

ISRAEL, THE PEOPLE OF GOD, AND THE NATIONS

ECKHARD J. SCHNABEL*

I. THE UNIVERSAL CONTEXT FOR ISRAEL'S STORY

Genesis 1 begins with the sentence: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God the Creator has created the entire world (Gen 1), he created mankind (Gen 2). The book of Genesis, which is read by Israel as God's revelation about his creation, shows again and again that God and his purposes are not limited by the boundaries of Israel: God's being and God's purposes are relevant for the entire world and for all human beings. YHWH is the Lord of world history and the Lord of human history. The book of Genesis implies that Israel's relationship to her God must be understood in this general, universal context.¹ The account of God's revelation as Creator depicts YHWH as God who blesses man. When God blessed and halloved the seventh day, he expressed the purpose of man's existence: as the days of the week proceed towards the goal of the seventh day, so man and woman are to serve their Creator in worship, trust, and obedience.

This universal perspective surfaces repeatedly in the history, literature, and liturgy of Israel: in the history of Abraham and his descendants who are to be a blessing for all nations; in the psalms in which all nations and kings are called upon to praise YHWH; in prophecies directed to nations who are sometimes used by God as his instruments; in prophecies about a time when nations will find salvation in YHWH; and in prophecies of a new heaven and a new earth. The parallels between Israel's language and literature and the languages and cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia are a testimony of the international horizon of Israel.²

The universal dimension of Israel's faith is expressed in Gen 12:2–3, a significant text of the book of Genesis (cf. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). We note that the focus of Gen 12:1–3 is the unique position which YHWH accords Abraham, i.e. Israel: the first recipients of God's assurance of his blessing for the families of the earth are Abraham and his descendants. The blessing for the nations becomes a reality in Abraham's blessing and thus underlines his unique position.³ The parallel promises in Gen 18:18 and 28:14 seem to

* Eckhard Schnabel is associate professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2065 Half Day Road, Deerfield, IL 60015.

¹ Claus Westermann, *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen* (ATD Ergänzungsband 6; 2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985) 72–74.

² Elmer Smick, "Old Testament Cross-Culturalism: Paradigmatic or Enigmatic?" *JETS* 32 (1989) 3–16.

³ Wolfgang Kraus, *Das Volk Gottes. Zur Grundlegung der Ekklesiologie bei Paulus* (WUNT 85; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996) 37–38.

interpret the meaning of Gen 12:3 in terms of Israel's uniqueness: the nations of the earth shall be blessed "in Abraham" who shall become "a great and mighty nation" and whose offspring shall be "like the dust of the earth," spreading abroad "to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south." Israel's "story" clearly incorporates a universal dimension, as her identity is intimately linked with Abraham's call and the divine promise of blessing which is extended to "all the families of the earth." But Gen 12:3 does not convey "a high and lofty missionary teaching."⁴

Israel's liturgy consistently reflects this universal dimension. (1) The nations are challenged to praise YHWH (Pss 47:2; 66:8; 96:7; 117:1), to serve him (72:11; 102:23), and to fear him (102:16). (2) The expectation that the nations will worship YHWH is expressed both with regard to the present (Ps 67:2–8) and the future (72:17; 86:9; 102:16, 23). (3) The person praying intends to worship YHWH in the midst of the nations (18:50; 57:10; 108:4), and Israel is called upon to proclaim among the nations YHWH's deeds (9:12; 96:3; 105:1) and kingship (96:10). (5) Some psalms look forward to a time when the nations will belong to Israel (2:8; 111:6). Similarly, Solomon, in his great prayer in the Temple, refers to the foreigner who "comes from a distant Land because of your name" and because he has heard of the mighty deeds of Israel's God (1 Kgs 8:41–42).

II. ISRAEL'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE CANAANITE NATIONS AS A HOSTILE TAKEOVER

The universal perspective of Israel's identity is, of course, linked with Israel's allegiance to YHWH, the one and only true God. Texts which Israel recites daily in the *shema* speak of God's uniqueness: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone" (Deut 6:4; cf. Exod 20:3). The conviction that God is One implies not only the unity and the continuity of God's history with his people, or the limitation of true worship to the Tabernacle and the Temple, but also the "nothingness" of the gods of the nations (Isa 43:10; 44:6), and the focus of universal salvation on Israel: when pagans find salvation, they join Israel (cf. Naaman), and when pagan nations find salvation, they will come to Zion (cf. Isa 40–66). The conviction that God is One implies God's judgment of the nations which is mentioned not only in the legal (e.g. Lev 18:24–25) and prophetic literature (Is 30:27–28) but also in Israel's liturgy (e.g. Ps 2:9; 9:19–20).

God's judgment of the nations found historical expression in the Exodus. God promised Israel: "For I will cast out nations before you" (Exod 34:24; cf. Lev 18:24). He gave to Israel the command to "utterly destroy" the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Deut 7:1–2). The account of the conquest of the promised land narrates the execution of this command (cf. Josh 3:9–10; 11:1–11).

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 20.

The exodus was, according to Israel's story, the most significant act of God since the days of the creation. The prophetic announcement, the historical reality, and the legal stipulations surrounding the exodus indicate that Israel's role as a witness among the nations and to the nations was a passive one at best.

III. ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH HER PAGAN NEIGHBORS AS TOLERANT RESERVE

Israel's legal code contains regulations concerning non-Israelites, the נִכְחֵרִי (*nōkhrī*), the זָר (zār), and the גֵּר (*ger*). The term *ger* designates the non-Israelite resident alien who lives within the borders of Israel; the term תּוֹשָׁב הָאֶרֶץ (*tōschāb*) is often used as a synonym. The Mosaic law demands that the Israelites should care for the resident alien: the alien must not be oppressed (Exod 22:21; 23:9). The reason for the injunction that the alien should essentially be treated like the Israelite is found in Israel's history (Lev 19:34; cf. Deut 10:17–19).⁵ It is in this context that Deut 10:18 can assert that YHWH loves the alien (Deut 10:18).⁶

The following stipulations are the most relevant:⁷ (1) In regard to legal matters, the alien must be treated fairly (Deut 1:16; 24:17; 27:19). (2) In regard to economic matters, the alien must be treated like a fellow Israelite (Deut 24:14). (3) The alien must obey the laws concerning the Sabbath (Exod 23:12; 20:10; Deut 5:14). (4) If an alien has been circumcised, he shall celebrate Passover alongside the Israelites (Exod 12:19; 12:48–49; Num 9:14), and he participates in the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29). There are further cultic regulations with which the alien must comply.⁸ These passages indicate that the circumcised *ger*—and not all *gerim* were circumcised—is regarded as an integrated “proselyte” (cf. Num 15:15–16), which is the term the LXX uses 77 times for *ger*.⁹

It is evident that the resident alien had a status inferior to that of the Israelite. This is demonstrated by the fact that he is specifically referred to

⁵ Several stipulations differentiate between the Israelite and the *ger*, e.g. Deut 14:21: “You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to aliens (*ger*) residing in your towns for them to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner (*nōkhrī*). For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.”

⁶ For a recent discussion (and not always convincing) on the motivation of the positive treatment of the alien, see Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law. A Study of the Changing Legal Status of Strangers in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSS 107; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 166–72.

⁷ Cf. R. Martin-Achard, *THAT* 1.409–12; D. Kellermann, *TWAT* 2.979–91; J. R. Spencer, *ABD* 6.103; also K. L. Schmidt, “Israels Stellung zu den Fremdlingen und Beisassen und Israels Wissen um seine Fremdling- und Beisassenschaft,” *Judaica* 1 (1945) 269–96; Christoph Bultmann, *Der Fremde im antiken Juda. Eine Untersuchung zum sozialen Typenbegriff ‘Ger’ und seinem Bedeutungswandel in der alttestamentlichen Gesetzgebung* (FRLANT 153; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

⁸ Cf. Lev 17:10, 12, 13 (eating blood), 18:6–17 and 18–23 (sexual sins); 17–33 (quality of a sacrifice); Num 15 (sacrifices); Num 19 (purification).

