

# Context Is Everything: “The Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16

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## INTRODUCTION

AS PAUL BRINGS TO a close his letter to the churches in Galatia, his final words include a profound benediction. Even as the apostle declares at the beginning of his letter a curse upon those—

whether human or angelic—who would preach a false gospel (1:8-9), so now at the conclusion he pronounces a blessing upon certain individuals (6:16).<sup>1</sup> The question is “To whom is this blessing directed?”

More specifically, who is “the Israel of God” in v. 16? Answering this question is clearly the exegetical issue in Paul’s postscript that has generated the most discussion and disagreement among interpreters of the letter. Most in the history of

interpretation have argued that Paul uses this phrase with reference to the church, the “true Israel” or “spiritual Israel.” Yet a number of scholars believe this view is very questionable, if not highly unlikely.

In Gal 6:16, Paul writes, “And as many as walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” (ESV). The verb translated “walk by” (στοιχήσουσιν) means to be in conformity with or to follow that which is considered a standard for one’s conduct.<sup>2</sup> Paul uses it earlier when he exhorts the Galatians, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by (“conform to,” “keep in step with”) the Spirit” (5:25). Paul’s blessing in 6:16 is thus upon those whose lives are in conformity to the “this rule” he has just proclaimed. But what is this “rule/standard” (κανόνι)? In the previous verse, Paul writes, “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” Most likely, the “rule” or “standard” is the “new creation” itself. All who have experienced the new creation in Christ will have lives that manifest conformity to it.<sup>3</sup> The remainder of v. 16 contains Paul’s blessing. The ambiguous syntax contributes to the differences in interpretation. The Greek text (εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ) could be rendered, “peace and mercy be upon them, that

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is (or “namely”), upon the Israel of God,” taking the second *kai* in an explicative or exegetical sense. In this way, the “Israel of God” would be further describing the “them” who “walk by this rule.” In other words, Paul would have in mind *one* group: the church. A similar view sees the *kai* as slightly ascensive (“even”)<sup>4</sup> but still denoting equivalence of the two groups.<sup>5</sup> Others, however, argue that the *kai* after “mercy” is used in an ascensive sense (“even”) or copulative sense (“and”), indicating that Paul has in mind *two* groups: “peace be upon them, and mercy even (or “also”) upon the Israel of God,” or “peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.” For most interpreters who translate the verse in one of these latter ways, “the Israel of God” is understood to be either believing ethnic Jews or the remnant of ethnic Jews chosen by grace who, according to Paul, will be saved in the future (see Rom 11:5, 26).

The following brief essay will consider the issues that have contributed to the competing understandings of the verse, looking first to the arguments of those who believe Paul uses “the Israel of God” to speak of ethnic Jews in some sense. I will then offer several reasons to justify the traditional interpretation and argue that Paul instead uses the phrase to refer to the church. In the context of Galatians (and the New Testament) it is best to see “the Israel of God” in Gal 6:16 as a reference to the unified people of God consisting of both Jews and Gentiles who have faith in Jesus Christ.

### **VIEW #1: “THE ISRAEL OF GOD” REFERS TO ETHNIC JEWS**

Ernest de Witt Burton is an important commentator who advocates seeing “the Israel of God” in Gal 6:16 as a reference to ethnic Jews. Burton believes Paul is speaking not of the whole Jewish nation but of pious Israel—“the remnant according to the election of grace (Rom 11:5).” The apostle has two groups in mind. He invokes peace on those who walk according to the principle of 6:15, and he proclaims mercy on those within Israel who are as yet unenlightened but who constitute the true

Israel of God. Burton views the *kai* after “mercy” as slightly ascensive, thus expressing his true feelings toward his own people in light of his strong anti-judaistic argument. “It can scarcely be translated into English without overtranslating,” he contends.<sup>6</sup> Against seeing both groups as referring to the Christian community, he finds the order of the words “peace” (εἰρήνη) and “mercy” (ἐλεος) to be illogical, placing cause after effect. In other NT benedictions “mercy” always precedes “peace” (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; 2 John 3; Jude 2). Though he acknowledges that Paul elsewhere distinguishes between Israel according to the flesh and Israel according to election (Rom 9:6; 1 Cor 10:18) and that Paul’s expressions in Rom 2:29 and Phil 3:3 could lend support to the alternative view, Burton emphasizes that there is no other instance in which Paul uses the term “Israel” except to refer to the Jewish nation.<sup>7</sup>

