

Is Israel replaced by a new 'Body of Christ' or do we have Gentile inclusion in the Abrahamic Family:

Why has the true reality of life and relationships in Rome at the time that the Apostle Paul (Sha'ul) wrote to Rome not been fully acknowledged by Christian scholars until very recently?

What presuppositions have been so strong that they have kept scholars from properly discerning Sha'ul's argument, both as to who his intended audience was, and what is actual message therefore really was?

Part of the answer may be:

- 1) A misconception that Christians were meeting in house-churches at the time, that were independent, of and in opposition to the Jewish synagogues. Such a cataclysmic separation between the church and Judaism had not occurred at this time;
- 2) The assumption that the supposed 'Law-free' or 'Torah-free' theology of Galatians was operative in Rome at this time. There is simply no evidence for this;
- 3) The assumption that 'justification by faith' obviates Torah observance.

Regarding point 1, in the 'Mystery of Romans' Prof Mark Nanos demonstrates that the followers of Yeshua were part of the community that was built around many synagogues (including some meeting in homes) that existed in Rome at the time. The Gentile believers had joined these Jewish communities in the Diaspora and it was through these communities that they had come into the knowledge of the Messiah Yeshua and his Father, the One True God¹.

Nanos provides evidence that these diaspora Jewish communities in Rome were composed of:

- 1) non-Messiah believing Jews,
- 2) Messiah-believing Jews and,
- 3) Messiah-believing Gentiles.

While this may not on first reading and reflection seem that unusual, what needs to be made clear here is that the Sha'ul sees all three of these sub-groups as 'saved', that is, as sharing a faith in the Almighty and His purposes that both leads to living and acting righteously in this age, as well as providing them with a place in the Age to Come, in the full implementation of the Kingdom of God.

Nanos actually make a brilliant suggestion that accords with this appreciation and that almost instantly allows the many apparent contradictions in Paul's writings to dissolve away.

He suggests that *"To be more faithful to the contextual usage of the Apostle Paul's language, the interpreter of Paul's rhetoric should add, "for non-Jewish believers in Jesus Christ" to the end of virtually every characterization of Paul's position."*² I recommend this approach be taken to every one of Paul's epistles.

While this may not seem that earth-shattering on first appraisal, when considered along with the high probability (as demonstrated by Nanos), that the 'strong' whom Sha'ul forcefully admonishes and warns are a sub-group of the Gentile believers, and that the 'weak'³ he speaks of are non-Messiah believing Jews, the implications are huge.

"Paul himself wishes to do the Law; agrees with it in his inner-self; and finds in Christ the victory enabling him to fulfil Torah; he expects the same of those whom he addresses (in Romans)" – Mark Nanos, from 'The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans' in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol 61, No 2, April 1999.

Consider Romans 7:12,14,22:

"12 So the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

14 For we know that the Torah is spiritual,

22 For I delight in the Torah of God, in my inner being,"

¹ Also supporting Nanos' evidence is Ambrosiaster (late 4th century CE) in his commentary on Romans where he writes that the first Jewish Christians observed Torah: *"It is established that there were Jews living in Rome in the times of the apostles and that those Jews who had believed passed to the Romans the tradition that they ought to profess Christ but keep the law ... One ought not to condemn the Romans but to praise their faith because without seeing signs and miracles, and without seeing any of the apostles, they nevertheless accepted faith in Christ, although according to a Jewish rite."* – see 'Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9-11' by Richard H. Bell (p 66)

² See *"Rethinking the "Paul and Judaism" Paradigm"* by Mark Nanos at www.marknanos.com

³ Nanos demonstrates that Paul's terminology for 'weak' (whether originally in Hebrew or Greek) would be better translated into English as 'stumbling'. I discuss this later on in my review of his book.

and Romans 13:8-10:

8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Torah .

9 The commandments, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet, and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law Torah."

Whereas most Christian scholars are still blinkered in the narrow and historically inaccurate view that Sha'ul (Paul) was a Christian writing to Christians in Christian churches, many are at last beginning to look at the historical evidence anew and try to re-read Sha'ul in a manner which fits which the historical reality that existed in Rome at the time of Sha'ul's letter.

As Nanos points out in the article referred to above, if the followers of Jesus/Yeshua had been meeting in 'Christian churches', separated from the Jewish synagogues through which they have first come to learn of God and his Messiah, we could expect the Sha'ul to write to them about codes of behaviour in their new setting and religion.

