

The Challenge Posed by God's Covenant with Israel for Christian Mission

A Post-Supersessionist Messianic Jewish Missiology

Paper for the Turku Missiological Symposium, "Messianic Judaism, the Church, and God's Mission"

Introduction

This paper asks what happens to Christian mission if God's covenant with Israel¹ is ongoing, irrevocable, and central to biblical theology. The question is not merely one of missionary method, nor even of Jewish-Christian relations narrowly conceived. It concerns the way Christians tell the biblical story, understand the identity of the Church,² relate to Israel and the Jewish people, and practise witness to Messiah among Israel and the nations.

The central thesis is this: if Israel remains elect, then mission cannot be structured as replacement but must be reconfigured as participation in Israel's ongoing vocation within the purposes of God. This requires rethinking the biblical narrative, the nature of mission, and the practice of evangelism. It also requires asking whether common forms of Christian mission theology, even when they reject explicit supersessionism, may still see the election of Israel as preliminary, instrumental, or obsolete. The outline on which this paper is based frames the issue precisely: the standard narrative of "Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation" is coherent, but it often leaves Israel marginal to the main plot; the key question is whether Israel is merely instrumental to God's purposes or intrinsic within them.

The paper proceeds in three sections. First, it considers the telling of the biblical narrative in a post-supersessionist mode, engaging with Christopher J. H. Wright, R. Kendall Soulen, and Collin Cornell. Second, it develops a layered account of the mission of God, humanity, Israel, the nations, the Church, and Messianic Jews. Third, it draws out practical

¹ As in Lecture 1, the Jewish people.

² In this presentation I will use familiar terms such as "Church," "Gentiles," and "mission," but I want to qualify them carefully. By "Church" I mean the *ekklesia*, the community called together in Messiah, which began within Israel's own story. By "Gentiles" I mean the *ethnē*, the nations — collective peoples, not merely non-Jewish individuals. And by "mission" which has many negative associations for Jewish people I do not mean coercive proselytism or the erasure of Jewish identity, but participation in the mission of the God of Israel to bless, restore, reconcile, and dwell with Israel and the nations.

implications for evangelism, discipleship, and mission to the Jewish people, with particular attention to humility, repentance, and covenantal continuity.

I have very limited understanding of your context here in Finland but hope that my contribution to will be relevant to the situation.³ My understand is that the Finnish and wider Lutheran setting makes these questions especially important. Finnish mission theology has often been shaped by holistic mission, diakonia, ecumenical cooperation and Jewish-Christian sensitivity. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's recent ecumenical reflection rejects proselytism while also recognising that some Finnish mission agencies continue to regard institutional mission among Jews as a justified position, and that practical work among Jews has emphasised dialogue and support for Messianic Jews and their legitimate freedom of religion.⁴ The Lutheran World Federation's 2023 study document likewise calls churches to renewed Jewish-Christian relations, repentance for anti-Judaism and careful reflection on the painful history of Christian witness to Jews.⁵ This lecture therefore does not ask an abstract question. It asks how Christian mission may be reconfigured in a context where witness, dialogue, repentance, religious freedom, Jewish continuity, Messianic Jewish identity and Israel-Palestine all press upon us at once.

The argument is offered from a Messianic Jewish theological perspective. Messianic Jewish theology is defined elsewhere as theology constructed in dialogue with Judaism and Christianity, refined among reflective practitioners, and developed as a new theological tradition based on the twin epistemic priorities of Israel's continuing election and Yeshua's messiahship.⁶ This paper seeks to bring those priorities to bear on missiology.⁷

³ I am most grateful for previous visits and discussions I have had with Juhani Koivisto, Sanna Erela and others over years.

⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Committee for Ecumenical Relations, "Charta Oecumenica Revision Statement," 11 September 2024.

⁵ Lutheran World Federation, *Hope for the Future: A Study Document for Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2023).

⁶ "Messianic Jewish theology is disciplined reflection about God's character, will, and works, and about God's relationship to Israel, the Nations, and all creation, in the light of God's irrevocable election of Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and God's creative, revelatory, and redemptive work in Messiah Yeshua. Messianic Jewish theology is rooted in divine revelation (Torah), pursued in the context of Jewish communal life and tradition and in respectful conversation with the entire Christian theological tradition, and informed by prayer, by experience of the world, and by all available sources of human knowledge and understanding." (Kinzer 2006)

⁷ Richard Harvey, "Missiology of Messianic Judaism (5.4)" in "Messianic Jewish Theology," *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (2025).

1. Telling the Biblical Narrative in a Post-Supersessionist Mode

1.1 The Importance of Narrative for Mission

Christian mission is never practised apart from a story, a vital component for the construction of any worldview.⁸ Mission presupposes an account of who God is, what God has done, what has gone wrong in the world, what God is doing to set it right, and who is called to participate in that work. The biblical narrative, therefore, is not simply background material for mission. It is the theological architecture within which mission becomes intelligible. One understanding of mission is that of overlapping stories [SLIDE]. How do the story of God, my story and my neighbour's story come together?

