

THE IDENTITY OF THE ἸΣΡΑΗΛ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ (ISRAEL OF GOD) IN GALATIANS 6:16

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Introduction

Who is the “Israel of God” in Gal. 6:16? Entire theological systems divide over the interpretation of this passage, which has an important bearing on the question of the relationship between Israel and the church. Yet, rather than being viewed through a pre-existing systematic-theological grid, Paul’s puzzling reference to the “Israel of God” in Gal. 6:16 ought to be studied first and foremost in the context of the entire epistle and especially in light of Paul’s anti-Judaizing polemic. Even this polemic, moreover, should be seen in the larger framework of the cross work of Christ and its implications for the new covenant community.¹ J. D. G. Dunn, in his important work *The Partings of the Ways*, sketches these larger issues well:

Another inescapable question which lies at the heart of Christian self-understanding as a result of its origins is: *Who are the people of God?* How stands now the axiom of Israel’s election? So long as Christianity and Judaism were still part of an unbroken, continuous spectrum, it was not so much of a problem. It was possible to speak and think of a renewed or expanded Israel in continuity with the old But with the final parting of the ways the question becomes more pressing and unavoidable as such. Who are the people of God? All Jews? Or only those Jews who have become Christians = the remnant = eschatological Judaism? Or Gentiles as well? What about the great bulk of the Jewish people who have not believed in Jesus as Messiah and still show no signs of doing so? And has Christianity taken over from Israel, the “new Israel” superceding the old?²

Traditionally, Gal. 6:16 has been interpreted as affirming that the church replaces Israel as God’s new covenant community, the true spiritual “Israel.”³ As W. D. Davies observes, however, “If this

¹The major contours of this article were in place prior to the publication of Greg Beale’s important article, “Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6,16b,” *Bib* 80 (1999): 204–23. Beale’s primary purpose is to establish Is. 54:10 with its “new creation” context as the most plausible background for Gal. 6:16 (in both cases, “mercy” and “peace” are collocated). While the approach of the present study is more rhetorical and contextual, Beale’s argument supplements our own conclusion regarding the identity of the “Israel of God.”

²Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), 248; cf. also the excellent article by W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of Israel,” *NTS* 24 (1977): 4–39 from whom Dunn seems to glean many of his insights, including the term “parting of the ways” for the title of his book (cf. *ibid.*, 10). Davies locates Paul’s major concern in Galatians “with establishing who constitute the true people of God” (*ibid.*).

³Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990), 298, referring to Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 11.5; John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*; N. A. Dahl, “Der Name Israel: Zur Auslegung von Gal 6,16,” *Judaica* 6 (1950): 161–70; Ulrich Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständnis bei Paulus* (Munich: Kaiser, 1968), 270, n. 11.

proposal were correct one would have expected to find support for it in Rom. ix–xi where Paul extensively deals with ‘Israel.’⁴ The Jewish-Christian antagonism that developed during the crystallization period of the church in the first few centuries A.D. doubtless influenced this interpretation. Paul was read as teaching a “replacement theology” where the New Testament church took the place of Old Testament Israel in God’s plan for His covenant people.

Moreover, if Galatians is the first epistle Paul wrote, the question of the development of Paul’s views on the relationship between Israel and the church arises as well.⁵ How can his statements in Gal. 6:16 and 1 Thess. 2:13–16, which seem to indicate a rather negative view of the Jewish people, be reconciled with Paul’s much more positive views expressed in Romans 9–11? Do different polemical contexts adequately account for different emphases within Pauline theology? Or is there a development in Paul’s thought? And if there is a development, are Paul’s later writings consistent with his earlier ones or do they, at times, actually contradict them?⁶

The present study will set forth the following theses. First, the tension between Gal. 6:16 and Romans 9–11 is real but not irresolvable. Second, Gal. 6:16 is part of the epistle’s summary statement in Gal. 6:12–16⁷ and rests on Paul’s strong anti-Judaizing (not anti-Jewish) polemic throughout the entire letter. Third, the “Israel of God” are all believers regardless of their ethnic provenance who follow Paul’s “new rule” of a Spirit-led life by faith in the crucified Christ. It will be argued that Gal. 6:16 does not refer to (literal) ethnic Israel for the following reasons. Paul’s sustained anti-Judaizing polemic renders a sudden shift in his argument in Gal. 6:16b (e.g., in form of pronouncing a blessing on literal Israel) implausible. Moreover, a Romans 9–11-style salvation-historical treatment of the relationship between Israel and the church is absent in Galatians. In Galatians, the issue is not the place of Israel and the church in salvation history, but the proper “rule of conduct” for believers. Judaism with its insistence on keeping circumcision and the Mosaic Law cannot—and must not—be used to limit Christian freedom. Faith in Christ and a life in the Spirit, not keeping of the Law, are to be the distinguishing characteristics of believers. Believing in Christ, therefore, transcends other distinctions of gender, race, or status (cf. Gal. 3:28).

⁴Cf. W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of Israel,” 10–11, n. 2.

⁵This study assumes the correctness of the South Galatian theory, with the corollary assumption that the epistle was written either after Paul’s first missionary journey (A.D. 49) or early during his second missionary journey (c. A.D. 49–50). Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, lvii–c; Donald Guthrie, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 465–81. Thus Galatians will be seen as Paul’s first written expression of his understanding of the Jewish-Gentile relationship.

⁶On the issue of development in Paul’s thought, cf. especially Hans-Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); and U. Schnelle, *Wandlungen im paulinischen Denken* (SBS 137; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989). Betz has no problems postulating that Paul changed his mind to the point of actually contradicting some of his earlier positions. Schnelle traces the development of Paul’s thought in eschatology, the Law, and Israel (on Israel, Schnelle discusses 1 Thess. 2:14–16, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans). He seeks to strike a balance between continuity and development in Paul’s thought. For a treatment that accounts for different emphases in Paul’s writings by different polemical contexts, cf. Andreas Lindemann, “Paulus und die korinthische Eschatologie. Zur These von einer ‘Entwicklung’ im paulinischen Denken,” *NTS* 37 (1991): 373–99. See now also Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Vielfalt und Einheit des Neuen Testaments,” in *Das Studium des Neuen Testaments. Band 2: Spezialprobleme* (ed. Heinz-Werner Neudorfer and Eckhard J. Schnabel; Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2000), 233–65, esp. 245–47, and the English abridgment in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, forthcoming).

⁷See Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “Gal. 6:11–18: A Hermeneutical Key to the Galatian Letter,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 90–107; idem, “The Pauline Letter Closings: Analysis and Hermeneutical Significance,” *BBR* 5 (1995): 177–98, esp. 194–97. Frank J. Matera, “The Culmination of Paul’s Argument to the Galatians: Gal 5,1–6,17,” *JSNT* 32 (1988): 79–91 contends that the last two chapters of Galatians culminate Paul’s argument.

Our interpretation of Gal. 6:16 will proceed as follows. First, we will briefly review two important issues: the identity of Paul's opponents, and the issue at stake in Galatia. Then we will consider the structure of the epistle and seek to identify how Gal. 6:16 functions in the framework of the letter as a whole. When interpreting the passage, we will first consider syntactical and then theological issues. We will conclude with some biblical-theological observations.