That is, we would expect to read Sha'ul addressing "issues in Gentile congregations like household codes, instructions for baptism, marriage, burial, ..." etc. Instead, we read a very Jewish context when Sha'ul speaks of being 'slaves of righteousness' and the 'obedience of faith'⁴.

There is extant literature from around this time that indicates that the Jewish people expected that, when the Messianic times arrived; that is when the 'last days' arrived, Gentiles while remaining Gentiles, would no longer be sinners or idolaters', but be 'righteous Gentiles' (see for example Paula Fredriksen "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2" Journal of Theological Studies, N.S. 42 (1991) p532-64.

Was this expectation common before Sha'ul's Damascus revelation, or a view so well propagated by Sha'ul that it became somewhat common-place after his Damascus Road revelation?

I believe that this view was in many ways thanks to Sha'ul. The evidence we have on the famous Rabbi's Hillel and Shammai (early 1st Century CE) is that both believed that Gentiles needed to convert to gain citizenship in the Coming Age, at the Resurrection of the Righteous.

The Jewish scholar, Rabbi Moshe Reiss also states that "*While Jews believed that Righteous Gentiles would enter the Kingdom of God Paul recognized that they would be considered (at least by most religious Jews) as second class citizens.*"⁵

Sha'ul on the other hand is quite emphatic that Yeshua-believing righteous Gentiles have equal status before the Almighty.

Two portions of Sha'ul's epistles that speak of this new revelation are Ephesians 3 and Col 1:25-27.

"It is a consequence of this that I, Sha'ul, am a prisoner of the Messiah Yeshua on behalf of you Gentiles. 2 I assume that you have heard of the work God in his grace has given me to do for your benefit, 3 and that it was by a revelation that this secret plan was made known to me. I have already written about it briefly, 4 and if you read what I have written, you will grasp how I understand this secret plan concerning the Messiah. 5 In past generations it was not made known to mankind, as the Spirit is now revealing it to his emissaries and prophets, 6 that in union with the Messiah and through the Good News the Gentiles were to be joint heirs, a joint body and joint sharers with the Jews in what God has promised." - Ephesians 3:1-6

"I became a servant of the Good News because God gave me this work to do for your benefit. The work is to make fully known the message from God, 26 the secret hidden for generations, for ages, but now made clear to the people he has set apart for himself. 27 To them God wanted to make known how great among the Gentiles is the glorious richness of this secret. And the secret is this: the Messiah is united with you people! In that rests your hope of glory!" - Col 1:25-27

⁴ *'Sha'ul echoes Yeshua. How is a man set free? By becoming a slave to righteousness. Sha'ul contrasts freedom from sin with slavery to righteousness. He writes to Gentiles who have embraced the faith of Israel. They were once embroiled in the inner battle for personal liberty, deluded into thinking that their license was freedom. Sha'ul splashes them with the cold, hard facts. They were slaves. But something happened. They became obedient to the teaching they had been given. Their obedience was a process of adopting rules and regulations about life. They submitted themselves to an external authority. What was the result? Exactly the same as the promise Yeshua made to His followers. They were free – to be slaves to righteousness. The yetzer ha'ra was domesticated to the will of God. They discovered the joy of no longer being held captive but rather being held in the arms of the Father. Yeshua and Paul agree. Freedom comes through obedience."* - <http://skipmoen.com/2010/12/02/who-is-free-2/>

⁵ http://www.moshereiss.org/christianity/02_tradition/02_tradition.htm

You will note here that Sha'ul is speaking to Gentiles; that he is arguing that it was by direct revelation and not purely from the study of the Tanakh (though this truth may have always been in the Tanakh, it had not been seen as far as we can tell), that Sha'ul was made aware of this 'end-times' plan, of how Gentiles could become equal members of the Kingdom of God, thanks to the resurrection of Yeshua.

It seems to me that Romans 15 really put's the finishing touches to this understanding.

