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Christ, the Savior of Israel

An Evaluation of the Dual Covenant
and *Sonderweg* Interpretations of Paul's Letters

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Chapter One: Introduction

The interest in Israel and the Jewish people has always been high in Christian circles, but no more so than since World War II. The restoration of national Israel has caused a stir in virtually every wing of Christendom, especially following the Holocaust and the manner in which the nation was established. Furthermore, there is renewed interest in the theological question of Israel. This latter interest concerning Israel's theological importance raises other questions of the relationship of this people to the church.

Soteriological issues are some of the more difficult problems when one investigates the relationship of Israel and the church. The history of Jewish-Christian dialogue in the last sixty years as well as the New Perspective on Paul (hereafter NPP) have resulted in many positive developments. But one wonders if these developments have forced certain exegetical and theological results, especially regarding the relationship of Jews and Gentiles to the gospel of Christ. Recently a small but influential group of primarily Christian scholars has reinterpreted Paul as allowing for distinct means of salvation for the church and Israel. It is this topic that will be addressed in this dissertation.

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to examine the letters of St. Paul to determine his understanding of the precise nature of the relationship of the salvation of the Jewish people to Jesus Christ. The project will attempt to address the question of the means of salvation for Israel, and to confirm that Paul sees Israel being saved through faith in Jesus Christ as He is presented by the church.

There is some terminological confusion about the precise referents of the terms *Sonderweg* and "bicoventanism." Some view these terms as purely synonymous, encompassing almost any distinction between the salvation of the Jewish people and the salvation of the church.¹ But they are distinct. The dual-

1 See, e.g., Terence L. Donaldson, "Jewish Christianity, Israel's Stumbling and the *Sonderweg* Reading of Paul," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29.1

covenant approach² is championed by Lloyd Gaston, Krister Stendahl, and John G. Gager, among others.³ They maintain that Paul says the Jewish people have

(2006): 27-54; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New International Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 725 n. 61, though, to his credit, Moo recognizes the significant variations that exist between the different scholars on this topic; and Reidar Hvalvik, "A 'Sonderweg' for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11.25-27," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38 (February 1990): 87-107.

- 2 For the sake of clarity and simplicity, this approach to the salvation of the Jewish people in this project will be called by the synonymous terms "dual-covenant theology," "bi-covenantalism," the "two-covenant approach," or simply "the two ways" referring to the two distinct covenants God has, on the one hand, with the Jewish people (through the OT covenants and Torah), and, on the other, with the church (through Jesus Christ).

N. T. Wright (*The New Testament and the People of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 473 n. 5), and Nahum N. Glatzer (*Franz Rosenzweig—His Life and Thought* [New York: Schocken Books, 1953], xxv), credit Franz Rosenzweig with being the first serious proponent of this bi-covenantal approach in which Christianity and Judaism are both seen as legitimate religions and approaches to God and to reality. Cf. Ernest Simon and Edith Rosenzweig, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig—Briefe* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1935), 73-74; and Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 265-424, esp. 413-16. For Rosenzweig's life and contribution to dual-covenant theology, see Ronald H. Miller, *Dialogue and Disagreement: Franz Rosenzweig's Relevance to Contemporary Jewish-Christian Understanding* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 55-120; Kai Kjør-Hansen, "One Way for Jews and Gentiles in the New Millennium," in *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 296-300, 345-46. For a brief but helpful review of the historical development of the two-covenant position, and for the ideology of it, see Jakób Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: A Study in the Relationship between the Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London: S.P.C.K., 1949), 314-22. For a summary of the history and ecumenical acceptance of bi-covenantalism, see Henri Blocher, "Two Covenant Theology and its Implications for Jewish Missions," in *Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People: The Uniqueness of*

always been rightly related to God and that Jesus Christ is the savior *only of the Gentiles*, not the Jews. The Jews have always enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, a right standing with God because of His covenant faithfulness to them as promised in the Torah, and through their own faithfulness in keeping the Torah. Christ's death has relevance only for the Gentiles, and through His death they can receive the same position of righteousness before God that the Jews possess by virtue of the Law. They maintain, therefore, that Paul never urges Jews to embrace Christ as their Messiah, nor condemns them for refusing to do so.

The *Sonderweg* position is quite different from bicovenantalism, which denies any relevance of the saving work of Christ for Israel. *Sonderweg* proponents maintain that the Jews are saved through faith in Christ, but unlike the church, this faith is engendered by the *Parousia*, when Christ comes out of

Jesus and Jewish Evangelism, ed. David Parker (London: Paternoster, 2011), 184-208.

