

Perspectives

explorations in theology and practice

All Israel will be saved

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Perspectives: explorations in theology and practice continue in the theme of the 'explorations' series of books. On a given subject they are designed to provoke thought as well as presenting a perspective.

This eighth volume is a perspective on how the New Testament approaches the promises to Israel - promises beginning with Abraham and to his descendants. I also draw on the work of Jason Staples who carefully shows that the terms 'Israel' and 'Jew' are not synonymous nor interchangeable.

Biblical texts quoted are from The New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition, unless noted otherwise.

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All Israel will be saved (Ro. 11:26)

The verse in the title is toward the end of Paul's discourse that had begun in Rom. 9 and is a fitting conclusion to his statement in 9:6

It is not as though the word of God has failed.

In these chapters he is concerned to show **how** God has been faithful to his promises to Israel, ending then with the fuller statement 'And **in this way** all Israel will be saved'. He is focused primarily on how ('this way') not on a time-table (which would necessitate translating and reading καὶ οὕτως (kai houtōs) as 'and then'.¹ If Paul had intended a temporal sense the obvious would be to use καὶ τότε (kai tote - and then).

In eschatology there is often a focus on the land of 'Israel' and events that can indicate what the time is on 'God's clock'. There are accusations of 'replacement theology' (the church has replaced Israel) on the one side and of 'Christian Zionism' on the other, with

¹ This translation is one possible, but marginal, way to read the phrase. It is not the natural way to read it and the default way that it is to be read in Paul is 'modal' not 'temporal': Rom. 1:15; 4:18; 5:12, 15, 18, 19, 21; 6:4, 11, 19; 9:20; 10:6; 11:5, 31; 12:5; 15:20. Hence 'and thus / in this way' is the natural way to translate this phrase. Likewise if he wanted to imply a temporal sequence he had other phrases he could have used. In the text I wrote that it Paul is 'focused primarily on how' but I could have written that he is 'only' focused on how.

that latter view in its most extreme form holding to there being two ways of 'salvation': one for Jews and one for Gentiles. This paper will suggest that in finding a way forward we need to distinguish between two central descriptions, that of 'Israel' and of 'Jews'.²

The concluding verse of Romans 11:26 ('and all Israel will be saved') has been taken as a statement about the future and understood to mean that in the 'end-times' or at the *parousia* there will be a wholesale turning to Jesus as Messiah. There are many difficulties with such a reading:

- The actual language used is not that of a temporal clause, such as 'and then' or 'after this'. It is describing 'how' not describing something that will take place in the future.
- It does not say 'all Jews' but 'all Israel'. It certainly does not say 'every Jew alive in the end-times'! Understanding what 'all Israel' is referring to is important.
- And with a reading that proposes a future event, we are left with the issue of what about all those from Israel (or all Jews) who had lived prior to this future event - if this Scripture was referring to a future event would the 'salvation' be limited only to those alive at this future event? If it extends beyond those who are alive at that time we would expect somehow that anyone ethnically of Abraham's seed would have been 'saved' all along - something hard to align with the preaching

² In this paper I am deeply indebted to the pioneering work of Jason Staples - two being *Paul and the Resurrection of Israel*, and *The idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism*. Even seasoned NT scholars simply suggest the two terms are synonymous.

in Acts (calling the audience to a response and to separate themselves from the corrupt generation for we have to remember that the audience is only a Jewish one in those early years) or to the ‘conversion’ of Paul.

We will explore this Pauline statement, but for now I note that **there is no temporal indication in this verse** and to translate it as a ‘and then’ clause is simply in error. ‘In this way’ is really the only valid way to translate καὶ οὕτως (*kai houtōs*); it is not a temporal clause but indicates a **means** that produces an outcome or a result.

A second factor to consider is how the term ‘all Israel’ was used here by Paul. He has already stated that,

For not all those descended from Israel are Israelites, and not all of Abraham’s children are his descendants, but “it is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.” (Rom. 9:6,7).

We thus enter an interesting scenario: not all those descended from Abraham are considered to be ‘Israel’, and as we will explore, ‘Israel’ is also bigger than those who are called ‘Jews’! (Smaller and larger!)

One final Scripture to add in this introduction is that of Paul’s statement before Agrippa,

And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night (Acts 26:6,7).

I get ahead of myself, but simply wanted to indicate one key

direction that I will be taking, and that is the difference between the term ‘Jew’ and the bigger definition of ‘Israel’, or as Paul uses here in his defense before Agrippa, the ‘twelve tribes’. The eschatological hope was of the restoration of **Israel**, a restoration that would touch the twelve tribes not simply those living in Judea (Jews).

Thus there are a number of aspects we need to keep in focus as we progress.

Ethnic or faith

Israel is both bigger than we might suppose ‘Israel’ to be and also smaller! The name Israel is used for the covenant people because of the patriarch ‘Jacob’ whose name was changed to ‘Israel’;³ the covenant people who come from the line of ‘Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’. We might assume that the twelve tribes are descended from the 12 sons of Jacob / Israel but that is only approximately true. Joseph’s two sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) are described either as two tribes or as half-tribes with the two together making up the tribe of Joseph.⁴ Indeed Ephraim became so significant that to use the

³ Israel has three applications: the land of Israel; the whole 12 tribes; and the northern ‘10 tribes’ sometimes also called ‘Ephraim’ (as it was the main northern tribe). Jews, as we will see, are part of Israel, but are not ‘Israel’. Jews were those of the tribe of Judah (and Benjamin is included, along with some of Levi who were originally distributed throughout the land).

⁴ There are various lists of the tribes; for example ‘Joseph’ is included in the blessing of Jacob over his sons prior to his death (Gen. 49: 3-27); in the census of the tribes (Num. 1:20-43) Ephraim and Manasseh are included (Joseph nor Levi are listed); and in Revelation 7:5-8 the list includes Manasseh, Levi and Joseph but drops Dan and Ephraim.

term often indicated that all the tribes of the northern kingdom were being referenced.

The bigger point, in this though, is one of ethnicity. The sons of Joseph were born in Egypt to the daughter of the priest of On.

Asenath, **Joseph's Egyptian wife**, gave birth to two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen. 41:50).⁵

These sons are not only included in Israel but give identity as tribes so much so that in later history 'Ephraim' can be given as an umbrella name for the 10 northern kingdom tribes. Ethnicity was not in view!

At the time of the Exodus we read that not only those descended from Jacob's immediate family exit the land but that an 'alien' who joined themselves to those of 'Israel' were to be considered as 'natives of the land' and as a result a '**mixed multitude**' left Egypt (Exod. 12:36-38). With regard to the Passover instructions we read,

If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the Passover to the Lord, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it; there shall be one law for the native-born and for the alien who resides among you (Exod. 12:48,49).⁶

⁵ There is a parallel with Moses being married to the priest of Midian (Jethro) and having sons, Gershom and Eliezer; those two served within the tribe of Levi.

⁶ When we come to the NT Paul also claims that those who, in spite of not

Those who enter the land then are not all descended from Abraham, but they are considered to be part of Israel **though they are not ethnically descended from the patriarchs.**⁷

[When we come to the NT we find Paul claims that those who have received the Spirit are descended from Abraham,

*Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” so, you see, **those who believe are the descendants of Abraham.** And the scripture, foreseeing that God would reckon as righteous **the gentiles by faith**, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the gentiles shall be blessed in you.” For this reason, **those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed...** And if you belong to Christ, then **you are Abraham’s offspring**, heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:6-9, 29, emphases added; written to a Gentile audience).*

*In the Scriptures related to the ‘alien’ it was necessary for the males to receive the sign of the covenant (circumcision), marking their allegiance to the God of Israel; in Paul the evidence is **faith**. The result in both instances is the same - they are counted as part of the covenant people.]*

As they enter the land we read of **Rahab** and her household being added to the covenant people and later of **Ruth** (a Moabite) who

being descended ethnically from Abraham, are indeed Abraham’s descendents

⁷ In Exodus when listing the genealogy of Moses and Aaron we read, ‘The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, **the son of a Canaanite woman**; these are the families of Simeon (6:15). Racial purity is not the focus in recounting the genealogy.

becomes an ancestor of David. In the Rahab story Achan and his household (Israelites) are **cut off from the people** while she and her household are incorporated. Matthew in his Gospel (a Gospel that is very 'Jewish') lists both those women as part of the genealogy of Jesus.

Caleb (a great hero, alongside Joshua) was a Kennizite as was **Othniel**, the judge. The Kennizites were either a tribe in Canaan or descended from Kenaz, a grandson of Esau. It is Solomon's wife from an Ammonite background that continues the line of David, with their son, Rehoboam, becoming his successor (1 Kings 14:21).