Probably the most influential scholar to oppose viewing “the Israel of God” as applying to the church is Peter Richardson. He contends that, from an historical perspective, the term “Israel” is explicitly applied to the church for the first time in Christian literature in A.D. 160 by Justin Martyr.<sup>8</sup> Like Burton, Richardson also observes the illogical order of “peace” and “mercy.” If one considers the word “grace” as well, one finds further evidence that Paul arranges the terms logically in prayers, blessings, and liturgical formula. When used, the formula “grace and peace” is never varied in Paul—the order being based on “the logic of God’s activity among men: source then benefits.”<sup>9</sup> So, rather than one group in 6:16, Richardson sees two. When Paul adds his conclusion to the letter, he wants to prevent the Galatians from moving toward “a new Christian exclusiveness and sectarianism,” so he writes, “May God give peace to all who will walk according to this criterion, and mercy also to his faithful people Israel.”<sup>10</sup>

S. Lewis Johnson also argues against equating the “Israel of God” with the church. It is “very relevant,” he emphasizes, that in Scripture “the term *Israel* is never found in the sense of the church.”<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Johnson objects to taking the *kai* that follows “mercy” in an explicative or exegetical sense (“namely,” “that is”). “In the absence of compelling exegetical and theological considerations,” he insists, “we should avoid the rarer grammatical usages when the common ones make good sense.”<sup>12</sup> Since the explicative or exegetical usage of *kai* is “proportionately very infrequent” in the literature and “the common and frequent usage of *and* makes perfectly good sense in Galatians 6:16,” Johnson believes the former should be rejected.<sup>13</sup> He further argues that if Paul had wanted to identify the two groups in 6:16, “why not simply eliminate the *kai* after ‘mercy?’” One could then make a solid case for “Israel of God” being in apposition to “them.” According to Johnson, interpreting the *kai* in an explicative or appositional sense indicates that “dogmatic concern overcame grammatical usage.”<sup>14</sup>

#### **VIEW #2: “THE ISRAEL OF GOD” REFERS TO THE CHURCH**

In spite of these arguments and objections, it seems best to understand Paul as speaking of one group in 6:16 and applying the phrase “the Israel of God” to all believers, Jew and Gentile. Paul invokes peace and mercy upon all who walk in conformity to the new creation: “that is, upon the Israel of God.” The church is, thus, the “true Israel” or “spiritual Israel.” The following reasons are offered in support of this view.

(1) While it is certainly true that nowhere else in the New Testament do we find the *term* “Israel” being applied to the church, the *concept* is ubiquitous. I will limit my survey to the writings of Paul. The apostle frequently speaks of believers in Christ (including Gentiles) using Old Testament language that originally referred to Israel. Believers are God’s “elect” or “chosen” (Rom 8:33; Eph 1:4; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4) and those whom he has “called” (Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 1:24). They are “sons of God” (Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26) and “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7). Paul tells the Ephesians they are a “holy temple” and a “dwelling of God” (Eph 2:21-22). In contrast to the Judaizers and their false circumcision

(“mutilation,” Phil 3:2), Paul tells the Philippians, “We are the (true) circumcision” (3:3). In Romans, Paul clearly makes a distinction between ethnic and spiritual Israel. Being a Jew is not outward, nor is circumcision outward. A true Jew is one inwardly, whose heart has been circumcised by the Spirit (Rom 2:28-29). If being a (true) Jew is not about externals but the circumcision of the heart, then this would apply in a spiritual sense to Gentiles. Therefore, the objection that the term “Israel” is never used to refer to the church (except for Gal 6:16!) is not very weighty in light of the clear evidence for the concept.

(2) The context of Galatians justifies understanding “the Israel of God” as designating all believers, Jew and Gentile. While questions of syntax and grammar in Gal 6:16 must be addressed, Thomas Schreiner is right: “It is unlikely that the dispute can be resolved on the basis of grammar alone.”<sup>15</sup> The most decisive factor is the context of the epistle in which the phrase is found. Throughout the letter, Paul has argued that Gentiles need not be circumcised and practice “works of the law” to be justified, receive the Spirit, and be incorporated into the people of God (2:16; 3:2; 5:2-6). Rather, those of faith are sons of Abraham and, in Christ, receive the promised Spirit (Gal 3:7, 14). The Galatians are sons of God in Christ Jesus through faith (3:26), having received adoption as sons (4:4-7). Through their incorporation into Christ—who is the seed of Abraham (3:16)—*they* become Abraham’s seed. “There is neither Jew nor Greek,” for they are “all one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). Therefore, they are Abraham’s offspring and heirs of the promise (3:29). The “Jerusalem above” is their mother, so they are “children of promise” just like Isaac (4:26, 28). Gentiles are not second-class citizens, but full members of God’s people. As Donald Guthrie suggests, given Paul’s argument in the letter, he is perhaps describing the Christian church in this way “because he wants to assure the Galatians that they will not forfeit the benefits of being part of the true Israel by refusing circumcision.”<sup>16</sup> While it is possible for one to abstract 6:16 from its con-

