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The Reconciliation of Future Israel in Romans 9–11

Abstract

This paper contends that supersessionism does not adequately understand the soteriological concept of reconciliation as it applies specifically to Israel because it does not correctly understand the apostolic hermeneutic. Reconciliation refers to the ending of hostility between two parties, which encompasses the removal of the root cause of the enmity in order to effect a change in their relationship from “enemy” to “friend.” While reconciliation describes the work of salvation accomplished in Christ for all humanity, it takes on additional significance when applied to Israel. In Romans 9–11, Paul highlights Israel’s enmity with God, God’s provision for removing the enmity’s root cause, and the future reconciliation of Israel as a nation by incorporating specific prophecies and OT language. Romans 10:18–21 reflects Israel’s state of enmity in her failure to heed the words of inspired Scripture concerning God’s intent to provoke her to jealousy through the salvation of the Gentiles, and 9:30–33 reflects the persistence of enmity in her failure to accept Christ, the stumbling block that was also foretold. Romans 10:4–13 highlights God’s provision for the removal of enmity in Christ with the installation of faith as a new redemptive-historical paradigm. Romans 11:25–27 highlights a future time when reconciliation will be accomplished on a national scale for Israel when the Messiah redeemer comes in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Keywords

Supersessionism, Eschatology, Israel

Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

Supersessionism¹ is an unfortunate ideology that has plagued Christian thought for centuries.² Many have explored the Supersessionist tendencies exhibited by a variety of Christian thinkers throughout church history, and the relative influence such thinkers have had on theology and world events. For example, John E. Phelan has explored the evolving Supersessionist beliefs of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who, though originally Supersessionist, began to change his perspective as the Nazi agenda concerning Jews became clearer by the late 1930s.³ Nicholas Scott-Blakely has considered the Supersessionist beliefs of Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, and the steps that have been taken recently by the Protestant church in the Netherlands to distance themselves from such beliefs.⁴ Jeremy Coen has explored the writings of Thomas Aquinas in order to offer a corrective to the general embarrassment Christians have had over the Supersessionist beliefs of the early church fathers, arguing that such beliefs cannot ultimately be dismissed from an honest assessment of his

¹ Supersessionism is apparently a difficult ideology to define succinctly. See Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 11–12 for a discussion of the various ways the ideology has been nuanced. For simplicity, this essay adopts Vlach’s provided definition: “The view that the NT church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God” (12).

² *Ibid.*, 27–75 for a helpful survey of Supersessionism throughout church history.

³ John E. Phelan, “The Cruelty of Supersessionism: The Case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 59.

⁴ Nicholas Scott-Blakely, “Abraham Kuyper and the Instrumental Use of Biblical Israel,” *BibleRec* 8, no. 2 (2021): 195–208.

writings and influences.⁵ Other research varies wildly between those who still contend for the ideology (albeit, with nuance),⁶ those who call for its rejection,⁷ and those who simply acknowledge its influence within Christendom, whether for good or bad.⁸

Supersessionism's fatal flaw is its misunderstanding of the soteriological concept of reconciliation, particularly as it applies to Israel. Its diagnosis of Israel's spiritual plight is often hyperbolic and does not account for her covenant disobedience⁹; its evaluation of what God has accomplished in Christ is prone to generalizations that are theologically untenable,¹⁰ and it fails to account for what Christ's work implies for restoring Israel to her special covenant relationship with God; its view of salvation does not adequately establish continuity with what was promised

⁵ Jeremy Cohen, "Supersessionism, the Epistle to the Romans, Thomas Aquinas, and the Jews of the Eschaton," *JES* 52, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 527–553.

⁶ Philip La Grange Du Toit, "Is Replacement Theology Anti-Semitic?," *IDS* 54, no. 1 (2020), accessed March 31, 2022, <http://www.proquest.com/docview/2377863344/abstract/E89983A6B3F645DDPQ/1>.

⁷ Joel Willitts, "Jewish Fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ) in Post-Supersessionist Water: Messianic Judaism within a Post-Supersessionistic Paradigm," *HvTSt* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–5.

⁸ Amy-Jill Levine, "Supersessionism: Admit and Address Rather than Debate or Deny," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 155.

