1:15–20; Eph 1:7–14; for the inextricability of covenant and creation renewal in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, see similarly Jub. 1:23–29; 4:26; 19:21–25; 22.

11 Rom 2:14–16, 25–29; 7:6; 8:1–11; Gal 3:2–5; 4:6; 5:5; 1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 3:6.

12 I am aware that some scholars, such as Terence L. Donaldson, question the import of this tradition for Paul. Please see my full defense of this tradition as being integral to Paul's worldview in (Zoccali 2017).

13 E.g., Isa 2:2–5; 11:1–10; 19:18–25; 25:6–10; 42:1–9; 45:22–23; 49:6; 51:4–6; 56:6–8; 66:18–21; see also Jer 3:17; 16:19–21; Amos 9:11–12 LXX; Mic 4:1–3.

14 See (Korner 2017) for a substantive argument regarding Paul's understanding that the *ekklēsiai* represent the sacred site to which the people of God are being gathered in the eschaton, now inaugurated by virtue of the Christ event.

15 Paul holds that Christ allegiants attain to moral perfection at the general resurrection; Phil 1:6; 3:20–21; 1 Cor 15:50–58.

16 E.g., Rom 2:25–29; 4:11–12, 16; 14:1–15:4; 1 Cor 7:17–20. Paul advocates what I have called "variegated covenantal expression," in that Christ allegiants can express their faithfulness to God in a diversity of ways within the broader boundaries of the appropriate communal ethos and praxis that Paul articulates throughout his letters. On the general call to Torah obedience as well as the variegated nature of such obedience, in addition to the more expansive discussion in (Zoccali 2017). See further here (Zoccali 2010, pp. 55–170; 2015; 2020, pp. 257–91).

17 Despite the popularity of the claim, Paul knows nothing of a "Law-free" gospel in any sort of absolute sense of that phrase. Being in Christ means that Jews and gentiles are no longer under the dispensation of Torah (Gal 3:23–29; 5:18; Rom 6:14; 7:6; 1 Cor 9:20; see also 2 Cor 3:3–18), but that does not mean that the Torah ceases altogether to play an important role for Jews in particular, and the Christ community collectively. Paul is otherwise unambiguous that his gospel confirms the Torah and does not overthrow it (Rom 3:31).

18 E.g., Rom 1:16; 2:25; 3:30; 4:12, 16; 9:24; 11:11–32; 15:7–13; 1 Cor 1:23–24; and 7:17–20.

19 Although I do not follow all her conclusions, on this point see (Fredriksen 2017, pp. 49–130).

20 It should be noted that there was not a single imperial cult; distinctions in orientation and practice existed in different regions of the Empire.

21 Note that my use of the term "dispensation" is *not* intended to invoke the system of theology known as "Dispensationalism".

22 Matt 9:37–38; Luke 10:2, 7; 2 Cor 11:13; 1 Tim 5:18; 2 Tim 2:15; Did. 13:2.

23 Cf. Paul's reference to the *good* work of God and the Christ community (Phil 1:6; 2:12–13).

24 E.g., LXX Pss 5:5; 6:8; 13:4; 35:12; 52:4; 58:2, 5; 91:7, 9; 93:4, 16; 118:3; 124:5; 140:4, 9.

25 Paul warns the Roman Christ community of these same sorts of persons in Rom 16:17–18; also compare Acts 20:29–32 with Phil 3:2, 18.

[26] This concern is even more understandable given the possible turnover within the Philippian Christ community due to the probably significant numbers of migrant workers engaged in specialized service occupations (Damico and Chavez 2015, p. 267; Oakes 2007, p. 35).

[27] John Chrysostom, St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, homily 10. For an excellent discussion on Chrysostom's treatment of this passage (see Jacob 2006, pp. 267–86).

[28] E.g., Deut 12:12–21; 30:11–14; Mic 6:8; Isa 1:10–20; 5:7; 56:1; Jer 7:3–7, 21–26; Amos 5:14–15, 21–27; Hos 6:6–7; see also Gen 6:9; Job 1:1; Tob 1:3.

[29] These are what Paul elsewhere refers to as the *ergōn nomou* ("works of Torah"), a phrase that functions as a synecdoche for Jewish identity and thus covenant identity in the dispensation before Christ (Rom 3:20; 3:27; 4:2; 9:12; 11:5; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). As noted above, with the coming of Christ, the markers of covenant identity have been transformed to allegiance to Jesus Christ and reception of the Spirit, i.e., *pistis* (Rom 1:16–17; 3:21–26; Gal 3:21–29).

[30] I translate *pisteōs [Iēsou] christou* (e.g., Gal 2:16; 3:22; Rom 3:26) such that it is essentially synonymous with the gospel, that is, God's faithful eschatological act of redemption/reconciliation/restoration through Jesus Christ, which calls for and enables the human response of fidelity to God (cf. Gal 3:13; 4:4–5; see similarly Martyn 1997, p. 314). For a recent analysis of *pistis christou* as an "eschatological event" (a so-called third view that moves beyond the subjective or objective genitive debate), see (Schliesser 2016, pp. 277–300). For a similar interpretation here (cf. also Bockmuehl 1998, p. 211; Fowl 2005, p. 154). See additionally on this matter in (Zoccali 2017).

[31] In this respect, Paul would be conducting here a *qal wahomer* style of argumentation, in which his willingness to relativize his own prized ethnic identity and status in favor of "in Christ" identity, and suffer greatly in the process, is all the more reason for the Philippian Christ allegiants to do likewise.