The Setting and Structure of the Epistle

A thorough analysis of the setting and structure of Galatians confirms that it is unlikely that the "Israel of God" of Gal. 6:16 is to be identified with (parts of) ethnic Israel. Paul's Galatian opponents and the issue at stake in Galatia call forth a very strong response by the apostle. He consistently labels circumcision as slavery and employs "rule" statements to distance himself from his adversaries. Paul's own focus is on a new creation brought about by Christ's cross, faith exercised in love, and a life lived by the Spirit. Thus, if Paul is teaching a "replacement theology" at all, it is not so much concerned with the church replacing Israel, as of the cross replacing circumcision and of the Spirit replacing the Law as the energizing and organizing principles of the Christian faith.

The Identity of Paul's Opponents in Galatia

Traditionally, Paul's antagonists have been identified as Jewish Christians who sought to "Judaize" the Gentile Christians in Galatia, arguing for the continuing significance of the Mosaic Law in the Christian life (cf. especially Gal. 2:13–15).⁸ A close reading of the text confirms this description.

Paul views his opponents as counteracting the very gospel of Christ (τινές εισιν οἱ ταρασσόντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ: "Those who disturb you and want to distort the gospel of Christ," 1:7).⁹ He portrays their mission as one of seeking to lead the Galatians from their liberty in Christ back into slavery (ψευδαδέλθους οἵτινες παρεισήλθον κατασκοπήσαι τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν ἣν ἔχομεν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσουσιν: "False brothers who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus in order to bring us into bondage," 2:4). The apostle traces his opponents' origin to Jerusalem, and he characterizes them as having a high reputation (τῶν δοκούντων εἶναι τι . . . οἱ δοκούντες: "Those who were of high reputation," 2:6). Their theology Paul characterizes as bound up with the Law (Ὅσοι . . . ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εισίν: "As many as are from the works of the Law," 3:10; οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε: "Those who want to be justified by the Law," 5:4).

The central issue in Galatia is circumcision (Ὁφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς: "Would that those who are troubling you even mutilate themselves," 5:12; Ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπήσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι: "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised," 6:12; οὐδὲ . . . οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν, ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχῶνται: "Those who are circumcised do not keep the Law themselves but they want you to be circumcised, in order that they may boast in your flesh," 6:13).

Paul contrasts his opponents with the apostolic circle (οἱ δοκούντες στῦλοι εἶναι, "Those reputed to be pillars," 2:9). Those who live by Paul's rule are characterized by faith (as Abraham was; οἱ ἐκ πίστεως . . . υἱοὶ εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ: "Those of faith are sons of Abraham," 3:7; οἱ ἐκ

⁸But cf. Lloyd Gaston, "Paul and the Torah," in *Anti-semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (ed. A. T. Davies; New York: Paulist, 1979), 62, who argues that Paul so identified with his readers that the first person plural in Galatians actually means "we Gentiles," a position that Longenecker, *Galatians*, 121, calls "impossible to maintain" (cf. Longenecker's arguments on p. 164). Cf. also Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987).

⁹Note that all translations of Scripture in this paper are the author's.

πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ: “Those of faith are blessed together with believing Abraham,” 3:9). They have been “baptized into Christ” (ὅσοι . . . εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, 3:27), and “have crucified the flesh” (οἱ . . . τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν, 5:24). They are “spiritual” (οἱ πνευματικοί, 6:1). As many as will conduct themselves by Paul’s rule (that is, that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision amounts to anything, but a new creation; cf. 6:15–16: ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν), are part of this group. Finally, as will be argued in this paper, these believers are the “Israel of God” (6:16).

Paul contends that the members of the “circumcision party” (cf. 2:12) themselves do not keep the Law (cf. 4:21; 5:3; 6:13). Christians, on the other hand, are to fulfill “the Law of Christ” (cf. 6:2). Paul directly addresses the Galatian Gentile Christians by asserting that the Judaizers want them to be circumcised in order that they might “boast in your flesh” (6:13; on “boasting,” cf. 6:3–4). This charge seems to point to the gratification derived by the Judaizers from converting these Gentile believers to their own theological practices and convictions. Paul argues that while he himself has the Galatian Gentile believers’ best interests at heart, these Judaizers care more about their own views and about pressuring others to conform to them.

In light of these characterizations, there seems to be no good reason to question the traditional identification of Paul’s Galatian opponents with Judaizers who advocated adherence to the Mosaic Law, and especially circumcision, for Gentile Christians.¹⁰ Interestingly, Paul charges that this “circumcision party” sought to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ by continuing to adhere to the Mosaic Law (cf. 6:17). In an environment where Judaism was a *religio licita* while Christians did not enjoy similar protection from Roman persecution, this charge is both credible and serious.

The Issue at Stake in Galatia: Old and New Rules of Conduct

Now that Paul’s opponents have been identified as Jewish Christians who argued for the continuing significance of the Mosaic Law (and especially circumcision) in the Christian life, we may look more closely at the issue at stake in Galatia.¹¹ A thorough reading of the entire epistle reveals that every but the opening section includes a statement of a “rule” (Gal. 3:28; 5:6; 6:15),¹² in keeping with the sections’ major theme (that is, slavery in the first and circumcision in the second and third sections).¹³ It can further be observed that the issue of circumcision is closely

¹⁰Cf. for a helpful survey W. Russell, “Who Were Paul’s Opponents in Galatia?” *BibSac* 147/587 (1990): 329–50. The author lists as alternative views on Paul’s opponents in Galatia that they were both Judaizers and libertine pneumatic, or gnostic/syncretistic Jewish Christians, and argues for the traditional view. Cf. Guthrie, *Introduction*, 482–85.

¹¹The emphasis of this study lies in a fresh evaluation of Galatians from the text itself. For a treatment of Galatians as dealing with the problem of “covenantal nomism” (E. P. Sanders’s term), cf. James D. G. Dunn, “The Theology of Galatians,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* (ed. David J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 1–16.

¹²The semantic field of rules and conduct in Galatians consists of the following terms (in brackets the frequencies of occurrence in Galatians): κανών (once); νόμος (32 times; found in 2:16–6:2); ἀναστροφή (once); Ἰουδαϊσμός, Ἰουδαίος, ἰουδαῖζω, Ἰουδαῖκος (8 times; only in 1:13–14, 2:13–15, and 3:28); περιπατέω (once); στοιχέω, στοιχείον, συστοιχέω (5 times; only in chaps. 4–6); and παράδοσις (once).