In much contemporary evangelical and ecumenical mission theology, Scripture is narrated as a unified drama: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. This narrative is powerful. It provides coherence. It links the Testaments. It shows that mission is not merely a voluntary activity of the Church but participation in the purposes of God. It also resists the fragmentation of the Bible into disconnected devotional or doctrinal fragments. [SLIDE Wright definition].

Yet the same narrative can become problematic if Israel appears only as a middle episode: chosen for the sake of the nations, useful in preparing the way for Messiah, but no longer central once Christ has come and the Church has emerged. The problem is not always explicit denial of Israel's election. It is often narrative displacement. Israel appears, but does not shape the whole.

1.2 Glasser, Goheen, Wright, and the Dominant Mission Paradigm

For Finnish Christians not familiar with the recent North American and British discussion, it may be helpful to identify the major figures behind this paradigm. [This section may be cut or shortened – what do you think?]

Arthur F. Glasser belonged to an earlier generation of evangelical missiology and was an influential figure in the Lausanne movement and the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE).⁹ A missionary in China and later a leading figure at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission, Glasser helped give mission studies a biblical-theological foundation. His *Announcing the Kingdom* presented Scripture as the unfolding story of God's kingdom mission. This was a significant advance over models that treated

⁸ N. T. Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*. London, SPCK, 1992, 124. David K. Naugle. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2002. I wonder how Finnish Christian worldviews are constructed?

⁹ <https://www.lcje.net/>.

mission merely as an ecclesiastical programme or as the overseas activity of Western churches. It placed mission within the whole biblical economy.¹⁰

Michael W. Goheen represents the later “missional church” development of the same instinct. Goheen has argued that the Church discovers its identity within the biblical story and is called to live as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom. In his work, the Church is not merely an organisation with a mission department; it is a community whose whole existence is shaped by participation in God’s mission.¹¹

Christopher J. H. Wright has provided perhaps the most globally influential evangelical articulation of this approach. Wright’s *The Mission of God* argues that the whole Bible is to be read through the lens of God’s mission. Wright’s great contribution has been to recover the Hebrew Bible as a central resource for Christian mission theology and to insist that mission begins not with the Church but with God. Soulen rightly notes that Wright emphasises the unity of Scripture and the mission of God, while also asking whether this can risk instrumentalising Israel if not carefully nuanced.¹² Wright’s recently published revised edition of *The Mission of God* has a key chapter on the Election of Israel which engages in detail with Soulen’s critique.¹³

Such authors have made an enormous contribution. They have shown that mission is not an appendix to theology but belongs to the identity and action of God. They have helped Christians read the Old Testament missionally. They have reminded the Church that the nations come into view already in the promises to Abraham, the Psalms, Isaiah, and the prophetic hope. Yet precisely because this paradigm is so influential, its treatment of Israel must be examined carefully.

1.3 Barth, von Rad, Childs, and the Theological Recovery of Scripture

Behind the contemporary mission paradigm lies a wider twentieth-century recovery of Scripture as theological witness. Karl Barth’s influence on biblical theology is important here, even though it operated differently in different figures. Barth helped dislodge the idea

¹⁰ Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

¹¹ Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹² Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 17–60.

¹³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (2nd Edition) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2025), “Election and Supersessionism”, 257–278.

that Scripture could be treated merely as a record of religious development. He reoriented interpretation toward the God who speaks and acts.

Gerhard von Rad developed a salvation-historical and confessional account of Israel's testimony to God's mighty acts. Brevard Childs, in a different way, developed a canonical approach that emphasised the final form of Scripture as the context for theological interpretation. Both sought to move beyond atomised historical criticism, though von Rad remained more closely tied to tradition-historical reconstruction and Childs to canonical final form. Their work helped create the atmosphere in which biblical theology could again ask how Scripture hangs together as theological witness.

This background matters because contemporary mission theology inherits not only a missiological model but a canonical imagination. The question is not whether Scripture has unity, but how that unity is construed. Does the unity of Scripture allow Israel to remain central after Messiah, or does it silently move beyond Israel?

1.4 Soulen and the Problem of Structural Supersessionism

R. Kendall Soulen's critique of the "standard canonical narrative" is indispensable for this discussion. In *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* and more recently in *Irrevocable*, Soulen argues that Christian theology has often told the biblical story in a way that sidelines Israel's election. In *Irrevocable*, he defines supersessionism as the Christian belief that the Jews are no longer God's elect people. He notes that the usual rationales have been that God's covenant with the Jewish people is obsolete or that the Jews have forfeited it, but the essential claim is that Jews are no longer what they once were—God's elect people.¹⁴

Soulen's crucial move is to show that supersessionism is not only punitive or economic. It can also be structural. [SLIDE] The story may be told in such a way that Israel is not explicitly rejected, yet Israel's covenantal life is not structurally central to Christian theology. Soulen's account of the standard canonical narrative identifies its fourfold plot: creation, fall, redemption in Jesus Christ, and final consummation. He argues that Christians absorb this narrative through worship, catechesis, devotion, and theology, often without realising how it shapes their imagination.¹⁵

For Soulen, the contemporary church's affirmation that God's election of the Jewish people is irrevocable poses a serious hermeneutical challenge. It is not enough simply to add Israel back into an unchanged framework. Christians must ask how their customary reading of the Bible harboured supersessionism and how it can be re-envisioned so that Israel's

¹⁴ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); idem, *Irrevocable: The Name of God and the Unity of the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), 5–15.

