RYAN HEINSCH

The Figure of Hagar in Ancient Judaism and Galatians

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe
579

Mohr Siebeck

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe

579

Ryan Heinsch

The Figure of Hagar in Ancient Judaism and Galatians

Mohr Siebeck

Ryan Heinsch, born 1985; 2008 BA, Moody Bible Institute; 2014 MDiv, Moody Theological Seminary, Michigan; 2019 PhD, University of Aberdeen; currently adjunct professor at Moody Theological Seminary, and Bible faculty at Southwest Christian High School (Chaska, MN).

ISBN 978-3-16-161789-8 / eISBN 978-3-16-161855-0
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-161855-0

ISSN 0340-9570 / eISSN 2568-7484
(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at *http://dnb.dnb.de*.

The book was printed on non-aging paper by Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen, and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

This monograph is a slightly revised version of my doctoral thesis, which was written under the supervision of Prof. Grant Macaskill at the University of Aberdeen. A special thanks to my examiners, Dr. Matthew V. Novenson and Prof. Philip G. Ziegler, who carefully reviewed my thesis and provided insightful feedback. This project is better because of their engagement with it. And a special thanks to Prof. Jörg Frey for recommending my thesis for publication and to the team at Mohr Siebeck for accepting it.

A project such as this is not completed in isolation, but in a community of support. There are a number of people to thank. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Grant Macaskill. Your careful and constructive feedback consistently pushed me to sharpen my own thinking and argumentation. You have been a most excellent *Doktorvater*! Thanks to Dr. Andrew Clarke for originally agreeing to supervise this study. What I learned from you in that first year will remain with me. Thanks to Dr. J. Brian Tucker for encouraging me to pursue doctoral studies. You have been both a friend and a colleague, but most of all, a mentor. Thanks to my fellow Aberdeen peers, especially Dr. Kris Song, Dr. Jeannine Hanger, Dr. Joshua Honeycutt, Daniel Thorpe, Lisa Igram, and Melissa Tan. Your friendship and support have been an encouragement. Thanks to the students (esp. Richard Spenst), staff, and faculty of Moody Theological Seminary for the opportunity to work out some of my ideas in the classroom. Thanks to the staff and faculty at Southwest Christian High School for encouraging me to continue my scholarly pursuits; thanks to the students for your curiosity and questions; and thanks to my colleagues in the Bible department. To Dr. Donald H. Carlson, Dustin Thompson, and Brian Goldie, we are indeed the best high school Bible department in the country.

Finally, thanks to my parents for encouraging and praying for me. Thanks to my wonderful children, Adelyn and Gideon. I love you both so very much. And most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Laura. The sacrifices you have made over the years are beyond my ability to repay. God has truly blessed me with a thoughtful, caring, supportive, and beautiful wife – I love you!

10 August 2022 Ryan Heinsch

Table of Contents

Style and Abbreviations

For all abbreviations, footnotes, and bibliography items, this study follows the *SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd edition.

NTAS	New Testament after Supersessionism
TGNT	Tyndale Greek New Testament

Introduction

In view of the sobering reality of the Holocaust, and with the emergence of the so-called "New Perspective on Paul," much recent scholarship has sought to take Paul's Jewishness more seriously by reading and understanding him as a first-century Jew who, in one way or another, remained within the symbolic universe of pluriform first-century Judaism. While this approach has produced fresh insight into and renewed engagement with key Pauline texts, other texts have remained more or less unaffected. One such text is the famous – or even infamous – allegory of Hagar and Sarah in Gal 4:21–31. Although recent scholarship has worked to challenge the overt anti-Judaism and naively blatant supersessionism of previous generations, other interpretations of an implicitly anti-Jewish and supersessionist sort continue to reverberate from this text. Put simply, Gal 4:21–31 continues to be read largely as a polemic against Jews, Jewish Christ-followers, and the continuing validity of the Jewish law. However, as scholarly consideration of Paul and Judaism continues to develop, offering more nuanced categories from which to consider afresh the various issues at play in the text of Gal 4:21–31, the current readings on offer need to be interrogated more carefully and alternative readings explored.

