

Thy Kingdom Come

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“The Israel of God” in its own Context and in Light of Comparative Jewish Texts*

Stefan Bosman

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| Israel of God | Galatians 6:16 | Supersessionism | Replacement Theology |
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ABSTRACT:

This study seeks to establish the identity of “the Israel of God” in Paul’s enigmatic statement in Galatians 6:16b, “peace [be] upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.” (εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.) Comparing this Pauline text with contemporary Jewish texts uncovers a possible trajectory of Jewish traditions that suggests that the Israel of God points to nothing else, but (eschatological) ethnic Israel. While this is not a new position, the argument informed by *Traditionsgeschichte* does contain a new proposal, not hitherto considered. Furthermore, the result of this tradition-historical investigation affirms the findings of grammatical, lexical, and contextual investigations. As a result, the conclusions of this study challenge the still widely held supersessionist reading of Galatians 6:16, which poses that “the Israel of God” points to the Church.

INTRODUCTION

In Matthew 16:3 Jesus chastises the Sadducees and Pharisees, because they recognize meteorological signs, but not the “signs of the times.” In this day and age biblical interpretative approaches and theological positions undoubtedly influence whether today’s news is understood as old things happening to new people, or whether they can also be identified as “the signs of the times.” This study does not aim to directly address world events, but rather only an aspect of theology that influences how such events are interpreted, viz. supersessionism.

Supersessionism is also known by a different name, namely replacement theology, or in German *Ersatztheology*. The latter expression

requires no explanation. The former essentially expresses the same idea. “Supersessionism, from the Latin, *supersedere* (to sit upon, to preside over)”¹ expresses the same sentiment as replacement theology in that “the Church is the new Israel that supersedes national Israel as the people of God.”² One should bear in mind that supersessionism is not just a matter of ticking a theological box, but rather can have consequences on many levels. For example, it impacts Christology in that Christ is not only a man-God, but also one who takes on Old

1 Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing?: Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 10-11.

2 Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2010), 79.

* : Suggestions of Carl Martin and Trond Skinstad improved this article’s English and clarity. Errors are the author’s.

<p>¹⁵ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.</p> <p>¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace [be] upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.</p>	<p>¹⁵ οὔτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἐστίν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ καινή κτίσις.</p> <p>¹⁶ καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.¹</p>
<p>¹ : Text critical issues, while important, do not significantly support alternative readings. Hence, such readings are not discussed here. For more information see Constantin von Tischendorf, <i>Novum Testamentum Graece, Vol. 2</i> (Lipsiae: J.C. Hinrichs, 1872), 661.; Stephen C. Carlson, “The Text of Galatians and its History” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2012), 271-73.</p>	

Table 1.

<i>1 group, 2 bestowals</i>	<i>2 groups, 2 bestowals</i>	<i>2 groups, each 1 bestowal</i>
peace be upon them, (καὶ) and mercy, (καὶ) that is upon the Israel of God.	peace be upon them, (καὶ) and also mercy, (καὶ) and also upon the Israel of God.	peace be upon them, (καὶ) and mercy (καὶ) even upon the Israel of God.

Table 2.

Testament roles, such as being the ruler on David’s throne. It impacts ecclesiology, since either all covenants are fulfilled in the Church, or some are still awaiting fulfilment in Israel. It impacts eschatological-ecclesiology by asking whether the Church is one homogenous whole or will there, for example, be a distinct role for Israel in the last days? And finally, it impacts missiology in that there should or should not be a distinct mission to the Jews. Thus much more is at stake than subscribing to an intellectual position, because it impacts many areas of our theological understanding and even practical life.

The examination at hand does not tackle the whole problem of replacement theology, but it does address the most important passage used as a proof-text, which is Galatians 6:16. A rather literal translation directly reveals its awkward turns of phrase. Verses 15-16 follow. (See Table 1.)

