ZIONISM IN PAULINE LITERATURE

Does Paul Eliminate Particularity for Israel and the Land in His Portrayal of Salvation Available for All the World?

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About eighty-five years after Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, Justin Martyr wrote in his Dialogue with Trypho, “And hence you [Trypho] ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation [the Jewish people] have been transferred to us [Christians].” Perhaps the most articulate proponent of this “transference theology” today is N. T. Wright, who has spent the last forty years writing about the relationship between the church and Israel in Paul’s theology. Wright argues that through the coming of Christ, God’s relationship with the Jewish people has been reconfigured so that Israel’s covenant blessings, responsibilities and calling have all been “transferred” to the church as a whole, thus resulting in the erasure of divinely given Jewish boundary markers of identity. Or to put it in more politically correct language, these boundary markers have all been universalized:

In Rom. 5–8 Paul develops the picture of the church in terms belonging to Israel. This transfer is achieved in two stages. First, Israel’s calling, responsibilities

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Justin, Dialogue with Trypho. In the oldest extant commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans (ca. AD 246), Origen argues that Israel’s blessings have been transferred from the Jews to the Gentiles: “Through the whole text of the epistle . . . the Apostle has taught how the highest religion has been transferred from the Jews to the Gentiles, from circumcision to faith, from the letter to the spirit, from shadow to truth, from carnal observance to spiritual observance.” Origen, Commentaire sur l’Épître aux Romains, tome 4: Livres IX—X, trans. Caroline P. Hammond Bammel and Luc Bresard, Sources chrétiennes, 555 (Paris: Cerf, 2012) (emphasis added).
and privileges have been taken over by the Messiah himself, alone: second, what is true of the Messiah is reckoned to be true of his people. . . . In him all believers, without distinction of race, inherit all that was Israel's. . . . Paul, in line with Old Testament prophecy, claims that God's glory has been taken away from Israel according to the flesh and given to the community of the new covenant. . . . The Christian is the true Jew. . . . The first five verses of the chapter [Rom 5:1-5] thus set out the grounds of assurance in terms of the transfer of Israel's privileges to the church. . . . What Israel should have done, the Messiah has done alone. Having therefore taken Israel's task, he (and hence his people) inherit Israel's privileges. . . . We have seen that Paul explicitly and consciously transfers blessings from Israel according to the flesh to the Messiah, and thence to the church. . . . In the same way, Gal. 2-4 argues precisely that the worldwide believing church is the true family of Abraham, and that those who remain as "Israel according to the flesh" are in fact the theological descendants of Hagar and Ishmael, with no title to the promises. . . . It is not therefore without a touch of bitter irony, reminiscent of Phil. 3:2ff., that he [Paul] transfers the name "Israel" to the church.3

In line with this transference theology paradigm,5 Wright argues that the temple, Jerusalem and the land of Israel are all covenantal blessings that were "superseded" (to use Wright's term)!4 through the coming of Christ. Based on this supersessionist reading of Paul, Wright goes on to describe Christian

Zionism as a "soi-disant 'Christian' apartheid" that should be rejected. He writes in his essay "Jerusalem in the New Testament":

In Romans 4:13 Paul says, startlingly, "The promise to Abraham and his seed, that they should inherit the world." Surely the promises of inheritance were that Abraham's family would inherit the land of Israel, not the world? Paul's horizon, however, is bigger. The Land, like the Torah, was a temporary stage in the long purpose of God of Abraham. It was not a bad thing now done away with, but a good and necessary thing now fulfilled in Christ and the Spirit. It is as though, in fact, the Land were a great advance metaphor for the design of God that his people should eventually bring the world into submission to his healing reign. God's whole purpose now goes beyond Jerusalem and the Land to the whole world. . . . The Temple had been superseded by the Church. If this is so for the Temple, and in Romans 4 for the Land, then it must a fortiori be the case for Jerusalem. . . . Jesus' whole claim is to do and be what the city and the temple were and did. As a result, both claims, the claim of Jesus and the claim of "holy land," can never be sustained simultaneously. . . . The only appropriate attitude in subsequent generations towards Jews, the Temple, the Land or Jerusalem must be one of sorrow or pity. . . . The responsibility of the church in the present age is to anticipate the age to come in acts of justice, mercy, beauty and truth; we are to live "now" as it will be "then." We can only do this, of course, insofar as we have got quite clear in our minds that there is no going back to the old lines that demarcate human beings (race, colour, gender, geography, etc.). That is to say, among other things, that there can and must be no "Christian" theology of "holy places" (on the model or analogy of the "holy places" of a religion that has an essentially geographical base), any more than there can be a "Christian" theology of racial superiority on the model or analogy of a religion that has an essentially racial base. To that extent, "Christian Zionism" is the geographical equivalent of a soi-disant "Christian" apartheid, and ought to be rejected as such.5

3N. T. Wright, "The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology with Particular Reference to the Argument of the Epistle to the Romans" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1980), 139-140; 193, 196. In Romans 5-8 Paul argues that all of Israel's privileges have now been transferred, via the Messiah, to the worldwide people of God, the true family of Abraham. . . . Christians are the new humanity ([Rom] 5:12ff.), God's sons ([Rom] 8:29ff.), inheriting God's glory ([Rom] 8:30ff.), his covenants and law ([Rom] 7:1-8:31), his promises to the Patriarchs ([Rom] 4) and so offering to God the true worship of Israel (Phil. 3:2ff.). That this list fits so well with Rom. 9:9ff. is again indicative of the whole shape of Paul's argument. N. T. Wright, "Justification: Its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism (1980), in Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 35, 325ff.

4Wright's brand of supersessionism is reviewed in Douglas Harink, Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 151-207; and in Michael G. Vanlaningham, "An Evaluation of N. T. Wright's View of Israel in Romans 11," BRSC 170 (April-June 2013): 179-93.

It is not an overstatement to say that a growing number of Christians are sympathetic to Wright's view. But is this transference reading of Paul correct? Would "the circumcised apostle" nod approvingly at Wright's attempted synthesis of Paul's perspective on this subject? Or would Paul view the notion of a first-century expiration date on Jewish election as a distortion of his teachings? The bottom-line question is, does Paul eliminate particularity for Israel and the land in his portrayal of salvation available for all the world?