⁹ N. Scott-Blakely, "Kuyper," 195–208 offers plenty of examples of such exaggerated descriptions from Kuyper. For example, "the grieved Spirit of God abandoned the churches of these synagogues, and allowed the spirit of Satan to invade them. Thus the church of the Jews became a synagogue of Satan, or what we would call a false church" (201). Similarly, Phelan, "Cruelty," quotes Bonhoeffer, saying, "[The Jews] 'nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross' and 'must bear the curse for its action through a long history of suffering' (5).

¹⁰ E.g., Du Toit, "Replacement Theology," 5 provides a fairly standard description of the respective eras of the OT and the NT: "In the first epoch, people were under (the power of) law, sin and death, and people's identity was marked off by the works of the law. In the new epoch in Christ, people are 'now' subjected to the reign of the Spirit and not to the old way of the written code." Such elaborate statements make for beautiful homily, but they often produce more questions than answers (e.g., What "people" were under law, sin and death—humanity in general or Israel specifically? How were people under the OT saved if they were hopelessly under law, sin, and death? Who specifically were the people "marked off" by the works of the law—humanity or Israel? What is "the reign of the Spirit?").

to Israel in the OT, stopping short of what reconciliation will look like for the nation, and the world, when it reaches its full effect.¹¹ This flaw is not merely a result of misunderstanding theology, but of an untenable hermeneutic that flattens out ethnic distinctions in the people of God.¹² Worse, it is often perpetuated by a misunderstanding of how the NT authors interpreted OT texts, how they privileged their own redemptive-historical outlook over the plain meaning of the OT author, and how Christians should then interpret the OT in solidarity with what they espoused.¹³ Without acknowledging Israel's existence as God's covenant nation, the miracle of reconciliation gets lost in indignation, short-sightedness, and tenuous hermeneutical assumptions.

Leon Morris has provided a helpful summary of the concept of reconciliation.¹⁴ In sum, reconciliation refers to the ending of hostility between two parties. However, this basic notion is premised on three important realities. First, before reconciliation happens, both parties are at enmity with each other, and stand in opposition to each other's wellbeing. Second, in order for reconciliation to occur, the root cause of the hostility must be taken away; otherwise, no true change can occur in the relationship. Third, when reconciliation occurs, the hostility comes to an end, resulting in a change in the relationship from "enemy" to "friend." Reconciliation is not merely a synonym for salvation, tantamount to "redemption" or "deliverance," but an important descriptor of what that work of salvation accomplishes.

As a NT concept, reconciliation is exclusively mentioned in Paul's letters,¹⁵ which he used to describe what God has accomplished in Christ. In the relationship

¹¹ E.g., Millard J. Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium*, Revised edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 123 says, "it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Paul regarded the church, Jew and Gentile alike, as the true heir to the promises originally made to national Israel."

¹² Du Toit writes, "replacement theology...cannot be anti-Semitic, for neither race, biological descent nor ethnicity is part of its hermeneutic" ("Replacement Theology," 9).

¹³ E.g., Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 50 declares his own Supersessionist hermeneutic as "the historic protestant hermeneutic."

¹⁴ *NBD*³, 1002–3.

¹⁵ The verb, "reconcile" (καταλλάσσω), is used six times Rom. 5:11 [2x]; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, 20). An emphatic form of the verb, "reconciled completely" (ἀποκαταλλάσσω), occurs in

between God and man, there is enmity between the two resulting from man's sin (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). Man, through sin, has violated God's holiness and, as a result, incurred God's wrath (Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6). Because it was man who created the offense, he is therefore the one who must be reconciled to God instead of the reverse. However, man in his sinful state cares little to make the change necessary to end the root cause of his hostility (Rom. 8:7; 2 Cor. 2:14; 4:3). Hence, God in his kindness took the initiative to effect reconciliation on his own by providing his Son as an atonement for sin (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:13–22; Col. 1:20). With sin atoned for, God effectively removed the root cause of hostility, no longer holding the sinner's actions against him (2 Cor. 5:18; cf. Rom. 4:6–8), and providing a means through which reconciliation is possible.

