

The Place of Israel in Systematic Theology

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Let us begin with an assumption: that Israel *ought* to be a topic within Systematic Theology. Once that has been said, of course, we are set on a collision course with just about everybody, for the moment we ask what is meant by ‘Israel’ and even by ‘Systematic Theology’, we are, probably, going to encounter, initially at least, almost no common ground. For instance, by ‘Israel’ do we mean ancient Israel, the descendants of Abraham through Jacob, or do we mean ‘the Israel of God’ spoken of by Paul in Galatians 6:16 (assuming they are not one and the same), or perhaps the Israel of the 21st Century, understood by some to be the key to eschatology? As for Systematic Theology, also known as Dogmatics, ‘for every dogmatician there is a different definition’.¹

Within Systematic Theology, which, for the sake of simplicity, we might define as ‘systematic and thorough reflection on the content of the relationship which God has established with us in Christ’,² or as Karl Barth defines it, ‘the scientific self examination of the Christian Church with respect to the content of its distinctive talk about God’³, there are, indeed, some authors who include ‘Israel’ as a topic for discussion. Calvin wrote:

... until the advent of Christ, the Lord set apart one nation within which to confine the covenant of his grace. “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam,” says Moses, “his people became his possession; Jacob was the cord of his inheritance.” [Deut. 32:8-9 p.] Elsewhere he addresses the people as follows: “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and ... earth with all that is in it. Yet he cleaved only to your fathers loved them so that he chose their descendants after them, namely you out of all peoples” [Deut. 10:14, 15 p., cf. Vg.]. He, therefore, bestowed the knowledge of his name solely upon that people as if they alone of all men belonged to him. He lodged his covenant, so to speak, in their bosom; he manifested the presence of his majesty to them; he showered every privilege upon them. But – to pass over the remaining blessings – let us consider the one in question. In communicating his Word to them, he joined them to himself, that he might be called and esteemed their God. In the meantime, “he allowed all other nations to walk in vanity [Acts 14:16], as if they had nothing whatsoever to do with him. Nor did he give them the sole remedy for their deadly disease – the preaching of his Word. Israel was then the Lord’s darling son; the others were strangers. Israel was recognized and received into confidence and safekeeping; the others were left to their own darkness. Israel was hallowed by God; the others were profaned. Israel was honored with God’s presence; the others were excluded from all approach to him. “But when the fullness of time came” [Gal. 4:41 which was appointed for the restoration of all things, he was revealed as the reconciler of God and men; “the wall” that for so long had confined God’s mercy within the boundaries of Israel “was broken down” [Eph. 2:14]. “Peace was announced to those who were far off, and to those who were near” [Eph. 2:17] that together they might be reconciled to God and welded into one people [Eph. 2:16]. Therefore there is now no difference between Jew and Greek [Gal. 3:28], between circumcision and uncircumcision [Gal. 6:15], but “Christ is all in all” [Col. 3:11, cf. Vg.]. “The nations have been made his inheritance, and the ends of the earth his

¹ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Introduction to the Study of Dogmatics*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1985. Perhaps it is salutary that my spelling checker offered ‘Dogmatic Ian’ as a better spelling of ‘dogmatician’!

² Berkhof, *Introduction*, p. 9.

³ *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1975, p. 3.

property” [Ps. 2:8 p.], that “he may have unbroken dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth” [Ps. 72:8 p.; cf. Zech. 9:10].⁴

Calvin’s point was that Israel as a nation was to be seen as having its identity within the wider purposes of God. The many blessings given to Israel served a particular goal, namely to bring about the revelation that God is the reconciler of all the nations. Theologically, Israel’s place is within salvation history and not, therefore, as a topic on its own but as part of the process by which God has brought salvation in Christ to the world.