This essay maintains that Paul's gospel does not eliminate such particularity and that a compelling case can be made on the basis of Paul's writings for the perpetuity of Jewish particularity. I will begin by discussing several Pauline passages that are often quoted by transference theology proponents to contend that Paul opposed Jewish particularity. Then I will present arguments in support of the view that Paul upheld the continued election, gifts and calling of the Jewish people.

Arguments Against Particularity

The Promised Land has been universalized in Christ. In his book Jesus and the Land, Gary Burge claims that Christ universalized the Promised Land and that this is explicitly stated in Paul's words, "For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom 4:13). Burge, building on Wright, reasons that Paul's use of the expression "inherit the world" rather than "inherit the land of Judea" indicates that the land promise was reconfigured and no longer in force. "The formula that linked Abraham to Jewish ethnic lineage and the right to possess the land has now been overturned in Christ. Paul's Christian theology links Abraham to children of faith, and to them belongs God's full domain, namely, the world." 7

Transference theology proponents often consider Romans 4:13 to be the clearest statement in Paul's writings that the particularity of the land promise was voided after the coming of Christ. 8 The case for this, however, is surprisingly weak. First, Romans 4:13 does not say that the Jewish "right to possess the land has now been overturned in Christ" as Burge contends. To suggest this is to read into the text something that Paul does not actually say.

Second, Burge does not substantiate his assumption that for Paul the universal is better than the particular. The Pauline corpus does not support a Baurian view that Judaism is defective because of its particularism. 9 The fact of the matter is that there is much in Paul's letters (e.g., Rom 9–11; 15) that envisions the universal and particular coexisting in God's kingdom, a view consistent with

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10E. C. Baur viewed Christianity as a universal religion that transcended the particularism of Judaism: "What is it in Christianity that gives it its absolute character? The first and obvious answer to this question is that Christianity is elevated above the defects and limitations, the one-sidedness and finiteness, which constitute the particularism of other forms of religion. Here then we meet again the characteristic feature of the Christian principle. It looks beyond the outward, the accidental, the particular; and rises to the universal, the unconditioned, the essential... the all-commanding universalism of its spirit and aims... [Paul was] the first to lay down expressly and distinctly the principle of Christian universalism as a thing essentially opposed to Jewish particularism." Baur, The Church History of the First Three Centuries (London: Williams & Norgate, 1878), 33, 43, 47. See James D. G. Dunn, "Was Judaism Particularist or Universalist?" in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 1, Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 57–73.

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the eschatological model in Paul's Jewish Bible (cf. Deut 32:43; Rom 15:10). Paul's ideal is not the erasure of Jewish distinctiveness but Jews and Gentiles relating to one another in a spirit of interdependence and mutual blessing, which leads to mutual humbling and praise to God (Rom 11:11-2; 15:17-27).

Third, Burer presumes that in Paul's thought when something takes on new or additional meaning in Christ that the “fulfillment” ipso facto cancels out the validity of the prior practice or institution. However, Burer offers no evidence to support this presupposition, and there are a number of texts that would call it into question. Consider the Pauline view that marriage points to the relationship between Christ and the church (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33), and yet marriage is not overturned through the coming of Christ. God continues to call men and women to be married (1 Cor 7:1-40; Col 3:18-19). Or consider Paul's present-tense affirmation of temple worship in Romans 9:4 (“the glory . . . the worship”) and Luke's account in Acts 21:17-26 that Paul entered the Jerusalem temple and participated in offerings, or Paul's prophecy in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 about the man of lawlessness who "takes his seat in the temple of God," even while Paul considered his own body and the church to be temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22). Similarly, Romans 4:13 indicates that the Abrahamic promise ultimately points to Christ and the church, but this does not necessarily imply that the particular territorial dimension of the Abrahamic promise has been "overturned."

Fourth, Burer asserts that “Romans 4:13 is the only place where the apostle refers explicitly to the promises for the land given to Abraham.” However, Paul may not have the land specifically in view in this passage; he may be speaking of people. In his article "Abraham as 'Heir of the World,'" Nelson Hsieh concludes that in Romans 4:13 Paul is focusing not on the land but on Abraham's descendants:

I have shown that the context of Rom 4:13 is focused upon the OT promises of descendants (Rom 4:17-18, quoting Gen 17:5 and 15:5), not the OT promises of land (e.g. Gen 12:7; 13:15; 17:8). Finally, I have shown that κόσμος can refer to persons as well as land, and that κληρονόμος does not always refer to inheriting land, but can also refer to inheriting righteousness, life, persons, etc. This understanding of Rom 4:13 is appropriately called the "inheritance of many nations" view. Abraham is not inheriting land, but inheriting people—namely, his innumerable spiritual descendants from all the nations of the world. According to this view, Rom 4:13 has nothing to do with the OT land promises and thus neither affirms nor expands the OT land promises. It is about the worldwide nature of Abraham's descendants; it is not about the worldwide nature of Abraham's land promise. Thus, Rom 4:13 simply has nothing to say about the land promise.3

Boyd Luter concurs that "the flow of this entire passage is clearly about people and faith, not land. Thus, Romans 4 cannot be legitimately used to argue for the replacing of the Land Promise to Israel in the New Testament."

Fifth, in Second Temple Jewish literature, there are numerous statements similar to Romans 4:13 that describe Abraham as heir of the world. Gerhard Visscher surveys these texts in his monograph Romans 4 and the New Perspective on Paul:

In Hebrew scriptures, there is no statement to the effect that Abraham would be heir of the world. However, as Schreiner has pointed out (Romans, 227), both in the Hebrew scriptures (cf. Ps 2, 22, 47, 72; Isa 4:1-4; 19:18-25; 49:6-7; 52:7-10; 55:3-5; 66:13; Amos 9:11-12; Zeph 2:9-10; Zech 14:9) and in Second Temple Literature, the universal character of the promise to Abraham was stressed. In Sir 44:19, Abraham is described as "the great father of a multitude of nations . . . and Sir 44:21 speaks of how the Lord swore to give him offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky, and he would "give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends

of the earth." It is especially in the extrabiblical literature that the idea seems to grow that Abraham would inherit the world. According to Jub. 22:14, Abraham gives a blessing to Jacob which includes the wish that he "inherit all of the earth." According to Jub. 32:39, Jacob receives the promise from God at Bethel: "And I shall give to your seed all of the land under heaven and they will rule in all nations as they have desired. And after this all of the earth will be gathered together and they will inherit it forever." In 2 Bar. 14:13, the righteous are said to leave this world, confident "of the world promised to them" and in 2 Bar. 51:3, the righteous will one day "acquire and receive the undying world which is promised to them." According to 1 En. 5:7, the elect "shall inherit the earth." Given all these references, Paul does not seem to be sounding a note too far removed when he refers to Abraham and his offspring "inherit- ing the world." 