⁹ Besides προσήλυτος, the LXX translates *ger* with πάροικος, (11 times), γ(ε)νώρας (2 times), and ξένος (once). The term πάροικος is usually the translation of נִכְחֵרִי (*nōkhrī*). The evidence in the LXX can most often be explained by the fact that προσήλυτος was used in religious contexts and thus did not fit in every passage. On the other hand, the Israelites in Egypt can be called προσήλυτοι (cf. Exod 22:20; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19).

in the Mosaic legislation, and that he is mentioned in the Decalogue last after reference to the sons, daughters, slaves, and cattle (Exod 20:10). The fact that the *ger* did not receive land which he could pass on to his descendants shows that both his social and his legal status were inferior.

The terms נָכְרִי (*nōkhrī*)¹⁰ and זָר (zār)¹¹ usually refer to the “foreigner” both in an ethnic and a political sense, that is, they designate the non-Israelite. They refer, for example, to merchants and soldiers who come to Israel. In most passages the “foreigner” is mentioned in a negative context. In the prophetic literature the *nōkhrī* and the *zār* are mentioned with reference to other nations that potentially or actually oppress Israel,¹² sometimes as God’s instruments of judgment.¹³ Contact with these foreign nations is problematic as they may seduce Israel to apostasy.¹⁴ Israel is to avoid contact with foreigners as much as possible. After the return from exile, “those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors” (Neh 9:2). The prophets anticipate a time when Israel’s oppression by foreigners comes to an end and when she dominates the foreign nations herself.¹⁵

Neither the Torah nor the prophets contain any hint that Israel has a historical mission to bring members of other nations to a saving knowledge of YHWH.

IV. ISRAEL WELCOMES FOREIGNERS WHEN THEY TURN TO YHWH

Members of other nations can become members of Israel. The book of Joshua mentions two examples of foreigners joining Israel: Rahab the prostitute who asks for mercy (Josh 2:8–13), and the inhabitants of Gibeon who want to avoid the fate of the inhabitants of Jericho and Ai (Josh 9). In the time of the judges there is Ruth the Moabite who comes to live in Israel. In the time of David one encounters people who were evidently full members of the community of Israel while maintaining their non-Israelite ethnic identity, such as Uriah the Hittite who fought in David’s army and followed purity laws (2 Sam 11:6–13).

The admission of non-Israelites into the community of God’s people thus was a definite possibility. None of the relevant texts, however, alludes to Gen 12:3 or to a divine commission as the motivating factor. None of the texts recounts or implies “missionary outreach.” And none of the texts implies that the admission of non-Israelites was regulated by ritual or cult. Thus it is not helpful to assume that these texts might help us to understand how Israel understood the implications of Gen 12:1–3.¹⁶

¹⁰ Cf. Lang, *TWAT* 5.454–62; Martin-Achard, *THAT* 2.66–68; Begg, *ABD* 2.829–30.

¹¹ Cf. Martin-Achard, *THAT* 1.520–21; Snijders, *TWAT* 2.556–64; Begg, *ABD* 2.829–30.

¹² Cf. Isa 1:7; 62:8; Jer 5:19; Lam 5:2; Hos 7:9; 8:7; Obad 11.

¹³ Cf. Ezek 7:21; 11:9.

¹⁴ Cf. Isa 2:6; Jer 2:25; 3:13; Ezek 16:3; 44:7.

¹⁵ Cf. Isa 25:2, 5; 60:10; 61:5; Jer 30:18; Joel 4:17.

¹⁶ Pace David Bosch, *Die Heidenmission in der Zukunftsschau Jesu. Eine Untersuchung zur Eschatologie der synoptischen Evangelien* (ATANT 36; Zürich: Zwingli, 1959) 111; Kaiser, *Mission* 40–50.

The book of Jonah addresses the possibility that pagan nations, when they hear a message of judgment, repent and are spared by God (Jonah 3:4–5, 10). Jonah is the only example in the OT of a prophet who is sent by YHWH to a pagan nation with the charge to preach a message of repentance from sins. His reaction indicates that the thought that a prophet of Israel should go and preach to a pagan audience with the goal of saving them from God's judgment was quite foreign to him. He refuses God's commission because he begrudges the Ninevites being an object of God's mercy. It is doubtful whether the book of Jonah should be labelled a "missionary text":¹⁷ Jonah is not simply a "reluctant prophet"¹⁸ but a prophet who would rather die than watch the Ninevites repent and be spared judgment (4:3). While the rhetorical question with which the book ends may be aimed at challenging Israel to share God's concern for "that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left" (4:11), such a concern is not linked, in the story of Israel as told in the Pentateuch and in Israel's liturgy, with a comprehensive missionary call to lead the nations to YHWH.

Non-Israelites join Israel of their own accord—for various motives, sometimes as a result of military actions. While it may be theologically appropriate to speak of demonstrations of "the outreach of the grace of God,"¹⁹ there is no exegetical evidence that allows us to speak of examples of an outreach of the people of God.

V. ISRAEL EXPECTS A CONVERSION OF THE NATIONS TO YHWH IN "THE LAST DAYS"

The active, deliberate, and planned outreach to non-Israelites with the goal of convincing them of the exclusive salvific truth and power of YHWH is, in the OT, part of prophetic eschatology: several prophets of Judah and Israel announce a future gathering of the nations and their integration into the people of God, as a result of specific divine activity in the history of mankind.²⁰

John Oswalt summarizes the message of Isaiah concerning the relation between Israel and the nations—a message which in his opinion remained unchanged over the course of the 400 years of "classical prophecy"—as follows:²¹ (1) The message that the nations will come to Zion in order to worship the Lord alongside Israel indicates that Israel was conscious of having

¹⁷ Ferdinand Hahn, *Das Verständnis der Mission im Neuen Testament* (WMANT 13; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1963) 11–12, against Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (ed. Hugo Gressmann; HNT 21; 4th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1966) 82, who suggests that the Book of Jonah was written in order to support the Jewish mission to the Gentiles.

¹⁸ Kaiser, *Mission* 69–70, who argues again for a missionary purpose of the book of Jonah.

¹⁹ Thus Kaiser, *Mission* 40.

²⁰ Cf. J. Margull, "Mission III. Christliche Mission," *RGK* 4.974.

²¹ John N. Oswalt, "The Mission of Israel to the Nations," in *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard* (ed. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 85–95.

a certain responsibility with regard to the nations. (2) Israel has the function of a witness: being God's people is to witness, through word and deed, to the character and the reality of YHWH. The conversion of the nations is not, however, Israel's responsibility: God himself will cause the nations to come. (3) Even though Israel has not been given the task to convert the nations, her testimony is normative: the one true God reveals himself only in and through Israel. (4) Israel's witness has a universal goal: as YHWH is the only God in all of creation, the truth that Israel possesses, lives and proclaims is relevant for all nations, for all "flesh." (5) Israel's universal witness is not the focus of the prophets' message. Their main task is to call Israel back to obedience to her covenant God and to remind God's people of the consequences of a lack of obedience.

We should note that a "universal commission" of Israel is not the same as the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion that the prophets promise for the future. J. Oswalt is correct in answering the question of whether Israel is responsible for making sure that the nations hear about YHWH and as a result of this preaching come to Jerusalem in the negative. This means, however, that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to speak of a universal task, or commission, of Israel. As I understand the OT, it seems quite clear that the "mission" that YHWH gave to Israel—to worship him and to do his will in thankful and joyous obedience to the covenant stipulations—was a *local* mission, that is, a task carried out by the Israelites within the borders of Israel. What is *universal* are the consequences of Israel's obedience—in the future eschaton. Israel is looking forward to the last days when the nations, or representatives of the nations, will find salvation as they turn to YHWH in the time of the Messiah when "survivors from the nations" will be sent by YHWH to the nations.

