

## Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9–11\*

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Noting the conjunction of ‘mercy’ and ‘Israel’ in Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9–11, this article argues that in both letters ‘Israel’ denotes the Jews. In Galatians 6.16, with an on-going mission to the Jews in view, Paul invokes peace on those who live according to the new creation, and mercy on unbelieving Israel. In Romans 9–11, he draws on both Scripture and his own experience of mercy to revisit the question of Israel’s destiny, discerning therein a providential pattern of a divine call that is interrupted by obduracy under the law, and ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

**Keywords:** mercy, Israel, election, Galatians, Romans

### 1. Introduction

In both Galatians and Romans, Paul brings together two weighty terms, ‘mercy’ and ‘Israel’. In Galatians, each term appears only once, linked in the blessing of Gal 6.16. In Romans 9–11, the terms also are closely intertwined. Apart from Gal 6.16, the great majority of references to *Israel* occur in Romans 9–11, where the term refers to the Jewish people, Paul’s flesh and blood kinsfolk (9.6, 27, 31; 10.19, 21; 11.2, 7, 25, 26).<sup>1</sup> Paul uses the terms *remnant* or *elect* (Rom

\* An earlier version of this argument appears as ‘Israel and Divine Mercy in Galatians and Romans’, *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11* (ed. F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner; WUNT; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, [2010]). This essay is substantially revised and expanded, with new arguments in each section, an additional section on Paul’s self-representation in relationship to Israel, and new views on key issues.

<sup>1</sup> Interpretation of Rom 9.6b is the most contested of these verses; for further discussion, see below. In 1 Cor 10.18 Paul directs the attention of his Gentile converts to the cultic practices of Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σόζκα, in order to instruct them regarding the Lord’s supper. Some commentators suggest that the qualifier, κατὰ σόζκα, implies the existence of an opposite Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ. See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 274. Such an opposition between κατὰ σόζκα and τοῦ θεοῦ, however, never occurs in Paul’s letters. In Galatians itself, where one might expect to find it, *flesh* occurs in

9.27, 29; 11.5, 7) to denote both Gentile and Jewish Christians, whose common denominator is faith in Christ.<sup>2</sup> He uses the term *Israelite*, however, to denote both Christian and non-Christian Jews, whose common denominator is Jewish ancestry (Rom 9.4; 11.1; 2 Cor 11.22; Phil 3.5).

Apart from Romans 9–11 and Gal 6.16, *mercy* appears very rarely elsewhere in Paul's letters. Once Paul attributes Epaphroditus's recovery from illness to God's mercy (Phil 2.27), and twice he describes his own ministry in terms of God's mercy (1 Cor 7.25; 2 Cor 4.1). But as he writes Romans, it is in his pondering of Israel's destiny within God's plan that mercy comes to the fore as a major theme, primarily in connection with citations from the LXX.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in both Gal 6.16 and Romans 9–11, 'Israel'—however 'Israel' is defined—is linked with divine mercy.<sup>4</sup>

This simple observation provides the starting point for my argument: The link between divine mercy and the identity of Israel is as crucial to the interpretation of Paul's blessing and prayer near the end of Galatians as it is to the interpretation of Romans 9–11. In what follows, I shall argue that in both letters Israel refers neither to Jewish Christians nor to the church as a whole, but rather to the Jewish people, whom Paul calls 'my people' (ἐν τῷ γένει μου) in Gal 1.14, and 'my kinsfolk according to flesh' (συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα) in Rom 9.3. Further, I shall argue that Paul's ultimate vision of divine mercy for Israel reflects his own experience of the God who graced him with a ministry (δικονομία) flowing from that same mercy (2 Cor 4.1), and called him in the midst of his 'life in Judaism' (Gal 1.13).

The argument that I shall propose here is certainly a minority view; the majority of scholars interpret 'Israel' as denoting different entities in Gal 6.16 and Romans 9–11. In Romans, 'Israel' is widely understood to refer to empirical

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antithetical relationship to the promise and the Spirit (4.23; 5.17–24); Paul never coins the expression Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ πνεῦμα (G. Schrenk, 'Was bedeutet "Israel Gottes"?', *Judaica* 5 [1949] 81–94, esp. 87). H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), argues for a distinction between a 'true' and 'false Israel' (323). The discussion by W. Schrage is more persuasive. He argues that Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα in 1 Cor 10.18 denotes not Israel as a whole, but those in Israel who served idols (1 Cor 10.6–10); nonetheless, there is no correlative notion of the church as Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ πνεῦμα (*Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* [EKK 7; Zurich: Benziger; Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991–99] 442–3).

2 N. A. Dahl, 'Der Name Israel', *Judaica* 6 (1950) 161–70, esp. 162, arguing against Schrenk's contention that Paul refers here to Christ-believing Jews as Israel ("Israel Gottes").

3 Cilliers Breytenbach, "'Charis" and "eleos" in Paul's Letter to the Romans', *The Letter to the Romans* (ed. U. Schnelle; BETL 226; Louvain; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2009) 247–77.

4 Rightly noted by Dieter Sänger, *Die Verkündigung des Gekreuzigten und Israel. Studien zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Israel bei Paulus und im frühen Christentum* (WUNT 75; Tübingen: Mohr, 1994) 132 n. 348.

Israel.<sup>5</sup> But in Gal 6.16, Israel, qualified importantly as ‘the Israel of God’, usually is identified as the church as a whole, or as some portion thereof.<sup>6</sup> The primary and consistent basis for the latter interpretation is that it appears to confirm the force and message of the entire letter, and hence that to read Gal 6.16 differently would be inconceivable. The argument is straightforward and compelling. Throughout Galatians, Paul has affirmed to his Gentile converts that through Christ they have become ‘sons of God’ (3.26; 4.5–7), Abraham’s heirs (3.29), children of promise, like Isaac (4.28), and children of ‘Jerusalem above’ (4.26, 31). The attributes of Israel now accrue to both Gentile and Jewish Christians on the basis of Christ alone, with no distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised.<sup>7</sup> It

5 For example, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 175–6; J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (WBC 38b; 2 vols.; Waco: Word, 1988) 2.539–40; F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 335–6; contra N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 250.

6 In the last half-century, the terms of debate over the identity of ‘the Israel of God’ in Galatians have reflected an interchange between Nils Dahl and Gottlob Schrenk in 1950. Schrenk proposed that *Israel* signified Jewish Christians loyal to Paul’s gospel, whereas Dahl, followed by the majority of scholars since then, argued that in Gal 6.16 Paul applies the name, Israel of God, to the church as a whole. See G. Schrenk, “Israel Gottes”, and N. A. Dahl, ‘Der Name Israel’. For agreement with Schrenk, see P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969) 80–1; E. deWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 357–9: this is ‘pious Israel, the remnant according to the election of grace (Rom 11.5), including even those who had not seen the truth as Paul saw it, and so could not be included in ὄσοι...στοιχ’ (358). For agreement with Dahl, see U. Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständnis des Paulus* (München: C. Kaiser, 1968) 270, 285; Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 173–4; J. M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 98 n. 54; Betz, *Galatians*, 323; K. W. Clark, ‘The Israel of God’, *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren* (ed. David Aune; Leiden: Brill, 1972) 161–9; J. L. Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 574–7; G. Beale, ‘Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6.16b’, *Biblica* 80 (1999) 204–23; Andreas Köstenberger, ‘The Identity of the ἸΣΡΑΗΛ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ (Israel of God) in Galatians 6.16’, *Faith and Mission* 19.1 (2001) 3–24; R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Waco: Word, 1990) 297–8; W. Kraus, *Das Volk Gottes: Zur Grundlegung der Ekklesiologie bei Paulus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996) 247–52. For the view that the Israel of God designates empirical Jews, see F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 417; Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, 274–5; M. Bachmann, *Antijudaismus im Galaterbrief? Exegetische Studien zu einen polemischen Schreiben und zur Theologie des Apostels Paulus* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhöck & Ruprecht, 1999); English translation, *Anti-Judaism in Galatians? Exegetical Studies on a Polemical Letter and on Paul’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

7 For in-depth arguments, see Martyn, *Galatians*, 574–7; Dahl, ‘Der Name Israel’, 167–8. Dahl also references the attribution of Jewish privileges to Paul’s Gentile converts throughout the

seems but a short step, and a powerful one, also to ascribe to Christians the name of Israel in the summarizing postscript of the letter.<sup>8</sup> Thus Ulrich Luz speaks of ‘Das Fehlen Israels im Galaterbrief’ (‘the absence of Israel in the letter to the Galatians’).<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, such an identification often accompanies the conviction that Galatians is concerned only with inner-church issues, not with non-Christian Jews. J. Louis Martyn, among others, rightly emphasizes that Galatians concerns matters internal to the church, and Paul’s opponents in Galatia are not Jews per se, but rather other Jewish-Christian missionaries who are requiring circumcision of Paul’s Gentile converts. Therefore, *Judaism* is not Paul’s concern as he pens this passionate letter, and he in no way discusses, let alone denigrates, the practices and beliefs of non-Christian Jews. In Martyn’s words, ‘No Jews are addressed in the Galatians letter, and no Jews are being spoken about in the letter... For the letter’s consumptive focus on the evangelization of Gentiles means that there is no Jewish horizon in Galatians. For that we must go to Romans 9–11’.<sup>10</sup>

These are weighty arguments, and I oppose them with some trepidation. When I first began working on Gal 6.16, I followed the scholarly consensus in viewing the Israel of God as Paul’s circumlocution for the church. It was only as I pondered Paul’s puzzling syntax in 6.16, and in particular his uncharacteristic reference to mercy at this juncture in the letter, that my thinking began to change. The literature is oddly reticent about the function of mercy as a divine

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letters (e.g. 2 Cor 6.16; Rom 2.17–29; Gal 4.29; 1 Cor 10) to demonstrate that Paul sees his converts as already partakers of Israel (162–3). But in none of these texts does Paul actually use the term ‘Israel’.

8 On this, see in particular Dahl, ‘Der Name Israel’, 164–5, and Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 174.