¹⁵ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, 5–15; cf. Soulen, *God of Israel*, on the standard canonical narrative and structural supersessionism.

irrevocable election appears as an intrinsic part of the Bible's witness to Yeshua the Messiah.¹⁶

Soulen's later work develops this point further. He argues that Christians must read the Bible in a way consistent with the Almighty's identity as the faithful God of Israel, and he identifies two features any canonical construal must honour: the Bible's pancanonical witness to God's irrevocable election of the Jewish people and the unerasable distinction between Israel and the nations that results from it.¹⁷

This distinction between Israel and the nations is decisive. A theology that dissolves the Jew–Gentile distinction into a simple Church–world distinction has not yet become post-supersessionist. It may affirm Israel's importance historically, but it has not allowed Israel's continuing election to reshape the whole.

1.5 Instrumental and Intrinsic Israel

The key question, therefore, is whether the election of Israel is understood instrumentally or intrinsically. In an instrumental account, Israel is chosen in order to serve a wider divine purpose—usually the salvation of the world—and once that purpose is achieved, Israel's distinctive significance diminishes. In an intrinsic account, Israel is loved and chosen not merely for what she does, but for who she is within God's covenantal affection and purpose. Israel's election is not reducible to function, utility, or service to the nations, though it certainly includes mission to the nations. Israel is beloved because God has freely set his love upon her and bound himself to her irrevocably.

This distinction is essential for mission. If the election of Israel is merely instrumental, mission to Israel can be framed as persuading Jews to leave an obsolete covenantal identity and join the Church. If Israel's calling is intrinsic, mission must be reconfigured. Witness to Yeshua remains, but it must not imply that God's purposes for Israel have been fulfilled in the Church. Rather, it must be a summons to recognise Israel's Messiah within Israel's continuing covenantal calling. That summons becomes the theological hinge for a post-supersessionist Messianic Jewish missiology.

1.6 Cornell's Critique of the Dramatic Paradigm

Collin Cornell's recent work intensifies this concern. Cornell argues that much modern biblical theology of mission has been dominated by a "dramatic paradigm," associated with creation–fall–redemption–consummation schemas. In this paradigm, the Fall becomes the controlling problem and mission is construed primarily as God's work of repair. Cornell's

¹⁶ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, 5–15.

¹⁷ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, especially his discussion of God's name, Israel's irrevocable election, and the distinction between Israel and the nations.

concern is not that repair is false. Sin, rupture, exile, idolatry, injustice, and death are real. The problem is that repair becomes too dominant.

In the Wright–Cornell exchange, Wright summarises Cornell’s argument as a critique of the dramatic paradigm’s excessive emphasis on the Fall as the trigger for the rest of the story, which then becomes God’s long-term project to “fix” what the Fall created. Wright acknowledges Cornell’s concern that a relentless focus on repair can obscure the Bible’s emphasis on communion—God’s intention to dwell within creation in loving union with human beings and all creatures.¹⁸

Cornell’s alternative is to foreground God’s desire to draw near. He points to the tabernacle, temple, Song of Songs, blessing, divine nearness, and mutual delight as biblical themes that cannot be reduced to problem-solving. In his response, Cornell argues that if the Old Testament remains an abiding resource for knowing God and discerning God’s mission, it opens thematic possibilities otherwise closed off. He notes that the Song of Songs does not troubleshoot a problem but celebrates desire and delight, and that the tabernacle may be understood not chiefly as mending a breach but as hosting joyful meeting between God and Israel.¹⁹

This is a major contribution. Cornell exposes how a repair-dominated narrative can make earlier realities appear temporary. If Israel functions primarily as part of the repair mechanism, then once repair is accomplished, Israel risks becoming obsolete. Cornell’s concern is that the dramatic paradigm can make Israel, the Hebrew Scriptures, and even the Incarnation vulnerable to instrumentality and obsolescence.²⁰ Cornell’s proposal, which he calls the ‘geometric narrative’, is more focused on communion with God.

1.7 Wright’s Response: Complementarity Rather than Opposition

Wright’s response is important because it prevents Cornell’s critique from becoming a simple rejection of the dramatic narrative. Wright agrees that God’s purpose is communion and that the Bible points toward the dwelling of God with creation. He also insists, however, that dramatic redemption and divine communion need not be opposed. In the exchange, Wright says that the dramatic narrative of redemption and the divine goal of communion are “complementary, not contrary.” He observes that Cornell himself recognises that God’s will toward communion generates God’s will toward repair.²¹

¹⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright and Collin Cornell, “Response to Collin Cornell: *God Draws Near*,” *Journal of the Evangelical Missiological Society* 6, no. 1 (2026): 87–96.