These first-century Jewish texts not only highlight the universal dimension of the Abrahamic promise but also assume the continuation of Jewish particularity in the eschaton. For example, in Jubilees 22:14, Abraham blesses Jacob with the words, "May you inherit all of the earth." Notably this passage is located between Jubilees 22:11 and Jubilees 22:15, where Abraham says to Jacob, "May you serve you, and all the nations bow themselves before your seed." May He renew His covenant with you that you may be to Him a nation for His inheritance for all ages." Given Paul’s emphasis in Romans 2-3 and 9-11 on the present-tense election, gifts and calling of the Jewish people, it is reasonable to assume that in Romans 4:13 he echoes the normative view of his day that the Abrahamic promise included universal and particular elements. Mark Forman arrives at the same conclusion in his study The Politics of Inheritance in Romans:

But how does all of this relate to the phrase Paul uses in Rom. 4:13, "inherit the world"? Within the tradition surveyed above, there does seem to be the implication that the Abrahamic promise was always intended for the entire world, not exclusively for Israel. As Scott observes, "The Abrahamic Promise sets in motion a trajectory whose ultimate fulfillment takes place in the time of Israel's Restoration, when Israel will again become a great nation, and all nations (i.e. all those listed in the Table of Nations) will be blessed in Abraham and his seed." ...

References to Israel's future "inheritance" of the world are scattered throughout the Intertestamental literature, as is the more general concept of Israel in relation to the nations. Amidst these references, however, there is one book in particular, the Book of Jubilees, which has much to offer to an understanding of "inherit the world" in Rom. 4:13 and the tradition which this stems. There are several reasons why Jubilees is especially instructive. To begin with, there are three direct references to the inheritance of Israel: inherit "the land" ([Jub.] 17:3); "inherit the earth" ([Jub.] 22:14); and "gain the entire earth and inherit it forever" ([Jub.] 32:19). In itself, this makes these references particularly illuminating for a reading of Rom. 4:13. But what adds to the import of these phrases is the broader framework within which the word inheritance is used: the land of Israel, together with the role it fulfills within the purposes of God, is one of the primary concerns of Jubilees. In other words the concept of inheritance takes its place within the broader expectation of Israel's future. This is not to say that Rom. 4:13 should be understood exclusively in relation to Jubilees but that the use of inheritance here does bear close resemblance to Romans and is therefore instructive. ...
Similar to the OT tradition, Jubilees conveys the idea that first Zion will be renewed and then the rest of the earth will similarly be restored. . . .

All of this suggests, therefore, that in using the phrase “inherit the world” Paul stands in continuity with this Intertestamental literature. In these texts the language of inheritance takes its place within a wider perspective of the descendants of Israel and the relationship which they will one day have with the whole earth.  

Sixth, the Second Temple Jewish concept that Abraham would be “heir of the world” is likely rooted in Genesis 22:17-18, where the Lord declares that Abraham’s descendants will possess the cities of their enemies: “I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (NIV, emphasis added). Similarly, Isaiah 54:1-3 (cf. Gal 4:27) states, “Sing, O barren one . . . Your descendants will possess the nations.” The LXX word for “possess” is κληρονομεῖο, a cognate of κληρονόμος—the term Paul uses in Romans 4:13 for “heir.”

In using the expression “heir of the world,” Paul may also have in mind Genesis 26, where the Lord says to Isaac, “I will give you all these lands [plural]”:

Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you. Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for you and to your descendants I will give all these lands [kāl-ḥaʿārāsōt], and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands [kāl-ḥaʿārāsōt]; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. (Gen 26:2-5)

Later, the Lord confirms to Jacob that he will not only inherit the land promised to Abraham but that nations and kings will come from him:

God said to him [Israel], “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations [gōy taḥal gōyim] shall come from you, and

kings shall spring from you. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” (Gen 35:11-12, emphasis added)

Note that the universal and particular are both present. All of this serves to underscore the point that Paul’s portrayal of Abraham in Romans 4:13 as “heir of the world” is unspectacular. Paul did not make a startling statement, as Wright suggests. The image of Abraham as “heir of the world” is strongly implied in the Torah, and this is why it was a familiar concept in Paul’s day. In the Torah and in Second Temple Judaism, Abraham’s call to be “heir of the world” and the particularity of the land promise were not seen as either-or trajectories but both/and. If Paul had territory in view in Romans 4:13, he had one eye on the universal aspect of the promise and the other on the particular. Michael Vanlaningham concludes, “Rather than removing the privilege of the land from Israel, Paul appears to affirm it . . . It is preferable, precisely because the or and Early Judaism indicate that Israel will inherit the world, to place Paul in continuity with the or teaching rather than in contrast to it.”

Jewish identity is a matter of indifference in Christ. Paul makes three statements that are often taken by transference theology proponents to be synopses of his view that Jewish identity is relativized to the point of indifference in Christ. The similar language suggests to some scholars that they are variations of a slogan:

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing (οὐδὲν); but obeying the commandments of God is everything. (1 Cor 7:19, emphasis added)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love. (Gal 5:6)

22Burge, Jesus and the Land, 21-34, argues that Philo and Josephus redefined the land promise in such a way that its particularity was undermined. However, this is an oversimplification. See William Horbury, “Jerusalem in Pre-Pauline and Pauline Hope,” in Messianism Among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 190; and George Wessley Buchanan, The Covenant: Its Replacement and Renewal in Judaism and Christianity (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 100.