With regard to the prophets' message concerning the nations, one notes particularly prophecies concerning the future Davidic king and the Servant in Isaiah's prophecies.²² The coming Davidic king will judge the ungodly and restore righteousness (Isa 11:3–5); he will bring peace (11:6–9) and fill the earth with the knowledge of YHWH (11:9); and he will draw the foreign nations to himself: "On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious" (11:10). The Servant of YHWH, who may be identified with this coming king, has the task of serving Israel as "a covenant to the people" (42:6): he accomplishes the restoration of the people of God (49:6a) by replacing the first servant, Israel (49:3), because he is deaf and blind (42:18–20).²³ He serves at the same time as "a light to the nations" (42:6), as he will "bring

²² See generally H.-J. Hermisson, "Israel und der Gottesknecht bei Deuterocesaja," *ZTK* 79 (1982) 1–24; B. Wodecki, "Heilsuniversalismus im Buch des Propheten Jesaja," in *Dein Wort beachten* (ed. J. Reindl; Leipzig: St. Benno, 1981) 76–101; Horst Dietrich Preuß, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992) 2.324–26; Richard Schultz, "'Und sie verkünden meine Herrlichkeit unter den Nationen.' Mission im Alten Testament unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Jesaja," in *Werdet Meine Zeugen. Weltmission im Horizont von Theologie und Geschichte* (ed. H. Kasdorf and F. Walldorf; Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1996) 49–53.

²³ Cf. Schultz, "Herrlichkeit" 49–53.

forth justice to the nations" (42:1) as the "coastlands wait for his teaching" (42:4; cf. 49:1). He is "a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6b).

Isaiah announces that in the last days, when God will reveal his righteousness, biological descent or bodily mutilation will no longer determine membership in his people. Foreigners will "join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants" (56:7). As they keep the covenant, God will bring them to Zion and give them access to the Temple that will be "a house of prayer for all peoples" (56:7). When the nations, together with those whom YHWH gathers from Israel, have become servants of the Lord, loving him and worshipping him in the Temple, the distinction between faithful Israelites and believing foreigners has been abolished. The criterion for being part of YHWH's future restoration and establishment of his kingdom is not ethnic descent but a contrite spirit and a contrite heart (v. 15) and a righteous response to God's will on the part of those individuals who belong to the remnant for whom God has compassion (58:7–14)—those who "take refuge" in YHWH "shall possess the land and inherit my holy mountain" (v. 13), both "the far and the near" (v. 19).²⁴ This means that in the Isaianic prophecies the criteria for membership in the eschatological people of God have changed in a fundamental way:²⁵ when YHWH restores the earth, both repentant Jews and repentant Gentiles will constitute his covenant people.

It appears that the process which leads to the integration of foreigners into the people of God is centripetal, both in terms of initiative and in terms of geographical movement.²⁶ The drive to Zion is initiated by the nations, caused by the epiphany of YHWH and the activity of the Servant. It is not portrayed as the result of missionary preaching by emissaries of Israel; the movement is from the periphery to the center, from foreign countries to Jerusalem, from the nations to Israel. The task of Israel seems to consist in "being Israel" in a consistent manner (Isa 40:1–5). Israel, being blind and deaf, seems to be a passive witness, representing the acts of God in her history (cf. 43:1–7).

Isaiah contains the only two statements in Israel's prophetic tradition that portray a "centrifugal" movement from Israel to the nations. First, the Servant of the Lord who is the "light of the nations" carries the will of YHWH to the nations (Isa 42:1, 6–7; 49:6; cf. 51:4–5). Second, "survivors" from Israel are sent by YHWH to the nations so that there may be priests

²⁴ Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 281–82.

²⁵ H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* (The Didsbury Lectures 1997; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) 197.

²⁶ Cf. recently Preuß, *Theologie* 2.323; similarly Schultz, "Herrlichkeit" 51–52, who points out, however, that it is sometimes difficult to decide whether a text implies a centripetal or a centrifugal perspective (cf. Isa 61:9; 62:2). It was Bengt Sundkler, "Jésus et les Païens," in *Contributions à l'étude de la pensée missionnaire dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. B. Sundkler and A. Fridrichsen; Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 6; Uppsala: Neutestamentliches Seminar zu Uppsala, 1937) 24–40, who introduced the terms "centripetal" and "centrifugal" into this discussion.

and Levites from among the nations who serve YHWH (66:18–21). The “survivors” of Isa 66:19 are Jews who have survived God’s judgment on his people: they are sent to the nations, to the remote regions of the earth, in order to proclaim YHWH and the salvation that he has made possible.²⁷ Isa 66:19 is the only passage in the OT, apart from the *Ebed* YHWH texts, where the proclamation to Gentiles by human messengers is mentioned.²⁸ And Isa 66:21 implies that privileges that under the stipulations of the old covenant not every Israelite, let alone a proselyte could ever achieve—serving God as a priest or a Levite—are extended to Gentiles when YHWH gathers all nations.

As a result of this survey of relevant OT texts, we may divide the options for Israel’s relationship with the nations into five categories: (1) God commands the leaders of Israel to execute his judgment on the Canaanite nations (Deut 7:1–2); (2) God expects the Israelites to treat foreigners living in their midst with tolerance (Lev 19:34); (3) individual Gentiles are accepted as members of God’s people; (4) God designates other nations besides Israel with the predicate “people of YHWH” (Isa 19:25) or accords other nations the same status as Israel (Isa 25:6–8); (5) the concept of the “people of God” is defined: membership in God’s people is no longer dependent upon biological descent (Isa 56:3–8), Gentiles are given privileges that had been reserved for Israelites (Isa 66:21). The question of Israel’s relationship with foreign nations has thus two basic answers: a historical and an eschatological answer.²⁹ The historical answer has three parts: Israel destroys the Canaanite nations; Israel treats foreigners with kindness; Israel allows individual non-Israelites to be integrated into God’s people. The eschatological answer has two closely related parts: God will grant foreign nations the status of a “people of God” when the Servant of the Lord accomplishes his will; God will grant everyone who worships him in the last days the full privileges of his people.

The Second Temple period essentially confirms the OT attitudes of Jews concerning the nations. The evidence of early Jewish texts reaches from brusque demarcation to more moderate attitudes. The tendencies toward demarcation are clearly more frequent and more pronounced, especially in Judea.

VI. JESUS’ MINISTRY INITIATES THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISES OF GOD

Jesus’ proclamation of the arrival of God’s kingdom was accompanied by a redefinition of what the kingdom meant, with the symbols of Israel’s

²⁷ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 2.688–89.

²⁸ Claus Westerman, *Das Buch Jesaja Kap. 40–66* (ATD 19; 5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 337; Rainer Riesner, *Die Frühzeit des Apostels Paulus. Studien zur Chronologie, Missionsstrategie und Theologie* (WUNT 71; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994) 219.

²⁹ Charles H. H. Scobie, “Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology,” *TynB* 43 (1992) 283–305.

identity either missing (circumcision, sabbath, food) or transformed (nation, land, Torah, Temple).³⁰ The promised restoration of Israel was redefined in terms of allegiance to Jesus rather than to the old national symbols of Israel: the focus is not on the Temple, or the law, or the land, but on the message of the dawn of God's rule in the ministry and person of Jesus.

All four Gospels describe some repercussions of Jesus' ministry among non-Jews. The fact that the summaries of Jesus' ministry (Matt 4:24–25; Mark 3:7–8; Luke 6:17) contain references to the impact of Jesus on non-Jews is often overlooked. Beside the predominantly Jewish areas of Judea (Matt, Mark, Luke), Jerusalem (Matt, Mark, Luke), Galilee (Matt, Mark) and Transjordan (Matt, Mark), they mention Tyre and Sidon (Mark, Luke), Idumaea (Mark), Syria (Matt), and the Decapolis (Matt). Despite the fact that Jesus addressed his ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing to Jewish audiences and spent most of his time in Galilee, at least the news of his ministry quickly reached beyond the borders of Galilee and Judea.

Matthew links his account of Jesus' first preaching in Galilee with the comment that his sojourn in "Capernaum by the sea . . . the territory of Zeulun and Naphtali" fulfills the prophecy of Isa 9:1–2: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned" (Matt 4:13–16). The original context speaks of a crushed people, defeated by the Assyrian army and carried off into exile (2 Kgs 15:29; 1 Chr 5:26), that is given the promise of a son from the house of David who will bring salvation. Matthew sees this prophecy fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus: he interprets the literal destruction and the political crisis as moral and spiritual darkness,³¹ and interprets Jesus' announcement of the dawn of God's kingdom (Matt 4:17) as the fulfillment of the deliverance "on the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations" (Isa 9:1).

