

John Hagee – Undone (The problem with Zionism)

John Hagee pastors a large church in San Antonio, Texas. He is founder of 'Christians United for Israel' (CUFI) and a major financial and political supporter of Israel.

In the foreword to John Hagee's book¹, Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg writes "The prophet Isaiah, in chapter 49 verse 22, says *"for thus saith my Lord, behold I will raise my hand towards the nations, and to the peoples will I hoist my banner, and they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings will be your nurturers and their princesses your wet nurses... For the Lord shall comfort Zion, He shall comfort all of the rooms; He shall make her wilderness like Eden and her wastelands like a garden of the Lord, joy and gladness shall be found there"*.

'The Lord has hoisted His banner to rally His troops.'

Scheinberg compliments Hagee on having a *'clear and wise voice that has alerted the world to the duplicity and hypocrisy of Europe, the United Nations, and the Arab and Muslim countries of the world.'* With this compliment Scheinberg has accused half the world, and the major peace organisation, of lying and deceit: and lauded Hagee for wisdom and clarity. Well, it wouldn't be the first time that a lone voice has spoken out across the crowd. But is Hagee entitled to this accolade? Before we answer that let's take note of some duplicity right here in the passage Scheinberg quotes.

Scheinberg's claim is that the modern state of Israel and the Jews are the specific subjects of this verse; is this justified? The ellipsis (...) in Scheinberg's quotation, after 'nurses', loops from Isaiah chapter 49:22 to chapter 51:3, so not exactly a quote from Isaiah 49 verse 22. It looks suspicious but might he be justified? My answer is 'no', but for a fuller treatment read the text and commentaries.

Briefly here, at the end of chapter 48 we find a desolate cry, *there is no peace* says the Lord, *for the wicked*, (48:22). It could stand as a summary of what has gone before and, being repeated at the end of chapter 57, a situation statement for what is to come. In order to make sense of verse 49:22 we need context. Chapter 49 verse 22 needs verse 21, 21 needs 20 *"who are these ...children born in your bereavement"*; what a strange concept. And who is "you" in chapter 49 verse eight? For, if it is Jacob then Israel is "given... as a covenant to the people", which makes sense only if Israel and the people are different.

Why, in response to Scheinberg, does Israel need evangelical Christians for support and defence? Perhaps, because there is 'no peace'. But then we need to ask whether the reason there is no peace is because of injustice, because of the failure to honour God's Messiah. The Christian Mission is to witness to the kingdom of God, not to defend nationalism.² In the passage Scheinberg uses there is no 'rallying of troops'; none is needed because God himself acts, it is His own righteous action. Put simply, Scheinberg has ignored Isaiah's context. For Christians, this passage is clearly messianic, including as it does a clear summary of God's intention, *he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth"*.³

John Hagee describes himself as an avid student of history. At the date of publication Hagee was convinced that

'Iran is the new Germany; Mohammed Ahmadinejad, is the new Hitler; Iran poses a threat to the state of Israel that promises nothing less than a nuclear holocaust. The only way to win a nuclear war is to make

1 John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel*. Front Line, 2007

2 Matthew 28.

3 Isaiah 49:6

certain it never starts. We must stop Iran's nuclear threat and stand boldly with Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East'.⁴

He is wrong on every count bar one, that the only way to win a nuclear war is to make sure it never starts.

Hagee himself is capable of dissimulation, for on page 5 of his book he includes a sentence that reads *'The Final Solution of Adolph Hitler... was carried out by baptised Christians in good standing with their church*, and gives the reference as below.⁵ The web page redirects to an article 'Final Solution, part II' by Elesha Coffman, but reading it, you'd be forgiven for wondering what Hagee is up to.

The quote actually comes from a different article, by Egal Feldman, entitled, 'Catholics and Jews in 20th-century America'. I haven't read Feldman's article so I cannot vouch for the accuracy or otherwise of the quotation, but a literature and web search suggests that Mr.Hagee's historical application is dubious. This isn't surprising since the article is about Catholics and Jews in America, not in Europe. It is illogical to use assumptions regarding one group in one part of the world, (Catholics in America), as a control for similar but distinct groups in other parts of the world, (Catholics and Lutherans in Germany) and at different periods.

Coffman actually uses the quotation in order to refute it. Hagee uses it in quite the opposite manner, forcing a conclusion contrary to that intended by the author and doing him an injustice. Failure to point this out is deceitful, (The moral, always check your references; including mine).⁶

And since when has being baptised meant 'in good standing', and what does 'in good standing' mean? To support his claim that Hitler was 'in good standing' with the church and that therefore the church is complicit in the crime of the Holocaust, Hagee quotes Hitler's *Mein Kampf*,

'Hence today I believe I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the *work of the Lord*' (italics original).⁷

Hagee wants us to assume that it is the Christian God for whom Hitler was working. But Hitler held Christianity in contempt. There are frequent references in *Mein Kampf* to the god or goddess of e.g. fate (p.29), distress (93), vengeance (289), clues which suggest that his religion, if any, was Norse 'pagan' rather than Middle East monotheism.

Hagee is right that we Christians should ask forgiveness of Jews for acts of anti-Semitism, just as we need to ask forgiveness for the enslavement of black Africans, present-day Islamophobia and our treatment of women; a dilemma concerning my capacity to ask forgiveness for wrongs committed by others to others. Whether I can apologise for something I didn't do is debatable, better surely to avoid repeating the mistakes. And we should also forgive Jews for their persecution of Christians in the early centuries of the first millennium.

Hagee is also correct that sins of omission are as serious as sins of commission. But when he cites the failure to bomb Auschwitz in 1944 as a 'sin of omission' he is straying into fantasy. In his book 'Hitler's Holocaust'⁸ Guido Knopp reports that Nathan Goldman of the World Jewish Congress approached the military with precisely this request. He spoke to *'British Air Marshal Dill, who stated bluntly that "the British had to conserve their bombs for military targets, and the only salvation for the Jews lay in the allies winning the war"'*. I have no evidence to disagree with the Air Marshal's military assessment. Given its sacrifices on behalf of freedom Britain may find it irritating to be lectured on this by an American, these nation profited from the war at Britain's expense.

4 Op cit P.2.

5 www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2002/jan25.html accessed by me July 2014

6 It is possible that no deceit was intended in which case we have sloppy research and lazy history.

7 2 Volumes published in 1925 & 1926, that is 15 years before the 'Final Solution', and 7 years before his election to the Reichstag

8 Guido Knopp, *Hitler's Holocaust*. The History Press, 2004

Although Hitler's attitude towards Jews was well-known it was not until 1941 that the 'Final Solution', the Holocaust, became the final solution. Until the failure of 'Operation Barbarossa', Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Hitler's solution to the 'Jewish problem' had various elements. One was the 'Mischling Laws' intended to determine a person's Jewishness. Prior to Hitler's invasion of Poland his main targets were not Jews but liberals, socialists, communists, intellectuals, homosexuals and people with disabilities. These together with millions of Jews would be used as forced labour and starved to death. Jews could also be exported eastward as happened with many Jews from eastern Poland. With the Eastern front at stalemate following the battle of Moscow, the only way to get rid of Jews was genocide.

Mr. Hagee's assessment is just too simplistic. Britain had received Jewish child refugees up to the declaration of war on 3rd September 1939. Were it not for Britain's lonely stand against Nazism from 1939 to 1942, unsupported by USA, the destruction of Europe's Jews might have been total. Isn't turning a blind eye to more than 65 years of persecution of Palestinian Arabs as bad as ignoring the plight of Jews in Hitler's Germany? This is not to minimize the wrong, rather to place it in context.