Returning to Barth’s definition above, we can see that he contends that Systematic Theology is the task of the Christian church in order to make certain that what is proclaimed is in conformity with the revelation of God in Christ. Referring to church history which, from Calvin’s position, would include the prior work of God through Israel, Barth has this to say:

What is called Church history does not correspond to any independently raised question concerning Christian talk about God, and it cannot therefore be regarded as an independent theological discipline. It is an auxiliary science indispensable to exegetical, dogmatic and practical theology.⁵

This does not imply a lack of interest in Israel by Barth, as Hendrikus Berkhof demonstrates:

Very original and still insufficiently studied is the threefold manner in which Barth deals with the way of Israel in his C[hurch] D[ogmatics]. First in I, 2, par. 14, 2: “The Time of Expectation” (p. 71: “Revelation in the Old Testament is really the expectation of revelation or the expected revelation”); next in II, 2, par. 34: “The Election of the Christian Community” (“Israel is the negative side of the Christian community, mirror of judgment, a form that passes away”); finally in IV, 3, par. 69, 2: “The Light of Life,” pp. 53-72 (p. 65: “In and with the prophecy of the history of Israel there takes place in all its historical autonomy and singularity the prophecy of Jesus Christ Himself in the form of an exact prefiguration. It is a true type and adequate pattern.” These three approaches appear contradictory, yet are not. They are all based on the same christological approach to the OT. Broadly speaking they can be distinguished as: the OT as preparation, as antithesis, and as identity. These three lines are found everywhere in the NT and in the history of the church. It is regrettable that Barth has not more closely related them to each other.⁶

In all of the material dealing with Israel, and Berkhof surveys a number of other writers, from Irenaeus in the second century to the Reformation period and then to Weber, Brunner and Barth in the twentieth century, as well as a number of Roman catholic scholars,⁷ the equation can almost always be drawn between Israel and the Old Testament.⁸ The place of Israel as a nation after New Testament times is more properly the domain of historians and then, mostly Jewish historians. As far as I can tell, the conspicuous exception would be the Roman Catholic writer, Hans Küng.⁹ I am not competent to make any further observations about the post New Testament times, except to observe that what I mean by Israel is not found in its successor,

⁴ *Institutes*, II, 11, 11.

⁵ *C.D.* I, 1, p. 5.

⁶ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 224.

⁷ *Christian Faith*, pp. 222-225.

⁸ See also Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, pp. 249-375. Spykman is perhaps clearest among the modern writers I have found in seeing a current relevance to ‘our Jewish neighbors’ (pp. 370-375).

⁹ *Judaism*, SCM, London, 1992.

namely Rabbinic Judaism. So if the theologians write of Israel and in doing so limit themselves to the Old Testament and to its climax in the New Testament, I believe that they will have done their duty.

Israel in the New Testament

When we go to the Scriptures to determine what is genuine, we are faced with the living world of faith which understands the things given to us; there is no *abstract*, speculative theology there. For instance, the Paul who wrote, ‘And so all Israel will be saved’, is the same Paul who also wrote, ‘Five times I have received *from the Jews* the forty lashes minus one’. If that makes us ask about a possible distinction between ‘Israel’ and ‘the Jews’, then we have to ask further about the mind of the early church when faced with persecution. Acts 4 records the prohibition placed on the preaching in the name of Jesus and the reaction by the church:

After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, ²⁵it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant:

‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things?’

²⁶The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.’

²⁷For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ...” (Acts 4:23-28)

Knowing that the psalm which identified the anointed one as God’s son/king who would receive the nations as his inheritance also recognised that those nations were steadfastly contemptuous of the LORD, the believers then saw that ‘the peoples of Israel’ stood with the Gentiles in that rebellion. Whether the phrase ‘peoples of Israel’ simply draws on the plural of Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25) is problematical.¹⁰ Luke insisted that the psalm has the authority of the Holy Spirit,¹¹ and his companion, Paul, also knew the significance of the singular/plural distinction (see Gal. 3:16), but a precise meaning for the plural is hard to discern. Whatever the range of possibilities, ‘Israel’ is, at that point in the story at least, understood in opposition to God and to the church purchased by the blood of his Son.