One such issue at play in the text of Gal 4:21–31 is Paul's somewhat perplexing allegorical appropriation of the figure of Hagar. To briefly state the matter: it is widely assumed that Paul links the figure of Hagar and thus slavery to key aspects of Judaism and Jewish identity (such as the Sinai covenant, Mount Sinai itself, and the city of Jerusalem) and, in one way or another, the Jewish people in order to contend for the superiority of faith in Christ and, assumedly, Christianity and Christian identity. While the exact inferences of the apparent connections Paul develops between the figure of Hagar and Judaism are debated (e.g., does Paul call for the wholesale rejection of Judaism, or is he simply critiquing a particular law observant strand of so-called "Jewish Christianity"?), what is almost universally agreed upon by scholars is that Paul appropriates the figure of Hagar in such a way as to realign her otherwise non-Jewish identity with key aspects of the Jewish symbolic universe, thus signaling the obsolescence of the Jewish law and, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the supersession of Jewish ethnic identity.

However, what is often inadequately developed in or entirely missing from scholarly discussion of Gal 4:21–31 and Paul's appropriation of the figure of

Hagar in particular is consideration for how the figure of Hagar was appropriated by ancient Jews in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period; and how considering Paul's own depiction of Hagar within the context of these traditions may shed fresh light on the text of Gal 4:21–31, thus providing an alternative reading of it. In fact, it will be the primary contention of this study that situating Paul's appropriation of the figure of Hagar squarely within the context of Second Temple Judaism has the potential to bear such exegetical and interpretive fruit.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to consider afresh Paul's allegorical appropriation of the figure of Hagar in Gal 4:21–31 within the context of Second Temple Judaism. As such, our principal aim is to situate Paul's portrayal of Hagar within the various streams of ancient Jewish tradition on her, with our goal being the production of an alternative and thus altogether different reading of key aspects of the text of Gal 4:21–31. To that end, the primary claim of this study is that Paul's portrayal of Hagar can be read and understood to stand in continuity with Second Temple Judaism in that Paul, like other Jews in antiquity, depicts Hagar and likewise her descendants as non-Jews.[1] In relation to Gal 4:21–31 more specifically, I will argue that Paul allegorically portrays the figure of Hagar as the covenantal mother of slave-born gentiles. Altogether, the present study contends that Gal 4:21–31 is not a polemic against Jews, Jewish Christ-followers, or the abiding significance of the Jewish law (and thus Jewish identity and practice); rather, it is an allegory principally about the experience of gentiles in general and the once pagan Galatian gentiles in particular.

While several of these claims are not entirely unique to this study – a small number of scholars have drawn similarly related conclusions – I will seek to advance these claims in two key areas. First, by undertaking a detailed examination of key Jewish texts from the Second Temple period, I will seek to more fully demonstrate the way Paul's depiction of Hagar maintains – and does not abandon – key elements found in the extant ancient Jewish traditions on her. Second, and related, I will bring this first claim to bear more knowingly on the interpretation of Gal 4:21–31. By understanding Paul's portrayal of Hagar and her descendants as non-Jews, I will demonstrate the way this claim provides alternative solutions to several of the interpretive difficulties within the allegory itself and as related to the allegory as a whole. Thus, by applying a more nuanced set of categories in which to interrogate and interpret this text, it will be demonstrated that the allegory can be read in such a way as to illustrate the experience of non-Jewish identity in relation to Christ: both the experience of

[1] As one of the primary findings of this study, Paul stands in continuity with Second Temple Judaism on this important point. This, however, is not to say that Paul does not align with Jewish traditions on Hagar in other ways. As will be demonstrated in Part Three, Paul's appropriation of Hagar is found to be both similar to and different from the various Hagar traditions on offer in ancient Judaism.

non-Jewish identity apart from Christ (4:22–23, 24–25, 29–30) and also in Christ (4:26–28, 31).