Sadly, in addition to Mr. Hagee being a very poor exponent of history, his theology is no better. I will have to be selective and deal with what I believe to be the more significant errors. On page 7 of his book Hagee writes:

There is a verse in Matthew chapter 25 that few Christians understand in context. Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me" (verse 40, NIV).

"The expression "these brothers of mine" in this verse is a Greek term that refers to "relatives according to the flesh."

Jesus was speaking about the Jewish people when He said, "I was hungry and you didn't give Me food. I was thirsty and you didn't give Me water. I was naked and you didn't clothe Me."

"When did we see You in that condition?" the disciples asked Him.

Jesus replied that it was whenever they saw one of His "relatives" in that condition.

Whenever Christians have seen the relatives of Jesus suffering – for instance, in the Holocaust – and done nothing, it was as if they had ignored the suffering of Christ Himself.

This novel interpretation of Matthew 25 is wrong on every point. To begin with, whilst Jesus is teaching his disciples, he is not speaking to them directly as Mr. Hagee explicitly states. The 'king' who is 'the Son of Man' (verses 34 and 31), is speaking at the final judgement to two groups of people, identified as 'sheep and goats'. It is these groups individually that are addressed by the king. This is not semantics, Hagee's approach is the equivalent of my coming from a lecture with 50 other students and telling a friend "the lecturer said to me...".

Mr. Hagee concludes that, '*Jesus was not asking for emotion from His disciples; He wanted action.*'. In fact, as is clear from reading the passage Jesus is not asking his disciples to **do** anything, he is expanding on how judgement will finally be made. Matters are no better when he has the disciples asking Jesus, "*When did we see You in that condition?*" It isn't the disciples who ask '*when was it ...*', but all the righteous at the judgement, and Jesus' reply is addressed to all of them. Things are further complicated from Mr. Hagee's viewpoint by the absence of any reference in the original to 'these brothers of mine' at verse 45.

The NRSV translates the Greek word '*adelphon*' as 'members of my family' the margin note is better 'these my brothers'. So, does this word mean 'relatives according to the flesh', and did Jesus mean 'Jews'? We get the answer from Jesus himself, in Matthew. Apart from those places where Jesus refers to specific familial relationships, for example the calling of James and John, there are two passages that cast light on Jesus' use of the word, *adelphon*. Following the crucifixion, (ch.28:10) the two Mary's went to the tomb only to find it empty. As they ran to tell the disciples Jesus met them,

and he said *go and tell my brothers (adelphois) to go to Galilee*. The word *adelphois*, used here, from the same root as *adelphos* refers specifically to Jesus' disciples, it cannot mean 'the Jews' as a collective.

The other passage is Matthew 12:46-50. Jesus had been preaching, teaching and healing when his mother and brothers arrived. Jesus was told,

"Look, your mother and your brothers (adelphoi) are standing outside, waiting to speak to you", the text continues: 'but to the ones who had told him this Jesus replied, "who is my mother, and who are my brothers (adelphoi)?" and pointing to his disciples, he said, "here are my mother and my brothers (adelphoi). For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother (adelphos) and my sister and mother".

Could Jesus be any clearer that his 'family' is those who do God's will. Nothing to do with ethnicity or race. In Matthew chapter 25, the peoples, all of them, (*panta ta ethne*) are gathered⁹ for judgement, it's the final act of the drama. They are separated, sheep on one side and goats on the other. Whatever our nationality or ethnicity, whether Jew or Briton, American, German or Arab, Chinese or Brazilian, the division will be according to righteousness, and the least of Jesus family will be those who do the Father's will, as we've just seen in Matthew 12:50.

Mr. Hagee has disregarded context, distorted the text and played fast and loose with Jesus' meaning, he could hardly be more badly adrift. If we are to treat the text according to his methodology we have a circular argument with the disciples being told to be nice to themselves.

Assuming, against all evidence, that Mr. Hagee is correct in his reading he has created a dilemma, what happens to the Jews? If they are the subject in verse 40 (and, by implication, in verse 45), then the two groups whose future is under consideration at the judgement are those who, according to Hagee, have been good to Jews, and those who have been bad to Jews. The former go into eternal life and the latter to eternal punishment, verse 46. So, where do the Jews go and what happens to those who have been good (or bad) to non-Jews? And what happens to those who have never had the opportunity to do good or bad to Jews? In his desire to reinterpret this scripture to his satisfaction Hagee has created something worse than purgatory. All the nations have been gathered but most have been left hanging about, including God's 'chosen'. This is not what one expects from an 'evangelical pastor'.

To show how far astray Hagee is he claims in support of his argument that 'this is the only time in scripture that Jesus asked those who followed him to do something specific for him'.¹⁰ I suggest he read, for example, Matthew 26:36-46; and 28:10, 19 with parallels too numerous to mention.

What are we being taught in this text? Aside from the sermon on the mount, (Matthew chapters 5-7) this is the longest teaching of Jesus that Matthew gives us, commencing in chapter 24 with the 'signs of your coming'. The disciples question is prompted by Jesus prophecy concerning the stones of the temple. We need to read these two chapters together; that will give us a better sense of the whole. Each of the parables Jesus uses here point to the one event, the coming of the 'Son of Man'.

The first part, chapter 24: 1- 44, shows us how to recognise the coming events. So, are we in the 'end times'? Yes, of course, we have been since the ascension, two thousand years and waiting. Are we at the end? We don't know and it isn't for us to know, (it's all there in the text we've just read). So, during this period of waiting what should Jesus' followers, God's people, be doing? That is the subject of 24:45 to 25:30; we are to keep awake, stay faithful and act righteously. Then we come to the final passage that deals with the judgement. The conclusion, apparent to me from the age of 20, is to be about the Father's business of justice, righteousness and truth and leave everything else to God.

Hagee heads a chapter 'Honouring Israel brings God's blessing', and claims, on the basis of Genesis 12:3,

⁹ Verse 32. in the original nations/people is not repeated.

¹⁰ Op cit. Page 7.

'it is an undeniable fact that the man or the nation that has blessed Israel has been blessed of God, and to the man or the nation that cursed Israel the judgement of God came in spades.'

His evidence of 'blessing' is a list of eminent Jews. Quite apart from his unsupportable assumption that 'the Jewish people' equals Israel,¹¹ and that Israel in scripture equals Israel the modern state, his 'fact' is easily deniable. He has taken two clauses out of a sentence, out of context, redrafted them and created a 'doctrine'. And the single New Testament reference to the 'Jewish people' in Acts 12:11 is not promising for Hagee's position. It occurs where Peter has been rescued by an angel *'from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting'*.¹² Are we to bless Jewish people when they act against God's Will and persecute his people?

As evidence for his claim that those who honour Israel are blessed, Mr. Hagee points to Luke chapter 7 where Jesus heals a Centurion's slave, and to Acts chapter 10 where Cornelius is chosen to hear the gospel. Certainly they had done good things for people in Judea and it is a minor detail that Jesus did not actually go to the house of the Gentile Centurion as Hagee says. However, it is of major importance to assert that Jesus did this 'because the Gentile had blessed the nation of Israel'¹³. We simply cannot draw those conclusions from the texts, which frankly point in a different direction. It is the centurion's faith to which Jesus responds, *"not even in Israel have I found such faith"*, hardly a ringing endorsement of 'Israel'.

In Acts 10 the centurion's alms giving was recognised but it is surely his devotion to God along with his prayers that was crucial. Peter got the point, “

I truly understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation (ethnei) anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34).