At that level 'Israel' is not confined to those whose **genealogies** are ethnically of 'Israel', but includes a larger group whose **allegiance** is to the God of Israel. Ruth's statement to Naomi is an apt-description of how allegiance was a marker that triumphed over ethnicity:

[Y]our people shall be my people and your God my God (Ruth 1:16).

We can further add the challenges from the New Testament, such as John the Baptist's statement that confronted the claim to ethnicity as the marker,

We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham (Matt. 3:8).

Or Paul's pushback on 'external' factors as defining who is a 'Jew',

For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is

one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not the written code. Such a person receives praise not from humans (Rom. 2:28,29).

In those passages we have both a **widening** of those who are of Israel and also a **narrowing**. Allegiance to the 'God of Israel' determines the widening or the narrowing; **faith seems to take precedence over ethnicity**.

'Israel' included those who were not ethnically descended from Abraham and at the same time it was also smaller than ethnic 'Israel'. Paul's words summarise that,

It is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all those descended from Israel are Israelites, and not all of Abraham's children are his descendants (Rom. 9:6,7).

This was not unique to Paul, for within Judaism (Judaisms?) this 'narrowing' view is what fuelled the diverse sects. The stricter the sect the more they saw themselves as truly Israel and others as not being faithful to the ways of God, and thus excluded from Israel. The 'sinners' we read about in the Gospels were those considered not to be part of the covenant people, even though ethnically they might have been pure.

'Being cut off from this people' meant, in spite of ethnicity, a failure to keep the covenant required those people to be excluded (Lev. 7:27, 18:29, 23:29); Peter uses the same understanding (but very provocatively as he centres everything in on Jesus) with his entreaty to his audience to,

Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. (Acts 2:40)

Ethnicity is further challenged by Jesus in Matthew 21:43,

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits.

The complexity of Israel being both larger and smaller than 'Israel' means we cannot simply draw (for example) a straight line from the Israel of the Bible to the state of Israel today.

Israel or Jew

A common response and understanding of the terms 'Israel' and 'Jew' is to see them as simply synonymous, such as we read in the following quote,

Generally speaking, the terms Hebrews, Jews, and Israelites all refer to the same people - the nation which sprang from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, a nation promised and chosen by God in the Old Testament.⁸

The work of Jason Staples has shown that the two terms are not simply two descriptions for the one entity and that Paul follows the distinction that writers such as Josephus and Philo make.

⁸[\(https://www.timberlandchurch.org/articles/is-there-a-difference-between-hebrews-jews-and-israelites#:~:text=Generally%20speaking%2C%20the%20terms%20Hebrews%2C.the%20Old%20Testament%20\(Genesis%2012%3A1%2D3\)](https://www.timberlandchurch.org/articles/is-there-a-difference-between-hebrews-jews-and-israelites#:~:text=Generally%20speaking%2C%20the%20terms%20Hebrews%2C.the%20Old%20Testament%20(Genesis%2012%3A1%2D3)) (accessed 13 Jan., 2026).

Josephus (37-100AD) who wrote the *Jewish Antiquities* (a history of Israel) referred to Israel/Israelites 188 times in the first 11 volumes but **does not use those words outside of those 11 volumes**; he uses the term 'Jew' only 26 times in the first 10 volumes, but in the remaining 9 volumes he **only refers to the term 'Jew'** (1162 times), never using the term 'Israel'. If the terms were interchangeable we would expect a much more even spread; the incredible difference in the statistics indicate that these two terms do not refer to the same people. Something happened in the history to highlight 'Israel' in the earlier period but 'Jew' in accounts relating to the later history. His use indicates that it was only 'Jews' who returned from the exile in Babylon - Jews being from the southern kingdom of Judah.

When these Jews (*Ioudaioi*) learned of the king's piety towards God, and his kindness towards Ezra, they loved [him] most dearly, and many took up their possessions and went to Babylon, desiring to go down to Jerusalem. But all the people of Israel remained in that land. So it came about that only two tribes [Benjamin, a smaller tribe is included, also some from Levi who were distributed in both the northern and southern kingdoms] came to Asia and Europe and are subject to the Romans, but the ten tribes are beyond the Euphrates until now and are a countless multitude whose number is impossible to know (Ant. 11:132-133).

Josephus writing in the Roman era describes the other 10 tribes as being beyond Roman territory. His change of usage indicates that 'Israel' (the 10 northern tribes that were taken away in the Assyrian conquest of 722BC) did not return and he could not use the term

'Israel' of returning Jews.⁹ Israel was either used to refer to the whole people or the northern tribes but never as a synonymous term for 'Jews'; the *Ioudaioi* (Jews) were the southern kingdom that did return after the Babylonian exile.

The later volumes of Josephus cover the history after the northern kingdom went into their exile (never to return)¹⁰, hence those that remain are referred to as 'Jews'. Once the Southern kingdom returns from the Babylonian exile the people are **only** referred to as 'Jews' by Josephus; Jews then are a subset of Israel and all Jews together do not constitute Israel - this will become important when we come to Paul's statement of 'all Israel will be saved'.

A few paragraphs later Josephus writes,

From the time they went up from Babylon they were called by this name [*Ioudaios*] after the tribe of Judah. Since the tribe was the prominent one to come from those parts, both the people themselves and the country have taken their name from it (Ant. 11:173).

Jews are those from the tribe of Judah - the southern kingdom. It was the tribe of Judah and Benjamin that went into Babylonian

⁹ Jews were those from the southern kingdom therefore part of Israel but not Israel. We might compare this with 'Scandinavian' and 'Norwegian'. All Norwegians are Scandinavian, but not all Scandinavians are Norwegian. 'All Israel' is a bigger term than 'all Jews'. We can all Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews. (I use the term Israelite in the previous sentence as I am using an ethnic categorisation, not a faith one; 'all Israel' does not mean 'all Jews'.

¹⁰ I will make a note later about the 'Samaritans'.

captivity and who returned.¹¹

Within the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) and the books that are post-Babylonian-exile the term 'Jew' **only** refers to those who were from the tribe of Judah (and Benjamin and some from Levi who were distributed across the northern and southern kingdoms). Philo of Alexandria (20-50AD) likewise uses the term Israel(ite) eighty times in his Greek works, but he **never** uses it synonymously with Jew, nor does he ever refer to the contemporary people as Israel or Israelites. Like Josephus, he uses *Ioudaios* to refer to contemporary Jews.

The shift that takes place is the demise of the northern kingdom who are taken into exile by Assyria and eventually are scattered among the nations. That northern kingdom carried the name 'Israel' whereas the southern kingdom was termed Judah - the tribes splitting after Solomon dies. Israel could be used as a term to describe the whole people (descendants of Jacob/Israel) or of the northern kingdom by itself, but the southern kingdom was **never** referred to as Israel.

This distinction remains consistent in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is the 'elders of **the Jews**' (Ezra 6:14) who are those who rebuild the Temple and when the Temple is dedicated a sin offering is made for **all Israel**, **twelve** male goats, according to **the number of the tribes of Israel** (Ezra 6:17). 'Jews' had returned from the Babylonian exile, but the remainder of Israel had not, hence the elders were the elders of the Jews (not of Israel), but they expressed

¹¹ Paul is a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin.

a hope that persisted for the restoration of the twelve tribes (Israel / all Israel) such as was also articulated by Paul,

And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, **a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain**, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, Your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews (Acts 26:6,7).

The prophetic hope was for the twelve tribes, but Paul was accused by Jews! The hope was expressed in different passages but the 'I will make a new covenant' passage in Jeremiah is a good summary of the future hope of restoration (emphases added below) - a hope for the house of Israel, the fullness of the 12 tribes:

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of **all the families of Israel**, and they shall be my people... The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow **the house of Israel and the house of Judah** with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord... The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make **a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah**. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with **the house of Israel** after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:1, 27-28,

*[A sidenote - there was a partial return of the northern kingdom but it was ethnically mixed, being based in Samaria they were known as Samaritans. They are **never known as Jews**, but did refer to themselves as 'Samaritan Israelites' or as 'guardians of the Torah', this scenario further makes the identification of 'Jew' as applied only to those of the southern kingdom. The Samaritans viewed themselves as Israelites (**not as Jews**) while the majority of Jews viewed them as illegitimate. The debate was not whether they were Jews - that point was agreed on by all: they were not Jews. The debate was whether they were legitimately part of Israel. Thus again we see that even the sum total of all Jews could not be termed 'all Israel'.]*

Paul's statistical use of Israel

Paul uses 'Israel / Israelites' 13 times in Rom. 9-11 and only 7 times in the rest of the Pauline literature (we will look at those below); he does not use the term 'Israel' in Romans outside of those 3 chapters, but uses the term 'Jew' on numerous occasions, and only

¹² Later we will comment on the disciples' question 'are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time' noting that the term 'Israel' not 'Judah / Jews' is used.

once does he use the term ‘Jew’ inside those three chapters.¹³ His focus inside these chapters is on ‘Israel / all Israel / the restoration of the twelve tribes’; outside the chapters he is diving into the Jew / Greek issue (the world as categorised that he is working within).¹⁴

Those statistics alone should get our attention.

