

GRAFTING IN THE ORIGINAL BRANCHES: RETHINKING THE PURPOSE OF A PRE-
TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE IN LIGHT OF A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF ISRAEL
by Paul A. Himes¹

Some years ago, a popular-level article in *Christianity Today* exemplified the skepticism that many evangelicals feel about a pretribulational rapture. In this 1-page short story, “Seth” is caught up in the rapture, but pauses to consider whether leaving the world behind is, in fact, the “Christian” thing to do (“WWJD”). He contemplates the fact that the pain, suffering, and rebellion the world will experience will be accompanied by glorious opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ. Having “counted the cost,” Seth states, “My brothers and sisters will be there, doing your work. Even you will be there. Why shouldn’t I be there?” Jesus, with a hint of “subtle satisfaction,” allows Seth to remain on earth.²

This short story attempts to raise an objection to a pre-tribulational rapture position (PrTRP): Why would a mature Christian wish to prematurely abandon his vocation of witnessing to a lost world, especially in a time period that involves much fruit and much suffering, which, Christians are reminded, results in “blessing” (1 Pet 3:14, 4:14)? Consequently, if those of us advocating a PrTRP position have not appropriately integrated such a position into our biblical theology in such a way that it explains the purpose of a pretribulational rapture, the *CT* article may have a valid point.

Indeed, this writer was hard pressed to find clear statements that “The purpose of the rapture is [x]” within scholarly pretribulational literature.³ Frequently, however, one does get a sense from PrTRP literature that God raptures the church to avoid their experiencing His wrath against a fallen world. This writer accepts that as *part* of the answer, in light of 1 Thess 4:13–

¹ Professor of Bible and Ancient Languages, Baptist College of Ministry and Baptist Theological Seminary (Menomonee Falls, WI). I can be reached at phimes@gmail.com.

² Glenn Paauw, “The Rapture: What Would Jesus Do?”, *Christianity Today* 45 no. 2 (February 2001): 68.

³ Case in point: the promisingly titled article “Why a Pretribulational Rapture?” by Richard L. Mayhue does not deal “Why is there a pretribulational rapture?” but rather “Why should I believe in a pretribulational rapture?” See Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulational Rapture?”, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13.2 (Fall 2002): 241–253, but esp. 241. Likewise, John F. Walvoord, in *The Rapture Question*, rev. and exp. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), never seems to directly address the purpose of the rapture (a search of the otherwise helpful index fails to reveal any mention of “purpose,” either under “pretribulationism” or “rapture”). To his credit, Walvoord does an excellent job of discussing the purpose of the Tribulation, however (62).

James F. Rand’s *BibSac* article is a bit more promising; he states that the purpose of the Second Coming “is in vital contrast to the purpose of the rapture which is said to be that the church shall ‘meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord’ (1Thess 4:17)” (Rand, “A Survey of the Eschatology of the Olivet Discourse: Part II,” *BibSac* 113.451 (July 1956): 203. In response, however, 1 Thess 4:17 nowhere indicates the “purpose” of the rapture but rather the result (ἔπειτα). Indeed, if the rapture is necessary for “being with the Lord forever,” then unfortunately OT and Tribulational believers apparently are not allowed to “be with the Lord forever.”

From another angle, Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Come!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 12, suggests that “The Lord’s declared purpose for coming again to receive church saints to Himself” is “that where I am, there ye may be also.” Showers is citing John 14:3, considered a rapture prooftext by many (cf. Mal Couch, s.v., “Rapture, Biblical Study of the,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology: A Practical Guide to the People, Viewpoints, and History of Prophetic Studies*, ed. Mel Couch (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996); Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Salvation, the Church, and the Last Things* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 3:337). Granted, John 14:3 does seem to be a rapture passage, and granted it contains a purpose clause (ἵνα), albeit not a specific one that would necessitate a rapture, *per se*. However, since Jesus is specifically addressing the 11 disciples, the focus must not be on the rapture of the living church (because then the promise would not apply to the 11 disciples, all of whom have died), but rather the resurrection that accompanies it.

5:11 and 2 Thess 2:1–12. Craig Blaising states, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief, suddenly, without warning, but its onset brings about contrasting experience for believers and unbelievers. Believers will experience deliverance by means of the rapture, and unbelievers will be as if they are caught in a trap”⁴ However, by itself, the idea of “escaping divine wrath” is inadequate as a reason for the PrTRP because all believers escape divine wrath (Rom 5:9; 1Thess 1:10), the tribulation contains many believers (Rev 7:14), and thus a pre-tribulational rapture is not a *necessary* component in the escape from divine wrath.⁵ Indeed, why could not believers simply be miraculously shielded from harm during the Tribulation?

Many treatments of the PrTRP seem to argue from Rev 3:10 that Jesus basically rewards the church with the Rapture for its faithfulness.⁶ I will argue below why I feel this is an inadequate proof-text for a PrTRP. Yet if Rev 3:10 is removed from the equation, then to this writer’s knowledge no clear purpose statement of a pretribulational Rapture exists, or at least one that would necessitate a pretribulational or midtribulational Rapture as opposed to a posttribulational Rapture.⁷ As a result, we are left with this question from the original *CT* article: Why should the church be denied participation in one of the most evangelistically fruitful eras in all of history (Rev 7:9–17)?

The appropriate answer to that question lies in a dispensational theology of Israel, especially of Israel’s original vocation and calling. In other words, this paper will attempt to respond to a systematic theology question (“What is the point of a pre-tribulational rapture?”) with a biblical theology answer, namely that by following the canonical storyline we see that that God intended Israel to reach the world, she miserably failed at that task, and God then grafted in the church to reach the nations and proclaim his glory; however, God, because He has not forgotten His sacred word, will graft Israel back in again *and use her to accomplish the very task to which he originally called her*, blessing the world. We see the emergence of this task in the

⁴ Craig A. Blaising, “The Day of the Lord and the Rapture,” *BibSac* 169.675 (July–Sept 2012): 269–270; cf. 259–265. Similarly, see Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 of 4 (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2005), 615–6; Paul D. Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulational Rapture,” in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation*, ed. Gleason L. Archer (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 50–63.

⁵ This is an argument often brought up by posttribulational scholars, and it has some validity. See, for example, T. Van McClain, “The Pretribulational Rapture: A Doubtful Doctrine,” in *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 238; William R. Kimball, *The Rapture: A Question of Timing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1985), Kimball 1985, 71. Having said that, I am open to Paul Lee Tan’s analogy of the difference between Noah’s flood and Lot’s escape: the former was “kept safe through” and the latter had to be removed before judgment could strike in Gen 19:22 (Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* [Dallas, TX: Bible Communications, 1974], 338). On the other hand, difference between Sodom and Gomorrah and the world during the Tribulation is that the world is not annihilated.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries, rev. and ed. by Philip E. Rawley and Mark Hitchcock (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2011), 84 (“Because of their faithfulness, the Christians in Philadelphia are promised that they will be kept from the hour of trial . . . the event in view here that will deliver the true church from the tribulation is the rapture, which must occur prior to the tribulation for this promise to have its full force”); Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 455 (“We have here a marvelous promise of Christ’s protection [*tēreō*, ‘keep’] for those who have protected [*tēreō*] his word by their loving obedience”; note that Johnson is less dogmatic about this being a pretribulational rapture, though he does hold to that position); Robert L. Thomas *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 of 2 (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 283 “In response to the church’s keeping of His standards, Christ promises to keep it from the hour of trial”).

⁷ Jeffrey L. Townsend, in his oft-cited *BibSac* article, seems to recognize this when he states, “. . . no verse of Scripture specifically states that relationship [between “the time of the rapture of the church in relation to the tribulation”]. But Revelation 3:10 comes close: . . .” (Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” *BibSac* 137.547 (July 1980): 252).

Tribulation with the 144,000 witnesses, though Israel does not fully embrace the task until the Parousia.

In this way, a more promising picture of the purpose of the Rapture emerges. The church does not receive the opportunity to minister in the Tribulation because *it is Israel's job*. Thus Israel is the 1st string quarterback, temporarily removed due to injury while the church is the 2nd string quarterback whose playing time will be over at the Rapture. In essence Romans 11 (God's restoration of Israel) is the hinge between Deut 4:5–8 and OT theology in general (Israel's mission) and Revelation 7 (the beginning of Israel's return to her vocation)

The focus on Israel in regards to the PrTRP is not original with this writer, though it has not been explored as thoroughly as it should have been. In one of the better treatments on this topic Michael Rydelnik states, "The distinction between the church and Israel should yield a belief that the rapture of the church will take place before the tribulation of the end days (a pretribulation rapture)," especially since "Israel is central to the tribulation."⁸ Charles Ryrie's classic *Dispensationalism* also points in this direction: "The distinction between Israel and the church leads to the belief that the church will be taken from the earth before the beginning of the Tribulation . . ."⁹ This paper, however, proposes to narrow the focus to Israel's mission: not only is the Tribulation about history's focus on Israel as opposed to the church, the Tribulation is about Israel *recovering her vocation* to be a witness to the nations.