¹³From the perspective of formal criteria for isolating those three “rule” statements, one notes that all three formulations are generally worded, using the phraseology of “neither . . . nor” Structurally, these “rules” function climactically in their respective contexts in the letter. They build upon one another in the overall argument of Galatians (cf. especially the similar wording of 5:6 and 6:15), and are introduced by the conjunction “for” (γάρ) which links these “rules” with their preceding contexts (cf. 3:27; 5:6; 6:15).

related to the imagery of slavery. Generally, circumcision is presented in antithesis to the cross of Christ.¹⁴ The rhetorical pattern can be laid out as follows.¹⁵

1. *Narratio*: Paul has followed the rule (1:10–2:14)

- a. Paul is “a slave of Christ” (Χριστοῦ δοῦλος, 1:10)
- b. Paul claims that “not even Titus . . . was compelled to be circumcised” (οὐδὲ Τίτος . . . ἠναγκάσθη περιτμηθῆναι, 2:3)
- c. Paul claims that he was “entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision just as Peter of the circumcision” (πεπίστευμαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς ἀκροβυστίας καθὼς Πέτρος τῆς περιτομῆς, 2:7; cf. 2:8–9, 12)

2. *Probatio*: Paul’s rule is to be followed, or slavery results (3:1–4:31)

- a. The former prison of sin and the Law (3:1–4:1)
 - i. “Scripture has shut up all under sin” (συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφὴ τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν, 3:22)
 - ii. “Kept in custody under the Law, being shut up” (ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι, 3:23)
Rule: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female” (Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληγ, οὐκ ἔστι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔστι ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυ, 3:28)
 - iii. “As long as the heir is a child, he is no better than a slave” (κληρονόμος νήπιός . . . οὐδὲν διαφέρει δούλου, 4:1)
- b. The former prison of the world’s principles (4:2–20)
 - i. “Enslaved by the principles of the world” (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι, 4:3)
 - ii. “So that you are no longer a slave but a son” (ὥστε οὐκέτι εἶ δοῦλος ἀλλὰ υἱός, 4:7)
 - iii. “Then when you did not know God you were slaves” (τότε μὲν οὐκ εἰδότες θεὸν ἐδουλεύσατε, 4:8)
 - iv. “Turn to the weak and worthless principles to be enslaved” (ἐπιστρέφετε . . . ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα . . . δουλεύειν, 4:9)
- c. The present prison of Judaism (4:21–5:1)
 - i. “From Mount Sinai bearing children unto slavery” (ἀπὸ ὄρους Χινᾶ εἰς δουλείαν γεννώσα, 4:24)
 - ii. “Corresponds to the present Jerusalem . . . she is in slavery with her children” (συστοιχεῖ . . . τῇ νῦν Ἱερουσαλήμ, δουλεύει . . . μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς, 4:25)
 - iii. “Do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery” (μὴ πάλιν ζυγῶ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε, 5:1)

3. *Paraenesis*: Paul’s rule is to be followed, not circumcision (5:2–6:10)

- a. The futility of circumcision (5:2–12)
 - i. “If you are circumcised, Christ was of no benefit to you” (ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε, Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει, 5:2)

¹⁴The semantic fields of circumcision, slavery, and the cross include the following terms: περιτομή, περιτέμνω, ἀκροβυστία (16 times), ἐνκόπτω, ἀποκόπτω (once each in 5:7, 12); δούλος, δουλεία, δουλεύω, δούλω, καταδουλώ (12 times; 8 times in 4:1–5:1); συγκλείω, φρουρέω (3 times; 3:22–23); σταυρός, σταυρώ (6 times). Of further interest are the terms freedom and free (ἐλεύθερος, ἐλευθερία), which occur in 2:4; 3:28; 4:22–31 (5 times); 5:1, 13.

¹⁵The use of rhetorical categories does not necessarily imply that Paul consciously followed Graeco-Roman rules of rhetoric. The flow of argument and major divisions stand regardless of the rhetorical categories employed.

- ii. “Every circumcised man is obliged to keep the whole Law” (παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ . . . ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι, 5:3)
Rule: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision is anything nor uncircumcision but faith working through love” (ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη, 5:6)
- iii. “Who cut you in from obeying the truth?” (τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοψεν [τῆ] ἀληθεία μὴ πείθεσθαι; 5:7)
- iv. “If I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the offense of the cross would be abolished” (εἰ περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω, τί ἔτι διώκομαι; ἄρα κατήργηται τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ; 5:11)
- v. “Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves” (Ὁφελον καὶ ἀποκόπονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς, 5:12)
- b. *Paraenesis* (5:13–6:10)
 - i. “Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be slaves to one another” (μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῆ σαρκί, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις, 5:13)
 - ii. “Those of Christ have crucified the flesh with [its] passions and desires” (τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις, 5:24)

4. *Conclusio*: Paul’s blessing on all who follow his rule (6:11–18)

- a. “Those who want to make a good showing in the flesh, those urging you to be circumcised” (ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι, 6:12)
- b. “For neither do those circumcised themselves keep the law, but they want you to be circumcised to boast in your flesh” (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον θυλάσσουσιν ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρα σαρκί καυχῶνται, 6:13)
Rule: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation” (οὔτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἐστὶν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις, 6:15)
- c. “And those who walk by this rule, peace upon them and mercy, even upon the Israel of God” (καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ, 6:16)

The issue of conformity vs. nonconformity to Paul’s “rule” is a significant part of the argument of the letter. Nonconformity results in slavery; conformity results in the “slavery” of loving one another. Paul’s rule is closely tied to the futility of circumcision in the age of the “new creation” Christ ushered in.¹⁶ The rule of Gal. 6:16 is resting on the strong anti-Judaizing polemic of the whole letter. An identification of the “Israel of God” with parts or all of literal, physical, ethnic Israel seems therefore unlikely.

In the *narratio*, Paul focuses on his former life in Judaism: Ἠκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ (“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism,” 1:13). The apostle describes his progress (καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας: “And I advanced in Judaism above many countrymen,” 1:14) and zeal (ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων: “Being zealous for the traditions of my fathers,” 1:14).

Paul then narrates his confrontation with Peter who had been swayed by Judaizers: συνυπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὥστε καὶ Βαρναβᾶς συναπήχθη (“The remaining Jews joined him in hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away,” 2:13). Paul’s question to Peter

¹⁶The maxim, “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but a new creation,” points to the eschatological component of Paul’s gospel that he saw introduced by the cross of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul collates the expression “new creation” with the cosmic reconciliation effected by Christ on the cross, the proclamation of which constitutes his ministry. The cross of Christ, and the gospel of reconciliation, inaugurated a “new rule,” that is, that in Christ all other distinctions with regard to status before God had been rendered immaterial (cf. Gal. 3:28) except that one be “in Christ.”

sets up the issue from an autobiographical angle: εἰ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων ἐθνικῶς καὶ οὐχὶ Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῆς, πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις ἰουδαίειν; (“If you, being a Jew ethnically, do not live like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” 2:14).

Toward the end of the *narratio*, and reaching into the *probatio*, Paul begins to address an inadequate rule for conduct, “works of the Law” (2:15–3:14). He argues that “we who are by nature Jews and not sinners from the Gentiles know that a man is not justified by works of the Law but by faith in Christ Jesus . . . and not by works of the Law, for by works of the Law no one will be justified” (ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἀμαρτωλοὶ εἰδότες ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ . . . καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ; 2:15–16).