Of the seven references outside of Romans 9-11 when Paul uses the term ‘Israel’, he is referring to historical / ethnic Israel. Only once does he use ‘Israel’ to refer to a current entity, the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16),

As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.¹⁵

‘And (καὶ) upon the Israel of God’ can either be indicating two groups - ‘those who follow this rule’ and ‘the Israel of God’, or the use of the καὶ can be ‘epexegetic’ and thus carrying a clarifying meaning - those who follow this rule who are the Israel of God. We can further contrast this phrase to Paul’s use of ‘Israel according to the flesh’ (1 Cor. 10:18). There it is clearly a reference to ethnic Israel (τὸν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα - Israel kata sarka); in Galatians his term is τὸν

¹³ Ro. 9:24 where he is referring to his current time when God has chosen those from among the ‘Jews’ and the ‘Gentiles’. He is referring to the time when ‘Israel’ is not an entity as a whole.

¹⁴ The term ‘Jew’ appears 25 times in Paul. He reserves Israel to the historical (and larger) term to refer to the 12 tribes (consistent with Josephus and Philo).

¹⁵ Ps. 125:5 reads, ‘As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.’ Paul qualifies ‘Israel’ with ‘of God’.

Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ (Israel of God). The contrast in the two qualifiers means that if both terms are applied to ethnic Israel then this would simply suggest that ‘not all who are (ethnically) Israel are of God’s Israel’. The reference then is either to that portion within ethnic Israel that has responded to Messiah (the Galatian letter is about how Jew and Greek are included in the Messiah) or he is pushing his view that those who respond in faith (who follow this rule) are descendants of Abraham (whether Jew or Gentile) and thus are the ‘Israel of God’. Regardless he is not advocating two ways to salvation!

Paul never uses the terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Israel’ synonymously (he maintains the distinction between the terms **consistent with other Jewish writers of the 'second temple' era**). Outside of Romans 9-11 his normal contrasting language is ‘Jew and Greek’ (Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10, 17; 3:1,9; 1 Cor. 1:22, 24; 12:13; Gal. 3:28) or ‘Jew and Gentile’ (Rom. 3:29; 9:24; 1 Cor 1:23; Gal. 2:14-15).¹⁶

¹⁶ As noted in Rom. 9 the only time he uses Jew and Gentile is with reference to his current era. It is in reference to what God is doing in his day; the larger context of 9-11 is of defending the promises of God to (all) Israel.

The use of the term ‘Greek’ is not restricted to those who are living within Greece, but is a description of Gentiles who live within the Roman Empire. Greek was the language of the eastern part of the empire and in Paul’s world and in the Jewish literature of the period, Greece and the Greeks were commonly referenced as the religious, political, and cultural context with which Judaism struggled to co-exist. For example, Zechariah expects YHWH to raise up the sons of Zion “against the children of the Greeks” (Zech. 9:13 LXX); Antiochus Epiphanes exhorts the seven devout Jewish brothers: “Enjoy your youth by embracing a Greek way of life and changing your mode of living” (4 Macc. 8:8). Paul uses the term ‘Greek’

I end this section with the important understanding that when we read Romans 9-11 we will have to approach it realising that 'Israel' and 'Jew' are not synonymous terms. Paul's language in Romans 9-11 has changed from the earlier chapters in the book and also differs from his normal language in his other letters. 'Jew' being reserved for those from the southern kingdom living back in the land in his day, whereas 'Israel' carries either a historic reference to the people as a whole or to the history of the northern kingdom. 'All Israel' cannot mean 'every Jew' and has to extend beyond those living in the land.

The people 'in' Messiah and Israel

The coming of Messiah in order to fulfil the promises to Abraham (Genesis 12 onwards) and to heal the sickness that creation endures (as outlined specifically in Genesis 1-11) is not simply a situation of the past progressing. We read the Scriptures historically and we read them with Jesus being their fulfillment; he fulfills what

synonymously with the term 'Gentile' as that was the world in which he was seeking to see people (Jew or Greek / Gentile) come to faith in Jesus. There is no distinction between the two terms 'Gentile' or 'Greek'. He does use the term 'barbarian' and 'Scythian' referring also to Gentiles but to Gentiles who are outside the Roman domain.

has been previously written. And yet there is something more that takes place. The resurrection of Jesus changes 'time'. Not a change as to how time is measured, but one that changes expectations. An event (the resurrection) that was hoped would occur at the fullness of time had now occurred in time, we could say ahead of schedule. Death and resurrection (of Jesus) might be separated by three days but they were part of one event, with the resurrection ushering in a new era, even what is termed 'new creation'. Something of the future became present with the resurrection of Jesus. The end is not something we wait for, but the end (in the Person of Jesus) is something we welcome. Hence when we turn to the New Testament there are surprises and twists with regard to fulfilment(s).

Paul sums it up with his words in 2 Corinthians 1:20,

For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God.

All promises that God has made are **guaranteed** and **fulfilled** in Christ. Centring everything on Christ means the fulfilment at times might look different¹⁷ to what was expected and we have to take care about simply taking an Old Testament promise and seeking to project forward.¹⁸ The eschatological fulfilment is more vital, and this

¹⁷ The fulfilment is 'beyond' what was expected. Progressive revelation is from the lesser to the greater, never the other way round.

¹⁸ We have to do the same with the various laws. We neither abrogate them all except for the ones that are affirmed in the NT, nor do we hold them all except for the ones that have explicitly been cancelled! The tendency is to take one or the other approach. Continuity and discontinuity is involved and all Scripture has to pass through the Jesus filter.

seems to be why Paul says that Abraham was promised the 'world' (*kosmos*) not the 'land' (*ge*).¹⁹

The church replaces Israel?

There is a theology termed supersessionism where the church is said to supersede / replace Israel. This can be expressed in a very simple way or nuanced better with Jesus faithfully fulfilling Israel's calling and that those who are in Christ are where the purposes of God are centred. The contrary perspective is that which Dispensationalism expresses - that there are two different paths to salvation: one for Israel and one for those who have come to faith in Jesus. I once heard a Messianic Jew say, 'In the New Testament the early believers were clear that Jews needed Jesus, they were just not sure about the Gentiles. Now two millennia later we have reversed that approach where we are sure that Gentiles need saving but we are not sure about the Jews!' This is certainly true of those who hold to two paths for salvation.

We can look at the tussle that occurred in the early chapters of Acts. They are clear that there was 'no other name' by which people could be saved (Acts 4:12). Peter's audience were Jews in Jerusalem and

¹⁹ This is not explicit in the promises to Abraham but the parallel with Adam and the garden of Eden opens this direction. The fruit-laden garden was not to be the extent for Adam's (humanity's) stewardship. The garden might have been the starting point but the earth was given to humanity (Ps.115:16). One might draw a line from the promise to Abraham concerning the land but the line is fully drawn when operating as Paul does from the future as occurred through Jesus.

he said that they could not appeal to the patriarchs ('other names') as being their guarantee of salvation; then when Gentiles began to respond to Jesus the question was how were they to relate to the law. Gentiles who converted to Judaism took on board the Torah and its instructions - so what response was required of Gentiles who expressed faith in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel? Part of the offence in the new Messianic movement was that Gentiles were given full inclusion **without** submitting to the law.²⁰

The belief that I highlighted earlier (of two separate paths) is something I reject²¹ and the alternative view (of the church replacing Israel) I wish to nuance somewhat.

The heading I have given as a question ('The church replaces Israel') in itself raises some questions. Always the danger of using the word 'church' is that almost inevitably we have injected into the word a predetermined meaning or concept. If, however, we transliterate the Greek underlying word (*ekklesia*) we can see that the question is indeed a strange one. Israel was termed the *ekklesia*²² Thus it is bizarre to ask the question 'does the *ekklesia*

²⁰ And we must not think of Judaism as being a religion of works; the law acted as a boundary marker and was viewed as God's gracious gift to the people. Conversely we must not consider that the entry for the Gentiles was one of cheap grace (Torah-free is not lawlessness). Paul was committed to bring about 'the **obedience** of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name' (Rom. 1:5).