This paper will begin by discussing Rev 3:10 and suggest that it is inadequate as a PrTRP proof-text. Next, this paper will examine Israel's mission from a biblical-theological perspective, in the process discussing whether or not Israel was to be actually involved in *proclamation* in addition to (more-or-less) "lifestyle evangelism." Thirdly, this paper will examine Romans 11 and the restoration of Israel, a passage which functions as a "hinge" between Israel's OT vocation and the future reclamation of her vocation, which brings us to Revelation 7 (the fourth section). Finally, this paper will attempt to briefly summarize its argument via canonical biblical theology and reiterate why this perspective seems more promising than others.¹⁰ In this way a PrTRP will be preserved, but one that relies more heavily on dispensational theology.

Is Revelation 3:10 a PrTRP Proof-text?

The impetus for this paper stems from this writer's disillusionment with Rev 3:10 as a promise of a pretribulation rapture, though Rev 3:10 is almost-universally accepted as a rapture proof-text by pretribulation scholars.¹¹ Revelation 3:10 in Jesus' letter to the church at

⁸ Michael A. Rydelnik, "Israel: Why the Church Must Be Raptured Before the Tribulation," in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, ed. John F. Hart (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2015), 256. Rydelnik develops three key points: "Israel is central to the tribulation," "Israel sets up Christ's return," and "The church is absent from the earth during the tribulation" (256–66).

⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. and exp. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 148. Surprisingly, even Hal Lindsey's popular-level book *The Rapture* does a better job than most by seeing this connection: "Since the focus of God is once again upon the Jew as a Jew in the seven final years of dealing with Israel . . . , the Church cannot be present" (74).

¹⁰ Defining "biblical theology" is complex and debated task. I follow to approaches to biblical theology: The first is the tracing of a theme in a particular book, and the second is the tracing of a theme in the canon. For more discussion, see Paul A. Himes, "First Peter's Identity Theology and the Community of Faith: A Test-Case in How Social Scientific Criticism Can Assist with Theological Ethics via Biblical Theology," *EvQ* 89.2 (2018):115–132, esp. 116fn5 and 125.

¹¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 216; Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona

Philadelphia states, ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, καὶ γὰρ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ, τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.¹² John Walvoord's statement is representative of many others: "The expression seems as strong as possible that the Philadelphian church would be delivered from this period, which is the great tribulation, Daniel's seventieth week (cf. Dan. 9:25=27)."¹³

On the one hand, this writer acknowledges that the second half of the verse does indeed fit well with the tribulation described in the rest of Revelation, and the expression "earth dwellers" (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) overwhelmingly refers to those in opposition to God in the end time period in Revelation.¹⁴ One should note, however, that οἰκουμένης ὅλης could refer strictly to the Roman Empire in the 1st century (e.g., Luke 2:1).

As for the meaning of τηρέω + ἐκ, the situation is complicated, and space does not allow for a thorough examination.¹⁵ This writer will tentatively suggest that all tribulational positions may be overthinking the expression, since it could simply mean "protect you from" without any reference to *how* this will occur.¹⁶

Lake, IN: BMH, 1974), 464; David G. Winfrey, "The Great Tribulation: Kept 'Out of' or 'Through'?", *GTJ* 3.1 (Spring 1982): 3–18; Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Salvation, the Church, and the Last Things* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 356; Andrew M. Woods, "John and the Rapture in Revelation 2–3," in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, ed. John F. Hart (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2015), 195–224; Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 131–33; Thomas, *Revelation*, 283–9; Keith H. Essex, "The Rapture and the Book of Revelation," *MSJ* 13.2 (Fall 2002): 215–39 (the premise of Essex's article is that Rev 3:10 is the only legitimate reference to the rapture in Revelation); Lindsey, *The Rapture*, 119–20; Feinberg, "Case for Pretribulation Rapture Position," 64–5; Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," 252–63

¹² This writer could spot no textual variants in the text when comparing the Nestle-Aland 27th, Stephanus' TR, and the Robinson-Pierpont Byzantine 2005. However, the suggestion has been made that the ὅτι-clause that begins v. 10 actually modifies the previous clause (see John H. Niemelä, "Revelation 3:10 and the Rapture: A New Departure," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 30.58 (Spring 2017): 35–47. Niemelä raises an interesting possibility; however, his discussion of καὶ γὰρ on pages 40–42 is problematic, ignoring such uses of καὶ γὰρ in Matt 2:8, 18:33; Luke 19:23; John 5:17; Rom 3:7; etc., all of which clearly connect with the previous clause, and not providing a single instance of καὶ γὰρ outside of Rev 3:10 that supports his syntactical argument.

¹³ Walvoord, *Revelation*, 84.

¹⁴ Having said that, since many believe that the meaning of ἄγγελος changes from human messenger in Rev 2–3 to non-human "angel" in the many uses of the rest of the book (e.g., one of many, Everett Ferguson, "Angels of the Churches in Revelation 1–3: 'Status Quaestionis' and Another Proposal," *BBR* 21.3 [2011]: 371–386), this is not an insurmountable argument. Perhaps, hypothetically, the "earth-dwellers," wicked inhabitants of the Roman Empire, that experience a time of testing in (for example), 193 AD ("The Year of the Five Emperors") are meant to be a harbinger of the even more wicked "earth dwellers" in the newly-revived Roman Empire during the time of the Tribulation.

¹⁵ Probably the best treatment on the pretribulation side is Townsend's 1980 *BibSac* article, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10." However, I am dissatisfied with Townsends syntactical work in three areas: 1. On page 255 he mentions Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.2.1 [4.11–13], arguing that it supports his view on ἐκ; however, the problem with Townsend's interpretation is that the context of 4.2.1 [4.11–13] clearly indicates that the Jews were *already* in the midst of extreme hardships (thus τότε μᾶλλον ὑπὸ τῆς ἀπορίας καὶ συμφορᾶς ἐξηγανᾶκτον [4.2.1 [4.11]), and God (and Moses) rescued them from out of the midst of such circumstances, despite their rebelliousness. 2. He makes no mention of Josephus *J. A.* 5.26 [5.1.5], which contains the expression τηρεῖν ἐκ and, in the context, clearly refers to "silver and gold" that was taken *out* of the city of Jericho and devoted to the Lord; 3. On pages 256–257, he does not adequately explain the link between Heb 5:7 and John 12:27; he believes they are referring to the same event (I concur), but I confess to being thoroughly confused by his discussion of how Heb 5:7 must necessitate ἐκ referring to "position outside its object rather than emergence from the object" (257). Surely that would only be the case if *Jesus did not, in fact die!*

¹⁶ Ἐκ is flexible enough for this. For example, in 1Cor 9:19 (ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν), the ἐκ does not need to represent spatial dislocation, merely dislocation from negative effects. Thus ἐκ can more-or-less

Yet those issues are all secondary to this concern: How can a specific promise made to a specific, local church suddenly potentially benefit every true church existing today *but not the original church* (since the Philadelphian church presumably would have died out before the Tribulation anyway)?¹⁷ Pre-tribulational proponents have anticipated the first part of that objection but generally ignore the second part. For example, Keith H. Essex argues, “The recurring refrain ‘what the Spirit says to the churches’ does expand the application of what Christ said specifically to the other churches of Asia and to the other churches who would hear the book of Revelation read.”¹⁸ Essex’ argument is echoed by other pretribulational scholars.¹⁹

Two responses are in order. First, one is certainly justified in declaring that Jesus’ messages to the seven churches are applicable to us today, just as Paul’s message to the Galatian church, or Peter’s message to the Anatolian churches, are all applicable to us today. Nobody disputes this. It is another matter altogether, however, to claim that a specific promise made to a specific church is somehow directly applicable to all churches everywhere in the current era. This raises the question: how far are we willing to take this hermeneutical principle, and how consistent will we be? Will every church, like Smyrna, suffer ten days of tribulation? Does every church contain a “Jezebel” whose children are about to be destroyed (Rev 3:20–23)? Is every modern church, like Ephesus, in danger of losing her very existence as a church (Rev 2:5)?²⁰

The response to the last point may be: “Only those churches that have lost their first love are in danger of ending up like Ephesus.” Fair enough. Then, in regards to the applicability of Rev 3:10 to all churches, we might respond, “Only those churches that have ‘kept the word of Jesus’ patience’ will go up in the Rapture.” Ergo, we seem to be forced to a partial rapture position.²¹ To avoid this, one must demonstrate that “all churches” have indeed “kept the word of Jesus’ patience,” otherwise the conditional ὅτι clause that precedes the promise might just as well not exist. In other words, it is hermeneutically inconsistent to suggest that Rev 2:5 applies to all churches today only insofar as they are making the same mistake as the church in Ephesus, and then turn around and say Rev 3:10 applies to all churches regardless of how well they match the ὅτι clause.

