



Are They Not All Israel Who Are Descended from Israel? A Post-Supersessionist Reading of Romans 9:6–13

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ABSTRACT One of the key texts used to validate the supersessionist reading of Paul is Rom 9:6b: “For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel.” That reading was challenged in 2004 by Klaus Wengst, who proposed that Rom 9:6b should be read as a rhetorical question: “Are not all out of Israel, even Israel?” The affirmation that “all Israel” is Israel is completely consistent with Rom 9:4–5 and fully coherent with Rom 9:7–13 read as the genealogy of Jacob/Israel as children/sons of God. Wengst’s proposal avoids all the interpretive difficulties and incoherence of the traditional reading of 9:6b, which sees an “Israel” within Israel. Wengst’s reading transfers 9:6b from the supersessionist side to the post-supersessionist side of the debate, with significant implications for the interpretation of Romans and Paul’s theology of Israel and the gentiles. Yet Wengst’s reading has remained virtually unknown within the English-speaking theological community. The purpose of this essay is to make Wengst’s reading better known by presenting a summary of Wengst’s reading, adducing additional supporting arguments, and proposing a fresh post-supersessionist translation of the key verses 9:6–8.

KEYWORDS Klaus Wengst, Paul, Romans 9:6, post-supersessionism, Israel, seed, genealogy, gentiles, father Abraham, sons of God

Introduction

The supersessionist paradigm—that God has rejected unbelieving Israel and has replaced her by the Church as the true “Israel of God”—has dominated Christian theology from the second century until the middle of the twentieth century, when the shock of the Holocaust motivated re-readings of the NT in the light of its Jewish context, leading to fresh interpretations of many of the texts traditionally understood as supporting supersessionism. That trend

continues to develop and is producing a growing body of scholarly output, which has been tentatively designated as post-supersessionist.¹

One of the main texts that has proved difficult to integrate into a post-supersessionist reading of the NT is Rom 9:6–13. The key verse is 9:6, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel (ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ).”² The declarative second statement—that some of Jacob’s descendants are excluded from “Israel”—which seems to contradict what Paul had just stated in 9:4–5 that God’s gifts belong to all Israel κατὰ σάρκα—constitutes the main interpretive challenge. A definitive response to that challenge was offered by the publication in 2004 of an essay by Klaus Wengst entitled “Sind den nicht alle aus Israel eben Israel? (Röm 9,6b).”³ As stated in its title, Wengst proposed that Rom 9:6b should be read as a rhetorical question: “Are not all out of Israel, even Israel?” Wengst’s proposal produces a fundamental reversal of the reading of Rom 9:6b, with significant implications for the interpretation of Rom 9:6–13 and of Romans overall. Yet that reading has remained virtually unknown to the English-speaking theological community.

The purpose of this essay is to make Wengst’s reading of Rom 9:6b better known and to provide additional support for his reading. I proceed as follows. First, I give a brief overview of the supersessionist paradigm and its interpretation of Rom 9:6–13; second, I present the main elements and the logic of Wengst’s argument; third, I introduce additional supporting arguments that advance Wengst’s thesis; fourth, I document the very limited engagement with Wengst’s reading by English-speaking scholars; finally, I offer an English translation of 9:6–8 based on Wengst’s reading and make some conclusions.

The Supersessionist Paradigm

Supersessionist sentiments were already being expressed in the ἐκκλησία in Rome, as evidenced by Paul’s warning to gentile believers who arrogantly claimed that “[Jewish] branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in” (Rom 11:17–19). By AD 130 Paul’s warning was being ignored, as evidenced by

1. For example, the Wipf and Stock Cascade Books series *The New Testament after Supersessionism*. The series preface reads, in part: “By post-supersessionism we mean a family of theological perspectives that affirms God’s irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people as a central and coherent part of ecclesiastical teaching.”
2. All Scripture quotations are from the NASB (1995) unless otherwise noted.
3. Klaus Wengst, “Sind den nicht alle aus Israel eben Israel? (Röm 9,6b) Interpunktion als Interpretation,” in *Dem Tod nicht Glauben: Sozialgeschichte der Bibel*, Festschrift für Luise Schrottroff zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Frank Crüsemann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004), 376–93.

The Epistle of Barnabas with chapter headings such as “Chap. XIII.—Christians, and not Jews, the heirs of the covenant; Chap. XIV.—The Lord hath given us the testament which Moses received and broke.”⁴ A few decades later Justin Martyr (ca. AD 160) became the first⁵ known “Father” to explicitly claim the title Israel for the gentile Church: “He [Christ] is the new law, and the new covenant, and the expectation of those who out of every people wait for the good things of God. 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.”⁶ And again: “As, therefore, Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, even so we, who have been quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelitic race.”⁷ Jakób Jocz summarizes the development of the supersessionist paradigm as follows:

The Jewish people ... gradually becomes in the eyes of the Gentile Church a God-forsaken people divested of all merits. The Church appropriates not only the spiritual heritage of Israel, but even the national history of the Jews, their patriarchs, saints, and prophets. In time, the whole spiritual and national background of Judaism was torn away from the Synagogue and claimed as the sole property of the Church.⁸

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that a significant turn away from supersessionism developed, including a focus on re-reading Paul (and the rest of the NT) within the perspectives of Second Temple Judaism.⁹ A growing stream of such scholarship has produced viable post-supersessionist readings for many of the NT texts foundational to supersessionism.¹⁰ Nevertheless,

4. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, ANF 1.145–46.

5. Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, SNTSMS 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 1.

6. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ANF 1.200.

7. Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ANF 1.267. See further, e.g., R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996); Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church, the Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010).

8. Jakób Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London: SPCK, 1949), 73.

9. Although challenges to supersessionism appeared earlier, post-supersessionism as a movement can be taken to have started (more or less) with Johannes Munck's *Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1954), subsequently published in English as *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959); or perhaps with Krister Stendahl's essay “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” first published in English in the *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215.

10. Representative works include: A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007); Susan Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16

supersessionist interpretations continue to be convincing to many. Two such commentators who can be considered as representative, and who roughly bracket the post-Holocaust period, are C. K. Barrett and N. T. Wright. Their approaches to Rom 9:6–13 are exemplified below.