9 Luz, *Geschichtsverständnis*, 279–86. Luz argues that prior to the coming of Christ, both Gentile and Jew are represented by the symbol of the minor heir, in Gal 4.1–7, but that after Christ’s advent, any destiny (*Schicksal*) for Israel is excluded (283). He also reads Jews, not circumcising missionaries to Gentiles, as the target of Gal 4.30, because grace, not law, gives access to God; in his view, Gal 4.30 explicitly states the rejection of the Jews (284–5). Hence ‘the Israel of God’ must refer to the church (285), leading Luz to speak of ‘the absence of Israel in Galatians’. Although I see a circumcising Jewish-Christian mission to Gentiles as the target of Paul’s argument in Galatians, rather than Jews per se, I agree that Galatians excludes the law as a way of salvation. Insofar as there is no salvation for either Jew or Gentile apart from the grace of God in Christ, Luz is correct that Paul’s train of thought leads (at least *indirectly*) to the exclusion of Jews. (On this, see Martyn, *Galatians*, 164.) But does this mean that the question of their destiny is thereby excluded as well (283)? Does it not rather raise that question? See further discussion below.

10 Martyn, *Galatians*, 40–1. Martyn does acknowledge that Judaism ‘lies just beyond the letter’s horizon’ (41 n. 75).

attribute in this benediction, apart from speculation about its antecedents. Yet if we attend closely to the quality of mercy as God's acts of deliverance in spite of human faithlessness, we are justified in asking whether the identity of the Israel of God must be limited to those, present or future, who already believe in Christ, or whom Paul somehow knows will be converted in the future.

Thus the following discussion begins with Paul's use of 'mercy' in Galatians and Romans, thence turning to the identity of 'Israel' in each letter. A third section will examine parallels between Paul's description of his own call in terms of mercy, and his vision of God's dealings with Israel. My conclusion will consider the theological importance of the consistent and continuing identity of 'Israel' as the Jewish people.

## 2. 'Mercy' in Galatians

### 2.1. Paul's Puzzling Syntax

Perhaps the occurrence of 'mercy' in Gal 6.16 receives short shrift in scholarly investigation because it is outweighed by the grammatical difficulties of the verse, as well as an operating assumption that it is part of a paired benediction of 'peace and mercy'. Let me begin with a discussion of syntax, and then move to the question of whether mercy belongs with peace as a single benediction.<sup>11</sup> Galatians 6.16 reads:

καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ' αὐτούς  
καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.

A word-for-word translation of this contested and difficult verse would read:

And for as many as will walk in line with this rule, peace be upon them and (even) mercy and (even) upon the Israel of God.

Or as Luther translated:

Und wie viele nach dieser Regel einhergehen, über die sei Friede und Barmherzigkeit und über das Israel Gottes.

The awkwardness of translation highlights difficult questions of interpretation.<sup>12</sup> There are three possibilities: (1) Paul is pronouncing a single blessing of *peace*

11 For discussion of the Greek, see particularly Schrenk, "Israel Gottes", 84-6; Schrenk, 'Der Segenswunsch nach der Kampfpistel', *Judaica* 6 (1950) 170-90, esp. 177; Dahl, 'Der Name Israel', 167; Burton, *Galatians*, 357-9; Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 80-1.

12 The NRSV maintains the ambiguity of the Greek: 'As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God'.

and mercy on a single group of people, named both as those who walk in line with this rule and as the Israel of God. (2) He is pronouncing a unified benediction of peace and mercy on two separate groups: on the one hand, those who remain faithful to Paul's gospel, and on the other hand, the Israel of God. (3) He is pronouncing a blessing of peace on the first group, and a prayer for mercy on the second.

The primary translation issue concerns the punctuation dividing the two clauses in the sentence, which in turn affects the relationship between the attributes of peace and mercy, the translation of the third καί, and consequently, the identity of the Israel of God. The majority of interpreters opt for a comma after ἔλεος, thus reading it as paired with εἰρήνη in a single blessing. In this case, the second καί links mercy with peace, and the third καί introduces a subordinate clause.<sup>13</sup> The relationship between the clauses then hangs on the translation of the third καί. It could simply mean 'and' or 'also', indicating that 'the Israel of God' is a separate entity that also receives a blessing of peace and mercy.<sup>14</sup> The NJB translates the verse thus: 'Peace and mercy to all who follow this as their rule, and to the Israel of God'. Or the second clause could be understood as qualifying αὐτούς as the Israel of God, translating the καί as expegetical or explicative, simply omitted or translated as 'that is to say'. This is the predominant view among interpreters, reflected in the RSV as 'Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God'.

The variation in translations indicates, however, that such an identification of Israel with the church is not clear in the text as it stands. It requires reading 'peace and mercy' as a single blessing, and αὐτούς as the single recipient of that paired blessing, related both to its logical antecedent, ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, and to a postcedent, τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ, from which it is separated by καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπί. As Peter Richardson observes, 'There are no parallels for such a structure'.<sup>15</sup> This structure depends on punctuating the sentence so that the division between clauses occurs after ἔλεος and before καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ. It is entirely possible, however, to place the comma after αὐτούς and before the second καί. Punctuated thus, καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ

13 It is rarely noted that there are actually three occurrences of the conjunction καί in v. 16: at the beginning of the sentence, and both preceding and following ἔλεος.

14 Schrenk in particular argues for this interpretation, translating the third καί as 'also' ('Der Segenswunsch', 177–8).

15 Richardson, *Israel*, 81. See also the discussion in Mussner, who argues, 'die Partikel καί trennt ja deutlich die αὐτοὶ vom "Israel Gottes"' (*Der Galaterbrief*, 417). Dahl suggests Acts 5.11 as an example in which καὶ ἐπὶ functions expegetically to link two clauses, but there it is by no means clear that, as Dahl claims, 'die Ekklesia gehört natürlich mit zu denjenigen, die es hörten' ('Der Name Israel', 167). Nor is the sentence structure parallel; in Acts 5.11 both clauses function as direct objects of a single predicate. Such is not the case in Gal 6.16, where there is no main predicate, and a second attributed blessing precedes the second ἐπί.

θεοῦ stands as an independent clause, with a distinct blessing and a distinct recipient. In parallel with the first clause, the second also begins with καί, thereby creating two separate benedictions:

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.<sup>16</sup>

Here the καί linking ἔλεος and the Israel of God is ascensive, adding emphasis to the final clause.<sup>17</sup> Such a reading accords well with the word order in the verse by separating the difficult ‘double *epi*, double *kai*, and double attributes in reverse order’ into two independent clauses.<sup>18</sup> Thus it also takes account of another problem, that of finding a precedent for a blessing that combines ‘peace’ and ‘mercy’, with peace preceding mercy. Furthermore, as we shall see, it fits the pattern of Paul’s epistolary benedictions, and it attends to the peculiar character and proper objects of divine mercy.

## 2.2. ‘Peace and Mercy’?

The translation of ‘peace and mercy’ as a compound blessing has instigated considerable scholarly effort in a search for possible antecedents, but parallels are difficult to find. Whereas there are many blessings of peace upon Israel, and mercy upon Israel, they rarely occur in a combined blessing.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Gregory Beale states, ‘the combination of “mercy and peace” was *not* a typical part of formulaic benedictions in early Judaism nor a part of typical conclusions in early Hellenistic epistolary literature’.<sup>20</sup> There are exceptions to this claim: the Aaronic blessing of Num 6.24–26 (LXX), which invokes first mercy and then peace, in parallel phrases, and the occurrence of mercy and peace in proximity, in Ps 84.8–11 and Isa 54.10.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, even in these instances the word order is the reverse of that in Gal 6.16, in which peace precedes mercy. Many proposals attribute the reversed order to the influence of the

16 This translation highlights the parallel function of the two occurrences of καί as introducing independent clauses. Paul frequently uses such a construction; see Rom 1.28; 2.27; 3.8; 5.16; 1 Cor 5.2; 6.2; 2 Cor 1.7, 15; 2.3; Phil 1.9, 15; 1 Thess 1.6.

17 Richardson, *Israel*, 82, following Burton, *Galatians*, 358.

18 Richardson, *Israel*, 81.

19 For the blessing of peace upon Israel, see, e.g., Pss 125.5 (LXX 124.5); 128.6 (LXX 127.6). The invocation of mercy is exceedingly frequent. See, e.g., Hos 1.6, 7, 25; Amos 5.15; Isa 14.1; Ezek 39.25; Pss Sol. 4.25; 7.6; 10.3; 9.8. For discussion, see Bachmann, *Antijudaismus*, 179–84.

20 Beale, ‘Peace and Mercy’, 209 (emphasis original). Despite this observation, however, Beale himself does not question the pairing of peace and mercy.

21 Remarkably, with the exception of Breytenbach (“Charis”, 268–9), few commentators reference Num 6.24–26. Beale, ‘Peace and Mercy’, argues that Isa 54.10 is echoed in Gal 6.16: the scriptural echoes are intriguing, but the sources lack an exact structural parallel to the benediction of Gal 6.16.

Nineteenth Benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, which invokes ‘peace...and mercy on us and on all Israel thy people’.<sup>22</sup> 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, if not impossible, to prove. Indeed, the search for antecedents abundantly demonstrates both the frequency of prayers for mercy on Israel, and the lack of exact parallels for a combined benediction of ‘peace and mercy’. Furthermore, no proposed parallels prove that in Gal 6.16, Israel acquires a new denotation as the church.<sup>23</sup> Hence it is no surprise that Richardson comments, ‘no parallel can be found for the structure of the sentence with its double noun and double preposition’.<sup>24</sup>

The difficulty in locating precedents for a blessing of ‘peace and mercy’, whether in the Pauline corpus or outside of it, should make us pause before assuming that Paul pronounces such a blessing in Gal 6.16. Rather, careful attention to the pattern of Paul’s benedictions in his other letters will shed light on the unique syntax and vocabulary of Gal 6.16. One common proposal is that Paul is drawing on his usual salutation of ‘grace and peace’, but reversing the order and substituting ‘mercy’ for ‘grace’.<sup>25</sup> Yet nowhere else is *mercy* included in either an opening blessing or a closing benediction; nowhere else does *Israel* refer to anyone but Jews; and nowhere else does the phrase, *the Israel of God*, occur.<sup>26</sup> Rather, as in Gal 1.3, typically we find the double blessing of ‘grace and peace’ in his *opening salutations* (1 Thess 1.1; 1 Cor 1.3; 2 Cor 1.2; Phlm 3; Rom 1.7; Phil 1.2). In his *closing benedictions*, however, grace and peace appear separately and in reverse order: first Paul pronounces a conditional blessing of peace near the end of the letter, frequently applying it specifically to the situation addressed in each congregation (Rom 15.33; 16.20; 2 Cor 13.11b; 1 Thess 5.23; Phil 4.9b).<sup>27</sup> Paul’s blessing of grace, on the other hand, varies very little, and always

22 So Breytenbach, “‘Charis’”, 269; Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, 274–5; for further discussion of this possibility, including conflicting views on the dating of the Nineteenth Benediction, see also Betz, *Galatians*, 321–2; Richardson, *Israel*, 78–80; Beale, ‘Peace and Mercy’, 207–8.

