

TWO PROBLEM PASSAGES ON ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH
FOR TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONALISTS

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When I was ministering as an associate pastor in a Baptist church in Washington, I was blessed with the opportunity to take my adult Sunday School class through a year-long study of biblical eschatology. It was a time of significant growth both for the class and for me personally, and I will always remember it fondly. But I will also always remember the unique challenge posed by one of my students, Ron. Ron was a committed post-millennialist, partial preterist, and supercessionist. Needless to say, he found plenty to disagree with in a class on eschatology taught by a premillennial dispensationalist! Often, after everyone else had filtered out of the classroom, Ron would seek me out and pose a friendly challenge or objection to my teaching for the week. As the year wore on, I couldn't help noticing how frequently Ron's challenges and objections would inexorably involve an appeal either to Romans 9:6 or Galatians 6:16. In the years since, I have read and heard countless other supercessionists make identical appeals to these same passages, and they always make me think fondly of my conversations with Ron.

This paper will take a long, hard look at these two passages. They are not the only prooftexts employed by supercessionists, but they seem to be the two most commonly cited. I will survey the principal interpretive approaches to each passage, consider the major factors affecting the determination of which interpretive approach is most exegetically warranted, and try to come to grips with the question, "Do these passages on Israel and the Church pose a problem for traditional dispensationalists?"

Romans 9:6

Οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ·

At one time, Romans 9:6 was a favorite prooftext for supercessionists. When Arnold Fruchtenbaum wrote his doctoral dissertation on Israelology in 1989, he was able to claim, "The majority [of Covenant Theologians] understand this verse to be speaking of the Church."¹ Today, however, the situation has changed insofar as the scholarly world is concerned. The overwhelming majority of commentators—including our covenantalist brethren—have now moved away from the supercessionist interpretation of Romans 9:6.²

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology," PhD Dissertation (New York: New York University, 1989), 322.

² Oftentimes this move is made with a wistful glance behind: note the number of commentators who, in the process of disclaiming the supercessionist interpretation of this passage, hastily add that *of course* they still hold a basically supercessionist theology on the basis of other passages—usually Galatians 6:16 [E.g. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 574; Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 242; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 2:9–11; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 493; Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 3:332–333; etc.].

Nevertheless, the verse's inclusion in this paper is warranted on the grounds that popular-level writers still frequently appeal to it in support of their view that the Church is the "true Israel."³ Thus, the task of examining and understanding the reasoning underlying the classic supercessionist approach to this verse remains altogether valid.

Description of the Interpretive Views

There are basically two interpretive approaches to Romans 9:6: the supercessionist view and the remnant view. Vlach provides a succinct description of the supercessionist view: "Some see in the mention of 'Israel' a concept of Israel that goes beyond ethnic boundaries. Thus, Paul is allegedly making a distinction between ethnic Israel⁴ and a spiritual Israel that consists of all believers including Gentiles."⁵

It is granted that not all who hold this view would embrace the term *supercessionist*; some have insisted that their understanding entails not so much a *replacement* of Israel by the Church, as an *enlargement* of Israel *into* the Church!⁶ (Ice and Vlach refer to these as neo-supercessionists.)⁷ While I recognize the theoretical validity of the distinction, their views do not seem to be substantially distinguishable from classic supercessionism, so the term *supercessionist view* will be used here to encompass both camps. The defining characteristic of this approach to this passage really has little to do with the question of whether Israel is

³ E.g. Russell Moore, "Is There a 'Genuine Offer' of the Kingdom?" <http://www.russellmoore.com/2009/04/02/is-there-a-genuine-offer-of-the-kingdom/> [Accessed July, 2015]; Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville, TN: 2007), 50; Bruce Tucker, *The Posttribulation Rapture of the Church* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2001), 82; Brian Warner, "Replacement Theology," <http://replacementtheology.org/> [Accessed July, 2015].

The situation is somewhat comparable to the current status of the Graf-Wellhausen documentary hypothesis on Pentateuchal origins. While the hypothesis is widely recognized by scholars as having been mortally wounded ages ago, it is kept on perpetual life support via popular avenues of communication, such as History Channel specials and poorly-researched polemical books by the new atheists.

⁴ "Empirical Israel" is another term sometimes employed as an alternative to "ethnic Israel." Curiously, "national Israel" is almost never used in discussions on this passage.

⁵ Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 128.

⁶ Samuel E. Waldron, *MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto: A Friendly Response* (Owensboro, KY: Reformed Academic Press, 2008), 7; Hank Hanegraaff, "Response to *National Liberty Journal* Article on *The Apocalypse Code*," <http://www.equipresources.org/atf/cf/%7B9C4EE03A-F988-4091-84BD-F8E70A3B0215%7D/PSN001.PDF> [Accessed July, 2015].

⁷ Thomas Ice, "Neo-Replacement Theology," paper presented to the Pre-Trib Study Group, <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Ice-NeoReplacementTheolo.pdf> [Accessed July, 2015]; Michael Vlach, "An Analysis of Neo-Replacement Theology," paper presented to the Pre-Trib Study Group, <http://pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Vlach-AnAnalysisofNeoRepla1.pdf> [Accessed July 2015].

replaced or enlarged; it is, rather, that the first occurrence of Ἰσραήλ in this verse denotes ethnic Israel while the second occurrence denotes a *broader* company including both Jews and Gentiles.⁸

The remnant view is aptly described by Johnson:

The statement “for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” has nothing to do with Gentiles, although some have tried to make it include them. What it says, plainly and simply, is that there are two kinds of Israelites. Just because a person is ethnically an Israelite does not mean that he or she is an Israelite in the truest sense, for the term is a religious one. To be a true Israelite, one must be a believer, walking in the steps of father Abraham (cf. 4:12). It is to the believing seed of Abraham that the promises are given. Paul discusses a division within the nation of Israel, not Gentiles.⁹

Note that this is not an overtly dispensational interpretive approach; as mentioned previously, many supercessionists have adopted it quite comfortably. However, of the two approaches it is far more *conducive* to dispensationalism, so it is no great surprise to find that it has been and remains the position of virtually all dispensational commentators.¹⁰

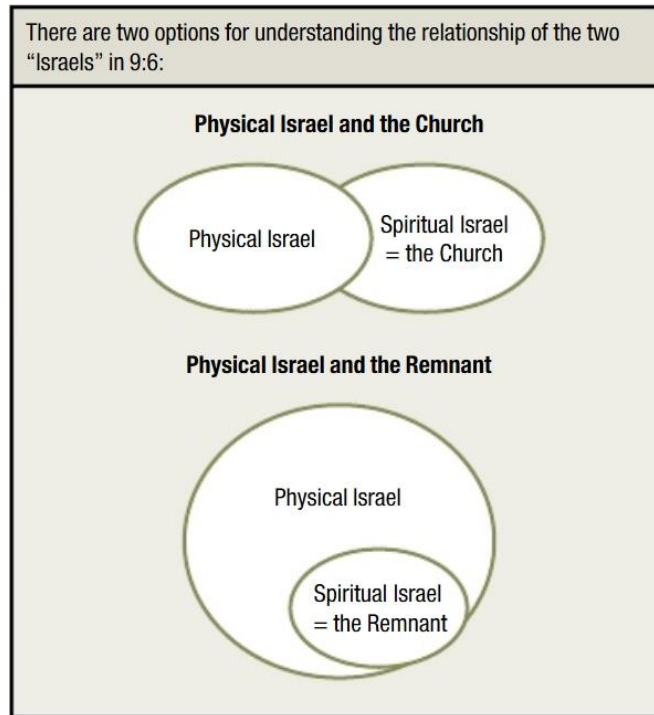
A helpful aid for visualizing these interpretive approaches is provided by the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*:¹¹

⁸ Unfortunately, while it is relatively easy to define the supercessionist view of Romans 9:6, it is an altogether trickier matter to understand the major arguments in its favor. This is because many of the view’s advocates prefer to establish it by assertion rather than argumentation [E.g. Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 122; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 959; *A Basic Guide to Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 123–124; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, translated by J. R. De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 336 n. 30; Dinkler, “The Historical and the Eschatological Israel in Romans Chapters 9–11,” *Journal of Religion* 36:2 (Apr 1956): 116; Ellis, 137.]

⁹ S. Lewis Johnson, *Discovering Romans*, edited by Mike Abendroth (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 152.

¹⁰ Another exceptionally succinct and clear statement of the remnant view is Walvoord’s [*The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham, 1959), 168–169], but it is much more overtly dispensational than Johnson’s.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2309.



Major Factors

Here we will consider the major factors upon which one's interpretation of Romans 9:6 will turn. These include the distinction between Israel and Israel, syntactical issues, contextual issues, and Paul's application of "Israel" terminology to the Church.

The Distinction between Israel and Israel

As traditional dispensationalists, we are committed to the programmatic distinction between Israel and the Church. The Apostle Paul went one step further: he distinguished between Israel and Israel! (To avoid question-begging, I will refer to them as Ἰσραήλ¹ and Ἰσραήλ² herein.)

This is a minor point, but it needs to be made. In some cases, proponents of the supercessionist view have cited the *fact* of this distinction as a point in their favor, as though Paul's establishing the distinction implied anything definite about the *nature* of that distinction.¹² This is an illegitimate tactic. Both sides of the debate agree that a distinction is

¹² E.g. "Paul actually began the whole section (9:6) with just such a programmatic distinction of two 'Israels', and throughout the letter (e.g. 2.25-9) as well as elsewhere (Philippians 3.2-11) he has systematically transferred the privileges and attributes of 'Israel' to the Messiah and his people" [N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 250]; "When Paul says in Romans 9:6 that 'they are not all Israel that are Israel,' he is using the term *Israel* with two different meanings in a single verse" [O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 188].

made; the real disagreement is over the distinction's *extent*. If Ἰσραήλ¹ and Ἰσραήλ² are fundamentally disparate but overlapping categories, then the distinction is severe. If the latter is a subcategory of the former, then it is less so.