The peculiar grammar of verse 16, as well as the hitherto unique expression, “the Israel of

God,” has baffled many a scholar. According to the consensus view, this text clearly indicates that the Church is now the Israel of God.³ Should this view be accepted without challenge? Our discussion at hand has two goals, namely: first, to determine whether a replacement theological reading is possible, and second, to search for the tradition that underlies the writing of Galatians 6:16, which subsequently will be called the Galatian Benediction.

³ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation*, 125n8 The list is not exhaustive, but would it be, it would be too overwhelming. Among those mentioned are: James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 100.; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), 227.; N. A. Dahl, “Der Name Israel: Zur Auslegung Von Gal 6, 16,” *Judaica* 6 (1950), 168.; G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6, 16b,” *Biblica* 80 (1999), 205. Also, the two key figures of the Reformation should be mentioned in this regard: John Calvin and Martin Luther. Another list of those supporting the supersessionist view is found in S. L. Johnson Jr., “Paul and “The Israel of God”: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study,” *TMS* 20, no. 1 (2009), 43-44.

Galatians 1 ³ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins in order to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of God and our Father; ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.¹

1QHodayyot 5 ³³ ...Only by your goodness ³⁴ will a man be made righteous and by {your} plentiful compa{ssion(s)} --} in the way you cause him to be in splendour, and you will cause him to reign with many delights with peace ³⁵ [for]ever and [in] length of days...

³ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ⁴ τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ὅπως ἐξέλθῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, ⁵ ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων ἀμήν.

... רק בטובך ³⁴ יצדק איש וברוב רח[מ]יך [-- בהדרך תפארונו ותמשילנו] ב[רוב] עדינים עם שלום ³⁵ עולם ואור
ימים...ⁱⁱ

ⁱ The Revised Standard Version

ⁱⁱ Martin G. Abegg, Jr., *Qumran Sectarian Manuscripts* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003)

Table 3.

IS A REPLACEMENT THEOLOGICAL READING POSSIBLE?

Three Readings

There exist typically three possible readings of Galatians 6:16. In the first reading, the Israel of God is the same group as those walking according to this rule. Here the last καὶ⁴ is understood as an apposition, which in English translates as “that is.” (Cf. NIV, NLT, RSV) A second scenario creates two bestowals on two groups. (Cf. ESV, NASB, NET) A third scenario speaks of one bestowal on one group and another bestowal on another group. (Cf. Holman, ISV, and possibly the KJV.) (See Table 2.) Of these three readings, only the first reading is supersessionist, i.e. the Church assumes the title, “the Israel of God.” In effect the Christian Church thus supersedes or replaces the old Israel, as the (new or true) Israel of God.

⁴ The word καὶ is the most common Greek word and typically means “and,” although it can also mean numerous other things, such as: or, and then, and so, and yet, and in spite of that, nevertheless, and even. William Arndt and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 494-96.

Grammatical Considerations

To determine whether a supersessionist reading is valid, depends on whether or not the two addressees in Galatians 6:16 are identical. While not being conclusive, a linguistic inquiry favors a non-supersessionist reading. This can be seen in three areas: (1) the usage of καὶ, (2) the bestowal-order, peace followed by mercy, and (3) the double ἐπι⁵ followed by an accusative.

First, for a supersessionist reading, where the addressees are identical, the last καὶ needs to function as an apposition. However, an appositional καὶ is rare in the New Testament and possibly even absent from the Pauline corpus.⁶

Second, the peculiar order of peace and mercy is unique in the New Testament. The reverse order of mercy and peace is the common order, which suggests an idea of cause and effect, i.e. mercy causes peace. Two examples that illustrate causation follow. (See Table 3.)

⁵ The word ἐπι is a preposition typically meaning “upon” when followed by an accusative. C.f. *Ibid.*, 363-67

⁶ Johnson, *Paul and “The Israel of God”: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study*, 48; Michael Bachmann, *Anti-Judaism in Galatians?: Exegetical Studies on a Polemical Letter and on Paul’s Theology* (Cambridge, U.K.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 199 n49.; C. J. Ellicott, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Longmans, Green, 1867), 154.