Are we to suppose that Peter was swayed by the arguments of the people, “This man has been nice to us so you must be nice to him”? Cornelius may have been *well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation* but that he was *upright and God-fearing* is what would have counted with God. And, as Peter shows, anyone from any nation who fears God and does what is right, is accepted, one of 'God's people', clarifying any difficulty we might have had with Matthew 25.

I find it strange and sad that a Christian Pastor can write:

"The principle that the Gentiles are blessed through the Jewish people is verified in the New Testament. Jesus Christ of Nazareth, a rabbi, was “a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2: 32) ”¹⁴

The argument is illogical; 'Jesus is the Saviour, Jesus is a Jew; therefore all Jews are Saviour'; this is nonsense. The Queen is British, I am British, therefore I am the Queen: seriously! Jesus Christ, not in any formal sense a Rabbi, is **The Jew, The Israelite, The one**, through whom Gentiles may be blessed. Paul sees clearly – *For there is one God, there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus...* (1 Timothy 2: 5)

Hagee continues by skating over one of the most remarkable mission and gospel expanding passages in the whole Testament. For Hagee the main thrust of John 4 is to point out to the Samaritan woman the shortcomings of her worship, *“you worship what you do not know”*. The point of the meeting recorded in John chapter 4 is much broader, including, significantly, that it doesn't matter where you worship, it is neither here nor there, what matters is how.¹⁵ We might note that, as to where, many Pharisees would have disagreed whilst agreeing with 'how'.

11 Op cit.115

12 NRSV & NIV; KJV = 'people of the Jews'. my emphasis.

13 ibid p. 129

14 ibid p 120

15 John 4:21-24

The blessing to all the peoples, that is to say Gentiles *and* Israel is not a Jewish principle but an Abrahamic one. We could be picky and say it is patriarchal; but the blessing comes in fulfilment of the promise to Abraham and Jacob, through David's descendant, Jesus of Nazareth as the one true Israelite and God's Messiah. To focus on national Israel trivialises God's purpose and Jesus' kingdom agenda, and is a major exercise in missing the point, with tragic consequences for mission and justice.

A principal target of Mr. Hagee is what he calls 'the myth of replacement theology'. He fears that many Christians have unknowingly fallen prey to a 'doctrinal error'. He is right; except he replaces that error with one of his own. Both 'replacement theology', (Hagee's version) and 'Christian Zionism' are mistakes, and for broadly similar reasons. First, I don't know of a serious Evangelical Christian theologian who subscribes to the view of 'replacement theology' described by Hagee.¹⁶ The question raised is this, has God in fact 'replaced the nation of Israel and the Jews' (Mr. Hagee's phrase), with the church? There are problems inherent in the question: what is meant by the phrase 'the nation of Israel *and* the Jews'? The conjunction 'and' implies that they are distinct but that's not what he believes. As for 'replace'

As his basis for this chapter Mr. Hagee uses an article by Clarence Wagner.¹⁷ Here is one section of the Wagner article in which he sets out what he believes to be a 'replacement theology' claim, then provides a rebuttal. Item 5 reads as follows:

Claim: Paul shows that the Church is really the same "olive tree" as was Israel, and the Church is now the tree. Therefore, to distinguish between Israel and the Church is, strictly speaking, false. Indeed, people of Jewish origin need to be grafted back into the Church (Rom 11:17-23).

Rebuttal: This claim is the most outrageous because this passage clearly shows that we Gentiles are the "wild olive branches," who get our life from being grafted into the olive tree. The tree represents the covenants, promises and hopes of Israel (Eph. 2:12), rooted in the Messiah and fed by the sap, which represents the Holy Spirit, giving life to the Jews (the "natural branches") and Gentile alike. We Gentiles are told to remember that the olive tree holds us up and NOT to be arrogant or boast against the "natural branches" because they can be grafted in again. The olive tree is NOT the Church. We are simply grafted into God's plan that preceded us for over 2,000 years.

What is 'outrageous' is the rebuttal's misuse of scripture, not least the Ephesians passage, where Paul uses a very different set of pictures from those he uses in Romans 11. Wagner's 'sap' is an invention and he seems confused about exactly who, or what, is 'the tree'. It doesn't appear in the Ephesians verses which are clear that it is 'in Christ' that both groups are reconciled into one body (Eph.2: 13-16). Romans does refer to the 'olive tree', and Wagner is right to say that 'The olive tree is not the church'. Where he is mistaken is in implying that 'the tree' is Israel which we are to think of as 'the Jewish people'. It ought to be clear from reading Romans chapter 11 that these verses, (17 on) regard 'Israel' as being both 'natural branches', which is to say faithful Israelites, and wild branches, which is to say grafted in Gentiles. And we must not forget the third group, unfaithful Israelites who can be grafted in 'if they do not persist in their unbelief', (verse 23). Clearly from the text, if they remain in unbelief they are not grafted in and therefore are 'out'.

The biblical position, therefore, is that the 2nd and 3rd sentences of the 'claim' are broadly correct but they need amplification and clarification and rest on a better foundation than the first sentence.

16 I don't say there aren't any. I've not come across their work. There are theologians who defend something that might be called 'Replacement' but it's nothing like the one Hagee describes.

17 pp.127-132. I have been unable to access the article referenced on p.129 but have accessed what I take to be the original Clarence Wagner page at <http://ldolphin.org/replacement/> on 20th July 2013.

Let's tidy up those two final sentences. The distinction in sentence two is actually between faithful Israel and the church, and, strictly speaking, this is true. Faithful Israel and faithful church are one and the same. To distinguish them culturally may be acceptable, to split them theologically makes Paul contradict himself. Being 'in Christ' is not a competition. And to be faithful to Paul it is only unfaithful Israelites, as in sentence three, that need grafting back in.

The real problem is with what Hagee, and Wagner do with the 'tree'. We know, of course, that in the Hebrew Bible the olive tree is often symbolic of Israel, but the passage in Isaiah 5 and Jesus' teaching in Matthew 21 should make us think more deeply both about what the prophets 'intend' and what God, in Christ, does. Taken with the discourse in John 15 we are forced to take the traditional Christian view that all the promises and prophecies from Israel's past focus down into the single Israelite capable of fulfilling God's plan. Wagner in his rebuttal manages to be half-right at one point – Gentiles get life from being grafted into the tree – for the rest he doesn't even get close. He declares on the basis of Ephesians 2:12 that the tree represents the covenants etc; which, more than a step too far, is to plunge off an exegetical cliff! What Wagner claims cannot be derived from Ephesians, or indeed anywhere else, but 'rooted in the Messiah' is practically right. Only, 'practically'?

It's a pity that Wagner's metaphors are so mixed. When Jesus says, "*I am the true vine.*"¹⁸ it should be obvious that he is distinguishing himself from the vine that is 'not true'. So, where might we look for this 'not true' vine? Well, in Matthew 21 for a start with its direct reference to Isaiah chapter 5. Paul in Romans 11 is making a simple point: if you're not 'in Christ' whether Jew or Gentile, you are outside the kingdom and lost. Of course the 'olive tree is not the church', but then neither is the olive tree 'the Jews'. Why can't Wagner and Hagee follow their own logic? If 'the tree represents the covenants, promises and hopes of Israel' surely we are talking about Israel's messiah, Jesus.