23 Perhaps the strongest attempt to draw such a conclusion is Beale’s argument that traces thematic links between new creation themes in Isa 40–66 and Gal 6.16, in order to claim that such links demonstrate Paul’s identification of the church as a whole with Israel as a new creation, rather than referring only to a Jewish-Christian subset of the church (‘Peace and Mercy’, 216–18). He does not, however, entertain the possibility that *Israel* refers to non-Christian Jews, nor does he account for Paul’s usage of the terms *Israel* and *Israelite* elsewhere in his letters.

24 Richardson, *Israel*, 78.

25 See, e.g., Burton, *Galatians*, 357–8; Richardson, *Israel*, 76–80; R. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 297–8. Breytenbach argues that the Jewish blessing of ‘mercy’ is a predecessor for Paul’s language of grace (“‘Charis’”, 273–6).

26 *Israel of God* is unique not only among NT writings, but among all extant Jewish literature.

27 Rightly noted by Bachmann (*Antijudaismus*, 178–9). Significantly, often the peace is contingent upon certain behaviours on the part of Paul’s auditors. For example, in Phil 4.9 he

occurs as a distinct, unconditional, and final benediction: ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom 16.20; 1 Cor 16.23; 2 Cor 13.13; 1 Thess 5.28; Phil 4.23; Phlm 25).<sup>28</sup> Indeed, he concludes Galatians itself with just such a blessing in 6.18.

These observations raise interesting points of congruence between Galatians and Paul’s other letters. Grace and peace appear together in his opening salutation (1.3), but separately and in reverse order in his closing comments. Paul adapts his conditional benediction of peace to the specific concerns of the letter—peace on all who will walk in line with the rule of the new creation, in which there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision. The final, completely characteristic invocation of grace stands apart from the conditional blessing of peace. Hence it is unnecessary and misleading to assume that peace and mercy belong together in a single benediction, as a variant of Paul’s formulaic blessing of grace and peace. But if they are separate blessings, then it follows that they fall on two separate groups. In that case, what distinguishes Gal 6.16 from Paul’s characteristic benedictions is neither his word order nor the presence of mercy as a substitute for grace, but rather, the *addition* of a prayer for mercy, and the denotation of the *recipient* of that mercy as the Israel of God.

### 2.3. ‘The quality of mercy is not strained’

Further reflection on the character of mercy will drive home the point. If mercy is paired with peace as part of a single blessing, it must partake of the limiting, conditional character conveyed by the phrasing of the first clause of the sentence: καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτούς.<sup>29</sup> Ὅσοι is both inclusive and exclusive: peace is not for everyone, but for all those who

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promises peace to those who practice what they have heard and seen in Paul, and in 2 Cor 13.11b a series of imperatives urging unity prefaces his promise that the God of peace will be present with the Corinthians: ‘Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you’, (RSV translation).

<sup>28</sup> Whether the concluding benediction of grace in Rom 16 belongs in v. 20 or following either v. 23 or v. 27, as in some manuscripts, is immaterial for the argument. In any case, the textual variants reflect an understanding that the benediction of grace is Paul’s final word in his letters. When we turn to the disputed Pauline letters, we find ‘grace and peace’ in the salutations of Eph 1.3 and Col 1.2, and the combination of ‘grace, mercy and peace’ in 1 Tim 1.1; 2 Tim 1.1. As for closing benedictions, Eph 6.23–24 and 2 Thess 3.16–18 maintain the pattern of an invocation of peace followed by the benediction of grace; Col 4.18, Titus 3.15, 1 Tim 6.21 and 2 Tim 4.22 all say simply, ‘grace be with you’. For an overview of Paul’s benedictions, see L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation* (JSNTSup 55; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 132–57.

<sup>29</sup> See Betz, *Galatians*, 321–2, who argues further, ‘This conditional blessing implies a threat against those who, after having read the letter, do not intend to conform to Paul’s rule and, consequently, fall under the curse (1.8–9)’. See also Martyn, *Galatians*, 566.

will walk in line with the canon of the new creation set forth in Gal 6.15.<sup>30</sup> That much is clear. But we may rightly question whether the imposition of such conditions is congruent with the peculiar character of mercy, which is God's gracious activity on behalf of disobedient humanity.<sup>31</sup> It is this characteristic of mercy that is ignored in the bulk of scholarly commentary on Gal 6.16.

The assumptions that peace and mercy constitute a single blessing, and that mercy therefore is limited to those who fulfill the conditions requisite for peace, must both hold true if the Israel of God is to be equated with the new community of those who are in Christ. If they do not, then the widespread view that Paul calls the church by the name of Israel must be reappraised.

### 3. 'Mercy' in Romans 9–11

As noted above, the language of mercy is rare in Paul's letters, apart from Romans 9–11, where it occurs with great frequency. The word appears repeatedly at three key points: 9.15–26, 11.30–32, and 15.9.

#### 3.1. *Romans 9.15–26*

In Rom 9.15 Paul quotes and expounds upon God's words to Moses in Exod 33.19 (LXX), where the Lord promises:

I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (Ἐλεήσω ὃν ἄν ἐλεῶ, καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἄν οἰκτίρω).

In Exodus, this divine disclosure comes at a crucial point. Following the incident of the golden calf, Moses pleads with the Lord not to withdraw the divine presence from Israel. Then he asks to see God's glory, and the Lord responds with this promise of a theophany, which indeed occurs on Mt. Sinai in the following chapter. This is the textual anchor for a theme that reverberates throughout Israel's Scripture: the revelation of God in Exod 34.6 as 'the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious (ὁ θεὸς οἰκτιρῶν καὶ ἐλεήμων), slow to anger and abounding in mercy and truth (μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινός)', gives hope to errant Israel.<sup>32</sup> Cranfield describes this theophany as

<sup>30</sup> Martyn is explicit in stating this conviction, basing it on interpreting Gal 6.15 as 'a cosmic announcement' that describes 'the real world'. 'Paul can pronounce his blessing only on those who will continue to follow in the train of that grand *fact*' (*Galatians*, 567, emphasis original).

<sup>31</sup> Both Gal 5.7 and Rom 11.32 name disobedience as a problematic aspect of humanity's situation, albeit in different contexts. In both letters, such disobedience is not, however, simply a matter of *human* disobedience, seen as wrong choices and wrong actions; humanity, rather, has been turned over to the power of sin (Gal 3.22), and shut up into disobedience (Rom 11.32). Human beings need mercy because they are unable to get free of that destructive power.

<sup>32</sup> Among very many examples, see Isa 49.10, 13; Tob 14.7.

an ‘explicatory paraphrase’ of the revelation of the divine name in Exod 3.14.<sup>33</sup> Here mercy is the essential and defining characteristic of God in God’s self-revelation to Israel. A people that belongs to this God is a people that lives by God’s mercy. Very clearly, mercy is God’s powerful deliverance for those who do not deserve it and indeed are unable to help themselves.

Within the flow of Paul’s argument in Romans, the placement of this quotation from Exodus is also crucial. It is his answer to the question in 9.14, ‘Is there injustice (ἀδικία) with God?’ This question in turn arises from the preceding verses 6–13, where Paul progressively traces the history of God’s word of promise (9.6, 9) through the stories of Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau (9.7–13). At each juncture in that history, God elects ‘Israel’, the bearer of the promise, and excludes ‘non-Israel’.<sup>34</sup> God’s choice appears unjust precisely because it occurs without reference to human actions, whether bad or good. Nonetheless, its very arbitrariness serves the divine purpose: ‘in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not on the basis of works but on the basis of call’ (v. 11). ‘God’s purpose of election’, anchored and clarified in Exod 33.19, will thread through the rest of Romans 9–11 as the crucial point in Paul’s argument. That is, because divine election is *only* on the basis of God’s call, it is grounded purely in God’s free and sovereign exercise of mercy.

Hence in Rom 9.16–18, Paul immediately expands on this idea of mercy in relationship to the purpose statement of v. 11, as we hear first Moses, and then Pharaoh, addressed by the divine voice.<sup>35</sup> The two quotations and Paul’s commentaries on them function as parallel, mutually enriching expositions of the central theme in v. 16: ἤρα οὖν οὐ τοῦ θέλοντος οὐδὲ τοῦ τρέχοντος, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ. Cranfield interprets the unnamed subject of this sentence as mercy itself. ‘It—that is, God’s mercy—is not a matter of human willing or activity, but of God’s being merciful’.<sup>36</sup> But the subject could as well be God’s purpose of election, which is revealed to Moses as divine mercy (v. 15), and

33 C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* (ICC 2; 2 vols; London: T&T Clark, 1979; repr., 2004) 2.483.

34 In my view it is confusing to speak here of a division *within* Israel; the distinction is between the line of promise and those descendants of Abraham who become the progenitors of the Gentiles. See particularly B. R. Gaventa, ‘On the Calling-into-Being of Israel: Romans 9.6–29’, *Between Gospel and Election* (ed. Wilk and Wagner) 255–69 (259–63); J. R. Wagner, ‘“Not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles”: Mercy to the Nations in Romans 9–11’, *Between Gospel and Election* (ed. Wilk and Wagner) 417–32 (421–2). In my own article in the same volume, I argue for a temporary division within Israel in Rom 9:6–12, but further reflection has persuaded me differently (‘Israel and Divine Mercy’, 163). Contra Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.471; R. Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2007) 574–5; Watson, *Paul*, 310–11. See further discussion below.

35 Although God speaks directly to Moses, and through scripture to Pharaoh, both quotations are indicative of the divine will. J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul ‘In Concert’ in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 53–4 n. 34.