In Galatians 1:3-5, Christ's atonement, allowed for the bestowal of grace upon the Galatian believers, resulting in peace with God. Further, in 1 QHodayyot 5:33-35, God's compassions are clearly explicated as the cause of everlasting peace. A causal connection between grace and peace thus seems reasonable. By implication, the reversal of this order suggests that each benediction refers to a different group. Why otherwise would those already having received peace need mercy?

Third, New Testament statistics of the double ἐπὶ with a direct object refer nine out of ten times to non-identical addressees.⁷ An example in Acts 5:11 follows: "And great fear came upon the whole Church" (ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν) "and upon all who heard of these things" (καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας ταῦτα). The Church and those hearing these things may be overlapping groups, but they are certainly not identical. Thus also in regard of the double occurrence of ἐπὶ followed by a direct object, it is unlikely that a supersessionist reading exists in Galatians 6:16. Hence, in retrospect, the previous grammatical considerations of the order of peace then mercy, the rare appositional meaning of καὶ, as well as the rare chance (10%) that a double ἐπὶ with direct object refers to multiple addressees, make a supersessionist reading that equates "the Israel of God" with "those walking according to this rule," from a grammatical perspective, an improbable possibility.

The Term Israel

It appears that the term Israel always points to

7 A comparison of the double ἐπὶ in the accusative case within the NT yields ten relevant occurrences. Only one of these ten occurrences points to an identical object in terms of meaning. (Different: Matt 21:5, Matt 27:25, Acts 2:18, Acts 5:11, Acts 7:10 (only in a variant reading), Acts 11:15, Heb 8:8, Rev 8:10, Rev 19:16, Rev 20:4; identical: Rev 14:6)

ethnic Israel in Second Temple Jewish literature.⁸ Only Philo uses the term ambiguously.⁹ In other words, Philo neither affirms nor denies that Israel could point to those outside the boundaries of ethnic "Israel." In the *Community Rule* and *Warscroll*, which are eschatological documents from Qumran, the community is depicted as a sort of a true Israel within the larger ethnic Israel.¹⁰ Hence, also there the term Israel still only points to ethnic Jews. A similar case can be made for Romans 9:6b, which literally translates as, "for not all, who [are] from Israel, these ones [are] Israel." (οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ). While a significant number of commentators maintain that here the subset of Israel points to the Church¹¹, this is hardly likely in light of the context. The preceding context speaks of the Israelite Jesus-believing remnant (Rom 9:1-5). The succeeding context speaks of the genealogical line of the patriarchs (Rom 9:7-13). While the ideas, "election" and "promise," feature prominently in verses 7-13, commentators as Dunn, neglect to point out that each descendent there refers

8 Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 359-360, 372.; Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1969), 218-20.

9 Sigurd Grindheim, *The Crux of Election: Paul's Critique of the Jewish Confidence in the Election of Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 69-73. For a list of various opinions on whether Philo's Israel included Gentiles, see *ibid.*, 71n138

10 Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "Israel and the Community in Paul (Rom 9-11) and the Rule Texts from Qumran," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pauline Literature*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 286-87.; David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge; Jerusalem: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2007), 16.

11 E.g. John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 65.; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 239.; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans, Vol. 2* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 539.

to a physical descendant.¹² In this regard Romans 9:6-13 is unlike Romans 4:16, where Abraham’s descendants are numbered by those believing like him.¹³ Thus, Romans 4:16 speaks about the ethnic-universalism of the Body of Christ. Romans 9:6, however, speaks just like Qumran about a faithful ethnic remnant, i.e. Israel within Israel. Finally, while much more could be said about the term Israel, we will limit ourselves to only one more observation, namely its reception-history. The term Israel as applied to the Church, only emerges in 160 CE, in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*.¹⁴ Thus for more than a century, patristic writers refrained from using (the) Israel (of God) in a supersessionist fashion, evidently because Israel was not understood to be superseded by the Church. It follows from this survey that there exists much reason to consider the term Israel in Paul to refer only to ethnic Israel.

