



## The Place of Israel in the Theology of N.T. Wright

### Session #1: Recapturing the Jewishness of the New Testament Message - The Strength of N.T. Wright's Israel-Christology

#### Wright's Statement of Purpose: Recovering the Jewishness of the New Testament Message

"...nineteenth century historians frequently ignored the Jewishness of Jesus, trying as hard as they could to universalize him, to make him the timeless teacher of eternal verities." (JVG 20)

"The Old Quest [for the historical Jesus] was determined that Jesus should look as little like a first-century Jew as possible." (JVG 85)

"One of the central arguments of this whole book...is that Paul remained stubbornly and intentionally a deeply Jewish thinker." (PFG 1408)

"The Christians, from the start, behaved not as a new variety of pagan religion but as a new and strange variety of Judaism..." (PFG 278)

#### A Jewish Narrative Structure

- The traditional four act drama: creation / fall / redemption / consummation
- Wright's five act drama: creation / fall / Israel / Jesus / church-and-kingdom

#### A Jewish Theological Structure

- Monotheism, election, and eschatology

"Jesus affirmed Israel's election, Israel's belief in her god, and Israel's eschatological hope. But this status, this theology and this aspiration were to be redefined around a new set of symbols." (JVG 395-96)

"When, therefore, we allow Paul's native Jewish world to set the theological agenda...we see the three major points of what might be called 'Jewish theology'...substantially reinterpreted, reworked, around the Messiah and the spirit. The three categories are monotheism, election and eschatology: one God, one people of God, one future for God's world." (PFG 46)

"The symbolic world of first-century Judaism has been rethought from top to bottom, even while its underlying theology (monotheism, election, and eschatology) has been explicitly retained." (JVG 218)

#### Jewish Patterns of Thought

"This protestant impulse has regularly tended to cut the connecting cables between faith and obedience" (PFG 1096)

"It is a measure of how far the church has travelled from Paul's vision that Romans has often been read as a book about individual salvation rather than as a treatise on the nature of the people of God." (Climax, 252)

"The true statement that baptism makes is a statement about the baptized community in Christ, with the truth of the dying and rising of the particular individual who is baptized on this or that occasion being a function of that larger reality... The primary point of baptism, then, is not so much 'that it does something to the individual', though it does, but that it defines the community of the baptized as the Messiah's people." (PFG 423)



## The Place of Israel in the Theology of N.T. Wright

### Session #2: Jewishness without the Jews? The Weakness of N.T. Wright's Israel-Christology

#### Wright's Jewish Problem: The Jewish *People* as Theologically Insignificant

##### Synoptic Gospels: Jesus Transcends the "Symbol" of Jewish Identity

- Jesus' statements about divine judgment
- Jesus' statements about the priority of his own person

##### Pauline Letters: Jewish Identity Endures Only Outside the Jesus-Community, and Only for Individuals

"Paul is differentiating between the two different routes by which these two groups came into the one, single family: gentiles were brought in from the outside; Jews, already in a sense within the covenant, were renewed as such by the gift of the spirit, whose first evidence is faith. And he is thereby highlighting the things each group particularly needed: gentiles, to inherit the Abrahamic blessing; Jews, to be renewed in covenant membership." (PFG 864)

"When God brings a Gentile to faith, this is a creation out of nothing; the person had no previous covenant membership of any sort...When God brings a Jew to share the faith of Abraham, this is more like a life out of death, a renewal of covenant membership after the threat of being cut off..." (Romans 498)

- The basis for Jewish identity outside the Jesus-community: (1) descent from the patriarchs; (2) familial connection to Jesus; (3) sanctification by the Jewish disciples of Jesus
- Jews outside the Jesus-community have a special relationship to the death and resurrection of Jesus  
"[I]f Israel has embodied the *casting away* of the Messiah, Israel will now find a way to share his *resurrection* as well. And the word Paul uses for the way by which they will get there is *proslēmpsis*, 'acceptance'...if Israel, as the Messiah's people, have lived through the historical equivalent of his crucifixion, being 'cast away for the reconciliation of the world', then *we should expect some equivalent of the resurrection*. This expectation grounds and sustains the hope held out in chapter 11" (PFG 1198-99)
- The central question of Romans 11: are Jews outside the Jesus-community still "saveable"?

#### Final Assessment