The Gospels report four major encounters with Gentiles: the healing of the son of a woman in Phoenicia (Matt 15:21–28 par. Mark 7:24–30), the healing of a demon-possessed man in Gadara (Mark 5:1–20 par. Luke 8:26–39), the healing of the son of a Roman centurion (Matt 8:5–13 par. Luke 7:1–10), and the healing of a deaf man in the Decapolis (Mark 7:32–37). To this list we may add the encounter with the Samaritan woman outside Sychar (John 4). And some link the feeding of the 4,000 that took place on the Eastern side of the Lake with a Gentile audience.³²

The faith of the centurion (Matt 8:10) consists in this Gentile's confidence that Jesus brings healing even to those who do not belong to Israel and thus have no claims on God's intervention. This is precisely what many Jews refuse to believe: they believe in Jesus' miracle-working power, but

³⁰ See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God Vol. 2; London/Minneapolis: SPCK/Fortress, 1996) 369–442, 467–72.

³¹ Cf. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 1.380.

³² Cf. Zenji Kato, *Völkermission im Markusevangelium: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (EHS 252; Frankfurt/Bern: Lang, 1986) 98.

they do not believe in his universal mission.³³ Jesus explains the contrast between the faith of this Gentile and the unbelief of natural heirs of God's kingdom (υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας) with the words: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 8:11–12; cf. Luke 13:28–29).³⁴ If this explanation refers to the prophetic tradition of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion (Isa 56:3–8)³⁵ and/or to the vision of the eschatological banquet "on this mountain" (Isa 25:6–8),³⁶ two observations are striking: (1) neither Jerusalem nor Zion are mentioned, both of which figure prominently in the prophetic tradition; (2) the ingathering of the Gentiles happens not for the glory of Israel who will rule over the nations; rather, Israel is, surprisingly, threatened with exclusion from God's presence.

In John's Gospel, Jesus makes this very point in 8:34–36 when he emphasizes that he alone is God's Son, in contrast to his Jewish discussion partners who are sinners and thus slaves who do not have "a permanent place in the household" (v. 35)—a slavery and a situation from which he can save them (v. 32). The Jews protest that they are Abraham's children and thus God's children (vv. 39, 41). Jesus points out that he indeed denies that they are God's children if they make this claim solely on the basis of their descent from Abraham: as he is God's son in an exclusive sense, true love for God the Father must now include love for Jesus as he comes from God (v. 42).³⁷ The identity of Israel as the people of God is radically dependent upon each individual's acceptance of Jesus as the one whom the Father has sent.

When Jesus speaks of himself as the shepherd who has a flock (John 10:11), he alludes to a rich biblical tradition that describes Israel as YHWH's flock, with either YHWH (Ps 23) or Israel's leaders (Ezek 34) as shepherds. Jesus' flock consists of those who are his "own" (τὰ ἐμὰ; v. 14): they are those who "know" him, who have come into an intimate relationship with him—Jews such as his disciples and many others who acknowledge him as God's messenger. But he has "other sheep that do not belong to this fold" (πρόβατα ἕγω ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ταύτης; v. 16a) who will be brought into his flock as they listen to his voice—non-Jews who will be converted in the future. The result will be "one flock, one shepherd" (γενή-

³³ Cf. Christoph Burchard, "Zu Matthäus 8, 5–13," ZNW 84 (1993) 285–86.

³⁴ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 268–70, defends both the authenticity of the passage and a reference of Jesus to Gentiles. D. A. Carson, "Matthew" (EBC 8; ed. F. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 202, assumes with regard to the differing context of the sayings Matt 8:11–12 and Luke 13:28–29, noting the clear differences in terminology, that the two sayings are no parallels but similar assertions of Jesus spoken on different occasions ("especially if warnings to the Jews and the prospect of Gentile admission to the fellowship of God's people were two of his major themes").

³⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM, 1958) 56–61. Keener, *Matthew* 268: "Jesus regards this exceptional Gentile as the promise of more Gentiles to come."

³⁶ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993) 185.

³⁷ Cf. Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 149–50.

σονται μία ποιμνὴ, εἷς ποιμήν; v. 16c). “If salvation is ‘of the Jews’ (4:22), it must first come to the Jews, and then proceed from them to the nations.”³⁸ It is but after the resurrection that Jesus will indicate how he will bring other sheep into his fold. The gathering of his sheep from within Israel was his own mission; the gathering of God’s people from among the nations will be the mission of the disciples whom he sends as he himself has been sent by the Father (20:21).

VII. JESUS COMMISSIONED HIS JEWISH DISCIPLES TO REACH ALL NATIONS

Jesus’ calling of twelve disciples (Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:12–26; Matt 10:1–2) is highly significant: if Jesus saw himself as the Messiah, the twelve disciples represent his claim that his ministry initiates the eschatological restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel. Note, first, Jesus’ repeated claim that he “gathers” Israel: “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Matt 23:37 par. Luke 13:34) and, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Matt 12:30 par. Luke 11:23).

Second, there is Jesus’ answer to Peter’s question regarding compensation for following Jesus. He directs his disciples to “the renewal of all things (παλιγγενεσία), when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28; par. Luke 22:29–30). The reference to Dan 7:22, 27 is highly significant: in Daniel 7 it is *Israel* (“the saints of the Most High”) who receives the kingdom and rules over the *nations*, whereas Jesus asserts that it will be the *twelve disciples* who will judge the *twelve tribes of Israel*. This transfer highlights the role of the disciples for the spiritual state and the eschatological fate of Israel.³⁹

Third, Jesus makes a similar assertion in the parable of the tenants when he describes the rejection of himself as God’s “cornerstone”: “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people (ἔθνος) that produces the fruits of the kingdom” (Matt 21:43).⁴⁰ The rejection and execution of the Messiah results in the unexpected new situation that God’s presence and God’s salvific intervention⁴¹ are no longer

³⁸ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word, 1987) 171, who points out that in the context of the assertion that salvation is “of the Jews,” Jesus was described by the Samaritans as the Savior of the world (cf. 4:42).

³⁹ Cf. R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (TNTC; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1985) 288; also I. H. Marshall, “Church,” *DJG* 122–23.

⁴⁰ On the authenticity of this saying see K. R. Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation* (WUNT 27; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983) 63–65; H. F. Bayer, *Jesus’ Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection: The Provenance, Meaning and Correlation of the Synoptic Predictions* (WUNT 2/20; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1986) 90–109.

⁴¹ Cf. W. Trilling, *Das wahre Israel. Studien zur Theologie des Matthäusevangeliums* (SANT 10; 3d ed.; München: Kösel 1964) 85, who underscores the personal formulation ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ that is rare in Matthew.

localized in Israel but were given to another “people,” that is, to another people than the biological descendants of Abraham. This passage clearly demonstrates the simultaneous reality of continuity and discontinuity: God’s rule continues to be a powerful reality and is focused on a “people,” but the identity of this people has changed. This (new) people is not formed by an exchange of her leaders but by the introduction of a new criterion for membership. The new people is constituted not by privileges of birth but by the reality of fruit (a subject already introduced in Matt 3:8–10; 7:15–23; 8:11–12; 12:39–42; 21:28–31).⁴²

Equally significant is the content of the call extended to the Twelve: they were called and prepared by Jesus for a future missionary task. They are called in order “to be with Jesus” and “to be sent” to preach the gospel (Mark 3:14); they are called to be “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17).⁴³ The Twelve spend three years with Jesus who prepares them for an extensive ministry that intensified and extended Jesus’ preaching of the dawn of God’s kingdom.⁴⁴ By mentioning Jesus’ calling of two sets of brothers as disciples in the context of Mark 1:17 (cf. v. 16, 19–20), Mark “anticipates the fulfillment of this prediction in Jesus’ sending them and the rest of the twelve disciples two by two for preaching, healing, and exorcism (3:13–19; 6:7–13, 30).”⁴⁵ The disciples had witnessed Jesus’ itinerant ministry of proclamation and healing in Galilee and Judea. They were prepared for an itinerant ministry both among the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6) in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and—in the context of the eschatological expectations of an influx of pagan nations who would worship YHWH—among Gentiles as well.