Context

From the perspective of the broader context, some scholars have suggested that Paul’s attitude towards Jews in Galatians exhibits a so-called disinheritance theory, where Jewish ethnic titles are now applied to Christians.¹⁵ Others classify Galatians as a letter that is primarily concerned with eradicating the dividing distinctions.¹⁶ “For you are all sons of

God through faith in Christ Jesus There is neither Jew nor Greek ...” (πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνας ...) (Gal 3:26, 28). While it is true that there is a transposition of Israelite or Jewish ethnic terms to Christians, this does not carry through to the term “Israel” or have supersessionist consequences.¹⁷ Further, while there certainly is unity and equality before God in Christ Jesus, closer scrutiny shows also another reality in which ethnic distinction is still important in past and present. For example, it is clear that for Paul it is still relevant whether someone was male, female, slave or free, because he gave specific instructions to such groups. The same would then also count for Jew and Gentile. The latter can, for example, be seen in Romans 11, where there exists a clear distinction between Jews and Gentiles.¹⁸ Another example is the collection that is mentioned in Galatians and Romans (Gal 2:10, Rom 15:26-27). Especially in Romans, the rationale for giving “material blessings” by Gentile believers to Jewish believers is clearly an ethnic-laden statement. Even within Galatians there are numerous ways in which Paul differentiates between Jews and Gentiles.¹⁹ Consider for example Paul’s esteem for the Jerusalem pillars, the support for the poor (Jewish believers) in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9-10), or the Jewishness of God’s Son “born under the

12 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 509-10.

13 “It depends on faith ...” (Διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ πίστεως ...)

14 Trypho asks “are you Israel?” (Ὑμεῖς Ἰσραὴλ ἐστε), to which Justin Martyr eventually responds “we, who have been hewn out from the belly of Christ, are the true Israelite race.” (ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ λατομηθέντες Ἰσραηλιτικὸν τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἔσμεν γένος) (Just., D. 123:7, 135:3).

15 Jürgen Roloff, *Die Kirche Im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 126.

16 E.g. Aaron Sherwood, *Paul and the Restoration of Humanity in Light of Ancient Jewish Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 227-29.; Christopher Cowan, “Context is

Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16,” *SBJT* 14, no. 3 (2010), 78-85.

17 For New Testament and other texts, where ethnic Israelite terms became redefined, sometimes even referring to Gentiles, see Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 31-32. However, the special title “Israel” was not applied to the Church until Justin Martyr’s dialogue with Trypho. See n14.

18 C.f. Romans 11:5, 13-14, 24-25, 29, 31-32

19 Bachmann, *Anti-Judaism in Galatians?: Exegetical Studies on a Polemical Letter and on Paul’s Theology*, 105; Donald W. B. Robinson, “The Distinction between Jewish and Gentile Believers in Galatians,” *ABR* 13 (1965), 41-45.

law” (γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον). Thus, while the context of the Pauline corpus, in general, and of Galatians, in particular, speaks of soteriological unity and equality in Christ, these very contexts also continue to uphold a diversity of Jew and Gentile within this unity. These contextual observations will need to be taken into consideration when evaluating Galatians 6:16. The claim that only ideas of unity exist in Galatians and that hence Galatians 6:16 only points to one group of people, cannot be maintained.²⁰ Thus, the Galatian context cannot rule either for or against a supersessionist reading.