At this point we must observe that, as a category for theological research, Israel has hardly missed out. Just given the vast amount of work over the last thirty years, in areas with titles such as ‘The Third Quest for the Historical Jesus’ or ‘The New Perspective on Paul’, all of which have involved detailed and stimulating research into Second Temple Judaism, we may well find ourselves overwhelmed by the theological study of Israel. But, of course, the question of what is meant by ‘a Jew’ or by ‘Israel’ remains. While I have reservations about some of his methods, James D. G. Dunn has addressed the question in *The Partings of the Ways*,¹² and concludes that, for Paul, ‘the Jews’ may be best understood as the way of defining that body of

¹⁰ See C.K. Barrett, *Acts 1-14* (ICC), T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 2004, p. 247.

¹¹ We should note that the authority of the Scriptures is not dependent on our views of ‘inspiration’ etc.

¹² James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, SCM, London 1991, p. 143ff. For instance, and Dunn is not alone in doing this, he posits a supposed historical background for various New Testament documents and then proceeds to reach concrete conclusions on the basis of the suppositions. See p. 158ff. where the Fourth Gospel is analysed against the background of its presumed authorship in the time of the complex processes of Jewish reconstruction at the time of the council of ‘Yavneh’.

people understood in their distinction from others, ethnically and/or religiously, while 'Israel' 'was much more an *'intra muros, intra-Jewish designation ... denoting a self-understanding in terms of election and covenant promise'*.¹³

Dunn addresses the question of alleged anti-Jewishness within the New Testament and in doing so says the following:

It is important not to fall into the mistake of thinking that [Romans] chapters 9-11 are about 'the church and Israel', as though already in Paul's mind these were distinct entities. Not at all! The discussion of those chapters is exclusively about Israel (9.6). Israel is the factor of continuity; the chief question is whether God's purpose has been sustained and will be fulfilled in Israel (11.26). Gentiles are only heirs of the promise and covenant as having been grafted into the olive tree of Israel - *not* into a different tree, but into the *same* tree (11.17-24). The Israel of God's purpose consists of Jew first, but also Gentile (9.24 and 10. 12 - the only two references to 'Jew' in chs 9-11; and note the climax to the whole argument in 15.7-12). The point of 9.6 is not to disown Israel, but to point out that Israel is defined and determined by promise and election, not by physical descent, and not by works of the law (9.7-11). Those who are Israelites, but who fail to recognize the covenant character of their status as Israelites, have to that extent sold their own birthright for a bowl of bread and pottage (Gen. 25.29-34). Whereas those who recognize the totally gracious character of God's call and respond in faith are Israel, whether descended from Jacob or not.¹⁴

While I am able to agree in general with this paragraph, there is an assumption within it with which I have problems. It is: 'Gentiles are only heirs of the promise and covenant as having been grafted into the olive tree of Israel - *not* into a different tree, but into the *same* tree (11.17-24).' I want to ask if it is indeed true that the tree is simply 'Israel'. A similar problem exists in my mind with the approach taken by many to Galatians 6:16, 'As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.' Let me deal with the Galatians verse first.

There are two ways in which this is translated: '*and* upon the Israel of God' (*NRSV, ASV, KJV, NASB, RV, ESV*), and '*even* upon the Israel of God' (*NIV, cf JB*). The *RSV* fudges and does not translate the Greek *kai* (*and/even*). The former seems to assume some distinction between all who follow the rule of the new creation being all that matters and the Israel of God, while the latter sees that those who follow that rule actually constitute the Israel of God. A solution to the problem of which is correct will not come from Greek grammar but from exegesis and, frankly, it is hard to see how ordinary, first century believers who received this letter from Paul would have survived the commentators!