²¹ Jesus being **the way**, the gospel being the power of God to salvation to **everyone** who believes, to the Jew first and also for the Greek.

²² The common word used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures when describing Israel as the community in response to God,

replace the *ekklesia*!

We have to dig deeper. So let's try and expand this somewhat. As discussed earlier in this paper, fundamental to Israel's identity was that of faith - faith triumphed over ethnicity. Israel was always smaller than the ethnic boundary and yet always bigger than any ethnic boundary as faith drew a bigger circumference.

Prior to the 'Jesus is the promised Messiah' era when Gentiles became Torah-obedient they were included as part of Israel; this emphasis continued among certain Jewish followers of Jesus, hence the disagreements within the early Jesus-movement. The controversy that ensued was settled when it was decided that Gentile followers of Jesus were not required to be obedient to Torah.

Hebrew Scriptures and the trajectory of the bigger circle

A core Scripture giving Israel an identity was that of Exodus 19:5,6,

Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

Peter utilises that Scripture in 1 Peter 2:9,10 (and goes on to quote Hosea concerning the casting away of Israel and the drawing back),

hence Moses was said to be with the *ekklesia* in the wilderness (Acts 7:38).

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of
him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
Once you were not a people,
 but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
 but now you have received mercy.

Unless Peter is addressing an exclusive group of Jews who follow Jesus, he is clearly giving to these Jesus-followers descriptive terms that were used for Israel. Israel's regathering into a relationship with God is fulfilled through those (Gentiles) responding to Jesus.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 pulls together a number of Old Testament passages as he warns the gentile Christians:

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, as God said,
"I will live in them and walk among them,
 and I will be their God,
 and they shall be my people.
Therefore come out from them,
 and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
 then I will welcome you,
 and I will be your father,
 and you shall be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."

He boldly quotes and alludes to a host of Old Testament texts here - among them are Leviticus 26, Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 52, Ezekiel 20, and

2 Samuel 7. Those Old Testament texts refer to Israel, with the latter allusion being to David! Paul cites texts that were Israel-centric and applies them to a (predominant / exclusive?) group of Gentile converts. He follows the quotes and allusions with the provocative statement, 'Since **we** have these promises' (2 Cor. 7:1). He does not write 'since they have these promises' but 'since **we**'. He (and he is a Jew) aligns these converts with Israel!

He aligns converts, regardless of their ethnicity, with the 'ancestors' of Israel. Those ancestors, he writes, are **our** ancestors:

I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea (1 Cor. 10:1).

Although the Corinthians are not **ethnically** part of Israel, Paul says they are incorporated into Israel.²³ This seems to be something that is very consistent in Paul and when we come to the chapters in Romans (9-11) it will become very evident in his view that wild-olive shoots have been grafted into the one olive tree.

A longer passage is in Ephesians 2,

So then, remember that at one time you gentiles by birth, called

²³ Writing to the Corinthians Paul describes them as formerly being Gentiles "You know that **when you were gentiles** you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak" (1 Cor. 12:2); and in Philipians he writes to 'Gentiles' and calls them the 'circumcision'!
"For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

“the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— remember that you were at that time without Christ, **being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise**, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus **you** who once were far off **have been brought near** by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made **both into one** and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself **one new humanity** in place of the two, thus making peace, and might **reconcile both** to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off **and** peace to those who were near, for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God**, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God (Ephes. 2:11-22, emphases added).

The passage needs almost no comment but I note that ‘gentiles / the uncircumcision’ who previously had a status as those who were ‘outside the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant’ had been brought near so that the divide between the two groups had ended; the Gentiles had now become citizens with the saints and members of God’s household. To be ‘brought near’ was the language to describe what had taken place when Gentiles converted

to Judaism.²⁴

What is described is not 'replacement' but **incorporation** and the foundation being based on that of 'apostles and prophets'.²⁵

In Ephesians chapter 3 that follows the above quote Paul unfolds that what was not understood prior to the resurrection had now been revealed. That mystery was that the Gentiles had become **sharers in the promise of God** which could only mean that they were incorporated into Israel. The mystery revealed alters any expected time sequence - this is not something taking place after the restoration of Israel (as certain OT Scriptures seem to indicate) but taking place simultaneously, and it was taking place without the Gentiles submitting to the Torah.

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Ephesians 3:5,6).

²⁴ Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost records that the promise was for those immediately present, the subsequent generations and for 'those afar off'. The OT expectation that post-restoration Gentiles would come in, the mystery that has been revealed to Paul is that this was not some future event, but a current one and it was happening without the Gentiles submitting to the Torah as had been the requirement for those converting to Judaism.

²⁵ In this context it is feasible to understand this to be the proclaimers of God's will from what we can term (looking back) the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In these passages all those who are in Christ are now partakers as Abraham's descendants, and so can be said to be incorporated into Israel (the Israel of God?). If we pull on Paul's words in Galatians where he insists that the 'seed' of Abraham is singular and that singular seed is Messiah²⁶ then it follows that all who are in Christ are therefore descendants of Abraham.

The Acts 1:6 question

Did the disciples completely miss the mark with their question concerning the 'restoration of the kingdom'? And perhaps more importantly, how should we understand Jesus' reply? Is it an affirmation that there is work to be done first and **then** the kingdom will be restored to Israel, or is his answer a redirection?

Their question the disciples asked is understandable as it aligns with the hope that had been consistently expressed. In the vision of the dry bones coming back to life we read,

Thus says the Lord God: I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone and will gather them from every quarter and bring them to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms. They shall never again defile themselves with their idols and their detestable things or with any of their transgressions. I will save

²⁶ Neither in English nor in Greek is Paul on firm ground linguistically, but his point is theological.

them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek 37:19-23).

The restoration vision was of those who had been scattered (the northern tribes / Israel / Ephraim) being gathered from where they had been scattered, being re-united with the southern kingdom (Judah and the smaller tribe of Benjamin) under one king. In Isaiah we read that the land would be desolate until 'a spirit from on high is poured out' (Is. 32:15) and Peter says this had indeed taken place,

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you see and hear (Acts 2:33).²⁷

A new era of fulfilment was here. The big vision for restoration was therefore within sight; the Messiah had been raised from the dead so we can understand the disciples' question,

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

In response Jesus clearly pushes the disciples away from a focus on time but **engages them in a process**. In doing so he uses a framework from Isaiah relating to the servant (Israel, Isaiah,

²⁷ We could further note the comparison with Moses, who ascended on high and the law came down. The giving of the Torah was celebrated at the Feast of Pentecost. We should also note that when the tablets of stone came down that 3000 were killed (Lev. 43:38), contrasting the 3000 responding to Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

Messiah, and now disciples) as ‘witness’.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Reflecting on the Isaianic passages we can see they carry the theme of the restoration of Israel. Here are some Isaianic passages that undergird Jesus’ response and we should in particular take note of the final one:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations (Is. 42:1).

You are **my witnesses**, says the Lord,
and my servant whom I have chosen (Is. 43:10)

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations (Is. 44:26).

And now the Lord says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring **Jacob** back to him,
and **that Israel might be gathered to him**,
for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
and my God has become my strength—
he says,
“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant

to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and **to restore the survivors of Israel;**

I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach **to the end of the earth**" (Is. 49
5,6).

From Jerusalem and Judea (the Jewish world) to the Samaritans (are they 'of Israel' or are they not? - but they are a sign pointing toward the restoration of Israel)... and then 'to the ends of the earth'.²⁸ Leaning on Isaiah 49 the reaching out to the ends of the earth **is** the gathering of the 'tribes of Jacob / Israel'. Hence we should understand Jesus response (in summary) as being:

- Don't focus on timing.
- Focus on process.
- And the process affects the timing, for in the process the restoration of the kingdom to **Israel** is taking place.²⁹

This latter point I understand to mean that as the mission extends to the ends of the earth the ingathering of the tribes of Jacob takes place **simultaneously** with the 'conversion' of Gentiles.³⁰

²⁸ The Bible version I am quoting from has 'ends of the earth' in Acts and 'end of the earth' in the quote from Isaiah, but the underlying Greek is the same in both - ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

²⁹ NB to 'Israel' -not synonymous to 'Jews'; and in the restoration 'Israel' is defined by faith (smaller than all who are ethnically descended from Abraham, **and** also larger than those who are ethnically descended).

³⁰ This, as I will write later, is how I think we should read Paul in Romans when he says 'in this way all Israel will be saved'. The 'Gentile mission' is crucial to the restoration of Israel!