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Article

The Problem(s) of Reading 1 Peter after Supersessionism

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Abstract: Recently, there has been a growing interest in the creative identity formation strategies found in 1 Peter, especially concerning the way that the letter appropriates the Jewish scriptures and Israel's privileges, promises, and vocation. While some find these strategies to be beneficial, others regard them as problematic because they promote a posture of supersessionism toward Israel. Some have suggested that the problem of supersessionism can be ameliorated by noting the silence in the letter regarding the relationship between Israel and the gentile addressees. This silence creates theological and hermeneutical space to go outside of the text itself to resolve the tension. But the move to go outside of the text can create its own problems because of the influential "standard canonical narrative", which fills the silence and exerts pressure on the reader to replace Israel with the church. This article seeks to demonstrate that the text of 1 Peter itself pushes against a supposed supersessionist posture in part because such a reading is inconsistent with the claims made about God, but also because the implicit narrative in the letter along with the exhortations to distance oneself from a gentile way of life necessitate that the addressees "appropriate Israelhood" without expropriating Israel.

Keywords: 1 Peter; supersessionism; post-supersessionism; replacement theology; identity formation; Jewish–Christian relations; standard canonical narrative; postcolonial criticism

> *In a way virtually unique among Christian canonical writings, 1 Peter has appropriated the language of Israel for the church in such a way that Israel as a totality has become for this letter the controlling metaphor in terms of which its theology is expressed . . . In 1 Peter, the language and hence the reality of Israel pass without remainder into the language and hence the reality of the new people of God. As a result, that language is more than simply illustrative—it is foundational and constitutive for the Christian community in a way that has not always been recognized by those who have studied this epistle.*
>
> (Achtemeier 1996, p. 69).

1. The Problematic Identity Formation Strategy of 1 Peter

The once-marginalized letter of 1 Peter now has become a popular place to explore the social dimensions of early Christianity and in particular the way in which Christian identity was shaped in the early church.[1] Concomitant with this recent interest in the identity formation strategies of 1 Peter is a renewed appreciation for the way in which Second Temple Judaism is a determinative context for understanding the writings of the New Testament, and as a result, recent studies in 1 Peter have revealed the manner in which the identity formation strategies of the letter are deeply dependent upon the Hebrew scriptures, Israel's vocation, Jewish identity markers, and Jewish restoration ideology (e.g., Schutter 1989; Bosetti 1990; Dubis 2002; Mbuvi 2007; Horrell 2011; Liebengood 2014; Sargent 2015; Horrell 2015; Doering 2016; Egan 2016; Botner 2020; Marcar 2022). In particular, Primopetrine scholars have noted the way in which Israel categories, privileges, and concepts are appropriated in order to educate and exhort newly formed followers of Jesus Christ who are trying to figure out what it looks like to be faithful to God in the midst of social alienation and persecution as well as how to engage with their unsympathetic

neighbors and the polytheistic Greco-Roman culture around them. What is more, in light of the scholarly attention the letter has received of late, pastors and practitioners increasingly have been drawn to 1 Peter in order to better understand the church's mission in and for the world, especially where Christians find themselves trying to live out their ecclesial vocation in a post-Christian or even anti-Christian context (e.g., Volf 1994; deSilva 2000; Fagbemi 2007; Chester and Timmis 2012).

For some, these recent studies in 1 Peter helpfully have highlighted an often-underapp reciated letter that is abundant with resources and creative strategies to aid in Christian identity formation and mission. But for others, the way the author of 1 Peter grounds and forms Christian identity is perplexing and some would even say deeply troubling.[2] The problem arises when we bring to the fore two key features of the letter. First, there seem to be convincing indications that the original recipients of 1 Peter were predominantly if not exclusively gentile in makeup (see for example 1 Pet 1:18, 21; 2:9–10; 4:3–4).[3] Second, as I have already stated in brief, the foundational strategy by which the author seeks to develop a missional identity is to appropriate Israel categories, prerogatives, and privileges and then apply them to this predominantly or exclusively gentile audience. This can be seen most readily in a few examples in the first two chapters of 1 Peter: the recipients are introduced as "elect sojourners of the Diaspora" (1:1)[4] to whom the prophets have prophesied (1:10–12); they are exhorted to be holy as God is holy (1:15–16; applied from Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26); and they are given the privilege of being a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation" (2:9; drawn from Isa 43:20 and Exod 19:6) who bear the vocation of offering acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God (2:5) and proclaiming the mighty acts of the one who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (2:9; appropriated from Isa 42:12, which is an allusion to the event of the exodus from Egypt).

Granting these two features of the letter, and in light of our post-holocaust, post-colonial, globalized world which has fostered a growing awareness of the way in which religious texts can be used to inculcate prejudice and discrimination in a variety of forms, some have raised concern that the message of 1 Peter promotes a supersessionist posture toward Israel; that is to say that the letter appears to suggest that the church replaces Israel as the new(er) and true(r) people of God.

Surprisingly, until recently, in the modern era of 1 Peter studies, there has been almost no reflection on or discussion of the apparent supersessionism in 1 Peter and to what degree this might be problematic as an identity formation strategy.[5] Instead, commentators and scholars have tended to ignore this feature of the letter, or to be indifferent, ambiguous, or implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) triumphalist regarding the way in which the church relates to "Israel in the flesh." As one scholar has put it, "the supersessionism of 1 Peter has largely been ignored, downplayed or denied, but rarely discussed" (Bauman-Martin 2007, p. 150).

There may be some explanations for this lack of discussion and/or concern regarding the way in which the author of 1 Peter seems to transfer Israel's identity and privileges over to gentile followers of Jesus.[6] It may be the case that particular scholars do not accept that there was a sharp distinction between Judaism and Christianity in the time in which the letter was written, and that early rhetoric, like that found in 1 Peter, was part of a larger dialogue about what it meant to be a faithful Israelite. What we find in a text like 1 Peter, they might argue, is an intra-Jewish struggle to define who the true Israel of God is. As such, a charge of supersessionism would be considered anachronistic and thus irrelevant (Levering 2010, p. 12).