Galatians shows us that the matters of circumcision, in particular (Gal. 2:3-5), and also Jewish dietary laws (Gal. 2:12-13) could cause deep and tragic division in the Christian community. Paul's strong language really must not be minimised: 'I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves' (Gal. 5:12). Circumcision was now nothing, even if it once was something. But to some, the Jewish (ethnic/religious) distinctives of circumcision, dietary laws and sabbath observance (Col. 2:8-17) were regarded as also essential to those who were not ethnically Jewish but who had come to faith in Israel's Messiah. While Paul was a Jew and so kept Jewish observances (Acts 21:17-26), and while Peter and the others also attended the temple services (Acts 3:1 etc.), there are a couple of defining moments in Acts which show that these Jewish distinctives had had their day. Those were Acts 10 and Peter's vision of the command to eat animals which were unclean according to the *Torah* and Acts 15,

¹³ *Partings*, p. 145.

¹⁴ *Partings*, p. 148. Emphasis his.

where circumcision was ruled out as an essential for Gentile believers. Galatians is a tract that declares that Jewishness is part of the old creation but that it is no longer a defining feature of the Christian community:

Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:24-29)

Being *in Christ* by faith is what matters, for only by *that* are we Abraham's offspring. That alone is how the new creation is known. Those who follow *that* rule, rather than some other outmoded one, are those upon whom Paul pronounces his blessing. And that also applies to the Israel of God, the covenant people through whom the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:14) has come to the whole world. Israel had a significant role in the history of salvation, but that role is both complete and, by many within Israel, rejected. As Bill Dumbrell put it: 'National Israel by its crucifixion of Jesus had forfeited its place in the divine purposes',¹⁵ whereas those who are in Christ are sons of God.

'Sons of God' (Gal. 3:26), if compared with the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:38, would imply that the heart of the new creation is the restoration of all that was forfeited in Adam. Hence, the blessing of Abraham relates directly to the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:14).

Dunn's treatment of Romans 11:17-24 (above) that argues that the tree into which Gentiles are grafted is Israel, seems to me, therefore, to miss the point. The tree, as evidenced in Romans 4:1ff, is not Israel at all; it is Abraham to whom the promise of global restoration was given and who stands as the classic man of faith.

Israel in the Old Testament

What then is the place of Israel? Although the unavoidable polemics of the New Testament make the argument seem so negative towards Israel, I do not believe that that is so at all. There is a place for Israel, and that place is in the church of God¹⁶, and that place is a place of honor. But it is not the defining place; that is reserved for the last Adam, the second Man.¹⁷

Paul's description of Jesus as the last Adam and the second Man is simple. All that Adam was created to be and to know was forfeited in the Fall and is fully restored

¹⁵ William J Dumbrell, *Galatians: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Creation Publications Inc. Blackwood, 2006, p. 95.

¹⁶ We might ask if the use of *ekklēsia* in Acts 7:38 is in any way intended to imply some continuity between the Christian *ekklēsia*, previously only mentioned in Acts at 5:11, or if it is simply a general use (see *NRSV*, *congregation*), reflected in the more political use of Acts 19:32, 39, 41. The LXX regularly uses *ekklēsia* to translate the Hebrew *qahal* and *sunagōgē* to translate *edah*. The distinctions between the terms are worth pursuing; see, e.g., L. Coenen, 'Church' in Colin Brown (Ed), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume I, Paternoster, Exeter, 1975, pp. 291-296.

¹⁷ I think it is important that we do not throw out the theological baby with the cultural bathwater here. The use of 'Man' (*anthrōpos*, *adam*) is not intended to convey masculine dominance or whatever. If masculinity over against femininity was the issue, then there were other perfectly clear words (*anēr*, *ish*) which could be used for that purpose.

in Christ (Col. 2:9-10). But what is sometimes not well stated is that Christ, the man, the Jewish Messiah, did not come out of nowhere. Thus, Romans 9:4-5:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

The Messiah comes from the matrix of Israel, the covenant people, and we should also recall that the covenant people come from the promise made to Abraham. While this may seem axiomatic, there are also elements which need to be stressed. Israel while seeing itself as the offspring of Abraham must also see itself as concerned with the purpose of God through Abraham and that, it seems to me, is one of the critical elements so often overlooked. N. T. Wright has observed:

As later tradition puts it, Abraham will be God's means of undoing the sin of Adam. This broad theme is given significant detail by a set of recurring motifs, in which the commands given to Adam in Genesis 1.28 reappear in new guise:

1.28: And God blessed them, and God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

12.2f.: I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you...