36 Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.484–5.

demonstrated through Pharaoh as divine power (ἐνδειξομαι ἐν σοὶ τὴν δύναμίν μου) that results in the proclamation of God's name in all the earth (v. 17). Verbal cues within the verse remind us that Paul preaches the obedience of faith among the Gentiles for the sake of God's name (1.5), and that the death of Jesus was for the demonstration (ἐνδειξίτην) of God's righteousness (3.25–26). We remember that just as the Gospel is the power of God for salvation (1.16), so here also God's power is not 'unqualified power', to use Cranfield's terms, but rather 'saving power'; it is 'power directed toward the deliverance of God's people'.<sup>37</sup> It is, in other words, the powerful expression of God's freedom to be merciful, regardless of human actions.

The ensuing contrast between 'vessels of wrath' and 'vessels of mercy' (9.22–23) makes the same point about God's sovereign election. It is not clear who the 'vessels of wrath' are. Frequently interpreted as a reference to unbelieving Israel, in contrast with the vessels of mercy called from both Jews and Greeks (9.24), the metaphor in this context more likely applies to the Gentile Pharaoh (9.17), whom God used as an 'instrument' of wrath in order to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt.<sup>38</sup> But the identity of the vessels of wrath is not Paul's emphasis, which falls instead on God's patient endurance, and God's purpose of making known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy. God 'hardens the heart of whomever he wills', whether Gentile or Jew, but for the purpose of demonstrating his glory. The eloquent exposition of Cranfield bears repeating:

The relations between God's patient enduring of vessels of wrath, the showing of his wrath, and the manifestation of the wealth of His glory upon vessels of mercy, will be illuminated by 9.30–11.36. We shall see there that the ultimate purpose of that patience of God toward rebellious

<sup>37</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.487.

<sup>38</sup> See Meyer, 'Romans', *The Word in this World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004) 197. Wagner reads Paul's difficult syntax as a *qal-vaḥomer* argument, and paraphrases 9.23 as follows: 'If...God endured with great patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction... how much more will he bear patiently with Israel, the people whom he has chosen as his own inheritance [cf. 11.1] until their time of hardening is over?' (*Heralds of the Good News*, 76–7). As Richard Hays has noted, the image of vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy comes from the metaphor of the potter and the clay in 9.20–21, which he in turn traces to Jer 18.3–6: 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel'. In Hays's words, 'the prophetic subtexts keep the concern with which the chapter began—the fate of Israel—sharply in focus' (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University, 1989] 66). Meyer ('Romans', 196) traces the metaphor to Isa 45.9–13, noting especially the promise that God will 'raise up' the pagan Cyrus to accomplish the divine will (Isa 45.13). Contra Dunn, *Romans*, 2.597; Jewett, *Romans*, 597; Watson, *Paul*, 318.

Israel which is depicted in 10.21 includes the salvation of rebellious Israel itself (chapter 11).<sup>39</sup>

As Paul's argument progresses, we do indeed discover that both Israel's temporary hardening and eventual full inclusion display mercy as God's sovereign elective activity in the world.

### 3.2. *Romans 11.30–32*

Paul drives home this theme in 11.5–6. 'So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace'. In other words, because the remnant is 'chosen by grace' without any recourse to its own actions, its very existence demonstrates God's freedom to 'have mercy on whom I will have mercy'. Precisely for this reason, the remnant functions as 'a forward-looking token of grace for the future'.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, following the distinction between 'the elect' and 'the rest' in 11.7, Paul immediately makes clear that this present division is provisional. In the present, unbelieving Israel's hardening, trespass, and rejection (ἀποβολή) serve God's purposes for the reconciliation of the cosmos; in the future, its full inclusion (πλήρωμα) and acceptance (προσλήψις) will mean nothing less than life from the dead (11.7–15).

Thus at the culmination of his argument in 11.30–32, Paul returns to the theme of mercy precisely for those who are disobedient.

Just as you [Gentiles] once were disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they [Israel] have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all (συνέκλεισεν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς πάντας εἰς ἀπειθειαν ἵνα τοὺς πάντας ἐλεήσῃ).

Here both Jew and Gentile take turns passing through the experience of disobedience, in order that both may be the recipients of mercy. As Klaus Haacker puts it, 'this change of roles is not to be final since—strangely enough—it had been arranged by God Himself. For what reason? In order to show mercy to all'.<sup>41</sup> Hence it is not surprising to find Paul summing up his argument in Romans 9–11 and using it as the basis of his appeal for mutual service in 12.1, with the phrase, 'by the compassionate mercies of God (διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ)', echoing his citation of Exod 33.19 in Rom 9.15.<sup>42</sup>

39 Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.497. Also cited in Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 77 n. 105.

40 W. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (LNTS [JSNTSup] 322; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 128.

41 Klaus Haacker, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003) 95.

42 Breytenbach, "Charis" '.

### 3.3. *Romans 15.9*

Finally, at the climax of his letter as a whole, Paul again speaks of ‘mercy’, but this time in reference to the Gentiles (15.8–9):

For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God, in order to confirm the promises of the fathers, and of the Gentiles on behalf of mercy, in order to glorify God (λέγω γὰρ Χριστὸν διάκονον γεγενῆσθαι περιτομῆς ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ βεβαιῶσαι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν πατέρων, τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν).<sup>43</sup>

Here Gentiles, like Israel, are the recipients of divine mercy. As Wagner perceptively comments, ‘the apostle carefully constructs for the Gentiles a negative identity as outsiders with respect to God’s elect people Israel. He does this both to establish their identity anew on the ground of God’s mercy alone and to form in them a mindset—a way of thinking, feeling, and acting—appropriate to their new, God-determined identity’.<sup>44</sup> The catena of scriptural citations that follows carries forward the underlying theme of mercy extended to both Jews and Gentiles. Psalm 17 (LXX) praises God for his mercy to his anointed, to David and his seed forever (v. 51); Ps 116 (LXX) calls on the Gentiles to rejoice with God’s people, because ‘his mercy has conquered us, and the truthfulness of the Lord endures forever (ὅτι ἐκρῆταιώθη τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ κυρίου μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα)’.<sup>45</sup>

Thus we can see a progressive widening of the arena of God’s mercy over the course of Paul’s argument in Romans 9–11, yet always consonant with the fundamental theophany of Exod 33.19 in Rom 9.15. The point throughout is God’s mercy as God’s sovereign action (even including shutting up all in disobedience) on behalf of those who would otherwise be excluded. As Breytenbach puts it: ‘To show “mercy” and “compassion” to whoever he chooses is God’s reaction on the disobedience of both gentiles and Jews (Rom 11.30–32)’.<sup>46</sup>

## 4. The Identity of ‘Israel’ in Romans

As noted above, the majority of scholars think that throughout Paul’s letters, apart from Gal 6.16, the term ‘Israel’ denotes the empirical Jewish people, Paul’s kinsfolk ‘according to the flesh’ (Rom 9.3). The purpose of this

43 In my view, Wagner’s translation of this difficult verse rightly fills in the gaps in Paul’s syntax: ‘For I say that the Christ has become a servant of the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God, to confirm the promises of the fathers, and [a servant of] the Gentiles on behalf of mercy [of God], to glorify God’ (*Heralds of the Good News*, 308).

44 Wagner, ‘Mercy to the Nations in Romans 9–11’, 420.

45 See Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 314–15, for further discussion of these echoes.

46 Breytenbach, ‘“Charis”’, 266.

brief overview of Romans 9–11 is to ascertain whether this is the case. The actual term, Israel, occurs nine times in Romans 9–11 (9.6, 27, 31; 10.19, 21; 11.2, 7, 25, 26). It is the interpretation of the first and last of these verses that occasions the most controversy, but they in turn must be interpreted in their contexts.

In Rom 9.1–5, Paul abruptly turns from his celebration of the blessings that belong to all those who are in Christ, to his anguished concern for his kinsfolk according to the flesh. The ensuing argument in many ways restates and amplifies an earlier argument in the letter. In 3.1–9, Paul makes two apparently conflicting statements in response to the question, ‘What advantage has the Jew?’ (3.1). Paul’s own dialectical answer makes clear that in this context, ‘Jew’ refers to the Jewish people.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand (3.2), the advantages of the Jew are many, because the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ). That is, the Jews are the bearers of the promises of God. On the other hand, the Jews are no better off than Gentiles because all humanity is under the power of sin (3.9). Being entrusted with the words of God does not exempt Jews from sharing in the universal human condition. All must rely on the one God of all, who rectifies both the circumcision and the uncircumcision on the basis of christologically determined ‘faith’ (3.30).<sup>48</sup>

Romans 9.1–5 restates in amplified form both Paul’s positive and negative answers to the question of 3.1. Many are the advantages of the Jews: the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, the patriarchs, and the fact that the Christ who is the fulfillment of the promises comes from the Jewish people. Yet despite this Paul is anguished, because they have not embraced that very Christ. How can this be? Paul’s theological wrestling with this crisis immediately carries forward the argument in terms of God’s word, echoing 3.2: The Jews were entrusted with τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, yet do not believe in Christ; nonetheless, it is not as though the word of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) has failed (9.6a).<sup>49</sup> This focus on the word of God frames Paul’s theologizing in terms of the character of God, who is, as Paul Meyer puts it, ‘the real subject of Romans

47 Certainly the question of their ‘advantage’ (περισσόον) arises because in the preceding verses, 2.25–29, Paul has defined the ‘Jew’ in terms of an inward circumcision of the heart, ‘spiritual not literal’ (ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι), over against a visible, fleshly circumcision. His language seems to open the way for a redefinition of ‘Jew’ leading directly to the question: What is the advantage of the Jew (3.1)? And yet the very formulation of the question implies a dialectical use of terminology; ‘the Jew’ in 3.1 must refer to physically circumcised Jews for the question, and its conclusion in 3.30, to make sense.

48 For the sake of brevity and focus, I leave aside here the complex issues concerning the interpretation of πίστις in 3.30. I note simply that Paul qualifies this terminology by the immediately preceding restatement of the epistle’s theme: the manifestation of the righteousness of God through the faithful and redemptive death of Christ Jesus (3.26).