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (Gal 6:15)

Did Paul consider Jewish identity to be a matter of indifference, as 1 Corinthians 7:19 and Galatians 5:6 and 6:15 seem to indicate? Horrell assumes that “nothing” or “not anything” points to unimportance. But given the context, Paul is more likely saying that “neither circumcision nor the lack of circumcision has ultimate bearing on salvation.” With respect to status before God and eschatological blessing, being Jewish or Gentile is irrelevant.

I contend that Paul uses hyperbole in these passages to stress that being “in Christ” is more important than being Jewish. This means that being Jewish could still be very important to Paul. He is simply relativizing A to B. In support of this possibility, there are several occasions when Paul uses “nothing” (οὐδὲν) or “not anything” (οὐδὲ ... τι) language in a clearly hyperbolic way. First, with respect to the work of planting the Corinthian congregation, Paul describes himself as nothing compared to the Lord:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything [οὐδὲ ... ἵνα οὖσαν], but only God who gives the growth. (1 Cor 3:7)

Are Paul and Apollos truly nothing? Did they really do no work of any significance? On the contrary, their work was vital to the establishment of the Corinthian congregation. But relative to what God did, the miracle of changing lives, their work was nothing. Similarly, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:11, “I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing (οὐδέν εἰμι).”

Again, was Paul—the apostle to the Gentiles—truly “nothing”? Or is he saying that, relative to the Lord, he is nothing, even as relative to the super-apostles he is something?

Another example of Paul relativizing two important works of God is 2 Corinthians 3:6-11. Here Paul contrasts the glory of Moses’ ministry with the ministry of the Spirit. Though God performed miracles through Moses’ ministry that were unparalleled in history, Paul refers to Moses’ ministry as having no glory now, for what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all, because of the splendor that surpasses it” (στοιχεῖον). It all pales in comparison. Moreover, three times Paul uses a kai vachomer (a fortiori) argument to compare old covenant and new covenant experiences of the presence and power of God (2 Cor 3:8, 9, 11). Both are truly glorious revelations of the God of Israel, but one is more glorious than the other. To emphasize the “splendor that surpasses,” Paul uses language that downplays the Sinai revelation. But it is wrong to mistake this as trivialization of the old covenant glory. It is instead a rhetorical device intended to highlight the greater glory. He refers to something genuinely important to emphasize what is even more important. It is likely that Paul used the same rhetorical device when he referred to circumcision and uncircumcision as “nothing.”

Second, Paul’s manner of expression (οὐδέν ... ἀλλὰ καὶ οὐδὲ ... τι ... ἀλλὰ) in 1 Corinthians 7:19 and Galatians 5:6 and 6:15 is consistent with the Jewish idiom of dialectic negation in which the “not ... but ...” antithesis need not be understood as an ‘either ... or,’ but rather with the force of ‘more important than.’ Consider, for example, how the prophet Hosea makes the same kind of hyperbolic comparison statement when he speaks in the name of the Lord.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hos 6:6)

Sacrifices were important, for the Lord commanded them, but “steadfast love” was even more important. To emphasize this, the Lord states that he does not...
desire sacrifice. The negative statement should be taken as hyperbole; it is a Hebrew rhetorical device.30

Third, Paul’s anti-circumcision language (directed at Gentiles) in Galatians can be understood as upholding Jew-Gentile distinction rather than collapsing it: “Circumcising Gentiles would have made Jews and Gentiles all the same. Paul’s vehement rejection of circumcision demonstrates his commitment to maintaining Jews and Gentiles as different and distinct, and militates strongly against seeing Paul’s goal as creating human homogeneity.”31

There is no longer Jew or Gentile in Christ. Transference theology tends to place a lot of weight on Galatians 3:28 (“There is no longer Jew or Greek... for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”), viewing it as evidence that Paul considered Jewish particularity to be universalized in Christ.32 But examined more closely, there are numerous holes in this argument.33 First, the Galatians 3 context has more to do with the justification of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ and the community formed by these believers than the erasure of Jewish and Gentile identity in the present age.34 Paul makes the same point in Romans 10:10-12, “For one believes with the heart and is justified, and one confides with the mouth and is saved... For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.”35

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30A variation of this is found in the Letter of Aristides 354. Cf. Mark 1:17; 7:15.

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Second, Paul states in Galatians 3:28 that “there is no longer male and female.” But is the male-female distinction erased in Christ? On the contrary, Paul distinguishes between men and women in his congregations (1 Cor 11:13-34; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:12). The created order with respect to “male and female” (Gen 1:27-28) is not overturned in Christ. This raises an important question: if in Paul’s thought the third pair (male and female) is not erased, why should it be concluded that the first pair (Jew and Greek) is erased?

Third, the NA28 text of Galatians 3:28 includes the word év (“one”). The NRSV translates Galatians 3:28 “for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” What is this oneness? Boyarin interprets it as a “universal human essence” where all distinction is eradicated.36 But where is the direct evidence for this? If “male and female” in Galatians 3:28 alludes to Genesis 1:27-28, perhaps “one in Christ Jesus” is not unlike the labāš’ eḥād (“one flesh”) between male and female in Genesis 2:24.37 Here eḥād describes a composite unity (two that are distinct but one). Might Paul have been thinking of a Genesis 2 eḥād-like unity in Galatians 3:28?38 The argument adds to the case that the relationship between Jew and Gentile in Galatians 3:28 is one of unity with distinct, sameness.

Fourth, Paul refers to Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) in his letters.39 To Peter, who withdrew from eating with Jesus-believing “Gentiles” (Gal 2:12), he says, “you are a Jew” (Gal 2:14 NIV). The writer of Colossians 4:10-11 refers to Aristarchus, Mark and Justus as “the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God.” By contrast, Titus is a “Greek” (Gal 2:3). In Romans 11:13, Paul writes, “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles” (cf. Rom 4:11-12). All of this suggests that, for Paul, the Jew-Gentile distinction is preserved, not erased in Christ.40 “He accepts, and even insists on retaining, the differences as ethnicity markers at the same time as he strips them of soteriological...”
significance. . . . ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek’ is not about erasure of differences but revalorization of differences.”