In order to accomplish this task, this study will proceed in three parts. Part One includes two chapters addressing introductory matters. Chapter 1 establishes the way scholarly approaches to Gal 4:21–31 have long embodied and continue to embody (whether intentionally or unintentionally) various forms of supersessionism.[2] While such readings cannot be ruled out *a priori* – nor is it the intention of this study to overtly judge the validity of these readings – it is possible that the leading scholarly approaches to the allegory of Hagar and Sarah continue to be governed by a set of interpretive patterns and categories that are overly simplistic (or narrow) and possibly even wrongheaded when applied both to Paul and this text. Thus, Chapter 1 begins by examining the concept of supersessionism, along with its continued – and often implicit – outworking in the field of New Testament studies, which is then followed by a brief survey of scholarship on Gal 4:21–31 in relation to this abiding conceptual framework. Overall, it will be found that traditional notions of supersessionism are rooted in certain convictions and claims about the obsolescence of the Jewish law and thus the superfluidity of Jewish identity: convictions and claims that continue to govern most interpretive approaches to Gal 4:21–31. I will then conclude Chapter 1 by considering the way scholars have understood the allegory in general and Paul's portrayal of Hagar in particular in relation to the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, and whether such considerations have provided fresh insights and alternative approaches to the text of Gal 4:21–31. Finally, Chapter 2 outlines the comparative method to be employed and establishes the way this study will read and understand Paul as a first-century Jew and apostle to the nations.

Part Two consists of two chapters examining the portrayal of Hagar in ancient Jewish literature. Chapter 3 examines the portrayal of Hagar in the LXX of Genesis. The primary purpose of this chapter is to lay the comparative groundwork for what follows so as to identify the way the figure of Hagar is portrayed in different ways and for different purposes as she is variously appropriated by ancient Jewish thinkers. Chapter 4 examines the Second Temple Jewish texts of 1QapGen, Jubilees, Baruch, selected works of Philo, and Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*. It proposes that, for all of the ways these texts portray Hagar differently, they stand in continuity on two interrelated points: first, Hagar's status as foreigner is taken for granted, and she is consistently depicted as an outsider and, in particular, a non-Jew; and second, her descendants therefore are representative of the nations – or simply put, they are gentiles.

Finally, Part Three of this study contains three chapters dealing in various ways with the text of Gal 4:21–31. Chapter 5 prepares for the discussion of Chapter 6 by exploring the literary context in which the allegory is situated. It

[2] A discussion and definition of supersessionism is provided in Chapter 1.

proposes that, based on the recurring presence of the adverb πάλιν in 4:9, 4:19, and 5:1, Paul introduces the story of Hagar and Sarah for his own rhetorical purposes, and he does so not as a polemic against Jews, Judaism, or a group of Jewish Christ-following missionaries, but as a stark reminder and illustration of the Galatian gentiles' own experience of Hagar-like enslavement. Chapter 6 – the central chapter of this study – undertakes a detailed examination of the portrayal of Hagar in Gal 4:21–31. It proposes that Paul takes Hagar's ethnic or non-Jewish identity seriously and allegorically portrays her as the covenantal mother of slave-born gentiles: gentiles who are symbolically born *away from* (ἀπό) Mount Sinai, and thus *away from* the presence and liberating knowledge of Israel's God, and consequently, born into slavery (4:24). In addition, the language of expulsion in 4:30 is considered. Based on our understanding of Paul's portrayal of Hagar in 4:24, it is argued that 4:30 is best understood as a warning rather than a command. Finally, in view of the argument of Chapter 6, Chapter 7 rounds off our study by considering the textual variant of Gal 4:25a, along with a brief consideration of the "present" and "above" Jerusalems spoken of in 4:25b–26. It proposes that many of the interpretive difficulties that surround these verses are resolved by understanding Paul's portrayal of Hagar as the covenantal mother of slave-born gentiles. Overall, then, Paul is found to stand in continuity with the literary traditions of Second Temple Judaism in that he, like other Jews in antiquity, portrays Hagar and her descendants as non-Jews.