Another way that some have downplayed any charge of supersessionism is to argue that although Israel becomes "the controlling metaphor for the letter," there is no evidence of anti-Semitism or any sense in the letter that the Jews have been rejected by God (Achtemeier 1996, p. 23). But this is an argument made from silence and raises more questions than solutions. For example, might the metaphor itself, taken to its logical conclusion, imply a replacement of Israel? Or, might the silence be interpreted as a subtle and subversive demotion of Israel in favor of the gentile church?[7] Or, might the metaphor be regarded in a

diminutive sense as a "mere analogy" that is not meant to communicate what is "real" or "true" about the audience?[8]

Additionally, one might disregard supersessionism in 1 Peter on the theological and hermeneutical grounds that such a posture toward Israel is in fact the proper way of reading not only the text of 1 Peter but also the Christian canon as a whole. Simply put, rather than reject or avoid the idea that Israel has been replaced by the church, this "replacement theology" may be seen as the correct interpretation of God's plan as revealed in scripture (e.g., Marshall 2004, p. 650). As we will see, this has been the predominant way in which the silence of 1 Peter has been filled in the history of interpretation of the New Testament and 1 Peter in particular.

Regardless of what the rationale may be, overall, there remains a silence and a scholarly inattention to this important phenomenon of identity formation in the text.

2. More on the Problematic Silence of 1 Peter

The relative silence on the apparent supersessionism in 1 Peter was broken in 2007 in an essay by Betsy Bauman-Martin, who leveraged the tools of postcolonial criticism in order to draw attention to the problematic identity formation strategy in 1 Peter, stressing that the replacement strategies of the letter, far from being benign, set a dangerous precedent. Bauman-Martin insists that 1 Peter scholarship has downplayed the blatant appropriation of Jewish identity and heritage by minimizing it as a mere rhetorical strategy (Bauman-Martin 2007, p. 163). She argues that what is not readily acknowledged in 1 Peter scholarship is that this kind of appropriation is itself a kind of imperialism that degrades the integrity and identity of the culture that is being misrepresented and defined out of existence (Bauman-Martin 2007, pp. 173–77). She summarizes her critique by arguing that 1 Peter participates in the appropriation/plundering of cultural treasures/resources of another group, rewrites the past of another group for its own benefit, endorses a hierarchy that includes an emperor, suggests but rejects true hybridization and a real diaspora consciousness, and highlights the concepts of chosenness and homeland, all through the utilization of the language of transcendence and inclusion/exclusion (Bauman-Martin 2007, p. 156).

So for Bauman-Martin, while 1 Peter presents itself as a letter written to an oppressed and marginalized people, the "winning strategy involves the bankrupting of a competing oppressed group, snatching their identity" in such a way that engages in totalizing discourse that creates a universal and absolute identity of superiority (Bauman-Martin 2007, pp. 176, 169). For her, this is deeply problematic and should no longer be ignored.

In the following year, David Horrell offered a more nuanced assessment of the relationship between gentile followers of Jesus and Israel in 1 Peter but not without highlighting the "ambivalent legacy" of the methods used in the letter in order to shape Christian identity (Horrell 2008, pp. 102–5). For Horrell, the ambivalence is generated by silence in the text: 1 Peter neither explicitly confirms nor denies that Israel has been replaced by the church. Horrell is not alone in pointing out the ambiguity in the letter.[9] In a 2016 essay, Lutz Doering (2016, p. 272) offers a thorough assessment of the way in which 1 Peter appropriates Israel epithets and concludes that:

> In view of the thoroughgoing adoption of Israel epithets, it is significant that 1 Peter does not deploy any form of the term Ἰσραήλ for the addresses. While they take on the status, role, and function of Israel, the addressees *do not become Israel*—as either an accrual to the people of Israel, a "new" Israel, or even the "Israel of God" (cf. Gal 6:16). Neither, however, are they explicitly *likened to* Israel, which would expressly distinguish them from Israel. "Israel" simply does not feature in this letter. It seems that the constitution of the new people through divine begetting would not be appropriately expressed by reference to "Israel". If not "Israel" or "Jews", what else are the addressees? Apart from applying Israel epithets to the new people constituted by divine rebegetting, the letter does not give us an answer.

He further underscores that (2016, p. 276):

> Israel is appropriated without being expropriated. The confirmation to the addressees to be an elect people of God is carried out without a corresponding announcement of the rejection of the "first" people. The addressees somehow stand in connection with Israel. However, the precise relation to Israel of those addressed as elect remains open precisely because of the situative focus of the letter that is entirely concentrated on strengthening the addressees in distress.

For Doering, this ambiguity generated by silence in the text means that drawing on 1 Peter for Christian–Jewish dialogue is "extremely difficult" (Doering 2016, p. 276). He suggests that those who wish to draw any conclusions regarding the relationship between the church and Israel from 1 Peter need to acknowledge that to do so "requires us to fill aspects not actually covered by the situative focus of the text, or at least to read the text alongside other New Testament witnesses that are more explicit on the matter" (Doering 2016, p. 276).

In a similar vein, Horrell suggests that the silence in 1 Peter creates hermeneutical and theological space for readers and communities either to allow for Israel to continue as the people of God on the basis of their original covenant with God or to deny Israel its special place as the people of God. But he also highlights that a supersessionist reading of the silence in 1 Peter is problematic, in part, because it raises a theological inconsistency: "what has become of God's faithfulness to the covenant" (Horrell 2008, p. 104)? In the end, Horrell urges readers to fill in the silence of 1 Peter "within a wider theology which constructs a positive place both for the Church and for Israel" (Horrell 2008, p. 105). And he challenges Christian theologians with this question: "Can the identity of the Church be claimed and sustained without at the same time implying that the Jews have lost their status as God's people" (Horrell 2008, p. 102)?