In keeping with the character of the *narratio*, Paul first gives his own personal example: ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω (“For I died through the Law to the Law, in order that I might live to God,” 2:19). Then he adds three powerful arguments: First, “if righteousness is through the Law, Christ died in vain” (εἰ γὰρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη, ἄρα Χριστὸς δωρεάν ἀπέθανεν, 2:21); second, he asks, “Did you receive the Spirit from works of the Law?” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε, 3:2); third, he queries, “The one who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith?” (ὁ . . . ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως; 3:5).

What follows is at the heart of Paul’s argumentation in Galatians, as is underscored by Paul’s prolific use of Old Testament texts: “For those who are from works of the Law are under a curse . . . by the Law no one is justified before God . . . but the Law is not from faith, but . . . Christ bought us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us” (Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν . . . γεγραμμένοι ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά. ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ . . . ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ . . . Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα, 3:10–13). Most importantly, Paul summarizes his point as follows: “That in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (3:14).

In the second section of the *probatio*, Paul argues for a new perspective on the Law, that is, one that views it in relation to the Abrahamic promise (3:15–29). Paul sets up the issue by arguing that the Law does not void the promise (νόμος οὐκ . . . καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, 3:17), and that, if inheritance is from the Law, it is no longer from the promise (εἰ . . . ἐκ νόμου ἢ κληρονομία, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας, 3:18).

In characteristic diatribal fashion, Paul then anticipates two important objections: first, Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; (“Why therefore the Law?” 3:19); second, ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν; (“Is therefore the Law against the promises?” 3:21). Paul’s answer to the second question is, “May it never be!,” μὴ γένοιτο! His answer to the first question is twofold: on one hand, the Law is not able to give life (εἰ . . . νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιῆσαι, ὄντως ἐκ νόμου ἂν ἦ ἡ δικαιοσύνη, 3:21); on the other hand, the Law had a preparatory function (Πρὸ τοῦ . . . ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι . . . ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν: “But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, so that the Law became our tutor unto Christ,” 3:23–24). The apostle concludes this subsection by enunciating his rule at the apex of the whole epistle: οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνας, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος . . . (“There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, . . .” 3:28). As at the end of the previous subsection in 3:14, Paul summarizes his point: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Now Paul turns to the Gentile believers in Galatia, directing the third section of the *probatio* as well as the *paraenesis* to them. He reminds the believers that they were formerly enslaved to the principles of the world (ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι, 4:3). Now that Christ has come, “Born by a woman, born under the Law, in order that he might redeem those under the Law, in order that we might receive sonship” (4:4–5), “Do you want to be slaves again to the weak and poor principles?” (ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα . . . ἄνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε, 4:9). Paul’s rhetorical question as to whether those who want to be under the law actually obey

the law (οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε, 4:21; cf. 6:13), launches him into an allegory of the two covenants by which he seeks to show that contemporary Judaism is enslaved.

Finally, Paul's *paraenesis* starts from a severe condemnation of the Law as a totally inadequate rule for Christian conduct: every circumcised man is obliged to keep the whole Law, which, as has just been argued, is impossible (παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ . . . ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι, 5:3). The apostle has reserved some of his harshest language for those who advocate keeping of the Mosaic Law as an alternative to a lifestyle characterized by faith in Christ: "You are severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by Law, you have fallen from grace" (κατηργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ, οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξέπεσατε, 5:4).

After this condemnation of the Law as an adequate rule for Christian conduct, Paul moves to a positive form of *paraenesis*. He begins by affirming the centrality of love: "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word," that is, love (ὁ γὰρ πᾶς νόμος ἐν ἐνὶ λόγῳ πεπλήρωται, 5:14). This is the kind of "slavery" he desires for the Galatian Christians (cf. 5:13). The following five statements all center on the Spirit as the energizing principle of Christian conduct:

- πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε ("Walk by the Spirit," 5:16).
- εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμον ("But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law," 5:18).
- κατὰ τῶν ποιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος ("Against such things [i.e., the fruit of the Spirit] there is no Law," 5:23).
- Εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματι, πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν ("If we live by the Spirit, let us also conduct ourselves by the Spirit," 5:25)
- οἱ πνευματικοί . . . ἀλλήλων τὰ βάρη βαστάζετε καὶ οὕτως ἀναπληρώσετε τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ ("You who are spiritual . . . bear each other's burdens and thus fulfill the Law of Christ," 6:1–2).

Paul closes his letter with a statement surveying the crucial issues at stake in Galatia. The antithesis between circumcision and the cross constitutes the conceptual framework of this section (ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί . . . ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι . . . ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται: "Those who want to make a good showing in the flesh compel you to be circumcised, so that they might not be persecuted for the cross of Christ," 6:12).

Paul contrasts himself deliberately with those advocating circumcision in terms of the cross (οὐδὲ . . . οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον θυλάσσουσιν, ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρα σαρκί: "Those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh," 6:13; ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο καυχᾶσθαι εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' οὗ ἐμοὶ κόσμος ἐσταύρωται καγὼ κόσμῳ: "But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world," 6:14).

In effect, Paul denounces the Law as a proper rule for Christian conduct. He argues that the gospel is centered on the cross of Christ; and he postulates the necessity of the Spirit for living the Christian life. That is the context in which Paul's summarizing "rule" statement and benediction in Gal. 6:16 should be understood. After having established the basic flow of the epistle as a whole, one may now turn to the interpretation of Gal. 6:16.

Interpretation of Galatians 6:16

Who, then, are the referents of the expression "Israel of God" in Gal. 6:16? The following solutions have been proposed: First, the "Israel of God" is used figuratively for "those who will follow this rule," that is, the members of the "new creation" referred to in 6:15, believers regardless of their Jewish or Gentile provenance, be it the church at large or in Galatia (Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, Theodoret; Luther, Calvin; Beale, Dahl, D. Guthrie, Lietzmann, Luz,

Longenecker, Ray, Ridderbos, Stott, and many covenant theologians);¹⁷ second, “Israel of God” is used literally, referring to ethnic Jews, that is, either to (a) a believing Jewish remnant within the broader Christian church (Burton, Davies, Richardson, Betz; Walvoord, S. L. Johnson, and other dispensationalists); (b) an eschatological Israel that will be saved at Christ’s return (i.e. the “all Israel” of Rom. 11:26; Mussner, Bruce); or (c) non-judaizing Jewish Christians in Galatia (Schrenk, Robinson).¹⁸

Syntactical Issues

The major syntactical difficulty that has an important bearing on the interpretation of Gal. 6:16 is related to Paul’s use of the conjunction *καί* at the end of the verse.¹⁹ Are we to read, “And those who will walk by this rule, peace upon them and grace, even upon the Israel of God,” taking the conjunction *καί* to be explicative and exegetical of “those who will walk by this rule”? In this case, the two groups would be identical.