Part One
Introductory Matters

Chapter 1

Echoes of Supersessionism and the Figure of Hagar in Galatians 4:21–31

1.1 Introduction

Die jüdische Deutung wird auf den Kopf gestellt. Die Traditionslinien laufen nun buchstäblich über Kreuz. Die Hagar-Ismael-Linie, die geschichtlich auf die Araber hinführt, läuft nun auf die Juden zu, die Sara-Isaak-Linie dagegen, auf der abstammungsmäßig die Juden ihren Ort haben, läuft auf die Christen zu. Begründet wird diese Umkehrung im Blick auf die Juden mit dem Argument, daß sie sich in Unfreiheit befinden.[1]

The above statement by Gerhard Ebeling succinctly articulates a time-honored reading of Paul's letter to the Galatians. For centuries, interpreters widely agreed that the argument of Galatians centered on the question of Judaism vis-á-vis Christianity in order to contend for the superiority of Christianity and faith in Christ over against the religion of Judaism and its legalistic slavery-inducing "works of the law."[2] Moreover, in light of a text such as Gal 4:21–31, from which Ebeling's statement is formulated, Paul's argument was clear: due to the Christ event, there was now an unquestionable dualistic or antithetical polarity between Judaism and Christianity. According to Paul, so the argument goes, Judaism and the people belonging to it – being in the line of Hagar (Ishmael), slavery, the Sinai covenant, and the earthly Jerusalem – have been rejected by God; and alternatively, Christianity and the people belonging to it – being in the line of Sarah (Isaac), freedom, the Spirit, the new covenant, and the heavenly Jerusalem – have thus superseded his ancestral religion. In short, Christianity had replaced Judaism; the church had replaced Israel.[3]

---

[1] Gerhard Ebeling, *Die Wahrheit des Evangeliums: Eine Lesehilfe zum Galaterbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 318.

[2] For a brief history of interpretation of Galatians, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), xliii–lvii. For a more detailed account, see John Riches, *Galatians through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008). On the use of Galatians in the early church, see Karla Pollmann and Mark W. Elliott, "Galatians in the Early Church: Five Case Studies," in *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letter*, ed. Mark W. Elliott et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 41–60.

[3] When considering the context of the first century, there are inherent difficulties with applying labels such as "Christian(s)," "Christianity," and the "Church" to the early Christ-movement. Although such terms will need to be employed at various points throughout this

Following this line of reasoning, the famous if not also unsettling conclusion of J. B. Lightfoot on the meaning of Gal 4:21–31 in his now classic commentary on Galatians captures the overall force of this longstanding interpretive tradition:

> The Law and the Gospel cannot co-exist; the Law must disappear before the Gospel. It is scarcely possible to estimate the strength of conviction and depth of prophetic insight which this declaration implies. *The Apostle thus confidently sounds the death-knell of Judaism*.[4]

Hence, for previous generations of interpreters – and even some contemporary – Paul's letter to the Galatians, and 4:21–31 in particular, was commonly understood to reflect one of, if not the clearest expression of his polemic against, opposition to, and ultimate rejection of his ancestral faith. Paul, the so-called "Christian" and apostle to the nations, was no friend of Judaism; Paul was a supersessionist.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a survey of scholarship on Gal 4:21–31 in order to demonstrate the way this text has been traditionally read and understood to promote various forms of supersessionism; and from this, we will likewise consider the way several of even the more recent approaches to this text – while seeking alternative outcomes from that of their predecessors – continue to put forward readings of Gal 4:21–31 that remain vulnerable to charges of at least a form of implicit supersessionism by recourse to the way these more recent approaches continue to be governed by certain interpretive patterns and categories that undergird much of the supersessionistic claims and conclusions of previous generations of scholars. In relation to this, we will also consider the way these interpretative patterns and categories have largely centered on and developed from a particular understanding of Paul's allegorical portrayal of the figure of Hagar in and for the allegory as a whole. Finally, in the latter part of this chapter, we will examine key interpreters who have sought to compare Gal 4:21–31, and Paul's allegorical portrayal of Hagar in particular, with the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period. The goal of which is to

---

study, my own approach will largely follow the terminological suggestions of Anders Runesson, "The Question of Terminology: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussion of Paul," in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 53–77. In place of the term "Christian" I will use the term "Christ-follower(s)," while also distinguishing between Jewish and gentile individuals and groups where necessary: i.e., "Jewish Christ-follower(s)" and "gentile Christ-follower(s)." In place of the term "Christianity" I will use "Christ-movement." And, in place of the term "church" I will use "congregation," "assembly" or ἐκκλησία. Similarly, see Paula Fredriksen, "Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go," *SR* 35 (2006): 231–46. For a discussion of the terms Ἰουδαῖος and Ἰουδαϊσμός, see the excursus in Chapter 2.