On that note, it bears mentioning that the language used to describe this distinction (by proponents of both views) tends to improperly absolutize the distinction. Observe:

- Grudem: “Those who are in the most true sense ‘Israel,’ are not the nation of Israel by physical descent from Abraham but those who have believed in Christ.”¹³
- Hodge: “God was at liberty to reject the Jews and to call the Gentiles, Paul argues, 1. By showing that the promises which he had made, and by which he had graciously bound himself, were not made to the natural descendants of Abraham as such, but to his spiritual seed.”¹⁴
- Barnhouse: “At once we see, therefore, that the selection is tied to the promises of God and not to the fleshly line of Isaac.”¹⁵
- Barrett: “But Israel is not a term like Ammon, Moab, Greece, or Rome. ‘Israel’ cannot be defined in terms of physical descent, or understood simply ‘on the human side’ (v. 5); it is created not by blood and soil, but by the promise of God, and therefore exists within the limits of God’s freedom.”¹⁶
- Byrne: “The focus remains upon God and the indications given in scripture that “promise” and “calling,” rather than ethnic belonging, mark the pattern of divine action.”¹⁷
- Dewelt, MacKnight, and Lard: “Now God had made certain promises to those of Israel just as he had to those of Abraham. But did he mean all those who were of the *flesh* of Israel or, of the *spirit* of Israel?”¹⁸
- Mounce: “Spiritual kinship, not ethnic origin, determined who was a true Israelite.”¹⁹

Additional examples could be multiplied. This kind of language creates a false dichotomy between ethnic identity and spiritual identity, as though Ἰσραήλ¹ is circumscribed only by

¹³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 861.

¹⁴ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 303.

¹⁵ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Exposition of Bible Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954–62), 4:26.

¹⁶ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1817), 180.

¹⁷ Brendan Byrne, *Romans, Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 292.

¹⁸ Don Dewelt, James MacKnight, and Moses E. Lard, *Romans Realized*, Bible Study Textbook (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1959), 144.

¹⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 198.

the former, Ἰσραήλ² only by the latter.²⁰ By contrast, the remnant view operates according to the logic that ethnic identity circumscribes Ἰσραήλ¹, while both ethnic and spiritual identity circumscribes Ἰσραήλ². This tendency is therefore detrimental to the remnant view, but as we shall see it has little textual basis.

Syntactical Issues

The only syntactical issue pertaining directly to this discussion is the relationship between the negative particle οὐ and the two halves of Romans 9:6b. That is, did Paul intend οὐ to modify πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραήλ or οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ? The overwhelmingly majority of commentators and translators have favored the former option (usually without articulating their reasons for doing so), but John Piper makes a case for the latter:

For two reasons I have construed the οὐ to modify the clause οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ rather than πάντες. In the first place the demonstrative οὗτοι refers to a definite group of people, but the negation οὐ πάντες is very indefinite. It does not work to say, “Not all the ones from Israel, these are Israel.” In the second place Rom 7:15, a very close parallel to the grammatical structure of Rom 9:6b, has οὐ in the same anterior position as here but there it definitely modifies the second clause.²¹

Piper’s reasoning seems sound. He is joined in this opinion by Dunn, Moo, and Schreiner.²² As far as I can tell, no one has mounted a vigorous defense of the other option on grammatical grounds. Jewett has opposed Piper’s contention on contextual grounds:

[A] strict construal of this reading would be to extend Paul’s claim too widely by implying that none of those descended from Israel belong to the true Israel. . . . If from “all those who are from Israel,” *none* are truly Israel, then the distinction that Piper wishes to maintain in *Justification*, 48–52, between the Israel according to the flesh and the true Israel is undermined.²³

Jewett’s concern is valid, but he may be pressing the point too far. Paul could simply be emphasizing that the *totality* of Ἰσραήλ¹ is not identical to Ἰσραήλ², without thereby implying that *none* of the constituents of Ἰσραήλ¹ is contained in (or overlaps with) Ἰσραήλ². Either

²⁰ Later, we will observe a similar absolutizing tendency with respect to the language of election in this passage.

²¹ John Piper, *The Justification of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 47. Emphasis in the original.

²² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 539; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 573; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, 493.

²³ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia, edited by Eldon Jay Epp (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 574. Italics in the original.

option seems a valid interpretation of Piper’s reading, but of course the latter is untenable since it would disqualify Paul himself from inclusion in Ἰσραήλ!

If Piper’s proposal is accepted, the case for the supercessionist interpretive approach is strengthened—though only slightly.²⁴ Arguably, grouping οὐ with Ἰσραήλ¹ is more conducive to a restrictive understanding (the remnant view), whereas grouping it with Ἰσραήλ² at least opens the door to a more expansive understanding (the supercessionist view).²⁵ But it would not *impel* anyone to the supercessionist view, since the restrictive sense is viable on both readings. Hence, Schreiner’s caveat that “the meaning of the sentence is not affected significantly on either reading.”²⁶

Contextual Issues

I understand the foregoing material in Romans to flow as follows:

- I. Introduction to the epistle’s theme, the Gospel, 1:1–17
- II. Justification: The Gospel’s application accomplished, 1:18–5:21
 - A. The universal necessity of justification, 1:18–3:31
 - B. The universal availability of justification, 3:21–4:25
 - C. Some principal benefits of justification, 5:1–11
 - D. Transition: a theological and historical reflection, 5:12–21
- III. Sanctification: The Gospel’s abiding effects, 6:1–8:17
 - A. The necessity of sanctification, 6:1–23
 - B. The means by which sanctification is accomplished, 7:1–8:17
- IV. Glorification: The Gospel’s ultimate objective envisioned, 8:18–30
 - A. The necessity of glorification, 8:18–23
 - B. The inevitability of glorification, 8:24–39

Having thus sketched out all that is involved in the salvation transaction—justification (past), sanctification (present), and glorification (future)—Paul concluded on a note of triumph. All those whom God has foreknown He will also elect, call, justify, and glorify (8:29–30). And, consequently, none of God’s elect can ever be separated from “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:31–39). This sounds wonderful, of course, but the thoughtful reader

²⁴ Piper himself adopts the remnant view, but Dewelt, MacKnight and Lard seem to base their supercessionist interpretation partly on this very syntactical decision [*Romans Realized*, 141].

²⁵ Consider the difference between “Not all players on the Chicago White Sox are the greatest baseball players in the world” and “All those players on the Chicago White Sox, they’re not the greatest baseball players in the world.” The former is more restrictive (the speaker is about to select just a few of the White Sox players to extol) while the latter is more expansive (the speaker is going to look outside the White Sox organization for players to extol).

²⁶ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, 493.

will immediately notice an apparent anomaly in the history of God’s dealing with man: *What about Israel? Wasn’t she an elect nation? Yet she turned from God and crucified the Lord of Glory. Perhaps God’s election isn’t quite so secure and inviolable after all.* If this objection is permitted to stand, one can see how devastating it might prove to Paul’s argument.

In classic Pauline fashion, the apostle anticipates the objection and confronts it headlong, embracing upfront the fact of Israel’s fallenness (9:1–3). He will devote three chapters of his epistle (9–11) to explaining how her fall from grace does *not* obviate his exposition of the Gospel.²⁷

Paul affirms that Israel is indeed an elect nation and enumerates her resultant privileges (9:4–5),²⁸ but is quick to point out that although these benefits presumably accrue to every single Israelite (Ἰσραήλ¹), *salvation* does not. That is a privilege accorded only to Ἰσραήλ². Clearly, the logic of this assertion will be understood differently depending on whether one adopts the supercessionist or the remnant view. Granted the former, Paul would be saying, “Yes, Israel was a divinely chosen nation with many significant privileges, but that does not mean all Israelites are saved. Salvation is a matter of faith, not ethnicity. The real company of the saved is the Church, Jews and Gentiles alike united in one body by grace through faith.” Granted the latter, Paul would be saying, “The many privileges that accrued to Israel by virtue of her status as an elect nation do not include salvation. Only a small portion of those who belong to the elect nation are also themselves elect individuals, saved by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

The flow of vv. 1–6 suggests that the content of v. 6 is offered as a factor that mitigates the sorrow Paul expressed in vv. 1–2. Observe:

1 Ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι, συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς μου ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ,

2 ὅτι [indirect discourse: ἀλήθειαν λέγω, v. 1] λύπη μοί ἐστιν μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος ὀδύνη τῇ καρδίᾳ μου.

3 ἡχόμην γὰρ [explanatory: gives the reason for Paul’s sorrow, vv. 1–2] ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα,

²⁷ Just as his preceding discussion progressed roughly in a chronologically linear fashion (past, 1:18–5:21; present, 6:1–8:17; future, 8:18–39), I think it is helpful to view his treatment of Israel as roughly chronological (past, ch. 9; present, ch. 10; future, ch. 11). Granted, these divisions are not entirely airtight, but I think they do accurately describe the general shape of Paul’s thought here.

²⁸ This is a discussion he actually began back in 3:1 when establishing the total damnability of Jew and gentile alike, but he digressed from the topic until 9:1. [George Gunn, “Romans 11:17, Israel, the Church & the Olive Tree,” paper presented to the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, 2014, 2–3.]