Is the conjunction copulative or ascensive, so that the second group is a larger or more general group than the first? In that case, “Israel of God” may be interpreted as Christians everywhere (or in general) while “those who follow the rule” would be Christians in Galatia.²⁰

Or is *καί* to be translated with “also,” adding a different category (connective use)? This rendering would distinguish the two groups referred to in Gal. 6:16, so that the first group would be Gentile and the second group Jewish believers. In support of the last option, Richardson has proposed a change in punctuation so that the passage would be read as conveying Paul’s pronouncement of two separate blessings, that is, “peace” to “those who will walk by this rule” on one hand, and “mercy” to “the Israel of God.”²¹

Essentially, the first two options represent the view that “the Israel of God” refers to the church, while the third alternative favors a distinction between Gentile and Jewish believers. Since grammars generally do not distinguish between the first and the second category, they will be treated as one and the same for the purposes of the present analysis. It may be best to treat the second option as a further specification or subcategory of the first.

A survey of the various uses of *καί* in the New Testament and of Greek grammars yields Acts

¹⁷A variation of this interpretation is Weima, “Pauline Letter Closings,” 195, concludes that “the Israel of God” are “those Gentile Christians in Galatia who walk according to Paul’s rule.”

¹⁸Cf. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost* (ed. Stan Toussaint and Charles Dyer; Chicago: Moody, 1986), 183–94, for a survey of interpretive options and respective commentators. See also Schrenk, “Israel Gottes,” 94, n. 29, where the author, among others, names the following commentators as following his line of interpretation: Pelagius, Beza, Grotius, Bengel, B. Weiss, Hofmann, Zahn, Schlatter, Bousset, and Burton.

¹⁹Cf. Gottlob Schrenk, “Was bedeutet das ‘Israel Gottes’?” *Judaica* 5 (1949): 84–85 for a clear presentation of the three alternative renderings of this construction. Note also that it may be more correct to extend the identification of the syntactical difficulty in Gal. 6:16 to the use of both *καί*s in the construction *εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ*. Regarding the use of the first *καί* in this construction, see the comments at the end of this section below.

²⁰E.g. Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina 9; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 232.

²¹For the latter view, cf. P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (SNTSMS 10; Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 74–84, following E. de W. Burton, *Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), a work Richardson terms “one of the best commentaries ever written” (83, n. 1). Richardson’s repunctuation would make the sentence read as follows: . . . *εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς, καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ*. For the former view, cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 296–98.

5:21 as the closest syntactical parallel to Gal. 6:16.²² The passage reads, συνεκάλεσαν τὸ συνέδριον καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν (“They assembled the Sanhedrin, that is, the *gerousia*”). The conjunction καὶ seems to be used exegetically to identify a given group by an equivalent expression for the same body.²³

Similarly, in Gal. 6:16, with ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχίσουσιν emphatically at the beginning of the sentence, Paul pronounces a blessing, “Peace upon them and mercy,” εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος, only to add a further identification of the recipients of this blessing, “Even upon the Israel of God,” καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ. We opt for an ascensive understanding of the conjunction in Gal. 6:16, with the first group referring to Christians in Galatia, and the second group broadening the reference to Christians in general.²⁴

Another relevant issue is the use of the earlier καὶ in Gal. 6:16 between εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.²⁵ Is the conjunction used to connect “peace and mercy,” or does it introduce a reference to, and a blessing upon, a different group from the one mentioned earlier in the clause? This is a difficult question indeed. A search of the New Testament for parallel syntactical constructions (that is, a noun followed by a preposition governing a pronoun followed by καὶ plus another noun), yields only one other passage, Luke 3:22, which reads: καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον σωματικῶς εἶδει ὡς περιστερὰν ἐπ’ αὐτόν, καὶ φωνὴν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ γενέσθαι (“And the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven”).

While the parallel is not very close, the passage is nevertheless instructive. One notes that the verse has two different infinitives complement the respective objects. Thus the conjunction καὶ

²²Cf. Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (Rome: PBI, 1963), 153–54, who lists Acts 5:21 under the “neutral” use of simple καὶ to be translated “that is.” Zerwick adds the qualifying remark, “unless πᾶσα ἡ γερουσία is a different body from the sanhedrin?” As Schürer explains, however, in New Testament times “[i]n place of συνέδριον, expressions πρεσβυτέριον and γερουσία (Acts 5:21) are also used.” Cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol. II. (rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 206. Schürer adds, “A striking feature of the last-mentioned passage (Acts 5:21) is the formula τὸ συνέδριον καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ. As there can be no question as to the identity of the two concepts συνέδριον and γερουσία, only two possibilities exist: either καὶ is to be taken as explanatory, or it must be assumed that the author wrongly held that the Sanhedrin was of a less comprehensive character than the *Gerousia* . . . The wording would suggest the latter.” Schürer’s identification of the two bodies is significant and relevant for the interpretation of the similar construction in Gal. 6:16. His adoption of the latter alternative, however, cannot be maintained. Apart from his failure to elaborate on his rationale for rejecting the former option, Schürer (or one of the editors) charges the biblical author—in this case, Luke—with error, which is especially dubious as Luke is particularly concerned with historical accuracy.

²³Zerwick cites Gal. 6:16 as the other example for an exegetical use of καὶ besides Acts 5:21. He also cites Jn. 4:10 as a possible instance of this use. Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, Vol. III of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (ed. James Hope Moulton; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 335, gives the following references for an exegetical use of καὶ (that is, “even”): Mk. 1:19; Lk. 3:18; Jn. 1:16; 20:30; Acts 22:25; Rom. 1:5; 13:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 6:6–8; Eph. 2:8. BDF 229 cite Mk. 1:19; 1 Cor. 2:2; 3:5; 6:6,8; 15:38, etc. and refer to the discussion by G. Schrenk, “Israel Gottes,” 85, n. 9, where he quotes 1 Cor. 8:12; 12:27–28; 14:27; 15:38; and 2 Cor. 5:25. Schrenk argues that the movement is always from the general to the particular. However, his examples are not very close parallels to Gal. 6:16. More importantly, he fails to consider Acts 5:12, the closest parallel (see discussion above).

²⁴Cf. 1 Cor. 1:2 where a similar movement from the local congregation to a universal reference is found: “To the church of God which is at Corinth . . . together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .”

²⁵It is interesting to note that the use of the earlier καὶ in Gal. 6:16 is hardly ever given serious consideration in the articles and commentaries perused for this study. This is all the more surprising since the use of this conjunction is of great importance for the understanding of the whole phrase.

connects two different things John the Baptist is said to have seen. In Gal. 6:16 there is no such distinction through two separate verb forms. Rather, the appropriate form of the verb “to be” needs to be supplied in both cases. Thus it seems more likely that in Gal. 6:16 the conjunction καί links the two expressions “peace . . . and mercy” than that it introduces a new clause.

On balance, the conjunction καί in Gal. 6:16 should therefore probably be seen as linking “peace and mercy” as the joint blessing of the group which has been previously mentioned in the verse and which is then exegetically further defined as “the Israel of God.”²⁶ The alternative option requires the conjunction to function somewhat disjunctively as introducing a separate blessing to a different group. In light of the absence of any further contextual indicators pointing to this kind of disjunction (that is, Paul could have used δέ or ἀλλά instead of καί), it seems preferable to reject this reading. However, the syntax of this passage is notoriously difficult, and grammatical arguments by themselves remain less than conclusive and need to be supplemented by larger contextual and theological considerations.