**Arguments for Particularity**

Having discussed several Pauline passages that are often quoted by transference theology proponents to demonstrate that Paul opposed Jewish particularity, I will now present arguments in support of the view that Paul upheld the continued election, gifts and calling of the Jewish people. The combination of these arguments is mnemonically represented in the acronym GUCCI.

- **G** The **Gifts** of Israel
- **U** The **Uniqueness** of Israel
- **C** The **Calling** of Israel
- **C** The **Confirmation** of Israel’s promises
- **I** The **Irrevocability** of Israel’s election

**Figure 6.1 Arguments for particularity**

**The gifts of Israel.** Paul writes in Romans 9:3-5:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah.

Here Paul states that the covenants, the promises and the Torah remain (in the present tense) possessions of the Jewish people. In his essay “The Priority of the Present Tense for Jewish-Christian Relations,” R. Kendall Soulen points up the significance of Paul’s use of the present tense in this passage:

The single most important element of Rom 9–11 for Jewish-Christian relations is its use of the present tense to characterize the Jewish people—Paul’s kinsmen “according to the flesh” —as the heirs of God’s covenant promises. We encounter this all-important present tense at two crucial points, near the very beginning: “They are Israelites . . . and to them belong . . . the covenants . . . the promises . . .” ([Rom] 9:4–5) and again near the very end (where the present tense is, to be sure, implied): “… as regards election they are beloved . . . for the sake of their ancestors” ([Rom] 11:28). It is impossible to overstate the importance of these two present-tense passages for the structure of Paul’s argument. They are the iron brackets which surround Paul’s argument and ultimately contain its explosive force. . . .

When Christians do not attend in a serious way to “the shock of the present tense” in Rom 9–11, they are prone to read the Scriptures in ways that lead them to conclude that God’s election of the Jewish people was a phenomenon of the ancient past. Perhaps if they pay a little attention to Rom 11, they will also think of Israel’s election as a phenomenon of the eschatological future, when “all Israel will be saved” ([Rom] 11:26). This traditional Christian view of Israel’s election may remind us of the Queen’s attitude toward tea in Alice in Wonderland: “Tea yesterday, and tea tomorrow, but never tea today!” Precisely here, the “shock of the present tense” in Rom 9–11 exerts its enduring, foundational importance for Christian-Jewish relations. To the degree that Christians submit themselves to this shock, they will turn to their Jewish neighbor and see one who is God’s beloved—not only in the primordial past and eschatological future—but also and above all in the abiding now of covenant history.

When Paul refers to Israel’s “gifts” (χαρίσματα) in Romans 11:29 (“for the gifts and the calling of God [to Israel] are irrevocable”), he is likely pointing back to the list of national privileges of the Jewish people mentioned in Romans 9. Moreover, Paul’s use of the term χαρίσματα in Romans 11 is informed by Second Temple Jewish literature where Israel is described as having been given national “gifts” from God. This is attested in Philo, Josephus (who relates the term “gifts” to the land of Israel) and Ezekiel the Tragedian (a Jewish dramatist who wrote in Alexandria at the end of the second century BC). After surveying this Second Temple background, William Horbury concludes in his study “The Gifts of God in Ezekiel the Tragedian”:

By “gifts” were meant, as in line 35 [in Ezekiel Tragicus], the national privileges given by God through the patriarchal covenants; and the promises of increase and of the land were especially in view (cf. Exod. 32:13). Ezekiel

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Tragicus is an early witness to this application of words for “gift” to the covenantal privileges of Israel. The allusive character of his usage suggests that it was already traditional. This view of its age is consistent with its widespread attestation at the end of the Second Temple period, both among Greek-speaking Jews (see Philo and Josephus) and among those who used Hebrew or Aramaic (see the rabbinic texts). A wide currency is also suggested by its appearance, in Philo and Josephus, in summaries of prescribed prayers. This Jewish usage was reproduced by St. Paul (Rom. 11:29; cf. Rom. 9:4-5), and extended in 1 Clement.46

What is the takeaway from Horbury’s findings? It is that the term “gifts” includes the land especially. Similarly, the terms “covenants” and “promises” in Romans 9:4 and 15:8 cannot be understood apart from their land aspect, because the origins of these covenants and promises are conterminous with the oath that God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning the land (e.g., Ex 32:13).47 This interconnection between covenant, promise and land is echoed hundreds of times in Israel’s Scriptures, something that would have been as clear to Paul as the stars in the sky.48 Along these lines, Richard Bell concludes in his monograph The Irrevocable Call of God: An Inquiry into Paul's Theology of Israel:

The term τὸ χαρίσμα [in Rom 11:29] refers most likely to the election of and promise to Abraham and his descendants κατὰ χάριν (Rom 4:4, 16). Although Paul’s argument is primarily concerned with salvation I wonder whether one can exclude the concrete promise of the land (and of “seed”). Further, one should add that the promise of the land is made more concrete through Jesus Christ. For by becoming a servant of the circumcision, he has confirmed the promises made to the patriarchs. Jesus Christ does not make the promises to

47The stress upon Abraham as the paradigm for faith warns us against deciding too quickly that the land motifs are absent; see Romans 4; Galatians 3–4). While the Abraham image undoubtedly is transformed, it is inconceivable that it should have been emptied of its reference to land. No matter how spiritualized, transcendentized or existentialized, it has its primary focus undeniably on land. That is what is promised, not to the competent deserving or to the dutifully obedient, but freely given (as in the beginning) to one who had no claim.” Walter Brueggemann, The Land: Place at Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 166. Cf. Richard C. Lux, “The Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael) in Jewish and Christian Understanding.” SCJR 3 (2008): 15; and James D. G. Dunn, “Did Paul Have a Covenant Theology? Reflections on Romans 9.4 and 11.27,” in The Concept of Covenant in the Second Temple Period, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline C. R. de Roo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 301-3.
48C. P. D. Moule, The Epistle to the Romans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 164.