Secondly, and more importantly, those arguing for a PrTRP from Rev 3:10 have not adequately demonstrated how this verse actually came true for the Philadelphian church *as a promise*. Assuming that the Philadelphian church no longer exists, we can acknowledge that they

mean “in regards to” in same cases. However, in Rev 3:10, one would necessarily have to examine what it means to be protected from an “hour” of something. In this writer’s opinion the arguments are inconclusive. In John 12:27 was Jesus expecting to be physically removed, i.e., “raptured,” before that hour could come upon him, or was he merely asking God to protect from or through the time period ahead of him? If the former, and Jesus’ request was not answered, then what does Heb 5:7 refer to?

¹⁷ Obviously my entire objection rests on the assumption that any local churches in the modern city of modern day Alaşehir possess no continuity with the church at Philadelphia in c. AD 95. If such could be proved, this writer’s objection would disappear.

¹⁸ Essex, “The Rapture and the Book of Revelation,” 224.

¹⁹ E.g., Woods, “John and the Rapture in Revelation 2–3,” 211; McCune, *Systematic Theology*, 3:354; Alva J. McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 464 (to his credit, however, McClain brilliantly demolishes any attempts develop a “7 Periods of History” approach to Revelation 2–3 [448–9]).

²⁰ We ignore here the sadly persistent and hermeneutically self-destructing view that somehow the seven churches represent seven ages, except to point out that Philadelphia is the *sixth* church, not the last one, which would entail that Laodicea is an apostate church going through the Tribulation, which then begs the question as to why Jesus implies that he loves the Laodicean church (Rev 3:19).

²¹ Very few pretribulational writers seem to acknowledge the potential problem here. An exception is John H. Niemelä, “Revelation 3:10 and the Rapture,” 35–36.

are obviously not going to experience the Tribulation. The problem is, *neither will the Laodicean church or the Ephesian church!*²² In other words, if Rev 3:10 is merely prophecy about avoiding the Tribulation, then it has come to pass for that church. However, if Rev 3:10 is a promise of a reward specifically for “keeping the word of Jesus’ patience,” *as indicated by the ὅτι clause*, then surely such a promise would leave the Philadelphian church feeling somewhat cheated, for they have gained nothing by their faithfulness that other, *inferior* churches have not also gained merely by dying out. One must ask, then: if the Philadelphian church would not have experienced the Tribulation anyways *because they eventually died out* (just like Ephesus and Laodicea), then what is so special about Jesus’ promise to them? Would this not be akin to declaring to a class of graduating seniors, “Because [ὅτι] you raised a thousand dollars for the food drive, none of you will have any exams next school year”? The “reward” does not match the ὅτι clause since they would not have had any exams anyways, regardless of their work on the food drive. In the same way, the Philadelphian church would not have experienced the Rapture anyway, so what use is the ὅτι-clause? The only solution seems to be if one can prove that all true churches, by their very definition, “keep the word of Jesus’ patience,” whatever that might mean. This then raises the question of why the promise was given specifically to Philadelphia, how one determines what is a “true church,” why Ephesus is warned against the removal of her lampstand (which would imply that the promise to Philadelphia might not come true for her), etc.

A better approach, in this writer’s opinion, lies in discarding the paradigm of the Rapture as some sort of “promise” for the church due to her performance and focusing instead on the Rapture in relation to Israel’s missional vocation, a perspective that has not, to this writer’s knowledge, been adequately explored.

Israel’s Mission

That Israel had a mission to the nations in some form is commonly acknowledged in biblical scholarship. Thus Michael Vlach can declare, “God does not intend for Israel to be an end in itself. Israel is not an end but a means—a means for worldwide blessings.”²³ At the other end of the spectrum N. T. Wright, when discussing Galatians 3:1–14, has spoken of “the ‘covenant of vocation,’ here specifically *Israel’s* vocation, the seed-of-Abraham vocation, to be the means of blessing for the world.”²⁴ Michael F. Bird notes, “The purpose of Israel’s election in the divine mandate was not wholly introspective and isolationist, but included an intermediary role before the nations.”²⁵ Almost 150 years ago premillennialist C. K. Imbrie even went so far as to declare,

There are *two* instruments recognized by God for conveying his salvation to the nations, and restoring the world at length to His allegiance. Two; the first, and above all, the centre of all, His own Son, . . . And secondarily, in subordination to Christ, as an external

²² The Ephesian church, after all, is apparently threatened with having its existence as a local church eliminated (Rev 2:15). For the individual believer within the Ephesus church, this would act just as efficiently as whatever Philadelphia was doing for keeping an Ephesian Christian out of the great Tribulation.

²³ Michael Vlach, “What about Israel?”, in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, eds. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 109.

²⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 240; cf. 211–212.

²⁵ Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, LNTS 331 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 126.

means, God's firstborn Son, the seed of Abraham—the national Israel; the blessing to all the nations.²⁶

Here this paper will first briefly survey some key OT texts that speak to Israel's mission to the Gentiles before looking at the issue of Israel's *proclamation* to the Gentiles, arguing that the latter is a smaller subset of the former that does occasionally appear in the OT.

Key Texts on Israel's Vocation

We begin with the Torah itself. The promises to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3 18:18, 22:18, etc. all demonstrate that one of the purposes of Israel's existence was so that other nations might be blessed (ultimately through Abraham's Seed). That Abraham himself embraced the role of beneficiary even towards pagan city-states is demonstrated by his intercessory prayer on behalf of even Sodom (Gen 18:22–25).²⁷ Later on, the initiation of the Sinai Covenant (Exod. 19:1–8) contains the significant declaration that Israel was to be a “kingdom of priests.” Thus the Torah contains a mediatory function:

The metaphor likens Israel's relationship to the world to that of a priest who serves society and mediates God's blessing by being set apart to him. . . . By their obedience they represent *I AM* to the nations and become the means of bringing the nations to turn to and trust *I AM* who teaches and protects them (cf. Deut. 4:5–8; Isa. 42:1–4; 44:3–5; 45:22; 49:6; 51:4–5). They mediate God's blessings to others according to the divine intention for Abraham and his seed to be a missional nation from the beginning (Gen. 12:3).²⁸

Furthermore, Deuteronomy 4:5–8 indicates that one of the key purposes of the Torah itself was for other nations to sit up and take notice: “Here, in an emphatic position in the opening section of the book, a primary motivation for Israel's obedience is given, namely, the watching nations.”²⁹ Indeed, while “a major part of the motivation underlying Old Testament ethics is the challenge for Israel to be visibly different from the surrounding nations,” yet the nations are supposed to “see the difference, and questions will be asked—questions that, significantly, include the nearness of God in the midst of this people.”³⁰

The rest of the Tanakh continues to amplify this theme of Israel's mission. In the historical books, 1 Kings 8:41–43 (cf. 2Chr 6:32–33) contains one of the high points of this trajectory. In the midst of his prayer for the nation, Solomon specifically pleads for the foreigner, the נָכַר³¹, that God would hear the prayer of this foreigner (who is clearly not a resident alien, as v. 41b states), *specifically for the purpose that* (v. 43b לְמַעַן) non-Israelites may come to know (יֵדַע) God. Thus the distant foreigner coming to have a relationship with God is a key part of Solomon's prayer for Israel herself.

²⁶ C. K. Imbrie, “The Regeneration,” in *Premillennial Essays: Prophetic Conference 1878*, reprint (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1981; originally published in 1879), 122.

²⁷ Note the discussion in Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 358–62.

²⁸ Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 407.

²⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 261.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 336.

³¹ A sad irony exists here: Solomon pleads for the נָכַר in this passage, but in 1 Kings 11:1, 8, it is his foreign (נָכַר) wives who steal his heart away from the one true God.

The Psalms are replete with a desire to see God's blessings upon the nations. A few key examples will suffice. In Psalm 22, after the "hinge" of v. 22 [Heb. v. 23] leads to the anticipation of a positive outcome, v. 27 [28] declares that "all the ends of the world/all the kindreds of the nations" will "turn to" and "worship" the God of Israel. In Psalm 67:2 [3], God's blessing on Israel is clearly meant to result in (*lamed* + the infinitive construct) His way being known among all nations. Indeed, the "peoples," *plural* (עמים), not just Israel, are to praise God (v. 3 [4]). The universal emphasis of this psalm is further amplified by the frequent use of varied plural nouns in vv. 2–5 [3–6]: גוים in v. 2 [3], עמים (x2) in v. 3 [4], an alternating of עמים, לאמים, and לאמים in v. 4 [5], and finally עמים (x2) in v. 5 [6]. In other words, this cluster of three verses contains eight different nouns referring to pagan nations, all anticipating their turning to the one true God! Even the Psalm of the Ideal King, Psalm 72, sees a reorientation of pagan nations towards the one true God. Psalm 72:17c-d contains two parallel constructions expressing the desire that all nations (כל-גוים) will simultaneously be blessed by God and bless him themselves. Finally, in Psalm 98:3, the Lord's remembrance of his חסד to Israel is, interestingly, linked directly to the entire world (כל-אפסי-ארץ) noticing God's salvation and then, in v. 4, praising him.