[4] J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians: With Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 184. Emphasis my own.

determine whether, and if so to what extent, scholars have considered the various ancient Jewish traditions on Hagar for the purpose of informing their respective readings of Paul and this text, and thus the possibility of an alternative set of interpretive categories from which to draw, and whether such considerations have led to fresh interpretations of it. However, before embarking on this endeavor, I will begin by providing some clarity as to the concept of supersessionism being considered in this chapter (and at various points throughout this study) by briefly exploring the way a particular form of supersessionism continues to subtly manifest itself in prominent interpretations of the New Testament and, more specifically, Paul.

1.2 Supersessionism and the Study of the New Testament

1.2.1 Supersessionism Traditionally Understood

According to Terence Donaldson, the term "supersession" can be described as "a situation where one entity, by virtue of its supposed superiority, comes to occupy a position that previously belonged to another, the displaced group becoming outmoded or obsolete in the process."[5] Traditionally and theologically speaking, then, "supersessionism" is the belief that Christianity (a superior entity) has replaced Judaism (an inferior entity), and thus the Christian church has replaced ethnic Israel as the people of God,[6] with the term "supersessionist" often being employed to describe the posture of the Christian church – made up of largely gentiles nonetheless – toward the Jewish people for the most part of the last two thousand years.[7]

---

[5] Terence L. Donaldson, "Supersessionism and Early Christian Self-Definition," *JJMJS* 1.3 (2016): 7.

[6] Donaldson, "Supersessionism," 10; see also William L. Krewson, *Jerome and the Jews: Innovative Supersessionism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 2. Finally, Terence L. Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in the New Testament: Decision Points and Divergent Interpretations* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 20, more fully describes supersessionism as such: "With respect to Jewish–Christian relations, 'supersessionism' refers to the idea that the Christian Church has superseded the Israel of the 'Old Testament' – in other words, that the Church has succeeded and replaced Israel as the people of God and has inherited everything of value in Israel's tradition; that only the Christian movement has any legitimate claim to the Old Testament and the revelation it represents; that pre-Christian Israel has been rendered obsolete and that ongoing non-Christian Judaism is thus illegitimate; that Judaism has been cut off from the Scriptures and has no claim to it; and so on."

[7] In his seminal study on supersessionism, R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 1, describes this "theology of displacement" as having permeated the Christian church and its reading of Scripture – largely Israel's Scripture – since as early as the second century CE. An early example of

By and large, Christian forms of supersessionism are based on a certain unifying approach interpreters have taken to the narrative framework of the Protestant Christian canon, which, according to R. Kendall Soulen, teaches:

> God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and their place was taken by the church, the new Israel.[8]

According to this "standard canonical narrative," the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is governed by two central convictions.[9] First, carnal Israel has either completed (positively) or forfeited (negatively) its role as God's chosen people, and thus the unique status of the Jewish people as the people of God has been transferred to God's spiritual people, the church (now made up of a majority of Christ-following non-Jews and only a minority of Christ-following Jews).[10] And second, the natural corollary to this transfer of status is that the church is now understood to constitute the true spiritual Israel, namely, the Israel of God (cf. Gal 6:16).[11]

While the above overview briefly describes and defines traditional notions of supersessionism, within the interpretive framework itself there have been and remain diverse approaches to making sense of this "hermeneutic of displacement." Since the seminal work of Soulen, scholars and theologians have

---

supersessionism can be found in the second-century CE work of Justin Martyr's well-known *Dialogue with Trypho* where he argues vigorously for the superiority of Christianity over against Jewish faith and practice; see *Dial.* 11–12, 16, 119; cf. also, Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.21.1; 4.18.4; 4.21.3; 4.28.3. For an overview of the history of supersessionism, see Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 27–77; Gerald R. McDermott, "A History of Supersessionism: Getting the Big Story Wrong," in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 33–44. As Donaldson, "Supersessionism," 7, reminds us, what has naturally (and regrettably) developed from such Christian belief is anti-Jewish rhetoric and anti-Semitic activity.