Eschatology

Another concern is the future. While, the Galatian Epistle may not strike the reader as eschatological, closer scrutiny shows that this is exactly what Galatians 6:16 seems to express. The future tense, “will walk” (στοιχήσουσιν), in Galatians 6:16, is directed towards the Galatian audience. These Galatians who are in Christ (Gal 3:26-29) and already part of the new creation (Gal 6:15, 2:20, c.f. Rom 6:5-11, 2 Cor 5:17), are urged, or even threatened²¹, to walk according to the rule of this new creation (Gal 6:16a). Having met this condition (“those who will walk according to this rule”), they will in the future receive peace (“peace be upon them”). Paul’s intent here is that the Galatians participate in this new creation. Considering the conditional nature of Galatians 6:16 and its future tense, it follows that this peace has not yet been realized in the Galatians’ lives, but points to a future expectation. A further consideration is the significant Isaianic

backdrop to Galatians. The Isaianic peace refers to eschatological peace that comes as a result of the LORD’s salvation.²² Thus, the significant Isaianic backdrop in Galatians as well as the use of the future tense, suggest that the Galatian Benediction discusses final eschatology.

Conclusion

The previous discussions focused on linguistic considerations, the use of the term Israel in Second Temple Jewish literature and Paul, the context of Galatians 6:16, and the question of eschatology. First, linguistic considerations rendered the equation of the Church with the Israel of God unlikely. Second, the term Israel appeared nowhere in Second Temple Judaism to refer to anything but Israel. Only Philo’s use of the term is dubious and can therefore not be determined either way. Similarly, in the New Testament, including the Pauline corpus, the term Israel only refers to ethnic Israel. It is likely that this also counts for the passage in question. Further, in patristic texts, the Israel of God does not refer to the Church, but until one century after the letter to the Galatians was written. Third, in terms of context, it appears that next to the theme of soteriological unity, there also exist texts that distinguish between Jews and Gentiles, even when both belong to the Jesus movement. Fourth, the usage of the term peace and the use of the future tense, mark the verse of Galatians 6:16 as a present condition with a future eschatological fulfilment. These observations show that a supersessionist reading of Galatians 6:16 should be abandoned. As a result, the last clause speaks about an eschatological mercy upon the Israel of God. While by now this is hopefully a fairly well established point, a more tentative enquiry

20 Cowan, *Context is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16*, 78-85

21 Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 321.

22 Matthew S. Harmon, *She must and Shall Go Free Paul’s Isaianic Gospel in Galatians* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 55.

Isaiah 54 ¹⁰ [Nor] will the mountains be removed and neither will your hills be shifted, so neither, from me to you, will mercy fail, nor will the covenant of your peace be removed, but my steadfast love shall certainly not depart from you, for the Lord, who is merciful, has spoken to you.

¹⁰ τὰ ὄρη μεταστήσονται οὐδὲ οἱ βουνοὶ σου μετακινήσονται, οὕτως οὐδὲ τὸ παρ' ἐμοῦ σοι ἔλεος ἐκλείψει οὐδὲ ἡ διαθήκη τῆς εἰρήνης σου οὐ μὴ μεταστή, εἶπεν γὰρ κύριος Ἰλεώς σοι.

Table 4.

about the sources underlying this passage may further illuminate Paul’s intent for his Galatian audience.

THE JEWISH EXEGETICAL TRAJECTORY OF GALATIANS 6:16

Comparative texts

The next section of this study focuses on the text or tradition that might have undergirded the Galatian Benediction, which is also known as tradition-history or *Traditionsgeschichte*. This type of inquiry runs the risk of minimizing an author’s creativity, in this case Paul’s. On the other hand, uncovering anything of an author’s source, may help cast further light on this verse.