The classic texts of the “great commission” extend the mission of the Twelve to regions beyond the Jewish homeland (Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8).⁴⁶ We note the following points: (1) Jesus asserts that he possesses the universal authority of the Son of Man of Dan 7:13–14: the phrase ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς highlights Jesus’ participation in God’s authority over creation as a new dimension of his mission that is about to become the mission of the disciples; (2) Jesus commands the disciples to go and preach and make new disciples because he now possesses this authority. The new era of messianic authority changes the conditions of their ministry: the universality of his claims as Son of Man, recognizable only sporadically during his ministry in Galilee and in Judaea, can and must be preached as the disciples embark

⁴² R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (TNTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985 = 1989) 310.

⁴³ Luke 5:10 uses the phrase ἀνθρώπους ἔσθῃ ζωγρῶν with regard to Simon.

⁴⁴ R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTK II/1–2; Freiburg: Herder 1989) 1.113.

⁴⁵ R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 67.

⁴⁶ Questions of authenticity cannot be discussed here. It is promising to see that P. Stuhlmacher has recently changed his mind and now accepts the basic historicity of the great commission. Cf. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999) 2.159 (compare with 1.215–16); *idem*, “Zur missionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Mt 28, 16–20,” *Evangelische Theologie* 59 (1999) 108–29.

on their universal mission as “fishers of men” and founders of communities of new disciples whom they “teach”; (3) Jesus commands the disciples to reach “all nations” with the gospel. The phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη clearly refers to all nations including Israel. When Jesus had sent the disciples on their first mission he specifically restricted them to Jewish audiences (Matt 10:5); now there are no restrictions. The rejection of Jesus’ message by the Jewish leaders does not mean that the good news of the dawn of God’s kingdom can no longer be preached in Israel: the error of the Sanhedrin does not exclude Israel from salvation. The evangelistic ministry of the early Christian missionaries among Jews demonstrates how they understood the great commission: they preached in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and beyond the borders of Palestine.

In Jesus’ charge to the disciples to go to all the nations “until the ends of the earth,” the prophetic vision of nations coming to Jerusalem (Isa 2:2–5, Mic 4:1–5; Zech 8:20–23) is replaced by the reality of Jewish missionaries going to the nations. The anticipated movement from the periphery to the center is redirected in terms of a mission from the center (Jerusalem, where Jesus had died and was raised from the dead) towards the periphery (the ends of the earth).

VIII. THE APOSTLES UNDERSTOOD THEIR MISSIONARY RESPONSIBILITY

The apostles were convinced that the promised era of salvation had become a present reality with the ministry and especially the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah—the time when God would restore the fortunes of Israel and draw the nations to Zion. This ingathering of the nations had to wait until Jesus, the Son of Man, had proclaimed the dawn of God’s kingdom to Israel and had died and was raised from the dead.⁴⁷

The disciples, after Easter and after Pentecost, understood what their task was until the Parousia and the visible consummation of God’s Kingdom. Jesus had called them right from the beginning with the purpose of training them to be “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). He had helped them get experience in fulfilling this task (Mark 6:7–13 par.). He had emphasized the international, cross-cultural nature of their mission that would extend to “all nations” (Matt 28:19–20) after his resurrection, and he had confirmed the universal scope of their mission before the ascension (Acts 1:8). The fact that the remaining eleven disciples insisted that there must be twelve apostles as witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 1:21–22) shows that they fully understood their responsibilities. In other words, the disciples must have grasped the notion that their proclamation of Jesus the Messiah would lead to an inclusion of the nations of God’s kingdom, as final act before the consummation.

I do not agree with the interpretation, recently put forward again by J. Dunn, that the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, maintaining the continuity

⁴⁷ Jeremiah, *Promise* 70–73.

with Jesus' mission to Israel that has not yet been completely fulfilled, and that they "do not themselves take the message to the end of the earth."⁴⁸ It is hardly conceivable that the Twelve had left the practical realization of the missionary task entrusted to them by the risen Lord to coincidences of more or less accidental developments.⁴⁹ This is the impression which Luke's depiction of the earliest Christian mission in Acts *seems* to convey: first, the first missionary sermon, preached by Peter, appears to be a spontaneous statement (Acts 2:12–14, 37–38) explaining to a bewildered crowd the significance of the outpouring of the Spirit; second, there is no hint at missionary travels of the Twelve; third, the first journey that Luke mentions is the flight of some Christians of the Jerusalem church to Judea and Samaria after the martyrdom of Stephen, and Luke specifically points out that the apostles were spared this initial persecution (Acts 8:1); fourth, the first major expansion of the Jerusalem church into Samaria is related, as regards initiative and quantitative success, to one of the leaders of the Greek-speaking house churches rather than to an apostle, and appears as a spontaneous event in the midst of a persecution rather than as a planned undertaking. Hence some regard the leaders of the Jerusalem church as a conservative body that was never responsible for new ventures.⁵⁰ Several observations indicate, however, that this is not the whole picture.

The apostles were clearly aware of their responsibility for an active missionary outreach, even to the Gentiles. First, we must not forget that Luke portrays in a highly selective manner the ministry of only one of the Twelve, that of Peter. Otherwise he mentions only John, always in connection with Peter, and John's brother James (who is executed in 12:2). If Luke has given a limited picture of Paul's mission—even though over half of this material concerns Paul!—it should come as no surprise that his sketch of the mission of the Twelve is also selective. This is all the more remarkable, second, since Luke begins his treatise on the history of the early Christians and their expansion from Jerusalem to "the end of the earth" with a list of the eleven remaining disciples (Acts 1:13) and a comparatively long section on the replacement of Judas as the twelfth apostle (Acts 1:15–26). Third, Luke reports that the Jerusalem apostles had enormous courage and were prepared to challenge with great boldness a political institution that may call for their execution, refusing to stop their public proclamation and their private teaching of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18–20; 5:28–29). This seems to speak against the view that they were timid leaders unwilling to initiate new ventures. The Sanhedrin, fourth, was concerned that the messianic movement linked with Jesus of Nazareth would spread to new territories (4:17). This clearly implies the dynamic vitality of the Jerusalem apostles and their drive towards expansion of the Jerusalem church. Fifth, as the prophecies regarding the nations describe not only a movement to Jerusalem but a prior movement of the word of the Lord out from Jerusalem (Isa 2:3b), it is quite possible that in the earliest period of the Jerusalem church the expect-

⁴⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth, 1996) 11.

⁴⁹ Adapted from E. J. Schnabel, "Mission, Early Non-Pauline," *DPL* 752–75.

⁵⁰ Cf. I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (TNTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1980) 156.

tation was that through the proclamation of the gospel in Jerusalem (cf. Isa 40:9) its sound would reach to the ends of the earth, through the constant stream of pilgrims to Jerusalem and back into the countries where they lived. "In that case, Luke provides us, in his portrayal of the first preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem to a crowd drawn from all nations under heaven (Acts 2:5–11), with a programmatic account of the earliest mission strategy of the Jerusalem church."⁵¹ Sixth, the narrative in Acts indicates that the Jerusalem apostles acted in accordance with their call to missionary outreach: (i) they send Peter and John to Samaria when they hear of converts there (Acts 8:14); (ii) they link up with Paul and hear not only of his conversion but also of his work as a missionary in Damascus (9:27); (iii) Peter appears to be involved in a missionary journey through all the cities and villages of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (9:32 with 9:31; 8:25) and in the coastal areas (9:35); (iv) Peter plays a pioneering role in the first breakthrough to the Gentiles in Caesarea (10:1–11:18); (v) the Jerusalem church feels responsible for the missionary outreach to Gentiles in Antioch (11:19–24); (vi) all the early coworkers in Paul's mission to the Gentiles came from Jerusalem: Barnabas, John Mark, and Silas. Seventh, Paul's statement of missionary policy in Rom 15:20 that includes the principle "not to build on another's foundation" does not establish him as the only pioneer missionary to Gentiles (so most commentaries) but indicates, on the contrary, that others were actively involved in the mission to the Gentiles. This is also implied by 1 Cor 9:5 and 15:10.⁵² Even the Judaizers wanted to win Gentiles (Gal 6:13)! Eighth, the early tradition that the apostle Thomas evangelized in India is very probably authentic.⁵³

Quod erat demonstrandum: the disciples knew what their task was until the Parousia, they were obedient to his commission to preach the gospel of the dawn of God's kingdom and the reality of God's restoring work, not only in Israel, but to all nations.