Nor is it just, 'rooted in the Messiah and fed by the sap ...' as Hagee wants us to believe. Every Old Testament metaphor for Israel Jesus appropriates to himself. He says, "*I am the vine, you, (that is, his disciples) are the branches*". Jesus is vine, vineyard, gardener, temple, sacrifice, priest. And we are not 'simply grafted into God's plan that preceded us for over 2000 years' as if we were God's afterthought. It was always God's plan to use faithful Israel to redeem his creation. It was always intended that this redemption would fully and finally be achieved through one faithful Israelite. It was always the plan to use the one faithful Israelite as the necessary sacrifice to break the bondage of evil and death and to bring about the reconciliation of Hebrew and Gentile, as we find clearly and simply in Ephesians 2 and Romans 11.

In a section titled 'The Crisis Theory', Mr. Hagee's, still dealing with 'the myth of Replacement Theology', continues to misunderstand scripture and create logical contradictions. This is what he writes:

'Some replacement theologians have created an erroneous crisis theory as the catch-22 of the New Testament. The crisis theory defined is this: "God had plan A and plan B for the ministry of Jesus Christ while he was on the Earth. Plan A was for Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel. Plan B was the cross of Calvary. Since the Jews rejected Jesus as reigning Messiah, God had no choice but to go to plan B, which was the crucifixion".¹⁹

I agree with Mr. Hagee that 'there is no truth in this theory', but I don't know of any genuine evangelical theologian who holds it. If it exists I cannot find it and I'm left to wonder if Mr. Hagee has invented it in order to refute it. If there are theologians who believe that the Cross was 'Plan B'

18 John 15

19 Op cit p.135.

they've clearly not understood their Bible. It would have been helpful had Mr. Hagee provided some references. The only place I've come across a Plan A - Plan B scenario is from reading dispensationalists like Hagee where Plan A is for earthly Israel and plan B is for Spiritual Israel, defined by Hagee as the church. And, when it comes to conclusions he is further adrift as a few more examples will demonstrate.

Mr. Hagee writes:

The Holy Spirit of God announced through a Jewish prophet, Simeon, that the sovereign purpose for Jesus' life was to be *a light to the Gentiles* (Isaiah 42:6) and the glory of Israel. ... 'As the crucified Messiah, He now was ready to bring light to the Gentiles and become the glory of Israel, as Simeon had prophesied'.

The idea of Jesus being a light o the gentiles was a shocking revelation because the Jews considered the Gentiles unclean²⁰ (then)

That is why the Great Commission commanded, "Go ye [Jews] into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Gentiles were considered creatures.²¹ (on this last, see below)

Let's deal first with loose language. Twice Mr. Hagee refers to Simeon as a prophet, using the sense of foretelling the future, (not the only sense, of course). But, neither Simeon, nor scripture make this claim. Then, in the quotation from Luke 2: 29-32, by inserting the word 'become' between the 'Gentiles' and 'Israel' Hagee has subtly separated the two clauses in a way that the text won't allow, introducing a time element missing from the original.

Examining the text we are told by Luke that Simeon was *righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel*; that is Simeon's personal context. He had been assured by the Holy Spirit that *he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah*. That is the cultural/religious context – the ancients didn't make the philosophical separations that we do between the spiritual and secular. Israel's consolation and the Lord's Messiah are clearly one and the same. And nothing in the text suggests that Simeon was a prophet or that his song should be regarded as a future prophecy. It does fulfil the prophetic function of telling what **is**, "*my eyes have seen*", i.e. it's happened.

Seeing the baby Jesus, Simeon sings his eloquent song: God's salvation has come and it is light to the Gentiles **and** glory to Israel - literally "*A light for revelation (to the) Gentiles and glory of your people Israel*". This is not something that *will* happen, first to the Gentiles because of Israel's rejection and then, later, to Israel, presumably after the 'rapture'²² It is not, for Israel, a 'becoming', it's an 'is'. For Simeon it has happened. That, by the way, is also Jesus testimony in the gospels. For Jesus, as for Paul, it was 'to the Jew first' so, if Hagee is correct Simeon can't be. '*(God's) salvation... prepared in the presence of all peoples, (is both) light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*'

As for it being a 'shocking revelation'. In his effort to show just how prejudiced against the 'unclean, polytheistic Gentiles' the disciples were he refers to Peter's visit to Cornelius, whilst ignoring Philip's mission in Samaria and to the Ethiopian, (Acts 8). And, if '*the sovereign purpose*' for Jesus was as light to the Gentiles one wonders how to make sense of Jesus' ministry and that of the apostles including Paul. Peter had no doubt that Jesus was indeed the 'Jewish Messiah' for he concludes his Pentecost 'sermon' *Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.*²³

It is interesting that Mr. Hagee uses the New King James Version as his standard, especially when it comes to Mark 16:15. This is the verse quoted above, "*Go ye [Jews] into all the world and preach*

20 *ibid* p. 137 quoting Luke 2:25-32.

21 *ibid* p.138

22 An 'event' that won't happen. On which see elsewhere.

23 Acts 2

the gospel to every creature.” This is Mark’s version, using the Greek word *ktisei* which actually translates as ‘creation’, (NRSV, NIV, etc.) compared with Matthew and Luke *ethne*, translated ‘nations’. Given that they were to ‘go’ to all nations, all creation, and begin in Jerusalem – see also Acts 1 – Mr. Hagee’s interpretation is seriously misleading.

But Mr Hagee believes that Jesus is not the Jewish Messiah, but Messiah for the Gentiles.²⁴ In promoting his book he claimed that 'Jesus did not come to earth to be the Jewish Messiah'. To achieve this 'doctrine' he divides Israel's 'suffering servant' from the 'reigning King', which may work with his odd approach to exegesis but does immense damage to the gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God, the kingdom already present by the Spirit in His people. There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that Jesus and his followers thought of him as anything other than Israel's Messiah, and most Christian Zionist leaders disagree with John Hagee on this point.

In fairness, on this point John Hagee is consistent. His Zionist theology leads him to believe that Jesus hasn't yet come to the Jews, and the logic is, therefore, that he is not the Jewish Messiah. It follows, for Hagee, who wants still to be 'evangelical' that Jesus is the 'Jewish Messiah to Gentiles', a bizarre concept unknown anywhere in the ancient world.

Mr. Hagee offers 'Eight Biblical evidences' to prove his assertions.²⁵ There is so much wrong with these sections, ('Judicial Blindness' and 'Eight Biblical Evidences') that it is difficult to know where to start. So let me begin where I can agree that Paul's letter to the Romans 'cannot have it's middle section taken from it without causing havoc'. I will also happily agree that, 'there is a great difference between interpreting scripture and ignoring scripture'.²⁶ Yet this is precisely what Mr. Hagee then does, dividing scripture, ignoring parts and making Paul contradict himself. He accuses others of regarding Romans chapters 9-11 as 'an appendix or afterthought', (it's true, some have), but then divides Romans into three sections. 'It is obvious', he writes, that 'Romans 1-8 has the doctrinal themes of justification and sanctification leading to Salvation while Romans 12-16 has a common theme of the believers relationship to God through love and service'.

So what does Mr. Hagee think Romans 9-11 is? It is 'God's position paper on the Jewish people'.²⁷ He quotes approvingly J.Vernon McGee's description of 'the epistle of Romans as a “flowing stream” that cannot have Romans 9-11 taken from it just as the Mississippi River cannot have it's middle section taken from it without causing havoc'. So why does he think this 'flowing stream' comes to an abrupt stop at 8:39 to start a new section at 9:1, and what then is the purpose of 'therefore' at 12:1 if it doesn't function as a link to the previous section? This sectional split of Justification, the Jews, Service simply will not do, it is not ‘obvious’, it is the worst kind of 'systematic theology';²⁸ scrutinizing the detail without standing back to view the whole and allowing that 'whole' to challenge our presuppositions. There is of course a place for detailed and scholarly scrutiny but it must always be the servant of exegesis not its master. Here Mr. Hagee doesn't even get the detail right.