Limited space will not permit consideration of the full scale of sources that could have served as backdrop to the Galatian Benediction. At any rate, most seemingly comparable texts can be dismissed based on the fact that they do not share the peculiar feature of peace being followed by mercy. This leaves us with only three traditions that do share the peculiar order of peace followed by mercy in common with the Galatian Benediction, namely, LXX.Isaiah 54:10, 1 Enoch 1:8, and the last Benediction of the Babylonian Amidah. As backdrop to the Galatian Benediction, the Amidah has often been proposed, Isaiah has been proposed

by Gregory Beale²³, and 1 Enoch by Michael Bachmann.²⁴

Isaiah

Gregory Beale suggested that LXX.Isaiah 54:10 undergirds the Galatian Benediction. (See Table 4.) It is the only passage in the Septuagint that contains the peculiar order of peace followed by mercy. Further, the precious stones in Isaiah 54:11-12 underlie Revelation 21:18-21, which describes the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 in turn discusses the new creation. Revelation’s employment of Isaiah 54 allows Beale to associate the new creation with Isaiah. This constitutes a further parallel with the Galatian Benediction, since the new creation is mentioned in Galatians 6:15. In addition, using Isaiah in the Galatian Benediction coincides with several studies that confirm the prominent background of Isaiah for Galatians.²⁵ Thus, because of the shared word-order, eschatological setting, possible association with the new creation, Isaiah 54:10 forms a good candidate as inspiration for Paul’s passage.

²³ Beale, *Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6, 16b*, 204-223

²⁴ Bachmann, *Anti-Judaism in Galatians?: Exegetical Studies on a Polemical Letter and on Paul’s Theology*.

²⁵ E.g. Harmon, *She must and Shall Go Free Paul’s Isaianic Gospel in Galatians*

1 Enoch 1:8

(a) And upon the righteous He will make peace,	(a) καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς δικαίους ⁱ τὴν εἰρήνην ποιήσει,
(b) And upon the elect there will be protection,	(b) καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς ἔσται συντήρησις [καὶ εἰρήνη], ⁱⁱ
(c) And upon them will be mercy	(c) καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς γενήσεται ἔλεος,
(d) And they will all belong to God, ⁱⁱⁱ	(d) καὶ ἔσονται πάντες τοῦ θεοῦ, ^{iv}

ⁱ The Ethiopic has either “and upon all the righteous” or “but to all the righteous” (*walā’la šādeqān kwellomu/ lašādeqān*). George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36, 81-108* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 143. In light of formulaic coherence with the following lines the former is preferred, 𐩈𐩣𐩪𐩠 : 𐩈𐩣𐩪𐩠 : 𐩈𐩣𐩪𐩠. Hence, the Greek μετὰ τῶν δικαίων can alternatively and preferentially be rendered ἐπὶ τοὺς δικαίους.

ⁱⁱ Both Black and Nickelsburg consider the καὶ εἰρήνη an addition, which according to Black made by the translator of the Greek. Matthew Black, James C. VanderKam, and O. Neugebauer, *The Book of Enoch: A New English Edition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 108.; Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36, 81-108*, 143.

ⁱⁱⁱ This translation is based on the Greek reconstruction, which is the result of evaluating Ethiopic and Greek text-critical data. See n.i and n.ii, above.

^{iv} The Greek text, in as far as it has not been changed, comes from Black’s edition, which is mainly based on *Codex Panopolitanus, Gizeh Papyrus*, dating to the sixth century C.E. Matthew Black and Albert-Marie Denis, *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 7, 19.

Table 5.

1 Enoch

Another candidate as backdrop to Galatians 6:16 was proposed by Michael Bachmann, namely 1 Enoch 1:8. While, Bachmann’s discussion is worthy of consideration elsewhere, this study wishes to leave Bachmann’s discussion aside in order to focus on an alternative comparison between 1 Enoch 1:8 and the Galatian Benediction. Just as Isaiah, 1 Enoch 1:8, shares the order of “peace” followed by “mercy.” Its context also discusses an eschatological setting as well as the idea of new creation.