'Forever' promises

The New Testament changes expectations, and that is an understatement. Not simply that the Messiah will be crucified, but such elements as the perceived 'sequence of events'. An expectation that there will be restoration of 'Israel' and to the land, with Gentiles then coming to worship the God of Israel is fulfilled by a Gentile 'mission' that **is** the restoration of Israel.³¹ Promises in the Hebrew Scriptures therefore have to be interpreted (and expanded) through the lens of the New Testament. Scripture is Jesus-centric.

With regard to the question of promises that are 'forever' - king, priests and land: the first two find their fulfilment clearly in Jesus who is both 'high priest' and 'son of David'.³² The fulfilment is not,

³¹ This occurs in two ways. 1). Those who are scattered among the nations of the 'tribes of Jacob' come in as the nations (*ta ethne* - literally 'the nations' but used in the sense of the nations but not 'Israel', hence the Gentiles) are embraced. Many of those who were ethnically descended from Abraham were within the nations to one degree of assimilation or another. 2). As Gentiles receive the Spirit ('And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us, and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us' (Acts 15:8,9)) they are declared 'of Israel / descendants of Abraham' even though they do not have to submit to the works of the law. This is the mystery that Paul says has now been revealed, hence there is no future expectation of the 'conversion' of Israel set by a timetable.

³² The promise of the Aaronic line being a 'perpetual priesthood' (Exod. 40:15; Num. 25:13) clearly comes to an end / fulfilment in Jesus and in the embodied *ekklesia*. Likewise there is no unbroken line of a descendant on the throne; Jesus is the 'son of David' so lays claim to that. The Hebrew writer sees Jesus as the 'Great High priest' in spite of coming from the

however, something that someone would reasonably project from OT declarations such as that we read in Jeremiah,

For thus says the Lord: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time (Jer. 33:17,18).

Fulfilments clearly challenge expectations, and what might be considered the 'plain reading' of Scripture does not seem to be the direction the fulfilments move toward! The land most likely follows a similar path, and certainly the promise regarding the promise of the land 'forever' meets an interesting challenge when we read that Paul insists that Abraham was promised the world (*kosmos* - Rom. 4:13). The outward mission of Acts is the reverse direction of the conquest of the land, and many parallels can be seen in the narrative, with a gradual conquest of the land becoming the gradual expansion of the reach of the gospel.

The temple - forever

We can also add in a 'forever' statement about the temple that Solomon built,

For now I have chosen and consecrated this house so that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time (2 Chron. 7:16).

'wrong' tribe. (Not sure that her / his exegesis would be considered valid, and (s)he further blurs the ethnic aspect as he suggests that Jesus' (priestly) ancestry is from a non-descendant of Abraham - Melchizedek!)

And yet the glory left the temple and the sign of the curtain ripped from top to bottom at the time of the crucifixion confirms that the perpetual presence of God in the temple was not to be the future expectation. The Great Commission in Matthew parallels the edict of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22-23) to build a temple in Jerusalem but moves in an opposite direction. The Great Commission has at its heart a centrifugal direction; a temple not of physical stones but of disciples (from the nations) who become a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Matt. 28:7-20; Ephes. 2:19-22).

The promise to live in Solomon's house forever seems to clearly mean for as long as the house stands. The term 'forever' is either conditional (obedience / disobedience) or is time limited: 'until' there is a fulfilment.

In the NT we have 112 references to 'temple'. In the Gospels 58 times it refers to Herod's Temple and 8 times it is in reference to Jesus, his resurrection being the raising up of the Temple; in Acts the 25 times the word appears it refers to Herod's Temple or to a pagan shrine; in the letters 3 times it refers to the Temple in Jerusalem and once to a pagan shrine, then 6 times to either the individual as a 'temple' or the corporate people as a 'temple' for the Holy Spirit; and finally in Revelation we have 12 references - either to a heavenly temple or to the Lord God directly. **There is no expectation of a temple to be re-instated or built. The application of the word within the NT was either to something existing or to God / Jesus / believers as the temple.**

The temple with its three-fold division was a cosmic map. The Holy

of Holies represented the highest heaven, the Holy Place represented the visible heavens, and the outer court the earth.³³ The final vision is not of a restored Temple but of a city with no temple within it; heaven comes to earth and **the New Jerusalem fills the whole earth**; that city being the same (cubic) shape as the Holy of Holies. The ripping of the curtain is then highly prophetic of the outward movement of God: the restoration of creation. It is not the rebuilding of a temple that is to be the result of that movement.

The land - conditional

The promise of the land, such as we read in Genesis 17:8

And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding, and I will be their God

is conditional, (Deut. 4:40; 28:63) and in Hebrews the land is interpreted as a sign of an inheritance beyond the physically delimited land that was known as 'Israel' (Heb. 11:13-16).

There is a progression from the Garden of Eden to that of Israel and their land flowing with milk and honey, and a fulfilment in the coming age. That coming age is what shapes us in the here and now.

³³ In the tabernacle within the Holy of Holies cherubim were placed (heavenly creatures surrounding the throne of God); the curtains for the Holy Place were of 'blue, purple and scarlet' - representing the sky - and the lamps on the lampstands were to represent the sun, moon and stars; the outer courtyard with the large bronze washbasin (referred to as the 'sea') and the altar built with uncut stones represented the earth.

A couple →	A people →	Neither Jew nor Greek	A multitude without number ←
Garden →	Land →	Citizenship in heaven: let your kingdom come	A city - union of heaven and earth ←
Expelled →	Exile →	Emmanuel	God among them ←
Pre-Law	Law	Spirit	

As we approach Paul's extended passage in Rom. 9-11 here is a summary thus far.

- The term 'Jew' was applied to those of the former southern kingdom, who had returned to the land post-the Babylonian exile. The term 'Israel' was used of the northern kingdom and of the 12 tribes considered together.
- There was a hope for the restoration of Israel. That could not mean simply a restoration for Judah / Jews. The disciples' question has to be understood in that context.
- This restoration was taking place through the Gentile mission. Members of the northern tribes were dispersed throughout the nations and thus as the nations were brought into obedience to Christ among those Gentiles were those of

the northern kingdom, but further as Gentiles found faith in Messiah they were incorporated as Israel. The Gentile mission enabled those of Israel beyond Judah to discover that faith in Jesus was the fulfilment of their hope, **and** meant that the Gentiles who responded were incorporated into Israel.

- Those Gentiles did not become **Jews** (but were incorporated into **Israel**). And they were not required to follow Torah to manifest allegiance to Messiah.
- The reception of the Spirit was key in this, not only for them but also for those who were ethnically descended from Abraham. ('For **all** who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God'.) This applied to all - whether they were ethnically descended from Abraham, or they were those who received the Spirit, even though ethnically they belonged to the 'nations'.

Now as we come to Romans 9-11 we can see how those chapters align with those interim conclusions.

Romans 9-11 A quick run through

***[First an even quicker run through!]** Given that Paul's arguments are somewhat dense at times and there is an appeal to his use of language I first give a summary!*

Paul is concerned to show that God has been faithful to his promises to people he describes as being his own flesh and blood (Israelites -

*an ethnic term; he does not use the term 'Israel' as that has to be explained theologically, as he goes on to do). He insists that God has not abandoned his promises and draws from history that not all who are physically descended from Abraham are 'Israel', even though they are 'of Israel'. Drawing on Scripture he uses the illustration of Ishmael and Isaac: they were both **ethnically** descended from Abraham but the 'seed' is through Isaac. Then he uses the story of Esau and Jacob with Jacob being chosen, and the choice not on the basis of **works**. In using those two illustrations he is effectively saying that neither **ethnic** descent nor even living by the **works** (of Torah) are sufficient. The two foundational understandings by which 'Israel' could lay claim to being the true 'seed' of Abraham.*

God has not rejected his people - evidence Paul himself has found faith and history informs us that those who were truly the people of covenant were always a remnant (a part of the whole). He references Elijah and the 7000 faithful people to illustrate this point.

*Israel has always been likened to an Olive Tree and consistent with history unfaithful branches have been cut off, the remaining branches are drawing from the root, and at the same time 'wild branches' have been grafted in. He instructs those branches not to be arrogant and he holds out hope for branches that have currently been cut off to be regrafted - **conditional** on their repentance, not something that will simply occur automatically. Those wild branches are from the Gentiles / nations... among those 'other nations' the northern kingdom of 'Israel / Ephraim' has been sown. So as the 'Gentile branches' are grafted in two aspects take place: northern*

tribes are coming in (for they were scattered among the nations) and the Gentiles are incorporated into Israel. The tree that is pruned and has had the wild branches grafted is Israel, thus Paul concludes 'in this way all Israel will be saved'. All Israel is the olive tree. Not all those of Israel are Israel, but Israel is the olive tree - smaller than all ethnic Israelites; but beyond a remnant of Jews; and bigger than ethnic Israel.]