4 οἵτινές [antecedent: τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα] εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται, ὧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθηκῆ καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι, 5 ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὧν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

6 Οὐχ οἷον δὲ [adversative: contrasts with Paul's sorrow, vv. 1–2] ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.

Verses 1–2 state Paul's sorrow, v. 3 supplies the reason for Paul's sorrow, and vv. 4–5 expand on the significance of Paul's kinsmen. Most likely, then, v. 6 stands in a mildly adversative relationship to vv. 1–2.²⁹ In other words, Paul is saying, “I am very sorrowful because of the fallenness of the Jews, *but* my sorrow is mitigated because I know that not all of them will be lost.” (If this interpretation of the syntactical relationships is correct, it will significantly strengthen the remnant view.³⁰ The supercessionist understanding of the passage would not bring any relief to Paul's sorrow over his fellow Israelites fallenness; if anything, it would heighten it!)

It is important to note that, according to Paul, it had *always* been the case that not all individual Israelites were saved simply by virtue of their inclusion in the covenant nation. As early as 2:28–29 Paul distinguished between superficial Jewishness (which is merely external) and true Jewishness (which is both external and internal).³¹ This distinction was alluded to again in 4:12,³² where Paul posited Abraham as the “father of all who believe without being circumcised” as well as “of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised

²⁹ I am indebted to George Gunn for first pointing this out to me. Cranfield [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 2:472], Sanday and Headlam [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 240], and Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown [*A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments* (Glasgow, Scot.: William Collins, Sons, & Co., 1874), 250] also come close to articulating it.

³⁰ Cranfield's explanation here is helpful: “But, if God's purpose of election has, from the very beginning, included a process of distinguishing and separating even within the elect people, then the present unbelief of many Jews is no proof that that purpose has failed, but may be understood rather as part of its working out” [*Epistle to the Romans*, 2:474].

³¹ John A. Witmer, “Romans” in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 435–503 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985): 476. Some supercessionists [e.g. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 1:133] see the Church as the true Israel in this passage, too. But this is unlikely, since “Paul concluded his discussion of the Gentiles in Romans 2:16. In Rom 2:17–30 he considers the Jewish question” [Fruchtenbaum, “Israel and the Church,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. W. R. Willis and J. R. Masters (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 128].

³² Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, translated by Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 204.

but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” Now the existence of the second category (ethnic Jews who have faith in God) implies the existence of a third (ethnic Jews who do not have faith in God).³³

Justified		Not Justified
Faithful Gentiles	Faithful Jews	Unfaithful Jews

Having stated the principle of distinction between Ἰσραήλ¹ and Ἰσραήλ², Paul now proceeds to illustrate the selectivity of God’s election from Israel’s history. The patriarchal history is rehearsed, with the emphasis placed on God’s selective narrowing of the promised line from Abraham to Isaac (Ishmael is excluded, vv. 7–9) to Jacob (Esau is excluded, vv. 10–13).³⁴ In each case, the election of one individual to father the chosen line is based entirely on the sovereign choice of God, not on any consideration of the individual’s merits. This point is made especially clear by the rejection of Esau and election of Jacob, for that decision was made while the twins were still in utero!³⁵

The principle is clear: it is God’s sovereign choice that results in salvation. Mere inclusion in the covenant nation by virtue of being born to Jewish parents, while certainly advantageous in some respects, is insufficient in and of itself to secure right standing with God. But while Paul’s logic is readily understandable, we might quibble over how he is applying it to the distinction between Ἰσραήλ¹ and Ἰσραήλ². The supercessionist will place all of the emphasis on God’s sovereignty in choosing while effectively ignoring the narrowing pattern within the Abrahamic family tree. Thus, there is a tendency (once again) to create a false dichotomy:

- Dodd: “It follows that the status of the Jew rests upon nothing but a free determination of the divine will.”³⁶
- Fitzmyer: “The Old Testament promises were not made to the ethnic or historical-empirical Israel, those of physical descent or of flesh and blood, but to the Israel of

³³ Obviously, this chart could be further expanded to include *unfaithful Gentiles* under the second category. But my intention here is not comprehensiveness; it is simply to establish that Paul’s language in 4:12 distinguishing two groups (faithful Gentiles and faithful Jews) implies also a third (unfaithful Jews).

³⁴ Although Paul does not discuss it, I believe this is simply the continuation of a narrowing process that had begun much earlier, immediately following the seed promise of Genesis 3:15. The line of the promised seed was narrowed first to Seth (Gen. 4:25), then to Noah (9:9), and finally to Abraham (12:7, 13:15–16, 15:5ff.), Isaac (17:19), and Jacob (28:4, 13).

³⁵ Robert Mounce, *Romans*, 198–199.

³⁶ C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 156.

faith. If God were bound by physical descent, his promises would not have been freely made. They were made instead to the Israel that would come to faith.”³⁷

- Sproul: “God’s promise is given sovereignly, not biologically.”³⁸

By contrast, the advocate of the remnant view will incorporate *both* the sovereignty of God’s electing choice *and* the narrowing pattern within the Abrahamic family tree, in his understanding of how Paul intends this historical illustration to function. Munck captures this sentiment perfectly:

Even though [Paul] maintains in this passage that God in his sovereign will chooses whom he wishes, one must not fail to add: whom he wishes *from Israel*. Paul does not here visualize “Israelites” who do not belong to physical Israel as being within the new Israel of the church. It is not until 9:22ff. that Paul includes the Gentile Christians in his reflections. Here in 9:6–13 the only point he makes is that claims cannot be made on the basis of physical descent, since descendants of the patriarchs with exactly the same claims were allotted different destinies.³⁹

Finally, in considering the surrounding context of Romans 9:6, we must note Paul’s citation of two Old Testament passages emphasizing the concept of a righteous remnant that is contained within the broader category of national Israel. Isaiah 10:20 (quoted in Romans 9:27) is an especially apt illustration. Isaiah’s tenth chapter is situated toward the end of an extended section in which the prophet pronounces the coming Assyrian invasion and the deportation of the northern kingdom. He views this oncoming disaster as God’s judgment on Israel for her exceeding sinfulness. Verses 20–27 soften the blow by announcing that God will preserve a righteous remnant alive and regather it into the Promised Land.

Isaiah 1:9 (quoted in Romans 9:29) is a slightly less obvious connection, but it, too, fits the mold of the remnant concept. The occasion for its writing was probably Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah⁴⁰ (2 Kings 18–19), which both Micah (Micah 1:12) and Isaiah (Isa. 1:2ff.) identify as divine judgment on Judah for her depravity. Although Yahweh permitted Sennacherib to destroy virtually every city in Judah, he spared Jerusalem by sending an

³⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 559–560.

³⁸ R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2005), 164.

³⁹ Johannes Munck, *Christ & Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9–11* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 35–36. Italics in the original.

⁴⁰ J. A. Emerton, “The Historical Background of Isaiah 1:4–9,” *Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993): 34–40.

angel to annihilate the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35–37), thus preserving a remnant of Judah alive rather than wiping her out “like Sodom [and] Gomorrah” (Isa. 1:9).⁴¹

Quite plausibly, Paul may have selected these two texts (one addressing the northern kingdom, the other the southern kingdom) in order to emphasize that this has been God’s pattern for dealing with the *entire nation*—all twelve tribes. There were certainly other Old Testament texts emphasizing the remnant concept that he might have chosen (one thinks of Elijah⁴² [1 Kings 18:22] and possibly certain of the servant songs⁴³ [Isa. 44:1; 51:1–7]), but these two texts in particular emphasize God’s wholesale judgment on each of the divided kingdoms yet also highlight His mercy in preserving a righteous remnant.

If the supercessionist approach to this passage were correct, then it would be remarkable coincidental that virtually all of Paul’s illustrations—on this view designed only to emphasize the sovereignty of God’s choosing and nothing else—would all happen to carry the accidental side effect of depicting a narrowing pattern *within* national Israel. Indeed, in that case it would seem that Paul’s piling up Old Testament illustrations that all contain this motif would actually be contrary to his communicative purpose and would obscure rather than clarify his main point (i.e., that the promises to Israel have been transferred to the Church)! It is these contextual factors that have been a bridge too far for most commentators and have converted some of the most committed supercessionists to the remnant view of Romans 9:6.⁴⁴

[**Excursus:** When in Romans 9:6 Paul refers to Ἰσραήλ (both the name of the Patriarch and the nation he spawned) and then proceeds to illustrate his point by appealing to the patriarchal history, it is difficult to say just how much antecedent historical/theological data from Jacob’s life story he expects his readers to import into their understanding of this passage. (Certainly, when Jesus, for example, referred to Nathanael as ἀληθῶς Ἰσραηλίτης ἐν ᾧ δόλος οὐκ ἔστιν, He seemed to be intentionally alluding to Jacob’s pre-conversion character flaws and his name change to *Israel* at the moment of his spiritual turning point.) It may or may not have been Paul’s intention to communicate this, but it is interesting how Jacob’s life can function as a good illustration for the remnant interpretation of Paul’s Ἰσραήλ¹ / Ἰσραήλ² distinction. Jacob was designated the heir to the covenantal promises in

⁴¹ Cf. Yahweh’s promise in 2 Kings 19:31: כִּי מִירוּשָׁלַם תֵּצֵא שְׂאֲרֵית וּפְלִיטָה מִתֵּר צִיּוֹן קִנְיָת יְהוָה תִּעֲשֶׂה וְאַתָּה .