When comparing Galatians 6:16 with the first four clauses of 1 Enoch 1:8—after having

taken some text critical observations into account—some remarkable parallels become visible. (See Table 5.) First, both the bestowal of peace and the bestowal of mercy occur with the preposition ἐπὶ, followed by a direct object. Observe 1 Enoch 1:8a and 8c: “(a) And upon (ἐπὶ) the righteous (accusative) He will make peace, (c) And upon (ἐπὶ) them (accusative) will be mercy.” Second, if the them of 8c is read as referring to the elect, then the bestowal of mercy is upon Israel, just as in Galatians. Last, if 8d is again understood as referring to the elect then we have a very close resemblance with the unique expression, the Israel of God,

Grant peace, welfare, blessing, grace, lovingkindness and mercy to us and to all Israel your people	שים שלום טובה וברכה חן וחסד ורחמים עלינו ועל כל ישראל עמך
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Table 6.

namely: “And the elect will all belong to God.” These striking parallels lead to the conclusion that 1 Enoch parallels the Galatian Benediction more closely than Isaiah 54—though it would be safer to speak of an Enoch-like tradition, rather than an explicit usage of 1 Enoch *per se*.

While it has now been determined that 1 Enoch 1:8a-d most closely resembles the Galatian Benediction, it would be difficult to suppose that the Galatians would have understood an Enochic reference. On closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that 1 Enoch 1:8 seems to be a reworking of Isaiah 54:10. The Enochic verse can in a sense be considered as a commentary on Isaiah. Hence, considering the three areas, namely: (1) the clear Isaianic backdrop to Galatians, (2) the much closer resemblance of 1 Enoch 1:8 to the Galatian Benediction, as well as (3) the clear reliance of 1 Enoch 1:8 on Isaiah 54:10, this study proposes that underlying the Galatian Benediction lies a tradition like 1 Enoch 1:8. By utilizing this Enoch-like tradition, Paul’s audience would still have been able to suppose the Isaianic backdrop, while Paul, using the Enoch-like tradition was able to more clearly speak of two groups, namely: those who walk according to this rule, i.e. the Church, as well as the Israel of God, i.e. eschatological ethnic Israel.

Babylonian Amidah

One final tradition not yet considered is the last benediction of the Babylonian Amidah, i.e. Birkat-haShalom. (See Table 6.) This tradition probably did not exist in Paul’s time. An earlier version of this benediction can be found in the Palestinian Amidah, which is dissimilar enough to no longer be a serious candidate as backdrop to the Galatian Benediction. However, the later Babylonian Amidah, does show how a benediction that first mentions peace and then mercy, even on two groups, was still in use after the formulation of the Galatian Benediction. It thus supports a contemporary and wider Jewish usage of this formula.

Trajectory

These observations allow the postulation of the trajectory in a chronological perspective.²⁶ First, the text of Isaiah gave rise to a reworking in 1 Enoch 1:8. While it is hard to tell, which came first, the Septuagint or 1 Enoch, it is clear that the text in the Septuagint is much shorter. 1 Enoch could have elaborated this Septuagint text. A tradition like 1 Enoch 1 could certainly have been known by Paul, as is evident from

²⁶ This does not mean that all traditions are chronologically related to one another. The case made in this study was that Paul relies on an Enoch-like tradition. The Amidah, however, most likely did not rely on Galatians. Neither were the rabbis very fond of Enochic material. The Amidah at this stage of inquiry simply seems to point to a wider Jewish usage of the “peace followed by mercy” benediction.

Jude citing 1 Enoch.²⁷ Further, even post-70 CE the formula of peace being followed by mercy reappears in the Amidah, thereby suggesting it could very well have been part of Paul's milieu.

Isaiah

(before the second century BCE)

LXX.Isaiah and 1 Enoch

(approximately second century BCE)

Galatians

(approximately mid first century CE)

Babylonian Amidah

(after 70 CE)

Afterthought

Those who do not confirm to the consensus view that the Galatian Benediction refers only to one group of people that is the Galatian churches, or by implication the Christian Church, are sometimes accused of relying on Romans 9-11.²⁸ This accusation does not apply to this study.