¹⁹ Collin Cornell, response in Wright and Cornell, “Response to Collin Cornell,” 87–96.

²⁰ Richard Harvey, “Beyond Repair? Cornell, Wright, Israel, and the Mission of God,” draft paper, 2026.

²¹ Wright and Cornell, “Response to Collin Cornell,” 87–96.

This is a necessary caution. A post-supersessionist Messianic Jewish missiology should not abandon narrative, redemption, or fulfilment. The issue is not whether the Bible tells a story but how the story is told and whether Israel remains a living covenantal subject after Messiah.

Wright shows how our mission is grounded in the purposes God and reads the Hebrew Bible as the grounds from which the Church's mission emerges. Yet Soulen and Cornell press him—and us—to ask whether the narrative still tends to make Israel's election primarily instrumental. The revised form of the debate should not be “Wright versus Cornell,” but a more integrated question: how can we retain Wright's *missio Dei*, Soulen's post-supersessionist critique, Cornell's recovery of communion, and Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology in one coherent account?

1.8 Why Cornell Does Not Go Far Enough

From a Messianic Jewish perspective, Cornell's proposal is both important and insufficient. It is important because it exposes the danger of obsolescence. It is insufficient because communion alone does not guarantee Israel's ongoing covenantal centrality. The question is not only whether God desires fellowship, but how that fellowship is covenantally structured.

A theology of communion can become too general unless it is tied to Israel's election, Torah, Messiah, and the nations. Cornell helps us see that mission is more than repair. Soulen helps us see that Israel must be restored to the theological foreground. Kinzer helps us see that this restoration must become ecclesially concrete, in a bilateral understanding of the ekklesia in which Jewish disciples of Yeshua remain Jews and the nations remain nations, united but not homogenised.²²

This is the first major claim of the paper: a post-supersessionist biblical narrative must not abandon the drama of Scripture, but it must retell that drama so that Israel is neither merely prologue nor instrument. Israel remains a living, elect, indispensable people in relation to whom the Church itself understands its identity.

2. Tikkun Olam: Repair and Communion within Covenant

2.1 Jewish Meanings of Tikkun Olam

The phrase *tikkun olam* is often translated as “repair of the world,” but its meanings in Jewish thought are varied. In rabbinic usage, the phrase can refer to social ordering, legal measures, and communal responsibility enacted “for the sake of the ordering of the world.”

²² Harvey, “Beyond Repair?”; Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

In later Jewish thought, especially in mystical and modern ethical contexts, it often points more broadly to acts of justice, mercy, healing, and restoration.

In modern Jewish discourse, *tikkun olam* is frequently associated with social responsibility, moral action, and the pursuit of justice. It expresses the conviction that the world, though damaged and disordered, remains the sphere of God's concern and human responsibility. *Tikkun olam* carries meanings from social ordering and communal responsibility to ethical action, justice, and participation in the healing of creation.²³

2.2 A Messianic Jewish Reconfiguration

A Messianic Jewish understanding affirms the emphasis on repair but places it within a wider biblical and covenantal framework. The world does indeed require healing. Sin, violence, exile, injustice, estrangement, and death testify that creation is wounded and needs restoration. Yet *tikkun* is not only about fixing what is broken. Repair is penultimate, not ultimate. It serves something deeper: communion with God.

In this perspective, *tikkun olam* has two complementary dimensions. First, repair: God heals, restores, judges, reconciles, and sets right what has been damaged. Second, communion: God dwells with his people, and creation is brought into reconciled fellowship with its Creator. Repair is necessary, but not ultimate; it leads toward communion with God; mission involves restoration that culminates in covenantal communion between God, Israel, and the nations.

This is where Cornell's emphasis on communion and Wright's emphasis on mission can be held together. Mission certainly includes repair, redemption, restoration, and renewal. But these are not ends in themselves. They serve God's deeper purpose: communion, presence, blessing, and the restoration of all things in covenant fidelity.²⁴

2.3 Covenant as the Form of Communion

The necessary addition from a Messianic Jewish perspective is covenant. Communion must be specified covenantally. God does not draw near to an abstract humanity by bypassing Israel. God draws near as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God who calls Israel; the God who gives Torah; the God who sends Messiah; the God who gathers the nations into blessing without erasing Israel.

Thus *tikkun olam* becomes not simply repair, nor even repair leading to generic fellowship, but repair leading to covenantal communion. God heals creation in order to dwell with

²³ Richard Harvey, Tikkun Olam lecture notes, 2026; cf. Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).

²⁴ Cornell, *God Draws Near: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025); Wright and Cornell, "Response to Collin Cornell."