⁴² Steven A. Kreloff, *God’s Plan for Israel: A Study of Romans 9–11* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1995), 283.

⁴³ John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 150.

⁴⁴ E.g. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 519; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 574; Grant Osborne, *Romans*, 242; John Piper, *The Justification of God*, 47–51; Robert Mounce, *Romans*, 197; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 9–11; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, 493–494.

either Genesis 25:23 (while he and Jacob were still in the womb), 27:27–29 (when he stole the blessing Isaac intended for Esau), or 28:3–4 (when Isaac blessed him just before his flight to Paddan-Aram). (His status as covenant heir was later confirmed to him directly by Yahweh in 28:13–15.) As soon as Jacob became the covenant heir, he was equivalent to those in Ἰσραήλ¹ but not yet to those in Ἰσραήλ²; or, to use the verbiage of Romans 2:28–29, he was a Ἰουδαῖός ἐν τῷ φανερωῷ but not a Ἰουδαῖός ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ. He proceeded to live a remarkably ungodly, self-centered life. His spiritual turning point came in Genesis 32 when, in the shadow of the oncoming Esau and his army, Jacob wrestled with the Angel of Yahweh all night. At this point his name was changed to *Israel*, and I submit that at this point he became a member of Ἰσραήλ², or a Ἰουδαῖός ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ.]

To sum up, the contextual factors inform us as to the proper interpretation of Romans 9:6 in the following ways:

- This passage introduces us to an extended section (9–11) in which Paul seeks to explain how Israel’s falling away does not invalidate his argument concerning the efficacy and inviolability of salvation through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Syntactically, v. 6 is most likely mildly adversative to vv. 1–2, meaning that it furnishes the explanation for why Paul’s sorrow concerning the Israelites’ lostness is mitigated.
- Leading up to this point in the epistle, Paul has repeatedly emphasized the fact that faith is necessary for Jew and Gentile alike to be saved. To that end, he has already drawn up a conceptual dichotomy between merely external Jewishness and true Jewishness, which is both external *and* internal.
- The sovereignty of God’s elective activity is illustrated by several events in Israel’s history, including the narrowing of the bloodlines through the Patriarchal cycles and God’s merciful preservation of a righteous remnant when the northern and southern kingdoms were being destroyed in judgment of their rampant sinfulness.

All of these factors indicate a *restrictive*—not *expansive*—movement in Paul’s thought. Thus, they are supportive of the remnant interpretive approach and do not comport well with the supercessionist approach.

“Israel” Terminology Applied to the Church

But perhaps there is one last strategy capable of reclaiming the ground that the supercessionists lost during the contextual discussion. What about the fact that Paul elsewhere appears to apply “Israel” terminology to the Church (e.g. Gal. 3:7, 39; 6:16;

Eph. 2:11–13; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9–10)? Could this perhaps indicate that Paul is doing the same here, equating Ἰσραήλ² with the Church?⁴⁵

This argument should be rejected for several reasons. First, it definitely cannot stand as a deductive argument, since that would constitute the fallacy of the undistributed middle.⁴⁶ Observe:

- A. Israel is described by terms x, y, and z.
- B. The Church is described by terms x, y, and z.
- C. Therefore, the Church is Israel.⁴⁷

But perhaps this criticism is unfair. Perhaps supercessionists are not intending this observation as a *deductive* argument, but as an *inductive* one. That is, Paul’s frequent application of “Israel” language to the Church in other passages increases the probability that he is doing so here, too. This version of the argument would be more convincing, but there is a problem: once this observation is formulated as an inductive argument, the proponent of the remnant view can bring countervailing observations to bear in the form of his own inductive argument against the supercessionist understanding. These observations might include the following:

- God’s unconditional promises to national Israel (e.g. in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants) coupled with His immutability militates against the supercessionist framework.
- New Testament passages indicating a future in God’s program for national Israel (e.g. Matt. 19:28; 23:37–39; Luke 22:30; Acts 1:6ff; Rev. 7:4–9) can be stacked up on the other side of the proverbial scale. This makes it at least as likely that Romans 9:6 refers to national Israel as that it refers to the Church.
- The fact that Romans 9:1–5 unambiguously refers to ethnic/national Israel—not the Church—and that Gentiles are not introduced as a subject into the discourse until v. 30, makes it *more* likely that Paul is referring here to national Israel than that he is referring to the Church.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans*, 305; J. W. Aageson, “Typology, Correspondence, and the Application of Scripture in Romans 9–11,” *JSNT* 31 (1987): 54–55.

⁴⁶ S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and the Israel of God,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 20/1 (Spring 2009): 50–51.

⁴⁷ Compare to:

- A. All students wear backpacks.
- B. My grandfather wears a backpack.
- C. Therefore, my grandfather is a student.

⁴⁸ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 574.

- There is Old Testament precedent (Isa. 19:24–25) for a Gentile entity being referred to with “Israel” terminology, without thereby being understood as a replacement for or expansion of national Israel.⁴⁹

Summary

Romans 9:6 posits a distinction between Ἰσραήλ¹ and Ἰσραήλ². The positing of that distinction, however, does not in and of itself specify anything about the *nature* of the distinction. To discern that, other factors must be taken into consideration. Syntactically, either option remains open, particularly if one accepts Piper’s contention that οὐ should be understood as modifying the second clause. Context, however, strongly favors the remnant view. The only way interpreters can derive an *expansive* understanding from the flow of Paul’s thought is by arbitrarily emphasizing one aspect of Paul’s illustrations (God’s sovereignty) while downplaying or ignoring another (the winnowing pattern within the Abrahamic bloodline). Appeal to other Pauline applications of “Israel” terminology to the Church fails because it is either fallacious (if employed as a deductive argument) or insufficiently persuasive (if employed as an inductive argument) to overcome the strength of the remnant view’s support from contextual factors.

Galatians 6:16

καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνην ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.

Galatians 6:16 is a perennial favorite among supercessionists. It was first taken to support supercessionism by John Chrysostom,⁵⁰ and has been interpreted likewise by Reformed writers, beginning with Luther and Calvin.⁵¹ Recently there has been an impulse to challenge the verse’s suitability as a proof-text for supercessionism on exegetical grounds, but so far this impulse has not been successful in carrying the day among commentators.

⁴⁹ Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 149.

⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, “Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Gross Alexander with Anonymous, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 47.

⁵¹ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, translated by Erasmus Middleton, edited by John Prince Fallows (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1979), 381–382; John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 186–187.

Description of the Interpretive Views

Whereas for Romans 9:6 there were only two major interpretive views, for Galatians 6:16 there are at least five! But the four non-supercessionist interpretive approaches are all variations on a theme (i.e. that Ἰσραήλ means Israel, not the church), so discussion of this subject can be simplified by positing two separate classes of interpretive approaches: one supercessionist, the other non-supercessionist.⁵² I will refer to the latter as the *empirical Israel* approach.

As is often the case with the more disputed passages in Scripture, the surface-level meaning of Galatians 6:16 is relatively clear and uncontroversial: in the benediction of his epistle, Paul is wishing a blessing upon his readers and possibly upon a broader or additional group as well. What is disputed here pertains less to *meaning* and more to *reference*: to what group or entity does Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ refer? And this decision will, in turn, influence one's understanding of the referent of ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν.

The Supercessionist Approach

This approach is far and away the majority view among commentators.⁵³ According to this view, the two entities are in fact one and the same: “those who walk by this rule” and “the Israel of God” are both references to the Christian Church, comprising both believing Gentiles and believing Jews. Woudstra explains:

We believe that H. A. W. Meyer is correct when he calls Paul's reference to *all* Christians as the Israel of God “*gleichsam der Triumph des ganzen Briefes*” (“as it were the triumphant conclusion of the whole epistle”). The Judaizers against whom he has been writing so strongly must once and for all cease from making their claim as if

⁵² In his excellent article “Paul and the Israel of God,” S. Lewis Johnson treats each interpretive view in turn as though they were coordinate to one another (though he only distinguishes between three views, not five). While there is nothing wrong with this strategy *per se*, I find it simpler to adjudicate first between the two broader classes of approaches (supercessionist versus empirical Israel) before attempting to adjudicate between the various approaches subsumed under the latter class.

⁵³ A representative sampling would include Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 381–382; Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 186–187; *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, translated by Ross MacKenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 225; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 67–70; Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 220, 301, 327; N. A. Dahl, “Der Name Israel: I. Zur Auslegung von Gal. 6, 16,” *Judaica* 6 (1950): 161–70; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 345.

they as the Israel of God were entitled to the inheritance of salvation above the other Christians. All Christians, be they Jewish or not, are the Israel of God.⁵⁴

The Empirical Israel Approaches

Though they differ regarding the *precise* identity of Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ, all these approaches concur that the entity does *not* include Gentiles. It is truly and uniquely Jewish. That said, the four variations may be delineated as follows:

National Israel

Adherents to this view see Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ as national Israel, the predominantly unbelieving corporate entity. (It would therefore be roughly equivalent to Ἰσραήλ¹ in Romans 9:6, possibly or possibly not including Ἰσραήλ².) This is a minority view among those who favor the empirical Israel approach, having received significant support only from Davies and Eastman.⁵⁵

Hebrew Christians

On this view, Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ denotes Jewish believers in Jesus. (Some who hold this view see τοῦ θεοῦ as distinguishing that segment of Jews who believe from the vast majority who do not, i.e. Ἰσραήλ² rather than Ἰσραήλ¹.) Adherents to this view include Betz, Chafer, Johnson, MacArthur, McCune, Ironside, Ryrie, and Walvoord.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Marten H. Woudstra, "Israel and the Church: A Case for Continuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, edited by John S. Feinberg, 239–259 (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 235. Italics in the original.