IX. PETER ASSERTS THAT THE MESSIANIC PEOPLE OF GOD IS A UNIVERSAL COMMUNITY

When Peter explained the significance of the disciples' speaking in unlearned languages, he focused on the fulfillment of prophecy both in the pouring out of the Spirit promised by the prophets for the last days (Acts

⁵¹ R. Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting*, vol. 4: *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1995) 426.

⁵² F. F. Bruce, "Paul in Acts and Letters," *DPL* 688.

⁵³ Cf. J. N. Farquhar, "The Apostle Thomas in North India," *BRJL* 10 (1926) 80–111; H. Waldmann, *Das Christentum in Indien und der Königsweg der Apostel in Edessa, Indien und Rom* (Tübinger Gesellschaft Wissenschaftliche Reihe 5; Tübingen: Tübinger Gesellschaft, 1996) 9–57; as plausible possibility Vincent Smith, *The Early History of India: From 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan Conquest* (4th ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1962 [1924]) 245–49; S. Rahman Dar, "Gondophares and Taxila," in *St. Thomas and Taxila: A Symposium on Saint Thomas* (ed. John Rooney; Pakistan Christian History Studies Series 1; Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre Publication 1988) 19; Chr. M. Amjad-Ali, "The Literary Evidence for Thomas in India," in *St. Thomas and Taxila* 32–40; S. H. Mofett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1500* (New York: Maryknoll, 1998 [1992]) 25–44.

2:16–21) and in the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 24–32). Both events prove that Jesus was the Lord and the Messiah (vv. 32–36). When Peter explains the significance of these two events to the audience that wants to know what they should do, he urges them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus, so that their sins may be forgiven and they may also receive the Spirit. And he calls on his hearers to respond to participate in the promise of forgiveness and of the Spirit, because it was a promise that God himself had made to them and to their descendants as well as to “all who are far away” (καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακράν), to “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (v. 39).⁵⁴ The ambiguity of the last phrase, a quotation from Joel 2:32, “may deliberately embrace the thought both of the return of exiled Israel and of foreigners responding to Israel’s message.”⁵⁵

The restoration of Israel, which is the work of the Spirit in the last days, and the conversion of the nations, promised in the prophets, is the consummation of God’s promise that Abraham and his descendants would be blessed and that Abraham would be a blessing to the nations. If Peter had understood Jesus’ charge to his disciples to reach all nations with the gospel, verse 39 refers to a Gentile mission. “From its beginning the church was a universal society and its message was addressed not to Jews only but to distant races.”⁵⁶

In his sermon in the Temple a few weeks or months later (Acts 3:12–26) Peter addresses his listeners as “descendants of the prophets and of the covenant” (οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῆς διαθήκης, v. 25a), quoting God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 22:18; 26:4): “And in your posterity (ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου) all the families of the earth (πᾶσαι αἱ πατριάι τῆς γῆς) shall be blessed” (RSV; v. 25b). The beginning of the next verse (“When God raised up his servant,” v. 26) indicates that the “seed” is Jesus Christ. The ministry of Jesus and the message of the community of his followers is “an outworking of the original covenant promise given to Abraham.”⁵⁷ This promise to Abraham is understood as containing a promise that God’s blessing would be extended to non-Jews as well: “When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you” (ὁμῖν πρῶτον . . . ἀπέστειλεν; v. 26a). God’s covenant and blessing promised to Abraham is being fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus and his followers,⁵⁸ a fulfillment that includes the realization of the promised messianic salvation for the nations. The restoration of Israel happens through her Messiah who will bless the Jews when they turn from their wicked ways (ἐν τῷ ἀποστρέφειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ τῶν πονηρῶν ὑμῶν; v. 26b). In other words, Israel’s restoration is linked with her repentance and acceptance of the Messiah’s teaching. “As the word of God given through Moses was constitutive for Israel of old, so now the messianic word of the prophet-like-Moses is constitutive for the ‘Israel of the fulfillment.’”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Cf. Marshall, *Acts* 81–82.

⁵⁵ Dunn, *Acts* 33.

⁵⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 1.155.

⁵⁷ Dunn, *Acts* 48.

⁵⁸ O. Betz, “Ἀβραάμ,” *EWNT* 1.5.

⁵⁹ M. Turner, *Power from on High. The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (JPTSS 9; Sheffield: Academic, 1996) 311.

Darrell Bock is correct when he asserts regarding Acts 3:25–26 that “Jesus’ ministry and the new community’s message is [sic] not an attempt to break away from Israel, but a claim of the realization of her long awaited promises.”⁶⁰ It is equally correct, however, that at least for Luke, if not already for Peter, Israel is transformed and saved through the heavenly Lord Jesus Christ who exercises his power through the Spirit, the purging and restoring power of God, a power that nurtures, shapes, and purifies the life of the community of the followers of Jesus Christ who are called to be witnesses both to Israel and to the ends of the earth.⁶¹

X. JAMES AND THE INTERNATIONAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The discussion at the Jerusalem council in AD 48 puts the views of the major theological and missionary leaders of the early church in sharp focus (assuming that Peter and Paul agreed with James’s argument). James argues that converted Gentiles “should be accepted as ‘one people’ with the Israel of fulfilment (cf. 15.14) because this accords with Amos’ promise that the rebuilding of David’s fallen ‘dwelling’ (15.16) will cause ‘the rest of men . . . and/even all Gentiles’ to seek the Lord (15.17).”⁶²

The reference to Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15:16–18 is not a simple quotation, but “the product of skilled exegetical work . . . The interpretation takes ‘the dwelling of David’ (τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυίδ) to be the eschatological Temple which God will build, as the place of his eschatological presence, in the messianic age when Davidic rule is restored to Israel. He will build this new Temple so that all the Gentile nations may seek his presence there.”⁶³ Note first, that the opening and the closing words do not come from Amos 9:11–12, but from Hos 3:5, Jer 12:15, Isa 45:21. These passages are closely related to Amos 9:11–12, both in subject matter and in verbal resemblances (*gezerah shawah*).⁶⁴ “The allusions to three other prophetic passages which frame the main quotation from Amos put the latter in a context of prophecies which associate the eschatological conversion of the Gentile nations with the restoration of the Temple in the messianic age.”⁶⁵ Second, the wording of Amos 9:11 is adapted.⁶⁶ The modifications facilitate the interpretation with reference to the eschatological Temple. Third, the selection of the text of Amos 9:12a is significant, where LXX differs significantly from MT.⁶⁷ James proves his case with Amos 9:11–12: the Gentiles are included

⁶⁰ D. Bock, “Scripture and the Realisation of God’s Promises,” in *Witness to the Gospel. The Theology of Acts* (ed. I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson; Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) 51.

⁶¹ Cf. Turner, *Power* 306–12; *idem*, “The ‘Spirit of Prophecy’ as the Power of Israel’s Restoration and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel* 344–47.

⁶² Turner, *Power* 312.

⁶³ For the following see Bauckham, “James” 453–54.

⁶⁴ For details see *ibid.*, 455.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Two clauses are omitted: καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς, and καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος. The translation of the main verbs is modified: ἀναστήσω is replaced by ἀνοικοδομήσω and ἀνορθώσω. A phrase is omitted which would conflict with the superiority of the eschatological Temple over previous temples: καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος.