49 Meyer, ‘Romans’, 194; Wright, *Climax*, 235 n. 13.

9–11'.<sup>50</sup> In 9.8–9 we will learn that the word of God that has not failed is the word of promise (ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος) given to Sarah and Abraham, guaranteeing their progeny through Isaac.

But first comes Paul's restatement of the basic principle of Israel's election: 'For it is not the case that all who are from Israel are (indeed) Israel' (9.6b). Here Paul neither redefines 'Israel' nor creates a temporary distinction *within* Israel, an 'Israel within Israel'.<sup>51</sup> Rather, by tracing the line of Israel through Isaac, the miracle baby, he simply restates what is thematic throughout the patriarchal literature, in which '[h]istorical Israel itself is determined by "promise" rather than by "flesh"'.<sup>52</sup> Israel has always existed as the result of God's gracious election, not fleshly descent. This is the point of Paul's reference to the birth narratives of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau. Israel's identity is grounded in the God who calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rom 4.17), not in human willing or working (9.16).

Paul's terminology for this distinction between divine initiative and human achievement is that of 'promise' and 'flesh'.<sup>53</sup> His language should be read in conjunction with his distinction in 2.29 between 'fleshly' and 'spiritual' circumcision,

50 Meyer, 'Romans', 195. See also Wright, *Climax*, 235: '[T]he question throughout has to do with the character and purposes of God, and particularly his faithfulness to his promises'.

51 Contra Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.474, who argues for a temporary 'Israel within Israel', and Wright, *Climax*, 238, who argues that in Rom 9.6–13: 'There is already a "double Israel": in 6b there is an "Israel" that is so merely according to the flesh, and there is an "Israel" that is a "true Israel", the Israel of promise'. For Wright, this distinction is not temporary, but rather differentiates between ethnic Israel and Israel as 'the Messiah and his people' (250).

52 Meyer, 'Romans', 196. Wagner comments: 'In arguing that in the present time "not all from Israel are Israel", then, Paul is simply extending the logic of a narrative pattern established in the stories of Israel's national origins, a pattern which continued to shape the prophetic understanding of the nature of God's election of Israel' (*Heralds of the Good News*, 51). See also Jewett, *Romans*, 574–5. Jewett rightly observes the principle of selective election displayed here, but wrongly, in my view, argues that such a principle 'restricts the sphere within which the word of God must be held to be effective, thus advancing the distinction between the true Israel and "all Israel" in v. 6' (575).

53 Paul's vocabulary and logic here are reminiscent of his language in Gal 4.21–31. In Galatians he deploys this imagery in relationship to Gentile converts. In Rom 9.6–9 he uses it to locate Israel's true source of identity in God's promise, not in the 'flesh'. In both letters, Paul relies on the theologically significant birth narratives of Isaac and Ishmael in Genesis, to display God's way of dealing with all humanity, both Jew and Gentile. See in particular the discussion by F. Watson in *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004) 205–8. Watson rightly notes: 'In the light of the Genesis narrative, it is clear that the terms "promise" and "flesh" articulate the contrast and the conflict between divine and human initiative... Paul is proposing simply that the Genesis narrative be read with full theological seriousness' (206–7). For the contribution of Isa 54.1/Gal 4.27 to this theological reading of the Genesis narrative, see also M. C. De Boer, 'Paul's Quotation of Isaiah 54.1 in Galatians 4.27', *NTS* 50 (2004) 370–89; S. Eastman, *Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 127–60.

which do not denote two different human endeavors, but a human endeavor contrasted with that which only God can do.<sup>54</sup> At stake here is not identity politics, but rather God's consistent way of dealing with all humanity, here focused precisely on Israel as the bearer of the promise. Paul's argument, as we have seen, is grounded in God's character as merciful, which is displayed in God's abiding purpose of election (9.11). That purpose of election is enacted, *penultimately*, in making divisions between the elect and the non-elect: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Moses and Pharaoh. It is important to note that in each case, these pairs are composed of Jews and Gentiles, culminating in the quintessential Jew, Moses, and the quintessential Gentile, Pharaoh.<sup>55</sup> And in each case, the election of the representative Jew, that is, 'Israel', occurs without regard to Israel's conduct.<sup>56</sup>

Thus at this point in Paul's argument, 'Israel' consistently refers to the Jewish people, called into existence solely by God apart from any 'fleshly' criteria. Nothing in the text indicates a non-Jewish identity for Israel, which here is not internally divided but rather distinguished from Gentiles.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as we have seen in the discussion of mercy, it is precisely disobedient Israel who receives God's mercy at Sinai, while God hardens Pharaoh's heart (9.15–18). God's behaviour towards Abraham's wayward 'children of promise' is entirely consistent with the God whom Abraham trusted, the God who rectifies the ungodly (4.5).

As we trace the identity of Israel through the rest of Romans, the term remains tied to empirical Jews. Paul's argument is difficult to follow, however, for two reasons: (1) Israel trades places with the Gentiles in God's scheme of salvation. (2) The distinction between Israel and the Gentiles as elect and non-elect shifts to a distinction between 'the remnant' and Israel. Thus in 9.27, Israel refers to the whole of the Jewish nation as distinguished from the remnant—that is, Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles (9.24). Note that this division is still not precisely *within* 'Israel', but is rather between Israel and a separate entity called 'the remnant'. So whereas in Isa 10.22 the remnant is part of Israel, in Paul's

54 Meyer comments astutely that in Rom 9.8, 'promise' and 'flesh' 'are functioning here exactly as "spirit" and "letter" did in Rom 2.29' (*Romans*, 196). A similar logic is at work in Rom 4.1, when Paul asks rhetorically, 'Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?' and answers implicitly, 'No indeed!' To say, 'Not all who are from Israel are Israel' is like saying, 'Abraham is not our forefather according to the flesh, but through the promise'. For this translation, see R. B. Hays, "'Have We Found Abraham to be Our Forefather According to the Flesh?" A Reconsideration of Rom 4.1', *NovT* 27 (1985) 76–98.

55 Both Ishmael and Esau are progenitors of the Gentiles. See Wagner, 'Mercy to the Nations in Romans 9–11', 421–2.

56 See especially the careful exegesis of Watson, *Paul*, 308–14. Watson rightly observes that each of Paul's scriptural pairs—Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Pharaoh—functions to exclude 'any correlation between conduct and election' (312).

57 Watson, *Paul*, 311.

appropriation of this text the ‘remnant’ becomes identified with ‘even us whom he has called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles’ (9.24; cf., 9.27, 29; 11.5, 7). What distinguishes this remnant from Israel, as well as from Gentiles, is faith in Christ. Now *this* remnant is elected by grace (9.27, 29; 11.5, 7), in distinction from Israel (‘the rest’), which *now* stands in Pharaoh’s place as the object of divine ‘hardening’ (11.7).<sup>58</sup>

This is the Israel who pursues a law of righteousness as if it were based on works (9.31–32), having a zeal for God that is not according to knowledge (οὐ κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν—10.2). In 10.16–21, this is the people who have heard the evangelistic word of faith (τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως ὃ κηρύσσομεν) that Paul preaches (10.8), but have not responded with faith.<sup>59</sup> Their ignorance and disobedience (10.19, 21) is, in one sense, an outworking of their unenlightened zeal and ignorance of the righteousness of God (10.2–3), which leads Paul to heartfelt prayer on Israel’s behalf (10.1). On the other hand, behind their ‘failure to believe’ is the ‘hardening’ activity of God (11.7–10).<sup>60</sup> God’s sovereign freedom to harden hearts as well as to have mercy is now directed at empirical Israel itself.<sup>61</sup>

This denotation of empirical Israel as ‘hardened’ (11.25), as God’s enemies (11.28), and as ‘disobedient’ (11.30–31), brackets Paul’s startling conviction that ‘all Israel will be saved’ (11.26), and signals that throughout this section, non-Christ-believing Jews, taken as a whole, are in view. That this same people is at the very same time ‘beloved’ is no contradiction in terms; after all, God’s love is shown precisely through Christ’s death ‘while we were yet sinners’ (Rom 5.8). In Rom 11.26, the citation of Isa 59.20–21a in combination with Isa 27.9 expresses a similar conviction that God’s deliverer—Christ—will come on the scene in the very midst of Israel’s sinful condition, and take away ungodliness from Jacob.<sup>62</sup>

58 Dahl, ‘Der Name Israel’, 162. The Jewish-Christian members of the remnant, of whom Paul is the primary representative (11.1), function dialectically as a sign that God has not rejected his people. On the one hand they are still distinguished from ‘Israel’, which failed to obtain the goal of the law (9.31; 11.7). On the other hand, Paul himself, and presumably the ‘some’ who are saved through his ministry to the Gentiles (11.14), are also still Israelites. Thus Paul can say, ‘a hardening has come upon a part of Israel’ (11.25).

59 Meyer, ‘Romans’, 199–200; contra Watson, *Paul*, 331–2, who argues that Rom 9.30–10.21 defends Paul’s mission to the Gentiles.

60 Thus it is not precisely correct to say, with Wright, ‘It is not God who has failed, but Israel’ (*Climax*, 239). This formulation presents a false dichotomy: God has not ‘failed’, but God is also behind Israel’s apparent ‘failure’.

61 ‘9.6a is thus taken up, answered from Scripture, and made concrete by the reference to Israel. Naturally Paul is not speaking of an ideal Israel...but of the Jewish people, which is later called πᾶς Ἰσραήλ’ (Käsemann, *Romans*, 299).

62 The deliverer’s messianic identity is evident from 1 Thess 1.10 and Rom 7.24. For Paul’s citation of Isa 59.20–21a, conflated with Isa 27.9, see the discussion in Wagner, *Heralds*, 286–94. That Paul has the context of Isa 59 in mind is supported by his citation of Isa 59.7–8 in Rom 3.15–17. That context intensifies the dire culpability of Israel, and the futility of reliance on human intervention (59.16); only God’s dramatic deliverance will rescue Israel from its

In *all Israel*, therefore, Paul has in mind all his kinsfolk κατὰ σόζκα to whom belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises, and from whom are the patriarchs and Christ κατὰ σόζκα (9.3–5).<sup>63</sup>

This brief sketch of the identity of Israel in Romans 9–11 shows that Paul consistently uses the term to refer to his Jewish relatives in the present tense. All arguments that seek to equate the Israel of God in Gal 6.16 with the church must come to terms with this pattern of Pauline usage. As E. P. Sanders delineates very carefully,

Thus, although Paul thought of the members of the church as heirs of the promises to Israel, he did not (*with one exception*) give them the name. The title 'Israel of God' would be truly appropriate only when all the physical descendants of Jacob had been accounted for, at the end, when the polar distinction 'my people' and 'not my people' would cover everyone.<sup>64</sup>

The exception, of course, is Gal 6.16.