Israel provides a unique dimension to this reality given her relationship as the covenant people of God. As a nation, Israel was disobedient to God's commands, and the NT witness likewise characterizes her disobedience as an act of hostility.¹⁶ This was uniquely tragic for those who were called to be "a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). As Paul implies in Romans, she is in a greater predicament, given that she was given explicit commands, as part of a covenant obligation, that she did not fulfill (cf. Rom. 5:13; 7:10–13). Her hostility incurred God's wrath, but his wrath encompassed not only the same eternal condemnation reserved for all sinners, but specific covenant curses that precluded her from blessing as a nation (cf. Lev. 26:14–43; Deut. 28:15–68). The hostile relationship was not only an abstract reality, but tangibly evident through covenant disloyalty and its resulting punitive effects. Reconciliation, similarly, encompasses not only God's provision of an atonement for sin and the satisfaction of God's wrath; it fulfills specific promises concerning her function in God's plan. The concept of reconciliation as it is universally applied to all humanity encompasses the necessary spiritual circumstances for making man right with God, but reconciliation as it applies specifically to Israel takes on additional significance concerning what her restored relationship means for her status as God's covenant nation.

Paul speaks to the reconciliation of Israel in Romans 9–11 with his argument concerning Israel's present apostasy and future salvation. In an attempt to identify how reconciliation applies specifically to Israel in light of her calling, this

Eph. 2:16 and Col. 1:20,22. The noun, "reconciliation" (καταλλαγή), occurs four times (Rom. 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

¹⁶E.g., Jesus' "woes" pronounced against Israel (Matt. 23:1–39) and Stephen's sermon (Acts 7:51–53) both attest to the hostility that characterized Israel's disobedient.

study will adumbrate the necessary premises of reconciliation from the aforementioned description in Paul's argument. As is characteristic in all his letters, especially Romans, Paul exhibits a masterful use of Scripture to argue his point. This provides an opportunity for such an analysis to serve as a rebuttal to Supersessionism's evaluation of the Apostles' hermeneutic. Hence, this study will identify the specific component parts of Reconciliation that Paul will highlight in Romans 9–11 by analyzing the areas where they are specially amplified by his use of the OT. Concerning Israel's disobedience, and her consequent relationship of enmity with God, the study will consider Paul's use of prophetic passages in 10:19–21 and 9:30–33. Concerning God's initiative to provide for the removal of enmity's root cause, the study will consider Paul's application of the language of the Torah to a new redemptive-historical paradigm in 10:4–13. Finally, concerning ultimate reconciliation between Israel and God, the study will consider the coming redeemer as depicted in 11:25–27 with Paul's use of Isaiah.

Israel's Enmity with God

Israel's state of enmity is described in Romans 10:18–21 by her rejection of the clear message of the gospel, which is presently going forth into all the world, especially the world's Jewish communities.¹⁷ Even worse, she has rejected the inspired Scripture that formerly attested to the work God is now doing. Paul provides two passages, one from the Torah and the other from the prophets, to demonstrate the revelation of God's intent in the Scriptures he provided. From the Torah, he cites Deuteronomy 32:21, an excerpt from the song of Moses, foretelling a time when God will make Israel jealous over the Gentiles—"those who are not a nation." This was to be a response in kind to Israel's idolatry, which had originally provoked God to jealousy over the inanimate objects and demonic spirits that were "no god." The NT often links an affinity for worldly pursuits—idolatry—with a state of enmity with God (e.g., Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17). The prophetic nature of the passage¹⁸

¹⁷ Paul opens with Psalm 14:4 to substantiate this thought, but the passage will not concern the heart of his argument. In its original context, the passage referred to the going forth of general revelation through God's good creation, which Paul sees as analogous to God's revelation of himself through the revelation of his salvific intent as it is proclaimed by his preachers (cf. 10:15).

¹⁸ See Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2019), 32. The structure of the Pentateuch follows a specific pattern in which its major narrative portions concludes with a poetic passage containing Messianic prophecy (Gen 49:2–27; Ex 15:1–18; Num 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–24; Deut 32:1–43; 33:2–29). The Song of Moses

indicates that God's provocation was not only what they should know, but what they should expect "in the latter days." The broader context of the passage indicates why Israel should know it. Moses reminds her that disobedience was tragically woven into her history since her initial calling at Sinai. Her disobedience in the wilderness, reflected in her propensity to idolatry, was what drove him to hide his face from her, and this state of enmity is what cautioned them to beware of his impending provocation.