Barrett translates the implied verbs in Rom 9:4 in the past tense and uses language that suggests that Paul speaks of historical events rather than present realities: “they were shown his glory, with them he made the covenants.”¹¹ Barrett comments on the meaning of the overall passage 9:6–13 as follows:

So far Paul has simply established his argument in terms of events which happened in remote antiquity; but the first century Jew ... cannot escape the consequences of the argument. For what Paul has established is the freedom of God in grace. It is impossible for his Jewish interlocutor to reply: Very well! I am descended from Abraham, through Isaac (not Ishmael), and Jacob (not Esau); therefore I must stand within the promise. To argue in this way is to say: God was free in the days of the patriarchs, but he is no longer free now—which is absurd.¹²

Barrett’s argument involves, first, a chronological devaluation of God’s promises made “in remote antiquity,” which the “first century Jew” can no longer depend on; second, extraction from those promises of a theological principle—“the freedom of God in grace”—from which all specific content has been removed; and third, that God need not be faithful to his promises, because God must be “free.” Physical descent through the line of promise from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is thus rendered meaningless, and genealogical Israel no longer has any salvation-historical significance. On 9:6 specifically, Barrett states: “‘Israel’ cannot be defined in terms of physical descent, or understood simply ‘on the human side’ (v. 5);¹³ it is created not

and Romans 9–11,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 367–95; David Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews, Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23*, *WUNT* 2/304 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Rafael Rodriguez and Matthew Thiessen, eds., *The So-Called Jew in Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016); Mark D. Nanos, *Reading Romans within Judaism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018); J. Brian Tucker, *Reading Romans after Supersessionism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018); William S. Campbell, *The Nations in the Divine Economy, Paul’s Covenantal Hermeneutics and Participation in Christ* (Lanham: Fortress Academic, 2018); Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020).

11. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Black, 1957), 174–75.

12. Barrett, *Romans*, 183.

13. Barrett (*Romans*, 175) translates ἐξ ὧν ὁ χριστός τὸ κατὰ σάρκα (v. 5) as “from them (on the human side) springs the Christ himself.” Such devaluation of κατὰ σάρκα to a generic term in brackets seems to run counter to Paul’s intention to emphasize that the Messiah is a physical descendant (seed) of Israel (cf. Rom 1:3) and therefore, as per 9:7–13, also of Abraham. Christ’s

by blood and soil,¹⁴ but by the promise of God,¹⁵ and therefore exists within the limits of God's freedom."¹⁶

In N. T. Wright, we find a comparable treatment of Romans 9, albeit "re-worked" using New Perspective concepts but with similar results. Wright argues from a perceived "careful chiasmic structure" for Romans 9–11,¹⁷ that 9:6b exerts a controlling influence over the whole section, and on 11:26 in particular:

Paul ... has very carefully structured the entire three-chapter sequence. And he opens the account, the great historical narrative, in which his theological point is displayed, with a clear distinction: not all those who are "of Israel" are in fact "Israel" ... (9.6b). That distinction hangs over the rest of the discussion ... this ought to alert us to the fact that *pas Israel* in 11.26, close to the balancing point with 9.6 in the rhetorical architecture of the whole section, is not likely to mean "all Abraham's physical children."¹⁸

In apparent agreement with Justin Martyr on the meaning of "Israel," Wright concludes that: "the line of thought throughout the whole letter has all along indicated the possibility of a *polemical redefinition* even of this noble term for God's people."¹⁹ Elsewhere he states: "From Paul's Christian²⁰ point of view, those Jews who do not embrace Jesus as their Messiah are thereby embracing instead an identity marked out by blood and soil,²¹

physical descent from Abraham is critical for Paul's argument in Gal 3 that it is through receiving the Spirit of Messiah (3:14), who is the physical seed of Abraham (3:16), that gentiles become seed of Abraham (3:29). See further below.

14. The phrase "blood and soil" does not occur in either the OT or NT. Although genealogy is constitutive of the identity of Israel, the key scriptural term is σπέρμα (seed), not "blood." And the land, although one of the covenant promises, is not included in Paul's list in 9:4–5, perhaps reflecting the fact that Israel was rarely if ever in possession of the entire promised extent, which is to be fully realized only through Messiah in "the age to come"; Israel even in exile retains its identity. Problematic is that "blood and soil" is an exact translation of the infamous Nazi racist slogan *Blut und Boden*; see, e.g., Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 55–56, 233–36; R. Mark Musser, *Nazi Oaks* (Longwood, FL: Advantage, 2010), 84–95.
15. Barrett's blindness to his very problematic evisceration of "God's promise" of its essential genealogical content illustrates the power of the supersessionist paradigm.
16. Barrett, *Romans*, 180. Suggesting that "God's freedom" has "limits" seems self-contradictory.
17. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013), 1162–63.
18. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1241.
19. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1242.
20. The anachronism seems deliberate, perhaps intended to distance Paul from his brethren κατὰ σάρκα.
21. Wright *also* uses the problematic phrase "blood and soil." These terms are not usually included in the New Perspective's list of Israel's "boundary markers" (sabbath, circumcision, food laws). Could Wright (or Barrett) really have characterized Jewish self-understanding in terms of such

by ancestry and territory, in other words, by the ‘flesh.’ They are, therefore, subject to the same critique as paganism.”²²

Wengst’s Argument

The publication of Wengst’s 2004 essay was followed in 2008 by a commentary on Romans, in which Wengst reworked and expanded the argument for his proposed reading.²³ The argument presented in his commentary is essentially the same as in his 2004 essay, but is better organized, with more discussion and development of his main points and with added material in the form of interaction with other scholars. Wengst demonstrates that his reading of 9:6b is consistent with the positive statements about Israel in the preceding 9:4–5 and also that it connects logically with Paul’s argument in 9:7–13. Wengst’s argument for the latter is especially important in that 9:6b–7 is traditionally read as two negative statements, with the latter reinforcing the negative thrust of the former. For example, Cranfield translates 6b–7 as: “For not all who are of Israel are Israel, nor, because they are Abraham’s seed, are they all his children.”²⁴ Wengst exegetes v. 7 as affirming his positive reading of v. 6b, which then renders 9:7–13 as Paul’s presentation of the genealogical ground of Israel’s calling based on God’s promises to the patriarchs. As a result, the entire passage is rendered coherent in a way that the traditional reading has not been able to achieve. The summary of Wengst’s argument presented herein is based on his 2008 commentary.²⁵

Wengst’s thesis—that Rom 9:6b should be read as a rhetorical question: “Are not all out of Israel, even Israel?”—apparently came to him as a sudden insight: “It was like scales falling from my eyes when, some years ago, I realized that this sentence must not be read as a statement but as a rhetorical question: ‘Are not all out of Israel, “Israel”?’ Of course they are! All Jacob’s children who received the honorable name ‘Israel’ are Israelites.”²⁶

a deeply offensive slogan without being aware of its Nazi associations? Wright in this quote does seem to consider Judaism a form of paganism.

22. N. T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. R. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 176.
23. Klaus Wengst, “*Freut euch, ihr Völker, mit Gottes Volk!*” *Israel und die Völker als Thema des Paulus—ein Gang durch den Römerbrief* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).
24. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 2:470.
25. All translations of the German are my own.
26. Klaus Wengst, “*First to the Jews and also to the Greeks*”: *A Clearing through the Letter to the Romans* (online article, Jewish Christian Relations, May 31, 2008, <https://www.jcrelations.net/article/first-to-the-jews>).