Yet another syntactical peculiarity is the uncommon order of the benediction, “peace and mercy.”²⁷ However, while in letter openings the order “grace, peace, (and mercy)” is almost formulaic, there seems to be greater variety in concluding epistolary formulae.²⁸ Thus it seems precarious to limit Paul, as some seem to do, to a certain order of terms and to deny him the freedom to construct the final benediction in Gal. 6:16 according to his argument in the epistle.

Finally, some commentators interpret Gal. 6:16 in light of Paul’s alleged dependence on the nineteenth benediction where the similar order of blessings and a similar syntactical construction are found (*Shemoneh Esreh*; translation of Palestinian recension: δόση εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τὸν λαόν σου . . . καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν κληρονομίαν σου; Babylonian: δόση εἰρήνην καὶ ἔλεος ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ πάντα Ἰσραὴλ τὸν λαόν σου).²⁹ However, issues of dating deal this conjecture a fatal blow.³⁰ Moreover, even if Paul consciously or subconsciously had patterned his benediction in Gal. 6:16 after the nineteenth benediction, the question of Paul’s theological message in Gal. 6:16 would still remain.

Theological Issues

It is noteworthy that the phrase “Israel of God” is unique to this passage. None of Paul’s other

²⁶See Kermit Titrud, “The Function of *kai* in the Greek New Testament and an Application to 2 Peter,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (ed. David Alan Black; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 255, contends that adverbial καί serves as a “spotlight” and as “an intensifier calling special attention to what follows.” Titrud provides numerous examples of appositional καί in the New Testament.

²⁷Cf. the discussion in Longenecker, *Galatians*, 297–98. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans*, vol. 1 (WBC; Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 20, who provides the following supposed parallel in 2 Macc. 1:1: “The Jewish brethren in Jerusalem and those in the land of Judea, to their Jewish brethren in Egypt. Greeting, and good *peace*. May God do good to you, and may he *remember his covenant* [i.e. be merciful] with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, his faithful servants.” However, the parallel to the construction of the blessing in Gal. 6:16 is rather remote at best.

²⁸Cf. Dahl, “Name Israel,” 164. “Grace, mercy and peace” is only used in 1 Tim. 1:2 and 2 Tim. 1:2 (letter openings). Paul uses the term “mercy” only ten times: Rom. 9:27; 11:31; 15:9; Eph. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:16, 18; Tit. 3:5. “Grace and peace” occurs also in Gal. 1:3.

²⁹Cf. Str-B 4:214; cf. also Davies, “Paul,” 10, n. 2, and Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 79. Richardson calls Gal. 6:16 “an interpreted reflection of the benediction,” which seems to be an exaggerated claim (80).

³⁰Beale, “Peace and Mercy,” 207–8, points out that the A.D. 70–100 recension omits the crucial word “mercy” from the later Babylonian recension’s nineteenth benediction.

writings and the Jewish writings of the Second Temple period use this terminology.³¹ Thus it seems appropriate to assume that the expression was specific to the Galatian context itself. However, it is illegitimate to argue, as Schrenk repeatedly does, that the fact that Paul would put “Israel” and the church in correspondence only here, is an argument against this interpretation.³² One could just as well argue that, according to the criterion of dissimilarity, the interpretation that the church is the “Israel of God” is more likely. It appears that some of these interpreters’ objections against such an interpretation are rooted in their effort to interpret Gal. 6:16 in light of Romans 9–11.³³ Yet the different settings of Galatians and Romans account adequately for the respective emphases in these passages.³⁴

Some speculate that Paul took over the term “Israel of God” from his Judaizing opponents. This hypothesis must also assume that there were different groups within Judaism at that time that were divided among themselves, namely non-messianic Judaism and messianic Judaism, the latter priding itself of being the Israel “of God” over against the former. However, in Galatians the issue is arguably not an inner-Jewish controversy but a conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.³⁵

In any case, similar genitive qualifiers are found in Galatians elsewhere: in 1:13, where reference is made to “the church of God” (τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ), and in 6:2, where Paul refers to “the Law of Christ” (τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ). Thus the reference to “the Israel of God” may well connote a similar use of the genitive, and perhaps a similar reapplication of familiar terminology as in the case of “the Law of Christ.”

The following correspondences can be seen: καινὴ κτίσις “new creation” is related to ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τοῦτῶ στοιχῆσουσιν “as many as walk by this rule” which in turn is related to τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ “the Israel of God.”³⁶ Now that Christ has come, God no longer views people in terms of Jews versus Gentiles.³⁷ The Jews were formerly under the tutelage of the Law—now Christ has fulfilled the Law by becoming the curse set for disobedience (cf. 3:13). The Gentiles formerly served the principles of the world—now Christ has fulfilled the seed promise that was part of the Abrahamic covenant and included “all nations” (cf. 3:14, 29; 4:4).

³¹Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298–99; Beale, “Peace and Mercy,” esp. 209, 220–21. Commentators try in vain to find exact parallels to Paul’s language in Gal. 6:16. Among the passages named are Pss. 125:5, 128:6 which pronounce “peace upon Israel” (LXX: εἰρήνη ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ); similarly, 11QPs^a 133:3; cf. Ez. 3:11: τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ Ἰσραὴλ; Pss. Sol. 4:25; 7:10, 9:11; 11:9 (τοῦ κυρίου τὸ ἔλεος ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ); 13:12; 15:13. Richardson further lists Ezek. 39:25; Am. 5:15; Zech. 1:12–17; Is. 44:23; 49:13, and Jo. 2:13. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Black’s NTC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 344, also cites 11QPs^a 23:11 (“Peace be upon Israel”) and PssSol 17:51 (“May the Lord hasten his mercy upon Israel”).

³²Cf. Schrenk, “Israel Gottes,” 87–88; id., “Der Segenswunsch nach dem Kampfepistel,” *Judaica* 6 (1950): 171.

³³So rightly, Dahl, “Name Israel,” 161; cf. Schrenk’s two essays throughout. Cf. Dahl’s comment that Jewish Christians in Romans 9–11 are referred to not as “Israel,” but as “remnant” (λείμμα) or “election” (ἐκλογή) (162).

³⁴Cf. Dahl, “Name Israel,” 109.

³⁵Contra Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298–99; Betz, *Galatians*, 323.

³⁶On the “new creation” motif, see esp. the writings of Gregory Beale, including “Peace and Mercy,” with several further references.

³⁷Paul’s “non-discriminatory stance” in Galatians (cf. e.g. 3:28) needs to be held in tension with his insistence in Romans 9–11 that the Jews still have a distinctive place in God’s future plans. However, this tension can only be noted here.

Consequently, those who wanted to require Gentiles to conform to old covenant type regulations betrayed a failure to understand the provisional and prophetic nature of the Law. By treating the Law primarily as an ethical code, these proponents had substituted it as an alternative way of salvation, in effect setting aside the cross-work of Christ. This heresy, Paul calls “another gospel” (1:6–7), which is really no gospel at all. As does Jesus in His dealings with the Pharisees, Paul denounces his opponents by using exceedingly strong language.