⁵⁵ W. D. Davies, "Paul and the People of Israel," *New Testament Studies* 24: 10–11; Susan Grove Eastman, "Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9–11," *New Testament Studies* 56: 367–395.

⁵⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 320–323. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:48; S. Lewis Johnson, "Paul and the Israel of God," 184–185; John MacArthur, *Galatians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 210; Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 3:202–203; H. A. Ironside, *Expository Messages on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1941), 234; Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 149; *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 463; John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 169–170.

Torah-Observant Hebrew Christians

This view seems to be peculiarly that of De Boer. He argues that Paul had in mind principally those Jews who had believed in Jesus unto salvation but had not yet ceased to observe the Law of Moses:

“[T]he Israel of God” probably refers to Jewish believers in Christ who remain fully law observant. Paul calls these believers in Christ “the Israel of God” and invokes a blessing of mercy upon them because he realizes that what he has written in v. 15, which is a summary of his argument from 2:15 onward, could be construed as God’s rejection of the law-abiding church of Jerusalem and of its proper mission (to Jews not to Gentiles). . . . For this church and all those who identify themselves with its present posture, Paul nevertheless invokes a blessing of mercy (*eleos*), which is God’s compassion toward his disobedience people (cf. Exod 34:6–7; Isa 49:13), in this specific case, the church in Jerusalem and its missionaries in Galatia, upon whom Paul has invoked God’s anathema in 1:6–9.⁵⁷

This is a strange view, and unlikely to win many converts among conservative evangelicals, as it seems to rely on Baur’s proposed antithesis between Pauline and Petrine Christianity (a view that few conservatives accept).

Eschatological Israel

On this view, Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ refers to the future nation of Israel that will be wholly redeemed in the eschaton. It would therefore be equivalent to πᾶς Ἰσραήλ in Romans 11:26. This is the view favored by Bruce, Burton, Govett, and Richardson.⁵⁸

Major Factors

The major determinative factors include grammatical considerations, Paul’s usage of *Israel*, intertextuality, the application of “Israel” terminology to the Church, the context/argument of Galatians, and the unlikelihood of Paul pronouncing a blessing on unbelieving Israel.

⁵⁷ Martinus De Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 408. Italics in the original.

⁵⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 273–274; Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 357–359; Robert Govett, *Govett on Galatians* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley and Schoettle, 1981), 233–236; Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 76–82.

Grammatical Considerations

Several items of a grammatical nature feature heavily in this debate, including the function of the last *καί*, the doubling of the conjunction *καί* and the preposition *επί*, the sequence of *εἰρήνη* before *ἔλεος*, and the possible chiasmic structure of the benediction.

The Function of *καί*

The function of *καί* in *καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ* is of ultimate determinative concern in this discussion. If the *καί* is explicative, then the supercessionist approach is correct and the empirical Israel approaches are incorrect.⁵⁹ If the *καί* is conjunctive, then the supercessionist approach is incorrect and the empirical Israel approaches are validated. If the *καί* is ascensive then either approach is theoretically valid.⁶⁰

Many advocates of the empirical Israel approaches have convincingly argued against the intrinsic likelihood that *καί* carries an explicative force here. For one thing, of the various examples of explicative *καί* typically proposed (including Acts 5:21; Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 5:1; 6:6, 8, 10–11; 8:12; 12:27; 15:38; 2 Cor. 5:15; Eph. 2:8; and Heb. 11:12),⁶¹ most are disputable and none are as sufficiently strong and clear to provide exegetical validation of the explicative sense needed here. Ellicott rightly observes, “It is doubtful whether *καί* is ever used by St. Paul in so marked an explicative force as must here be assigned.”⁶²

For another, even if we grant that the explicative usage is valid, all will agree that it is remarkably uncommon, especially when compared with the standard conjunctive usage. It is

⁵⁹ If this were the case, it would not necessarily mean that one must be a supercessionist in his overall theological makeup. Warren Wiersbe is an example of a dispensationalist who takes the supercessionist approach to Galatians 6:16, but nevertheless rejects supercessionism as a theological position [*Be Free: An Expository Study of Galatians* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1975), 157]. This is the direct inversion of what we saw with Romans 9:6, where many commentators took the remnant view to that particular passage but retained their commitment to supercessionism theologically.

⁶⁰ Waltke takes *καί* as ascensive here, and seems to think that this is decisive in favor of the supercessionist approach [“A Response,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, edited by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, 347–359 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 352–353.] But Eastman argues convincingly that an ascensive *καί* would probably favor an empirical Israel approach by translating the benediction: “And for as many as will walk in line with this rule, peace be upon them. And mercy be even upon the Israel of God.” [“Israel and the Mercy of God,” 372–373.]

⁶¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 401; Gottlob Schrenk [“Der Segenwunsch der Kampfpistel,” *Judaica* 6 (1950)], cited in S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and the Israel of God,” 48; J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 225.

⁶² Charles John Ellicott. *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*. (Boston: Draper & Halliday, 1867), 154.

reasonable, then, to assume the more common conjunctive usage until and unless convincing exegetical reasons for the explicative or ascensive uses are advanced.⁶³

Furthermore, as Johnson notes, if Paul had wanted to equate the two entities here, he could have done so with much greater clarity simply by omitting the *καί* altogether:

The result [of eliminating *kai*] would be far more to the point, if Paul were identifying the “them,” that is, the church, with the term “Israel.” The verse would be rendered then, “And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them and mercy, upon the Israel of God.” A case could be solidly made for the apposition of “the Israel of God” with “them,” and the rendering of the NIV could stand. Paul, however, did not eliminate the *kai*.⁶⁴

The one logical argument supporting an explicative understanding of *καί* is advanced by Hoekema: “The problem with this [Walvoord’s] interpretation is that believing Jews have already been included in the words ‘all who follow this rule.’ The word *kai*, therefore, should be rendered *even*, as the New International Version has done.”⁶⁵ This seems convincing initially, but Johnson points to Mark 16:7 (ἀλλὰ ὑπάγετε εἴπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ) as a defeater.⁶⁶ So, there would seem to be no good reason on purely grammatical grounds to favor an explicative understanding of *καί*.

Doubled *καί*s and *ἐπί*s

Commentators are quick to acknowledge the awkward and unparalleled structure of this verse: first an entity is named, then either one composite or two separate blessings are invoked, then a second entity—which may or may not be identical with the first entity—is named. All admit that the construction is awkward, but the doubling of *both* *καί* and *ἐπί* should be seen as a major problem for the supercessionist approach. It indicates at the very least that two different groups are probably in view, for why else would Paul have doubled

⁶³ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 199; Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 1994), 440. Even Moo, who ultimately favors the supercessionist view of this passage, admits that this is a valid point against his position [*Galatians*, 402].

⁶⁴ S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and the Israel of God,” 49. Cf. Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 80.

⁶⁵ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 197. Italics in the original. Cf. Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 137; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 174.

⁶⁶ S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and the Israel of God,” 45, n. 22.

the preposition?⁶⁷ It may further indicate that two separate *blessings* are in view, not one composite blessing consisting of both peace and mercy.⁶⁸ Thus, Richardson concludes:

The sentence must be re-punctuated, so that it reads: εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτούς, καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ. ‘Peace’ is then applied to all who will walk according to the new possibilities of freedom and purity made available through the cross of Jesus; ‘mercy’ is wished upon some group which is called *Israēl tou theou*.⁶⁹

Peace before Mercy

Much has been written addressing the oddity of Paul’s listing peace before mercy in this benediction. If he intended these to be understood as two components of one composite blessing, then surely it would be more logical and natural to list mercy before peace, for that is the order in which God normally deals with sinful men.⁷⁰ Indeed, “mercy and peace” would seem to conform more closely to Paul’s favorite salutation (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη), but why “peace and mercy?”

Burton suggests that the illogic of placing peace before mercy indicates that two separate blessings are in view, not one composite blessing.⁷¹ Eastman concurs and takes the matter one step further: not only does it support double blessings, it also supports double recipients. Peace is wished for the Church (τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν) and mercy for Israel (τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ).⁷²

A Chiastic Structure?

Scot McKnight (a supercessionist) suggests that this benediction should be seen as a chiasmus:

⁶⁷ Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, New Testament edition, 587–612 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 611; Susan Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God,” 373; Martinus De Boer, *Galatians*, 404.

⁶⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 298; cf. Peter Oakes, *Galatians*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 191–192.

⁶⁹ Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 80–81.

⁷⁰ Cf. Num. 6:24–26; Ps, 84:8–11 (LXX); Isa. 54:10.

⁷¹ Ernest Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 357–359.

⁷² Susan Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God,” 373–374. In all my research I could not find a single attempt by a supercessionist to explain why, on their view, Paul would place peace before mercy in this benediction.

A. Whoever follows this rule

B. Peace

B.¹ Mercy

A.¹ Israel of God

In this case, the “whoever” and the “Israel of God” are identical, just as “peace” and “mercy” are put together into a synthesis. In this view, the church is now the “Israel of God” (emphasizing the continuity of the covenant with Abraham).⁷³

McKnight’s proposal is creative, but it is flawed on at least two counts. First, it is not at all clear that Paul intended this benediction to be taken as a chiasmus. The linkage between A and A¹ and B and B¹ is purely conceptual, not linguistic. Thus there is insufficient warrant to take this as a chiasmus (just because a passage *can* be arranged chiastically does not mean it *should*).⁷⁴ Second, even if we grant the chiastic structure, that does not prove nearly as much as McKnight claims for it. Why should A and A¹ stand in a relationship of identity while B and B¹ stand only in a relationship of synthesis? McKnight does not say. One gets the distinct impression that he is engaged here in question-begging.