Now the slightly longer version!

It was not controversial to suggest that not 'everyone descended from Abraham' would participate in ultimate salvation. Rabbi Simmai said that in the same way as only 2 out of 600,000 entered the promised land it would transpire likewise in 'the messianic age'. We are not to anticipate that Paul is presenting something in these chapters that defends why not all 'of Israel' are responding to his gospel. **Rather he is defending why the restoration of Israel is not happening as might be expected**³⁴ and further why uncircumcised Gentiles are being included. Given those two elements the issue is one over **God's faithfulness** to his promises.

Some have been unfaithful, but (in contrast) God has not been unfaithful:

What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? (Rom. 3:3).

³⁴ There was the expectation that Gentiles would come in **after** the restoration of Israel. Clearly Gentiles were already coming in and not even as proselytes. They were not becoming Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah, but as fellow-heirs of the promises made to Israel.

Paul insists God has not rejected Israel,

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew (Rom. 11:1,2).

How then can Paul show that God has been faithful to Israel? What follows is a sketch of where Paul takes us.

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own brothers and sisters, my own flesh and blood. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 9:1-5).

He is in deep anguish for those who are his 'own flesh and blood' describing them as 'Israelites' (Ἰσραηλίτης). He is making an identification of them at an ethnic level; he does not refer to them as 'Israel' which would carry a greater theological weight - they are Israelites but might not all be 'of Israel' as he later states. He refers to them **ethnically** and recognises what 'belongs' to them³⁵ and that

³⁵ One element that might be of note is that he refers to the 'covenants' as belonging to them. Covenants (plural) and as was noted earlier in this article, the 'new covenant' declared in Jeremiah was made with the whole house of Israel. We cannot simply suggest the 'old covenant' was with Israel and the 'new covenant' was with Christians.

the Messiah is ethnically from them.³⁶

We then come to the statement that he will defend: 'It is not as though the word of God has failed' (9:6). God is faithful and at the heart of it is his belief that 'Israel' is smaller than ethnic Israel. I use the NRSV updated edition that sadly misses a key element of where Paul is developing his argument. Here is its translation,

For not all those descended from Israel are Israelites, and not all of Abraham's children are his descendants, but "it is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." (9:6,7).

In reality all those descended from Israel are 'Israelites' as he has already indicated. **Ethnically** they are Israelites. Paul actually writes not all those who are of Israel (ἐξ Ἰσραήλ) are Israel (Ἰσραήλ). Being 'of / descended from Israel' means they are Israelites (an ethnic definition), but does not mean they are of Israel (a faith / faithfulness definition). This is clearly set out when he uses the term 'seed' (sperma: σπέρμα) that is translated above as descendants. The seed is the seed of promise (and Paul argues in Galatians that *the* seed of Abraham is Jesus). This first response is that of defining who is Israel, that definition being bounded by faith not ethnicity.

'Israel', he argues, has never included every descendent of Abraham (Isaac not Ishmael; Jacob not Esau are the two examples that Paul uses). God will always preserve Israel but this does not mean an automatic and universal participation by all 'Israelites'. God's word has not failed (9:6) when only a remnant is 'saved'.

³⁶ Romans 9:1-5.

The reference to Isaac and not Ishmael strongly illustrates that not 'all who are descended from Abraham' are Israel - **ethnicity** does not automatically count (both have Abraham as their father); and then with the reference to Jacob and Esau, Paul pushes into another area for 'it is before they have done anything good or bad' that one is chosen and the other not; this, I consider, is more than an oblique comment on Torah as he adds that the choice is not by 'works'.³⁷ Two aspects: ethnicity nor Torah-compliance are not necessarily enough! The promise, not ethnicity nor Torah-alignment, is what is key. Ethnicity by itself does not cut it and something deeper than Torah-alignment is required. Hard hitting!

The question that comes back is to question God's justice:

What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! (9:14).

The verses that follow (Pharaoh and the hardening) can seem to play into the hands of those who see the 'sovereignty of God' as involving predestination (and even double-predestination), but we should note that Paul quotes Exod. 33:19 where God says what he bestows is compassion and mercy, not mercy and condemnation!

For he says to Moses,
"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (9:15).

Now we come to Pharaoh and before looking at the verses in a little

³⁷ 'Works of the Torah' being a common phrase for Paul and also in rabbinic writings.

more detail here are a few points which have to be made only because of how these verses are appealed to with regard to predestination which I consider is not in Paul's vision here.

- What follows in Paul's presentation is focused on God's mercy - we do not read 'but on God who shows mercy and judgement', but only 'but on God who shows mercy' (9:16).
- The focus is not on individual salvation, but on God's purposes in history working to ensure that there is a people of promise.
- Further we should not focus so tightly on individual salvation to the exclusion of corporate 'salvation' for purpose.³⁸
- There is a focus on Pharaoh, but as leader of the nation of Egypt, it is not illegitimate to also understand this to imply an application to the nation of Egypt. The Israelites are not only freed from Pharaoh but from the dominating Pharaonic system.
- The pottery analogy can be misunderstood to imply an arbitrary choice by God; if that were so Paul is hardly

³⁸ For example in the context of the history of the Jews of Jesus' day it was said that Jesus 'will save his people from their sins' (Matt.1:21). The earlier verses give a genealogy through the Babylonian exile, the sins of the people bringing about the exile from the land. Although back in the land they continue as an oppressed people - they are not exile-free. Jesus will unlock the exilic condition so that they can fulfil the covenant purpose. The salvation is corporate (his people) and from their sins, not 'from hell'. We do not need to lose sight on individual salvation nor from future judgement, but at the same time we need to hold the focus on corporate salvation to purpose. These chapters in Romans are dealing with a corporate scenario - how is God being faithful to his promises to a corporate people.

answering the accusation that God is unjust (9:14), and we have to hold that Paul is not seeking to contrast mercy and judgement in his answer.

- The pottery analogy is to emphasise how difficult it is to work with clay! And both here in Paul and in other biblical references the clay has a mind of its own.

The potter and the clay

This analogy of the potter and the clay is not new to Paul with clay being a common image of God's dealings with humanity and Israel in particular. As we will see clay is difficult is the point not God is arbitrary. We encounter this image, for example, in Jeremiah 18. A key verse there is verse 4,

The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Clay is not easy to work with! In Jeremiah the potter (God) is unable to continue with the process such is the 'flaw' in Israel so he breaks the clay down and starts again and turns it into a different vessel than was originally intended. This is what he will do to Israel, but we also read in the verses that follow,

At one moment I may declare concerning **a nation** or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but **if that nation, concerning which I have spoken**, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight,

not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it (Jer.18:7-10).

There in that passage we read how **the potter responds to the choices being made by the particular nation**. If they turn from evil they will be formed into one kind of vessel, and if not into another. God, as potter, does not respond in an arbitrary way. God (the potter) makes choices but they are not presented as predetermined and arbitrary, far from it.

The final verse in that passage in Jeremiah indicates that God is forming Babylon into a vessel (of wrath) against Judah,

Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you, from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings (Jer. 18:11)

Returning to Paul's words in Romans we note in the Exodus passages that there was a process of non-repentance by Pharaoh, for we read that he hardened his heart. He did not turn from the evil which resulted in God hardening his heart, or in Paul's words that Pharaoh was hardened (in the kiln) as a vessel of wrath. This hardening is not arbitrary but God's choice was in response to how the 'clay' has been responding.

Paul quotes Exodus 9:16 concerning God having raised up Pharaoh for a purpose. We should not understand this as an oblique reference to some predetermined God-choice from eternity past. It

refers to God's patience (Rom.9:22) in not destroying Pharaoh.

But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power and to make my name resound through all the earth. You are still exalting yourself against my people by not letting them go (Exod.9:16,17).

God a) endures Pharaoh in spite of his pride and b) the 'name' of the Lord will be exalted through Pharaoh's resistance.

Two vessels

We should also note a further aspect of the two vessels (vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath). Paul uses two different verbs in two different 'moods' with regard to these two vessels. There is often frustration among commentators as to understanding what Paul is seeking to communicate. A few comments here might be a way through.

God 'endured' with much patience the vessels of wrath (9:22). The verb translated here as 'endured' is only used here in the Pauline corpus but we have something very close to the wording in the LXX of Jeremiah 50:25. Whenever there is a rare usage of a word / phrase it is often because Paul has in mind some OT scripture. In Jer.50:25 we read,

The Lord has opened his armory and brought out the weapons of his wrath.