⁶⁷ For details see Bauckham, *ibid.*

in the eschatological people of God as Gentiles without having to become Jews. The “tent of David” (τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ) will have been understood to be the Christian community as the new messianic Temple, an interpretation that goes back to the early Christian church (cf. the “pillars” in Gal 2:9). The phrase “over whom my name has been invoked” expresses ownership, and was often used of God’s ownership of the ark, the Temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the people of Israel (for the latter see Deut 28:10; 2 Chr 7:14; Jer 14:9; Dan 9:19; cf. Isa 43:7). Here it is related to “all the nations,” as did Amos 9 where reference was made to the subjection of Israel’s neighbors to Davidic rule. Amos 9:11–12 thus states that the nations *as Gentile nations* belong to Yahweh. Perhaps no other OT text could have made this point clear. James thus asserts that now the Messiah has been raised from the dead, “the way is open for the Gentiles to enter at once into the people of God.”⁶⁸

XI. PAUL’S HOPES FOR THE CONVERSION OF ISRAEL

Paul, the former rabbi in the Pharisaic movement who was proud of the fact that he was a “member of the people of Israel” (ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ; Phil 3:5) and a zealot of the law, had become God’s messenger among the Gentiles (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν; Gal 1:16) to preach the good news of Jesus the Savior. He saw himself as a “debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish” (Rom 1:14). But he never gave up preaching before Jewish audiences in synagogues. Paul had become convinced that God’s salvific revelation in Jesus Christ had redefined the old dividing line between Jews and Gentiles in terms of a new dividing line between believers in Christ, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, which had her integrating figure not only in Jesus Christ but *also* in Abraham.⁶⁹ Note the following train of thought.

In Romans 2 Paul argues against the self-confidence of Israel that claimed salvation-historical prerogatives on the basis of Torah and circumcision. He demonstrates the universal sinfulness of every human being: everyone is in need of salvation. God’s answer for the predicament of men and women everywhere, whether they be pagans or Jews, amoral sinners or self-assured moralists, is Jesus Christ whom God “put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (Rom 3:25). Everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ is “justified” (vv. 26, 28) and thus belongs to the “saints” (1:7), to the one “body of Christ” (1 Cor 12), to “the church of God” (ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ) to which both Jews and Greeks belong (1 Cor 10:32). Circumcision has ceased to be a necessary prerequisite and a distinguishing mark of God’s people. Believing Jews and Gentiles can live together in one local (!) community because “in Christ” the old distinction

⁶⁸ Barrett, *Acts* 2.726.

⁶⁹ U. Heckel, “Das Bild der Heiden und die Identität der Christen bei Paulus,” in *Die Heiden. Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden* (ed. R. Feldmeier and U. Heckel; WUNT 70; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994) 269–96.

between Israel and Gentiles has been abolished: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). As they are "one in Christ," they are God's covenant people: Abraham is "the father of all who believe without being circumcised" (πατὴρ πάντων τῶν πιστευόντων δι' ἀκροβυστίας; Rom 4:11). Everybody who belongs to Christ is "Abraham's children" (Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα; Gal 3:29). Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ are "one" because God has fulfilled his promises to Abraham in Christ (εἶς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ; Gal 3:27). The conviction that the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, culminating in his death and resurrection, had a profound and radical effect on the traditional Israelite and Jewish notion of man's relationship with God—removing ethnic criteria as basis for claims to have an exclusive relationship with God—this conviction is an integral part of the deep structures of Paul's theology.⁷⁰

Paul's understanding of the church as God's eschatological covenant people is clearly expressed in Col 1:15–20 and in Ephesians 2. He describes Christ, who is the "firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15), as "head of the body, the church" (v. 18a) because he is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead" (v. 18b). In Ephesians 2 he asserts that "in Christ Jesus" God has made Jews and Gentiles "one" (ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμώτερα ἓν, v. 14), that is, "one new humanity" (εἶς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, v. 15 NRSV; RSV and NIV have "one new man"). The barrier that had divided Jews from Gentiles is abolished, the enmity removed. As Peter O'Brien comments, "Nothing less than a new creation, an entirely new entity, was needed to transcend the deep rift between the two. It was effected through Christ's death, and the result is not an amalgam of the best elements of the two, but a 'new person' who transcends them both. The new humanity is not achieved by transforming Gentiles into Jews, or vice versa."⁷¹ In v. 19 Paul expresses the same notion with a second and third metaphor: Gentile Christians are no longer "strangers and sojourners" (ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι) but "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (συμπολιταὶ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ; v. 19). Gentile Christians belong "as fellow-citizens with the rest of the believers in that heavenly commonwealth ruled by God."⁷² And Gentile Christians are "at home in God's family."⁷³ The former aliens have become members of the house, "not necessarily kinsfolk but certainly not slaves; nor are they 'guests'—here to-day and away to-morrow' (Eadie)—well treated when present but forgotten when gone": they are members of the extended family of God.⁷⁴ In vv. 20–22 Paul uses a fourth metaphor to express both the new status of the Gentile Christians and the unity of the community of God's people: Gentile Christians also

⁷⁰ Cf. Hendrikus Boers, *The Justification of the Gentiles. Paul's Letters to the Galatians and Romans* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).

⁷¹ P. T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 200.

⁷² Ibid. 211.

⁷³ Ibid. 212.

⁷⁴ E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 279.

have a privileged position in the building in which God's household resides, that is, in the "temple" where God dwells—they are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (vv. 20–22). "Now through Christ Gentiles have been brought near to God, and along with Jews they have become the new temple, the place where God's presence dwells."⁷⁵ These metaphors demonstrate that Paul preached and taught a new concept of the people of God: the identity and the boundaries of God's people are no longer determined by ethnic, legal or ritual criteria, that is, no longer by the injunctions of God's covenant with Israel from Abraham to Moses. The identity and the boundaries of God's people are determined by faith in Jesus the Messiah.

The discussion in Romans 9–11 contains Paul's most extensive argument concerning not only the salvation-historical position of Israel—these chapters are not an "excursus"⁷⁶ for friends of Israel—but the spiritual status of the Jewish people. He expresses his "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" (9:2) because they are cut off from Christ (v. 3). Paul begins the ensuing discussion with a redefinition of "Israel" that we have seen in Jesus' teaching, in Peter's preaching, and in James's exposition (9:6–8). Faith in Christ and membership in the messianic community have not abolished all boundaries, but they did remove the distinctive criteria between οἱ ἔξω and οἱ ἔσω, between "outsiders" and "insiders" (1 Cor 5:12; 1 Thess 4:12). Thus, when Paul asserts that God's promise to Abraham is now wholly fulfilled in Christ, including especially the extension of God's blessing to the Gentiles, and when he asserts that this realization takes place in the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ, he expresses his conviction that the church, consisting of believing Jews and Christians, represents the eschatological restoration of Israel. Paul highlights in Romans 9–11 not simply the difference between the people of God and the church, but the difference between the people of God and empirical Judaism. The true people of God is the community of the elect who have been called to believe in Jesus Christ.⁷⁷

The list of the so-called "privileges" of Israel in Rom 9:4–5—adoption, glory, the covenants, the law, worship, promises, the patriarchs, the Messiah—is not accidental. Paul had demonstrated in chapters 1–8 that these characteristics of Israel were transferred to the Messiah who represents the people of God and thus to all who are "in Christ," whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Sonship/adoption, glory, covenant, law, worship, promises, the fathers, the Messiah—all this is the "glory" of the community of those who believe in Jesus.

⁷⁵ O'Brien, *Philippians* 220.

⁷⁶ Note the pointed comment of C. H. Dodd: "Chaps. IX–XI form a compact and continuous whole, which can be read quite satisfactorily without reference to the rest of the epistle" (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* [MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932 = 1959] 148).

⁷⁷ Cf. recently U. H. J. Körtner, "Volk Gottes—Kirche—Israel. Das Verhältnis der Kirchen zum Judentum als Thema ökumenischer Kirchenkunde und ökumenischer Theologie," *ZTK* 91 (1994) 59.