What is important to note for the purposes of this essay is that for both Horrell and Doering, the problematic silence of 1 Peter requires readers to go outside of the text itself if they wish to resolve what could be interpreted as a problematic supersessionist strategy of identity formation in the letter.[10]

3. How the "Standard Canonical Narrative" Problematizes the Silence of 1 Peter

But this suggestion to go outside of the text is complicated by the fact that the predominant reading strategy that has been employed for centuries problematizes the silence of 1 Peter. In his 1996 monograph, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, one of the primary arguments that Kendall Soulen advances is that the problem of the doctrine of supersessionism is more foundationally a canonical narrative problem (Soulen 1996, p. 13). Soulen defines a canonical narrative as "an interpretive instrument that provides a framework for reading the Christian Bible as a theological and narrative unity" (Soulen 1996, p. 13). A canonical narrative reflects both theological as well as hermeneutical decisions about how the Christian Bible, that is the Old and New Testament, fits together as a whole. For Soulen, it is simply not enough to repudiate supersessionism and re-affirm God's covenant fidelity with Israel. Rather, since Christian doctrine presupposes a storied account of God's relations with humankind, and since this storied account forms the bedrock of the church's convictions, practices (including hermeneutical strategies), and posture, the church must engage in a thoroughgoing reassessment of its standard canonical narrative (Soulen 1996, pp. 13–14).

In his analysis of the writings of Justin and Irenaeus, whom he contends lay the foundation for this standard canonical reading, Soulen identifies three kinds of supersessionism that he argues have been passed down to the present. First, the standard canonical narrative contains an *economic supersessionism* which tells the canonical story about God designing carnal Israel from the very beginning to become obsolete with the coming of Jesus Christ and the creation of the church. Everything that was covenanted to Israel is made redundant by its ecclesial equivalent: "The written law of Moses is replaced by the spiritual law of Christ, circumcision by baptism, natural descent by faith as criterion of membership in the people of God, and so forth" (Soulen 1996, p. 29). Soulen refers to this

telling of how the canon fits together as *economic* supersessionism because the obsolescence of carnal Israel is an essential feature of God's overarching economy of redemption for the world. Israel is transient because its role in the economy of redemption was always only to prepare salvation for its spiritual and universal form (Soulen 1996, p. 29). The hermeneutical and theological framework of economic supersessionism is encapsulated by the following comment from Melito of Sardis:

> The people [Israel] was precious before the church arose, and the law was marvelous before the gospel was elucidated. But when the church arose and the gospel took precedence the model was made void, conceding its power to the reality the people was made void when the church arose.
>
> (Soulen 1996, p. 29)

As Soulen notes, economic supersessionism is often accompanied by a second type that he calls *punitive supersessionism*—the notion that God abrogates his covenant with Israel because Israel has chosen to reject Jesus Christ and his gospel message. For this reason, God turns his back on and punishes the Jews.

Soulen also identifies a third type of supersessionism, which he considers to be implicit and thus more profoundly problematic. *Structural supersessionism*, Soulen argues, undergirds the standard canonical narrative, in which the Christian canon implicitly is unified in a manner that renders the Hebrew scriptures largely indecisive for shaping conclusions about how God's purposes engage creation in universal and enduring ways (Soulen 1996, pp. 31–33). That is to say that God's history with Israel does not contribute much of anything to the essential narrative of God's redemption and consummation. Instead, if God's interactions with Israel were to be completely omitted from an account of Christian faith, this would not disturb the logic of the standard canonical narrative (Soulen 1996, p. 32). For Soulen, the absence of any explicit mention of Israel in the church's foundational creeds illustrates the existence and influence of *structural supersessionism*. It appears, he argues, that the Christian conception of God, salvation, and life is minimally impacted by God's identity as the God of Israel. As a result, the prophets are reduced to finding prophecies that point to the coming of the Messiah; the Pentateuch is only as valuable as it helps us understand sin, forgiveness, sacrifice, and our inability to keep God's commands. Soulen underscores that in the standard canonical narrative, redemption supersedes consummation as the hinge on which the canonical narrative turns. As a result, the catastrophe and remedy of sin becomes the *telos* of God's interaction with the world rather than consummation, the eternal fellowship between God and his people.[11]

One reason for highlighting the work of Soulen is to show that the standard canonical narrative exerts significant hermeneutical and theological influence (often unknowingly), especially for those who read New Testament texts with a canon consciousness—because that consciousness brings with it an inherited reading strategy. The reality is that the vast majority of those who read and study 1 Peter do so within the framework of this inherited reading strategy, which offers an (often unexamined) way of understanding how Israel relates to the church. Soulen has convincingly shown that the problem of supersessionism in Christian theology goes beyond the explicit teaching that the church has displaced Israel as God's people in the economy of salvation and *missio Dei*; rather, the problem is a result of the way in which Christians (scholars, theologians, pastors, and practitioners) have traditionally understood the theological and narrative unity of the Christian canon as a whole (Soulen 1996, p. 33). Put bluntly, while the vast majority of Christian traditions have been engaged in debates about virtually every aspect of Christian theology for centuries, these debates have occurred largely within the hermeneutical and theological parameters established and relatively unchanged by the standard canonical narrative (Soulen 1996, p. 16). Soulen's work highlights that for most of its existence, the church has not sought to understand nor articulate itself in light of God's fidelity to the people of Israel. Instead, it has proclaimed itself to have replaced Israel as the true, spiritual people of God, comprising the faithful of all nations, in relation to which the old carnal Israel existed merely as a temporary foreshadowing.