In the Babylonian Amidah, "upon us and upon all Israel" discusses two groups, namely "us" and wider Israel. While some argue that the righteous and elect are the same in 1 Enoch, they could also be considered distinct, especially from Paul's perspective, as recipient of this tradition (or the like). Further, the second benediction in 1 Enoch speaks (at least) about ethnic Israel. Similarly, in the Amidah this is explicitly stated in "upon all Israel." Further, the text in Revelation 21, alongside a comparable text about the New Jerusalem in Tobit 13, discusses Gentiles visiting Jerusalem. These texts portray distinct identities of Gentiles and Jews in the New Jerusalem. Considering that these texts employed Isaiah 54 for their

statements, we can consider these texts in some sense to be instructive for the Galatian Benediction in terms of Jews and Gentiles.²⁹ The exegetical trajectory thus supports the idea that Jews and Gentiles have a distinct eschatological role, which reappears in the eschatologically oriented Galatian Benediction.

Thus the Galatian Benediction argues against supersessionism in its own right. It does not need to rely on Romans 9-11. However, this does not preclude appealing nevertheless to Romans 11:25-32 as an afterthought. This text in Romans could possibly represent a teaching that was in one way or the other already familiar in Galatia.³⁰ A justification for appealing to this text is found in that the idea of mercy plays an important role in the salvation of Israel at the end of times.³¹

25 Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, 26 and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; 27 "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." 28 As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. 30 Just as you were once disobedient to

29 Both Galatians and Revelation speak of the new creation (Gal 6:15-16, Rev 21). A distinction between Jew and Gentile in the new creation, thus also reflects back on the Galatian Benediction.

30 One may think of a teaching that was common knowledge, taught by Paul, or expounded by Paul's letter carrier.

31 It should be noted that the argument here only speaks of Romans 11 as afterthought. Again the exegetical trajectory sufficiently indicates that the last recipient in the Galatian benediction refers to ethnic Israel. Thus Sherwood's statement that "[v]irtually all those who resist this interpretation do so because they feel verse 16 must be interpreted in terms of Paul's later depiction(s) of Israel in Romans 9-11", does not apply here. *Ibid.*, 228

27 Jude 14-15 cites 1 Enoch 1:9.

28 Sherwood, *Paul and the Restoration of Humanity in Light of Ancient Jewish Traditions*, 229

God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.³²

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study consisted of two sections. The first section discussed the context of the Pauline corpus and in particular the Galatian epistle that an *a priori* dismissal of ethnic diversity in this letter cannot be sustained. Further, grammatical considerations and a lexical survey established that in terms of “the Israel of God” there is hardly, if at all, room for a supersessionist understanding. Contrary to the consensus view, “the Israel of God” should be understood as only referring to ethnic Israel.

The second part of this study was to postulate the most likely trajectory behind Paul’s statement. On the one hand, this was a heuristic exercise, whose results cannot be absolutely verified. Thus, one needs to be cautioned that these results are tentative. However, the results of this inquiry, in their own right, more or less reaffirmed the findings of the grammatical, lexical, and contextual inquiries.

The proposed exegetical trajectory suggests that some kind of a relationship exists between LXX.Isaiah 54, 1 Enoch 1, the Galatian Benediction, and possibly the Babylonian Amidah. The closest of these texts to the Galatian Benediction is 1 Enoch 1:8a-d, which reaffirms a reading of the righteous receiving peace and the elect receiving mercy. It even possibly offers a close parallel to the *hapax legomenon* “the Israel of God.” Close connections between Isaiah 54 and 1 Enoch 1 suggest that Paul

could have used this tradition (or the like) as “commentary” to Isaiah. Further, the suggestion was offered that Romans 11:25-32, may after all be considered as an afterthought, resembling a teaching explaining Galatians 6:16.

Stefan Bosman

Stefan Bosman serves as an online instructor of Biblical Hebrew for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Aberdeen and doing his research at Tyndale House in Cambridge. His research focuses on Jewish exegesis in the New Testament.

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³² The Revised Standard Version

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