The prophetic books also contain a number of instances of Israel, in one way or the other, leading to the blessing of the nations, e.g., Jeremiah 16:19–21 (surely a conversion experience).³² Special focus will be given here to the theology of Isaiah. Early on, in Isa 2:1–4, the nations will "flow" to Zion (v. 2) and express a desire to learn the ways of God (v. 3). In Isa 11:10 and 12, the root of Jesse will become לנס עמים and נס לגוים, respectively. Along with the positive portrayal of the Gentiles with אליו גוים ידרשו³³, it is worth noting that the only other times נס is immediately followed by a *lamed*, in both cases it clearly indicates that the ensign is for the advantage of those indicated (Isa 5:26 and 11:12).³⁴ Interestingly, this promise of hope for the Gentiles exists in a chapter that also deals with judgment upon the nations (11;14).

Later, in Isa 26:9, in the midst of an eschatological song (v. 1, "in that day"), the Lord's blessing is linked to the inhabitants of the earth learning righteousness. In Isa 27:6, metaphorically Israel's restoration will result in the whole world being filled with fruit. In Isa 49:6, the Servant is linked to both the raising up of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles.³⁵ Significantly, the only time the expression "light of the nations" (LXX φῶς ἐθνῶν) occurs in the NT is in Acts 13:47 where Paul and Barnabas appropriate this verse for their own mission of proclamation to the Gentiles.³⁶ Also, the expression ἔθνη ἐλπιουσιν, signifying Gentile eschatological conversion, occurs four times in LXX Isaiah (11:10, 18:7, 42:4, and 51:5), and only in Isaiah.³⁷

³² Much more could be said regarding Israel and God's mission in Jeremiah. For a helpful treatment on this neglected topic, see Jerry Hwang, "The 'Missio Dei' as an Integrative Motif in the Book of Jeremiah," *BBR* 23.4 (2013): 481–508.

³³ The LXX (and the Apostle Paul) interestingly translate this as ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἔθνη ἐλπιουσιν.

³⁴ Accordance command line "נס <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> =ל."

³⁵ As Andrew T. Abernethy indicates, the raising up of the Servant in Isaiah 43 seems to be linked to Israel's inability to accomplish its mission in Isaiah 42 (Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, New Studies in Biblical Theology [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016], 138, 142).

³⁶ Accordance command line "φῶς <WITHIN 2 Words> ἔθνος." The term occurs three times in the LXX, all in Isaiah (42:6, 9; 51:4).

³⁷ Accordance search "ἐλπίζω <WITHIN 2 Words> ἔθνος." Interestingly, the LXX in Isa 18:7 is significantly different from the Hebrew. The MT portrays a mighty nation who nonetheless comes to offer tribute to Israel, whereas the LXX portrays a *subdued* nation come to offer tribute. Ἐλπίζω in the LXX oddly enough translates קָנָן in the Hebrew.

Unfortunately, as a corporate entity meant to bear witness to the nations, Israel has miserably failed. Indeed, Matthew 2:15b's appropriation of Hosea 11:1 ("out of Egypt I have called my son") is not so much the fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy (Hos 11:2 can hardly refer to the Messiah, after all) as the ironic declaration that the Messiah accomplishes what Israel failed to do: the fulfillment of God's vocational calling. Whereas Israel was called out of Egypt and promptly went to serve false gods, Jesus was called out of Egypt and shed his blood for the sins of all humanity.³⁸ That Jesus, in a sense, fulfills Israel's vocational role is further confirmed in Rom 15:8–12. One might also add that the creation of the Church at Pentecost ensures that God's mission to humanity continues (without claiming that the church "replaces" Israel), in the same way that a second-string quarterback ensures that the game continues when the first-string quarterback is out with an injury. Nonetheless, Isaiah, especially, seems to indicate that future Israel is allowed the opportunity to regain her role becoming God's intermediary to the Gentiles.

Does Israel's Vocation Include Proclamation?

Years ago, Walter Vogels distinguished between the expressions "centrifugal ["outward-moving"] universalism" and "centripetal ["inward moving"] universalism." The former referred to the idea that Israel herself played an *active* role in reaching the entire world, while the latter presents Israel in more of a *passive* role in reaching the nations. Scholarship before the 1950s preferred the former, while scholarship after the 1950s has preferred the latter.³⁹

Many evangelical scholars suggest that in the Old Testament Israel's role was primarily centripetal, i.e., passive. The nations were supposed to observe Israel and learn about God. Thus Jason S. DeRouchie writes, "There is very little potential support from the Old Testament that within the old covenant period Israel bore a normative responsibility to be a 'go and tell' people, seeking the conversion of the nations. . . . I am not aware of texts within the old covenant itself that called Israel to urge the nations to respond to the news of global salvation."⁴⁰

This writer acknowledges that the majority of OT texts on Israel's mission do seem to entail more of a passive perspective.⁴¹ In Solomon's prayer (1Kgs 8:41–43), for example, we see no sign of missionary activity *per se*; the foreigner simply hears about Israel's God and comes to the temple to pray.⁴²

³⁸ Thus I agree with Peter Enns' perspective on this passage (though I disagree with him regarding much of his methodology in intertextuality). I believe Enns "gets" what Matthew is trying to indicate: "The son in Hosea and the Son in Matthew are a study in contrasts. A young *Israel* came out of Egypt, was disobedient, deserved punishment, yet was forgiven by God (see Hos 11:8–11). The boy *Christ* came out of Egypt, led a life of perfect obedience, deserved no punishment, but was crucified—the guiltless for the guilty" (Enns, "Fuller Meaning, Single Goal," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde, Counterpoints [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan], 200). Thus Matt 2:15b is not so much "fulfillment" in the sense of "fulfilling Messianic prophecy," but rather "fulfillment" in the sense of "Jesus did what Israel couldn't."

³⁹ Michael A. Grisanti, "Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40–55: An Update," *MSJ* 9.1 (Spring 1998): 40–54; Grisanti provides an excellent survey of scholarship on this topic.

⁴⁰ Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 403–404.

⁴¹ Thus, Isaiah, generally speaking, ". . . neither depicts Israel as a nation of world-traversing missionaries, nor does he exclude the nations from participation divine redemption" (Grisanti, "Israel's Mission to the Nations," 61).

⁴² As often noted, the Jerusalem temple itself was meant to play a missional role. See, for example, Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Israel, the People of God, and the Nations," *JETS* 45.1 (March 2002): 51; Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 134, 172.

However, “lifestyle evangelism” and “proclamation evangelism” are not mutually exclusive. In Deut 4:7, the pagan nations will not just hear about Israel, but rather will hear *the Law itself* (ישמעון את כל־החקים). Surely this involves some sort of vocal proclamation (how likely is it that other, travelling Gentiles would have committed the Torah to memory to proclaim it to their inquisitive countrymen?). In 1 Kings 10:3, Solomon himself is certainly involved in “proclamation,” i.e., speaking truth in answer to questions, and this results in the queen praising YHWH and his relationship to Israel and to Solomon. In Isa 43:21, the Lord declares that Israel exists to “show forth my praise,” an expression which certainly involves vocal proclamation, though the implied audience is left unstated. Thus even in the midst of a more “passive” witness for the Jews, some sort of proclamation seems to be included.