text and argue that “the Israel of God” in this verse *can* refer to those who are ethnic Jews (particularly in light of Romans 9-11), it is very hard to accept this view when one has read the verse in light of the whole epistle. To make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles here at the end of the letter would appear to counteract Paul’s entire preceding argument! Richard Longenecker’s conclusion seems justified: “All of the views that take ‘Israel of God’ to refer to Jews and not Gentiles, while supportable by reference to Paul’s wider usage (or nonusage) of terms and expressions, fail to take seriously enough the context of the Galatian letter itself.”<sup>17</sup>

(3) Many of the interpreters who deny that Paul uses “the Israel of God” to refer to Jew and Gentile believers attempt to reconcile the verse with Paul’s discussion in Romans 9-11 and his affirmation that God has not abandoned his people but that eventually “all Israel” will be saved.<sup>18</sup> However, one need not see the two passages in conflict. The fact that Paul saw a future for ethnic Israel does not mean he could not use the term for the church in a spiritual sense. Johnson acknowledges that Paul can use “Israel” to refer to those who “are truly Israel” as well as those who “are not truly Israel” (Rom 9:6).<sup>19</sup> But if, according to Paul, what it means to be “truly Israel” has nothing to do with ethnicity, why can Paul not refer to Gentiles as part of “true Israel”? Believing that the church is the “true Israel” and that there is a future salvation for ethnic Israel are not inconsistent propositions. They would only be so if ethnic Jews became part of the people of God on a different ground than Gentiles. However, Jews do not become part of spiritual Israel on account of their race, but through faith in Christ. Acknowledging the church as the “true” or “spiritual” Israel does not mean ethnic Israel has been eliminated. Ethnic Israel continues to exist and, through faith in Jesus Christ, can be incorporated into spiritual Israel.<sup>20</sup>

(4) The infrequency of the epexegetical usage of *kai* is not sufficient evidence to deny its presence in Gal 6:16. Standard Greek grammars and lexicons attest to an epexegetic or explicative usage of

*kai* in the New Testament in general and in Paul in particular.<sup>21</sup> Johnson believes one should avoid the rarer usages “when the common ones make good sense.”<sup>22</sup> But the fact that the *kai* in 6:16 is capable of being read with more than one meaning does not imply that we are simply to assume the more commonly attested one. The *context* is the ultimate determiner of meaning—not the frequency or infrequency of a given meaning. Examining the function of *kai* in the NT, Kermit Titrud maintains that *kai* introduces apposition much more frequently than translators and commentators realize. How does one determine if a particular usage of *kai* is appositional (i.e., epexegetical, explicative)? Titrud cites the linguistic principle of “maximum redundancy”—that is, “the best meaning is the least meaning.” In other words, the correct meaning is usually the one that “contributes the least new information to the total context.”<sup>23</sup> Charles A. Ray Jr. subsequently applied Titrud’s analysis to Gal 6:16, believing the context of the letter indicates that Paul applies “the Israel of God” to his followers.<sup>24</sup> To say that Paul intends the phrase to mean all believers, Jew and Gentile, is consistent with the letter and adds the least new information to the context.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, an appositional or epexegetical usage of *kai* in 6:16 seems quite defensible.<sup>26</sup>

(5) Regarding the alleged “illogical order” of the words “peace and mercy” in Paul’s postscript, the following should be noted. The New Testament benedictions that Burton compares to Gal 6:16 (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; 2 John 3; Jude 2) are all part of the introductions of letters—not conclusions. Furthermore, each of these introductory formulas is actually threefold. The first three also include the word “grace” (χάρις), and Jude 2 includes “love” (ἀγάπη). So they are not exactly parallel to Gal 6:16. The unique construction of Paul’s benediction here and the unique combination of “peace and mercy” would appear to argue against its being a formulaic benediction.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

For these reasons, it seems best to understand Paul as invoking peace and mercy upon the church in Gal 6:16 and using the expression “the Israel of God” to describe the unified people of God. As the saying goes, “context is everything,” and context is the decisive factor in understanding Paul’s meaning here. Having contended for the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ throughout his letter, now at the conclusion Paul identifies the church, those who conform to the new creation in Christ, as the *true* Israel.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Brian Vickers notes the parallel between the curse and the blessing in “Who Is the ‘Israel of God’ (Galatians 6:16)?” *Eusebia* 6 (Spring 2006): 5.