17.2, 6, 8: I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly... I will make you exceedingly fruitful,.. and I will give you, and to your seed after you, all the land of Canaan...

22.16ff.: Because you have done this... I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore... and by you shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.

26.3f.: (The Lord said to Isaac) I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your seed I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and will give to your seed all these lands: and by your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves...

26.24: Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake.

28.3: (Isaac blessed Jacob and said) God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham.

35.11f.: And God said to (Jacob) 'I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and company of nations shall come from you... the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.

47.27: Thus Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt... and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.

48.3f.: Jacob said to Joseph, 'God Almighty appeared to me... and said to me "Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you.... and I will give you this land, to your seed after you...

Thus at key moments – Abraham's call, his circumcision, the offering of Isaac, the transitions from Abraham to Isaac and from Isaac to Jacob, and in the sojourn in Egypt – the narrative quietly makes the point that Abraham and his family inherit, in a measure, the role of Adam

and Eve. The differences are not, however, insignificant. Except for 35.11f., echoed in 48.3f., the command ('be fruitful...') has turned into a promise ('I will make you fruitful...'). The word 'exceedingly' is added in ch. 17. And, most importantly, possession of the land of Canaan, and supremacy over enemies, has taken the place of dominion over nature given in 1:28. We could sum up this aspect of Genesis by saying: Abraham's children are God's true humanity, and their homeland is the new Eden.¹⁸

Abraham represents the new beginning for creation. Paul wrote that 'from one [man] he (God) made all the nations to inhabit the whole earth' so that those nations would search for God and find him (Acts 17:26-27). By the time of Abraham, the nations were in fierce rebellion against the mandate given by God to Adam (Gen. 11:4) so that the call of Abraham included the declaration that the creational covenant blessing¹⁹ would somehow be restored to the nations and families (cf. Gen. 10:32) which acknowledged Abraham's blessing by God (Gen. 12:1-3).

The overall purpose of God in calling Abraham was the blessing of the nations. Israel's role, as the primary descendent of Abraham, was to be a light to the nations (Isa. 42:1, 6) and the *Torah* of Israel was to be understood as the law of God himself given in specific covenantal terms, with a view to the nations coming to Israel to discover the truth of Israel's God, with the result that shattered humanity may know glorious restoration (Isa. 2:2-4). Describing the *Torah* in this way would explain why there is no particular distinction in the *Torah* between the so-called moral and ceremonial elements. Also we can see why some of the commandments are specifically for Israel and why later the new Christian church, though continuous with believing Israel, could reject certain items, or at least ignore them with a good conscience. As an example, Exodus 31:15-17 specifies that the institution of the sabbath was 'a sign forever between [the LORD] and the people of Israel'. Imposition of sabbath observance on Gentiles in the New Testament period, or on people today, is a failure to see the uniqueness of Israel's covenant relationship with the LORD. But this was not lost on Paul in Romans 14:5-6:

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord.

Likewise, neither Jesus nor the apostles were in conflict with the essential nature of the law concerning clean and unclean food when they declared all foods clean (Mark 7:20; Acts 10:9-15).

Matthew 5:17-18 is important:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Though often taken to mean that the law and the prophets are eternally valid, I suspect that the opposite is the meaning. The law and the prophets are valid and applicable *until* they are fulfilled (*plērōsai*)! The law and the prophets are the written, unique testimony of Israel to the whole character of God. But that unique testimony has a

¹⁸ N. T. Wright, 'Adam, Israel and the Messiah' in *The Climax of the Covenant*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 21-23.