Indeed, such proclamation outreach seems to be implied in the New Testament itself at a number of points. First, in Rom 10:14–18 Paul cites Isa 52:7 (where εὐαγγελίζω occurs twice) in reference to both Jews *and* Gentiles (10:15). Secondly, as noted above, Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:47 requisition LXX Isaiah 49:6 to refer to their own proclamation evangelism towards the Gentiles.⁴³ Indeed, one could even suggest that the Great Commission codified a paradigm shift from Jewish “centripetal” witness to Jewish “centrifugal” witness.⁴⁴ Yet even so, the continuity between Old Testament witness and New Testament witness remains. as Michael Bird points out,

It appears that the Gentile mission emerged from a cocoon of Jewish eschatological expectation that anticipated God’s final purpose for the nations as reaching their climax through Israel and the temple. . . . Jesus never envisaged a Gentile mission as a separate entity from a Jewish mission, but believed that the continuing Jewish mission would result in the gospel being proclaimed to the Gentiles along the way [in light of Mark 13:10].⁴⁵

Furthermore, prophetic proclamation to nations other than Israel does exist in the OT. Jeremiah, for one, was called “a prophet unto the nations [לְגוֹיִם, plural]” in Jer 1:5 though, ironically, Israel herself becomes “characteriz[ed] . . . as first among the גוֹיִם.”⁴⁶ The obvious example, of course, is Jonah. DeRouchie argues that “Jonah’s prophetic role was first not to convert the Ninevites but to ‘call out against them,’ declaring to them that they had sinned against YHWH and warning them of punishment.”⁴⁷ Yet one is hard-pressed to see a practical difference between those two elements of proclamation (“warning of punishment” vs. “trying to

⁴³ Isaiah 49 is directed towards the Servant of the Lord who, in this case, seems to be identified with the Messiah in this chapter as a whole. For now, we will follow F. Duane Lindsey here in suggesting that “Israel” in 49:3 “is a title of the individual messianic Servant” (Lindsey, “Isaiah’s Song of the Servant Part 2: The Commission of the Servant in Isaiah 49:1–3,” *BibSac* 139.554 [Apr 1982]: 134). Having said that, I do not think that Lindsey has adequately explained the Servant’s “apparent past failure” and how that can be reconciled with identifying the Servant in 49:1–4 with the Messiah (135–6). Furthermore, one gets the sense that the Messianic Servant in 49:6b is accomplishing precisely what the servant [ethnic] Israel was supposed to be doing all along, and a case can be made that earlier in the book (e.g., Isa 42:1–9) the Servant represents the nation of Israel, who failed in her task (see Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God’s Kingdom*, 138, 142).

⁴⁴ Schnabel suggests something similar in “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” 47.

⁴⁵ Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 172. Note also Charles L. Feinberg, who reminds us that salvation in the 1st century was “through the Jews” in the sense that the early proclamation of the Gospel and the early church were Jewish (Charles L. Feinberg, *Israel: At the Center of History & Revelation*, 3rd ed. [Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980] 89–90).

⁴⁶ Hwang, “The ‘Missio Dei’ as an Integrative Motif,” 486.

⁴⁷ DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 403; cf. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 164.

convert”). Jonah himself fully understood that the one could naturally lead to the other (Jonah 4:2). Indeed, while God may certainly utilize a prophet to declare a pagan city’s destruction as part of his message to Israel (e.g., Nahum), Jonah’s extensive trip to Nineveh itself and his personal proclamation to the pagans themselves is difficult to understand if God was simply rubbing their nose in their forthcoming punishment. In addition, in at least one place in the prophetic writings the text itself might have been specifically intended for evangelistic purposes: The Aramaic portions of Daniel contain a key prophecy of the Messiah (Dan 7:9–14) which was written in the *lingua franca* of the Empire, in the very hub of the civilized world (Babylon).

Finally, Isaiah, 66:19 seems to indicate an explicitly *active* evangelistic role for future Israelites: “And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, . . . and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles.” The context here contains “a succinct summary of eschatological themes that occur throughout the entire book of Isaiah.”⁴⁸ The question, however, is the identity of the pronoun “them” in the first clause of v. 19. On the one hand, the nearest antecedent is the “all nations and tongues” of v. 18, i.e., Gentiles, so an argument could be made that the proclaimers are Gentiles.⁴⁹ On the other hand, John N. Oswalt argues,

The survivors may be Jews who have survived God’s judgment on them. This seems to accord better with the larger context of the book. Especially interesting is the appearance of the same word . . . ‘survivors’ [פליטים] (although in a fem. form), in 4:2, speaking about the condition of those who ‘survive’ God’s judgment in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Jews seem to be addressed in v. 20. This understanding would certainly accord well with the tone of chs. 60 and 61, where it is through what God has done in judging and delivering his people that the nations are drawn to God in Jerusalem. Furthermore, this interpretation relates to one of the major questions dealt with in the first part of the book: Will the people declare the glory of God to the nations, or will they be so seduced by the glory of the nations that they will abandon their God?⁵⁰

To this might be added Edward J. Young’s comment: “It is difficult to think that Isaiah intended to assert that God would assemble *all* nations and then that those who had escaped from the world be sent to *all* nations.”⁵¹ If this interpretation is correct, then one may also point out that the reference to the “new heaven and the new earth” in Isa 66:22 offers an important link with Revelation.

To conclude, vocal proclamation seems to be at least a subtheme within the broader OT perspective on Israel’s mission to the nations, especially in an eschatological context.⁵² If this is

⁴⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 542.

⁴⁹ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H), 749.

⁵⁰ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 688–69.

⁵¹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, vol. 3 of 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 532.

⁵² Schnabel (who is not a dispensationalist) notes, “The active, deliberate, and planned outreach to non-Israelites with the goal of convincing them of the exclusive salvific truth and power of YHWH is, in the OT, part of prophetic *eschatology* . . .” (Schnabel “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” 39; emphasis added) Thus I do not agree with Charles H. H. Scobie when he states that “The ingathering of the nations is not the work of Israel” (Scobie, “Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology,” *TynB* 43.2 [1992]: 291); granted, “In a number of significant passages it is God who gathers in the nations [to Israel]” (Scobie, “Israel and the Nations,” 291). However, the two ideas are not mutually exclusive (i.e., God can use Israel to gather in the nations).

the case, then Israel's restoration should also include her proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles, especially once the (predominantly) Gentile church is removed from the equation.

Israel's Restoration in Romans 11

If Israel's mission involved proclamation of the glories of God to the pagans, and if she nonetheless failed in that mission, then we must turn to Romans 9–11 to understand how and why she will recover her status and her mission. We will begin with a brief discussion of the significance of Romans 9–11, including the expression “all Israel” in Rom 11:26, before examining two key points in Romans 11 which may speak to ethnic Israel's recovery of her witness.

Opening Considerations of Romans 9–11

Anyone who wishes to grapple with the theology of Romans 9–11 must take into account the Apostle Paul's own emotional state at the beginning and end of this section. Paul's heartbreaking cry in 9:1–3 may, in fact, show an awareness that his own success in the Gentile mission has dovetailed with, even impacted, Israel's rejection.⁵³ Regardless, the emotional state of Paul at the beginning drives his theology, a progression of thought which somehow culminates in his doxological outburst in 11:33–36. Paul's final doxological outburst is completely inexplicable if Paul had merely come to the realization that the status quo would be maintained: ethnic Israel would continue to by-and-large reject the Messiah. To the contrary, whatever results in Paul's overwhelmingly joyous expression at the end must be the result of something positive Paul has discovered about the fate of ethnic Israel.⁵⁴ Paul's doxology in Rom 11:33–36 can hardly be the result of the conclusion, “Well, I guess Israel doesn't really matter anymore to God.”

Consequently, Rom 9–11 is *not* about the Gentile church but rather about ethnic Israel.⁵⁵ Even Rom 9:6 represents not a *broadening* of the term “Israel” (i.e., as if to include Gentiles) but rather a “*narrowing*” of the term.⁵⁶ Furthermore, “Paul's claim that ‘not all who are from Israel are Israel’ (9:6) does not cause him to rest content with the current unbelieving state of ethnic Israel, as he insists throughout Rom. 11 that more Israelites, a preponderance of Israel even, must be brought in so as to confirm God's faithfulness to his electing grace.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 541.

⁵⁴ Michael Wolter well states, “Thus Paul has become certain in 11:26 of what he had expressed in Rom 10:1 as his deepest desire and prayer—that even the non-Christian portion of Israel would come ‘to salvation’ (εἰς σωτηρίαν).” Wolter, “Ein exegetischer und theologischer Blick auf Röm 11:25–32,” *NTS* 64.2 (April 2018): 126 (“Damit ist Paulus das, was er in Röm 10.1 noch als Herzenswunsch und Gebetsanliegen geäußert hatte - dass auch die nichtchristliche Mehrheit Israels 'zum Heil' (εἰς σωτηρίαν) gelangen möge -, in 11.26 zur Gewissheit geworden.”).

⁵⁵ When speaking about Paul's reference to “from Jacob” in Rom 11:26, J. R. Daniel Kirk points out, “Paul's concern is not merely to say that Gentiles are included. In point of fact, this reality creates the problem Paul is attempting to resolve throughout Rom. 9–11. Culminating his argument in these chapters with scriptural proof that Gentiles will be included would move the ground from beneath his own feet. Romans 4 was sufficient to prove that Gentiles are included in the blessings of Israel, Rom. 9–11 intends to speak to the fate and future of ethnic Israel given this Gentile inclusion” (Kirk, “Why Does the Deliverer Come ἐκ Σιών (Romans 11.26)?” *JSNT* 33.1 (2010): 87.