Pauline Usage of *Israel*

Proponents of the empirical Israel approaches have frequently observed that the meaning of Ἰσραήλ throughout the Pauline corpus is uniform: it always refers to ethnic/national Israel.⁷⁵ Surely this is a point against the supercessionist approach, which must take this one single occurrence of Ἰσραήλ as having a different referent than all the others.⁷⁶ Longenecker seems to object to this argument on the grounds that it illegitimately relies on the remnant view imported from Romans 9–11, a later epistle,⁷⁷ but this misses the thrust of the argument. It is

⁷³ Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 303.

⁷⁴ Von Wahlde’s warning is apropos here: “While failing to recognize chiasms neglects an important element of style and arrangement of thought and thus fails to do full justice to the author, it is equally important to recognize the danger of projecting chiastic arrangements onto material where the similarities and parallels are insufficient to be able to indicate with any assurance that they were, in fact, intended to be chiasms” [Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 24–25, n. 14.

⁷⁵ Donald Campbell, “Galatians,” 611; Ernest Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 358; Matthew V. Novenson, “Paul’s Former Occupation in *Ioudaismos*,” in *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul’s Letter*, edited by Mark W. Elliott, Scott J. Hafemann, N. T. Wright, and John Frederick, 24–39 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 38.

⁷⁶ Supercessionists George and Moo agree that this is a point against their view [Timothy George, *Galatians*, 440; Douglas Moo, *Galatians*, 402].

⁷⁷ Richard Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298.

not so much that the *concepts* related to Israel that Paul sketches out elsewhere should necessarily be imported into Galatians, but rather that since Paul's pattern of usage is uniformly on the side of the empirical Israel approaches, the burden of proof is shifted to the shoulders of the supercessionists. It is they who must demonstrate why Paul's usage of Ἰσραήλ here would differ from all his other usages elsewhere; the onus is not on advocates of empirical Israel approaches to establish that the impossibility of its differing here.

Moreover, this argument can be deployed from a slightly different angle: Since the supercessionist interpretation understands Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ to be a technical term denoting the Church, is it not exceedingly strange that Paul nowhere else uses this term?⁷⁸ For that matter, he does not anywhere assert that the Church has replaced Israel in a definite, unambiguous manner, despite the fact that his thinking on the matter had ostensibly reached maturity by the time he penned his first letter (according to the supercessionists), and despite the fact that he had ample opportunity to do so later in Romans 9–11!⁷⁹ So, far from Galatians's early date posing a problem for this argument, it can actually be seen to strengthen it.⁸⁰

Intertextuality

Several possibilities for an intertextual allusion have been suggested: Isaiah 54:10,⁸¹ Psalm 125:5 and 128:6⁸² and the *Shemoneh Esreh*.⁸³ Of these, only the first and last are usually seen to have much interpretive significance, so we can safely omit the options from Psalms from this discussion.

⁷⁸ Michael Vlach, *Has The Church Replaced Israel?*, 144–145; Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 199.

⁷⁹ W. D. Davies, "Paul and the People of Israel," 10–11, n. 2; Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 149.

⁸⁰ Granted, this is somewhat of an argument from silence and arguments from silence can never be conclusive. But they can in certain circumstances constitute strong supporting arguments, particularly when reasonable expectation of non-silence can be established. In this case, the fact that Paul later devotes three entire chapters to the question of Israel's standing before God (Rom. 9–11) without ever using the term Ἰσραήλ τοῦ θεοῦ or straightforwardly teaching supercessionism, renders this silence rather deafening.

⁸¹ G. K. Beale, "Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6, 16b," *Biblica*, 80 no. 2 (1999): 204–223.

⁸² Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 226; J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 224.

⁸³ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 227; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 344; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 344.

Beale argues that Isaiah 54:10 is the intended background to Galatians 6:16 and that it supports his supercessionist interpretation. His argument is very subtle:

Isa 54, 10 was a prophecy about the “peace” and “mercy” *Israel* would have in the coming new order after their restoration. If Paul has this verse in mind in Gal 6, 16, then he sees *all* believers in the Galatian church who experience “peace” and “mercy” to be composing end-time Israel in partial fulfillment of Isa 54, 11. Such an Old Testament background makes it unlikely that he sees two separate ethnic groups (respectively Christian Gentile and Jew) as having “peace and mercy” pronounced upon them.⁸⁴

Isaiah 54:9–10 (LXX, Brenton)	Galatians 6:16
From the time of the water of Noe this is my purpose: as I swere to him at that time, saying of the earth, I will no more be wroth with thee, neither when thou art threatened, ¹⁰ shall the mountains depart, nor shall thy hills be removed: so neither shall my mercy fail thee, nor shall the covenant of thy peace be at all removed: for the Lord who is gracious to thee has spoken it.	And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

There are two problems with Beale’s argument from intertextuality. First, the only overt linguistic parallel between Isaiah 54:10 and Galatians 6:16 is the presence of *mercy* and *peace* in close proximity to one another (ἔλεος and εἰρήνης in LXX; חַסֵּד and שְׁלוֹמִים in MT). That seems an insufficient basis to support such a linkage. Second, even if the linkage is granted, it is doubtful that Paul would expect his readers to import so much theological data from the original Isaianic context; more likely he would simply have been using Old Testament language reflexively, without thereby implying such a profound theological point.

The other option, the *Shemoneh Esreh*, is somewhat more likely as a background text for Galatians 6:16 given the closer linguistic parallelism between them:

<i>Shemoneh Esreh</i>	Galatians 6:16
Bestow peace, happiness, and blessing, grace, loving-kindness, and mercy upon us and upon all Israel your people.	And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

If this intertextual link can be established, Ridderbos believes it would strengthen the supercessionist approach:

⁸⁴ G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God,” 271. Italics in the original.

[T]he expression [the “Israel of God”] retains a surprising element, because Paul does not generally speak of Israel in this special sense, without further explanation. The occasion for doing so now may have been a traditional Jewish prayer, in which there is reference to *us* first, and then to *all Israel, thy people*. The apostle is, in other words, making use of a relationship lying already in his mind. It is a relationship, however, which in his preaching was given a new content because of the new development in the history of salvation.⁸⁵

The unexpressed rationale for Ridderbos’s contention seems to be that since the *Shemoneh Esreh* applies both peace and mercy to a single entity (Israel), Paul too should be understood as applying them to a single entity. And since everyone agrees that the first entity listed is the Church, then naturally the second should be understood likewise.

Three things can be stated in response. First, even though the proposed parallelism here is much closer than Beale’s proposal, that Paul really intended such an allusion is less than crystal clear.⁸⁶ Second, Beale points out that there is no extant evidence of this version of the *Shemoneh Esreh* existing as early as Paul’s time,⁸⁷ which significantly lessens the likelihood of the proposed intertextual connection. Third, even if the linkage is granted, it could just as easily be used to argue for one of the empirical Israel approaches: since *Israel* denotes national Israel in the *Shemoneh Esreh*, it likely denotes the same in Paul’s alleged allusion.⁸⁸

The task of establishing intertextuality, as always, is an imprecise science and constantly beset by the siren call of *parallelomania*.⁸⁹ In the case of Galatians 6:16, not only is intertextuality difficult to establish, even if it is granted it does not advance either side’s argument very significantly.

⁸⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, 227.

⁸⁶ Eastman cautions, “It may be the case that Paul’s prayer for *mercy on Israel* is influenced by the Nineteenth Benediction, but dependence on such a source is very difficult to prove” [“Israel and the Mercy of God,” 374].

⁸⁷ G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God,” 208. A version does appear in the Palestinian recension, dated to just shortly after Paul’s time, but it omits the word *mercy*. The version that includes both *peace* and *mercy* does not appear until the Babylonian recension.

⁸⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 274–275.

⁸⁹ *Parallelomania* is defined as “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction” [Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 1 (March 1962): 1].

“Israel” Terminology Applied to the Church

This is the same argument discussed earlier in reference to Romans 9:6. Numerous supercessionists have applied it to Galatians 6:16, also.⁹⁰ Arguably, the argument works slightly better here than it did in Romans since at least the other passages applying “Israel” terminology to the Church (Gal. 3:29; 4:28, 29) are within the same epistle in this case.⁹¹ Nevertheless, our previous criticisms of this approach apply here as well (i.e. the argument is formally fallacious if employed as a deductive argument and insufficiently persuasive if employed as an inductive argument given the countervailing factors that can be brought to bear). We may also raise an additional objection in this case: If it were really Paul’s intent throughout the Book of Galatians to teach a supercessionist viewpoint by applying “Israel” terminology to the Church, is it not exceedingly odd that the “payoff” finally comes, not anywhere in the main body of the epistle, but only in the benediction?⁹²

The Context/Argument of Galatians

This factor seems to be the primary concern for advocates of the supercessionist approach. So persuasive is the argument from context for them that it overrides every other exegetical factor we have surveyed up to this point.⁹³ Bird’s summary of the argument is representative:

⁹⁰ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 724; Robert James Utley, *The Gospel according to Paul: Romans*, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1998), 67; G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 538–539; Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, 227; Richard Manly Adams, “The Israel of God’: The Narrative Rhetoric of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” PhD Dissertation (Druid Hills, GA: Emory University, 2012), 399–400.

