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Simon J. Gathercole

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**M. A. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*:<sup>1</sup>  
A Review Article**

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**Key words:** M. A. Elliott; remnant; Second-Temple Judaism; E. P. Sanders.

The often quoted 'All Israel has a share in the world to come' (m. Sanhedrin 10.1) is often taken to be programmatic for Israel's self-understanding. E.P. Sanders has championed the view that this is true not only for the rabbinic period, but also for the earlier Second-Temple period, despite a considerable number of texts which see the works of the individual and the nation as also crucial (as focused on by more traditional presentations of Judaism). Elliott's thesis is that neither nationalistic nor individualistic portrayals of covenant theology do justice to a key group of texts from the Second-Temple period. Rather, for certain groups within that period, the covenant and salvation are the sole preserve of a *remnant* of Israel. Here we will examine briefly the content and the argument of this fascinating book, then assess some of its strengths and weaknesses, and finally explore some of the wider implications of its contribution in the current climate of research on Second-Temple Judaism and its relation to NT studies.

**Content and Argument**

The book, which started life as a doctoral thesis written under Prof I. H. Marshall at the University of Aberdeen, is nicely produced, well written, and for a book of its size, almost without spot or blemish from typographical errors. Because it is so long, reading it cover to cover is clearly not for the faint-hearted, with most of the twelve chapters being 60 pp. long. Elliott leaves no stone unturned, however, and mounts his assault on the nationalistic conception of Sec-

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1 Mark Adam Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids, USA/ Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000). xiv + 760pp. softcover. ISBN 0-8028-4483-9.

ond-Temple Judaism from historical, theological, and sociological angles, with reference primarily to the Dead Sea Scrolls, 1 Enoch, Jubilees, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Assumption of Moses, Psalms of Solomon, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch.

The argument proceeds very logically through clearly defined stages. Having justified its existence (Chapter 1: Why Another Book on Judaism?), the book evaluates the current state of the question in Jewish studies on this issue: 'Conventional Nationalistic Views of Election in Judaism'. Elliott is not an exponent of the view that the plurality of Judaisms in the Second-Temple period makes analysis impossible. With respect to the Pseudepigrapha on which he focuses in particular, he presumes 'a basic and reasonably intact set of beliefs presumed by these authors' (p. 6). In the secondary literature he sees three key tenets of Jewish 'theology' as particularly emphasised. First, the Jewish doctrine of God, which despite the very diverse forms of Second-Temple Judaism, does find some degree of common expression. Second, there is 'the preeminent place of law' (p. 28). But it is the third pillar of Judaism which Elliott seeks to question: 'the doctrine, widely assumed to belong *universally* to Judaism, of the *irrevocable national election of Israel*' (p. 28). He cites Bonsirven, Koehler, and Dunn as exponents of this position, which has been bolstered by a view of Judaism as unchanging (a later Rabbinic understanding of national election being read into the earlier period) and by the marginalising of texts which question a doctrine of national election (p. 39). Elliott's challenge to this prevailing attitude focuses on the 'remnant theology' of Early Judaism (p. 47). Such a motif has been noted before by figures as important as W.D. Davies and J. Jeremias, but because of a negative attitude to remnant theology, it was not granted its due importance (pp. 47-48). Furthermore, the clearest remnant theology, to be found in the Qumran texts, is too often dismissed by scholars as an exception (p. 49).

The first plank in Elliott's argument is his chapter entitled 'The Judgment-of-Israel Theme'. Looking first at the Qumran texts, he notes the abundant descriptions of the vast majority of Israel disobeying God and the Law, and standing subject to God's present and/or future judgment. On 1 Enoch, Elliott notes that in the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 83-90) 'a clear distinction is intended and for the most part sustained between two groups of sheep (and offspring) *both from Israel*' (p. 77). In looking at the Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36), Elliott criticises Sanders for seeing those who are not rescued from judgment as merely the exceptions within Israel. As he indicates later, the remnant can be a very small minority within Israel in the texts under discussion, with the vast majority not escaping 'a very serious and widespread judgment' (p. 86). Elliott goes on to

develop this analysis of Israel's apostasy as widespread, not consisting in exceptional cases (pp. 108-113). For these texts, the majority of Israel has desecrated the festivals, abandoned the true calendar, and exceeded even the gentiles in various vices.