### 5. 'The Israel of God' in Galatians

We turn now to the identity of Israel in Galatians, beginning with the obvious question: Why does Paul introduce Israel at this point in the letter? Most interpreters point to the puzzling qualifier, 'of God', as identifying 'Israel' with some aspect of the church.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, why use the term, 'Israel'? One influential answer is that 'the Israel of God' functions polemically in the Galatian context as the culmination of Paul's systematic re-signification of terminology employed by the circumcising mission. Martyn, for example, argues that the Teachers used Israel to refer to themselves and their followers, but that Paul appends *of God* in order to redefine Israel as 'those who will follow the standard of God's *new* creation'.<sup>66</sup> He bases his interpretation on the premise that τοῦ

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predicament. It is intriguing to note that Isa 59.21 promises that God will put God's words (ὀήματα) in the mouth of disobedient Israel, which may echo as a counterpoint to Rom 10.17. If this is Paul's intention, however, why does he not quote Isa 59.21b, rather than conflating 59.20–21a with Isa 27.9? For further discussion, see Wagner, *Heralds*, 293–4.

63 Contra Wright, *Climax*, 250. In part, Wright bases his interpretation of 'all Israel' as the church on a reading of Gal 6.16 as referring to the church. His argument that in Romans, Paul consistently transfers the blessings of Israel to 'the Messiah and his people', has to read 9.1–5 as ironic (*Climax*, 237).

64 Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 176, emphasis added.

65 Even Burton, as we have seen, reads τοῦ θεοῦ as delineating a believing remnant within Israel (*Galatians*, 358); see also Richardson, *Israel*, 80–1; Schrenk, 'Segenswunsch', 173–4.

66 Martyn, *Galatians*, 576, emphasis original. For the proposal that the entire phrase originates with the circumcision mission, see Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298–9; Betz, *Galatians*, 323.

θεοῦ here functions as a genitive of source or origin for a particular group of people, thus re-defining the identity of Israel in terms of those called into existence by the God of Jesus Christ, rather than in terms of law observance: ‘The God of Israel is first of all the God of Christ (3.16, 29), and it follows, for the author of Galatians, that the Israel of God is the people whom God is calling into existence in Christ (1.6, 13)’.<sup>67</sup>

This is an appealing argument. Nonetheless, if this is what Paul wanted to say, one might expect him to write Ἰσοῦλ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, or perhaps Ἰσοῦλ κατ’ ἐπαγγελίαν. Then his meaning would be explicitly Christocentric. As it is, if Paul is using terminology from the Teachers to address his converts in his concluding postscript, he runs the risk of misunderstanding, potentially allowing the circumcision mission to have the last word. Why take such a risk? Does Paul, as his final word on the new identity of the Galatian Christians, borrow language from his opponents, even re-signified by the puzzling qualifier, ‘of God’? Or does the ringing cry—‘new creation!’—stand as the climax of the Galatians’ new identity in Christ? If so, then the subsequent invocation of mercy on Israel could express Paul’s heartfelt concern for his own people.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, Israel, no less than the church, has always been a people called into existence by God to be God’s own possession. Hence the genitive carries both authorial and possessive force, reminding us that throughout Scripture empirical Israel is identified as ‘God’s people’ and as the inheritance of the Lord. There are very many examples of this linguistic pattern in the LXX.<sup>69</sup> And because Israel belongs to the God who is ‘the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow

67 Martyn, *Galatians*, 576. Martyn’s argument is somewhat weakened by the observation that when Paul uses the genitive construction elsewhere in Galatians to denote the origin of a group of people, his tendency is to preface it with the preposition ἐκ (3.9–10, 18; 4.22–23). For example, those whose identity is derived from faith are οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, in contrast with those whose identity derives from the works of the law, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου (3.10). These contrasting sources of identity correspond with those whose origin is in the promise (ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας, 3.18) and the free woman (ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρου), over against those whose origin is in the slave woman (ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης, 4.22).

68 Such a shift of focus is indeed abrupt, but not foreign to Paul’s letters. In the transition from Rom 8 to Rom 9 he exhibits a similar train of thought. In 8.28–30 he confidently proclaims the destiny of those who now are Christ’s brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοίς), and in 8.31–39, he celebrates the indissoluble bond between them and ‘the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’. The change in tone at 9.1–3 is startling, as Paul thinks with anguish of the apparent exclusion of his other ‘brothers and sisters’ (τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου).

69 A limited list of references includes Exod 8.27; 30.33, 38; 31.14; Lev 17.9; Deut 32.43; 33.3; 1 Macc 14.14; Sir 35.23; 45.9, 24; 47.5; 50.4; Isa 30.26; 32.18; 56.3. Paul does not generally speak of Israel as God’s inheritance, although if Wagner is correct in arguing for κληρονομίαν rather than λαόν in Rom 11.1, that verse proves to be an exception (*Heralds of the Good News*, 222–31). In light of Paul’s echo of Isa 49.1 in Gal 1.15, of particular interest is Isa 49.13, which speaks of God’s mercy on his people: ἠλέησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς ταπεινοὺς τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ παρεκάλεισεν.

to anger and abounding in mercy and truth' (Exod 34.6), Paul's benediction of mercy cannot help but name that relationship. To recognize this linguistic pattern in Gal 6.16 is not to deny that God is, above all, the God known in and through Jesus Christ, nor to claim that *only* empirical Israel is God's possession. It is simply to say that empirical Israel *also* owes its existence to God and belongs to God.

At issue is the extent of God's sovereign rule: Do only some people belong to God, or does God lay claim to all humanity? Specifically, in Gal 6.16 does God's possession include only those presently in Christ, or does it also include non-Christ-believing Jews? As noted above, the first option seems to operate with an *a priori* assumption that Paul cannot possibly pronounce a blessing or a prayer for mercy on anyone *outside* the church. Yet insofar as mercy is the fundamental attribute of the God who is sovereign over all creation, surely its extent cannot be limited to one portion of humanity.

The plausibility of such a prayer for mercy is strengthened by the observation that, earlier in Galatians, Paul distinguishes between Jew and Gentile *outside the Christian community*.<sup>70</sup> He describes a division of missionary activity into two arenas: his own mission to the uncircumcision, and that of Peter and the other Jerusalem church leaders to the circumcision (2.7–9). Hence it is not precisely correct to say that in Galatians Paul has no mission to the Jews in view; he simply names Peter and the Jerusalem 'pillars' as its leaders.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, according to Paul's own preaching, such a mission is necessary precisely because Jews, as well as Gentiles, need rectification through Christ.<sup>72</sup> This is not his focus, but it is assumed as an underlying conviction, as demonstrated in 2.15–16: 'We ourselves, Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a person is not rectified on the basis of works of the law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be rectified by the faith of Christ and not by works of the law, for by works of the law will no flesh be rectified'.

70 As Meyer notes, throughout Romans (1.16; 2.9–10; 3.1, 30; 4.11–12) Paul also maintains a distinction between Jew and Gentile ('Romans', 194).

71 His purpose in doing so may be polemical; he thereby signifies the approval of the Jerusalem church leaders for his own circumcision-free Gentile mission, and he implicitly criticizes them for abrogating their part of the agreement by meddling in his churches. We hear that Peter shows up in Antioch 'living like a Gentile' (2.12, 14), and apparently he baptized some Gentile converts in Corinth (1 Cor 1.12; 3.22; 9.5). As for Paul's own mission, even in Galatians his references to his experiences of being persecuted for not preaching circumcision (5.11; 6.12) and to his scars (6.17) hint that he preaches in synagogues as well as outside them. Paul has scars 'from Gentile stones and from Jewish whips (2 Cor. 11.24–26)' (Martyn, *Galatians*, 568). For the argument that Paul himself preached first in Jewish synagogues, see the careful analysis of Watson, *Paul*, 70–3, who comments, 'Indeed, it is questionable whether Gentiles were ever the *exclusive* objects of his preaching' (72, emphasis original). I do not, however, share Watson's view that in *Romans* Paul anticipates the conversion of all Israel through his own missionary work (338).

72 See Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, 177.

It is important to recognize the implications of this conviction for Paul in relationship to his kinsfolk. Paul's attack on the circumcising missionaries states boldly that observance of the Mosaic Law does not lead to the righteousness that is life (2.21; 3.21). This theological axiom is evident throughout the letter, and perhaps most poignantly expressed in the typology of 4.21–5.1, where Paul contrasts the destinies of those born according to the flesh—that is, through circumcision—and those born according to the Spirit—that is, through the promise.<sup>73</sup> Yes, the typology of 4.21–5.1 is not directed against Jews per se, but against those Jewish-Christian missionaries who seek to circumcise his Gentile converts. But because its logic explicitly excludes *all* who are not in Christ from the future promised to those born according to the Spirit, it *also* implicitly excludes non-Christian Jews from that destiny.<sup>74</sup>

The pathos of this exclusion should not be lost on us. Surely Paul's personal history and ties with his Jewish kinsfolk, now painfully strained at best, play a role in his thinking. Is it possible, as he writes to his Gentile converts that 'present Jerusalem is in slavery with her children', that the city of his ancestors and its plight do not even cross his mind?<sup>75</sup> Or that, as he emphasizes his converts' inclusion in the blessing of Abraham, the exclusion of his own kin does not cause him pain? Or that, when he warns of the disinheritance of those Gentile Christians being born 'according to the flesh' through the circumcising mission, he does not also wonder about the apparent disinheritance of his own people? What of those Jews outside the church, Paul's kinsfolk who have rejected his message, yet whom he consistently names elsewhere as Israel? Is it possible that Paul is concerned here with the destiny of this Israel?<sup>76</sup>

73 See S. Eastman, "'Cast out the slave woman and her son": The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Galatians 4.30', *JSNT* 28 (2006) 309–36. I read Gal 4.30 as a warning addressed to those who want to be under the law, who are the addressees of the allegory as a whole (4.21), not as a command to expel either Jews or Gentile converts who are being circumcised. For the view that here Paul announces the rejection of the Jews, see Luz, *Geschichtsverständnis*, 285. For the view that Paul commands his followers to expel the circumcising missionaries to Gentiles and their followers, see Martyn, *Galatians*, 446.