God’s “new creation” is a new entity of believers which had its continuity with the believing Jewish remnant of the Old Testament on the one hand and with Gentile believers in God (now Christ) on the other. The “Israel of God” is made up of those believers who understand and live by this new “rule.” In Gal. 6:16, Paul applies Old Testament covenant language to this new entity, when he pronounces on it the blessings of God’s peace and mercy. As Dunn notes, the concept of peace includes well-being, wholeness, and prosperity.³⁸ It is both spiritual and material, and not so much individual as social. Peace is something visible, including the idea of a productively harmonious relationship between people. Thus it may be argued that Paul, by wishing “peace,” expresses his desire for harmonious relationships among the Galatian Christians. Moreover, by invoking God’s mercy on Christians in general, he draws attention to the covenant faithfulness of God.

The strength of this interpretation is its understanding of the reference within the context of the Galatian polemic without interjecting extratextual information regarding the salvation-historical relationship between the church and Israel.³⁹ However, as mentioned above, other interpretations have been proposed as well.

Some see Paul as referring to nonjudaizing Jewish Christians of Galatia.⁴⁰ Others view the expression as an eschatological reference comparable to *πᾶς Ἰσραήλ* (“all Israel”) in Rom. 11:26–27, understood as the totality of Jews who will be saved at Christ’s second coming.⁴¹ However, as Longenecker points out, all the views that take Gal. 6:16 as a reference to Jews and not to Gentiles, while supportable by Paul’s usage elsewhere, are rendered improbable by the context of the Galatian epistle itself.⁴²

Why would Paul, after affirming as indifferent the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile Christians throughout the letter, close it by pronouncing a benediction that upholds this very distinction?⁴³ Luz agrees when he writes,

Der Gedankengang des Abschnittes Gl. 3,6–4,31 spricht eindeutig dafür, “Israel Gottes” auf die Gesamtkirche zu beziehen. Die Frage nach Israel oder nach den Judenchristen als theologisches Problem ist uns im ganzen Abschnitt nirgends begegnet, und so scheint es

³⁸Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 20.

³⁹Dahl, “Name Israel,” has been the most influential article on the subject in the recent history of interpretation of Gal. 6:16. A number of writers refer to his article as definitive on the subject. Cf. Luz, *Geschichtsverständnis*, 270, who calls Dahl’s argumentation “überzeugend” (convincing); Herman Ridderbos, *Paul-An Outline of His Theology* (trans. John Richard de Witt; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975 [1966]), 336, n. 30, who calls the arguments advanced by Dahl “decisive;” and many others. Ridderbos also refers to his article “Israel in het Nieuwe Testament,” *Exegetica*, II, 2, 1955, 33ff., 71.

⁴⁰Cf. G. Schrenk, “Was bedeutet ‘Israel Gottes’?” *Judaica* 5 (1949): 81–94; id., “Segenswunsch;” D. W. B. Robinson, “The Distinction between Jewish and Gentile Believers in Galatians,” *AusBR* 13 (1965): 29–44.

⁴¹Cf. F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (HTKNT 9; Freiburg, Basel and Vienna: Herder, 1974), 417; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 275.

⁴²Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298.

⁴³Cf. *ibid.* Cf. also Bruce, *Galatians*, 274.

durchaus konsequent zu sein, wenn Paulus, wie schon vorher, den Gottesvolkgedanken auf die Kirche bezieht und sogar das Israel-Prädikat der Kirche zuweist.⁴⁴

To the present writer, no satisfactory answer to these arguments has been supplied. Richardson's hypothetical reconstruction utterly fails to convince:

When he [Paul] reads it again [Galatians proper] and adds his own conclusion he clarifies his statements about the problem of circumcision and asserts the centrality of Christ's cross for all believers, *but to prevent the Galatians from moving from this position to a new Christian exclusiveness and sectarianism*, he adds his prayer for mercy on God's faithful people [i.e., a believing Israelite remnant].⁴⁵

Rather than resorting to sheer conjecture, however, interpreters are on more solid footing if they view the term "Israel of God" as referring to all "those who will walk according to this rule," Jewish and Gentile Christians alike.

Guthrie helpfully supplies a possible reason why Paul might have ended Galatians the way he did. According to Guthrie, Paul might have wanted to assure the Galatians that they would not forfeit the benefits of being part of true Israel by refusing circumcision.⁴⁶ Dahl sums up his case for an identification of "the Israel of God" with "believers regardless of their ethnic background" convincingly when he writes,

In dem eigenhändig geschriebenen Schlußteil des Galaterbriefes (6,11–18) ist es dem Apostel darum zu tun, die Judaisten endgültig und mit aller Schärfe zurückzuweisen und die Galater zum Gehorsam seinen apostolischen Weisungen gegenüber zu bewegen. Das ist sowohl V. 12–14 und 15, als auch V. 17 der Fall. Es ist undenkbar, daß er mit V. 16 einen ganz anderen Gedanken hat einführen wollen und einen Friedenswunsch für die christus-gläubigen Juden als versöhnendes Schlußwort hinzugefügt hat. Dagegen ist es sehr wohl verständlich, daß Paulus in diesem Zusammenhang mit den übrigen Würde-Namen der Juden auch den Namen "Israel" auf die Christenheit überträgt, auch wenn er das sonst nicht getan hat.⁴⁷

As Dahl rightly points out, an abrupt reference to believing Jewish Christians (in Galatia) as "the Israel of God" would appear to undermine what Paul had argued for in the entire letter.⁴⁸ On

⁴⁴Cf. Luz, *Geschichtsverständnis*, 285: "The flow of thought of the section of Gal 3,6–4,31 clearly favors a taking the 'Israel of God' as a reference to the whole Church. The question regarding Israel or regarding Jewish Christians as a theological problem has not been addressed anywhere in the whole section, and thus it seems conclusive when Paul, as also previously, refers the concept of the people of God to the Church and even attributes the predication of Israel to the Church." Note that all translations from the German in this paper are the present author's.

⁴⁵Cf. Richardson, "Israel," 84.

⁴⁶Cf. Donald Guthrie, *Galatians* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1973), 152.

⁴⁷Cf. Dahl, "Name Israel," 168: "In this final part of Galatians (6:11–18) which Paul wrote with his own hand, the apostle is concerned to refute the Judaizers decisively and in the sharpest terms, and to move the Galatians to obedience to his apostolic instructions. This is the case both with verses 12–14 and verse 15, as well as with verse 17. It is unthinkable that he would have introduced a totally different thought with verse 16 and added a blessing of peace for the Jewish-Christian believers as a reconciling final word. On the other hand, it is quite conceivable that Paul in this context, together with the other Jewish terms of dignity, also transfers the name 'Israel' to Christians, even though he did not do that elsewhere."