<sup>2</sup>See Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (ed. Frederick W. Danker; 3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), “στοιχέω” (hereafter, BDAG).

<sup>3</sup>So Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 226; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 567. Two interesting parallels to Gal 6:15—one of which occurs in the same letter—appear in Paul: “For in Christ Jesus, neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love” (5:6) and “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19). While each statement affirms the irrelevancy of circumcision and uncircumcision, Paul provides three different declarations of what really matters: “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6), “a new creation” (6:15), and “keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19). Those who are “in Christ,” and thus a part of the “new creation” (Gal 6:15), have received the eschatological gift of the Spirit (3:14). After telling the Galatians that what matters in Christ is not circumcision or uncircumcision but “faith working through love” (5:6), Paul exhorts them to serve one another in love and so fulfill the law: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (5:13-14). But this is only possible for those who walk by the Spirit

(5:16). Likewise, for Paul, “keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19) refers to “the moral norms of the law, which believers are enabled to keep by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993], 171). Therefore, Paul’s language of “new creation” in Galatians 6:15 not only testifies to an objective renewal of creation in Christ, but also, because of these parallel texts, should be understood as pointing to the subjective aspect of that renewal. The new creation manifests itself in loving behavior toward one’s neighbor, which fulfills the law (5:14, cf. 6:2). This is the very opposite of the behavior of the Judaizers who wanted to force circumcision on the Galatians so that they could boast in their flesh and avoid persecution for the cross of Christ (Gal 6:12-13).

<sup>4</sup>Daniel B. Wallace defines an ascensive conjunction as expressing “a *final addition* or *point of focus*. It is often translated *even*. This classification is usually determined by the context” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 670, emphasis in original).

<sup>5</sup>Some who hold this latter view affirm that both groups refer to the church but argue that “those who walk by this rule” refers to the Galatian Christians while “the Israel of God” refers to all Christians (see, e.g., Matera, *Galatians*, 232; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Identity of the ἸΣΡΗΛ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ [Israel of God] in Galatians 6:16,” *Faith and Mission* 19, no. 1 [Fall 2001]: 13). However, since these two views are in essential agreement (i.e., both believe “the Israel of God” is a reference to Christians, both Jew and Gentile), there is no need to argue for one over the other here.

<sup>6</sup>Ernest de Witt Burton, *Galatians* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 358.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 357-58. Other interpreters who, similar to Burton, identify “the Israel of God” with Paul’s “all Israel” of Rom 11:26 include Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969), 82-84; F. F. Bruce, *Galatians* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 275; S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “Paul and

'Israel of God': An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost* (ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer; Chicago: Moody, 1986), 192-94.

Hans Dieter Betz, on the other hand, claims Paul has in mind believing Jews: "Paul extends the blessing beyond the Galatian Paulinists to those Jewish Christians who approve of his *κανὼν* ("rule") in v. 15" (*Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 323). D. W. B. Robinson insists that the "Israel of God" refers only to Jewish believers and not Gentile believers (see his "The Distinction Between Jewish and Gentile Believers in Galatians," *Australian Biblical Review* 13 [1965]: 29-48). This is consistent with his contention that Paul distinguishes between the two groups throughout his letter. He bases his view on his interpretation of Paul's relationship to Jerusalem (Galatians 2) and largely on the assumption that Paul frequently uses different pronouns to refer to Jews ("we") and Gentiles ("you"). However, such a position that sees a distinction in referent by virtue of the pronoun used seems extremely difficult to maintain with consistency and coherency throughout the epistle. Moreover, it is hard to believe the Galatians could have understood Paul's argument without more explicit references (i.e., "we Jews," "you Gentiles").

<sup>8</sup>Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 9. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 11.5, Justin Martyr writes, "For the true spiritual Israel and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham ... are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ" (in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [vol. 1; ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1899], 200).