But more foundationally, the point of reflecting on the standard canonical narrative is to underscore that it problematizes the suggestion to go outside of 1 Peter to resolve the silence of the text regarding the relationship between the church and Israel. Horrell and Doering have encouraged readers to fill the silence of 1 Peter from outside theologically and canonically, respectively. But Soulen's work shows that this approach to ameliorate the silence of 1 Peter is likely to be problematic because the doctrine and hermeneutical posture of supersessionism originates as a theological and canonical problem of misreading the narrative unity of scripture. Stated plainly, the standard Christian canonical narrative, which is on the one hand a theological construct and on the other hand a hermeneutical framework, conditions many readers, especially those reading within the confines of the Christian tradition and canon, to be blind to the tension that is present in 1 Peter, which is generated by the author's application of Jewish identity, prerogatives, and privileges to gentile followers of Jesus. This may offer one explanation for why much of modern 1 Peter scholarship has tended to downplay, disregard, or ignore supersessionism in the text: 1 Peter has been seen to cohere with and affirm the "standard canonical narrative" in which the earliest Christian communities are seen as fulfilling Israel's promised destiny, as inheriting Israel's privileges and identity, and in effect replacing Israel as God's people. In short, the problem is that many have not seen this as a problem.[12]

4. The Textual Pressure to Solve the Problem(s) of 1 Peter

But in spite of this strong hermeneutical influence, in what follows, I will demonstrate that attentiveness to the text of 1 Peter actually confronts and challenges the standard canonical reading strategy described by Soulen, pushes against the purported silence, and raises questions about its supposed supersessionist posture. I will show that 1 Peter provides, on its own terms, a way for gentile followers of Jesus to situate themselves within the story of the God of Israel and his interaction with his people. I will do this by highlighting two features of 1 Peter that exert pressure on the reader to "appropriate Israelhood" without at the same time replacing Israel.[13]

I will begin by focusing on the way in which 'god' is described in 1 Peter and how this particular God is incomprehensible outside of an implicit narrative that is unique to Israel's account of the world. Second, I will attend more carefully to the way in which the identity of the addressees is re-oriented such that they are to find a new way of life in a kind of "Israelhood" that cannot be understood in a supersessionistic manner. As we will see, this reading will press against some of the concerns that Bauman-Martin has raised from her postcolonial criticism perspective, and it will offer a way of beginning to reimagine from within the text itself the relationship between Israel and gentiles who loyally align themselves with Jesus.

4.1. "God" and the Implicit Narrative of 1 Peter

We begin with the question, *Which god is the author of 1 Peter referring to in the letter*? In what follows, I want to briefly attend to the implicit, and in some cases explicit, ways in which God is referred to and described in 1 Peter. As we attend to these references to God in 1 Peter, we will see that the author appeals to Israel's scriptures, epithets, privileges, and prerogatives in order to draw the readers into an implicit narrative that is organically connected to both the God of Israel as well as to the hopes and expectations of the people of Israel. That is to say that the author is not merely using Israel as an analogy for identity formation but instead is grounding all claims about reality in terms of God's self-revelation and promises to Israel.

The God who is blessed, trusted in, and hoped for in 1 Peter is far from being a generic supreme higher power. Instead, the author of 1 Peter identifies this particular God as the creator (1 Pet 1:20; 4:19), as the one who made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (implicit in 1 Pet 3:5, and more generally with the reference to the prophets found 1 Pet 1:10–12), as the one who delivered these descendants from Egypt through the Passover (implied in 1 Pet 1:19), and as the one who has promised to once

again deliver them from their self-inflicted exile (implied in the usage of Isaiah 40, Ezekiel 34, Isa 43:20/Exod 19:5–6, Isa 28:16/Ps 118:22/Isa 8:14; Hos 1:6, 9, 10; 2:23; and Isaiah 53).[14]

It is this particular God who is also said to have raised Jesus Christ from the dead, which is a hope unique to the people of Israel.[15] As the author of 1 Peter details the accomplishments of this particular God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, he does so in terms that are unique to Israel's way of understanding what God is up to in the world and what he has promised for his people. For example, the salvation that the God of 1 Peter accomplishes through Jesus Christ is said to conform to the programmatic new-exodus prologue of Isaiah 40 (1 Peter 1:24–25), the covenantal renewal promises of Hosea 1:6, 9–10/2:23 (1 Pet 2:10), and Israel's national hopes for redemption from exile found in Isaiah 53 (1 Peter 2:22–25).[16] Jesus himself, the agent of God's redemption in the letter, is also characterized in terms that only make sense in a Jewish framework—as the lamb without blemish (1 Pet 1:19), the rejected cornerstone, who is nevertheless esteemed and chosen by God (1 Pet 2:6–8; Isa 28:16; Psa 118:22; Isa 8:14), and as the chief shepherd who heals and cares for the flock of God (1 Pet 2:25; 5:4; Jeremiah 23; Ezekiel 34; Zech 13:7; Psalm 23).[17] According to the author of 1 Peter, to trust in Jesus is to put one's hope in this particular God, the God of Israel (1:21); this hope involves seeing the world the way an Israelite would see the world, embracing the metanarrative of Israelite self-understanding.[18] Foundational to this metanarrative of hope is the expectation that this God of Israel is going to judge not only his people but the entire world, vindicating those who remain loyal to the one true God and his Messiah (1 Pet 2:4–10; 2:12; 4:18/Ezek 9:6). This coming judgment and vindication are said to be executed by Jesus Christ at his "revelation," and for this reason, the author of 1 Peter urges the addressees to place their hope completely in the grace that will be brought to them on that day (1 Pet 1:13).