Israel less concrete; he makes them more concrete. . . . I therefore conclude that from a Pauline perspective God’s promise to Israel of the land still stands. It is the gift of the electing God to his elected people.49

The uniqueness of Israel. The gifts of God to Israel made Israel unique. In his letters, Paul communicates this uniqueness (or “particularity”) in various ways. For example, he divides the world (including the church) into two groups: Jews and Gentiles.49 Jews are “the circumcised” as distinct from “the uncircumcised” (Rom 3:30; 4:9, 12). Jews are “natural branches” in contrast to “wild olive shoots” (Rom 11:17, 21, 24). Jews are “Israelites” in contrast to “the nations” (Rom 9:4; cf. Rom 10:1; 11:11, 25-26):

Paul is convinced that the election and calling of Israel are irrevocable (Rom 11:28-29) and, by implication, that the distinctiveness and uniqueness of Israel among the nations persist. In other words, there can be no ironing out of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles. . . . The Christ event, instead of bringing about a binary opposition between old and new Israel, reveals and renews a nondivisive difference between Israel and the nations, Jews and Gentiles. This is the nondivisive difference of election, in which Israel is distinguished from the Gentiles in a way that includes them, and the Gentiles are united with Israel in a way that undergirds Israel’s irrevocable difference. Israel and the Gentiles share in the same God, but differently.50

49See Romans 11:13 and Galatians 2:23. When Paul refers to Jews and Gentiles as a pair, he typically lists Jews first, the exception being Colossians 3:11.
50Although the οὐσία [Rom 11:17] reflects traditional replacement theology, ‘and you . . . were grafted in their place,’ the οὐσία and the άνθρωπος are closer to the Greek: ‘you . . . were grafted in among them [οἱ δὲ . . . ἐν αὐτοῖς].’ . . . In other words, the wild shoot is placed among the remaining branches as well as among the broken ones, which remain on the tree in an impaired state.” Mark D. Nanos, “Broken Branches: A Pauline Metaphor for the Gentiles?” ZAC 31 (2016): 35-6. For a discussion of other translations of Romans 11 that reflect transference theology, see Mark D. Nanos, “Romans 11 and Christian-Jewish Relations: Exegetical Options for Revisiting the Translation and Interpretation of This Central Text,” CTR 9, no. 2 (2013): 3-21.
The relationship between Jews and Gentiles is one of interdependence and mutual blessing. The salvation of Israel cannot happen without the faithful witness of Jesus-believing Gentiles to the Jewish people (Rom 11:11-14, 24-26, 30-31), and world revival cannot take place until Israel becomes a messianic Jewish nation (Rom 11:12, 15). Because Gentiles “share” in the nourishing sap of the Jewish olive tree (Rom 11:17), they are indebted to the Jewish people, “For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Rom 15:27 NIV).

The apostle writes that there is much “advantage” in being a Jew, and that there is significant “value” in circumcision if one keeps the Torah (Rom 2:25; 3:1-2). Paul even goes further and maintains that Jews (unlike Gentiles) are supposed to keep the whole Torah. He writes in Galatians 5:3 (niv), “Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.”

54An apt analogy likens Judaism to a ladder, with the sophistication of one’s commitment a function of how high a rung one has attained. Most Jews are positioned on a rung high enough to discern Mount Sinai and the Law Moses received thereon. Yet Paul feels that he has achieved a still higher rung and vantage point enabling him to discern, beyond the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the benefits of the far more marvelous revelation of Jesus as the Christ—i.e., as the Messiah. Unbelieving Jews will not be in a position to share Paul’s realization until they themselves venture higher on the self-same ladder that Paul still occupies. Since Paul anticipates their ultimately doing so, he now broadly lays out how he expects this development will unfold: the proliferation of Gentiles within the church, newly enjoying the fruits of God’s promises tendered originally to Israel’s own Patriarchs, will arouse within Jews a craving for the blessings they believe are properly theirs, mobilizing them, finally, to accept Christ’s “Jerusalem after all!” Michael J. Cook, “Paul’s Argument in Romans 9-11,” Rev&Esp 103 (Winter 2006): 101-3. Cf. Samuel Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 36.
57Paul’s words appear to imply that he was living the circumcised life: “If the Galatians did not know Paul as a Torah-observant Jew, then the rhetoric of [Gal 5:3] would have no bite: I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law’ Otherwise, they might simply respond, ‘but we want only what you have: Jewish identity, without obligation to observe “the whole law?”’ Mark D. Nanos, “The Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Context of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” in *The Galatians Debate: Contemporary Issues in Rhetorical and Historical Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 405. See also Mark D. Nanos, “Paul and Judaism: Why Not Paul’s Judaism?,” in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Given (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 151-52; Dieter Miehler, “‘Foolish Galatians’—A Recipient-Oriented Assessment of Paul’s Letter,” in *The Galatians Debate*, 405; and Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 171.
58Most notably P4.
61In saying that the gospel is “first” (πρώτος) for the Jew, Paul may be following the example of the Messiah who said, “First (πρώτος) let the children eat all they want” (Mk 7:25; emphasis added); cf. Mt 10:5-6; 15:24; Acts 13:25-26; 16:10. “Paul’s phrase ‘to the Jew first’ is not simply a rhetorical device. It was designed not to deceive readers about his view of Israel, but to emphasize it. Paul’s attitude toward Israel, though cautious because of their hardness of heart and constant rejection of the gospel, is based on a thoroughgoing conviction that Israel’s election by God is permanent and determinate for salvation history. Nor does the phrase merely depict Paul’s missionary pattern or the chronological precedence of Israel as the object of gospel preaching, since the context of Romans 11:16 is primarily theological and is designed to set the stage for Paul’s consideration of the relevance of God’s promises to both Jews and Gentiles throughout the epistle. Paul’s emphasis on the justification of Gentiles by faith never overshadows his confidence that God’s plan for Israel is still unfinished and that God’s fulfillment of His...
God’s children in a unique sense, “adoption” through covenant being one of the national privileges of the Jewish people that Paul lists in the present tense in Romans 9:4. That is why Paul can write in Romans 2:9-10 (NIV, emphases added): “There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” The Pauline principle here is theological and ethical: To whom much is given, much is expected. Because the Jewish people are in a unique filial relationship with God and have national privileges (including covenants, promises and the Torah), they will be judged by a different standard than the Gentile world.