Romans is consistent throughout, and chapters 9 through 11 must be read within the whole. Indeed, Paul's plea at the commencement of Chapter 9 depends for its pathos on the foregoing chapters; the link between 8:31-39 and 9:1-6 is dynamic. Who can separate us from God, who can bring a charge against the elect? Nothing, nothing, nothing – except, what about my people, “*my kindred according to the flesh*”. Paul '*could wish (to be) cut off..* for their sake. (9:3) echoing the 'separation' in 8:35 and 39. Which brings Paul to his point, '*it is not as though the word of God had failed*', (9:6). This is where he has been heading since chapter 1 verse 16. God is faithful, God is just, see i.e. 2:12-16; 3:27-31; 7:13.

24 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ktH3eknsak> accessed 28th January 2014.

25 Op Cit. p.145.

26 ibid p.145

27 Ibid p.144

28 No offence intended to genuine systematic theologians!

Chapter 12, an appeal away from the world's perspective to 'the will of God' (12:2), follows directly from Chapter 11. The 'mystery' to which Paul points here at the end of chapter 11 is neither more nor less than what he has been declaring throughout the letter; this is how is God going to save 'all Israel' together with the Gentile nations. Note verses 30 to 32, *you were disobedient, they have been disobedient, all are disobedient*. God's way of dealing with humankind's disobedience was to choose Israel. From Israel comes the Redeemer, the Messiah, Jesus, and, in time, 'all Israel will be saved'. But it is clear, not just in Romans, and not just in Paul, that 'all Israel' has been redefined, and along lines that fit exactly with the Old Testament. In the *Righteousness of God* it is *the one who is righteous (who) will live by faith*.²⁹

Paul's appeal for transformation in 12:2 is not a contradiction, but a confirmation of 11:33-36, which, by the way, but importantly, is why Paul uses 'therefore' in 12:1. This 'appeal' in Romans 12 verse 1 might possibly be placed anywhere in the letter after chapter 2. However, chapter 12 verse 2; 'do not be conformed, be transformed, do what is good and perfect'; follow well from chapter 11 but awkwardly following chapter 8 verses 37-39. Verses 3 to 8 of chapter 12 make perfect sense when they follow chapter 11 but appear out of nowhere if chapter 12 verse 1 is forced to follow chapter 8 verse 39, or is an entirely fresh subject. So, contrary to what Hagee **does**, although in line with what he **says**, Romans 9-11 does not represent a 'codicil'; Hagee's word; or an afterthought, it is deeply embedded in Paul's argument throughout.

But Mr. Hagee wants us to begin at chapter 9. This is what he writes,

'Evidence that Paul is outlining God's position on national Israel and not spiritual Israel (the church) is supported by his eight introductory statements that can *only* apply to the Jewish people as a *nation*' (italics original).³⁰

'Who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom according to the flesh, Christ came... - Romans 9:4-5'

But why stop at verse 5? Why not continue onto verses 6 and 7, indeed, why not read the whole chapter; but that would demolish his argument. Verses 6b to 8 are almost a definition of what Israel is and what it is not. But let's begin at the beginning. Paul begins with a triple affirmation, he is speaking the truth, not lying, and his conscience is clear. (9:1) then:

'For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, (adelphon - brothers) my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants...

(9:3-7; my emphasis, and please read the rest).³¹

These verses, which Hagee takes to apply *only to the Jewish people as a nation*, are actually about Israel, an adopted people, which is to say, a covenanted people. Furthermore, Paul never uses the term 'Jewish nation' in any of his letters, nor does the concept appear in any other form. Here, in Romans chapter nine, Paul writes out of his present situation of 'unceasing anguish' about the *people of Israel*, in particular those *kindred after the flesh*. In chapter 3 he asked, what advantage does the Jew have? *In the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God*, which would stand as a summary for chapter 9 verses 4 and 5. Paul's concern here is the 'righteousness of God', a concept

29 Romans 1:17; with Habakkuk 2:4 in mind

30 *ibid* p.145. Mr. Hagee's distinction between earthly and spiritual Israel has no biblical foundation, it is an invention.

31 David Evans makes a similar error claiming that Paul's definition here at vv.4,5 stands for the remaining chapters. Which makes one wonder why Paul bothered to write verse 6!

that appears more than thirty times in the first ten chapters. Israel's *unfaithfulness* does not *nullify the faithfulness of God*, to which point Paul returns in 9:6.

Mr. Hagee claims that,

'as Christians, we must rely on the words of the Bible as our plumb line for identifying the Jewish people. The apostle Paul refers to God's position on the Jews and Israel in chapters 9 through 11 of the book of Romans'.³²

I can agree that the Bible is our plumb line but I find no evidence in either Testament that God is interested in 'identifying the Jewish people'. The term only appears in Esther and Acts, so post-exile and little used, The people of God identify themselves by aligning themselves with his will and purpose! The only reference to Jews in these chapters is 10 verse 12 where Paul writes, '*for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek*', which rather contradicts Hagee's point. Hagee then ducks the issue he has raised saying that the doctrine of election is too controversial and complex for him to address. Unfortunately election is crucial to our understanding of these chapters, indeed to much of Romans, and whilst it requires careful thought, Paul is really not that difficult here. He provides us with plenty of 'clues' to his meaning.

Chapter 9 begins with what is virtually an amplification of chapter 4, on which, see below. His people, the Israelites, have every advantage and from them '*comes the Messiah...Amen*' (9.5), but, implicitly, what is their future? Has God failed? But before we get to verse 6 we have some work to do on those first few verses. Who is Paul speaking (writing) to and who or what is he speaking about?

To this point in Romans Paul's use of the word *brothers* means his fellow Christians, and in Rome they are both Jew and Gentile. At the beginning of chapter 9 he makes a clear distinction, the *brothers* under consideration here are *my kinsmen according to flesh*. This phrase *according to the flesh* (*kata sarka*) appears a number of times in the immediately preceding chapter(s). Paul, in using *kata sarka* at 9:3 and 5 is dealing with those who are of the world, exactly in line with chapter 8 where he writes, '*those who are in the flesh cannot please God*'. He is not making Mr. Hagee's distinction between 'national Israel' and 'spiritual Israel', it is a distinction between those who can and those who cannot *please God* (8.8).

So, when Paul repeats the phrase in 9.5 we're clear what he means. Of course 'the flesh' matters, it is, in a sense, what has got us to this point. But, if it's life you want, then it's the Spirit you need, (8.9-17). Nothing to do with 'pie in the sky when we die' but everything to do with the here and present although not completed kingdom that will culminate in the 'New Jerusalem' of Revelation 21 and 22: (Otherwise, what's the point of the Lord's prayer; why pray for God's kingdom to come, if we believe it can't until Jesus returns, by which time the prayer will have no relevance?).