Additionally, the people who place their hope in this particular God are said to have been "ransomed" (a concept that originates in Israel's exodus narratives) from the futile ways of their forefathers (1 Pet 1:18); they are exhorted to live in keeping with the foundational covenant stipulation established by the God of Israel in the wilderness: "you shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:15–16; Lev 11:44); and their vocation, or mission, is described in terms that echo both God's call for elect Israel as they were delivered from Egypt and also God's promises of redemption for exiled Israel in Isaiah: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9; Exod 19:5–6; Isa 43:20–21).[19]

I bring these implicit (and at times explicit) assumptions about God in 1 Peter to the surface to make three points. First, this is a uniquely Israel-centric way of telling the story of the world, of talking about who God is, and of describing what this God is up to in the world. It is important to underscore that the addressees are being asked to do more than think of Israel as an analogy; rather, they are being called to embrace a uniquely Israelite way of conceiving of and being in the world.

Second, the addressees are organically connected to and included in this story because of their association with Jesus. While it is true, as some have pointed out, that the addressees are not said to become Israel, they are nevertheless seamlessly placed within the story of God's redemption of Israel through the Christ and incorporated into the hopes of Isaiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, and the Psalmists. In this regard, the text seems to necessitate that the addressees "appropriate Israelhood," that is, to embrace an Israelite understanding of the problem of the world and the way in which this one true God of the world intends to resolve the problem. In short, he calls them to orient their lives around a particular hope (1 Pet 1:13; 3:15) that would prove to be utterly meaningless were Israel to be expropriated. To be a new people (1 Pet 2:9–10), they must see themselves as a part of a new story, belonging to a people and a history that has preceded them.

Finally, the claims that the author of 1 Peter makes about God and what this God has accomplished through Jesus make supersessionism deeply problematic because such a posture toward Israel is internally incoherent in the text. For example, the assumption for

the author of 1 Peter is that the God of Israel, who is characterized as the creator of the world and the one who formed, covenanted, and remains faithful to Israel (and not some generic notion of deity), has acted decisively in and through Jesus to bring to culmination the promises he made to Israel for the sake of the whole world. To be more specific, the author states that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:3) is in fact the God of Israel; that what this particular God has revealed about himself in Jesus is to be understood within the context of and in continuity with what he has revealed about himself through his covenant and history with Israel (e.g., 1 Pet 1:10–12). This covenantal history with Israel has been inscripturated in the Hebrew Bible (or what Christians refer to as the Old Testament), and when the author of 1 Peter appeals to the Hebrew scriptures to establish a point about, for example, Christology or the mission of the people of God, he is more foundationally appealing to the reliability and trustworthiness of this God of Israel. If we were to read 1 Peter in such a way that the author replaces the privileges and mission of Israel with "the church," then this calls into question just how reliable and faithful this God is that the author refers to fundamentally in his letter.[20] In this regard, the implicit narrative of 1 Peter forces gentile followers of Jesus to understand and articulate their own identity in light of God's ongoing fidelity to the people of Israel. Additionally, the way in which the author of 1 Peter narrates the story of God in the letter underscores the *telos* of God's dealings with Israel (as expressed in the Abrahamic covenant), namely the blessing of eternal fellowship with God through Israel for all the nations. That is, the goal of God's interactions with Israel is consummation and communion and not merely redemption.

If we are to read 1 Peter with a posture of supersessionism that renders the Jewish people a matter of indifference to the God of Israel, this seems to be inconsistent with the foundational assumptions of the author and his usage of the Hebrew scriptures in the letter. It also raises vexing questions such as: if the God of Israel is indifferent to a people that he once promised an inheritance, then how seriously can we take promises he is said to make to other peoples at other times? Or, if the God of Israel is capable of raising up a people only to abandon them for another, how sure can we be that he will not do the same to his new chosen people? In view of these foundational claims about the God of 1 Peter, the text of 1 Peter seems to necessitate that a gentile follower of Jesus "appropriate Israelhood" without denying it to Israel.

4.2. Embracing a Non-Gentile Way of Life

More can be said about the "Israelhood" posture that the addressees are called to embrace by looking briefly at a particular way in which the addressees are described in 1 Peter:

> Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge (1 Pet 2:12).

> You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do . . . they are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme (1 Pet 4:3–4).

These two references are particularly striking because, as we have already seen, there is a consensus within Primopetrine scholarship that the addressees are a predominantly if not exclusively gentile audience. So, what is the author doing with this move in which he seems to distinguish his predominantly gentile addressees from "the gentiles"? Contemporary 1 Peter scholars tend to explain this move as the author's way of distinguishing believers in Jesus from non-believers or more specifically non-Christians. For example, regarding 1 Pet 4:3, Joel Green asserts that "[t]his emphasizes, yet again, the distinction between believers and unbelievers" (Green 2007, p. 138); Michaels states that "[t]he term traditionally applied by Jews and Christians alike to non-Jews is transferred to non-Christians, so as to become the equivalent of such English words as 'heathen' or 'pagan'"(Michaels 1988, p. 117); Elliott claims that "[i]n most of its NT occurrences, the term *ta ethnē* continues to denote

non-Israelites in contrast to Israelites. However, in some cases, as here in 1 Peter, when *ta ethnē/hoi ethnikoi* is a foil to followers of Jesus, it becomes a designation for all non-Christians who disobey (2:7; 3:1), who have rejected Jesus as Messiah and malign his followers, including pagans and mainstream Israel alike" (Elliott 2000, p. 466); and Jobes insists that "[b]oth Peter and Paul, following Jewish thought, use the designation *ethnē* to refer to those outside the community of Christian faith" (Jobes 2005, pp. 169–70).