The calling of Israel. In Romans 11:29 (emphasis added), Paul writes, “for the gifts and the calling of God [to Israel] are irrevocable.” What does Paul mean by the “calling” of God to Israel? Notably, Paul uses the same term for “calling”—καλλομαι—in 1 Corinthians 7:17-20, where he refers to the “calling” of being circumcised. Paul writes, “This is my rule in all the congregations. Was anyone at the time of his call [to salvation] already circumcised?… In the calling in which he was called, in this let him remain” (1 Cor 7:17-18, 20, author’s translation). 61

The notion of a “Jewish calling,” and the responsibility of Jews to remain in their particular calling, finds support in Paul’s command to Jewish people in 1 Corinthians 7:18, where he says μη ἐπονομάζω (literally: “do not put on foreskin” / metaphorically: “do not assimilate or Gentilize yourself”). 62 The language is a covenant promise to Israel is just as significant in this age as His focus on worldwide Gentile salvation. For Paul, Christ’s mission to fulfill God’s covenants with Israel has theological priority and provides a paradigm for dealing with Jewish-Gentiles issues in the church.” Wayne A. Brindle, “To the Jew First: Rhetoric, Strategy, History, or Theology? BSR 150 (April-June 2011): 221-23. See Retišar Hrvalik, “To the Jew First and Also to the Greek: The Meaning of Romans 11:16,” Missiologic 10, no. 1 (1989): 1-8.

61 Cf. Exodus 4:23, Jeremiah 31:9 and Hosea 11:1. “In the Bible, it is not Abraham who moves toward God but God who moves toward Abraham in an election that is not explained because it is an act of love that requires no explanation. If God continues to love the people of Israel—and it is the faith of Israel that he does—it is because he sees the face of his beloved Abraham in each and every one of his children as a man sees the face of his beloved in the children of his union with his beloved.” Michael Wyschogrod, The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000), 64.


63 Let him not undo his circumcision… Paul is thinking of more than surgical operation, of one kind or another. The converted Jew continues to be a Jew, with his own appointed way of obedience.

likely allusion to 1 Maccabees 11:11-15, where the expression “removed the marks of circumcision” is linked to dejudiaization and the adoption of Gentile customs that collapse Jew-Gentile distinction.

Why was Jewish assimilation so problematic for Paul? It is probably because Jewish particularity reflects Israel’s divine calling. According to Exodus 19, the Lord elected Israel to be his “treasured possession [sagl Haus] out of all the peoples.” The text goes on to say that Israel was called to be a “priestly kingdom and a holy nation” [mamleket kohenim wagdy qaddis] (Ex 19:5-6; cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Philo, a Jewish contemporary of Paul, considered Israel’s Exodus 19 calling to be fundamental to the nation’s identity. 63 He compared Israel to a king’s royal estate and to a priest who ministered on behalf of a city. 64 In other words, Philo viewed Israel as having a priestly calling to be different, and through that difference to minister to the nations.

Against this Second Temple Jewish backdrop, we can understand Paul’s command in 1 Corinthians 7:18—μη ἐπονομάζω (do not assimilate)—as an imperative instruction to Jewish people, including Jesus-believing Jews, to remain faithful to their Jewish identity. This was ultimately so that, through their particularity, they might live out Israel’s priestly calling to the nations, even as Paul was living out this “priestly service” (as he puts it in Rom 15:16) by being the “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13).

The confirmation of Israel’s promises. In Romans 15:8, Paul writes: “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.”

C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and ed. (London: A&C Black, 1971), 168. Contra Bruce W. Winger, Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 146-46, who argues that 1 Corinthians 7:20 refers to epiphanic operations. Winter, however, offers no direct evidence that epiphanic was common enough in the first century to warrant Paul making a “rule in all the churches” (1 Cor 7:7), banning the operation. It should be noted that the metonymic and nonmetonymic positions are not mutually exclusive. A metonymic interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:20 would include epiphanic among the diverse ways that Jews could assimilate into Gentile identity and lifestyle.


66 “promises made to the patriarchs” reprises the theme of the gracious election of Israel ([Rom 9:4] and, in particular, the story of Abraham ([Rom 4:11-16, 16, 30, 21; 9:8-9]). “Confirm” here has the sense not only of ‘reaffirming’ but also of ‘realizing’ the promises. The primary issue Paul addresses in Romans in regard to God’s truthfulness is God’s faithfulness to his promises to Israel (e.g., [Rom 3:4; 3:4, 6, 11, 11]). 67 J. Ross Wagner, “The Christ, Servant of Jew and Gentile: A Fresh Approach to Romans 15:8-9,” JBL 116, no. 3 (1997): 577-78.
Hafemann maintains that the real climax of the covenant envisioned in Romans 15 is Israel’s future restoration for the sake of the nations:

Our passage thus gives no ground for seeing Israel’s identity and eschatological hopes reconfigured into Christ and/or the present Church, having been transformed by Paul into exclusively present realities. Redemptive history does not become abstracted into the “Christ-event” or personalized into an eschatological “community,” but continues on after Christ’s coming and establishment of the Church just as concretely and historically as it did before. The “climax of the covenant” remains Israel’s future restoration for the sake of the nations. Moreover, it is precisely this climax to the covenant that secures the believer’s salvific hope in the return of Christ. In light of God’s promises to the patriarchs ([Rom] 15:8), the Messiah, as the servant to the circumcision, must come again to judge the nations in order to restore Israel and save the Gentiles ([Rom] 15:12; cf. 11:29).^70

Significantly, Paul describes the future kingdom in Zionist terms in Romans 11:26, where he proclaims,

And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

“Out of Zion will come the Deliverer;
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.”