Wengst develops his argument within the several sections of his commentary dealing with 9:1–13,²⁷ with some support from Rom 9:14–26.²⁸ In his preamble, Wengst remarks that in the immediately preceding passage 8:31–39, Paul had emphasized the impossibility of Christian believers being separated from the love of God and that this assurance is based on God’s predestination and calling. When Paul proceeds in 9:1–5 to consider Israel, he does not argue that Israel’s connection with God has been somehow broken: if that were the case, it would undermine the believer’s assurance that Paul had just affirmed. Instead, he similarly affirms that God’s election of Israel remains valid.²⁹

Wengst begins his main argument in the section entitled “Paul’s Lament Concerning Israel and its Nonetheless Enduring Gifts of Grace (9:1–5).” Wengst notes that when Paul lists the God-given possessions of his Israelite brethren in vv. 4–5, his first statement establishes the foundation of what follows: οἳτινὲς εἰσὶν Ἰσραηλῖται.³⁰ Wengst captures the emphatic sense of the Greek: “Sie sind *ja doch* Israeliten.”³¹ Wengst then discusses these gifts, noting that these are stated to be Israel’s present and—looking forward to 11:29—enduring possessions.³² Wengst points out that Israel’s adoption as sons connects with the affirmation in 8:14–23 that gentile believers are also adopted sons but does not explain the distinction between the two types of sons.³³ Finally, Wengst asks what it was that brought Paul from his opening lament to the praise with which he concludes the first section (v. 5b): the obvious answer is that Paul has recalled God’s promises to Israel—God’s word that can never fail.

Wengst begins the next section, entitled “The Election of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (vv. 6–13),” by emphasizing the importance of 9:6 for the proper interpretation of the whole of Rom 9–11.³⁴ Wengst translates v. 6a as “but by no

27. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 287–302. Wengst does not deal specifically with text critical issues, apparently because they are minor; those listed in the SBLGNT apparatus for Rom 9:1–13 concern alternate word order (9:3), use of a synonym (9:11), and an alternate form of καθὼς (9:13); the UBS₃ apparatus lists διαθήκη in the singular instead of the plural (9:4) and a punctuation issue in 9:5. None of those *variae* are significant for this study.

28. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 302–14.

29. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 287.

30. Greek text embedded in the presentation of Wengst’s argument is from his commentary. Greek text introduced in my subsequent discussion is from the SBLGNT.

31. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 290.

32. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 290.

33. Wengst only states “[Paul] puts the [believing gentile] congregation and Israel, which does not believe in Jesus, into analogy with one another” (Wengst, *Freut euch*, 289, 291). I develop the distinction between Israelite and gentile sonship below.

34. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 294.

means is it as if the Word of God has become obsolete.”³⁵ Verse 6b is the critical interpretive nexus. Following what Paul has just stated about Israel in vv. 4–5, the traditional reading of 6b—“for not all from Israel are Israel”—comes as a shock:³⁶ the reader expects a confirming statement: “Als Intention für den mit V. 6 beginnenden Abschnitt ergibt sich damit: Was in V. 4f. gesagt ist, wird gegen dessen Bestreitung durchgehalten. Das soll, wie der Anschluss mit $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ in V. 6b zeigt, im Folgenden begründet bzw. erläutert werden.”³⁷

Wengst now considers the interpretations of the traditional reading of 9:6b by various scholars,³⁸ finds them all less than coherent, and concludes that reading 6b as a rhetorical question is more plausible (*einleuchtender*).³⁹ Wengst justifies the feasibility of his reading by noting that the lack of punctuation in the original manuscripts requires the reader to infer an intended question from style and context.⁴⁰ Wengst lists three principal reasons why reading 6b as a rhetorical question is to be preferred over the traditional one: (1) his reading is completely congruent with the preceding passage (vv. 4–5); (2) it fits with the genealogical argument in the following passage (vv. 7–13), which culminates with Jacob/Israel as the one who receives and transmits the promise; and (3) it is totally coherent with Paul’s claim in v. 6a that God’s word to Israel has not fallen.

Wengst then develops the argument that 9:7–13 presents the genealogy of Israel, from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, in a straightforward manner. He begins by raising the question of how v. 7 connects with v. 6b. The traditional reading of 6b–7 is as two negative statements, with the latter reinforcing the negative thrust of the former. How can the negative statement of v. 7 connect with his proposed reading of v. 6b as having a positive sense?⁴¹ Wengst notes that οὐδὲ does not (as normally understood) necessarily imply the connection of two negative statements; it can also (as determined by context) indicate an adversative sense for the second statement. In support, in addition to citing the

35. Wengst’s translation in 6a of ἐκπέπτωκεν as “become obsolete” is perhaps better translated as “fallen,” which would then make explicit the connection with 11:11 “they did not stumble so as to fall (πέσωσιν), did they?” and thus more explicitly support Wengst’s point: neither the word of God nor Israel has “fallen.”

36. J. D. G. Dunn (*Romans 9–16* [WBC 38B; Dallas: Word Books, 1988], 547) senses the incongruity: “Paul makes this apparently self-contradictory assertion in a matter-of-fact way as though it was an unexceptional statement.”

37. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 295.

38. Including Hübner, Dunn, Longenecker, Käsemann, Stegemann, and others.

39. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 295–97.

40. I provide support for the use of rhetorical questions in Romans in a brief discussion below.

41. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 297.

lexicons, Wengst cites Heb 9:25, and notes the similar construction with οὐδε plus preposition: Rom 9:7 starts with οὐδ' ὅτι; Heb 9:25 begins with οὐδ' ἵνα. With regard to the latter, Wengst comments that the usual translation misconstrues the οὐδε. For example, the NASB of vv. 24–25 (my emphasis/brackets) has:

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but [did enter] into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often,

Wengst sees that this text consists of three main clauses and that the last clause is not—as commonly understood—a continuation of the first (negative) clause, since there is an intervening positive clause. Thus, οὐδε here functions as a connector with the middle clause, which is positive; οὐδε should therefore have an adversative sense: Christ did enter into heaven itself *but not* so that there he would “offer himself often.” That logic should then also apply to the way Rom 9:7 connects with v. 6b: “Now it is not so that Abraham’s descendants [*Nachkommenschaft*] are all those that he had as children.”⁴² Wengst notes, as an aside without further comment, that although Rom 4 presented Abraham as the father of all believers, Paul makes no mention of that aspect in this passage.⁴³

Wengst accordingly reads vv. 7–13 as the genealogy of the line of promise from Abraham to Israel. Belonging to Israel is entirely based on physical descent from Abraham *and* Isaac *and* Jacob. After Jacob—who is Israel—there is no further diminishing of the line of promise: all of Jacob’s children and all their children after them are included in Israel. All Israel are “the children of the promise”; all others are “the children of the flesh.” But both categories of children are physical descendants. Paul’s contrast here is between “flesh” versus “promise,” not “flesh” versus “spirit.” Faith is not mentioned, consistent with Rom 3:4, “What then? If some did not trust, will their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? Not at all!”⁴⁴ Paul also does not contrast οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων with ἐκ πίστεως but with the calling of God: Israel’s

42. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 298. This reading of 9:7 is coherent with 6b read as a rhetorical question and Paul’s following argument from genealogy based on God’s word of promise (9:8–13). However, that reading becomes more persuasive when taking into account Paul’s use of the terms σπέρμα/seed and τέκνα/children; see my discussion below.

43. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 298. I address the issue of how Abraham’s fatherhood of gentile believers differs from his fatherhood of genealogical Israel in my discussion below of Abraham as the “father of us all.”

44. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 300.

enduring election is entirely dependent of the call of God⁴⁵ independent of anything they do or fail to do (9:11–12).⁴⁶

In concluding, Wengst comments on the traditional supersessionist typological interpretation of the Isaac/Ishmael and Jacob/Esau contrasts in this passage, which sees the rejected sons as types of “fleshly Israel,” which does not believe in Jesus, and the chosen sons as types of “spiritual Israel,” which does believe in Jesus. Wengst refutes this typological interpretation with a *reductio ad absurdum*: if Esau represents Israel κατὰ σάρκα, then, in 9:13, could God really mean “Israel I hated?”⁴⁷

Wengst adduces further support for his reading in the subsequent discussion of 9:14–23, where he interprets “vessels of mercy” as descriptive of Israel,⁴⁸ and in the section on 9:24–26 on the basis of the “also” in 9:24. Up to v. 24, Paul had discussed only Israel (or Israelites and non-Israelites) and not at all the Jesus-believing community. Only now does Paul—at this point identifying himself with his gentile audience—speak of “us”—“us whom he *also* called”—an “us” that consists of those who are called “not from among Jews only, but *also* from among Gentiles” (v. 24). The Israel of vv. 6–23 does not lose its calling; rather the “us” are now *also* called.⁴⁹

To summarize: Wengst posited five arguments in support of his reading of 9:6b: (1) Paul’s affirmation of God’s enduring love for gentile believers in 8:31–39 requires the same for God’s prior love for Israel; (2) God’s gifts to Israel κατὰ σάρκα in 9:4–5 cannot logically be restricted to a diminished “Israel”; (3) Israel in 9:7–13 is defined genealogically as the physical seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with no further limitation; (4) the meaning of Israel is consistent throughout 9:1–13 and validates Paul’s claim in 9:6a that the word of God has not failed; (5) Paul does not mention gentile believers until 9:24 using the qualifier “also.” I now proceed by first filling a minor gap in Wengst’s material and then offering four additional arguments that advance his thesis.

45. The call of God in 9:11 links to 9:24: “*even us, whom he also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles,*” reinforcing Wengst’s argument below on the occurrence of “also” in 9:24.

46. Douglas K. Harink (*Paul among the Postliberals* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003], 169) points out that “Paul writes the entire passage from 9:6 to 9:27 using nearly twenty active verbs depicting God’s action, but using only a few verbs, all passive, with respect to humanity. He thus makes his point absolutely clear, namely that the current ‘plight’ of Israel after the flesh is entirely the result of God’s decisions and actions.”

47. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 301.

48. Based on 9:23, “to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory.” Note the repeated “glory” and the connection with 9:4, “Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory.”

49. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 310–11.

Advancing Wengst's Thesis

Rhetorical Questions in Romans

Wengst did not cite examples or supporting references for the use of rhetorical questions in Romans. To fill this gap, I simply note the important work of Stowers on the rhetorical diatribe style in Romans with its characteristic use of rhetorical questions,⁵⁰ and one example of the application of rhetorical analysis to Romans 5.⁵¹ The latter demonstrates the explanatory power of reading an otherwise difficult text as a rhetorical question, of which Rom 9:6b is a prominent example.

Σπέρμα as the Interpretive Key in Romans 9:7–8

Although Wengst develops a persuasive case for the way that Rom 9:7 connects coherently with his reading of 9:6b, he does not discuss Paul's use of the two repeated terms in 9:7–8: σπέρμα/seed (thrice) and τέκνα/children (four times). Understanding Paul's use of those terms, especially σπέρμα, is critical to understanding Paul's genealogical argument in 9:7–13. The Greek text of 9:7–8, with the terms σπέρμα and τέκνα doubly and singly underlined, respectively, reads:

⁷ οὐδ' ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ'. Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα.
⁸ τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογίζεται εἰς σπέρμα.

It is apparent that in v. 7 Paul uses one of the two terms in a general sense and the other in a restrictive sense—but which is which?⁵² Most commentators, influenced by the traditional reading of 9:6b, which seems to disqualify some of Israel's descendants as “Israel,” take σπέρμα in 9:7–9 as the more general term. Fitzmyer's translation of 9:7a is: “nor because they are all the seed of Abraham (are they all his) children” and explains: “Physical descent alone does not insure inheritance, for Abraham had many offspring (*sperma Abraam*),” and then supports that reading by appealing to 9:6b: “As Paul has distinguished ‘Israel’ from those ‘who are from Israel,’ so now he distinguishes ‘the children of Abraham’ from ‘Abraham's seed (offspring).’ To the former belong the divine promises.”⁵³

50. Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

51. Stanley E. Porter, “The Argument of Romans 5: Can a Rhetorical Question Make a Difference?” *JBL* 110 (1991): 655–77.

52. Dunn (*Romans*, 540) on v. 7 perceptively states: “Translation here is surprisingly difficult and depends on whether the construction carries on from v 6 and whether σπέρμα or τέκνα is regarded as the more restrictive category.”

53. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 560.

Similarly, Byrne translates 9:7a as: “nor because they are descendants of Abraham are all children (of God).”⁵⁴

Dunn correctly recognizes how Paul uses σπέρμα and τέκνα in this passage; on v. 7a he states: “In the immediately following quotation σπέρμα is the more restricted category (v 7b; also v 8), whereas τέκνα embraces both Abraham’s ‘children of the flesh’ and his ‘children of the promise’ (v 8)”⁵⁵; and regarding v. 7b: “The ἐν is restrictive—only in Isaac.”⁵⁵ Yet in the same paragraph, he also claims, via an appeal to Rom 4:13–18, that “the true heirs of Abraham are to be reckoned in other than national (physical or legal) terms.”⁵⁶ Most English versions translate accordingly; for example, the NIV of 9:7 (with underlined words understood to be translations of the terms σπέρμα and τέκνα, respectively), reads: “Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’” The NIV reads σπέρμα (descendants) as the general term and τέκνα (children) as the restrictive term in the first clause. However, the context of the last clause requires σπέρμα to have a restrictive meaning. The NIV sidesteps the inconsistency by there translating σπέρμα as “offspring,” rendering the passage somewhat less than clear.

