

McGILL UNIVERSITY

Theology

Greek Exegesis

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THE ISRAEL OF GOD

GALATIANS 6 :16

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There are five possibilities for the identity of the Israel of God in Galatians 6:16.

- 1) All Jews
- 2) Elect Jews
- 3) Jewish Christians
- 4) Jew & Gentile Christians
- 5) Gentile Christians

We can eliminate the fifth right away since none but the most extremist gentile would affirm that Jews, at least individual Jews, have been completely cast off by God. This would be to totally misunderstand Rom. 11:1.

1) ALL JEWS

Reformed theologians since Luther's anti-jewish tract (Von der Juden und ihre Luegen, 1543) and especially German theologians of the post-Auschwitz era have had a bad conscience concerning the Jews and have a great fear of antisemitism.

Karl Barth wrote "The Jewish problem and the Christian Answer" just after the II World War and his son Markus Barth addressed american synagogues in the 1960's in an effort to carry on a Christian Jewish dialogue.

In his book, *Israel and the Church*, Markus Barth follows the more radical thinking of Ragaz and Parkes, who themselves are influenced by Franz Rosenzweig, a Jewish intellectual who almost became a Christian during the years of the 1st World War then suddenly drew back in order to reaffirm his Jewish identity.

Markus Barth commenting on Ephesians 2:11-22
notes:

"Through Christ's death on the cross, Jews and Gentiles who formerly had been hostile to each other have been made one. In Christ, the two have been created a new and are now "one new man". This new man is not identical with each individual Judaeo-Gentile or Christian who believes in Jesus Christ. He rather compromises at least 2 individuals, one of Jewish and the other of Gentile descent, who together approach God in common worship.

He goes on to say:

In this passage those who are circumcised - regardless of whether they believe in Jesus Christ or not - are called God's people and saints.

So, for Markus Barth, even though he writes elsewhere that it is in the Messiah that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled, yet in some dialectical or mysterious way, national Israel is the Israel of God.

This would also seem to be the position of K. Stendahl judging from the review E.P. Sanders writes of his book, *"Paul among Jews and Gentiles and other essays"*.

Stendahl proposed that at the end of Rom. 11, Paul provides for the salvation of "all Israel" regardless of whether or not they confess Christ as Lord.

2) ELECT JEWS

This is the position of Peter Richardson who writes:

"Galatians 6:16 does not presuppose that the Church has taken over the name Israel for itself."

"The "Israel of God" is, when Galatians is written, a part of the Israelite nation."

" A paraphrase might run: "May God give peace to all who will walk according to this criterion, and mercy also to his faithful people Israel."

Richardson's argument is that εἰρήνη is applied to all who will walk according to the new possibilities of freedom and purity made available through the cross of Jesus and ἐλεος is wished upon all those Israelites who are going to come to their senses and receive the good news of Christ. Thus there is an Israel of God within all Israel.

Richardson also argues that the καὶ calls attention to the last four words of the sentence, demanding for them special consideration. He affirms that the καὶ cannot be omitted.

Gaston also agrees with Richardson that in Galatians 6:16, both the Church and those who are not yet the Church are the subjects of a prayer to God for blessing.

Gaston writes:

"...Paul is not the founder of the 'displacement theory' which appropriates such theological concepts as Israel for the Church and denies them to the synagogue"

F.F. Bruce and C.F.D. Moule also lean to this position. Bruce writes that the true sense of $\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ is probably to be identified with $\pi\alpha\varsigma\ \text{I}\sigma\text{ρα}\eta\lambda$ of Rom. 11:26;

"For all his demoting of the law and the customs, Paul held good hope of the ultimate blessing of Israel. They were not all keeping in line with "this rule" yet, but the fact that some Israelites were doing so was in his eyes a pledge that this remnant would increase until, with the ingathering of the $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega\mu\alpha$ of Gentiles "all Israel will be saved". The invocation of blessing on the Israel of God has probably an eschatological perspective."

C.F.D. Moule says that Paul did not himself define the Church as a tertium genus over against Jew and Gentile.

He however notes that "Paul had begun to use 2 contrasting terms - 'Jews' for those who are externally or by birth Jews, 'Israel' for the religious community, the People of God as such. The latter is constituted by all, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, who put their trust in Jesus and are baptized into his name.

And he adds clearly: "Of the former only they belong to 'Israël' who are in the latter category".