74 As Barclay observes, 'Paul is attacking Jewish-Christians for their Jewish presuppositions, and for wanting to make Gentile believers live like Jews'; this amounts to 'an implicit attack on law-observant Judaism for its cultural imperialism' (*Obedying the Truth*, 250 n. 50). In Martyn's analysis (*Galatians*, 164), the exclusion of Jews is a subset of the exclusion of *all* religion as a merely human construct. This view differs from that of Bachmann, who argues for 'das heilsgeschichtliche *praesens* des Judentums' in the wider context of Galatians (*Antijudaismus*, 166–7). In Bachmann's salvation-historical reading of Galatians, Judaism takes priority in the history of redemption, such that the salvation of the Jews is a prerequisite for the salvation of Gentiles.

75 R. Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', *NIB* 11.181–348, here 302–3.

76 Implicit in these questions is the larger question of how Paul does theology. I am suggesting that pathos and personal experience are built into Paul's mode of thinking. See further discussion below, Section 6.

We do not need to hear Paul putting forth a theory of the Jews, or in any way *answering* the question, ‘What about the Jews?’ We may, however, hear him *asking* the question, in the form of a prayer that God have mercy on his own people, God’s ‘Israel’. The commentator who best gets the pathos of this verse is Franz Mussner:

Paulus läßt sich zwar im Gal über die Heilszukunft Israels nicht aus, wohl aber im Römerbrief; doch ruft der Apostel bereits in Gal 6.16 das ‚Erbarmen‘ Gottes auf sein geliebtes ‚Israel Gottes‘ herab, was sicher in den Augen des Apostels mehr als eine fromme Geste ist, wie Röm 9–11 bestätigt... Weil Paulus im Gal den Weg des Gesetzes, den das Judentum noch geht, als überholt erklärt, empfiehlt er Israel dem ‚Erbarmen‘ Gottes, der auch Israel ‚sola gratia‘ zu retten vermag. So deutet der Apostel in Gal 6.16 schon an, was er dann in Röm 9–11 explizieren wird. Paulus hat sein Volk nie vergessen.<sup>77</sup>

‘Paul has not forgotten his people’. This is the key point. Paul, who has not forgotten his people, cannot imagine that God has rejected his people (Rom 11.1–2). Thus at the end of this letter in which he has declared the obsolescence of the way of the law that his fellow Jews still follow, Paul prays for God’s mercy on Israel, that Israel also will be saved only by grace. Even here, there is a Jewish horizon to Paul’s thought.

If the interpretation proposed here is correct, it strengthens rather than undercuts the Christocentric identity that Paul so passionately proclaims to his Galatian congregations. The final word on that identity is the canon of the new creation, in which the old world distinctions between circumcised and uncircumcised have been nailed to the cross. Having modulated his opponents’ preaching of descent from Abraham into his own formulation of descent from God through Christ alone, Paul maintains his focus on that identity at the end of the letter.<sup>78</sup> He does not introduce, even in modified form, a term from the circumcision mission to the Gentiles, thereby taking over the name of Israel for those who are in Christ. Such an identification of Israel with the church would claim a

<sup>77</sup> ‘It is true that Paul does not speak about the future salvation of Israel in Galatians, but rather in the Letter to the Romans. Yet already in Gal 6.16, the apostle calls down the mercy of God on his beloved “Israel of God”. In the eyes of the apostle this is more than a pious gesture, as Rom 9–11 confirms... Because in Galatians Paul describes the way of the law—which the Jews still follow—as obsolete, he commits Israel to the “mercy” of God, which has the power to save Israel as well “by grace alone”. Thus the apostle already suggests in Gal 6.16 what he will explicate in Rom 9–11. Paul has not forgotten his people’ (Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 417, my translation). Mussner explicitly refutes the view of Richardson that Gal 6.16 refers to a ‘part’ of Israel, ‘an Israel (of God) within (all) Israel’ (*Israel*, 82), by linking this verse with Rom 11.26: ‘Das Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ von Gal 6.16 ist vielmehr identisch mit dem πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ von Röm 11.26’ (417 n. 61). See also Mussner, *Tractate on the Jews: The Significance of Judaism for the Christian Faith* (trans. L. Swidler; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 32–6.

<sup>78</sup> Gal 3.6–9. See Martyn, *Galatians*, 294–306.

theoretical continuity with God's people, but at the cost of making *Israel* merely a cipher, without reference to Paul's own people who historically claimed that name.<sup>79</sup> To do so would remove any motivation for an ongoing mission directed specifically to the Jews, a mission that Paul names and endorses.<sup>80</sup>

But there is such a mission named and assumed in Galatians. And so, as he draws his polemical letter to a close, Paul pronounces peace on all those who remain faithful to his vision of the gospel, which makes a new creation in which the distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision no longer matters. But then, precisely *because* the undoing of that distinction thoroughly shuts the door on Jewish privilege and identity markers, thereby calling Israel's destiny into question, he also prays for God's saving mercy on unbelieving Israel: 'And peace be upon as many as walk in line with this rule, and mercy even upon the Israel of God'.<sup>81</sup>

## 6. Mercy and Israel in Paul's Self-Representation

In 1 Cor 7.25, Paul refers to himself as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. In 2 Cor 4.1 he again attributes his own ministry to divine mercy: Διὰ τοῦτο, ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην, καθὼς ἠλεήθημεν, οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν. Paul's use of 'mercy' here is particularly striking, as it follows immediately upon an extended comparison between his own ministry and that of Moses, which in

79 Thus it is not correct to say with Daniel Boyarin that Galatians' 'theory of the Jews is nevertheless one that is inimical to Jewish difference', because 'The Jews as concrete signifier of the fulfilled spiritual signified, the body of Christ, the Church, had simply outlived their usefulness. They stood in the world now only as the sign of something else. They had been allegorized out of real historical existence' (*A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994] 156). The Jews certainly do have a continued historical existence for Paul, and not as a sign of something else. Nonetheless, as Boyarin rightly insists, Paul's Christocentric vision does *potentially* call into question the eschatological persistence of Jewish and Gentile difference.

80 Richardson comments: 'As long as a part of "Israel" is expected to come to repentance, it is unlikely that the name would be appropriated exclusively as a self-designation of the nascent group' (*Israel*, 73). Richardson rightly notes the importance of Paul's expectation of the salvation of Israel; we differ in regards to the extent of that salvation, whether for 'a part' of Israel, or 'all Israel'.

81 For an opposing statement, compare B. Longenecker, 'Defining the Faithful Character of the Covenant Community: Galatians 2.15–21 and Beyond', *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; WUNT 89; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996) 75–97. 'Paul hopes to establish the character of Jesus' faithful life as the identifying mark of all those who, despite their various ethnic origins and identities, make up what he dares to call, ὁ Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ (6.16)—those whose lives of Christ-like service fulfill the intentions of the law' (94). The problem with this interpretation is a failure to take into account the character and proper object of divine *mercy*.

turn explicates the theophany of Exod 34.6–9 (2 Cor 3.7–18).<sup>82</sup> Paul, like Israel in Rom 9.15–16, owes his own calling in grace to an undeserved act of divine mercy, grounded in the character of God as revealed in God's theophany to Moses. In this section, I suggest that the dynamic effect of this mercy is displayed in the retrospective narratives of Galatians 1 and 3, where we may discern a pattern similar to that depicted in Romans 9–11: an initial electing call and/or promise, followed by a period of misguided zeal for the law, which in turn is interrupted by the advent of Christ. According to that pattern, Paul himself was called by grace from his mother's womb (Gal 1.16), but then entered a period of zeal for his ancestral traditions, during which he violently opposed God's own church (Gal 1.13–14). Nonetheless, the God who initially called him did not abandon him; rather, God invaded his life through the apocalypse of Jesus Christ (Gal 1.16). His 'life in Judaism' was a temporary situation that interrupted but did not derail his calling by God. Similarly, Abraham received the gospel promise that ultimately was fulfilled in Abraham's singular seed, Christ (Gal 3.8, 15–22). The intrusion of the Mosaic Law appeared to supplant that promise, but instead it served a temporary purpose of constraining humanity until the coming of faith (Gal 3.17–23). Both Paul's 'former way of life in Judaism' (1.13), and the temporary constraint of the law in the history of the promise (3.23), illustrate the reality of which Paul speaks in Gal 3.22. 'But the scripture confined (συνέκλεισεν) all things under the power of sin, in order that the promise based on the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe'.<sup>83</sup>

Romans 9.4–5 states the beginning and end of this pattern in brief: in the beginning, *to* the Jews belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, and the patriarchs, and ultimately, *from* them is the Christ. Later Paul will reiterate both the initial gifts and call of God, which are irrevocable (11.29), and the promise of the deliverer who will come from Zion (11.26). In the interim, however, the majority of Israel is 'hardened' by God (11.7), seeking 'righteousness based on law' (9.31), having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (10.14), disobedient and contrary (10.21),

82 A comparison of Paul's treatment of the Sinai theophany in 2 Cor 3 and Rom 9 would be fascinating, but beyond the scope of this paper. For discussion of 2 Cor 3.12–4.4 as a *dissimile*, in which Paul's self-distinction from Moses creates undercurrents of likeness, see particularly R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989) 140–3: '[B]y distancing his ministry from Moses, Paul paradoxically appropriates attributes similar to those that he most insistently rejects' (142). We note Paul's implicit comparison of himself to Moses in Rom 9.1, when, like Moses pleading for his people after the golden calf incident (Exod 32.32), he is willing to be cut off from salvation for the sake of his people.