¹⁹ I understand 'blessing' and 'cursing' to be essentially covenant words, as exemplified in Deut. 27-30. Dumbrell's argument (W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984) that the covenant 'established' with Noah was the confirmation of a prior covenant with the whole creation (pp. 11-46) seems validated by the use of these words within the creation narrative and in the restoration of the creation mandate with Abraham.

particular purpose in view. Thus Paul said that ‘Christ is the end (*telos*) of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes’ (Rom. 10:4). When Christ is believed as the one who takes away the sin of the world, whether that belief be by Jew or Gentile, then the *telos*, the end as the goal of Israel’s law will have come.

The place devoted to the nations in the Old Testament prophets should be noted here. On so many occasions the prophetic writings turn from dealing with Israel or Judah and address the nations. That is because the nations were always the focus of the plan of God. Equally, it was Israel’s refusal to be part of that plan which was evidenced by its refusal to be the nation which testified by its righteous living to the truth of God. Far from being a tale about a large fish, the book of Jonah is surely a record of Israel’s resentment at God’s concern for the nations and a demonstration of their refusal to be part of the stated solution, and a graphic declaration that God would indeed use them to fulfil his purpose.

Following the oracle concerning Babylon, Moab, Damascus and others, and then Egypt and the judgement that would come on that nation, Isaiah has this to say:

On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.” (Isaiah 19:24-25).

Far from the nations becoming part of Israel, Israel will be fully saved when it stands as a nation alongside other purified nations. Here the traditional enemies will be fully united.

Israel and Jesus

Paul’s statement in Romans 9:5 mentioned above, that from Israel comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever, recalls Psalm 2, where the Anointed (Messiah) is the Son-King who is to receive the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession. This is what Adam was to do, to have dominion over all of creation, albeit a creation without rebellion or the pollutions of guilt. Thus, Jesus was born as ‘the king of the Jews’ (Matt. 2:2) and he was anointed as the beloved son who would fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15, 17). He came as Israel at last, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son’ (Matt. 2:15), and he would indeed receive the nations, though not as the usurper’s gift (Matt. 4:8-10) but as the fruit of his triumph:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18-20)

This was no missionary commission: it was the declaration that the purpose of God for creation was now established in the last Adam, the one who had all authority, in heaven and on earth, fully restored. Claiming the nations was everything that Israel had been set to do and now it was being done. There is a new Israel – and it is seen in all its restored purity on the day of Pentecost when first one hundred and twenty and then three thousand acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Then from this new Israel, the word goes out to the nations, first to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10) and, after that, the kingdom of God is proclaimed and the things concerning

the Lord Jesus Christ taught boldly and without hindrance, even in Rome itself (Acts 28:31).

Israel at the end of all things

How should we see Israel today? Given the way that God has worked salvation for the world, we could hardly be indifferent when there are men and women, ethnically Jewish, who do not know what it means to be part of the Israel of God. Redeemed humanity does not mean an homogeneous humanity, ethnically indistinct. Rather, the bride which is seen in Revelation chapter 21 comprises God's 'peoples' (Rev. 21:3),²⁰ and as such includes all the nations of the earth (Rev. 21:24) and 'people will bring into [the holy city, the bride] the glory and honour of the nations' (Rev. 21:26). This bride is radiant with the glory of God (Rev. 21:11), once seen in Adam (Ps. 8:5) and then in the worship of tabernacle and temple (Ex. 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10), then in Israel's Messiah (John 1:14). Now the glory is where it was intended. It fills the earth (Num. 11:21)! And there is Israel, participating fully in the radiance because participating fully in her Messiah.

There is a place for Israel in Systematic Theology, but hardly in some limited eschatological role. It is the place of the privileged people, to whom

belongs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:4-5).

And, by the abounding grace of Israel's Messiah, it is the place of a people who, having been provoked to jealousy for their inheritance, through the preaching of the gospel, are now standing as heirs of God, fellow heirs of Christ and with all those who are in him. The bride of Christ is wonderfully, gloriously, multi-ethnic.

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²⁰ See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, London, 1971, p. 765.