Romans 15:1-12

1 We who are **strong** ought to bear with the failings of the **weak ('stumbling')** and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

3 For even Messiah did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

4 **For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Messiah Yeshua,

6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Master Messiah Yeshua.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Messiah accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

8 For I tell you that Messiah Yeshua has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs

9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "*Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.*" (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49)

10 Again, it says, "*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.*" (Deut. 32:43)

11 And again, "*Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.:*" (Psalm 117:1)

12 And again, Isaiah says, "*The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.*" (Isaiah 11:10)

This section of Sha'ul's Letter to the Romans is pivotal in helping to appreciate how Sha'ul understood the Hebrew Bible's prophecies regarding Gentile inclusion in the family of God, and how he saw Yeshua as central to these prophecies.

Firstly it is imperative that we appreciate his intended audience and the context into which he spoke. As explained in detail by Prof Mark D Nanos in *'The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters'*, and summarised in my short article "*The Mystery of Romans: A Torah and Shema Centric View'*"; the '*strong*' here are Gentile believers in Yeshua as the Messiah and '*the weak*' (as Nanos explains this term is more properly translated '*the stumbling*') are faithful Jews who do not, at this time, accept that Yeshua is the Messiah.

So Sha'ul here is speaking to the '*strong*', the Gentile believers and telling them that the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible (the only Scriptures that existed in Sha'ul's day) contains truth from God to teach and encourage these Gentiles as well as the Jewish people to whom it was specifically given. This truth that he is sharing with regards the Gentiles is a confirmation of the promises given to the patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He then goes on to quote some five portions of the Tanakh (Torah/Nevi'im/Ketuvim) that relate to this truth. Sha'ul quotes from the Torah (Duet 32:43), the Prophets -Nevi'im (2 Sam 22:50 & Isaiah 11:10) and the Writings Ketuvim (Psalms 18:49; 117:1).

Let us consider each of them. First the quote as given in Romans and then it's wording in the Tanakh and some comment:

Romans 15:9: "*Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.*"

2 Samuel 22:50:

50 "For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.

51 Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever."

Psalm 18:49:

"49 For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.

50 Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever."

Clearly Sha'ul sees this '*praise among the nations*' as meaning that not only are the Jewish people praising God, but Gentiles are also praising God and thanking Him for the redemption He has instituted through his King; his Anointed, Son of David. Given the context of this reference, it would also seem clear that the King and anointed 'Son of David' or

'Mashiach ben David', is Yeshua.

Next Paul quotes from the famous 'Moses song' passage:

Romans 15:9 ***"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."*** - from Deut. 32:43: *"Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land."*

This passage is a prophecy from the Almighty to his Chosen People that if they turn from Him they will suffer terribly (for a season), but that ultimately God will restore His people and cleanse His Land (Israel). Note then, that Sha'ul recognizes the nations ('O Heavens'), or Gentiles as also rejoicing at this time. Clearly those amongst the nations who persecuted the Chosen People will not be rejoicing as they are punished, but rather those who have been grafted into the family of God through Yeshua, will be rejoicing (while still remaining Gentiles for this prophecy to be valid).

Romans 15:11 ***"And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."*** - from Psalms 117:1: *"Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!"*

Sha'ul clearly saw in such passages that the God of Israel was also the God of the Gentiles. Perhaps before his encounter with the Risen Yeshua, he had wondered how the God of Israel could also be the God of the Gentiles. Until his revelation the Rabbis of his day, such as Hillel and Shammai, had thought that God-fearing Gentiles, while having a place in the Coming Age, needed to become Jews to be full and equal members of God's family.

Romans 15:12 ***'And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."'***

Isaiah 11:

10: ***"In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.***

11 *In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.*

12 ***He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.'***

Romans 15:12 is perhaps the most informative of all these quotes from the Tanakh when we include verses 11 and 12 as well. It was quite common in Paul's day for the Jewish people to learn a great deal of Scripture off by heart and so that when a person mentioned one verse from a Book or Psalm, the hearers would recollect of the rest of the passage as well, as seek the relevance of the whole passage.

The classic example is the most quoted and alluded to verse from the Tanakh in the New Testament, Psalms 110:1. Whenever this verse was referred to it is quite clear that the whole Psalm would have come to mind and even been intended by the speaker.

It is also quite likely then, that Paul would have thought of at least these three verses 10-12 when he quoted verse 10 of Isaiah 11.

What we see here then is a prophecy (interestingly from the first section of Isaiah which speaks of the Kingly Messiah, rather than from Isaiah 40 on, where we read the prophecies principally based around the 'suffering Servant' – Israel or the Messianic figure), that this Jewish Messianic figure draws Gentiles to him and in some way 'rules' over them (to follow the ensign of a King was to accept his authority and government).