Israel and the nations in covenantal fullness. This allows mission theology to avoid two reductions. It resists reducing mission to social activism alone, because the goal is communion with God. It also resists reducing mission to individual salvation alone, because God's purpose includes justice, reconciliation, Israel, the nations, and creation.

In Messiah Yeshua, *tikkun olam* takes its fullest meaning. His death and resurrection address sin, hostility, exile, and death. But the *telos* of this work is not merely forgiveness in isolation. It is renewed covenant life, reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, restoration of Israel, inclusion of the nations, and the dwelling of God with creation. Our mission is to actively participate in this process.

3. The Mission of God, Humanity, Israel, the Nations, the Church, and Messianic Jews

3.1 The Mission of God

The mission of God (*missio Dei*) is the foundation of all mission. Mission begins not with the Church but with God's own character and action. God creates, blesses, calls, covenants, sends, redeems, judges, restores, and dwells. The Father sends the Son in the power of the Spirit, and the Church participates in this triune mission.

However, the *missio Dei* has sometimes been too easily abstracted from the God of Israel. A post-supersessionist missiology must insist that the God who sends is the God who names Godself in covenant with Israel. Soulen's emphasis on the Tetragrammaton is relevant here. He argues that attention to the divine name helps Christians read the Bible as a witness to the faithful God of Israel and show that the affirmation of Israel's irrevocable election enhances rather than disrupts the biblical mosaic.²⁵

Therefore, the mission of God is not a general divine benevolence later particularised in Israel. It is the mission of the God of Israel for Israel, the nations, and all creation.

3.2 The Mission of Humanity

The mission of humanity is rooted in creation. Human beings are made in the image of God, called to reflect God's character, steward creation, cultivate life, and live in relationship with God and one another. Mission is therefore not just a response to sin. Human vocation is already present before the Fall.

This is important because it supports Cornell's claim that mission cannot be reduced to repair. If human vocation precedes rupture, then mission includes creation, blessing, cultivation, presence, and communion. Repair restores what has been damaged, but it does

²⁵ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, on the Tetragrammaton and the unity of the Christian Bible.

not create the *telos*. The *telos* is already embedded in creation: life with God and neighbour in a world blessed by God.

3.3 The Mission of Israel

The mission of Israel is the central covenantal expression of God's purposes in history. Israel is called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, to embody Torah, to bear witness to the God of Israel, and to mediate blessing to the nations. The mission of Israel is the central covenantal expression of God's purposes, mediating blessing to the nations.

So Israel's mission is not cancelled. It is not replaced by the Church. Nor is it simply transferred to a universal people in which Israel disappears. Israel's election and mission remain part of God's ongoing purposes. This does not mean that Israel's mission is fulfilled apart from Messiah; rather, Messiah confirms, intensifies, and reveals Israel's calling.

Soulen's reading of Romans 9–11 strongly supports this. In *Irrevocable*, he notes that Paul uses the present tense in Romans 9:4: Jews "are Israelites," and to them belong adoption, glory, covenants, Torah, worship, and promises. Paul then affirms in Romans 11:28–29 that as regards election they are beloved and that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.²⁶

Thus Israel remains a living covenantal partner. The Church cannot understand itself without Israel because the Church is grafted into Israel's story.

3.4 The Mission of the Nations

The mission of the nations is often underdeveloped. In Genesis 12, the nations are blessed in Abraham. In Isaiah 2 and 60, the nations stream to Zion, bring gifts, learn Torah, and worship the God of Israel. In Zechariah 8, ten from the nations take hold of the garment of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." In Romans 11, the nations as unnatural branches are grafted into the olive tree of Israel and are warned not to boast over the natural branches.

The mission of the nations to Israel is therefore not replacement but humility, gratitude, solidarity, partnership, service and witness. The nations do not stand over Israel as those who have taken over the promises. They participate in Israel's blessings because of God's mercy. Their mission includes provoking Israel to jealousy—not through arrogance or pressure, but by displaying the fruits of life in the Spirit. Soulen argues that Paul holds open for the nations a form of indirect mission to Israel in Romans 11:13–14, namely provoking Israel to jealousy through the richness and clarity with which the nations display the fruits of life in the Spirit.²⁷

²⁶ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, on Romans 9:4 and Romans 11:28–29.

²⁷ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, on Romans 11:13–14 and Gentile mission to Israel through provoking jealousy.

This indirect mission remains insufficiently explored. It is a mission of holy attractiveness, not domination; of gratitude, not triumphalism; of participation in Israel's story, not displacement of Israel from it.

3.5 The Mission of the Church

The Church (*ekklesia*) is called to proclaim Messiah, disciple the nations, embody the kingdom, and bear witness to the reconciliation accomplished in Messiah. But the Church must do this while recognising its dependence on Israel. The Church is not the "new Israel" in a sense that makes old Israel obsolete. It is the community of Israel and the nations reconciled in Messiah.