⁵⁶ Rydelnik, “Israel: Why the Church Must Be Raptured before the Tribulation,” 268.

⁵⁷ Kirk, “Why Does the Deliverer Come ἐκ Σιών,” 95.

Thus οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται in Rom 11:26 naturally refers to ethnic Israel, for this expression represents the final section of Paul's thought process, a section that culminates in his doxology. If Paul truly believed that "the church, consisting of believing Jews and Christians, represents the eschatological restoration of Israel"⁵⁸ then Rom 11:11–25 becomes nonsensical and we are left with the inability to explain Paul's change from sorrow (Romans 9:1–3) to glorious hope (Romans 11:33–36); indeed, Rom 11:26 would simply express a tautology where absolutely nothing has changed since Paul began his agonizing, theological meditation in 9:1.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the οὕτως in 11:26 most naturally represents a sequence of events of some sort, where "event A" (v. 25) leads to "event B," both chronologically and as a "prerequisite" for the latter event.⁶⁰ Indeed, in tandem with this, quite a few scholars note that Rom 11 develops three stages of a process in the restoration of Israel. John K. Goodrich, for example, provides a helpful "three-phase" diagram where "phase 1" = "Israel's rejection," "phase 2" equals "the world's reconciliation," and "phase 3" = "Israel's acceptance/life from the dead."⁶¹ Thus, as Kirk states, "The narrative of salvation history that Paul articulates in Rom. 11 is anything if not consistent: Israel's partial hardening leads to the inclusion of the Gentiles, and this inclusion of the Gentiles is itself the means by which Israel will come to participate in God's saving work."⁶²

The Fourth Stage: Israel Returns to Her Mission

Yet what if there were actually fourth stage, where Israel's return to her former status directly leads to "life from the dead" for Gentiles? Piet Farla has argued that in in Rom 11:13–32, "If Paul looked to the premise of the actual division of Israel when explaining Israel's current situation, he is now looking to the beginning, to God's election of Israel, and towards God's ultimate purpose, when speaking of the eschatological future (see 11,26–27b.28–32)."⁶³ Yet would not that focus on Israel's election naturally imply a focus on her mission to the world, as well? In other words, when Paul reminds his audience that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29), could he also be implying that when Israel is restored she will also embrace her mission to the world?

⁵⁸ So Schnabel, "Israel, the People of God, and the Nations," 54.

⁵⁹ For some of the better treatments as to why "all Israel" is actually referring to Israel, see the following: John K. Goodrich: "Until the Fullness of the Gentiles Comes in: A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship on the Salvation of 'All Israel' (Romans 11:26)," *Journal for the Study of Paul & His Letters* 6.1 (Spr 2016): 5–32; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 623; Wolter, "Ein exegetischer und theologischer Blick," 125–6.

⁶⁰ Wolter, "Ein exegetischer und theologischer Blick," 129; see 127–129 for a very thorough discussion of the possible meanings of οὕτω (on that point, see also the discussion in Goodrich, "Until the Fullness of the Gentiles Comes in," 27)

⁶¹ Goodrich, "Until the Fullness of the Gentiles Comes in," 29. Cf. also Stanley E. Porter, *The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary* NTM 37 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015); Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 257–8; John F. Walvoord, "Eschatological Problems IX: Israel's Restoration," *BibSac* 102.408 (oct 1945): 415; Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 712. Interestingly, John K. Goodrich notes that in intertestamental literature Tobit 14:5–7 actually sees Gentiles being converted along with Israel in "phase 3" of a 3-phase process (Goodrich, "The Word of God Has Not Failed: God's Faithfulness and Israel's Salvation in Tobit 14:3–7 and Romans 9–11," *TynB* 67.1 (2016): 50.

⁶² Kirk, "Why Does the Deliverer Come ἐκ Σιὼν," 90.

⁶³ Piet Farla, "Christ Replaces the Law,—but Israel Remains the People of God': The Rhetorical *dispositio* of Romans 1,13–11,36," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 93.4 (Dec 2017): 628. Translated from Dutch by Brian Heffernan.

Two expressions in Romans 11 seem to indicate or at least allow for this. First, in Rom 11:12 and 15, Paul utilizes a lesser-to-greater argument with various parallel expressions to declare that if Israel’s rejection has benefitted the rest of the world, her restoration will provide even greater benefit.⁶⁴ The two verses indicate a progression culminating in a fourth stage which would seem to indicate a positive effect on the Gentile world. Thus:

	Stage 1: Negative Situation for Israel	Stage 2: Positive State for Gentiles	Stage 3: Positive State for Israel	Stage 4: Even More Positive State for Gentiles
Verse 12	τὸ παράπτωμα . . . τὸ ἥττημα	πλοῦτος κόσμος . . . πλοῦτος ἔθνων	τὸ πλήρωμα ⁶⁵	πόσῳ μᾶλλον
Verse 15	ἡ ἀποβολή	καταλλαγή κόσμου	ἡ πρόσλημψις	ζωὴ ἐκ νεκρῶν

In verse 12, the “more positive” result for the rest of the world is left unstated. In verse 15, however, it is described as “life from the dead.” What, then, does such an expression mean? Scholars generally posit either a “figurative” or a “literal” interpretation, where the former would be “a spiritual vivification” that impacts the entire world via Israel’s conversion and the latter simply refers to “the final resurrection itself.”⁶⁶

Douglas Moo gives three arguments in favor of the latter (the literal final resurrection from the dead): 1. “From the dead” overwhelmingly refers to a literal resurrection in Scripture; 2. Since clearly this “life from the dead” happens after Israel’s redemption, and since “vv. 25–26 suggest that the salvation of Israel comes only after God has brought into the kingdom all the Gentiles destined to be saved,” consequently “No room is left for a spiritual quickening of the world; all that remains is the consummation”⁶⁷; 3. “Since we are justified in thinking that Paul builds his teaching here on apocalyptic, a reference to resurrection at the end of history seems likely.”⁶⁸

In response to Moo’s first point, it should be noted that none of the other occurrences of ἐκ followed by νεκρός involve the word ζωή, so Paul’s expression in Rom 11:15 is unique, regardless.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Joseph Fitzmyer notes that the normal expression Paul uses for the event of the resurrection is ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν (e.g., Rom 6:5, consistently in 1 Corinthians 15, etc.).⁷⁰ In addition, Moo himself has noted a key exception to the reference of “out of the dead”

⁶⁴ Or, Vlach succinctly states, “What happens now is good, but it gets much better” (Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* [Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2017]), 452.

⁶⁵ As Craig A. Blaising points out, “The fullness [of Israel] here is contrasted to the part, the remnant, which is being saved in the present time (11:7–26)” (Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *JETS* 44.3 [Sept 2001], 438). Logically, then, this “fullness” is not the current church but something that involves a future Israel.

⁶⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 of 2, ICC (Edinburgh, U.K.: T&T Clark, 1979), 562–3.

⁶⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 694; similarly Cranfield, *Romans*, 563.

⁶⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 696.

⁶⁹ The Accordance command line “ζωῇ <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> ἐκ <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> νεκρός” yields only the one result.

⁷⁰ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 613. Similarly, John Murray writes, “One wonders why [Paul] did not use the term occurring so frequently in his epistles This expression ‘resurrection from the dead’ is the standard one with

in Rom 6:13, though he quickly emphasizes that the ὥστε there clarifies that a figurative meaning is intended.⁷¹ Significantly, though, Rom 6:13 is the only place in Pauline literature with ἐκ νεκρῶν within five words of ζάω⁷², and since, as noted, Rom 11:15 is the only place with the similar construction involving ζωή, it is more likely that both are figurative rather than one being figurative and the other literal.

In regards to Moo's second point, we will argue below that the "fullness of the Gentiles" (11:25) is not "all the Gentiles destined to be saved." In regards to Moo's third point, even if he is correct in suggesting that Paul is working from an apocalyptic framework, this hardly necessitates a reference to the First Resurrection; other key apocalyptic events will happen in the future besides the Resurrection.