The next two verses relate to the return to the Land of Israel from the dispersion throughout all the nations of the world. This prophecy is being fulfilled in our lifetime!

We may well question how Yeshua is directly involved in this return as this stage, though it is clear that there was, and is, considerable support from some Gentile followers of Yeshua for this miracle of our times.

In the final phase of this end time return event, we can expect the Messiah to play a much greater role, especially as the Kingly Messiah of Isaiah 11.

In summary then, in witnessing the great move of Gentiles coming to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah and coming into the community of Israel; sharing in the community life of the synagogue, etc., Sha'ul saw these prophecies being fulfilled before his very eyes!

Thus it appears he then concluded that it was Yeshua's crucifixion and resurrection that was the turning point, the apocalyptic event that enabled this great end-times fulfillment to begin.

As I have stated elsewhere, Sha'ul believed that God's adoption of the Gentiles was to precede the restoration of Israel (including the full return from exile and re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel).

Therefore Sha'ul believed that God had temporarily hardened the hearts of many Israelites to the truth regarding Yeshua as the Messiah, so that Sha'ul's mission to the Gentiles could first be accomplished. It is important also to repeat that a hardening or 'stumbling' is not a 'falling' (to destruction).

That is, these Israelites have not lost their place in the Kingdom, but have only lost the opportunity to share in the joy and great privilege of this climatic end-time event.

This hardening of Israel for a time is clearly laid out in the 'Olive Tree' analogy (Romans 9-11 and specifically 11:11-32), but is further exemplified in Romans 8 where he makes a reference to Psalms 44, as if to suggest that the 'stumbling' of some of Israel is not due to their unrighteousness, but is rather God ordained for the very purpose of bringing the Gentiles in.

Sha'ul then applies the same language to the 'stumbling' of Israel that he used to describe Yeshua's death.

See for example, Romans 8:32-33 *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?"*

What is the significance of this? Surely, just as Yeshua rose again so will Israel. Just as these individual Israelites in Rome may have 'stumbled' in not recognizing Yeshua as the Messiah, the Almighty still plans to justify them as they are His elect!

It was also vital then that these Gentiles believers in Rome continued to respect the Jewish authorities and community through which they had learned the truth of the One God and His Messiah. If they did not act in accordance with the expectations of the Jewish community they were now a part of, the 'stumbling' Jews would most likely reject this whole event as a move of God; reject Yeshua as Messiah; and reject that the 'restoration of all things' was about to take place (and as a result their 'stumbling' may result in 'falling' and destruction).

While there is some evidence that Gentile followers of Yeshua in Rome did maintain allegiance to the Jewish communities and synagogues at least up to the middle of the second century CE., the degree of allegiance to the purity laws, to the Sabbath and festivals, may not have been as great, or widespread as desired by Sha'ul.

With the turning away from the Jewish communities in which these Gentiles has been nurtured, the second stage of Sha'ul's end time scenario was impaired and it appears suspended.

This may even be part of the explanation as to why the return from the great dispersion has only begun in the last century, and therefore why the inauguration of the Coming Age has not yet occurred.

I like the way Richard B. Hays sums this up in his *'Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul'* (p 71):

"Clearly, he (Paul) has saved his clinchers for the end. After much allusive and labored argumentation, Paul finally draws back the curtain and reveals a collection of passages that explicitly embody his vision for... Jews and Gentiles glorifying God together.... All pointing to the eschatological consummation in which Gentiles join in the worship of Israel's God: truly the Law and the Prophets are brought forward here as witnesses." (cited by Nanos in 'The Mystery of Romans' p 435⁶)

In Romans 8 the Apostle Paul states that it is God Himself who justifies His 'elect', the people of Israel, and that this justification is 'gracious'. This is because God's covenant with Israel was an act of grace to start with.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Paul's vision here I again recommend 'The Mystery of Romans' by Mark Nanos

They did not earn it, but their response was seen in their faithful observance of the commandments.

This covenant is eternal because God can not break His own promises. The Apostle Paul clearly articulates the eternal nature of the Abrahamic covenant in Romans 11.

The Jewish people within ancient Judaism and even post-biblical Judaism did not see their Torah observance as at all legalistic. They did not see the need to attend to every 'jot and tittle' of Torah.