This requires rethinking ecclesiology. The Church of the nations (*ekklesia e gentibus*) must understand itself in relation to the *ekklesia e circumcissione*, the Jewish corporate form of the body of Messiah. Mark Kinzer proposes that bilateral ecclesiology is required if the Gentile *ekklesia* is rightly to claim a share in Israel's inheritance without compromising Israel's integrity or Yeshua's centrality. Kinzer's five basic principles of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* are:

1. The perpetual validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people.
2. The perpetual validity of the Jewish way of life rooted in the Torah as the enduring sign and instrument of that covenant.
3. The validity of Jewish religious tradition as the historical embodiment of the Jewish way of life rooted in Torah.
4. The bilateral constitution of the *ekklesia*, consisting of distinct but united Jewish and Gentile expressions of Yeshua-faith.
5. The ecumenical imperative of the *ekklesia*, which entails bringing the redeemed nations into solidarity with the people of Israel in anticipation of Israel's—and the world's—final redemption.²⁸

This bilateral ecclesiology is not two churches. It is one body with differentiated identity. It affirms unity without erasure and difference without separation.

3.6 The Mission of Messianic Jews

Messianic Jews have a distinctive role within the mission of God. They witness to Yeshua within Israel while maintaining Jewish covenantal identity. They embody continuity between Israel and the *ekklesia*. They testify that the God of Israel remains faithful to Israel and that Yeshua is Messiah of Israel and the nations.

²⁸ Harvey, "Messianic Jewish Theology," section on Kinzer and bilateral ecclesiology; Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*.

Messianic Jews are involved in three dialogues: the Church with the Jewish people, Messianic Jews with non-Jewish Christians, and Jews with Messianic Jews. These dialogues are fraught but essential. Recent developments, including Catholic–Messianic Jewish conversations, have opened new doors for considering the ecclesiological significance of Jewish disciples of Yeshua.²⁹

Messianic Jewish mission is therefore much more than evangelistic activism. It is witness, covenantal fidelity, solidarity with Israel, service to the Church, and participation in the healing of the schism between Judaism and Christianity. It also requires a transformed posture. We need to distinguish “missionary” from “missional” and insists that a missionary posture marked by pride, superiority, or supersessionist displacement is inappropriate. Witness must be expressed with patience, sensitivity, humility, and love.³⁰

This layered account may be summarised as follows:

Level	Missiological significance
God	The source and <i>telos</i> of mission: creating, calling, sending, restoring and dwelling.
Humanity	The creational vocation to image God, steward creation and live toward communion.
Israel	The covenantal people through whom God blesses the nations and reveals his faithfulness.
Nations	The recipients of Abrahamic blessing, called to humility rather than boasting.
Church	The reconciled body in Messiah, called to proclaim, disciple and embody differentiated communion.
Messianic Jews	A living sign within Israel and the ekklesia that Jewish covenantal identity and faith in Yeshua belong together.

²⁹ Harvey, “Messianic Jewish Theology,” on Messianic Jews in three dialogues and Catholic–Messianic Jewish conversations.

³⁰ Richard Harvey, on Messianic Jews, mission, proselytism, and the distinction between missionary and missional language. Ulrich Laepple (Hrg.), *Messianische Juden – eine Provokation*. Mit Beiträgen von Richard Harvey, Peter Hirschberg, Ulrich Laepple, Hanna Rucks, Hans und Rita Scholz. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016.

4. Exegetical Anchors: Romans 9–11 and Ephesians 2

4.1 Romans 9–11: Israel's Present and Future

Romans 9–11 provides New Testament grounding for a post-supersessionist missiology. Paul does not treat Israel's unbelief as evidence that Israel has ceased to be elect. He begins by listing Israel's present privileges: adoption, glory, covenants, Torah, worship, promises, patriarchs, and Messiah according to the flesh. Soulen rightly emphasises the present tense: "they are Israelites."³¹

Romans 11 then addresses Gentile arrogance directly. Gentiles are wild branches grafted into the cultivated olive tree. They do not support the root; the root supports them. Paul's warning—"do not boast over the branches"—is not a minor pastoral aside. It is a foundational principle for Gentile ecclesial identity.

The implication for mission is clear. The Church of the nations must not speak to Israel as if it had replaced Israel. It must witness from within gratitude and dependence. It must recognise that the salvation of the nations depends on God's fidelity to Israel. Soulen makes this systematic point forcefully: covenant history remains the living context—the *Sitz im Leben*—of the Church's life, past, present, and future, and the nations' blessing depends on God's fidelity toward Israel.³²

Romans 11 also places Israel's future in God's hands. Soulen notes that Paul rests his hope for the ultimate salvation of Israel not on the Church's missionary efforts but on God-in-Christ's direct intervention at the end of the age. This does not abolish witness, but it relativises ecclesial triumphalism. The Church does not come nearer to God's kingdom the more Jews it "converts." Both Church and Israel await the Lord's redemptive and healing advent.³³

4.2 Ephesians 2: One New Humanity as Dyadic Unity

Ephesians 2 is often cited to argue that Jewish and Gentile identities are abolished in Christ. But Andrew Rillera's careful study challenges that reading. He argues that "one new humanity" is not a *tertium genus*, a third race in which Jewish and Gentile identities disappear. Rather, it is a dyadic unity: the two are reconciled as two, not dissolved into one homogenised identity.