The same verb is used as he uses in Rom. 9:22. In Jeremiah it is rendered as 'brought out' and the connection that Paul makes to 'with much patience' recalls what Paul said earlier (Rom.2:4) where

patience was intended to lead to repentance. One more comment before seeking to bring the various elements together. The vessels are 'made' for destruction. Consistently in the Pauline literature and the wider NT literature this verb (κατηρησιμμένα) is translated as 'fixed' or 'restored'³⁹; there is no sense that these 'vessels' have been predestined to be what they became, rather God carries them patiently, giving them time to repent, but then - due to their response - they are fixed / 'repaired' to be what they become. This was the situation with Pharaoh - he hardens his heart; God is patient, then Pharaoh is 'fixed' as a vessel of wrath, and as such fulfils a divine purpose. Again we face that the 'clay' has a say in the outcome.

I repeat, the use of the potter analogy is not to show the arbitrariness of God, but the reluctance of the clay to be formed into 'a vessel of mercy'. In spite of the stubbornness of the clay (and the patience of God) the outcome is that the hardened vessel is used for a different purpose within history.⁴⁰ Resistant foreign nations became the vessel through whom God judged Israel. They, though not obedient to God, served a purpose - to judge, chastise and even 'destroy' the people of the covenant. This is the primary aspect Paul has in view (with Pharaoh) in the immediate background.

³⁹ For example in Gal. 6:1 the mature ones are to 'restore' the one who has fallen; in 1 Thess. 3:10 he desires to 'fix' what is lacking in their faith. Elsewhere it is used of 'fixing' the nets (Mk.1:19).

⁴⁰ It might have been noted that I have consistently used the term 'vessel' rather than the term 'object'. I have done that because the word is σκεῦος (*skeuos*) - a jar, a vessel, a dish being the common understanding. Consistently in Scripture a foreign nation was seen as the 'vessel' through whom the chastisement of God came to Israel. The Assyrians, the Babylonians and others were 'vessels of wrath'.

In contrast there are 'vessels of mercy' that have been (actively) prepared beforehand⁴¹. In this latter case God is very much involved, working with the response toward a 'positive' outcome; with the former case there is a great measure in which there is a natural outcome. God forms two differing vessels from the same lump of clay; this 'same' lump might be that of Israel - some become vessels of mercy, others who do not respond become vessels of wrath. Probably Paul is thinking beyond Israel for he says the vessels are not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles (9:24).

The verse he quotes from Hosea (1:9) is not simply a disputable application to Gentiles of a text that was addressed to the northern kingdom for Israel (the northern kingdom) post-Assyrian captivity had been sown among the nations and had become a 'useless vessel',

Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nation as a useless vessel (Hos.8:8).

Israel's disobedience merited judgement and being cast aside, but

⁴¹ A different verb is employed here than with the 'fixing' of the vessels of wrath; not only a different verb but a different 'mood'. With the vessels of wrath a passive mood is used; with the vessels of mercy the active mood is used. It is not to say that God is not involved with the 'fixing' of the vessels of wrath but the sense is that this is what happens to them; with the vessels of mercy God is very actively involved. If the clay does not respond to God then there is a course of action that will take place - they are not created for special use; if the clay yields to the hands of the potter the potter then creates out of the same lump (Israel or humanity? / or both in view?) vessels for mercy - they are created to carry the mercy of God having received God's mercy.

that was not to be the last word. A day was coming when God would embrace them again, the 'not-my-people' would become 'my people'. Where were those northern tribes to be found? Among the Gentile nations. Paul says not only 'from the Jews' but those who are among the nations - literally 'out of the nations' (ἐξ ἔθνῶν) (Rom. 9:24). The primary focus of Paul is the restoration of those who returned from the Babylonian exile (Jews) **and** those who had not returned after the Assyrian captivity (Israel). He is holding fast that God is faithful to the whole house of Israel.⁴² He is not focusing on the Jews of his day and seeking to explain why they are not wholeheartedly responding to the gospel - he is focused on explaining that God has not been unfaithful to his promises to **Israel**.

Those who are of faith (Jew or Gentile) have attained righteousness (9:30-32) and those who have failed to make the transition to trusting in Jesus (9:34) have stumbled over the stumbling block. A new era had come.

This centrality of Jesus as the means of attaining righteousness is what Paul picks up on throughout chapter 10. Faith in Jesus becomes the unifying factor - and also the dividing factor. For Paul, Jesus is central. He is Lord of all and faith in Jesus is the door of entry to salvation.

⁴² From 'Jews' and 'from among the nations' will lead to 'all Israel' being saved but this does not mean 'every Jew' nor 'every Israelite'. The re-gathering / restoration is 'out of' the tribes, thus lining with his foundational position of not all who are ethnically descended from Abraham are 'Israel'.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Rom. 10: 12,13).

The fourfold Scriptural quotations at the end of the chapter (10:18-21) alternate between Gentiles and (ethnic / historical) Israel. Gentiles have heard; Israel has not understood; Gentiles have found faith; Israel have been disobedient and contrary. This sets it up for the inevitable rhetorical question of the opening verse of chapter 11,

has God rejected his people.

This could have been the conclusion but Paul strongly (μὴ γένοιτο: a very emphatic denial) pushes back. He, himself, is one example that God has not rejected ‘his people’ and then he refers back to a time when Israel was ‘disobedient and contrary’ - during the time of Elijah, who had remained faithful to God, but was not the only one remaining faithful in that dark time for 7000 remained faithful. Paul says and so it is the same in his time - as always so now a remnant, a portion of the larger group, have responded to the grace of God. The ‘remnant’ or the ‘elect’ are separate from the rest.⁴³ God has not rejected his people... but not all ‘of Israel’ are ‘Israel’. (Here again we see the thinking that ‘Israel’ is smaller than (ethnic) Israel; later we will encounter the thinking that ‘Israel’ is bigger than (remnant) Israel.)

⁴³ This could be a reason to consider that Paul had been suggesting that the lump from which the two vessels were formed was Israel.

Paul divides Israel between 'the remnant' and 'the rest'. The remnant attained 'it' (righteousness by faith?)⁴⁴ while the rest were hardened. Paul uses a different word for the hardening of 'the rest' (πωρώω - *pōroō*)⁴⁵ than he used earlier for Pharaoh (σκληρύνω - *sklērunō*). Pharaoh's hardening was that of the clay vessel entering the kiln, indicating a final state; not so with Israel - there is hope.

Israel has experienced a hardening, a stumbling (11:11); certain 'branches have been broken off' (11:17) - Paul describes the situation using differing terminology and analogies, but he never accepts that the situation is necessarily permanent. The situation is not permanent but neither is it automatic that 'all' will be restored, it is contingent on 'if they do not continue in unbelief' (11:23).

Paul warns the Gentiles who have been grafted in that they are not to be arrogant and he says his own work among Gentiles is to provoke his ethnic brothers and sisters to jealousy (11:14)⁴⁶ so that **some** of them might be saved. He fluctuates between a realism of 'some' to an optimism couched in words such as 'full inclusion'

⁴⁴ Staples has a fascinating take on the NT use of the text that 'the righteous one will live by faith' and applies it Christocentrically to Jesus, the Righteous One. So he takes a slightly different route on what is attained.

⁴⁵ This verb occurs 4 other times in the NT, of Israel and of the disciples of Jesus when they did not understand (for example) the significance of the miracle of food multiplication. The text in Hebrews where the readers are entreated not to harden their hearts uses the same verb as Paul uses for Pharaoh. The two verbs (*pōroō* and *sklērunō*) are not direct equivalents.

⁴⁶ Jealousy is a concern / fear that some other party has taken one's place. If God is clearly being manifested among Gentiles then that should lead to a provocation, a jealousy.

(πλήρωμα - plērōma) or 'life from the dead'.⁴⁷

I want you to understand this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not claim to be wiser than you are: a hardening has come upon part of Israel until the full number of the gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved (11:25,26).

The hardening (failure to grasp) that had come on 'part' of Israel had meant that practically Paul had turned to the Gentiles⁴⁸ and spiritually that Gentiles were experiencing that the God of Israel was embracing them.⁴⁹ The hardening was not initiated by God, but was now very evident to those who believed Jesus was the Messiah

⁴⁷ There are allusions to the valley of dry bones where we have the question asked if the dry bones can live; further the inclusion (*plērōma*) probably does not include something like 'full number' but fully included.

⁴⁸ There are some decisive moments recorded in Acts when Paul shifted focus from engaging the synagogues to directly focusing on Gentiles, for example,

Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

⁴⁹ Two testimonies from Acts bear witness that the God of Israel was embracing Gentiles on the same basis as Jews who had found faith in Messiah were being embraced,

God has given even to the gentiles the repentance that leads to life (Acts 11:18).