⁹¹ Indeed, this observation forms the very heart of Adams’s argument.

⁹² Timothy George, *Galatians*, 440; Michael Vlach, *Has The Church Replaced Israel?*, 145.

⁹³ After virtually admitting that every other exegetical consideration points in the opposite direction, Moo cites the argument from context as the deciding factor for him in favor of the supercessional approach [*Galatians*, 403]. Similarly, see Timothy George, *Galatians*, 440–401; Christopher W. Cowan, “Context is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 14.3 (2010): 78–85. Other supercessionists who have leaned heavily upon this argument include Bird [*Evangelical Theology*, 724]; Fee [*Galatians*, Pentecostal Commentary (Blandford Forum, Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2011), 253]; Fung [*The Epistle to the Galatians*, 310–311]; Longenecker [*Galatians*, 298]; McKnight [*Galatians*, 303]; Ridderbos [*The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, 227]; Riddlebarger [*A Case for Amillennialism*, 136]; Robertson [*The Israel of God*, 40–41]; Schreiner [*Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 383]; Silva [*Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 184, n. 40]; Waltke [“A Response,” 352–353]; and Woudstra [“Israel and the Church,” 234–235]. Longenecker’s view is particularly outlandish: He suggests that Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ was actually a label claimed by the Judaizers, and that here Paul is co-opting it as if to say, “You aren’t the Israel of God; We’re the Israel of God!” [Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298–299]. This is a very unusual and weak position, for at least two reasons. First, it is pure speculation that the Judaizers referred to themselves as Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ. Second, and more importantly, this would be extremely confusing for Paul’s readers. The passage is opaque enough to engender

[I]t is incredibly difficult to imagine Paul arguing so passionately in Galatians for the unity of Jews and Gentiles in one church, united in Christ, with everyone as equal sons and daughters of Abraham, and then at the very end of that letter pronouncing a benediction that serves to separate groups within his churches according [*sic*] ethnic categories.⁹⁴

To strengthen this line of reasoning, some will stress the proximity of v. 15, with its emphasis on a *καινή κτίσις*, in which neither circumcision nor uncircumcision determines anything.⁹⁵

This argument certainly seems formidable. It *does* seem odd to see a Jew/Gentile distinction at the end of a letter such as Galatians—which so forcefully undermines a Jew/Gentile distinction within the church. But is this argument unanswerable? Ryrie and Radmacher don't believe so:

Although the grammar cannot of itself decide the question, the argument of the book of Galatians does favor the connective or emphatic meaning of “and.” Paul had strongly attacked the Jewish legalists; therefore, it would be natural for him to remember with a special blessing those Jews who had forsaken this legalism and followed Christ and the rule of the new creation.⁹⁶

After attacking these Jews, who would be considered Israel after the flesh, it is perfectly logical for Paul, when extending his blessing, to recognize those Jews who had left this legalism and were following the rule of the new creation, the *ekklesia*. Thus, he clarified to the Gentiles that he was not attacking Jews as such, and, likewise, he expressed his love for his “brethren according to the flesh.”⁹⁷

These comments apply to the version of the empirical Israel approach that sees Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ as Messianic Jews (the remnant), but the line of reasoning could also be easily modified to support other variations. For instance, De Boer invokes it in support of his view that Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ denotes Torah observant Messianic Jews: although Paul has denounced the Judaizers for their false teaching, he wishes they (and others like them) would come around

this protracted debate over whether or not the two recipients named are in fact one or two entities; now add to that the additional hypothesis that Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ was a descriptive term already in use by the very people Paul wished to oppose! Bewildering.

⁹⁴ Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 724.

⁹⁵ E.g. Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 136; Bruce Waltke, “A Response,” 352–353; Marten Woudstra, “Israel and the Church,” 234–235.

⁹⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 149. Cf. *Basic Theology*, 463.

⁹⁷ Earl Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1996), 184–185. Cf. S. Lewis Johnson, “Paul and the Israel of God,” 185.

to his way of thinking and free themselves of the now obsolete shackles of the Mosaic Law.⁹⁸ Similarly, one could feasibly apply this to the view that it denotes national Israel, including Jewish unbelievers: having castigated the Judaizers, Paul now moves to forestall the potential misunderstanding that he is fundamentally anti-Jewish. (This accords well with Paul's heartfelt concern for the Jewish people that will later be expressed in Romans 9:1ff.)

Both of these approaches to understanding Galatians 6:16 in terms of the epistle's overarching argument seem valid, and it is difficult to know how to adjudicate between them. In the end, it is most likely that one's theological presuppositions will make that determination, but that is precisely what should *not* be the deciding factor! Instead, it would be far better to take stock of the full range of exegetical factors on the table and make one's decision based on the preponderance of the evidence. As we have seen, every other factor has tilted the scales toward the side of the empirical Israel approaches. Since this particular factor can be reasonably construed to support either side, it is probably unwise to treat it as the "silver bullet" for the supercessionist interpretation. But, then, perhaps this assessment is too hasty; there is still one additional factor to consider.

The Unlikelihood of Paul's Blessing Unbelieving Israel

Again, Bird's comments are representative of this argument:

[W]e might compare the benediction of Galatians 6:16 with the benediction in 1 Corinthians 16:22, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!" For Paul, there is no blessing *irrespective* of their relationship to Christ. The grace, peace, and mercy of God are from Christ for the elect in Christ.⁹⁹

One gets the impression Bird is not extensively familiar with the full range of his opponents' literature. Notice how, of the four varieties of empirical Israel approaches, this objection is only applicable to one of them (the national Israel view)—one that is not even in the majority among empirical Israel proponents! The two such views receiving the most support are the Hebrew Christian and eschatological Israel approaches, both of which envisage a form of Israel that is savingly related to God through belief in Jesus Christ and the message of the Gospel. So, if this objection succeeds, it does so only against a minority variation of the view it is intended to refute.

On the other hand, Eastman's argument concerning the meaning of the *mercy* benediction would seem to totally undercut this objection. She argues that Paul's wishing for mercy on Israel means he is wishing that Israel might come to be the recipient of God's unmerited

⁹⁸ Martinus De Boer, *Galatians*, 408.

⁹⁹ Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 724. Italics in the original. Cf. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 310–311; McKnight, *Galatians*, 303.

favor¹⁰⁰—i.e. he is expressing his desire that this *unsaved* group of people would come to Jesus Christ for salvation. On this view, there is no inconsistency whatsoever between Paul’s benediction and national Israel’s present rejection of Christ.

Summary

Although the supercessionist approach is far and away the majority position among commentators, its warrant is extremely limited. Grammatical considerations strongly favor the empirical Israel positions: there is no need to invoke a rare and disputable usage of the conjunction *καί*, the double prepositions and double conjunctions are able to be fully accounted for, and the illogical arrangement of *peace* before *mercy* is resolved since there is no necessity of understanding them as component parts of a single composite blessing. McKnight’s chiastic argument is fundamentally flawed and easily disposed of. The uniform usage of Ἰσραήλ throughout the Pauline corpus militates against the supercessionist interpretation, and the arguments from intertextuality and the application of “Israel” terminology to the Church are underwhelming. The argument concerning the context of Galatians—so determinative for adherents to the supercessionist view—turns out not to be quite so insuperable as they seem to think, and the effort to preclude the possibility of Paul’s blessing empirical Israel simply does not succeed. In my opinion, the only rational response to all these factors is to concur with Johnson’s assessment: “If there is an interpretation that totters on a tenuous foundation, it is the view that Paul equates the term “the Israel of God” with the believing church of Jews and Gentiles. . . . It is a classic case of tendentious exegesis.”¹⁰¹

Which Israel?

Having decided in favor of the empirical Israel family of approaches, the task of adjudicating between them still remains. So, Paul meant Ἰσραήλ to mean Israel! Well and good; now, which Israel did he have in mind? National Israel, Hebrew Christians, Torah-Observant Hebrew Christians, or Eschatological Israel?

Here is where I feel the most ill-equipped to answer the question satisfactorily. The problem is that Paul simply does not provide elaboration on his intended referent; he simply mentions Israel and then adroitly moves on. So, it seems that while there are very solid grounds for rejecting the supercessionist approach in favor of the empirical Israel approaches, greater tentativeness is called for in adjudicating between the various sub-categories of the empirical Israel view.

¹⁰⁰ Susan Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God,” 375–380.

¹⁰¹ S. Lewish Johnson, “Paul and the Israel of God,” 54.

The first option I am inclined to reject is De Boer's—the Torah-Observant Hebrew Christians variation. His rationale for holding it is overly dependent on Longenecker's speculation that Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ was a term of self-designation employed by the Judaizers, a supposition that lacks explicit textual warrant. And has already been mentioned (see footnote 93 above), Longenecker's view was overly dependent on F. C. Baur's (in my view erroneous) Hegelian reconstruction of early Christianity, and it results in an extremely convoluted scenario.

This leaves the national Israel, Hebrew Christians, and eschatological Israel options. All are good candidates, but the eschatological option is probably the weakest. Clearly this meaning would accord well with Paul's teaching in Romans 11, so there is nothing wrong with it theologically. But eschatology—and eschatological Israel in particular—has not been discussed in any detail throughout Galatians, so to introduce it here in the benediction would seem somewhat odd.