Careful attention to Paul’s usage of σπέρμα and τέκνα in 9:7–8 is required. The only scripture citation Paul makes in this passage is Gen 21:12 (LXX), “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (ἀλλ’ ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα), which thus provides the scriptural ground for Paul’s argument. Evidently, Paul uses the term σπέρμα (seed) as a technical covenantal term, which restricts the covenant to those children of Abraham who descend through Isaac.⁵⁷ Paul confirms that usage of “seed” in vv. 8–9, where he carefully qualifies his three uses of the term τέκνα (children) to make his meaning clear: only the children of the promise are covenantal “seed,” further supported by a citation from Genesis 18:

⁸That is, it is not the children (τέκνα) of the flesh who are children (τέκνα) of God, but the children (τέκνα) of the promise (ἐπαγγελίας) are regarded as seed (σπέρμα), ⁹For this is the word of promise (ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὗτος): “At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.”⁵⁸

54. Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, SP 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 293.

55. Dunn, *Romans*, 540.

56. Dunn, *Romans*, 540.

57. The background for Paul’s use of the word “seed” as a covenantal category is located in God’s covenant promises to Abraham in Gen 17:1–14. The key passage is vv. 7–10 (LXX), which five times uses some form of the phrase “you and your seed (σπέρμα).”

58. Key terms in 9:8–9 have links within Romans that support Wengst’s thesis: “son” and “promise” (9:4); “word (of God)” (9:5); and “seed”: of the Messiah as σπέρματος Δαυὶδ in 1:3, and of Paul: ἐγὼ Ἰσραηλῆτης εἰμί, ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ in 11:1. Paul here identifies himself as the seed of

Paul's argument in 9:7–9 can be re-stated as follows: only the children of the promise through Isaac are covenantal seed⁵⁹ and therefore children of God.⁶⁰ Paul extends his argument in vv. 10–13 to further restrict the line of promise to Jacob. After Jacob, there is no further restriction: Jacob is Israel, and all those descended from Israel, that is, only those who have Abraham, Isaac, *and* Jacob as fathers,⁶¹ belong to the promised seed. This analysis of Paul's use of σπέρμα and τέκνα provides additional exegetical support for Wengst's reading of 9:7–9 and his reading of 9:6b as a rhetorical question.

Wengst does not remark on the fact that “the fathers” of Israel in 9:5 become explicit in 9:7–13 as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; “the fathers” are again referenced in 11:28. The fact that Israel has all three as fathers, while, according to Romans 4, gentile believers apparently have only Abraham as a father, points to a distinction between the two groups. This is elaborated in the following section.

Abraham the Father of Us All

The supersessionist reading of Rom 9:6–13 is often supported by reference to Romans 4, where Paul claims that it is those who are of the pre-circumcision faith of Abraham who have Abraham as father and so inherit the pre-circumcision promise given to him. Thus Jewett, on 9:6: “Paul has already established the distinction between those descendants of Abraham who follow the law and those who follow faith (Rom 4:13–16), insisting that only the latter are recipients of the divine promise. A similar distinction is intended here.”⁶² Similarly, Dunn, on 9:6–29: “Paul can effectively summarize his earlier argument in chaps. 2–4 that God's call comes to effect in terms of promise, not in terms of natural (national, ethnic, or racial) descent (vv. 7–9), and as determined by God's own purpose of mercy, not by works which document covenant membership and Jewish particularity (vv. 10–18),”⁶³ and “the true heirs of Abraham are to be reckoned in other than national (physical or legal) terms (see also on 4:13).”⁶⁴

Abraham, using the genealogical argument that he is (emphatically: ἐγὼ ... εἰμι) an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, son of Jacob.

59. Cf. Matthew Thiessen and Paula Fredriksen (“Paul and Israel,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Pauline Studies*, ed. Matthew V. Novenson and R. Barry Matlock [Online Publication, Oct 2021, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199600489.013.34], 19 n. 6): “At issue is the question of inheritance and who is the covenantal seed (*sperma*).”

60. Children of God are of course also sons of God which applies to all Israelites (9:4).

61. Cf. Exod 3:6: “I am ... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

62. Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 574.

63. Dunn, *Romans*, 539.

64. Dunn, *Romans*, 540.

Paul's focus in Romans 4 is to establish, for his gentile audience, the scriptural basis of their salvation.⁶⁵ Paul in 4:17 thus references Gen 17:4–5, “as it is written, ‘A father of many nations have I made you.’”⁶⁶ Yet Paul wishes to avoid the impression that gentiles through faith somehow become a part of Israel. He does this by the repeated use of “and”/“also” to maintain a distinction between believing gentiles/the uncircumcision and believing Jews/the circumcision: first, by his preparatory remarks in 3:29–30: “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one,” followed by similar statements in 4:9, 4:11–12, and 4:16.⁶⁷ Paul maintains both the Jew/gentile distinction and the connection of each to Abraham “the father of us all”⁶⁸ but does not elaborate at this point in his letter.

In Romans 9, however, Paul's focus shifts to genealogical Israel—the physical descendants of Jacob (πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραήλ). Paul now needs to clarify what distinguishes Israel from gentile believers. Gentiles—through faith in Christ—have (somehow) obtained Abraham as father; Israelites have—by physical descent—not only Abraham but also Isaac and Jacob as fathers. All Israelites are God's covenant children—whether or not they have believed the gospel: “my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers” (9:3–5). These

65. The traditional view that Romans is addressed to both gentile and Jewish Jesus-followers is no longer convincing. Paul at least twice explicitly identifies his audience as gentiles (Rom 1:13; 11:13). Andrew Das (*Solving*, 266) states: “All the pieces of the puzzle for Paul's letter to the Romans fit” when it is recognized that “The apostle is writing to a Gentile audience.” See also the arguments in Rodriguez and Thiessen, eds., *The So-Called Jew*.

66. The covenantal requirement of circumcision is stipulated directly afterward in Gen 17:9–14, which Abraham immediately enacts for himself and his entire household, and which ensures that Isaac is generated by a circumcised father. The “father of many nations” promise was not repeated to either Isaac or Jacob (cf. Gen 26:4; 28:14).

67. I cannot here discuss the significance of the prepositions in 3:29, “God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” nor of the question as to which (and how many) groups are referenced in 4:12; it is adequate for my purpose to note that Paul does not assimilate believing gentiles into Israel. But see the important essay by William S. Campbell, “Abraham in the Divine Purpose According to Paul: The Reception of Abraham Tradition in Romans 4 and Romans 9,” in *The Message of Paul the Apostle within Second Temple Judaism*, ed. František Ábel (Lanham: Fortress Academic, 2021), 145–65.