<sup>9</sup>Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 76-77. Richardson claims that the LXX displays the same pattern concerning usage of the words. The only exception to this pattern ("mercy and peace") is found in later Jewish tradition in a benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, which reads, "Bestow peace, happiness, and blessing, grace, loving-kindness, and mercy upon us and upon all Israel your people." Here "peace" and "mercy," as in Galatians, are found in reverse order (*ibid.*, 77-79). While some have pointed to this text as evidence that

the terms can be reversed (See, e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* [Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 298), Richardson notes the references in the benediction to two groups, "us" (the present worshippers) and "all Israel" (the Jewish community wherever it may be). He believes the similarity with Galatians makes it plausible that Paul is dependent upon or unconsciously alluding to the *Shemoneh Esreh*; however, Paul gives the benediction an ironic twist. While the former speaks of "us" and "them" (where "them" is an extension of "us"), Paul speaks of "us" and "them," where the latter refers to those who should be part of "us," but who are not yet. Richardson identifies this second group as those Israelites to whom God will grant mercy in the future, those who will receive Christ (*Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 79, 81-82).

G. K. Beale, however, emphasizes the difficulty in attempting to argue that the language of the *Shemoneh Esreh* "existed in an earlier form as far back as the first century"—thus enabling Paul to be dependent on its benediction. The Palestinian recension (approx. A.D. 70-100) omits half of the benediction's wording, which is found in the later Babylonian recension—including the word "mercy" ("Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6,16b," *Biblica* 80 (1999): 208).

<sup>10</sup>Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 84. Regarding his paraphrase, Richardson adds, "It is difficult to get exactly the right sense in English: 'also' is not quite right, but 'even' is too strong" (84, n. 2).

<sup>11</sup>Johnson, "Paul and 'Israel of God,'" 190.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 187

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.* As with this statement, Johnson's comments throughout his article seem greatly overstated. He claims the interpretation of "the Israel of God" as the church is asserted "in spite of a mass of evidence to the contrary" (182). He says it is the "least likely view among several alternatives" (182), the bases of its interpretation "are few and feeble" (184), and it "totters on a tenuous foundation" (195). On the other hand, there is "overwhelming support" for a more limited interpretation (his) (182).

- <sup>15</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming 2010).
- <sup>16</sup>Donald Guthrie, *Galatians* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 152.
- <sup>17</sup>Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298. Note the similar comments from others: “It is difficult to believe ... that in a letter where Paul has been breaking down the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile Christians and stressing the equality of both groups, that he in the closing would give a peace benediction addressed to believing Jews as a separate group within the church” (Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “Gal. 6:11-18: A Hermeneutical Key to the Galatian Letter,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 [1993]: 104). “Against this backdrop [of the letter], taking ‘Israel of God’ as a reference to ethnic Jews throws Paul’s entire argument up to that point into confusion” (Vickers, “Who Is the ‘Israel of God,’” 8).
- <sup>18</sup>W. S. Campbell confesses, “Our approach to Galatians 6:16 has naturally been coloured by the meaning of ‘Israel’ in Romans 9-11” (“Christianity and Judaism: Continuity and Discontinuity,” *Christian Jewish Relations* 18 [1985]: 10).
- <sup>19</sup>Johnson, “Israel of God,” 189.
- <sup>20</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Church as the New Israel and the Future of Ethnic Israel in Paul,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 13 (1983): 37. Vickers writes, “This interpretation does not spell the end of ethnic Judaism any more than saying ‘no male nor female’ [Gal 3:28] means there are no longer distinctions between the sexes” (“Who Is the ‘Israel of God,’” 8).
- <sup>21</sup>See BDAG, “καί” (1c); F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), §442 (9); Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, James Hope Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 335; G. B. Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek Regarded as a Sure Basis for New Testament Exegesis* (trans. W. F. Moulton; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1882) 545-46 (citing Gal 6:16); and Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (trans from 4<sup>th</sup> Latin ed. Joseph Smith; Rome, 1963), 154 (citing Gal 6:16, though with a question mark).
- <sup>22</sup>Johnson, “Israel of God,” 187.
- <sup>23</sup>Kermit Titrud, “The Function of καί in the Greek New Testament and an Application to 2 Peter,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (ed. David Alan Black; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 247-48. He concludes, “[W]e have ... posited that there is an element of καί that is unlike ‘and,’ namely that it regularly introduces apposition, and that this ... is often missed by exegetes.... [W]e have maintained in light of the rule of maximum redundancy that if apposition is a viable option among constituents of propositions conjoined by καί, it should be highly considered” (255).
- <sup>24</sup>See Charles A. Ray, Jr., “The Identity of the ‘Israel of God,’” *The Theological Educator* 50 (1994): 105-14. Linguist Martin Joos first suggested the “rule of maximal redundancy” to address the problem of *hapax legomena*. However, according to Moisés Silva, “the principle is readily applicable to polysemy [a word with more than one meaning]” (*Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* [rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 155).
- <sup>25</sup>As Betz rightly notes, the expression “Israel of God” is redundant: “it makes no sense to speak of an Israel which is not ‘of God.’ Yet such an expression does make sense as a critical distinction between a ‘true’ and a ‘false’ Israel” (*Galatians*, 323). But for Paul to use the phrase to refer exclusively to *Jewish* believers (as Betz contends) who are the “true” Israel would seem to introduce new material into the context that would not be readily apparent to his readers—who have not read Romans 9-11!
- <sup>26</sup>Johnson’s contention (“Paul and ‘Israel of God,’” 190) that a solid case for apposition could be made if Paul had eliminated the *kai* does not seem valid. The elimination of the *kai* after “mercy” need not necessarily render the phrase “peace and mercy be upon them, upon the Israel of God.” After all, advocates of view #1 like Burton (*Galatians*, 358) understand the *kai before* “mercy” to connect the two groups. Thus, the phrase could read, “peace be upon them, and mercy upon the Israel of God” (*ibid.*, 357), which would still permit one to argue for two distinct groups.