And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us, and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us Acts 15:8, 9).

appointed by God. Although not initiated by God it came to serve the purposes of God resulting in riches coming to the nations / Gentiles.

The olive tree is Israel (used this way also in the OT); this is clear but the implications of Paul's description of the process needs to be stated clearly:

- The pruned tree is Israel! We cannot say that the olive tree is Israel and the branches that have been cut off are also Israel. Those branches cut off continue as Israelites but they are not 'Israel'.
- Branches cut off can be grafted back in again. God has the 'power' to do that but they have to respond for that to take place (11:23). The issue is not on God's 'side' but resides with those to whom 'belong the covenants' and 'through whom the Messiah' has come.
- Wild olive branches grafted in are grafted into the olive tree. They are grafted into 'Israel'. There is a cleansing of their hearts so that they are adopted into the one family of God.

One family; Gentiles who submit to the God of Israel who raised Jesus from the dead can therefore be described as those who '**were Gentiles**'. Now they are descended from Abraham.

Is there a measure by which Paul expects a turning to Jesus as Messiah **after** the fullness of the Gentiles have come in? This could be suggested by the word 'until', however I am not convinced of that. The preposition ἄχρι can carry that sense, equally it can carry the meaning 'as long as / during'. Paul might have expected some major

response among his kin but he has been focusing on a **process** by which God is being faithful, **not** a timetable as to when God will be faithful. He could have used language to make it clear such as 'after that' or 'and then'. He simply uses the language related to process and continues with 'and in this way' (process language) all Israel will be saved.

Jason Staples has a further intriguing suggestion regarding the phrase 'fullness of the Gentiles / nations'. It is a direct translation from the Hebrew text into Greek of Genesis 48:19. There we read of Jacob blessing Ephraim (the umbrella name given to the 10 tribes who were removed from the land at the Assyrian captivity)

But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.

The last phrase translated literally says that Ephraim will become a 'fullness of nations / Gentiles' (nations and Gentiles are the same word). The suggestion then is that Paul is referencing this prophetic blessing over Ephraim with Ephraim's offspring both being the fullness of the Gentiles, and the northern kingdom thus the 'fullness of the Gentiles' is also what is needed for 'all' Israel to be saved.

I do not think Paul is bringing in a 'time-line' with a hardening on Israel, with the Gentiles being the recipient of mercy until that mercy is removed - if that were so the 'time of grace' for the Gentiles would then end.⁵⁰

His 'until' does not necessarily mean 'and then something different' and when he follows this immediately with 'in this way all Israel will be saved' rather than 'and then the hardening will be removed'. The hardening is not something that God did to them (so he could in theory remove it at a later date) but an inability to perceive that Jesus was indeed their promised Messiah.

A few verses later we read of what is taking place **now**, not in some staggered way, (I embolden the word 'now' in the text).

Just as you were once disobedient to God but have **now** received mercy because of their disobedience, so also they have **now** been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they also may **now** receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience **so that he may be merciful to all** (Rom.1:30-32).

There is a variant reading that removes that last 'now' but the best manuscripts have it. It is not that they will receive mercy *then* but the gospel declares that mercy is available (now) to all (God is merciful to Jew or Greek - to all who call on the name of the Lord).

⁵⁰ Of course this is what Dispensationalism would suggest with its imposed dispensations on Scripture. Grace remains until the *parousia*, grace for Jew and for Gentile.

Summary and final comments on 'All Israel'

Paul is concerned to show how God is faithful to the promises he has made, those promises were with Israel. If God had made promises to Israel and had now abandoned them for Paul that would present an issue concerning the faithfulness of God.

He changes his language in these three chapters to indicate his focus is on God and **how** he is fulfilling his promises to restore Israel (note Israel language not the language of 'Jew' nor of 'Israelite').

He goes down the well worked track of God works not with all who are descended from Abraham, but also pushes further with an argument (from Esau / Jacob) that Torah by itself is an insufficient basis to claim to be a true descendant of Abraham.

Israel encompassing a people who are larger than the tribe of Judah (and Benjamin) has sown among the nations. In order to be faithful to the promise there has to be a mission among the nations (and that part of the argument is easy to follow) as that is where the ten northern tribes are found. Paul, though, is taking it further for not only does this mean those from the nations who are Israelites can respond to the Messiah, but those who are not ethnically Israelites can now understand that the Messiah of Israel is the Saviour of the world, and as they come in so they become grafted into the olive tree. That olive tree is smaller than ethnic Israel, but now they as wild olive branches are grafted into Israel. The olive tree is not the remnant plus the rest that has been cut off (thus smaller than ethnic Israel), but neither is it simply the remnant for it now includes those

from among the Gentiles who have been grafted in (thus 'Israel' is larger than those ethnically descended from Abraham). Smaller and larger.

In this process 'all Israel' is being saved and this process will continue until the fullness of the Gentiles come in.

Some practical Q & A

Two covenants or one?

For those who suggest that there are two covenant paths to 'salvation' there is the need to resolve how the 'new covenant' is to be made with the house of Israel (Judah and Israel as Jeremiah states) and that it is the covenant that Jesus has mediated (Heb. 8:6; Luke 22:20). The promise and the fulfilment are one. There is not a 'new covenant' with the house of Israel and a different 'new covenant with Gentiles! Jesus initiates the new covenant through his death and that new covenant is the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. In initiating the new covenant the 'old' becomes obsolete and will soon disappear (a reference I suggest is to AD70 and the destruction of the Temple).

Is the state of Israel (1948) a fulfilment of prophecy?

Any restoration to the land has to be on the basis of repentance. The modern state of Israel is not a 'theocracy' but a secular state hence it is difficult to draw a line between the 'Israel of Scripture' to the 'Israel of today'. A belief in the modern state as being a fulfilment runs up against the clear difficulty that the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham is not held in a piece of land in the Middle East but in stewarding the 'world'. Rather than seek to make modern history a perceived interpretation of prophecy (and particularly given there is no expressed hope of 'Israel' in its land within the NT) we can look to what major redemptive purpose the land called 'Israel' today could fulfil. I suggest that there is no more powerful aspect than if it would manifest true reconciliation, particularly being that all three monotheistic and Abrahamic faiths find a focus there.

How should (formerly) Gentile believers relate to Messianic Jews (and vice-versa)?

This is an enormous question today and perhaps was a bigger issue in the early days of the gospel. We read of Paul's major conflict with Peter and with the wider 'Judaisers' in the book of Galatians and when we read beyond Rom. 9-11 to the following chapters it seems clear that he is concerned that a way is found through the difficulties. In those chapters he addresses issues of food and Sabbath. There is to be 'no despising' nor 'judgement' made and certainly to be no quarrelling over opinions (14:1,2).

In Paul's day those coming from a Gentile background were not

required to submit to the law and those from a Jewish background seemed to continue within the bounds of the Torah. How to live together was a provocative challenge and there probably was not one 'solution' to the challenge.

That challenge remains.

What is not acceptable is any response that either despises or judges. Love is the way. And love demands not our own way but provokes a compromise for a higher principle than personal conviction. Only love holds the highly potential clash of cultures and convictions. The 'one humanity in Christ' might not manifest in uniformity. I suspect that how that unity is manifest is secondary, and will remain challenging. Somehow the issue of eating together is central (where it manifested in Galatia) and as Jesus ate with sinners, so we, Jew or Gentile, eat with each other as sinners saved by grace. Love is the fulfilment of the law:

[F]or the one who loves another has fulfilled the law... therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

Should we be supportive of Israel (the state) as we owe to those of Israel a debt?

The accusation of 'anti-semitic' could be applied to many of the people who contributed to the writings of Scripture! The prophets were seldom 'pro-Israel' and continually critiqued their contemporaries for their lack of allegiance to God. Jesus made it

clear that it was ‘the peacemakers’ that would be blessed, so we cannot give wholehearted support to any who engage in war (we live before the ‘end’ hence I added the adjective ‘wholehearted’).

The Middle East of today has been largely shaped politically (consider the Sykes-Picot agreement) and that coupled with a people traumatised by the Holocaust and another people traumatised by the Al-Nakba (the catastrophe) it is not surprising that there has been horrendous conflict and genocide. The solution is certainly not to try to make it fit with (highly dubious) interpretations of Scripture but to hold that there is a healing that can come (can only come) through the one who made peace by his own blood. Given the notes above on Rom. 9-11 there are many among the Palestinians who are descended from Abraham; and so ‘in this way’ all Israel can find salvation.

As those who follow Christ, the One true human, all anti-human behaviour has to be resisted and called out. The prophets of Scripture (Jews and those from the northern kingdom) have always done so.