[8] Soulen, *God of Israel*, 1–2.

[9] Soulen, *God of Israel*, 13. Here Soulen describes the "standard canonical narrative" as "an interpretive instrument that provides a framework for reading the Christian Bible as a theological and narrative unity." For a more recent assessment, see R. Kendall Soulen, "The Standard Canonical Narrative and the Problem of Supersessionism," in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*, ed. David Rudolph and Joel Willitts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 282–90.

[10] Often the term "carnal" is employed to refer to an entity that is material rather than spiritual. In this way, it refers to how a group of spiritual people, i.e., the church, is set over against a group of carnal, fleshy people, i.e., Israel/the Jewish people; see R. Kendall Soulen, "Israel and the Church: A Christian Response to Irving Greensberg's Covenantal Pluralism," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 171–74.

[11] Vlach, *Has the Church*, 12.

primarily discussed two forms or approaches to supersessionism: economic and punitive supersessionism.[12] According to *economic supersessionism*, Israel's role in redemptive history was merely preparatory and thus always meant to be temporary.[13] Within God's overall plan or "economy of redemption," Israel's temporary role as God's people was to prepare for the coming of Israel's Messiah, salvation, and ultimately the church. In this way, national Israel served as a carnal prefiguration of Christ's spiritual Israel. However, with the advent of Christ and the establishment of the church, carnal Israel is rendered obsolete as its role in redemptive history has come to an end.[14] In its place now stands the church, the true people of God: a people who are not based on ethnicity (i.e., particularism) but only spirituality, namely, faith in Christ (i.e., universalism).

If economic supersessionism is to be viewed as the positive approach, its alternative, *punitive supersessionism*, has been described as economic's negative counterpart due to punitive's overtly polemical posture toward the Jewish people.[15] Simply put, punitive supersessionism states that due to carnal Israel's

[12] For a full discussion, see Soulen, *God of Israel*, 28–31. Soulen describes a third approach called *structural supersessionism*; see *God of Israel*, 31–33. This approach is less focused on the theological question of Israel and the church, and more concerned with the way the standard canonical narrative of the Bible (as espoused by most Christians) is read in a way that presupposes and supports a supersessionist hermeneutic. Essentially, the standard model – generally recognized as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation – unifies the Christian canon in such a way that it largely renders Israel's story and identity as the covenant people of God a non-essential aspect of the canonical narrative's structure and unity. If Israel's story is considered at all, it generally falls within the narrative *background* unit of disruption or fall, leaving Israel's story to function as little more than an example of God's dealings with humanity in light of his greater plan for universal redemption. However, as Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 19 n. 49, and 20 n. 56, has noted, structural supersessionism is better described as a consequence of both economic and punitive supersessionism than a form of or approach to supersessionism itself. For instance, although accomplished differently, both economic and punitive require that the Christian canon be unified and thus read in an "Israel-forgetful" manner. What eventuates from this is structural supersessionism: a hermeneutic that renders the Jewish people largely, if not entirely, superfluous for God's redemptive and consummative activity. A point similarly noted by Soulen, *God of Israel*, 31 n. 6; cf. also Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism*, 22 n. 50.

[13] See Soulen, *God of Israel*, 29.

[14] Vlach, *Has the Church*, 14.