One of the best examples of this lack of legalism may be seen in their understanding of the well known 'tooth for a tooth' declaration. The sages and Rabbis understood the call for a 'tooth for a tooth' as 'measure for measure' and interpreted this commandment thus: *"Full compensation must be paid for the loss of an eye, a tooth, a hand or a foot."*

No Jew/Israeli ever had his eye punched out, or tooth punched out, or hand or foot cut off, by the judges and local sanhedrin. The words used are merely a Hebrew idiom (another example of the Hebraic mindset), meaning that fair and reasonable compensation is to be paid to the injured person in proportion to the damage caused⁷.

Also it is important to appreciate that ancient Judaism is not a religion of salvation.

It did not focus its attention on personal salvation, especially in terms of an 'afterlife' or future Coming Age. Being obedient to God's commandments was not seen as a (selfish?) means to attain to this 'salvation' or afterlife, but was seen as purely the correct response from a heart that loved God.

The notion of eternal life, the resurrection of the body, and eternal rewards and punishments after death, while clearly articulated in the Tanakh, are in no way a major focus of its narrative and teachings. For biblical Israel, rewards and punishments came in the form of blessings and cursings in this life. So to be rewarded with freedom from slavery, with rain for growth, with many children and with wealth were the practical signs of having received 'salvation'.

The exodus from Egypt was the model for redemption and salvation – to be free from bondage and from the oppression and violence of their enemies, was to be 'saved'. They were freed to love, honour and obey the Almighty⁸.

This understanding and 'living in the present' focus began to change a little around the 2nd century BCE. Some of the non-canonical texts of this period before Yeshua, began to speak of the concept of bodily resurrection, an idea that was ultimately embraced by the Pharisees (and eventually the Rabbi's who succeeded them), though not agreed to by all (for example the Sadducees).

Thus, in the earlier times of Israel, living righteously was clearly not seen as a means to the goal of 'eternal life'. They did not see themselves as being saved by obeying the commandments, but rather their love for God their Father and Redeemer, led them to be obedient to Him, and in return to reap the benefits of prosperity and peace.

The Jewish people accepted the concept of the 'merit of the fathers'. This concept was that the nation of Israel benefitted from the great righteousness of the patriarchs, and in particular father Abraham.

Abraham's trust in God had resulted in great blessing from the Almighty which involved promises of land and many descendants, etc. Thus, when the Almighty made his covenant with Abraham, it was with his children as well:

"7 I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.

8 I will give you and your descendants after you the land in which you are now foreigners, all the land of Kena'an, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God."

9 God said to Avraham, "As for you, you are to keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation." Genesis 17:7-9 CJB

Consider this. This eternal covenant is to Abraham's children, even if and when they go astray. What grace, what overflowing love that God demonstrates here. We can perhaps see the 'merit of the fathers' in this.

Micah describes this very well:

⁷ For some evidence of this and some interesting biblical examples see <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/measureformmeasure.pdf>

⁸ See <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Freedom%20and%20the%20Law.pdf> for more on this freedom

“18 Who is a God like you, pardoning the sin and overlooking the crimes of the remnant of his heritage? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in grace.

19 He will again have compassion on us, he will subdue our iniquities. You will throw all their sins into the depths of the sea.

20 You will show truth to Ya’akov and grace to Avraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors since days of long ago.”
Micah 7:18-20 CJB

The righteousness of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has provided this great grace to the Jewish people. They (corporate Israel) cannot earn it; they don’t deserve it, and they can not lose it⁹. No wonder so many Gentiles who came to know the God of Israel wanted to become part of the family of Israel.

Such grace does not of course exclude the important role and need for repentance. Without obedience there are curses which fall upon the Jewish people, both corporately and individually. Yet ultimately the grace extended to Abraham, extends to ‘all Israel’ so that the Apostle Paul can proclaim, just as many of the great prophets before him had, that ‘all Israel will be saved’ (Romans 11:26).

To repeat, in the Biblical period especially, salvation was primarily envisioned in communal rather than individual terms. Often the focus of this salvation is seen in Israel having victory over all her enemies, being restored to the Land of Israel and the Kingdom of God being instituted so that all violence is removed and real peace with true justice and safety ensues.