The last choice is the most difficult of all since both remaining options seem very plausible and cogent. But if I am forced to choose, while it is acutely painful to part company with Chafer, Ryrie, et al, I am particularly drawn toward Eastman's view that national Israel is the intended referent. This makes good sense of Paul's particular wish that *mercy*—God's unmerited, lavish, superabounding favor—would fall on Israel. That said, the point should not be pressed too far, for Paul does frequently wish *grace* on those who have already been redeemed (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; Philem. 1:3).

Theological Reflections

While I recognize that in some company it is considered impolite to mix talk of *exegesis* and *theology*, I would like to conclude this paper with a few theological reflections on what is at stake in this debate. These remarks will focus not on the theological differences between supercessionism and dispensationalism—those have been well rehearsed elsewhere.¹⁰² Rather, I would like to tease out some of the unintended byproducts that might occur if one accepts the reasoning underlying the supercessionist approach to Romans 9:6 and Galatians 6:16.

Romans 9:6

The first and most egregious problem that presents itself is the difficulty entailed by God's electing one group and then apparently changing His mind, rejecting them, and replacing it

¹⁰² E.g. Renald Showers, *There Really Is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*, 12th ed. (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2010); Michael Vlach, *Has The Church Replaced Israel?*.

with a different group. Lest this be thought an unfair caricature of the supercessionist position, note the words of Dodd, Erickson, and Hodge:

- Dodd: “His promise to bless ‘Israel,’ His chosen people, certainly holds good; but it is for Him to decide with absolute freedom who shall constitute that chosen people. If He chooses to reject the Jews and to elect Gentiles, then the true ‘Israel’ is composed of those whom He elects.”¹⁰³
- Erickson: “It does appear that there will be a period of special favor toward the Jews and that they will in large numbers turn to God. It seems likely, however, that this will be brought about through their being converted and integrated into the church rather than through God resuming the relationship He had with them, as the chosen or covenant nation, in the Old Testament.”¹⁰⁴
- Hodge: “The Apostle shows . . . that God could cast off the Jews as a nation, without acting inconsistently with his covenant with Abraham, because the promise was not made to the Israel κατὰ σάρκα, but to the Israel κατὰ πνεῦμα. (Rom. 9:6–8).”¹⁰⁵
- Hodge: “That God was at liberty to reject the Jews and to call the Gentiles, Paul argues, 1. By showing that the promises which he had made, and by which he had graciously bound himself, were not made to the natural descendants of Abraham as such, but to his spiritual seed.”¹⁰⁶
- Hodge: “Ishmael was a son of Abraham as well as Isaac, but the latter only was, in the spiritual sense of the term, his seed. The Greek here answers exactly to the original Hebrew, ‘In Isaac a seed shall be called to thee, or for thee.’ That is, ‘Isaac (not Ishmael) shall be to thee a son and heir.’ God therefore is sovereign in the distribution of his favours. As he rejected Ishmael notwithstanding his natural descent from Abraham, so he may reject the Jews, although they also had Abraham as a father.”¹⁰⁷

Fathom the implications of such a horrifying thought! Almighty God—who in times past indicated that His immutability prevented Him from destroying His people Israel in anger (Mal. 3:6), and pledged to preserve Israel as His chosen nation as surely as He preserves the celestial bodies in their orbits (Jer. 33:26), and swore that He would cast off His covenant people only if a man could measure the heavens and the foundations of the earth (Jer. 31:37), and professed to Israel “with everlasting love I will have compassion on you” (Isa. 54:8)—

¹⁰³ C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 155.

¹⁰⁴ Millard Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology*, 123–124.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:133.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, *A Commentary on Romans*, 303.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 306.

turns out to be less than immutable and not so dependable after all. The sun and the moon still fulfill their functions, so God has evidently upheld his covenant with them, but He has broken His covenant with Israel? He for whom “it is impossible . . . to lie” (Heb. 6:18) and of whom it is said “if we are faithless He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13), this One was finally so overcome by Israel’s faithlessness that He abrogated His promise? His “everlasting love” proved to be slightly less everlasting than Willy Wonka’s everlasting gobstoppers? Should we really accept this?

I hope we will think long and hard before we do. For if this is the case—if God finally chose to terminate His arrangement with Israel due to her unfaithfulness—then what assurance have we that He will not do the same to us? What then becomes of the Christian liberty that Paul so exulted in (Gal. 5; Rom. 8, 14; 1 Cor. 6–8)? Or of the rest from legalistic effort commended to believers by the author of Hebrews (Heb. 4)? In the end, it all devolves into striving. *If only I can perform well enough, do enough good deeds, tithe enough of my income, say enough prayers, attend enough church services, maybe God won’t cast me off like He cast off His people Israel.*

There is a second (slightly less far-reaching but still theoretically possible) theological side-effect that bears mentioning. Paul’s distinction between the two entities works out well enough when it is applied to the appellation *Israel*, but suppose the same logic is applied to a different appellation, such as *the Church*—which, indeed, commentators have sometimes done.¹⁰⁸ If one thenceforth employs the logic of the remnant view, he would be on safe theological ground: the broader category (corresponding to Ἰσραήλ¹) would be equivalent to the visible church comprising both false professors and true possessors alike while the narrower category (corresponding to Ἰσραήλ¹) would be equivalent to the invisible church consisting of true possessors only. But what happens when he imposes the supercessionist framework instead? This would result in a situation where there is an overlap between those *within* the Church and those *outside* the Church, some of those outside the Church being understood as redeemed people despite their never having heard and believed the Gospel message. Just as a Gentile can be a “true Israelite” without belonging to Israel, perhaps a non-Christian, according to this logic, can be a “true believer” without belonging to the Church! So this becomes a direct line to soteriological inclusivism.

Perhaps this will sound far-fetched and outlandish. (After all, why would anyone feel compelled to transfer the logic of Paul’s distinction in Romans 9:6 from Israel to the Church to begin with?) Yet this was precisely William G. T. Shedd’s rationale for holding out hope of soteriological inclusivism:

That there is a class of persons in unevangelized heathendom who are the subjects of gracious influences of this kind [i.e. salvific influences] is implied in St. Paul’s

¹⁰⁸ E.g. James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991–1995), 3:1043–1044; Sanford Mills, *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham, 1968), 297.

affirmation that “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6) and that “they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7).¹⁰⁹

Galatians 6:16

The troublesome theological implication I would like to broach regarding this passage is not quite as destructive as the demolition of God’s trustworthiness or the validation of soteriological inclusivism, but it is nonetheless significant. I cannot help but notice that the logic underlying the supercessionist interpretation of Galatians 6:16 is remarkably similar to the justification for Christian egalitarianism offered by evangelical feminists. Compare the following examples:

Supercessionism	Egalitarianism
“It would be highly confusing to the Galatians, after arguing for the equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ (3:28) and after emphasizing that believers are Abraham’s children, for Paul to argue in the conclusion that only Jews who believe in Jesus belong to the Israel of God.” ¹¹⁰	“In an egalitarian framework, the guiding hermeneutic is Galatians 3:28, ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’” ¹¹¹
“For in a letter where Paul is concerned to treat as indifferent the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile Christian and to argue for the equality of Gentile believers with Jewish believers, it is difficult to see him at the very end of that letter pronouncing a benediction (or benedictions) that would serve to separate groups within his churches.” ¹¹²	“The most plausible, straightforward reading of Galatians 3:26–28 is that it is an acknowledgment of the fundamental spiritual equality of all categories of people, and a denial of the relevance of gender, race or social class to the assignment of <i>spiritual roles</i> and privileges.” ¹¹³
“[M]oreover, particularly in the light of v. 15, it is improbable that Paul, with his	“In Christ, these ethnic, socioeconomic, and biological divisions have been replaced with

¹⁰⁹ William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 908.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Schreiner, *Galatians*, 383.

¹¹¹ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 128.

¹¹² Richard Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298.

¹¹³ Rebecca Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 36.

concern for the unity of the church (cf. on 2:2), would here single out Jewish Christians as a separate group within his churches.” ¹¹⁴	a new oneness. Consequently, discrimination and special privilege based on these external factors is contrary to the unity of Christ’s body.” ¹¹⁵
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Complementarians typically respond to these kinds of arguments by pointing out that Paul’s teaching in Galatians 3:28 (and other related passages) concerns salvific unity, unity *in Christ*. This bespeaks the equality all Christians experience in terms of their relatedness to God by grace through faith. As the old saying goes, “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” But that does *not* mean that all ethnic, socio-economic, and gender-related distinctions are abolished within the Church. (Indeed, the very fact that Paul’s various “household code” passages issue differing prescriptions for different roles would be utterly senseless if redemption automatically abolished all such distinctions!) The same can, of course, be applied to the Israel vs. Church discussion. In Christ and *coram Deo*, the status differential between Jews and Gentiles is reduced to zero. Both Bob Smith and Benjamin Horowitz can approach God on the same footing through the saving grace made available by Jesus’ cross-work and resurrection. But that does *not* mean that Bob becomes a Jew or that Ben becomes a goy. Nor does it mean that, with the dawning of the Church-age dispensation, national Israel has forever lost her privileged status as a covenant people. Thus, it is fundamentally inconsistent to deny a divinely-ordained future for national Israel on the basis of Galatians 6:16 and simultaneously to deny women ordination into the pastorate.

Of course, if one is content to be both a supercessionist and an egalitarian, then the cognitive dissonance will quickly dissipate. But many supercessionists are *not* egalitarians, and they would do well to consider that the logic underlying their supercessionist interpretation of Galatians 6:16 could be used to powerful effect by their egalitarian opponents in the ongoing debate over gender roles in the local church.

¹¹⁴ Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 310–311.

¹¹⁵ Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 93.