More importantly, the lesser-to-great argumentation of vv. 12 and 15 would seem to indicate that "phase 4" is of benefit specifically towards *Gentiles*. This makes more sense as "an unprecedented quickening for the world in the expansion and success of the gospel" rather than a general resurrection of both Jewish and Gentile believers.⁷³ Following the logic of the lesser-to-greater argument, Israel's restoration could easily lead to massive Gentile conversion in the Tribulation, an explosion of salvation that would supersede even the years following Pentecost.⁷⁴

What, then, is the point of time when the "fullness of the Gentiles comes in" (πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εισέλθῃ) in Rom 11:25? Whatever this expression refers to, it clearly precedes Israel's corporate conversion.⁷⁵ However, this does not necessitate a reference to "the very end of the age," since "the apostle Paul does not say as much when he easily could have (cf. 'until the Lord comes,' 1 Cor 4:5; 11:26)."⁷⁶ Furthermore, "... the parousia interpretation contradicts Paul's claim for the means by which Israel's salvation will occur as articulated in 11.25–26a, the very verses Isa. 59.20 is intended to support: Gentile inclusion is the means by which all Israel will be saved."⁷⁷ For those who would argue that "God will bring about the salvation of Israel in connection with the completion of Gentile salvation," Robert L. Saucy makes a valid point: "That interpretation leaves no time for the Old Testament picture of the blessings of Gentiles *subsequent to* and *mediated through* a restored Israel."

Thus the "fullness of the Gentiles" is probably neither a reference to the Parousia nor a reference to the last elect Gentile being saved. Indeed, for premillennial dispensationalists, both

Paul and other New Testament speakers and writers to denote the resurrection" (Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, 2 vols. in 1, NICNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965], 2:83).

⁷¹ Moo, *Romans*, 694.

⁷² Accordance command line "ἐκ <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> νεκρός <WITHIN 5 Words> ζάω." One non-Pauline occurrence exists, 1 Pet 1:3, but the verb precedes the ἐκ by 5 words.

⁷³ Murray, *Romans*, 2:84.

⁷⁴ I am intrigued by the following statement by Charles Feinberg: "You have surely heard, as have I, that the world must be entirely evangelized in this age, and the task belongs to the Church. . . . Much of the error, if not the root of it, lies in a misinterpretation of Matthew 24:14 Such a wrong meaning of the verse can arise from but one thing: a failure to consider the context. The context reveals unmistakably that Israel is being spoken of. The time is the time of Jacob's trouble or the Great Tribulation. It is then that Israel will be God's Paul, multiplied thousands of times, to tell the story of the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations. These heralds are revealed in Revelation 7 as the 144,000 out of all the tribes of Israel. The result of their testimony is also set forth: the great unnumbered multitude from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation" (*Israel: At the Center of History & Revelation*, 187). Later, Feinberg states, "When God wants worldwide missionaries, he will again take up Israel. They will be a host of Jonahs back on their right jobs" (188). This resonates well with the thesis of this paper.

⁷⁵ Goodrich, "Until the Fullness of the Gentiles Comes In," 29–30.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 31

⁷⁷ Kirk, "Why Does the Deliverer Come ἐκ Σιών," 89.

Jews and Gentiles will continue to be saved in the Millennium, which rules out this latter possibility.

Consequently “the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles” refers to an event in time, probably *before* the Parousia, that directly leads to Israel’s corporate salvation that will in turn positively impact Gentiles. Considering that Paul spoke of the Jews being “jealous” of God’s blessing of the Gentiles (Rom 11:11), and since currently the Jews are most definitely *not* jealous of God’s blessing of the Gentile church (despite Paul’s personal desire in Rom 11:14), would it not take an event of momentous worldwide impact to actually accomplish such a radical paradigm shift among the worldwide Jewish community?

This paper suggests, then, that “the fullness of the Gentiles” is accomplished precisely when the overwhelmingly Gentile church is removed via the Rapture⁷⁸ which will provoke Israel to jealousy because she sees the obvious, worldwide sign of God’s favor on the overwhelmingly Gentile church (and her kinsman that have associated with it). The result is the beginnings of the nation-wide conversion of Israel and the entrance into the time of Jacob’s Trouble, a time when Israel once again takes center stage.⁷⁹ Yet with the Gentile church gone, who exactly will take up the mantle of Gospel witness?⁸⁰ Who better than the corporate entity who was given a mission to the world in the first place? Thus, in regards to Rom 11:11–12, “. . . Israel’s disbelief does, in some miraculous way, fit into God’s dynamic and paradoxical tactic of salvation. Paul highlights this in 11,12 by giving the assurance that Israel will eventually be saved *and will fully play its role serving the salvation of the world.*”⁸¹

This writer hastens to agree with all other dispensationalists that the vast majority of Israel’s blessing of and ministering to the Gentiles occurs during the Millennium. Yet with the church gone, one may reasonably suggest that such a ministry is jumpstarted during the Tribulation. Indeed, Revelation seems to give us an indication of that very event.

⁷⁸ This position is similar to Saucy’s suggestion that “The coming in of ‘the full number of the Gentiles’ [Rom 11:25] prior to the salvation of ‘all Israel’ is best understood as referring to the ingathering of Gentiles during the present age through the preaching of the gospel to all nations (cf. Mk 13:10; Mat 24:14)” (*The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 261). Similarly, Walvoord (“Israel’s Restoration,” 415) writes, “The terminus of Gentile blessing is the point in time when Israel’s blindness is lifted.” While I agree with Walvoord that the “fullness” is linked to “Gentile blessing” in a spiritual sense (i.e., the “fullness of the Gentiles” is *not* anything to do with the “time of the Gentiles” as Daniel saw it), nonetheless it is not so much a “terminus of blessing” as a “terminus of vocation.” With the removal of the church, the primary responsibility of proclaiming God’s praises ceases to be a Gentile job and reverts to Israel.

⁷⁹ I will stress here that I am *not* arguing that as soon as the Rapture occurs that Israel is saved. Rather, the Rapture marks the beginning of that process.

⁸⁰ Matthew 24:14 clearly indicates Gospel proclamation during the Tribulation. Interestingly, however, Johannes Munck suggests that Matt 24:14 and 2 Thess 2:6–7 both indicate that “the conversion of the Gentiles will lead to the coming of the antichrist, . . .” I am unsure of how Munck’s argument on these passages (interestingly, within the context of a discussion of Romans 11) would fit with my thesis, but it is worth repeating here:

“‘The fullness of the Gentiles,’ therefore, is not, as we have tried to show, a specific number to be attained, i.e., a full number. . . . There is no mention in any New Testament book of such a limiting number. ‘The fullness of the Gentiles’ must signify the goal that the totality of the Gentile world—admittedly in a representative form—should hear the gospel, that is, both that the gospel should be preached to them, and that they should hear and believe. This fullness, which according to Matthew 24:14 leads to the last phase of the eschatological events surrounding the revelation of Antichrist, is here regarded as the impetus to the salvation of the Jews. Since Paul, according to II Thessalonians 2:6–7, also believes that the conversion of the Gentiles will lead to the coming of Antichrist, it is a natural supposition that the conversion of the Jews is supposed to take place in the age of Antichrist, or at the conclusion of that period” (Johannes Munck, *Christ and Israel: An Interpretation of Romans 9–11* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], 134–5).

⁸¹ Farla, “Christ Replaces the Law, —but Israel Remains the People of God,” 626 (emphasis added).

Revelation 7: Israel Reclaims Her Vocation

So far this paper has attempted to demonstrate the following: 1. Rev 3:10 is inadequate both as a proof-text for a PrTRP and as a *reason* for the Rapture (i.e., as a reward for faithfulness); 2. Israel has always possessed a mission mandate to reach the nations; while *most* of that was passive, vocal proclamation is nonetheless a small part of this theological vocation; 3. ethnic/corporate Israel will be restored once the fullness of Gentiles comes in, and this restoration will somehow, in turn, bless the Gentiles; a PrTRP makes sense here as the means by which the “fullness of the Gentiles comes in,” leaving Israel to retake her position as the primary instrument of witness to the world, both passive and vocal.

Without a doubt, Israel takes center stage in Revelation after chapter 3 while the church is glaringly absent. By default, then, Israel will have a passive witness in the Tribulation simply by virtue of her continued existence despite the devil’s opposition (Rev 12:6).⁸² Yet surely some sort of vocal proclamation must also be involved (cf. Rom 10:14). Indeed, if the previous points made in this paper are accurate, then one would expect to see at least an indication of that in Revelation after the first three chapters (Revelation does, after all, have an evangelistic theme, e.g., Rev 22:17, “Let him who hears say, ‘Come’” [NKJV]).⁸³ Revelation 7 seems to provide the best indication of Israel’s involvement in vocal proclamation.