³¹ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, on Rom 9:4 and the present tense "they are Israelites."

³² Soulen, *Irrevocable*, on covenant history as the living context (*Sitz im Leben*) of the Church and the dependence of the nations' blessing on God's fidelity toward Israel.

³³ Soulen, *Irrevocable*, on Paul's hope for Israel's final salvation and the limits of Gentile missionary agency.

Rillera notes that the NRSV's phrase "in place of the two" in Ephesians 2:15 is problematic because "in place of" does not occur in the Greek text. He argues that the author maintains the duality of "the two" throughout the discussion; the "one body" and "one new humanity" always consist of "both."³⁴

Rillera's conclusion is directly relevant to bilateral ecclesiology. The body "consists of two, that is, of Jews and Gentiles," and does not form a *genus tertium* different from both. He concludes that the one new humanity is not a homogenised singularity but a dyadic unity, preserving both groups rather than obliterating either.³⁵

This supports a post-supersessionist missiology. Mission does not aim to erase Jewish identity or dissolve Gentile identity. It aims at peace, reconciliation, and communion in Messiah, in which Israel and the nations remain differentiated but reconciled.

5. Practical Implications: Mission, Evangelism, and Conversion

5.1 Evangelism Rooted in Israel's Story

Evangelism must be rooted in Israel's story. The gospel is not an abstract message dropped from heaven into a generic humanity. It is the proclamation that the God of Israel has acted in Yeshua the Messiah to fulfil his promises, restore his people, gather the nations, and renew creation. The good news is therefore inseparable from Israel's Scriptures, Israel's Messiah, and Israel's covenantal calling.

This does not reduce the gospel to ethnicity or national destiny. Rather, it protects the gospel from becoming detached from its scriptural and covenantal matrix. The nations are included in Israel's blessing through Messiah, not in a story that leaves Israel behind.

5.2 Should the Jewish People Be Evangelised?

The most sensitive practical question is whether Christians should evangelise Jewish people. Three inadequate answers must be avoided.

The first is supersessionist mission: yes, Jews should be evangelised, but in a way that expects them to leave Jewish identity and enter a Gentile-defined Christianity. This must be rejected because it denies the ongoing covenantal identity of Israel.

The second is postmissionary withdrawal: no, Jews should not be evangelised, because Israel already has its own covenant. This approach rightly rejects coercion and

³⁴ Andrew Remington Rillera, "Tertium Genus or Dyadic Unity? Investigating Sociopolitical Salvation in Ephesians 2," *Biblical Research* 66 (2021): 31–51.

³⁵ Rillera, "Tertium Genus or Dyadic Unity?," 31–51.

supersessionism, but it risks weakening the apostolic witness that Yeshua is Messiah of Israel and the nations.

The third inadequate approach is individualised conversionism, which invites Jews to personal faith but treats Jewish communal identity as irrelevant. This may be less overtly supersessionist, but it still fails to honour Israel's covenantal vocation.

A Messianic Jewish answer is: yes, there is witness to Yeshua among the Jewish people, but it must be transformed. Mission to Israel must be witness within covenant. It must reject coercion, cultural erasure, manipulation, contempt, and triumphalism. It must affirm that Jews who come to Yeshua do not cease to be Jews but are called to live as Jewish disciples of Israel's Messiah.

Jews do not stop being Jewish when they recognise Yeshua as Messiah; indeed, they often identify more strongly with their people. It is natural that they wish to share the Good News with their people and all nations, but the language of mission and proselytism must be carefully unpacked in light of persecution, forced conversion, supersessionism, and theological anti-Judaism.³⁶

5.3 Humility and Repentance

Mission requires humility, repentance, and a truthful reckoning with Christian history. This is especially important in Europe, where any discussion of witness to the Jewish people takes place in the shadow of forced conversions, social exclusion, polemics against the synagogue, Christian complicity in antisemitism, and the Shoah. The Jewish people have too often encountered Christian mission not as good news, but as pressure to abandon Jewish identity, communal life, and covenantal memory.

Postcolonial mission studies deepen this challenge by reminding us that mission has frequently been entangled with power, empire, cultural superiority, and unequal relationships.³⁷ They ask whether mission still has a place after colonialism, and if so, what form it should take. This question is especially acute in contexts where conversion has been perceived as anti-national, anti-communal, or destructive of a people's inherited identity and flourishing.

The Jewish context is not identical to colonial contexts, and it should not be too quickly absorbed into them. Yet there are important resonances. Mission to Jews has often been experienced as an attempt to erase Jewish difference, detach Jews from their people, and incorporate them into a

³⁶ Harvey, Kirchentag article draft, on mission, proselytism, and Jewish discipleship to Yeshua.