In 10:20–21, Paul cites Isaiah 65:1–2 as additional evidence for God's provocation. He introduces the quote as a "bold"¹⁹ declaration from Isaiah, the thought of which is similar to Deuteronomy 30:21. It is the belief of many commentators that Paul uses Isaiah 65:1 in order to draw an analogy that suits his point, rather than to identify a direct prophecy like he did with Deuteronomy 30:21.²⁰ This is premised on the conclusion that the original context of Isaiah 65:1–2 refers exclusively to Israel, rather than to both the Gentiles and Israel in each of the two verses.²¹ Many OT scholars have provided ample evidence to support this conclusion. For example, the Niphal verb forms in the original Hebrew of Isaiah 65:1, translated, "I was sought" and "I was found," are thought to be tolerative niphals, better translated, "I allowed myself to be sought" and "I was ready to be found."²² This would suggest that Isaiah reflects an attitude on the part of God rather than an

declares that Israel's former rebellion provoked God's judgment (32:15–18) and it would do so again in the future (32:19–38).

¹⁹ Paul uses ἀποτολμᾶ, an extremely rare word in Biblical Greek, used only in this verse in the NT and nowhere in the LXX. Its relatively more frequent use in Classical Greek suggests the word may reflect some measure of Hellenistic influence on Paul's part.

²⁰ E.g., Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 669; Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2018), 503–4; Mireia Ryskova, "The Reception of the Book of Isaiah in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *Theol* 9, no. 2 (2019): 95–116. Also, Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 665–66, though he suggests Paul means to identify a typological relationship.

²¹ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 859 suggests that Paul's attribution of Isaiah 65:1 to the Gentiles was an earlier Christian tradition.

²² Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, vol. 15B, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 700–1.

action God will do. Also, the Hebrew witness reflected in the MT renders the verb in the second half of the verse with reference to the “nation” in the passive sense (i.e., pual)—“a nation not called by my name.” However, there is a strong textual tradition to favor an alternative verb form (i.e., qal), which would render a more active sense—“a nation that did not call on my name.”²³ This reading, being the more strongly attested of the two, better complements a reference to Israel as the nation who did not call on God’s name, just as Isaiah had previously mentioned in 64:7. It is worth mentioning as well that, while Paul cites Isaiah 65:1–2 in Romans 10:20–21, as if both verses together prove his point, he does not include this second half of the verse as part of his citation.²⁴ This would be significant because, if the MT reading were attested in whatever copy of the OT he cites, and if this reading better proves the prophetic nature of the passage, one would expect to see him use it as part of his argument.

On the other hand, some interpreters conclude Isaiah makes a direct prophetic reference to the Gentiles in 65:1.²⁵ With respect to the Niphal verbs, for example, some contend that Niphal must always refer to actual events, not simply an attitude.²⁶ Hence, the verbs do not imply an attitude—a non-event—but an event that will come to pass. Also, it would seem that the verse better answers 63:19 in the context of Isaiah, where Israel appeared to say, in a spirit of contemptuousness, that “We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who are not called by your name.”²⁷ God’s address in 65:1 would then serve to turn their

²³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 632n49. Qumran, LXX, and the Targum all attest to the active reading. The MT is the primary witness for the participial reading.

²⁴ Ryskova, “Reception,” 108.

²⁵ This tends to be the view of older commentators. A current interpreter of Isaiah who holds the view is Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Isaiah*, Ariel’s Bible Commentary (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2021), 674–75; of Romans, Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 420–21.

²⁶ Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 349. Grogan also cites Derek Kidner in making this point.

²⁷ F. Derek Kidner, “Isaiah,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 669.

contemptuousness against them, suggesting that the people who sought and found him were the very people Israel arrogantly feared they had become.