68. Contra N. T. Wright (“Paul and the Patriarch: The Role of Abraham in Romans 4,” *JSNT* 35 [2013]: 209): “in Rom 4 Paul expounds the story of Abraham, especially in Gen 15 . . . in terms of God's establishment of the covenant which always envisaged a single worldwide family.”

gifts belong by natural inheritance to Israel only.⁶⁹ All Israelites are “natural branches” of the cultivated olive tree; gentiles are “wild branches,” and even when they as believers are grafted “contrary to nature” into the olive tree, they in some sense retain that identity (11:24). The promise of national salvation was given only to Israel (11:26), not to the gentile nations as nations.

In Romans 4, there is no mention of “covenants” or “promises” as in 9:4;⁷⁰ only “the promise” is mentioned, repeated four times (4:13, 14, 16, 20) each time in the singular and with the article. That promise is specified in 4:13 as “the promise to Abraham or to his descendants (seed) that he would be heir of the world” (ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῷ Ἀβραάμ ἢ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ, τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου). Contrary to the traditional explanation that reads 4:13 as a “universalizing” expansion of the land promise to all the world/creation,⁷¹ a more convincing explanation is that of David Burnett who links 4:13 with 4:17 and 4:23–24 and the promise from Gen 15:5 in Rom 4:18: “So shall your descendants be.” Burnett states:

The promise pertains to becoming a “father of many nations” which Paul links to the resurrection from the dead as he states in 4:17, “as it is written ‘I have made you a father of many nations’ ... in the presence of the God whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” ... He later relates Abraham’s faith to the faith of the believers in the resurrection: “But the words ‘it was counted to him’ (Gen 15:6) were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord” (4:23–24)... [T]he ideas of becoming “heir of the cosmos” ... a “father of many nations” ... and the hope of the resurrection are not separate promises but are understood by Paul as constituent parts of (and having been subsumed under) the *one* promise made to Abraham in Gen 15:5 in becoming as the stars of heaven.⁷²

69. Excluding, of course, apostate Israelites who have defied God and rejected Torah—they are “cut off from among their people.” Gentile believers who apostatize similarly forfeit their membership in the people of God.

70. Thus Campbell (*The Nations*, 313): “At a point where a reference to διαθήκη might be anticipated when Abraham is under discussion, Paul fails to include any reference to διαθήκη.”

71. E.g., Wright, “Paul and the Patriarch,” 212–13.

72. David A. Burnett, “So Shall Your Seed Be: Paul’s Use of Genesis 15:5 in Romans 4:18 in Light of Early Jewish Deification Traditions,” *JSPL* 5 (2015): 211–36. Thus also Kathy Ehrensperger, “Narratives of Belonging: The Role of Paul’s Genealogical Reasoning,” *Early Christianity* 8 (2017): 390: “The reference in Gal 5:21 that ‘envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these’ cannot inherit the kingdom points to another aspect of inheriting as σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ. The inheritance mentioned here is the kingdom of God, which is cosmological in scope—and thus possibly another way of expressing what is expressed in Rom 4:13 as κληρονόμον κόσμου.”

One could summarize Burnett's conclusion by stating that "the promise," obtained by faith, includes everything that is normally meant by the term "salvation." In Romans 8, Paul elaborates that this saving faith becomes operative in the believer's life by reception of the Spirit: "you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Rom 8:8–9). Romans 8 is replete with references to the necessity and the results of having the Spirit,⁷³ with 8:14 perhaps being the central reference: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, *these are* sons of God." It is the reception of the Spirit that effects the sharing of a believer in the sonship of Christ. Gentiles become seed of Abraham by becoming one with Christ and thus sharing in his genealogy as the seed of Abraham.

Paul develops this principle in greater detail in Gal 3–4: God's promise to bless the nations is effected through Abraham's σπέρμα the Messiah; it is through the Spirit of Christ whom gentile believers receive by faith that makes them sons of Abraham, rather than through mere imitation of Abraham as the prototype of the man of faith. Matthew Thiessen observes: "Galatians 3–4 (and Romans 8) suggests that it is not faith alone that makes gentiles into these new creatures; rather it is the *pneuma* that gentiles receive through faith that transforms their genealogical status"⁷⁴ and further clarifies the significance of that distinction:

[The] traditional understanding of Christian identity (Christians are spiritual Israel or spiritual Jews) fundamentally misunderstands Paul's argument about Abrahamic sonship ... [it] wrongly believes that Paul opposes biological descent (flesh and blood) to a fictive descent (a spiritual kinship based on faith). In contrast, the distinction with which Paul works is ... sarkic-fleshly as opposed to pneumatic materially conceived ... that is, the gentiles join Christ by taking his *pneuma* into their hearts, incorporating his substance into theirs ... the spirit ... provides a tangible organic connection.... By the incorporation of Christ's spirit in their bodies, the gentiles inherit his ancestry.⁷⁵

There exists therefore a dual Abrahamic ancestry: for Israel, a genealogical one based on fleshly descent, and for believing gentiles, also a genealogical one but based on pneumatic union with Abraham's seed the Messiah. Believing

73. Note also the resumption of cosmic references in 8:18–23, consistent with Burnett's understanding of 4:13.

74. Thiessen, *Paul*, 121.

75. Thiessen, *Paul*, 115. Similarly, Campbell, *The Nations*, 236: "the *ethne* are only related to the heritage of Israel through Christ and not directly through the lineage of Isaac and Jacob.... This relation to Abraham via Christ prevents *ethne* being accorded the title 'Israel' and releases them from the full obligations of the Torah ... to participate in the promises of Abraham, those from the nations require not only a connection with Christ but also via Christ (rather than via circumcision) to Abraham."

gentiles do not become Israelites. The fleshly genealogy of Israel thus retains its meaning and validity and supports Wengst's reading of Rom 9:6–13. Comparison of Rom 8:14 and 9:6b yields further support for the Jew-gentile distinction, as shown in the following section.

Romans 8:14 and 9:6b as Parallel Texts

In Romans 8, Paul reaches the culmination of his message of the gospel of God's son (1:1, 9, 15) to the gentile believers in Rome. The center of that gospel—that it is the reception of the Spirit through faith in God and his Christ that effects the adoption of a gentile as a son of God—can perhaps be taken to be Rom 8:14. As noted by Jewett, 8:14 contains the first reference in Romans to υἱοὶ θεοῦ (“sons of God”), indicating its importance.⁷⁶ The text reads:

οἱ ὅσοι γὰρ πνεύματι θεοῦ ἄγονται, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν θεοῦ.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, *these are* sons of God.