Based on this passage and Galatians 4:26-30 (“Be glad, barren woman” [NIV]), Horbury concludes in his seminal study “Jerusalem in Pre-Pauline and Pauline Hope,” that

Paul envisaged a coming messianic reign in the divinely prepared Jerusalem, bringing together the king with the city and the sanctuary on the Old Testament pattern…. Hints at a Jerusalem-centred messianic reign in both passages would be consonant with the eschatological importance of Zion or the land in Rom. 9.25-6.^71


Why does Horbury highlight this passage in Romans 9:25-26? It is because Paul quotes Hosea as saying,

> And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called children of the living God.” (Hos 1:10, RSV, emphases added)

Since the Greek word ἐκεῖ (translated “there” in Rom 9:26) does not appear in any known Septuagint version of Hosea, it would seem to suggest that Paul is placing an emphasis on this geographic location. What do the words “in the very place” and “there” point to? In the context of Hosea 1, these terms refer to the land of Israel. Moreover, the Hosea 1:10 text that Paul quotes is in the middle of the prophet’s description of how the land and seed promises to the patriarchs are fulfilled in the eschaton. In Hosea, a messianic king is appointed and then possession of the land is restored. The context states:

[Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the [very] place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” [there] they shall be called children of the living God. [The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of the land.]] (Hos 1:10, RSV)

W. D. Davies discusses this text in his monograph *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine*. Though Davies is known for his view that Paul regarded the land promise as “christified,” when it comes to Hosea 1:10 (quoted by Paul in Romans 9:26), Davies concedes that Paul presents in this Romans passage a normative territorial view of Zion. He writes:

> What is illegitimate is to ignore the plain geographic emphasis of the text at Rom. 9:25-26 in favour of a generalized reference to the call of the Gentiles or out of Jerusalem. He writes in Romans 15:9 that “from Jerusalem and as far around as Ilyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ” (cf. Rom 15:20-26; 1 Cor 16:11; Gal 1:21).

73In “Christ” Paul was free from the Law and, therefore, from the land.” W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 110. For a recent reassessment of Davies’s conclusions, see Forman: “This study of inheritance above has demonstrated that Davies is wrong to suggest that the concept of ‘land’ in Paul’s writings is entirely spiritualized... Against Davies, therefore, the present study has argued that Paul’s language of inheritance continues in a geographical, physical direction and that using this kind of language in the first-century context was undeniably subversive of the message perpetuated by the powers of the day” (Politics of Inheritance in Romans, 234).

of lapsed Jews. The full weight of the doctrines which we dealt with in Part I are in favour of giving to Zion a geographic connotation. Zion or Jerusalem was for the Jew, Paul, the centre of the world, the symbol of the land itself and the focal point for the Messianic Age. The likelihood is that, at first at least, it occupied the same place in his life as a Christian. 2 Thess. 2, and possibly Rom. 11:26, and, probably Rom. 9:26 confirm this.73

In addition to these Pauline texts that uphold a territorial confirmation of Israel’s promises, I would add 1 Corinthians 15 to the mix.74 Horbury notes that:

In the larger Pauline context the most important passage for the question is 1 Cor. 15:20-8. The present writer follows those who hold that in 1 Cor. 15 Paul envisages a Zion-centered Messianic reign, beginning with a second coming of Christ. As is shown in [1 Cor 15:25-8] by the exposition of Pss. 110.1, 8.6 on the subjection of enemies, this reign involves the crushing victory over hostile forces granted to the king, God’s son, in Zion, on the lines sketched in Pss. 2.6-9, 110.1-6... In Christian sources this execution of foes in the messianic victory is pictured at 2 Thess. 2.8.75

All of this eschatological drama described in 1 Corinthians 15, centering on the death, resurrection and bodily return of the Messiah, takes place in the land of Israel.

The irreversibility of Israel’s election. Paul writes in Romans 11:29 that “the gifts and the calling of God [to Israel] are irrevocable (ἀμεταχείριστη).” While in English translations the word “irrevocable” usually appears at the end of the sentence, in the Greek text, ἀμεταχείριστη appears at the beginning, thus placing emphasis on this word, as though it were highlighted or had an exclamation mark attached to it. Paul’s point is that Israel’s general state of unbelief does not compromise its election, gifts or calling (cf. Rom 3:3-4 ["What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!"] and the present-tense list of Israel’s covenant privileges in Rom 9:1-6). God remains faithful to Israel despite Israel’s unfaithfulness.

Paul makes the same point at the beginning of Romans 11 when he raises the rhetorical question, “I ask, then, has God rejected his people [or, in the marginalized
reading, “his inheritance”? (Rom 11:1). Here Paul does not go on to say: “Yes, God has rejected his people and transferred all of Israel’s blessings to the church.” On the contrary, he exclaims, “μη γένοντο,” which means, “Of course not!” (REB), “Absolutely not!” (NET), “Out of the question” (NASB), “By no means!” (NRSV), “Heaven forbid!” (CJB). The fact of the matter is that “if it can be concluded that God is unfaithful in his relationship to Israel, there is little reason to think that he should be otherwise in his relationship with the Christian Community.” Paul could not have been more loud and clear in affirming the irrevocability of Israel’s election.

**CONCLUSION**

In this essay I have argued that Paul does not eliminate particularity for Israel and the land in his portrayal of salvation available for all the world, and that a compelling case can be made for particularity when we consider what Paul has to say about:

- **G** The Gifts of Israel
- **U** The Uniqueness of Israel
- **C** The Calling of Israel
- **C** The Confirmation of Israel’s promises
- **I** The Irrevocability of Israel’s election

Paul does not undermine the particularity of the people or land of Israel in his teachings. Rather, he affirms the continuing election, gifts and calling of the Jewish people and spends considerable time in his letter to the Romans (at least five chapters) to get this point across.

In Paul’s view, particularity is part of the warp and woof of the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is manifest in a table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles who remain faithful to their calling as Jews and Gentiles in the Messiah. Paul’s Isaianic vision of the world to come is best expressed in Romans 11 and 15, where Israel and the nations are described as worshiping God together in unity and diversity, in interdependence and mutual blessing. Paul sums it all up beautifully in Romans 15:10 when he says, quoting the Song of Moses, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

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77Cf. Paul’s use of μη γένοντο in Romans 11:9. “The section [Romans 11:25–34] therefore suggests that the Jew’s election has not been annulled. There is value in being a Jew, and God has remained faithful even though Israel has not believed. Paul therefore does not hold to a substitution model here. God’s election of Israel is unshakable.” Bell, *Irrevocable Call of God*, 168.

THE NEW
CHRISTIAN
ZIONISM

FRESH PERSPECTIVES
ON ISRAEL & THE LAND

EDITED BY
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To Baruch Kvasnica,

who first planted the seed that eventually became
this book and whose teaching and correspondence
have taught me much ever since