But I contend that this reading of those two references of "gentile" demands more care. First, it seems to me that commentators are unduly anachronistic when they claim that the author is creating a third category, "Christian," that is distinguishable from Jew and gentile. Recent scholarship on the term Χριστιανός, which appears in 1 Pet 4:16 (as well as Acts 11:26 and 26:28), shows that the grain runs the opposite direction. Rather than create a third entity, the word is used to designate a sub-group which includes Jews and non-Jews who have aligned themselves with Jesus (Trebilco 2012, pp. 272–97). In other words, Χριστιανός does not constitute a new religious category nor is it meant to imply that the addressees were no longer viewed as Jews. What is more, Korner has observed that when the term Χριστιανός occurs in Acts, it is when "other ethnicities are depicted as being allowed entrance into a Jewish sub-group of Christ followers whose apostolic loyalty lies with the apostles in Jerusalem" (Korner 2020, p. 20; see also Korner 2017, p. 152). This observation fits well with reading that I have put forth in 1 Peter. All this is to say that at this stage in history, it is more accurate to see what is going on in 1 Peter as intra-Jewish debate about who the true people of God are (and how gentiles fit into that corporate entity), and about how God has been faithful to his covenant and his promises, rather than as the author creating a new category (Christian) that can be clearly delineated from Israel and its God. In other words, the text of 1 Peter itself does not give us warrant to create a new entity, Christian, that is mutually exclusive from Israel and Jewish followers of Jesus.

Second, if we read 1 Pet 2:12 and 4:3–4 with the grain of the implicit narrative that I have highlighted in 1 Peter, it seems to be the case that the author is not taking Israel's identity, prerogatives, and mission and transferring them to the gentiles (as has often been the assumption or claim), but rather that the author of 1 Peter is exhorting gentiles to distance themselves from their gentile culture with its assumptions, values, practices, and hopes. To be more specific, the author is exhorting his readers to orient themselves *as gentiles* to a particularly Jewish way of life that is patterned after the life of Jesus (e.g., 1 Pet 2:21–23 mimicked in 1 Pet 3:9–12) and built upon the hopes and expectations of Israel.[21] We see this in the fact that, as Doering as already underscored, these readers are never called a new Israel. Their identity as gentiles is in one sense preserved. But in another sense, their identity as gentiles is disoriented or dislocated because they are called to a new ἀναστροφή ("way of life" or "conduct") that is on the one hand a rejection of what they have inherited (1 Pet 1:18) and on the other what they are learning as new followers of Jesus (1 Pet 1:15, 17; 2:12). Seven times in key exhortative passages in the letter, the author uses either the verb ἀναστρέφω or the noun ἀναστροφή to explain the full implications of aligning one's life with the Jewish Messiah, Jesus (1 Pet 1:15, 17, 18; 2:12; 3:1, 2). This reading helps explain, in part, why the author of 1 Peter employs the unique image of "newborns" to his readers (1 Pet 1:3, 23: 2:2) who now must learn to "grow into salvation" (1 Pet 2:2). To say it another way, in 1 Peter, the gentiles who have been born-anew as a result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:3) are ransomed from their former way of life (1 Pet 1:18) and called to learn a new culture patterned after the Messiah of Israel and shaped by the God of Israel's expectations for Israel's corporate life but distinctly as gentiles. Their new way of life in Jesus Christ is to be understood as the culmination of the promises to and hopes of Israel (e.g., 1 Pet 1:3, 13; 2:4, 25) for the sake of the world.[22] Read in this way, it is not that Israel has been superseded by gentile followers of Jesus. Quite the contrary: if the audience is in fact made up of an exclusive or even predominantly gentile audience, it appears that the author of 1 Peter is claiming that their gentile heritage (narrative self-understanding, hopes, way of life, values, etc.) has been replaced with that of "Israelhood". Or to borrow from

Willie Jennings, these gentile followers of Jesus, as a new-born people, have been displaced and now must learn to participate in Israel's story as guests (Jennings 2012, pp. 250–88).

As we have seen, much of the discussion regarding Israel and "the church" has insinuated that the author of 1 Peter is appropriating Israel's identity in such a way that he gives it over to the gentiles, that the gentiles are exhorted to take Israel's vocation, prerogatives, etc. as their own in such a way that replaces Israel. But I have made the case that the pressure of the text moves in the opposite direction; that is, it seems that what the text is actually doing is demanding non-Jewish followers of Jesus Christ to no longer orient themselves around the inherited way of life of the "gentiles" but rather to find their heritage as part of the house or commonwealth of the Davidic king, Jesus, who is the hope of Israel and the nations (1 Pet 2:4–10, 25).[23]

This does not yet answer all the questions we may have about the relationship between Israel and the church in 1 Peter or more accurately Israel and gentile followers of Jesus.[24] What is important to note is the author does not care to explain all that makes these two entities different but rather seeks to emphasize what these newborn gentiles share with Israel. So, while their new birth does not make them Israel, it does connect them to Israel's God, Israel's call to be holy, and Israel's hope, all shaped by Jesus Christ, the God of Israel's cornerstone and shepherd (1 Pet 2:4, 25).

This is by no means an exhaustive survey of all the ways in which 1 Peter displaces, emplaces, and reorients the implied readers to inhabit the story of Israel. More can and should be said about how the author draws on Israelite notions of inheritance and salvation (1 Pet 1:3–12), how the author places the readers into a new wilderness of testing (1 Pet 1:5—2:10),[25] how the readers are to conceptualize being living stones who are built into a spiritual house (1 Pet 2.4–10), how the readers are to be a royal priesthood, and how they are to receive promises which seem to have been given exclusively to Israel (e.g., Hos 1:6, 9–10; 2:23 in 1 Pet 2:10) without at the same time replacing Israel.[26] But for the purposes of this essay, our brief survey above has highlighted that there is enough pressure in the text to question the concerns of Bauman-Martin as well as the suggestion to go outside of 1 Peter to resolve the seemingly problematic identify formation strategy of the letter.

5. Conclusions

The primary point of this essay is to underscore that it is not only postcolonial criticism that exposes problems with reading 1 Peter as a text that puts forth a supersessionist identity formation strategy. Some have tried to ameliorate this problem by pointing to silence in the letter, which creates hermeneutical space to go outside of the text itself to resolve the tension. I have shown that this move can create its own problems because of the influential standard canonical narrative, which exerts tremendous pressure to replace Israel with the church.