- 3 Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987); Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 4, and John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford, 1983); idem, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford, 2000). See also Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (London: Yale University Press, 1994). Stendahl claims that his readers have misunderstood what he believes about Israel's salvation. He did not intend to teach a two-covenant approach, though he can see why people have taken him this way based on what he said in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 3-5. He insists that he does not actually believe this (see his *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], x, 7). But what he writes in *Final Account* betrays this statement. There he is adamant: "The whole of Israel will be saved. He doesn't say Israel will accept Jesus Christ" (38). "God has the power to realize their [the Jewish people's] salvation, which is definitely not cast in christological terms" (40). "As Paul said, the Jews have the *hyothesia* [sic]—the status of children. They do not need to come to Christ in order to be children of God" (42). He does, however, also say: "The Jews did not arrive at this *dikaosyne* [sic] (righteousness), because they sought their own (10.3), their own in the sense of a righteousness according to the commandments rather than righteousness of faith, which for Paul is a catchword for salvation in Jesus Christ" (35). It is difficult to determine what Stendahl thinks, but at the very least he can be accused of lack of precision and clarity.

heaven, lifts Israel's hardening, preaches the gospel to Israel, and Israel trusts Him for salvation.⁴ Christians, on the other hand, are saved by hearing the gospel from other believers and responding in faith to their message. In this regard, Israel's future salvation parallels Paul's own which occurred because of the Christophany on the Damascus Road. In the process of this examination, it will be argued that neither bicovenantalism nor the *Sonderweg* approach does justice to Paul's teaching on the conversion of the Jewish people, either throughout the course of the present era or in their future conversion (Rom 11.25-27). Both approaches will be evaluated in what follows.

Procedure

Chapter One will serve as the introduction to the topic, and will summarize in some detail the two-covenant and *Sonderweg* approaches. This summary will involve a presentation of the assorted views, some of the hermeneutical, exegetical, theological, and logical methodology and argumentation of the various proponents of the views, and their conclusions. At this point relatively little critique of the views will be offered. Chapters Two through Six concern a summary and evaluation of bicovenantalism. The procedure will be to present five propositions proffered by the two-covenant proponents that encapsulate their view of Israel's salvation. A chapter will be devoted to each of these propositions, and will include a summary and critique of dual-covenant interpretations of the relevant passages. Those propositions serve as the chapter headings for these chapters. Those propositions, and the passages germane to each, include the following: (1) Paul never viewed the gospel of Christ as

4 For this aspect of the question regarding the means of Jewish salvation, the German term "*Sonderweg*" is used frequently. It means "special way," and has come to be used for the special way of salvation for the Jews at the *Parousia* (as differentiated from the "regular way" of salvation experienced by Gentiles in responding with faith to the proclamation of the gospel by the church). It should be noted that the understanding of the timing of Israel's salvation through Christ at the second coming is shared by a number of German scholars and some North Americans in the posttribulationist heritage, though posttribulationists see the need for the church to evangelize Israel unlike the *Sonderweg* champions.

salvifically relevant for the Jews (e.g., Rom 1.13-17; 1 Cor 1.18-25; 12.4-14). (2) Paul never condemns the Jews for rejecting Christ (Rom 2.17-3.20). (3) Paul never criticizes the Jews for doing “works of the Law” in order to be justified. His warnings about doing the Law were directed solely to Gentiles, because for them as those outside of God’s covenant community the Law produced nothing but condemnation. By implication, then, the Jews are not criticized by Paul for their faithful adherence to the Law (Rom 3.21-31; Gal 2.11-21; 3.19-4.11). (4) Paul never says that the Jews are not right with God (Rom 9.24-33; Gal 6.11-18; Phil 3.2-11). (5) Paul’s only complaint against the Jews related to their exclusivity—i.e., their unwillingness to recognize that *in Christ* the Gentiles could have the same standing before God that they enjoyed through the Torah (Rom 10.1-21).

Chapter Seven will focus upon the *Sonderweg* controversy, its claimants maintaining that Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus serves as a paradigm for the future salvation of all Israel at the *Parousia*. They refer to several texts outside of the Pauline corpus (e.g., Matthew 23–25; Paul’s conversion in Acts 9, 22, 26) to support their understanding of the salvation of Israel at the *Parousia*, and their view of these texts will be considered briefly. Chapters Eight through Ten will examine Romans 11 for the contribution it makes regarding Paul’s theology of Israel’s future salvation.⁵ These chapters will present and evaluate both the two-covenant and *Sonderweg* interpretations of Romans 11. Chapter Eleven will provide a final theological assessment of dual-covenant theology and the *Sonderweg* approach.

A number of significant theological concerns will not receive extended consideration in this work, such as (e.g.) the history of bicovenantalism, or the relationship of the church to Mosaic Law or to Israel, or the NPP, except as they intersect with the texts and issues at hand. The primary focus of this project is on exegetical and soteriological concerns, but the fact that the salvation of Israel includes both a present and, assuming for the moment a mass *future* salvation of the people as a whole (the future being seen, e.g., in Rom 11.25-27), there is a need for some analysis of eschatological themes as well. It is likely that the

5 Lest one be accused of question-begging, the intention is to prove, rather than just assume, that there is a distinct future for ethnic Israel. This will be demonstrated in Chapter Ten below when identifying those who are meant by the phrase *πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ* in 11.26 (see especially beginning on p. 239).