There are Biblical texts that indicate that the Gentiles nations are either destroyed or defeated or in some way subjected to Israel. While they may appear in some ways contradictory, there are also other Biblical texts that see the Gentiles nations as surviving in this Coming Age to also worship the God of Israel and to similarly visit Jerusalem to be part of the world worshipping the One True God.

For example Isaiah 2:2-4 (& Micah 4:1-3) and Zechariah 8:21-23:

*“2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of YHVH shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and **all the nations** shall flow to it,*

*3 **and many peoples shall come**, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHVH, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go the Torah, and the word of YHVH from Jerusalem.*

*4 He shall judge **between the nations**, and shall decide disputes **for many peoples**; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; **nation shall not lift up sword against nation**, neither shall they learn war anymore.” – Isaiah 2:2-4*

“21 Thus says YHVH: “Many peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come;

21 and the inhabitants of one shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go speedily to entreat the favor of YHVH, and to seek YHVH. I will go also.’

*22 Yes, **many peoples and strong nations** will come to seek YHVH in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of YHVH.”*

23 Thus says YHVH: “In those days, ten men will take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, they will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, ‘We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’” – Zec 8:21-23

While it may not be obvious to non-Jewish readers, these texts are not anticipating that these Gentiles and Gentile nations have all converted and become Jews, but that somehow, while remaining Gentiles they have cast of their worship of idols and turned to the One True God, the God of Israel.

Post-Biblical texts such as Tobit also share a similar understanding. A crucial part of this understanding is that the gentiles do not undergo circumcision and the other rites of proselytization (the ‘works of the law’¹⁰) and become Jews, but that they reject their false gods and instead prostrate themselves before the God of Israel and accept the yoke of His Kingdom.

None of these verses appear to detail how the Gentiles can join with Israel under the Abrahamic covenant and share in the worship of YHVH, without undertaking the ritual of circumcision. It appears that the answer to this very question was a significant part of the revelation given to the Apostle Paul.

⁹ Speaking of ‘all Israel’ or ‘corporate Israel’ here, not of particular individuals who may totally reject the ‘merit of the fathers’ and the great grace of God and turn their back on all the blessings of being one of the natural born children of Abraham.

¹⁰ See the appendix to my book ‘Defending the Apostle Paul: Weighing the Evidence’ for details
<http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Works%20of%20the%20Law.pdf>

That is, the Apostle Paul was given the revelation as to how the Gentiles could become part of the commonwealth of Israel, and though not natural sons of Jacob, that they could be 'grafted' into the covenant of Abraham and share in the same promises, both in the present age and for the Age to Come.

Grafting and the 'Olive Tree' allegory:

"13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you."

*19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."
20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;
21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.
22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.
23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.
24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?"*

In Romans 9-11 Paul articulates a 2 step plan for redemption. The first step (his preaching on the Kingdom and the Messiah) brings salvation to the Gentiles and then the (projected or anticipated) jealousy engendered in Israel by the nations relationship with God brings restoration and redemption to Israel.

I also think it important to appreciate that Paul does not speak predominately of personal salvation in all of this but that, as he saw the Coming Age as imminent, he was focused on this new era of peace and justice and how he could help inaugurate it through the in-gathering of the nations (who must remain distinctly non-Israel for prophecy to find fulfilment).

Appreciating that the Apostle Paul always spoke from within the mindset of a Hebraist and within the Judaism of his day (called 'proto-Judaism' by Prof David Flusser), is vital when trying to come to terms with the many seemingly contradictory and, at times, even anti-Torah sentiments that many scholars have argued he made. I have already written in some depth on this in my article 'The Apostle Paul: Disciple or Fraud' and 'Circumcision: A Step of Obedience'¹¹ and even more in my book 'Defending the Apostle Paul: Weighing The Evidence'¹².

I believe that it is from within the Judaism of his day that the Apostle Paul argues for a new approach to how Gentiles can enter into the family of God, which until his day had essentially only contained Israelites, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Family of God:

Paul, in coming to believe that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah, has recognized that the great Day of the Lord is about to dawn when 'all Israel will be restored' (Ezekiel 38,39).