⁴⁸Cf. *ibid.* Contra Schrenk, "Israel Gottes," 94.

the other hand, Paul seems to have saved perhaps the most provocative application of Old Testament covenant language to the church in Galatians until the end of his letter: the application of the term “Israel” to the church. Even Schrenk’s reference to 2:15–21 as a more positive passage regarding Jewishness does not weaken this argument.⁴⁹

Moreover, the motive for Paul’s adaptation of the concluding epistolary formula probably lies in his intent to limit the recipients of his final blessings to the group of believers who conform to his teaching rather than pronouncing an unconditional blessing. As Dahl correctly notes, this kind of procedure corresponds to the unusual lack of an opening thanksgiving section in Galatians.⁵⁰ Thus Dahl’s concluding judgment, “Eine besondere Hervorhebung einer abgegrenzten Gruppe, der christgläubigen Juden, wäre dagegen stilistisch und psychologisch kaum vorstellbar,” seems justified.⁵¹

Biblical-Theological Observations

If the above exegesis of the expression “Israel of God” in Gal. 6:16 is correct, the contemporary interpreter may be somewhat dissatisfied by the fact that Paul’s statement does not seem to address directly the kinds of questions that have subsequently exercised the minds of theologians (that is, the question of the nature of the relationship between the church and Israel or the issue of the continuity or discontinuity of God’s dealings with Israel).⁵²

Yet at the time of writing Galatians, Paul may not have developed his thinking about the relationship between Israel and the church as covenant communities along salvation-historical lines as fully as in Romans.⁵³ However, while Paul may not develop the implications of his teaching in greater detail in Galatians, the foundation for his later more extensive treatment of subjects such as the future of Israel and the salvation-historical relationships between Jewish and Gentile believers and Israel and the church in Romans has been laid.

There already is the clear realization that not all Jews have believed (cf. Rom. 9:6—“Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel”). There is the reality of a mixed Gentile-Jewish congregation (though the issues in Galatia are different from the ones in Romans). There is the understanding that the “Israel of God” is anticipated in the Old Testament Scriptures, especially in God’s promises to Abraham. This promise was made to Abraham *the believer* and included both his descendents (Israel) and all the nations (the Gentiles).

⁴⁹Cf. Schrenk, “Segenswunsch,” 181–83.

⁵⁰Cf. Dahl, “Name Israel,” 165.

⁵¹Cf. *ibid.* (“A special mention of a separate group of Jewish-Christian believers, however, would be stylistically and psychologically difficult to conceive.”)

⁵²It may be best to avoid or use very carefully the term “church,” since this term is not used by Paul to distinguish between true believers and Judaism. Dunn, *Romans*, 539, commenting on Rom. 9:6, seems to share this concern when he writes of the “inadequacy of any talk of a transfer of the name and blessings of ‘Israel’ to the ‘church,’ as though Paul saw them as distinct entities . . . ‘the Israel of God’ is still God’s covenant people, the characteristics of whose covenant some Israelites have misunderstood and into whom believing Gentiles are being incorporated.” Cf. also *ibid.*, 546–47. As Romans shows, Paul still wrestles existentially with the relative part that Jews and Gentiles play in God’s grand scheme of salvation.

⁵³As already mentioned, the different settings of Galatians and Romans account adequately for the different emphases in Paul’s teaching. In Galatians, Paul seems to deal with the Judaizing heresy. In Romans, the apostle probably dealt with a Jewish Christian minority that may have been slighted by the Gentile Christian majority (cf. Rom. 11:17–32). Thus Paul needed to tackle the issue of Jewish-Gentile relations more comprehensively.

Thus it may be said that Paul, while correcting the Judaizing understanding of God's plan of salvation, admirably keeps a balance between affirming a continuity between God's old and new covenant communities. At the same time he maintains a discontinuity between Old Testament ethnic physical Israel and "the Israel of God."

Admittedly there remains a tension between Paul's affirmation of a future for ethnic (believing) Israel in Romans 9–11 and the "Israel of God" reference in Gal. 6:16. Without Romans 9–11, one may well have concluded that there is no longer any future for ethnic Israel in God's plan. However, there is nothing in Gal. 6:16 that contradicts Paul's teaching in Romans 9–11. Paul's point in Galatians—that the "Israel of God" proper are all those who follow his "new rule" (that is, faith in Christ)—is not violated by his projection of a future time when "all Israel" will turn to Christ in faith. Then a more substantial portion of (ethnic) Israel will again become part of the "Israel of God."

Paul's discussion in Romans 9–11 therefore represents not so much a different perspective on the issue of Israel and the church as a further development of Paul's insights which are already found in Galatians in seed form in light of the needs of the Roman church. Schoeps relates the issues raised by Paul's reference to the "Israel of God" in Gal. 6:16 well to other Pauline passages:

Die Berufung der Heiden zum Volke Gottes ist für den Anbruch der postmessianischen Zeit das wesentliche Merkmal. Die Messiasgefolgschaft des erwählten Israels im Jetzt der Heilszeit ist die "Kirche aus Juden und Heiden . . ." In der Kirche des neuen Bundes gibt es den Unterschied von "Jude" und "Grieche," "Knecht" und "Freier," "Mann" und "Weib" nicht mehr. Auf dieses neue Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ (Gal. 6,16) ist nach Paulus das Auserwählungsprädikat des Israel κατὰ σάρκα gegangen. Und in 1 Thess. 2,14 heißt es sogar, daß die christlichen Gemeinden die Nachfolger der Gemeinden in Judäa geworden seien, die den κύριος Jesus getötet haben.⁵⁴

Finally, it would be incorrect to view Paul's teachings in Galatians as anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic. The term "Israel of God," while polemically used against humanly defined Israel, does not exclude all Jews. Paul's concern is to safeguard the gospel from accretions that would eventually resemble Judaism's external orientation which had added human rules and traditions to the extent that they had overlayed God's Word and robbed it of its power and authority. For Paul, the church, as the true "Israel of God" composed of both believing Jews and Gentiles, is the heir of the Isaianic vision of a restored Israel that constitutes the "new creation" of God.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Cf. Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Paulus. Die Theologie des Apostels im Lichte der jüdischen Religionsgeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1959), 255–56: "The calling of the Gentiles to the people of God is the essential characteristic of the inbreaking of the post-Messianic era. The followership of the Messiah of the chosen Israel in the present time of salvation is the 'church of Jews and Gentiles . . .' In the church of the new covenant there is no longer any difference between 'Jew' and 'Greek,' 'slave' and 'free,' 'man' and 'woman.' To this new Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ (Gal 6,16) has, according to Paul, the predication of election of the Israel κατὰ σάρκα been extended. And in 1 Thess. 2,14 it even says that the Christian churches are the successors of the communities in Judea that killed the κύριος Jesus."

⁵⁵As Greg Beale has suggestively argued in his essay, "Peace and Mercy," pointing not only to Isa. 54:10, but also Ps. 84:11 (LXX), Jer. 16:5, Jub. 22:9, and 1QH 13:5 as possible backgrounds or parallels. Beale believes that, while "the allusion to Isa 54:10 in Gal 6:16 may not have been understood by the Galatians on a first or second reading . . ., it may well have been in Paul's mind" (219).