Thankfully, Paul's point is not significantly impacted by whether Isaiah referred to Israel or the Gentiles. The decision is only difficult for discerning how he uses Isaiah 65:1–2 to make it. Looking at Isaiah in both the MT and the LXX, there appears to be an intentional distinction between “nation” (יָֹּׁׁׁ [MT] / ἔθνει [LXX]) in v. 1 and “people” (אָֹׁׁׁ [MT] / λαὸν [LXX]) in v. 2, which suggests a different referent between the two verses. Of these two, ἔθνος in v. 1 is the word Paul typically uses to denote the Gentiles. Moreover, Paul explicitly maintains this distinction as he quotes the two verses, introducing v. 2 with an expression that signifies Israel is the referent to whom the verse is addressed—“concerning Israel, he says” (πρὸς δὲ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ λέγει). It is also possible that a similar distinction occurs in the prior quote of Deuteronomy 32:21: Israel would be provoked by those who were *not* a “people”—Israel—and those who *were* a “nation”—Gentile.²⁸ More importantly, however, it is Paul's purpose in this context that suggests he interprets Isaiah as a forward-looking prophecy. He intends to demonstrate that the Law and the Prophets equally attest to Israel's present state of enmity, and that the texts which speak to it are not incomprehensible. Moreover, his use of Deuteronomy 32:21—a clear prophetic passage—suggests that he has forward-looking prophecy in mind. To cite the former as anticipating what would transpire in the future, only to then cite the latter as an analogy of what occurs in the present, would be to blunt his point. It seems, then, the tragedy to which Paul speaks is not only that Israel's rejection, and the consequent elevation of the Gentiles, was attested in Israel's Scriptures, but even more tragic, it was attested in such a way that Israel should have been looking for it.

Paul indicated in Romans 9:30–33 that God's intent to provoke Israel to jealousy had already begun in the era of the church. However, her state of enmity would only persist, as evidenced by her unwillingness to accept God's prescribed means of attaining the righteousness of God. Just like the provocation, Israel's persistent failure was not unexpected in the program of God. Israel stumbled over a stone—Christ—also in fulfillment of OT prophecy. The prophecy is drawn from Isaiah 28:16, the text of which serves as bookends in Paul's quotation—the stone “laid in Zion” in whom those who believe “will not be put to shame.” The prophecy had a history of messianic interpretation from early Jewish sources extending into the NT period.²⁹ Paul indicates his own commitment to a messianic interpretation

²⁸ Contra. Siefried, “Romans,” 664.

²⁹ See J. Randall Price, “Isaiah 28:16: The Messianic Cornerstone,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, ed. Michael

subsequently in Romans 10:11, where he quotes the latter phrase—whoever believes “will not be put to shame”—again with clear reference to belief in Jesus. In between the two bookends of Isaiah 28:16, he incorporates Isaiah 8:14, particularly the expression, “a stone of stumbling” and “a rock of offense,” so as to signify the effect this stone would have on unbelieving Israel. The combination draws out that, while God would establish his “stone” as the foundation for the believer’s salvation, this same stone would become a source of stumbling for the unbelieving.³⁰ Paul’s argument, the Jews did not pursue the righteousness of God through faith, is bolstered by his reference to Isaiah’s prophecy, which indicates that Israel’s inability to establish faith in Jesus—the stone laid in Zion—was directly foretold in their Scriptures.

God’s Initiative to Remove Enmity’s Root Cause

Paul’s use of the OT makes plain that Israel had grown ignorant of God’s revelation. What’s worse, they maintained a zeal for God that was fashioned after what they thought would please him, and not in conformity to what he revealed. Paul devotes Romans 10:4–13 to describing what God has provided in Christ for the removal of enmity’s root cause. In v. 4, he declares that Christ is the end of the law “for righteousness,” a bold declaration that denotes Christ has initiated a redemptive-historical paradigm shift from “righteousness based on the law” to “righteousness based on faith.” The former paradigm was exhibited by onerous obedience to a written code, but the latter would be exhibited by effortless faith.

In vv. 5–8, Paul demonstrates that this shift was anticipated in the Torah by citing Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:11–14, each as representative of the two historical paradigms. The first, “righteousness based on the law,” is represented by Leviticus 18:5, when God’s covenant people were expected to follow the Mosaic Law, in order that they might “live” by its commands. In using this verse, Paul could be suggesting that righteousness was attainable through perfect obedience to the Law, or at least that this was what many in Israel had come to believe. In this sense, to “live” by the commands would mean to find eternal life in obeying them.

Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 875–77 for a sketch of the messianic interpretation in Jewish and early church sources.

