

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

A Post-Supersessionist Messianic Jewish Missiology

Opening frame

- Main question: What happens to Christian mission if God's covenant with Israel is ongoing, irrevocable, and central to biblical theology?
- This is not only a question of missionary method; it concerns the Christian telling of Scripture, the identity of the Church, the Jewish people, and witness to Messiah.
- Key thesis: if Israel remains elect, mission cannot be structured as replacement; it must be reconfigured as participation in Israel's ongoing vocation within the purposes of God.
- In the Finnish/Lutheran context, this question is sharpened by holistic mission, diakonia, ecumenical sensitivity, Jewish-Christian relations, repentance for anti-Judaism, religious freedom, support for Messianic Jews, and the Israel-Palestine context.

Working definitions

- Church: the ekklesia called together in Messiah, beginning within Israel's own story.
- Gentiles: the ethnē, the nations — collective peoples, not merely non-Jewish individuals.
- Mission: not coercive proselytism or 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.
- Messianic Jewish theology: reflection shaped by two epistemic priorities — Israel's continuing election and Yeshua's messiahship.

1. Telling the biblical narrative in a post-supersessionist mode

1.1 Narrative matters for mission

- Mission always presupposes a story: who God is, what God has done, what has gone wrong, what God is doing to set it right, and who is called to participate.
- The familiar narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation gives coherence and shows that mission begins with God, not with the Church.
- The danger: Israel can become only a middle episode — useful for preparing Messiah, but no longer central after Christ and the emergence of the Church.
- Problem to name: narrative displacement, not only explicit rejection of Israel.

1.2 The dominant mission paradigm

- Glasser: mission located in the whole biblical economy and the story of God's kingdom.
- Goheen: the Church as sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom within the biblical story.
- Christopher Wright: the whole Bible read through the lens of the mission of God; the Hebrew Bible recovered as a central resource for mission theology.
- Question to press: does this paradigm allow Israel to remain intrinsic, or does it subtly make Israel instrumental?

1.3 Theological recovery of Scripture

- Barth, von Rad, and Childs helped recover Scripture as theological witness and canonical drama.
- The issue is not whether Scripture has unity, but how that unity is construed.
- Post-supersessionist test: does the unity of Scripture allow Israel to remain a living covenantal subject after Messiah?

1.4 Soulen: structural supersessionism

- Supersessionism is not only punitive ("Jews forfeited election") or economic ("Israel was a temporary stage").
- It can also be structural: the Christian story is told so that Israel's covenantal life is no longer central.
- Soulen's corrective: any Christian canonical account must honour the Bible's witness to Israel's irrevocable election and the unerasable distinction between Israel and the nations.

- A theology that dissolves Jew and Gentile into a simple Church/world distinction is not yet post-supersessionist.

1.5 Instrumental or intrinsic Israel?

- Instrumental Israel: Israel is chosen for the sake of a wider divine purpose and then becomes less significant once that purpose is fulfilled.
- Intrinsic Israel: Israel is loved, chosen, and bound to God by covenantal affection and promise, not reducible to usefulness.
- Mission implication: witness to Yeshua must be a summons to recognise Israel’s Messiah within Israel’s continuing covenantal calling, not a call to leave Jewish identity behind.

1.6 Cornell and Wright: repair and communion

- Cornell critiques the “dramatic paradigm” when the fall becomes the controlling problem and mission becomes mainly God’s work of repair.
- Cornell foregrounds communion: God draws near; tabernacle, temple, blessing, divine presence, Song of Songs, desire, delight.
- Wright responds that dramatic redemption and divine communion are complementary, not contrary.
- Messianic Jewish synthesis: retain Wright’s missio Dei, Soulen’s critique, Cornell’s communion, and Kinzer’s bilateral ecclesiology.
- Where Cornell needs supplementation: communion must be covenantally specified through Israel’s election, Torah, Messiah, and the nations.

2. Tikkun olam: repair and communion within covenant

- Tikkun olam can mean social ordering, communal responsibility, ethical action, justice, mercy, healing, and restoration.
- A Messianic Jewish reconfiguration affirms repair but refuses to make repair ultimate.
- Repair: God heals, restores, judges, reconciles, and sets right what has been damaged.
- Communion: God dwells with his people and brings creation into reconciled fellowship with its Creator.
- Covenant: the form of communion. God draws near as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God who calls Israel, gives Torah, sends Messiah, and gathers the nations without erasing Israel.
- Mission is therefore repair leading to covenantal communion between God, Israel, the nations, and creation.