What is Paul's point? Again, expanding on what has gone before, Paul asserts that '*the word of God*' has not failed, for '*not all Israelites truly belong to Israel*'. The Greek seems even more emphatic. Yes, he is in anguish about his kinsmen, they are after all the community from which he comes, but the point of Paul's concern, and not just in these three chapters, is God's righteousness, has God been faithful. Mr. Hagee's problem is that he assumes that when Paul writes about '*the children of the promise*' he must mean all the descendants of Jacob – identified as Jews – without distinction. That interpretation ignores the sense of the rest of the chapter, as well as whole chunks of the Old Testament. It is God's 'purpose of election, (9.11), God's mercy (v.15), God's choice, (v.18), in order that people who were '*not my people*' shall be '*called children of the living God*' (19-26). And, 'concerning Israel, '*only a remnant ... will be saved.*' If we are still uncertain Paul, returns to the subject in chapter 11. '*Has God rejected his people?*' is essentially the same question as '*has God's word failed?*': chapter 11:1 compared with 9:6. Paul's conclusion is that God has not rejected his

32 Op cit. p.51

people, but the issue in all these chapters is never nationalism, it is righteousness, for if God's people reject him they are self-excluded; not in-covenant and no longer of 'the people of God'. For Paul, as for God, it is never about nationality

Paul has been in this territory since chapter 3 at least, where he asked, *What advantage has the Jew?* bringing the reply, *Much in every way. They have the oracles of God*, which leads to a further question, 'So, do they benefit?' For Paul the answer is obvious, *No, not at all, for both Jews and Greeks are under the power of sin.* (v. 9) If they have these advantages but don't benefit what is the purpose in their being 'called'? This is the 'mystery' that Paul is unfolding, there's a problem needing a solution, the problem identified in i.e. chapter 8 verses 19-25. The solution is *The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction ...* (v.21ff) Neither Greek nor Jew has anything to boast about, except that God is God of both and both participate in Abraham's global inheritance which comes about *through the righteousness of faith* (4:13): Paul again has Habakkuk 2:4 in mind.

To attempt a summary of Paul's letter to Rome would be foolish given the volumes already written but it is surely evident that Paul has constructed his letter carefully. Thus, when in chapter 9 he writes *'it is not as though the word of God had failed, for not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, ...'* he is amplifying what we read in chapter 3, which itself extends what he wrote in chapter 2, *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly ...* Could he be any clearer. Or do we need John the baptiser's help, *Do not presume to say to yourselves, "we have Abraham as our ancestor", for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*³³

Paul's words here in chapter 9 of course, refer to Israelites (not a Jewish nation) but the point is that *not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.* therefore not defined ethnically. Mr. Hagee has again missed the point, this is not Paul's 'position paper on the Jewish people', it is Paul's understanding of the faithfulness of God. Paul is clear, *it is not the children of the flesh* (natural children NIV) *who are the children of God, but the children of the promise who are counted as descendants,* (9.8).

We might write this as – '... it is not children **in** the flesh who are children of God but the children **in** the promise who are counted as descendants', where 'in' denotes behaviour. And, to avoid any possible confusion, this is **not** Mr. Hagee's distinction between earthly and spiritual Israel (Jews and church); it is God's righteous distinction between those who obey him and those who rebel.

These clauses, in the same sentence, show that the *children of the promise* are distinct from the *children of the flesh*. Paul has done everything he can to be understood, why can't we take him at his word. He goes further using Hosea and Isaiah to make the point, those who were *not my people ... will be called 'children of the living God', and, though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.* (9:25-29). Paul is clearly not writing of a Jewish nation state, but of the *righteousness that comes from God* (10:3) which depends on the grace of God.³⁴

There is no plan B, and for Paul the anguished question is, 'what about my own people, my kinsmen'? In the earlier chapters he has laid out God's plan: Good creation, death through Adam, Abraham's faith, life in Christ, living in the Spirit, more than conquerors, inseparable from *the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

So, Paul asks, 'given all that, what about my kindred according to the flesh?'. And more particularly, how can God be just if the promises to Israel fail. Paul's answer: they didn't. God is just, after all *not all have obeyed the good news, Israel is a disobedient and contrary people,* (Romans 10:

33 In Matthew, Mark and Luke.

34 Romans 5

16,21), as they had always been, serving as exemplars of how not to be the priestly nation of their calling, (Exodus 19. compare 1 Peter 2 and Isa 61:6).

It is all about righteousness. If Paul summarises in 1 Corinthians 15:22 *for as all die in Adam so all will be made alive in Christ*, the detail is in Romans 5,

if, because of one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through one man Jesus Christ; ...

but we need the whole chapter! Should I here remind readers of Genesis 17 and 18?

Righteousness credited to Abram, required of his descendants, promised through a son of David, delivered, fulfilled, finished in Jesus. As Paul says, *to the Jew first and also to the Greek*, (Romans 1:16). 'Then' as NIV is misleading; it is not 'this then that' rather 'this and also that', no separation.

Mr. Hagee claims that Israel

'is always represented in scripture as God's children among all people. When Paul talks about 'the adoption' in Romans 9:4 he is referring to God's relationship with his firstborn (Exodus 4:22), the nation of Israel, not the church'.

The reference to Exodus 4:22 is little help here lacking context. Romans 9 verse 4 must be read in context with the whole, especially, for example, verses six and seven. *Israelites* in verse 4 specifically refers to those of his people who are 'my fellow countrymen according to the flesh', v.3. In listing the 'inheritance' Paul here develops the point he has made in chapters 2, 3 and 4. They had the advantages but didn't benefit. Now he wants to show how this serves God's righteousness.

The call to Abram and to Jacob-Israel was to be God's faithful, priestly people, that is why it is 'adoption' that is why – Romans 9 verses 8-16 – it is 'choice'. God's word has not failed but achieved precisely what was intended through the call and promises.

God, Mr. Hagee asserts, cannot 'disinherit ... national Israel', in favour of 'spiritual Israel, (the church)'.³⁵ He cites Deuteronomy 14:1 and Hosea 11:1 as evidence but, again, with complete disregard for context; neither provide help in understanding Paul in Romans. Here, in making a false choice he is completely at sea. At question is not whether Jacob-Israel was chosen, it is whether Jacob-Israel acted according to their status. We may not have Deuteronomy 14:1 without at very least taking note of, for instance, Deut. 14:21 and 15:11 and 16:20 and 18:13. The idea of national Israel as distinct from spiritual Israel would have left the prophets bemused and Peter and his contemporaries puzzled. John, the seer, might have pointed to the church in Sardis as an example,³⁶ and I suspect Paul, a well trained Rabbi, would have been furious.

Certainly Jacob's adoption precedes any Gentile claim but Paul at any rate is clear, Jacob's adoption is precisely so that the Gentiles can also benefit. That is the point he makes in Romans chapters 2:10,11; and 3:29; and 8:15-17; and in 4:13-17; *'For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ... For this reason it depends on faith.'* Paul is writing to a 'mixed' church, Gentile and Jew, and if Paul is right, as surely he is, that the 'Son' is the 'firstborn within a large family', (Romans 8:29, echoing Exodus 4:22?); how could we imagine God reconciling the world by dividing His family?

It is pertinent at this point to ask whether Paul's use of 'adoption' at 9:4 means something different from his use at 8:23. He has asserted (8:16ff) that *'we are children of God' and joint heirs with Christ*. He goes on to write, *'we ... groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies'*. Paul, an already adopted Jew waits for adoption. It is evident that the 'called' at 9:24 are the same as the 'called' at 8:30 for the same Greek word is used. Since 'election' at 9:11 shares

35 *ibid.* p. 145

36 Revelation 3.

the same root as the 'elect' at 8:33, we are entitled to view the evidence as conclusive: the 'elect' are the 'called' and they are those who have the faith of Abraham. Nothing entitles us to read chapters 9-11 so as to contradict not just 8:18-39 but the rest of Paul's writing.