[15] Vlach, *Has the Church*, 12, describes economic and punitive as positive and negative respectively. However, as Soulen, "Israel and the Church," 172, points out, economic supersessionism is ultimately more problematic because "it implies that God's covenant with the Jewish people is inherently obsolete and inferior, quite apart from whether the Jewish people are faithful or not." Elsewhere he contends that "it logically entails the ontological, historical, and moral obsolescence of Israel's existence after Christ"; see *God of Israel*, 30. Thus, while on the surface punitive appears to be more problematic, economic is ultimately more pernicious.

disobedience, most explicitly demonstrated in their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, God has in turn rejected Israel as his people.[16] Consequently, as punishment for their sins, God has revoked his covenant with the Jewish people and put the largely gentile church in their place. Thus, as William Krewson describes it, "[t]he Christian church displaces the Jews due to the largely Gentile acceptance of the Jewish messiah and thereby enjoys God's favor, while the Jews in their rejection fall under God's wrath."[17] Regardless of the approach one takes, however, the central conviction remains indisputable: whether economically or punitively, Christianity replaces Judaism, the church replaces Israel.

1.2.2 Supersessionism Reconsidered

To this point our discussion of supersessionism has largely focused on describing the concept as it relates to a particular – and particularly pervasive – theological construal of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and thus Israel and the church, which is often described in theological circles as "replacement theology." As such, the term supersessionism is regularly employed to describe a primarily theological issue: one that began to emerge only after the close of the New Testament when Christianity had more knowingly and recognizably separated itself from Judaism, and vice versa.[18] The

[16] Soulen, *God of Israel*, 30.

[17] Krewson, *Jerome and the Jews*, 3.

[18] As such, Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism*, 22–23, rightly cautions against the uncritical use of the term "supersessionism" in New Testament studies. This is because, as now widely acknowledged by scholars, the earliest Christ-movement was made up of a majority of Christ-following Jews and only a minority of Christ-following gentiles. Institutionally speaking, then, what we have come to know as "Christianity" initially began as a Jewish renewal or reform movement from within first-century Judaism itself. In other words, the early Christ-movement understood itself not as a so-called "Christian" movement distinct from and set over against Judaism, but as a Jewish renewal or reform movement that remained in social continuity with Judaism, along with many of its concomitant beliefs and practices; see now the recent discussion of this phenomenon in Terence L. Donaldson, *Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine: The Nations, the Parting of the Ways, and Roman Imperial Ideology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 152–93; cf. also Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 135–63; Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Community," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 55–95. Finally, as recent studies on the so-called "parting of the ways" have demonstrated, it is not until much later that a decisive point of separation between Judaism and Christianity can be clearly delineated. Any such clearly marked separation is believed to be no earlier than the fourth century CE; yet even then, the exact details of a full and complete break are difficult to substantiate; see the essays in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early*

question is thus naturally raised as to whether scholars of the New Testament should be concerned with notions of supersessionism, especially when undertaking the historical study of the New Testament, and likewise whether the term retains any explanatory value when considering scholarly approaches to and interpretation of the New Testament, both past and present. To answer this question, we will need to move beyond the theological and/or institutional categories that often govern and dictate discussions of supersessionism – i.e., the relationship between the entities of Judaism and Christianity and Israel and the church – and interrogate more carefully the foundational core from which the traditional understanding of supersessionism has developed and is made manifest.

In a recent study on the supersessionist theology of Thomas Aquinas, Matthew Tapie has helpfully shown that the concept of supersessionism, as traditionally understood, does not adequately account for the use of the term in its fullest historical sense. In fact, Tapie contends that the meaning of the term "supersede" and its various cognates (i.e., "supersessionism") is relatively ambiguous because the use of these terms has become increasingly confused and blurred in much of the current theological discourse.[19] As Tapie notes, while these terms have long been employed as a way of *positively* describing Christianity's triumphalist position over against Judaism and the Jewish people,[20] the use of these terms to describe the displacement of Judaism by Christianity as a *negative* phenomenon is relatively recent.[21] Thus, in an attempt to bring more historical clarity to these terms, Tapie traces this more recent (i.e., negative) usage back to the work of French-Jewish historian Jules Isaac.[22] According to

Middle Ages (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); see also the overview in Krewson, *Jerome and the Jews*, 10–26. Also, see now Lori Baron, Jill Hicks-Keeton, and Matthew Thiessen, eds., *The Ways That Often Parted: Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus*, ECL 24 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018); and Isaac W. Oliver, "The Parting of the Ways: When and How Did the *Ekklēsia* Split from the Synagogue," in *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity and Judaism*, Studies in Scripture and Biblical Theology, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 65–87. Thus, to apply the term and concept of supersessionism uncritically could be liable to disregarding the advances made in scholarship as to our understanding of the formative stages of the early Christ-movement.