3. The layered mission of God, humanity, Israel, the nations, the Church, and Messianic Jews

Use this section as the central map of the lecture. Each level is distinct but interdependent.

| Level | Missiological significance |
|----------------|--|
| God | Source and telos of mission: creating, blessing, calling, covenanting, sending, redeeming, judging, restoring, and dwelling. |
| Humanity | Creational vocation to image God, steward creation, cultivate life, and live toward communion with God and neighbour. |
| Israel | The covenantal people through whom God blesses the nations, reveals his faithfulness, and maintains an ongoing vocation. |
| Nations | Recipients of Abrahamic blessing, called to humility, gratitude, solidarity, partnership, service, and non-boasting toward Israel. |
| Church | The reconciled body in Messiah, called to proclaim, disciple, embody the kingdom, and live as differentiated communion. |
| Messianic Jews | A living sign within Israel and the ekklesia that Jewish covenantal identity and faith in Yeshua belong together. |

Kinzer’s bilateral ecclesiology

- The ekklesia is one body with differentiated identity, not two churches and not a homogenised “third race.”
- Jewish disciples of Yeshua remain Jews; the nations remain nations; unity is real but does not require erasure.
- The Church of the nations must understand itself in relation to the ekklesia e circumcissione and in solidarity with Israel’s ongoing vocation.

4. Exegetical anchors

4.1 Romans 9-11

- Romans 9:4 uses the present tense: “they are Israelites”; to them belong adoption, glory, covenants, Torah, worship, promises, patriarchs, and Messiah according to the flesh.
- Romans 11: Gentiles are wild branches grafted into Israel’s cultivated olive tree; they do not support the root, the root supports them.
- Paul’s warning — “do not boast over the branches” — is foundational for Gentile ecclesial identity.
- Israel’s final salvation rests in God’s faithful action, not in Gentile missionary triumphalism.
- Mission implication: witness to Israel must be marked by gratitude, dependence, humility, and hope in God’s irrevocable gifts and calling.

4.2 Ephesians 2

- Ephesians 2 is often read as if Jewish and Gentile identities are abolished in Christ.
- Rillera’s reading: “one new humanity” is not a tertium genus that replaces Jew and Gentile, but a dyadic unity in which the two are reconciled as two.
- The “one body” consists of both; peace is not homogenisation.
- Mission implication: reconciliation in Messiah preserves differentiated identity while overcoming hostility.

5. Practical implications for mission, evangelism, and conversion

5.1 Evangelism rooted in Israel’s story

- The gospel is the proclamation that the God of Israel has acted in Yeshua the Messiah to fulfil promises, restore Israel, gather the nations, and renew creation.
- Evangelism must not detach Yeshua from Israel’s Scriptures, Israel’s Messiahship, and Israel’s covenantal calling.
- The nations are included in Israel’s blessing through Messiah, not in a replacement story that leaves Israel behind.

5.2 Should the Jewish people be evangelised?

- Reject supersessionist mission: Jews are not called to leave Jewish identity for Gentile-defined Christianity.
- Question postmissionary withdrawal: respect for Israel’s covenant must not silence apostolic witness to Yeshua as Messiah of Israel and the nations.
- Reject individualised conversionism: personal faith cannot make Jewish communal identity irrelevant.
- Messianic Jewish answer: yes, there is witness to Yeshua among the Jewish people, but it must be witness within covenant.
- Such witness rejects coercion, cultural erasure, manipulation, contempt, and triumphalism.
- Jews who come to Yeshua do not cease to be Jews; they are called to live as Jewish disciples of Israel’s Messiah.

5.3 Humility, repentance, and postcolonial critique

- European mission to the Jewish people must be discussed in the shadow of forced conversions, social exclusion, polemics against the synagogue, Christian complicity in antisemitism, and the Shoah.
- Postcolonial mission studies expose the ways mission can become entangled with power, empire, money, cultural control, and the objectification of the other.
- The Jewish context is not identical to colonial contexts, but there are resonances where mission has been experienced as erasure of communal life.
- Kwiyani’s warning: the gospel does not need empire. Messianic Jewish addition: the gospel does not need the erasure of Israel.
- Mission is purified, not abandoned: witness without erasure, proclamation without coercion, reconciliation without replacement.

5.4 Discipleship within Jewish life

- Jewish disciples of Yeshua remain Jews and should be supported in Jewish communal belonging, Torah-shaped life, liturgy, festivals, family practice, solidarity with the Jewish people, and engagement with Jewish tradition.
- Churches should not encourage Jewish believers to abandon Jewish life.

- Churches should support Messianic Jewish congregations and communities, and recognise Jewish disciples of Yeshua as a living sign of Israel's ongoing election and the Church's dependence on Israel.

Conclusion: three shifts

1. Retell the biblical narrative so that Israel is intrinsic, not merely instrumental.
 2. Understand mission as repair leading to communion within covenant.
 3. Practise mission with humility, repentance, and covenantal respect.
- Final movement: 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.

Possible discussion questions

- Where does our usual telling of the biblical story place Israel after the coming of Messiah?
- How can Christian mission retain proclamation of Yeshua without implying Jewish covenantal obsolescence?
- What would it mean for Gentile churches to "provoke Israel to jealousy" through humility, holiness, and the fruits of the Spirit rather than pressure or triumphalism?
- How do repair, communion, and covenant reshape the meaning of mission in Finland, Europe, and Israel-Palestine?

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