<sup>27</sup>Beale, “Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God,” 220-21. Beale offers another argument for viewing “the Israel of God” as the church by examining the Old Testament background of 6:16. Some have posited as a potential Old Testament background the LXX of Ps 124:5 and 127:6: “peace be upon Israel” (εἰρήνη ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραήλ). However, the passages lack any reference to “mercy,” which is present in Gal 6:16. Instead, Beale proposes Isaiah 54 as a likely background. In Isa 54:10, we read, “But my *lovingkindness* (רַחֵם; LXX: ἔλεος) will not be removed from you, and my covenant of *peace* (εἰρήνη; LXX: εἰρήνη) will not be shaken.” This is one of only three Old Testament texts (the others are Jer 16:5 and Ps 84:10) in which these two Hebrew words occur in such close proximity (208). While Beale thinks all three may have had a collective influence on Paul in writing Gal 6:16, if one of the texts was foremost in the apostle’s mind, Beale believes it likely to have been Isa 54:10 and its context for the following reasons: (1) Paul has already quoted from Isa 54:1 in Gal 4:27. So we have explicit evidence that he has this context in mind while writing to the Galatians. (2) The word συστοιχέω (“corresponds”) appears in 4:25 just prior to the Isaiah quote, and στοιχέω (“conform”) appears in 6:15 preceding “peace and mercy.” The two words semantically overlap. (3) The “mercy” and “peace” of Isa 54:10 find their expression in 54:11-12, in which the Lord speaks of establishing Israel’s foundation, gates, and walls with crystal and precious stones. Revelation alludes to these same verses (Rev 21:18-21) to describe the appearance of the Jerusalem that descends from heaven—all of which is set in the context of the portrayal of the “new heaven and new earth” (Rev 21:1). Isaiah 54:11-12, then, is describing the conditions of the *new creation*, which Paul mentions in Gal 6:15 (210-11, 214). Having, thus, made his case for viewing Isaiah 54 as the possible OT background, Beale insists that it is unlikely that Paul has two groups in mind in Gal 6:16. If Paul is thinking of Isa 54:10—which speaks of the “peace” and “mercy” Israel would experience in the new creation—then he likely sees *all* believers composing end-time Israel. The MT of Isa 54:15 speaks of God’s protection of Israel from her enemies. But in the LXX interpretive paraphrase of this

verse, Gentiles receive eschatological blessing through their incorporation into Israel: “behold proselytes will come to you through me, and they will sojourn with you, and they will run to you for refuge.” From the LXX translator’s perspective, Gentiles receive God’s blessing through their identification with Israel (cf. Gal 3:16, 29) (215-17).

Beale’s background proposal is possible and well-argued. However, “the decisive argument for seeing the church as the Israel of God is the argument of Galatians as a whole” (Schreiner, *Galatians*, forthcoming).