[19] Tapie, *Aquinas*, 10–18.

[20] See the examples in Donaldson, "Supersessionism," 2–3; Tapie, *Aquinas*, 10. As an example, Donaldson cites Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine: A Contribution to a Critical History of Primitive Christianity*, 2 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1875), 1.59.

[21] Tapie, *Aquinas*, 11–12, rightly, to my mind, understands this to be the result of post-Holocaust sensitivities; see also Donaldson, "Supersessionism," 1, 3–5.

[22] Tapie, *Aquinas*, 12; similarly Donaldson, "Supersessionism," 3. For the work of Isaac, see especially, Jules Isaac, *Jésus et Israël* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1948); Jules Isaac,

Tapie, the first appearance of the term "supersede" in the work of Isaac is found in the 1964 English translation of his 1962 book *L'enseignement du mépris*.[23] Here Isaac uses the term "supersede" to specify a very particular and problematic understanding among interpreters related to how Christ is understood to have fulfilled the Jewish Law.[24] Tapie describes Isaac's concern as such:

> The English term supersede is used to translate Isaac's criticism of what he viewed as the *double sense* of Christ's fulfillment of the Law: "fulfilled and obsolete (*dépassée*)" or "fulfilled and expired (*périmé*)." Therefore, when "supersede" is first used to designate a problematic Christian view of Judaism in English theology it is used to name *a very specific theological concept*. With the coming of Christ, Jewish Law is *fulfilled* according to its inward spiritual intention and therefore *expired* according to its outer ceremonial form. It is, in short, *fulfilled* and therefore *obsolete*.[25]

In other words, according to its negative sense, the term supersede was used by Isaac *not* to refer to the replacement of one entity or institution by another (i.e., Judaism by Christianity or Israel by the church), but rather, to describe the problematic "double sense" of Christ's fulfillment of the Jewish law, along with its associated implications: that is, with the coming of Christ the Jewish law is fulfilled *and* rendered obsolete.

Like Isaac, Soulen describes the *sine qua non* or "heart" of supersessionism according to this "double sense" of fulfillment and obsolescence in relation to the Jewish law.[26] When the concept of supersessionism is considered from this more foundational vantage point, Soulen rightly contends that supersessionism creates a two-fold problem that runs deeper than traditional concerns over ideas of replacement theology. First, the double sense of fulfillment language in relation to the Jewish law suggests that the preservation of Jewish identity, which is maintained *through* the observance of Torah, is rendered "a matter of theological indifference at best, and a mortal sin at worst."[27] Second, the natural corollary to this first problem is that the very existence of the Jewish people, which is predicated on the preservation of

---

L'Enseignement de Méprissuivi de L'antisémitisme a-t-Il Des Racines Chrétiennes? (Paris: Fasquelle, 1962).

[23] Tapie, *Aquinas*, 14.

[24] See Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, trans. Weaver Helen (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), 75; English translation of Isaac, *L'Enseignement*, 67.

[25] Tapie, *Aquinas*, 16. Emphasis original and my own.

[26] Soulen, *God of Israel*, 12, 19; Soulen, "Israel and the Church," 171–72. See also Andrew Remington Rillera, "Tertium Genus or Dyadic Unity? Investigating Sociopolitical Salvation in Ephesians," *BR* 65 (2020): 2 (uncorrected proofs), who remarks: "The belief that baptized Jews either should abandon torah observance or that it is a matter of indifference (*adiaphora*) is the *sine qua non* of supersessionism."

[27] Soulen, *God of Israel*, 2.

Index of Ancient Sources

Hebrew Bible and Septuagint

Deuterocanonical Works

Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

Dead Sea Scrolls

Philo

Josephus

New Testament

Ancient Christian Writings

Other Ancient Sources

Index of Authors

Index of Subjects