³⁰ Given the similar use of these two Isaiah passages in 1 Peter, some have suggested the early church may have had a shared tradition that incorporated the two (i.e., “stone testimony”). See, e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 628.

The law was then the means for attaining eternal life. However, this would suggest that Paul is using Leviticus 18:5 to say something it didn't say in its original context.³¹ As Paul says elsewhere, the purpose of the law was never to effect salvation, but only to serve as a means of instruction for the covenant community concerning the reality of sin (Rom. 3:19–20; 7:7–13; Gal. 3:22), and what pleases God (Gal. 3:23–25).³² Leviticus 18:5 was not an offer to “life” in the sense of everlasting life that is merited with salvation; rather, it was a promise to abundant living as a member of the community. “It has to do with the quality of life lived in the promise and the joy of participating in all the benefits of that promise.”³³ Hence, Paul uses the text's original meaning to represent the time prior to Christ when God's covenant people were expected to follow the Mosaic Law. It was a time when God's purpose for the nations was realized through the mediatorial effect of God's kingdom of priests as they reflected his holiness through strict observance (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:6). The problem this posed was that the Law promised curse for those who disobeyed, and Israel's history reflected a persistent failure to live by its commands. Rather than enjoy the promise of life, the law proved death for them (Rom. 7:10), as it justly provoked wrath for those who failed to obey it. Hence, the law would only ever serve to justify the enmity that existed between Israel and God. If the enmity was ever to change, a provision was needed. With this in mind, Paul introduces the second paradigm in vv. 6–8, which accomplished what Israel needed for enmity's end.

This paradigm is represented by Deuteronomy 30:11–14. For some interpreters, Paul again appears to appropriate the text, this time to make it more suitable to the precepts of the gospel. Hence, while Moses may have spoken to what was immediately relevant to the people of Israel, Paul transforms the verbiage: “Who

³¹ Hence, Paul W. Meyer, *The Word in This World: Essays in New Testament Exegesis and Theology*, ed. C. Clifton Black, John T. Carroll, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, First Edition., NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 200 suggests Paul's use of the passage here is an exercise in “Jewish rabbinic procedure.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 2:51 says that “Paul appropriates [the text] as one suited to express the principle of law-righteousness.”

³² Wayne G. Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Collection (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 240–45.

³³ Walter C. Kaiser, “God's Promise Plan and His Gracious Law,” *JETS* 33, no. 3 (1990): 289–302. See also William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” *MSJ* 10, no. 2 (1999): 229.

will ascend into heaven?” (v. 6) refers to Christ’s incarnation in light of Paul’s editorial comment; likewise, “Who will descend into the abyss?” (v. 7) refers to his resurrection and “The word is near to you” (v. 8) refers to gospel preaching.³⁴ Paul’s rhetorical purpose indicates this is not likely. Here, he does not intend to demonstrate that Deuteronomy 30:11–14 is a direct prophecy fulfilled in Christ like he does in other areas of his argument. Instead, he uses Moses’ words as Moses originally intended them to demonstrate how the OT anticipated what is now a reality. Moses’ original message was that the Mosaic Law was understandable (i.e., “near,” in the “mouth,” and in the “heart”). There was no necessary journey to heaven, or beyond the sea, to receive or decipher its meaning. Hence, it could, and must, be obeyed. In similar fashion, Israel now has “the word of faith,” a new means of blessing that surpasses the law, which is “near” to anyone who desires to be saved, offering the prospect of justification to all who confess their sins with their “mouth” and believe that Jesus is Lord in their “heart” (vv. 9–10). Paul applies the language of Moses’ description, then, to this new paradigm: there is no need to ascend into heaven (v. 6), nor to descend into the abyss (v. 7) in order to receive the word of faith; like the Mosaic covenant, it is near, approachable, and therefore worthy to be heeded.³⁵ Paul thus explains that the new paradigm is of such a nature that God’s righteousness is imminent for any who might exercise faith in Christ.