The sign that Mr. Hagee has gone badly astray is that, on the basis of no evidence, he has decided that there are two Israels; a spiritual one, which he thinks is the church, and a material (or earthly) one which he thinks is the nation of Israel. As far as I have been able to ascertain nowhere does he provide any justification for this distinction. This is no surprise as the scripture doesn't make these 'western European' divisions.

Space doesn't permit for us to examine all of Mr. Hagee's eight points. He is trying to show from Romans 9:4 and 5 that the eight characteristics listed identify the Jews as the people Paul is writing about in this and the following two chapters. Well, yes and no, but mainly, no, especially 'no' in the sense that Hagee wants. What is striking about his seventh point, *the Israelites are from 'the Fathers'*, is his use of chapter 11 as 'proof'. Here is his point in full,

The patriarchs are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, founders of the nation of Israel. In Romans 11: 27-28, Paul makes this stunning statement: "For this is My covenant with them [the Jewish people], when I shall take away their sins!... They [the Jewish people] are beloved for the sake of the fathers." In this verse, "the fathers" refers to the patriarchs. The Jewish people are *permanently loved by God* because he made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning the future of Israel and the Jewish people.³⁷

Where to begin when there is so much wrong with this analysis. Where better than the text. Verses 25 to 29 read,

You mustn't get the wrong idea and think too much of yourselves. That is why I don't want you to remain in ignorance of this mystery: a hardening has come for a time upon Israel, until the fullness of the nations has come in. ²⁶ *That is how 'all Israel shall be saved', as the Bible says,*

*The deliverer will come from Sion
and will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.*

²⁷ *And this will be my covenant with them
whenever I take away their sins.*

²⁸ *As regards the good news, they are enemies- for your sake! But as regards God's choice they are beloved because of the patriarchs.* ²⁹ *God's gift and God's call, you see, cannot be undone.*³⁸

I am bound to repeat that we must not set these verses in contradiction to what Paul has already written.³⁹ First, and my apologies for being repetitive, Paul is not writing about 'the Jewish people', who are evidently part of the problem. Israel is his object but his subject is still the righteousness of God. Second, Mr. Hagee seems to have missed the point that Paul's 'stunning statement', is actually a quotation. Paul, in typical New Testament fashion, takes two Old Testament texts and reworks them for his purpose. But he always had in mind that those texts would have been well known to at least his Jewish readers. What would they have thought on reading verse 26b? Isaiah 59 and not just verse 20.

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance ... The Lord saw it ... there was no one to intervene ... so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. ... according to their deeds, so will he repay ... ²⁰ *And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord.* ²¹ *And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord,: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart ... from now on and forever.*⁴⁰

37 Ibid p. 148

38 From Tom Wright's translation. SPCK

39 including elsewhere, e.g. in Galatians

40 Isaiah 59: 14-21 selected, but read the whole including the chapters before and following.

And from Isaiah 27:9

*Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated,
and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin:
when he makes all the stones of the altars
like chalkstones crushed to pieces, ...*

The church in Rome was a mixed church of Gentile and Jewish Christians and, while the presence of the latter might raise the question as to what Paul meant by 'all Israel' in the next sentence, at this point he is addressing Gentile Christians, (verse 13). These are they who might get *the wrong idea*; as might we if we insist on atomising the text, picking up on phrases and words without stepping back to view the whole. It must be admitted that the text Paul has left us in chapter 11 is not as straightforward as we might like.

The translation 'so' in verse 26 is taken by Mr. Hagee and others to mean every Jew. This is problematic, what sensibly could be meant by the term? We read in verse 25 that 'a hardening has come upon part of Israel' which seems simple enough, until we continue, 'until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.' This invites the question, "then what?" and the leap, via 'so' to 'every Jew will be saved'. Even those who take that view can't agree what exactly it means: every Jew living – at what point; every Jew who ever lived ... ? A better translation of *καί οὕτως* is 'thus' or, *in this way*, answering the question 'how can Israel be saved'. This is the way according to God's plan to bring righteous Gentiles and Hebrews into the eternal but already present kingdom.

Earlier in the chapter we read 'Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it but the rest were hardened' (11:7). Is this 'hardening' permanent or does verse 12, 'their full inclusion' imply it is temporary? Paul doesn't help us when almost immediately he suggests that only 'some' might be saved, (v.14). But Paul does not leave us too long in the dark, the mystery is resolved, (vv 17-24). Unfruitful branches have been broken off and Gentiles grafted in, (it pushes the analogy too far to suggest that space on the tree is limited!). God's kindness must not be taken for granted; failure to 'continue in his kindness' will result in those grafted in being 'cut off' (22). As to unfaithful Israelites, those *after the flesh*, 'And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in for God is able to graft them in again'. (v.23. NIV).

And that is what the verses from Isaiah tell us. Reading from Isaiah 25 verse 6, *On this mountain the lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast..* noticing that *on that day* occurs in chapters 25:9; 26:1; and 27:1,2,12 & 13. Then, in chapter 27, we read of the *pleasant vineyard*, and that *Jacob shall take root*, but is currently *struck down ... a people without understanding*. That is the context for the expiation of Jacob's guilt. This is combined by Paul with the conclusion of Isaiah 59 where iniquity and justice are evenly balanced and it is God's action in righteousness that brings victory. The error here in Romans 11: 27 and 28 is in taking a phrase out of its context and interpreting it in such a way that it contradicts the rest of the letter.

Paul starts this chapter with the declaration, "I'm an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin", we might say he was a Jew. Paul's ancestors may have been among those taken into exile during 596-585 BC., returning sometime after 536 BC. His cultural and religious history was exile and his early adult life was as a zealous Pharisee trained in Torah, *of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*⁴¹

Is Paul a model of the 'hardened' or the 'elect'? Perhaps both. We know from Acts that Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen and that his career developed as a zealous persecutor of the church. Given credentials by the chief priests he was within sight of Damascus when he was blinded and heard a voice.

41 Philippians 3: 5,6

“Yes Saul, I know you, you are zealous for me, but you don't know me. You want to know me through keeping Torah, that's what keeps pricking at you. You are trying harder and harder but you still don't get it, you can't be justified by keeping the law. The love you have for law I accept as love to me, so get up, I have work for you”.⁴²

This is Paul, fully aware of the Greco-Roman cultural context in which he worked, (a Roman citizen from Antioch in Asia minor), having 'Jew' stamped over everything he wrote. As zealous in prosecuting the good news as he had been in persecuting the early church. What he writes in Romans chapters 8 and 9 is his own experience, what he was, *'in the flesh'*, and what he now is *in Christ*. In chapter 11 he has reached the climax of his argument and the emotional charge is evident as he concludes with *the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God ...*

The assertions by Mr. Hagee cannot be justified. His statement that

The Jewish people are *permanently loved by God* because he made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning the future of Israel and the Jewish people.⁴³

has too many errors to be taken seriously. If we are to maintain historical and biblical accuracy it is not pedantry to point out that no promises were made to 'the Jewish people' for, when the promises were made, they did not exist. We don't need to go searching for the 'lost 10 tribes' to understand that the 'Yehudans' – transliterated as 'Jews' – must be a subset of Israel. Hagee adds to his own confusion in using the phrase, 'Israel **and** the Jewish people', (my emphasis), rather contradicting his insistence on Jewish distinctiveness. How we are to cope with the ethnic diversity we find in the Old Testament we are not told, and modern day Jewry being essentially mixed-race presents insurmountable difficulties.