Jewett, citing BAGD,⁷⁷ comments on the sense of οὔτοι in the concluding clause: “The word οὔτοι (‘these’) has a resumptive sense in v. 14b, giving ‘special emphasis’ to something previously mentioned, namely, those led by the Spirit of God. One could translate ‘these very ones are God’s sons.’”⁷⁸ The similarities of vocabulary and structure between 8:14 and 9:6b is suggestive:

οἱ ὅσοι [γὰρ] πνεύματι θεοῦ ἄγονται, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν θεοῦ.

[For] all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

[οὐ γὰρ] πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ.

[For not] all those out of Israel, these are Israel.

When the introductory γὰρ and οὐ γὰρ are bracketed out, the two statements have the same structure. The οὔτοι in both texts is both resumptive and emphatic: “*these are sons of God*”; “*these are Israel*.” That being the case, to read 6b as a declarative—“for not all those out of Israel, these are Israel”—is incoherent.⁷⁹ To read 6b as a rhetorical question—“for are not all those out of Israel,

76. Jewett, *Romans*, 496

77. The BAGD reference to Rom 8:14 is located under οὔτος 1.a.ε: “Resuming something previously mentioned, with special emphasis: a substantive.”

78. Jewett, *Romans*, 496. Since υἱοὶ is anarthrous, it seems preferable to translate the final clause as “these very ones are sons of God” to remove the ambiguity in Jewett’s wording: believers in Christ cannot be the only “sons of God” because Paul in 9:4 states that “the adoption as sons” belongs to genealogical Israel.

79. John Piper (*The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993], 65) recognizes the force of the οὔτοι but transfers the οὐ to the concluding clause: “For all those from Israel, these are not Israel,” which would seem

these are Israel”—is completely coherent and connects logically with the preceding as well as the following verses within 9:1–13.

The noted parallel structure of 8:14 and 9:6b indicates a further correspondence: both texts stipulate defining attributes of “sons of God.” Romans 8:14 identifies the defining attribute of a gentile son of God as one who has acquired the Spirit. Romans 9:6b identifies the defining attribute of an Israelite son of God⁸⁰ as one who has physically descended from Jacob.⁸¹ This correspondence becomes evident only if Wengst’s reading is adopted.

Alignment with Other Post-Supersessionist Readings

Wengst’s reading aligns strongly with other recent studies that have advanced the post-supersessionist reading of Romans and Paul’s other letters. Significant results of those studies include: that Romans is addressed to gentiles;⁸² that Rom 2:17–29 is addressed to a Judaizing gentile who has had himself circumcised and “calls himself a Jew”;⁸³ that gentile salvation is based not on gentiles joining Israel or becoming a redefined “Israel” but on participation in Christ by the Spirit which makes them seed of Abraham;⁸⁴ and that Paul does not collapse believing Jews and gentiles into a “single family” but consistently distinguishes the two groups.⁸⁵ Those study results and Wengst’s thesis are mutually reinforcing, rendering each study more credible and the post-supersessionist approach as a whole more persuasive.

English Language Engagement with Wengst’s Reading

I have been able to identify only five scholars who engage with Wengst’s reading of Rom 9:6b in English; four post-supersessionist: William S. Campbell, Kathy Ehrensperger, Mark Nanos, and Brian Tucker; and one supersessionist: Robert Foster.

to exclude all of Israel from Israel! Dunn (*Romans*, 539) seems to accept the validity of Piper’s translation; Jewett (*Romans*, 574) rightly identifies the incoherence.

80. According to Rom 9:4 and 9:8, Israelites are sons/children of God.

81. Of course, the Israelite “son” who comes to faith in Jesus Messiah becomes all the more a son of God. Paul understands that all Israel will eventually attain to that status (11:26).

82. Stowers, *Rereading*; Das, *Solving*.

83. Rodriguez and Thiessen, eds., *The So-Called Jew*.

84. Thiessen, *Paul*.

85. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews*; Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians after Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission through Israel to the Nations* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017); Matthew Thiessen, “Gentiles as Impure Animals in the Writings of Early Christ Followers,” in *Perceiving the Other in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, Wolfgang Grünstäudl, and Matthew Thiessen, WUNT 394 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 19–32; Paula Fredriksen, *Paul the Pagans’ Apostle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

The most extended engagement with Wengst's reading has been by William Campbell in his 2018 *The Nations in the Divine Economy*.⁸⁶ Campbell finds Wengst's reading of 9:6b as a rhetorical question to be persuasive, in that it produces a more consistent and coherent overall reading of Paul's argument not only in chapters 9–11 but for Romans overall:

As Klaus Wengst has noted, it is probable that verse 6b should be read as a rhetorical question, "Is it not so that all Israel are Israel?" That this is feasible is supported by 9:14, 19, 30 and by the diatribe style of other important sections of Romans in which questions feature ... as standard means of advancing the argument. Wengst's view is to be strongly supported in that it gives continuity to Paul's affirmation of Israel and his recording of her God-given gifts in verse 4, while simultaneously avoiding the confusion caused by an apparent qualification or diminishment of these only two verses later.⁸⁷

Kathy Ehrensperger, in her essay "The Mysterion in Romans 11:25–36," critiquing the early church's appropriation to itself of the designation "all Israel," references Wengst (and Campbell) as follows: "Detailed arguments against the perception of Israel within Israel in Rom 9:6 have recently been presented by K. Wengst ... and, informed by Wengst, W. S. Campbell."⁸⁸

Mark Nanos references Wengst's reading in his 2018 *Reading Romans within Judaism* and comments as follows: "It is possible to punctuate 9:6 differently, as an assertion couched as a question: 'But are not all these Israel, who are from Israel?' (cf. Klaus Wengst's translation 'Are not all out of Israel, "Israel"?')."⁸⁹ Although Nanos recognizes Wengst's reading as a valid alternative, he does not adopt it, presumably because it does not fit well with his own previously developed reading of Romans 9–11, which accepts the existence of an "Israel" within Israel; the inner "Israel" are those who—with Paul—are properly carrying out Israel's vocation in preaching the gospel to the nations.⁹⁰

Brian Tucker, in his *Reading Romans* contribution to the *New Testament after Supersessionism* series, refers (in a footnote) to Nanos's mention of the alternative reading of 9:6b as a rhetorical question but does not reference Wengst. Tucker does not engage with that reading, apparently because he is focused on supporting a "soft" form of an "Israel" within Israel: "However 9:6 more likely

86. Campbell, *The Nations*, 228–29, 247 n. 13.

87. Campbell, *The Nations*, 228–29.

88. Kathy Ehrensperger, "The Mysterion in Romans 11:25–36," in *Searching Paul*, WUNT 429 (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 319–38, (here 336 n. 48).