This shift, ironically, signified God’s provocation of Israel. As God’s covenant nation, she would no longer be the *modus operandi* for effecting his promised blessing to the nations. Instead, salvation is now available to both Jew and Gentile through faith in Jesus, the ultimate Israelite and promised messiah. Yet, even as this shift would occur, “it is not as though the word of God has failed” (Rom. 9:6). It was anticipated by the idea that God would provide a righteousness that was not exhibited by onerous obedience to the law, but effortless faith. This lends apologetic value for Paul as he seeks to demonstrate how Israel failed to achieve the righteousness of God—by persisting in adherence to the law of God without acknowledging the faith now required in Christ. If Israel would accept God’s provision, however, in Jesus’ atonement, messiahship, and Lordship, he would have no

³⁴ Mark A. Seifrid, “Paul’s Approach to the Old Testament in Rom 10:6–8,” *TJ* 6, no. 1 (1985): 26–27; See also Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 1.

³⁵ So Moo, *Romans*, 653; Michael J. Vlach, *The Old in the New: Understanding How the New Testament Authors Quoted the Old Testament* (Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2021), 274–75.

further cause to set his face against her as an enemy. He would not count her sins against her and would reconcile her unto himself (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–19).

Reconciliation between Israel and God

In Romans 11, Paul admits that, at the present time, only a remnant of Israel would enjoy this state of reconciliation. Its full effect will occur at the moment of Israel's future national conversion when Christ returns. She will be saved on a national scale when God's purpose for the Gentiles (i.e., "the fullness of the Gentiles") is complete (11:25–27). To substantiate this point, Paul cites Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:8 as additional prophecies yet to be fulfilled. Taken together, they foretell a coming redeemer who will remove Israel's sin for the sake of God's covenant with them. The citation follows the LXX, which is characteristically Paul's preferred source for citing the OT.³⁶ However, he introduces a notable change in Isaiah 59:20: whereas the LXX reads that a redeemer will come "for the sake of Zion" (ἕνεκεν), as if Zion were a motivating reason for his coming, Paul says the redeemer will come "from" (ἐκ) Zion, suggesting that Zion is the place from which the redeemer will come. This reading does not correspond with any other known OT tradition Paul may have had access to, so it's difficult to explain why he would make the change. If we are right to think that Paul incorporates the OT context, then any suggestion in which he may have deliberately changed the text is unlikely.³⁷ Like-

³⁶ Paul's time was a period of "pluriform" transmission of the OT in which multiple textual traditions were represented in its multiple disparate copies and translations that circulated between regions. For general background on the sources of the OT in the NT period, see Eugene Ulrich in *DNTB*, 452–59, and Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009), 35. However, he was a Greek-speaker, an apostle to the Gentiles, and apparently had an ability to adapt and minister in a Greek-speaking context. His use of the LXX may have been a strategic choice to more easily disseminate his message of Jesus' messianic fulfillment to the Greek-speaking world.

³⁷ Many scholars appear willing to make this conclusion, though the specifics take on different forms. He could have changed the text under the influence of some other similar passage, perhaps in the Psalms (e.g., S.J. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 33, AB [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008], 624; Christopher R. Bruno, "The Deliverer from Zion: The Source(s) and Function of Paul's Citation in Romans 11:26–27," *TynBul* 59, no. 1 [2008]: 122), or perhaps to accord with some early Christological tradition (e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 728), or to produce a less offensive message for Paul's Gentile readers (e.g., Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006], 703).

wise, the idea that Paul was working off of a corrupted text would violate the integrity of Paul's letter as an inerrant text produced under divine inspiration.³⁸ Our best guess is that Paul was working from a tradition of the LXX which is now lost.³⁹ Given the pluriform context of Paul's day, this is not an unreasonable conjecture.

The significance of the change lies in whether the prophecy denotes a redeemer coming out of a restored Zion, or whether he is coming to restore it. Restoration is in view with his coming, regardless. That he would come out of Zion is well attested in OT prophecy (cf. Pss. 14:7; 20:2; 53:6; 110:2; 128:5; 134:3; 135:21; Isa. 2:3; Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2). It seems the difference concerns whether Paul intends to denote a specific event at one point in time (hence, "to Zion" at his coming) or whether he simply means to prove that Israel's salvation is well attested in OT prophecy. The latter appears likely given the context of his argument and the way he introduces the citation.⁴⁰ After speaking about Israel's condition at the present time, relative to the Gentiles, and the duration of such a condition culminating with her eventual salvation, he says that it is "in this way" (οὕτως) that all Israel is saved (v. 25).⁴¹ His emphasis, then, is on the process by which Israel will attain salvation, namely, through hardening and jealousy (vv. 11–24). When the fullness of the Gentiles is complete, God will redeem Israel, banish their ungodliness, establish his covenant with them, and take away their sins, as Scripture attests (i.e., "as it is written," [καθὼς γέγραπται]). Whether the redeemer should be viewed as coming "to" Zion to restore it, or "out of Zion" after its restoration, is ancillary to Paul's purpose. The restoration of Zion will be in view at such time when the redeemer appears to remove Israel's sin, and Israel's sin will be removed at such time when