In Rev 7:3, the four angels of the previous verses are told to withhold harming the earth until God’s servants have been sealed, and 7:4–8 proceeds to describe these servants. This paper assumes the standard dispensationalist interpretation that these are literal Jewish men; indeed, if this group were somehow meant to represent the church, then “the reader must figure out exactly why there is such a waste of verbiage in the enumeration of the tribes.”⁸⁴

Yet what, then, is the point of Rev 7:1–8 other than John continuing to highlight Israel’s central role? These could hardly represent the sum total of Israelites saved during the Tribulation; while “all Israel” in Rom 11:26 does not need to mean “every single person,” it would be inexplicable if it referred to a small minority compared to the millions of Jews that are alive today and will be alive during the Tribulation. A more likely solution is to focus on the statement that these are “servants of God” (τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν), a surprisingly rare phrase that nonetheless naturally points to divine calling and commission (e.g., Titus 1:1, LXX

⁸² Israel may, in a sense, even currently possess such a passive witness to God’s mercy. Gerald R. McDermott suggests, “Perhaps this recent emergence of Israel as a nation-state, even with all its faults and imperfections, is a firstfruit of the renewal of *the nations*. This is the renewal that we have just been discussing—not a world of undifferentiated souls but a future world of saints from the ‘peoples and nations and tribes and languages’ (Rev 7:9) united in serving the Triune God” (McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently about the People and the Land* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2017], 116).

⁸³ For an exploration of this theme, see Thomas Michael, “Evangelistic Motifs in the Book of Revelation: A Critical Analysis of the Book of Revelation with Regard to Its Various Evangelistic Motifs,” PhD diss. (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000).

⁸⁴ Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 195.

Ezra 5:11) and can appear in the context of vocal proclamation (Acts 16:17).⁸⁵ These 144,000 sealed servants have a specific task in hand, though the text does not explicitly state what it is.⁸⁶

One may then consider the possibility that the 144,000 are somehow related to the group which comes after them. The two groups, of course, are distinct. For a dispensationalist, only the most tortured hermeneutical process could suggest that men from specific tribes of Israel could somehow equal people from all different nations and ethnic groups. Yet does the activity of the first group somehow lead to the second group? This partially depends on the interpretation of μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον in Rev 7:9. On the one hand, mere literary sequence in Revelation does not automatically imply chronological sequence (as Revelation 12 indicates). Thus Robert Thomas, for example, argues that Rev 7:2–8 and Rev 7:9–12 “appear to be simultaneous rather than consecutive,” though he does not offer any syntactical arguments in support.⁸⁷ However, when one examines the four other occurrences (excluding Rev 7:9, they are Rev 4:1, 7:1, 15:5, and 18:1) of μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον in Revelation, all four *probably* involve either a chronological or a sequential order.⁸⁸

First, Rev 4:1 indicates the transition into the apocalyptic prophecy section of the book. It seems safe to assume that the throne room scene happens chronologically after Jesus addresses the seven churches. Secondly, the events of Revelation 7 seem to occur between the sixth and seventh seals, meaning that Rev 7:1 introduces events that occur after Rev 6. Thirdly, in Revelation 15:5, the seven angels with the seven final plagues come out of the temple. Since 15:1–4 is a temple scene⁸⁹, then clearly the angels’ exit from the temple in 15:5 takes place chronologically later than 15:4. Finally, since Rev 18:1 follows directly from a description of Babylon and the prediction of the ten kings warring against it, the proclamation of Babylon’s fall in 18:1–3 logically (if not chronologically) follows the events of the prophecy of chapter 17. Because the ten horns attack and destroy Babylon, consequentially she is “fallen.” The circumstances after the μετὰ ταῦτα of Rev 18:1 would not exist without the circumstances in ch. 17.

This does not prove that the events in the second half of Revelation 7 are dependent upon the events in the first half; it merely increases the likelihood. Consequently, *if* John intended us to see any sort of connection between Rev 7:1–8 and Rev 7:9–17, then the simplest explanation is that the ministry of the first group, “God’s servants,” leads to the conversion of the second group. Ultimately, as Patterson argues regarding Revelation 7, “The narrative suggests that the ‘times of the Gentiles’ (Luke 21:24) and, with that the church age, has passed. Then back on Jewish ground, one is witnessing here the beginning of that which the apostle Paul anticipated in Romans 11.”⁹⁰ To that statement this writer would add that the book of Revelation as a whole

⁸⁵ The Accordance command line “=δοῦλος <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 3 Words> θεός” yields only four results in the NT (Acts 16:17, Titus 1:1, Rev 7:3, and Rev 15:3) and four results in the Septuagint (Ezra 5:11, Neh 10:30, Ps. 85:2, Isa 42:19).

⁸⁶ I echo with Rydelnik, then, that “The tribulation will be a time of godly service for Israel . . . What they will do in service to God is unstated. However, in the paragraph that follows the description of the 144,000, there is a potential hint” (259).

⁸⁷ Thomas, *Revelation*, 483. However, Thomas does seem to believe that the 144,000 are, indeed, engaged in evangelistic activity, just not that which leads to the group in 7:9 (483).

⁸⁸ Accordance command line “μετα <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> οὗτος <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> ὁράω.” These are the only NT occurrences, all in Revelation. The LXX has four occurrences, and the sole occurrence in prophetic literature, Dan 8:4, clearly indicates an event that comes chronologically later than what was before.

⁸⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 561.

⁹⁰ Patterson, *Revelation*, 197.

portrays Israel embracing her vocation of being a witness to the true God, both passively (e.g., Revelation 12) and, for at least some, vocally (Revelation 7). The result is “life from the dead,” possibly mass conversion (followed by persecution) for Gentiles all across the world.⁹¹

Putting It All Together: The Rapture and a Biblical Theology of Israel to the Key of “Mercy”

This paper began with the question, “What is the point of the Rapture?” and argued that Rev 3:10 is inadequate to answer that question. The better answer stems from a dispensational biblical theology of Israel. Since the beginning, God has intended Israel to be a blessing to the nations. Much of that involved a passive witness while some of that involved a vocal witness. However, Israel has so far failed in her role as a witness. Jesus Christ came along, died on the cross for humanity’s sins and was resurrected by the Father, and then created the Church at Pentecost via the Holy Spirit to declare God’s praises to the world (1 Pet 2:9, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ). However, Israel has not been superseded; rather, she has simply been “benched.” Israel is the first-string quarterback that has been temporarily set aside so that the second-string quarterback can continue the game. Bluntly stated, Israel is Carson Wentz, and the church is Nick Foles.

However, *the story does not end there*, for God still has a contract with his first-string quarterback! Romans 11 declares that God will graft in Israel to her former position once the Church is removed, and the result will be immeasurable benefit for Gentiles all across the world. Revelation 7 provides a partial glimpse of how this takes place.

One key point must be stressed, however (and here the quarterback analogy breaks down). *Neither Israel nor the Church earns their job*. Rather, all of this is predicated on God’s mercy and faithfulness rather than merit. As Cranfield brilliantly remarked years ago,

“We shall misunderstand [Rom 9–11] if we fail to recognize that their key-word is ‘mercy.’ . . . It is only where the Church persists in refusing to learn this message, where it secretly—perhaps quite unconsciously!—believes that its own existence is based on human achievement, and so fails to understand God’s mercy to itself, that it is unable to believe in God’s mercy for unbelieving Israel, and so entertains the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His people Israel and simply replaced it by the Christian Church.”⁹²

Thus God will graft Israel back in to fulfill her mission of testimony, *not because she earns her spot*, but rather because He is a merciful God. The church is raptured away, *not because she has earned a rest*, but so God can be merciful to Israel. Mercy, not merit, is the key word in God’s election of both Israel and the church.

⁹¹ The idea that the 144,000 Jews are evangelists is common enough in dispensational circles, e.g., Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 214 (“God is . . . sending them [Israel] to the nations in place of the witness of the church, . . .”); Rydelnik “Israel: Why the Church Must Be Raptured,” 259; Charles Feinberg, *Israel: At the Center of History & Revelation*, 162–3. I do not believe, however, that this interpretation has been adequately defended.

⁹² Cranfield, *Romans*, 448. Cf. Vlach, *He Will reign Forever*, 145—“In the midst of disobedience and apostasy God affirms His plans to restore Israel. *This is not because Israel deserves it* but because God is faithful to the patriarchs with whom he made unconditional and eternal promises” (emphasis added); cf. also Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003), 179—“. . . God cannot contradict or be unfaithful to himself. Israel’s history remains for Paul a series of fragments and figures which testify to God’s election, *but in no sense does that history, as a history of Israel’s obedience or disobedience, constitute the grounds of Israel’s election*. Only God’s action does” (emphasis added).

Conclusion

This writer remains convinced that a pre-tribulational rapture position is the superior position exegetically. However, this position has not often demonstrated how a PrTRP integrates with a dispensational theology of Israel. The result has been an inadequate response to the question of “what’s the point?” The intent of this paper has not been to “prove” a PrTRP, but rather to show how dispensational biblical theology offers a better answer to the “why” of the Rapture than Rev 3:10.

No Scripture passage states, “The purpose of the Rapture is to allow Israel to fulfill her vocational calling.” However, this writer believes that such a perspective is implied by Scripture and strengthens dispensational biblical theology by showing how a PrTRP fits both our emphasis on Israel’s distinction from the church and her future restoration.