89. Nanos, *Romans*, 116 n. 11.

90. Nanos, *Romans*, 231–32.

does not teach that in-Christ gentiles have taken over the identity of historic Israel. Instead it describes a division within this historical group: Jews who believe in Jesus as Israel's Messiah and those who do not or will not."⁹¹

Robert Foster, in his published dissertation *Renaming Abraham's Children*⁹² references Wengst's 2008 commentary some fourteen times. However, it seems that the objective of Foster's work is to defend the supersessionist paradigm.⁹³ At the point where he directly discusses Rom 9:6b, and the apparent failure of 9:7–13 to "execute the inner-Israel division just anticipated," he states:

[S]ome recent interpreters have perceived this discrepancy. But in order to suit their interpretive interests, they merely set the problem on its head and force 9:6b and vv. 27–29 (and 11:1–10) into the mold of vv. 7–13. In this way Paul is made a champion of Jewish election without equivocation. The division within Israel is erased and the opening declaration is made consistent with what follows. Yet by imposing the text onto a Procrustean bed, they generally produce interpretations of 9:6b that noticeably limp. On their reading, "not all Israel is Israel" becomes a bizarre way of insisting the inviolability of all Israel's election.⁹⁴

Foster cites Wengst⁹⁵ as one of those "recent interpreters" who have so self-servingly and bizarrely proposed a reading contrary to that of Foster. Although Foster must have been aware of Wengst's proposed reading of 9:6b as a rhetorical question, he refused to engage with it or even to state it, leaving the reader ignorant of what Wengst had actually proposed.⁹⁶

Of the five scholars noted, Campbell and Ehrensperger support Wengst's reading; Nanos and Tucker accepted its validity but did not incorporate it into their work; Foster ridiculed it while managing not to mention it.⁹⁷ The lack of knowledge of Wengst's reading among English-speaking scholars is evidenced

91. J. Brian Tucker, *Reading Romans*, 131 n. 78, 132.

92. Robert B. Foster, *Renaming Abraham's Children: Election, Ethnicity, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Romans 9*, WUNT 2/421 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

93. In the introduction to his section covering Rom 9:6, Foster states with reference to 9:6a: "Behind this declaration lies Paul's restriction of God's saving act to the community of Christ followers ... Paul has already argued that the Jews proved themselves disobedient to the demands of the covenant (2:21–24)." Foster, *Renaming*, 114.

94. Foster, *Renaming*, 121–22.

95. Foster, *Renaming*, 121 n. 22.

96. This refusal, and Foster's pejorative language and mischaracterization of Wengst's actual exegetical method, does not reflect a spirit of honest enquiry. See further Paula Fredriksen's review of Foster, *Renaming* at: *Reviews of the Enoch Seminar* December 13, 2016 (online at <http://enochseminar.org/review/12511>).

97. Characteristic of those who have no effective counterargument.

in the case of post-supersessionist scholars Paula Fredriksen and Matthew Thiessen. In their recent entry “Paul and Israel” for the *Oxford Handbook of Pauline Studies*, they state, on Rom 9:6:

After listing all the privileges enjoyed by all Jews *qua* Israelites (9:3–5), and affirming that God’s *logos* cannot fail, Paul observes, “Not all from Israel, are these Israel” (v. 6). The NRSV introduces “truly” here (“Not all Israelites truly belong to Israel”). There is no warrant in the Greek, but this translation does reinforce the traditional supersessionist understanding that Paul redefines Israel to mean not ethnic Israel, but the mixed-ethnic church. Unfortunately, such a translation collapses 9:3–5 into utter incoherence: Paul has just finished affirming that genealogical Israel *is* Israel; and, as he will reaffirm by chapter 11, their divine gifts and calling are irrevocable (11:29).⁹⁸

If Fredriksen or Thiessen had been aware of Wengst’s reading of 9:6b that would surely have been reflected in their article.

A Proposed Translation of Romans 9:6–8

Although Wengst’s reading influences the interpretation of the entire passage of Rom 9:6–13, it directly affects translation only of vv. 6–8. Wengst’s rendering of those verses is:

⁶Keineswegs aber ist es so, als wäre das Wort Gottes hinfällig geworden. Sind denn nicht alle aus Israel eben Israel? ⁷Aber es ist nicht so, dass Nachkommenschaft Abrahams alle sind, die er als Kinder hat. Vielmehr: “In Isaak wird dir Nachkommenschaft berufen werden” (Gen 21,12). ⁸Das heißt: Nicht die leiblichen Kinder sind Kinder Gottes, sondern die verheißenen Kinder werden zur Nachkommenschaft gerechnet.⁹⁹

For reference, the Greek text is:

⁶ Οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ. ⁷ οὐδ’ ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ’ Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα. ⁸ τοῦτ’ ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογίζεται εἰς σπέρμα.

I now propose a translation of Rom 9:6–8 based on Wengst, taking account of my observations noted throughout, explicitly translating the γὰρ of v. 6,

98. Thiessen and Fredriksen, “Paul and Israel,” 11.

99. Wengst, *Freut euch*, 293.

adopting the sense of logical development indicated by the leading $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ of v. 7¹⁰⁰ and the fronting of $\sigma\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\alpha$ Ἀβραάμ, clarifying the distinction between children of the flesh and of the promise, and using a more fluid style:

⁶ But it is by no means as if the Word of God has fallen: for are they not all Israel who are descended from Israel? ⁷ Now they are the seed of Abraham not because they are all children of Abraham, but because “through Isaac your seed will be called.” ⁸ That is, it is not the merely biological children who are children of God, but the promised children are counted as seed.

Conclusions

Wengst’s proposal that Rom 9:6b be read as a rhetorical question has been shown to have strong exegetical and hermeneutical support. Wengst’s reading establishes consistency with the preceding 9:4–5, stating Israel to be the recipient of God’s enduring gifts; it facilitates a fresh understanding of 9:6–13 as a straightforward delineation of the genealogical specifics of God’s enduring election of “all Israel”; and it constitutes clear affirmation that “the word of God has not fallen” (9:6a). Romans 9:6b thus emerges as the keystone binding together the two sides of the archway of 9:1–13, which is accordingly revealed as a well-designed entrance to the whole of Romans 9–11. In addition, the correspondence between “all Israel” in 9:6b and 11:26 is perceived to constitute a chiasm governing the interpretation of Romans 9–11,¹⁰¹ which can now be read consistently and coherently throughout.

Wengst’s reading aligns with previous post-supersessionist readings of Paul in a way that makes the post-supersessionist approach more credible and persuasive. Wengst’s reading overcomes all the interpretive difficulties and incoherence entailed by the traditional reading and opens up new possibilities for the interpretation of Romans and Pauline theology as a whole. May scholars be motivated to continue developing this line of research, and may that result in blessing for God’s people, and mercy upon the Israel of God.

100. Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 36, 54.

101. In agreement with the “careful chiastic structure” perceived by Wright (see above), but his conclusion is thereby overturned.