3) JEWISH CHRISTIANS

This is only a refinement of the 2nd position in that Jewish Christians are actual and elect Jews are potential.

D.W.B. Robinson shares the view that in Galatians 6:16, the Church is not to be equated with Israel but makes a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers in Galatians which Paul is aiming at here.

Allan Cole upholds the possibility that Paul is here wanting to end his biting argument by stretching out an olive-branch to 'orthodox' Jewish Christianity, lest they should think that they were included in Paul's attacks on the Judaizers.

He writes:

"It would be a full recognition of the fact that Jew and Gentile alike are fellow-heirs of the grace of life; they have 'communion in the Messiah' to quote a great Jewish Christian. We may feel that it is an olive branch on the point of a bayonet; but it is a gesture of peace and reconciliation fitting the closing verses of such an Epistle."

4) JEWISH AND GENTILE CHRISTIANS

Trypho: Justyn Martyr wrote in his Dialogue with

"We, who have been brought to God by this crucified Christ, are the true spiritual Israel..."

This is apparently the 1st time that someone believed that that was what Paul meant.

Calvin says of the Israel of God that:

"There are two classes who bear this name, a pretended Israel, which appears to be so in the sight of men, - and the Israel of God."

Calvin believes that God calls the Israel of God "those whom he formerly denominated the children of Abraham by faith (Gal. iii 29) and thus included all believers whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church.

Lightfoot sees an implied contrast between Israel of God and Israel after the flesh. He affirms that

"...stands here not for the faithful converts from the circumcision alone, but for the spiritual Israel generally, the whole body of believers whether Jew or Gentile; and thus *καὶ* is epexegetic, i.e. it introduces the same thing under a new aspect..."

Stott translated the last clause thus:

"Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God."

He goes on to note that:

"All who walk by this rule" and the 'Israel of God' are not two groups, but one. The connecting particle $\kappa\alpha\iota$ should be translated 'even' not 'and' or be omitted (as in RSV). The Christian Church enjoys a direct continuity with God's people in the O.T.

In conclusion, the second half of Galatians 6:16 poses a question of interpretation which hangs on the exact meaning of the introductory $\kappa\alpha\iota$. In view of the fact that Richardson has to repunctuate the phrase; in view of the fact that he does not even consider that $\kappa\alpha\iota$ can mean "yea" or "even";

in view of Paul's transfer, in the same epistle (Galatians 4:21-31), of the covenant of the Spirit from the actual Jerusalem to the children of the promise, that is the Galatian Christians,

in view of Paul's position on election: all those who are descendants of Israel are not Israel (Rom 9:6), in view of his determination not to tolerate two distinct peoples of God (Gal. 2:11-14; Eph 2:11-22) because those who are in Christ are

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| 1) Abraham's offspring | Gal 3:29
Rom 4:11 |
| 2) the true circumcision | Phil 3: 3
Col 2:11 |

in view of John's statement that the purpose of Christ's death was to unite all God's dispersed children (John 11:52);

in view of Peter and John's transfer of the Old Testament Israelite titles to the Church: "But you are an elect race, a kingdom of priests" (I Pet. 2:9,10; Rev. 1:5,6);

in view of the application of Jeremiah's covenant with Israel (Jer. 31) to the new covenant people in Hebrews 8;

and in view of the new and distinct expression of Paul in I Cor. 10:32; "Do not be in scandal to the Greeks or the Jews or the Church of God,

I believe that the Israel of God in Galatians 6:16 applies to Christian Jews and gentiles who make up together the body of Christ.

Post Scriptum:

The conclusion does raise some hard questions, not the least of which is the continuation of national Israel. Paul asks "has God cast off his people ? " and answers "*μη γενοίτο*" ! The two extremes of insensitive proselytising among jews and total indifference to them must be avoided in the post-Auschwitz era in favour of a new caring by Christians for Jews. This, in my view, will take neither the form of Markus Barth's "dialogue" with them or the dispensationalist's total approval of Israel's homeland aspirations (Wim Malgo writes back to European Christians in his News from Israel that by their return to Palestine, the Jews have "initiated the redemptive process"). Rather, the Christian caring is to be an individual, sensitive, humble and frank approach, praying that the Spirit of God will be working as we seek to be light and love to the Jews. Light from their own scriptures concerning the Messiah and love which even says: "I am willing to be separated from Christ in favour of the Israelites according to the flesh".

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