Romans 10–11 does not depict two ways of salvation, one for Israel and one for the church. Gerbern Oegema has recently argued, as have others before him, that these are two historical *Heilswege*: Israel walks on the path of the Torah, *halakhah*, the nation, and the land of Israel, the Christians walk on the path of the “Old Testament” (i.e. the Torah interpreted christologically), the gospel, and the twofold commandment of love and world missions. Theologically and eschatologically, however, there is only one way to salvation, the way opened by Jesus Christ. Thus the church awaits Israel’s conversion to Christ which is predestined for the day of judgment.⁷⁸

In view of the intensive missionary work of all the apostles among Jews both in Palestine and in the diaspora, in view of Paul’s statements about the people of God that is an integrated unity of Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus the messiah, and in view of the context in Romans 9–11, this interpretation seems mistaken. The crux 11:26a (“and so all Israel will be saved”) is linked with the preceding assertion that Gentile Christians must not make arrogant claims vis-à-vis the Jews. The reason for this admonition is the “mystery.” This mystery can hardly be a new revelation in which God promises the eventual salvation of the Jewish people at the time of the Parousia. Such a revelation would contradict both the preceding and the following contexts. In the context of v. 25, the “mystery” seems to be that God does not judge Israel immediately even though she has rejected his Son. God allows for a period of “hardening,” after which judgment comes, after “the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25b). At present more and more Gentiles gain access to God’s people, and Paul has already expressed his hope, repeatedly, that this would make Israel jealous (10:19; 11:11, 14) and prompt her conversion. It is *in this manner* that God saves “all Israel” (v. 26a). A survey of the history of interpretation seems to show that the view a particular exegete holds concerning the meaning of the phrase *καὶ οὐτως* does not seem to be decisive.⁷⁹ whether authors see a temporal, a modal or a logical meaning, their interpretation of v. 26a depends on how they understand the link with v. 25 or with v. 26b, or on the import of Paul’s argument since 9:1 (or on a larger agenda of a politically correct “theology after Auschwitz”). Paul seems to interpret a specific *process* as salvation of “all Israel.” In the context not only of Paul’s argument since Rom 1:16 and particularly since 9:1, but also in the context of other statements of the apostle (some of which we reviewed above), the phrase “all Israel” can hardly mean “all Jews”—no matter whether this would refer to all Israelites and all Jews who live at the time of the Parousia. The argument that the term “Israel” in v. 26a has a different *referent* than in v. 25b cannot be

⁷⁸ Recently also Winfried Keller, *Gottes Treue—Israels Heil. Röm 11, 25–27—Die These vom “Sonderweg” in der Diskussion* (SBB 40; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998). He argues for a diachronic understanding of “all Israel” in 11:26a: all who belong to Israel, all Israelites and Jews from Abraham to the Parousia, will be saved when Christ returns (pp. 223–41).

⁷⁹ For a survey of opinions and arguments see François Refoulé, “. . . et ainsi tout Israël sera sauvé.” *Romains 11.25–32* (LD 117; Paris: Cerf, 1984) 32–34. Against a growing consensus, P. W. van der Horst, “‘Only then will all Israel be saved’: A Short Note on the Meaning of *καὶ οὐτως* in Romans 11:26,” *JBL* 119 (2000) 521–25, has recently argued for a temporal understanding of the phrase in Greek.

dismissed easily: right from the beginning of his argument Paul worked with a programmatic distinction between two "Israels," and since 2:25 he systematically transferred privileges and attributes of "Israel" to the Messiah and his people.⁸⁰ It is not at all impossible that his readers who have followed his argument so far would understand the phrase "all Israel" in 11:26b as (polemic) redefinition of Israel (as in Gal 6:16; cf. Phil 3:2–11 where the church is called "the circumcision"). N. T. Wright interprets the phrase "and so all Israel will be saved" thus: "God's method of saving 'all Israel' is to harden ethnic Israel (cf. 9.14ff.), i.e., not to judge her at once, so as to create a period of time during which the gentile mission could be undertaken, during the course of which it remains God's will that the present 'remnant' of believing Jews might be enlarged by the process of 'jealousy', and consequent faith . . . This whole process is God's way of saving his whole people."⁸¹

Whatever our interpretation of Rom 11:26, whatever our understanding of OT promises for Israel, whatever our expectations for ethnic Israel for the eschaton may be, it seems hardly possible that Paul would entertain the possibility that the gospel he preaches—the ministry of reconciliation given to him by God (2 Cor 5:18) whose power is the message of the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:18)—is valid only until the Parousia when suddenly ethnic affiliation becomes effective again, saving Jews (of all times, or only of that particular time) simply because they are Jews and are thus heirs of God's promise, notwithstanding their rejection of the Messiah and his saving death on the cross. Paul is utterly convinced that it is only faith in Jesus Christ that saves both Jews and Gentiles.

And those of us who are Gentile Christians should note what the real challenge of Romans 11 is. I submit that the real challenge for largely Gentile Christian churches is not the interpretation of 11:26a (like Jesus, Peter, James, and Paul we will continue to evangelize all people, "Jews first and also the Greeks," no matter which eschatological scheme we may find most convincing). It is, rather, the question whether the reality of our churches prompts Jews to jealousy, let alone Gentiles! If we have to sidestep a clear answer to this question, when the reality of our churches is characterized more by unbelief, coldness, disobedience, fragmentation, alienation, assimilation or lack of love, and when we see hope only for the time after the Parousia, we should not get too exasperated about the fate of Israel.

XII. JOHN'S VISION OF GOD'S PEOPLE FROM ALL NATIONS

In the letter to the church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:7–13), the believers' identification with Christ's name (v. 8) "is essentially the same as identification with 'God's name' and 'the name of the new Jerusalem.'"⁸² The "new

⁸⁰ Cf. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992) 231–57, specifically 249–51.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 250. The consensus view interprets "Israel" in v. 26a as a reference to ethnic Israel.

⁸² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1999) 293.

name” of Christ (v. 12) that is essentially “God’s name” and “the name of the new Jerusalem” refers to the intimate and ultimate presence of God and Christ with their people, consisting of Jewish and Gentile Christians. The multi-ethnic church in Philadelphia, being the “new Jerusalem,” represents the restored people of God.

John describes the church in Rev 7:9 as “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9). If this multitude is identical with the “servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads” (v. 3) who are represented as “one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel” (v. 4), John describes in vv. 1–8 the church as the new Israel on earth who need and have received God’s protection, and in vv. 9–17 as an assembly from all nations in God’s eternal kingdom.⁸³

The main arguments for this interpretation are well known: (1) the sealing must be as extensive as the dangers of the last days, that is, the time between the first and the second coming of Jesus; (2) John clearly implies in 9:4 that the church in its entirety has been sealed against the attacks of the demonic powers; (3) according to 13:16–18, all Christians are to be forced to accept the mark of the beast, that is, John announces that the world is split into two camps: people who have received God’s seal, and people who have accepted the mark of the beast.

If this interpretation is correct, the υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ of 7:4 represent the δούλοι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν of v. 3 without implying ethnic affiliations: John speaks of the church of Jesus Christ, the people of God, as restored Israel, that is, the community of those whom Jesus has “to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father” (1:6).

The final vision in the book of Revelation confirms this interpretation: John sees “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (21:10) on whose gates are inscribed “the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites” (v. 12) and on whose twelve foundation stones are written “the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (v. 14). I agree with G. K. Beale when he writes that the multiracial Christian church, the “saints” who wear wedding clothes in, 19:7–8, is “the redeemed group who, together with Christ, will fulfill Ezekiel’s prophecy of the future temple and city.”⁸⁴ The fact that the apostles are part of the foundation whereas the tribes of Israel are part of the gates in the wall that is built on the foundation stones highlights the conviction “that fulfillment of Israel’s promises has finally come in Christ, who, together with the apostolic witness to his fulfilling work, forms the foundation of the new temple, the church, which is the new Israel.” The foundation of the *new* Israel is not the historical Israel of the OT but the apostles, that is, the witness of the apostles to the reality and efficacy of the work of Jesus Christ.

⁸³ Cf. the commentaries by R. H. Charles, G. Beasley-Murray, R. Mounce, A. Pohl, W. Hadorn, A. Wickenhauser, E. Lohse, and G. Beale. See also Christopher R. Smith, “The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Names and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7.5–8,” *JSNT* 11 (1990) 111–18.

⁸⁴ Beale, *Revelation* 1070.