Instead, I have sought to demonstrate in brief that the text of 1 Peter itself pushes against a supersessionist posture, in part because such a reading is inconsistent with the claims made about God in the letter and raises serious questions about the trustworthiness of this God; but also because the grain of text—with the implicit narrative and the exhortation to distance oneself from a gentile way of life—seems to necessitate that the addressees "appropriate Israelhood" without expropriating Israel. The most basic observation that I have made by attuning to two non-exhaustive features of 1 Peter is that the author seeks to make sense of both Jesus as well as the new reality of the implied readers within the ongoing story of the God of Israel's interactions with Israel. Said in another way, the addressees are not to understand their allegiance to Jesus apart from their belonging to the hopes and expectations of Israel. First Peter compels an Israel-centric way of understanding the world and one's place in it. What is more, I have noted how a close reading of 1 Peter challenges the standard canonical reading strategy described by Soulen and in turn provides on its own terms a way for gentile readers to situate themselves within the story of the God of Israel and his interaction with his people.

This being the case, I contend that fresh research on the identity formation strategy of 1 Peter is in order, which requires (1) more attentiveness to the complex and comprehensive way that 1 Peter draws on Israel's privileges, prerogatives, and scriptures to invite gentiles to inhabit the hopes, expectations, and mission of Israel, (2) more inquiry into the assumptions that lead to a purported supersessionism in the letter, (3) as well as more attention to the ways the purported supersessionist posture of 1 Peter has been met with silence from many of its interpreters. In short, I contend that reading 1 Peter after supersessionism is a problem in search of a comprehensive solution.

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Notes

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[2] The authorship of the letter is contested among 1 Peter scholars. For a summary of the authorship debate, see Liebengood (2014, pp. 18–20). The arguments set forth in this essay stand whether the letter was written by the historical Simon Peter or as the Peter of the canonical tradition, in which case the letter was written no later than 92 CE. To not distract from the argument of this essay, I will use "the author" to refer to the possibility of either of these two options.

[3] There is currently a strong consensus among 1 Peter scholars that the letter was written to a predominantly if not exclusively gentile audience in Asia Minor. To trace this modern consensus, see (Michaels 1988, pp. xlv–xlvi; Achtemeier 1996, pp. 50–51; Elliott 2000, pp. 94–97), who emphasizes a mixed audience; and (Dubis 2006, pp. 204–5). For the most comprehensive study on the audience of 1 Peter to date, see Williams (2012, pp. 91–127), who concludes that "it seems best, therefore, along with the majority of commentators, to posit a primarily Gentile-Christian readership as the intended audience of 1 Peter" (Williams 2012, p. 95).

[4] Translation mine.

[5] Three notable exceptions to this trend will be discussed below. See also (Harink 2009; Botner 2020).

[6] See Bauman-Martin (2007, pp. 150–56) for a critique of some of these possible reasons for downplaying or ignoring the apparent supersessionism of the text.

[7] See Michaels (1988, p. 107), who questions whether there is anti-Jewish polemic that is expressed by pretending that Israel does not exist.

[8] For two significant discussions on how metaphors work in identity formation, especially in 1 Peter, see (Horrell 2011, pp. 135–43; Marcar 2022, pp. 24–51). See also (Horrell 2020).

[9] See also Achtemeier (1996, pp. 69–70).

[10] It is also important to underscore that both Horrell and Doering, in their own ways, offer a reading of 1 Peter that does not support Bauman-Martin's claim that the letter uses imperial and colonizing strategies for identity formation.

[11] Soulen (2013, p. 285) since has modified his critique of the standard canonical narrative: "I no longer think that supersessionism is an essential or necessary feature of the standard canonical narrative. I think of it rather as a deformation of that narrative, which can be overcome from within, by making it truer to the canon's witness to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Trinity revealed in him."

[12] With the exception of scholars such as Bauman-Martin, Horrell, and Doering mentioned above.

[13] I am indebted to Lindbeck (2000) for this terminology.

[14] For more details on the way in which these particular Old Testament scriptures are used in 1 Peter, see (Liebengood 2014, pp. 97–103, 175–99).

[15] I am not here claiming that everyone in Israel hoped for resurrection but that it was nevertheless a unique confident expectation for many as demonstrated in Jon Levenson (2006).

[16] See (Liebengood 2014, pp. 79–104) for further development.

[17] In this regard, even the addressees' allegiance to Jesus must be understood on Israel's terms.

[18] Albeit a contested identity characterized by intra-Jewish debate on how, when, and through whom this redemption would be accomplished.

[19] All scripture citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

[20] I place "the church" in quotations because it is important to note that the term ἐκκλησία never appears in 1 Peter. Despite this, scholars often refer anachronistically to the addressees as "the church," which is a historically and theological loaded term. This move subtly contributes to the problematic reading strategy I am seeking to highlight in this essay.

[21] It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a more comprehensive account of what it looks like in 1 Peter for gentile Jesus followers to orient themselves to a Jewish way of life beyond what I have done in this essay. See Liebengood (forthcoming, Cascade) for a thorough discussion of what is included and excluded in this new orientation.

[22] It is important to note that Israel's own self-understanding is also re-oriented by Jesus Christ as well.

[23] For the development of the Eschatological David Shepherd ideology in 1 Peter, see Liebengood (2014, pp. 79–104, 156–214).

[24] While many scholars have noted that gentile followers of Jesus are never called or likened to Israel in 1 Peter, it is also the case that gentile followers of Jesus are never referred to as the church, either. See the Liebengood (forthcoming, Cascade) for a rationale for this move.

[25] See Liebengood (2014, pp. 130–40).

[26] For a comprehensive examination of these questions, see Liebengood (forthcoming, Cascade).

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