Returning to Mr. Hagee's point we should see that, once again, context is ignored. Here is a selection of texts from chapters 9 to 11. A better understanding will be achieved through reading the whole letter in one sitting. (Better still, twice in different versions):

For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel (not all of Israel Israel), and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants^{9: 6-7} ... *So it depends not on human will, but on God who shows mercy ... he has mercy on whomever he chooses*¹⁶⁻¹⁸ ... *including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles, ... 'Those who were not my people I will call "my people"'*^{1: 24,25} ... *'Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved' ... 'if the Lord had not left survivors to us we would have fared like Sodom'*^{27,29} ... *Gentiles .. have .. attained .. righteousness through faith.*³⁰

For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes^{10: 4} ... *If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved ... For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek ...*

Have they not heard? ... did Israel not understand? ... of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'^{10: 18-21}

has God rejected ... God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah ... "I alone am left" (and the divine reply) "I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal" So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace^{11:1-6}

This is where chapter 11 begins, with Paul's question, *has God rejected his people*, and his response, 'No'. Notice three things that follow. First, *'there is a remnant chosen by grace'*. Paul's example here is Elijah and his confrontation with King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Seven thousand didn't bend the knee to idols, they were the 'faithful remnant'. The rejection is not total, but then

42 My, rather free translation of Acts chapters 9 and 26.

43 op Cit. p.148

neither is the return, it is a remnant, and a remnant *chosen by grace*. Second, Gentiles are *included* as is evident from Paul's testimony before Agrippa, "so that they ... may receive a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me";⁴⁴ and Paul's hope in his ministry to Gentiles is *to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them*.

Third, we have the illustration of branches grafted in and branches broken off. I'm no gardener but I'm told that we'd be wise not to apply Paul's teaching here to the trees in our garden. The analogy makes sense as long as we don't misapply it. No doubt Paul in chapters 10 and 11 could have been clearer but chopping up the text and leaving out the bits we don't like is never good theology. Even so it must surely be clear that Paul does not anticipate the salvation/restoration of every single Israelite, not the whole of ethnic Israel, and especially not, as Mr Hagee would want, 'the Jewish people'.

So what did Paul mean when he wrote Romans 11:16b to 24? To put it simply, if an Israelite (read Jew if you wish) is not a believer in Jesus, she is a 'branch cut off'. If a Jew (or any other Israelite) becomes a believer he is grafted back in. If a Gentile, (anyone who is not a Hebrew) believes in Jesus she is grafted in. If a Gentile believer falls into unbelief they will be 'lopped off'. Returning to an earlier point, we can surely only regard Israel as the tree if Israel in that context means either, singularly, Jesus, the one true Israelite; or collectively, every believer whether Jew or Gentile. I prefer the former, which is absolutely in line with Jesus words "I am the vine". The branches depend on the tree, as is evident from 11:24, where the '*natural branches (may) be grafted back into **their own olive tree***'.

To return briefly to the accusation by Christian Zionists that opponents of Christian Zionism believe that God invoked 'plan B' when the Jews rejected Jesus. It is irritating to be told what we believe, especially when we don't! We do not believe, as is supposed, that, '*the Jews rejected Jesus, so God rejected the Jews and decided to save the Gentiles*'. It shouldn't need saying that this is nonsense. It shouldn't be controversial that the early church was Jewish. Whilst many did reject Jesus as Messiah, other Jews accepted him. A blanket 'Jewish rejection' is simply historically wrong, the large majority of Jews had no opportunity to either accept or reject. Assuming the regular population to be no more than 30 -40 thousand, by Acts chapter 6 the Christian community in Jerusalem may have been one-fifth of all the people, including '*a great many of the priests*', (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7. Some archaeologists put the population as low as 25-30,000 inhabitants).

Christian Zionists ask us to believe that the Jewish rejection of Jesus was necessary for the gospel to go to the Gentiles; anticipated by God but nowhere revealed in the Hebrew scriptures. To the contrary the Hebrew scriptures frequently reveal a purpose for Gentile peoples going right back to Abram, recognised in the New Testament when Jesus was barely eight days old, a reference Hagee uses elsewhere but doesn't seem to have read properly.

It is Christian Zionism which needs plan B. According to the Christian Zionists scheme God always had a separate plan for Jews/Israel is distinct from his plan for non-Jews/Gentiles. With regard to Israel, they claim, God made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to Moses and David that can only be fulfilled by their ethnic descendants occupying a specific piece of land, 'Eretz Israel' as rulers. Christian Zionists God's plan for Israel is being fulfilled today, after an inexplicable delay of more than 2500 years, in the establishment since 1948 of the state of Israel and the increasing Jewish presence there.

Further, they see a previously secret plan come into operation when the Jews rejected Jesus' offer of an earthly kingdom with himself as king. This plan is for the church which Mr. Hagee refers to mistakenly as 'spiritual Israel'. So we have two plans, one for 'earthly Israel' and another for 'spiritual Israel': the Jews and the church. Two plans, and thus two divergent purposes of God, are necessary in the Christian Zionist scheme to account for the Jewish rejection of Jesus, the separate

44 Acts 26

rise of the Church, the so-called 'church age' which has lasted nearly 2000 years, and for their understanding of the 'end times'. In this scenario Jews return to the land, the temple is rebuilt, the sacrifices recommence and the tribulation begins with, at some point, the faithful church being 'raptured' out of harms way. The scheme also involves the forcible conversion of one-third of Jewry and the destruction of the remaining two-thirds. However, the Hebrew scripture is clear from Abraham to Malachi, salvation for Gentiles was always salvation for Israel, and the 'fullness' of either is nevertheless, a remnant. There is no hope for Gentiles outside of the 'hope of Israel', for the salvation of Gentiles is salvation within faithful Israel.

Mr. Hagee and Christian Zionism claim that in 1948, the Jewish material kingdom, postponed for more than two thousand years appeared through the miraculous agency of God's will.⁴⁵ Christian Zionists assert that the in-gathering of 'Jews' to 'Israel' has to be completed before the return of Jesus, begging the question why it wasn't required if the offer of Jesus was genuine. But there is no evidence that Jesus offered the Jews of Judea a material kingdom with him as king? How could a 1st century Jew, or anyone else for that matter, have understood a king who washed his servants feet? The kingdom Jesus offers, then as now, is of a different kind from what all expected and what many wanted. Can we blame them when after two thousand years the church still struggles with kingdom? There was in fact no offer of a material /national kingdom, so there could be no rejection. There has been no postponement, no 1948 miracle, and no prior in-gathering, that is to misread the texts.

There is not the scintilla of a hint of a suggestion of an inkling that Jesus came as anything other than the Jewish Messiah. Nothing in the Hebrew bible suggests a material kingdom for Israel and a spiritual kingdom for; well, for whom? What would we call them, 'God's people mark II'? To be clear the Hebrew bible does speak of a material kingdom for Israel which will also be the rule of God over the nations. Curiously, (or not), Jesus and the New Testament authors seem to think that had happened and was happening. They believed Jesus to be the fulfilment of God's purpose in calling Abraham and saving his good creation.

Nothing entitles us to be forced to choose either a 'material' Israel or a 'spiritual' church. Israel is the church as the church is Israel, both spiritual and material, (temporal is better). Neither the New Testament nor the Old allow the artificial separation of spiritual from material, that is Platonism or a modern equivalent. In Christ's redeemed creation it is all one: material **and** spiritual. One Israel incorporating Gentile believers with Jewish believers into Israel's true vine, Jesus the Jewish Messiah.

45 The math is right. If Jesus is **not** the Messiah for the Jews then the delay goes back to at least 68 BC probably earlier.