83 For further discussion of this pattern of call, interruption, and fulfillment in Paul's narrative in Galatians, see J. Barclay, 'Paul's Story: Theology as Testimony', *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (ed. Bruce W. Longenecker; Louisville: Westminster John Knox) 133–56; S. Eastman, *Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue*, 25–61.

and thus shut up, along with all humanity, into disobedience (11.32). The parallel between Galatians 3.22 and Rom 11.32 is often noted. What is less noted is that the narrative logic of Galatians 1 and 3 anticipates the logic of Romans 9–11: the gifts and call of God are irrevocable (11.29), but Israel passes through a period of disobedience, ignorance, and unbelief, until the advent of the Deliverer, in order that God's elective purposes may be seen as dependent solely upon divine mercy (Rom 11.32).<sup>84</sup>

These narrative patterns suggest further that Paul sees his own experience as adumbrating the future salvation of Israel. Otfried Hofius has proposed that in Rom 11.26, Paul envisions the salvation of 'all Israel' in terms analogous to his own salvation, by the direct revelation of God's messiah apart from human preaching:

'All Israel' is thus saved in a *different* way than the Gentile Christians and the 'remnant', which already believes in Christ, namely, not through the evangelistic preaching of the church. Instead, 'all Israel' is saved directly by the Kyrios himself. But that means that it is *not* saved without Christ, *not* without the gospel, and *not* without faith in Christ. If, therefore, Israel gets the gospel through a direct encounter with Christ himself, confesses Christ as the Kyrios, and comes to faith in him unto *salvation*, then *Israel comes to faith in the same way as Paul himself!* For Paul was seeking the δικαιοσύνη ἐκ νόμου through strict observance of the Torah and for that reason had responded with a vehement 'no' to the gospel when he met the resurrected and exalted Kyrios and was overcome by him. So it will be with Israel too.<sup>85</sup>

Galatians 1.11–17 fills out the parallels between Paul's call and the ultimate salvation of Israel. Just as God 'apocalypsed' his son to Paul, in the midst of the apostle's misguided zeal for the law, so Christ, the deliverer from Zion, will come on the scene in the midst of Israel's misguided zeal, and 'take away ungodliness' from unbelieving and disobedient Israel.

If there is indeed such a link between Paul's picture of Israel's future salvation, and God's electing activity in his own life, then Paul's own identity as an Israelite (Rom 11.1) is not only a sign of the salvation of all Israel, but an adumbration of *how* that salvation will come to pass.<sup>86</sup> No less than Gal 3.22–23, Rom 11.32

84 1 Tim 1.13 represents a later development of this theme in relationship to Paul's own ministry.

85 Hofius, "All Israel", 37.

86 "Thus Rom 11.1 throws new light on the subject of Israel's salvation above and beyond that provided by the notion of the "remnant" in this verse: "Has God rejected his people? By no means! For *I too* am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin". Paul recognizes and understands himself to be a prototype of the Israel which is closed to the gospel and not abandoned by the electing God' (Hofius, "All Israel", 37). Furthermore, Paul's vision of God's elective purpose as temporarily divisive for the sake of ultimate unity is not theoretical for him. It is his way of making sense of his own experience, in which his calling in Christ has separated him from his fellow Jews.

reflects Paul's own experience.<sup>87</sup> It is important to be precise about what Paul shares particularly with Israel, and what both Paul and Israel share with all humanity. On the one hand, in the final analysis, for both Jews and Gentiles, salvation comes through the bestowal of divine mercy on the ungodly, those imprisoned in disobedience (Rom 11.32). In this sense there is no *Sonderweg* for Israel; rather, Israel shares in the 'ungodliness' of all Adamic humanity (1.18; 4.5), 'handed over' to the destructive powers of sin (1.24, 26, 28), and Israel shares in the merciful redemption of all humanity only through Christ.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, the medium through which this redemption takes hold of both Paul and the majority of Israel differs from the humanly mediated preaching of the Gentile mission. Paul received his gospel by a direct apocalypse of Christ (Gal 1.11–12); and he prays for and anticipates a future direct revelation of Christ to all Israel (Rom 11.26).<sup>89</sup>

In such a scenario, what happens to the mission to the circumcision that Paul mentioned in Galatians? No such mission is named in Romans; Paul speaks only of his own Gentile mission as indirectly a mission to his fellow Jews, through which he will make his fellow Jews 'jealous' and thereby save 'some' (11.14).<sup>90</sup> Just as Paul himself is a gracious token of the salvation of all Israel, so this partial remnant is also a 'down-payment' on the full redemption that God will

87 In Romans 9–11, 'the apostle is not speculating but arguing in a reminiscence of his own experience and that of all Christians' (E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 317). See also Alan Segal, 'Paul's Experience and Romans 9–11', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin, Suppl* (1990) 56–70 (67): 'Paul was not writing an eternal, systematic theology. He was trying to understand the meaning of events in the way that any pious Jew of his day would have done: by consulting scripture and comparing it with his experience'.

88 This view is most in line with Hofius, "All Israel" ', and 'Das Evangelium und Israel: Erwägungen zu Römer 9–11', *Paulusstudien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989) 175–202. Hofius argues that at the parousia, Christ will give the word of faith directly to Israel, resulting in Israel's confession of faith in Christ as the Kyrios ("All Israel", 37). F. Mussner also posits a direct, christological salvation of Israel at the Parousia, without a *prior, requisite*, mass conversion to faith, but he does not hesitate to call this a *Sonderweg* (*Tractate*, 33–34). Neither Hofius nor Mussner is positing a 'two covenant' theory; each grounds the salvation of Israel in Christ alone, on the basis of grace that operates independently of human initiative, and each anticipates Israel's eschatological acclamation of Christ.

89 While Paul leaves open the timing and mode of the advent of the 'deliverer from Zion', the future tense of Rom 11.26 implies that Paul expects this direct revelation to the Jews to happen at the parousia. See the discussion in Jewett, *Romans*, 704; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.578; Käsemann, *Romans*, 314. See further, Hofius, 'Das Evangelium', 189.

90 Contra Käsemann (*Romans*, 306–7), I do not think that the salvation of 'some' Jews, made jealous by Paul's Gentile mission, is 'the apocalyptic dream of a man who tried to do in a decade what two thousand years have not managed to do' (307)—that is, as accomplishing the salvation of all Israel through his own mission.

effect apart from any human mediation.<sup>91</sup> In my view, then, in Romans Paul no longer hopes for Israel's conversion through an on-going mission evangelizing Jews *per se*.<sup>92</sup> Such a mission has already happened, in the global missionary activity through which the word of Christ (διὰ ὧματος Χριστοῦ) has gone out to all people, both Gentile and Jew, to which the Jews have responded with 'disobedience' (10.21). Paul's response to this disastrous state of affairs is not finally to blame his fellow Jews for their unbelief and redefine them out of the people of God, but rather to reaffirm God's sovereignty over unbelief as well as belief (11.7–10), and God's ultimate purpose of redemption precisely at the null point of Israel's history.

Where does Paul find the resources for this hope in the face of disaster? Most obviously, he finds testimony in Israel's scriptures, the very scriptures that were 'written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope' (Rom 15.4 RSV).<sup>93</sup> But he also, as I have suggested here, works out his theology in conversation with his own experience, in which God interrupted his life 'in Judaism' with the apocalypse of Christ.

## 7. Conclusion

I have argued that in both Galatians and Romans, 'Israel' denotes the Jewish people, Paul's kinsfolk according to the flesh. In Gal 6.16, Paul pronounces a benediction of peace on all who will walk in line with the rule of the new creation, in which there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, and a prayer for mercy on unbelieving Israel. When he pens the letter and the prayer, he does so in the knowledge that there is an on-going mission to the circumcision led by Peter and the other leaders of the Jerusalem church. It is quite likely, therefore, that his prayer includes hope for the success of that mission.

When Paul writes Romans, the mission to the Jews has not met with the success for which he hoped. In Romans 9–11, he again prays for his beloved kinsfolk (10.1), and works through the meaning of God's mercy for Israel, as well as for the Gentiles. In so doing, he draws on Israel's scripture, and he also draws on his own experience, which he earlier narrated in Galatians in parallel with the history of God's promise to Abraham. That history demonstrates a pattern encompassed by God's overarching purposes, beginning with a divine call, interrupted by

91 See Meyer, 'Romans', 203: 'The part is surety for the whole: the remnant, for the indivisible whole of Israel; the Jew Paul for his "flesh"; Israel, for God's whole creation'.

92 Hofius, "All Israel", 36; Mussner, *Tractate*, 34; Segal, 'Paul's Experience', 66. Contra Wright, *Climax*, 252–3, and Watson, *Paul*, 337–8.

93 Among many scholarly discussions, see particularly Watson, *Hermeneutics*, 78, and *Paul*, 334: 'As he reflects on his selected scriptural material from Genesis and Exodus, Hosea and Isaiah, Paul discovers a pattern of reversal within the unfolding divine electing action'.

human obduracy under the law, and ultimately fulfilled in Christ. In the midst of this providential pattern, Israel continues to exist in the present tense, distinct from the church, as the object of God's providence, judgment, and mercy. As such, in Gal 6.16 Israel is a sign of God's commitment to history, to flesh and blood people, beyond as well as within the confines of the church. Therefore, 'the Jew remains until the end of times a witness to the concreteness of salvation history as well as to the impenetrability of the divine salvific leading'.<sup>94</sup> And just as in Paul's own life, that divine salvific leading will display God's rectification of the ungodly, without prerequisites, in the very midst of human unbelief.<sup>95</sup> Therefore in Romans 9–11, the salvation of disobedient Israel becomes, along with the salvation of disobedient Gentiles, a sign of God's mercy: 'The God who acts soteriologically is always the Creator out of nothing. He always accomplishes the resurrection of the dead. He always works with what is by human judgment unserviceable material (1 Cor 1.18–31; 2 Cor 3.5f.), namely, the ungodly'.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Mussner, *Tractate*, 212.

<sup>95</sup> Hofius, "'All Israel'", 37; Meyer, 'Romans', 203–4; Mussner, *Tractate*, 34. It is *not* the case that 'all [Israel] needs to do is relinquish her frantic grip on the Torah' (Wright, *Climax*, 248). Such relinquishment is precisely what Israel is not able to do, nor did Paul himself fulfill such a precondition prior to God's apocalypse of Christ in his own life.

<sup>96</sup> Käsemann, *Romans*, 317.