³⁷ J. Jayakiran Sebastian, "Christian Mission and Postcolonialism: Re-Reading the Bible, the Theology, and the Call," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mission Studies*, ed. Kirsteen Kim and Alison Fitchett-Climenhaga (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 348–64. Harvey C. Kwiyani. *Decolonizing Mission*. London, SCM Press, 2025.

Gentile Christian body on Gentile Christian terms. In this respect, postcolonial critique and post-supersessionist theology converge. Both expose forms of mission that turn the other into an object: an object of conquest, correction, conversion, civilisation, or theological fulfilment.

The issue, therefore, is not only whether Christians should bear witness to Yeshua, but from what posture, with what memory, and with what account of power. Mission becomes distorted when it is carried by superiority, empire, money, cultural control, or a theology that assumes the Church has simply taken Israel's place. In relation to the Jewish people, this distortion is intensified by supersessionism. Israel has too often been treated as a people whose vocation has expired, whose Scriptures have been transferred, and whose Messiah can be proclaimed without honouring Israel's continuing election.

A post-supersessionist missiology must therefore receive Kwiyani's warning that the gospel does not need empire.³⁸ But it must also add: the gospel does not need the erasure of Israel. Witness to Yeshua must not require Jews to become less Jewish, nor should mission to the Jewish people be imagined as a project of ecclesial possession. It must be shaped instead by repentance, listening, humility, service, reconciliation, and deep respect for Israel's enduring covenantal identity.

Such a missiology does not abandon witness. Rather, it purifies witness. It calls the Church to speak of Yeshua without triumphalism, to confess its sins without defensiveness, and to approach the Jewish people not as a failed relic of salvation history but as the beloved people of God, still bearing an irrevocable vocation. Mission, in this frame, becomes less about control and more about faithful presence: witness without erasure, proclamation without coercion, and reconciliation without replacement.

5.4 Discipleship within Jewish Life

If Jewish disciples of Yeshua remain Jews, then discipleship must respect covenantal identity. This includes Jewish communal belonging, Torah-shaped life, liturgy, festivals, family practice, solidarity with the Jewish people, and engagement with Jewish tradition. Contemporary Messianic Jewish life includes observance of the Jewish calendar, lifecycle practices such as circumcision and bar/bat mitzvah, and diverse practices of baptism and communion. We should also note the influence of Jews in churches and groups such as

³⁸ Harvey C. Kwiyani. *Decolonizing Mission*. London, SCM Press, 2025. Richard Harvey, "Radical Integration: Jewish Disciples of Jesus, Missions to the Jews and the Construction of Hebrew Christian Identity". Oxford Companion, forthcoming

Yachad BeYeshua, which situate Messianic Jewish life within the wider Jewish world rather than primarily within evangelical Protestantism.³⁹

This has practical implications for churches. Churches should not encourage Jewish believers to abandon Jewish life. They should support Messianic Jewish congregations and communities. They should recognise Jewish disciples of Yeshua as a living sign of Israel's ongoing election and the Church's dependence on Israel.

Conclusion

The challenge posed by God's covenant with Israel is not peripheral to Christian mission. It is foundational. If Israel remains elect, then the Church's mission cannot be structured as replacement, domination, or assimilation. It must be reconfigured as participation in the ongoing purposes of the God of Israel.

This paper has argued that a post-supersessionist Messianic Jewish missiology requires three shifts. First, the biblical narrative must be retold so that Israel is not merely instrumental but intrinsic. Wright, Goheen, and Glasser help us see the unity of Scripture and the centrality of mission, but Soulen shows that the standard canonical narrative can remain structurally supersessionist. Cornell then exposes how repair-dominated mission theology can render Israel vulnerable to obsolescence. Yet Cornell must be supplemented by a thicker doctrine of Israel's ongoing election and by Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology.

Second, mission must be understood as repair leading to communion within covenant. *Tikkun olam* helps articulate this synthesis. God repairs the world not merely to make it functional, but to dwell with Israel and the nations in covenantal fullness.

Third, mission must be practised with humility. Evangelism remains proclamation of Yeshua as Messiah, but it must be rooted in Israel's story, shaped by repentance for anti-Judaism, and attentive to Jewish covenantal continuity. The Church of the nations is not called to replace Israel, but to join Israel's story through Messiah and to bear humble witness to the God whose gifts and calling are irrevocable.

Mission is therefore transformed: from replacement to participation, from domination to humility, from repair alone to repair leading to communion. The nations are included within Israel's covenantal story through Messiah, and Jewish disciples of Yeshua stand as living signs of the reconciliation still promised, still contested, and still awaited.

³⁹ Harvey, "Messianic Jewish Theology," on contemporary Messianic Jewish life, postmissionary Messianic Judaism, Hashivenu, and Jewish covenantal practice. Yachad BeYeshua. <https://www.yachad-beyeshua.org/>

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