We can see his appreciation that the Messianic Age was dawning, and that the Coming Age is imminent, by his comments in Romans 8:18-25:

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope

²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly

¹¹ Both available from www.circumcisedheart.info

¹² <http://www.amazon.com.au/Defending-The-Apostle-Paul-Weighing-ebook/dp/B009TLLK0U/>

*for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*²⁴ *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?*²⁵ *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Paul has seen, thanks in part to learning of the resurrection of Yeshua and the move of the Spirit, that the 'resurrection' (redemption of our bodies) and new creation were close at hand. Note also here his use of the terms 'sons of God' and 'children of God' and that he is applying these terms to his readers in Rome (mostly Gentile followers of Yeshua, but living/sharing with Jewish communities and attending Jewish synagogues each Sabbath to hear the words of Moses, etc.). He also uses terms like 'brothers' or 'my brothers' to accentuate this family aspect (when referring to his fellow Israelites he usually adds a qualifier to make this further distinction clear).

Paul, who is already a member of Abraham's family, also understands that from Isaiah 49¹³ and other prophecies that people from many nations (Gentiles) need to come into Abraham's family if the Coming Age (the Kingdom of God and the New Creation) is to fully dawn, as God had told Abraham that he would be a father of many nations (Gen 17:4).

Despite the fact that Abraham had had many other children, along with Isaac, and was thus already the father of many nations, in the Second Temple Period; in Paul's day, Abraham was considered that patriarch of the 'Jews'¹⁴ only.

So Paul saw the crucifixion and resurrection as somehow¹⁵ opening up the door so that Gentiles could enter into Abraham's family through Yeshua the Messiah. At the same time, he saw that they needed to remain people from many nations and not become Jewish and therefore not fully part of Israel, for the prophecies to be fulfilled.

So how could these Gentiles come into the family of God; into the family of Abraham and yet not become Jewish?

Part of the answer is 'grafting'. A graft of an orange onto a lemon tree means that orange can be supported and grow to maturity through the nutrients from the root of the tree, but it remains an orange! It does not become a lemon or replace any existing lemons (and I am not suggesting that Jews are lemons!).

Paul therefore saw that **Israel remains Israel**, and he believed that 'all Israel' would be saved (Romans 11:26 & Isaiah 59), and that many gentiles would also enter the Kingdom.

The 'olive tree graft' analogy¹⁶ that Paul uses can help us see his understanding of how Gentiles are accepted into the family of God. In Romans 11 Paul states that Gentile believers (wild olive shoots or branches) are grafted into Israel (the cultivated olive tree), so that they are now part of the family of Abraham and are truly 'children of God'. So when Paul states that '*there is now neither Jew nor Gentile, ... male nor female ...*' (Gal 3:28-29), Paul is speaking of a unity in the family and purposes of God.

Men still retain their gender, the grafted 'orange' tree branch still remains an 'orange', and the Gentiles still remain Gentile. Israel still remains Israel and Gentiles who don't convert, still remain Gentiles.

The Apostle Paul does not see Gentile believers as becoming part of Israel when 'grafted' into the 'cultivated olive tree' but rather he sees them as becoming part of the 'family of Abraham' (which previously was a designation that only applied to the Jewish people) and therefore 'children of God'. In coming to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah, the Gentiles are no longer 'alienated' from the 'commonwealth of Israel' (Eph 2:12), but become part of this community under father Abraham.

Clearly, if this assessment and paradigm is correct, then the church is not Israel, and cannot ever replace Israel. The 'church' (believers in Yeshua as Messiah) is/are part of the family of God but not the whole family. As Paul states in Romans 3:29, God is not just the God of the Jews but the Gentiles as well.

To be explicit, the 'family of Abraham', are the children of Abraham through the 'promise' (through the Spirit), but this means both the natural sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as the Gentiles who enter via the 'libation' (Ps 2:6 – an offering) of Yeshua.

Thus, when Gentiles through Yeshua join with Jews in worshipping the One True God, they together become a 'new man', a new body of believers.

¹³ See 'Isaiah 49: A Commentary' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Isaiah%2049%20-%20a%20commentary.pdf>

¹⁴ The term 'Jews' from Judeans is generally used to apply not just to the tribe of Judah but to all the 12 sons and tribes of Jacob.

¹⁵ I discuss this in a number of articles such as my 'Tripartite Salvation Paradigm' article.

¹⁶ This analogy is much more subtle and complex than it might appear. Prof Mark Nanos presents a brilliant analysis in 'Broken Branches: A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry?' - see <http://www.marknanos.com/BrokenBranches-8-1-08.pdf>

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