³⁸ Contra. Kruse, *Romans*, 444n225; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, vol. 38B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 682. Article XIV of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics reads, "We deny that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the Biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated.

³⁹ Interpreters who appear open to this view cite Brendt Schaller's essay on the subject. See, e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 727n74; Michael G. Vanlaningham, "Romans 11:25–27 and the Future of Israel in Paul's Thought," *MSJ* 3, no. 2 (1992): 171. They acknowledge the convincing nature of his case, but stop short of accepting it fully, given its speculative nature.

⁴⁰ See Vanlaningham, "Romans 11:25–27," 170.

⁴¹ Taking οὕτως as modal, in agreement with many commentators. Cf., Vanlaningham's qualification, however (*ibid.*, 157), that a temporal function is not completely jettisoned with the modal use in light of the context of Paul's argument.

her hardening and jealousy has reached its end, when the fullness of the Gentiles is completed.

Conclusion

Paul applies the soteriological concept of reconciliation to Israel in Romans 9–11 with a skillful use of the OT that preserves the original meaning of the OT authors. By using direct foretelling from both the Torah and Isaiah, he establishes Israel's state of enmity with God, resulting in her rejection of God's revelatory provision for her, and his rejection of her as the primary agent for disseminating blessing to the nations. He further highlights God's proactive provision for removing the root cause of the enmity with a redemptive-historical paradigm shift to a righteousness based on faith in the atoning work of Messiah Jesus. Keeping in mind the direct prophecy concerning God's provocation, as well as language in the Torah that applies specifically to this paradigm shift, Paul demonstrates that the OT anticipated this new reality, both in fulfillment of God's intent to judge Israel for sin and his intent to provide a means for reconciling Israel back to himself. Finally, with Christ having made provision for reconciliation, Israel will be reconciled in full when God's purpose for the Gentiles is completed, at some undisclosed time in the future when Messiah, their redeemer, comes. Her future reconciliation was also directly foretold and therefore equally worthy to be anticipated by Israel's present remnant, as well as any gentile believer who yearns to see God fulfill his promise to save her.

This study serves as a corrective to the Supersessionist outlook concerning Israel and the hermeneutic used to substantiate it in Scripture. Israel's disobedience is tragic, but it is not unexpected, nor is it the end of her story. As promised, God has provided a Messiah for removing hostility's root cause by taking away her sin. On the basis of what he has accomplished, Israel can be reconciled to God and he will take the initiative to restore her as God's covenant nation when he returns. Paul demonstrates in Romans 9–11 that this portrait of Israel's salvation was anticipated by Israel's prophets, and their prophetic utterance provides the assurance that she will be saved. Fundamentally, then, Supersessionism fails because it does not account for what the OT has promised, nor for why Paul would rely so fervently on such promises to contend for God's faithfulness.

The argument of this study can be nuanced with additional considerations from Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 5:17–21. His perception of his apostolic ministry was that it was closely related to what God was doing in reconciling the world to himself. It is curious to what extent he might have considered himself an agent in the fulfillment of OT promises concerning Israel's reconciliation. On this note, further research is needed concerning Paul's use of the OT, particularly as it

pertains to Messianic fulfillment. This study has demonstrated with selected OT quotes in Romans 9–11 that Paul used the OT to demonstrate direct fulfillment of OT promises in the person of Christ, both in what he accomplished with his first advent and what he will accomplish when he returns. A broader study of Paul's hermeneutic and his perception of Messianic fulfillment in his letters will further demonstrate how a Supersessionist outlook concerning Israel is contrary to Paul and the OT scriptures.

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