The next stage of his argument complements the *negative* evidence from the previous chapter, which detailed the criteria for condemnation of wicked Israelites. Chapter 4, 'Limits on the Community of Salvation', identifies the 'positive evidence' of the 'defining criteria for membership within the community' (p. 115). Here Elliott argues that each of the texts under examination presupposes and advocates that special revelation, which is necessary for salvation, has been made known to the relevant group. It is *revelation of knowledge* that is the key to the doctrine of special election. Here, Elliott's position differs slightly from that of Seifrid, who sees 'ethnocentric covenantalism' breaking down because of groups defining themselves over against each other – and thus drawing distinctions within Israel – on the basis of *behaviour*.<sup>2</sup> On a different note, it might be asked why Elliott contrasts the criteria for eschatological judgment of the wicked with the criteria for membership *in the present* of the community of the righteous. Is this comparing like with like?

Chapter 5, 'Reform and Dissent – The Sociohistorical Context', is a long historical section, which seeks to account for the development of understandings of special election through the complex events of, in particular, the last three centuries B.C. Elliott examines the various approaches to this material (with some particularly interesting critiques of sociological methods) and concludes with an attempt to define the diverse groups which constitute this non-nationalistic movement of dissent and protest. Echoing his dissatisfaction with anachronistic social-scientific categories, Elliott names these communities, by a properly Jewish category, as '*Remnant Groups*' (pp. 242-243).

The next two chapters, 'Dualistic Covenant Theology' and 'Soteriological Dualism', return to a more theological perspective. Elliott makes the important point that the covenant is not unambiguously a vehicle of *salvation*, *contra* the impression certainly given in Sanders' work, for example.<sup>3</sup> The 'witnesses' to the covenant, which – as Elliott shows – are very prominent in the literature, are by and large testimony to the fact that Israel has failed in her obedience to God. Fur-

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2 M.A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith. The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSupps; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 133.

3 E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), esp. 147-182.

thermore, Elliott shows that, in the texts with which he is dealing, the covenant tends towards being individualistic and conditional (see conclusions on pp. 306-307). Chapter 7 modifies this somewhat, however, putting forward the view that 'soteriology is no longer centred on the nation, nor has it become entirely individual, but – has become *ipso facto a corporate soteriology* focused on a remnant of Israelites' (p. 354).

Pneumatology is a crucial ingredient in this scheme. The majority of Israel has been abandoned to a spirit of apostasy. (This is shown in particular in the apocalyptic literature, which Elliott argues forcefully as concerned *primarily* with Israel's past history, rather than primarily with eschatology [esp. pp. 356-359]). On the other hand, certain groups claim distinctive possession of *God's Spirit*, which permits participation in the divinely prescribed order of the cosmos, and in angelic worship (pp. 414-415). This enables escape from future judgment, which is historically foreshadowed in the 'all-important flood paradigm' (pp. 424-432).

Eschatology very often includes the appearance of a Messiah figure, and the texts under discussion feature, crucially, 'an a-nationalistic messianology' (p. 436). The Messiah is rather a 'paradigmatic figure believed to *reappear* at the end of time' (p. 513). As a paradigmatic figure, then, the reappears for those who are associated with him, that is to say, for the remnant.

The last quarter of the book is actually the most enigmatic. Beginning with drawing many of the foregoing strands together in discussion of 'Eschatology in a Dualistic Context' (Chapter 11), Elliott reacts against 'end-of-the-world' views of eschatology, maintaining that in fact the coming of an 'end' is not as central to the texts under discussion as is often assumed (p. 542). Elliott emphasises (over-emphasises, in the reviewer's opinion) the importance of realised eschatology (e.g. p. 545), though future vindication is also affirmed. This is, again, the 'vindication, not of all Israel, it should be emphasised, but of those deemed to be righteous [in this case by 4 Ezra]' (p. 569). The literary function of this theology is, as one might expect, consolation to the righteous, and warning to the wicked (p. 573). The twist in the tale, however, comes at the end of this chapter. However exclusive the views of election and revelation are in these texts, a national restoration of Israel is never *quite* abandoned:

'This betrays a persistent hope for the eventual salvation of the nation. However, even this belief is dominated by a strict and exclusive soteriology usually resulting in a qualified understanding of restoration, which itself confirms the seriousness of the departure of this movement from more nationally oriented theologies' (p. 573).

The final chapter, 'Destruction-Preservation Soteriology', explores this tension between the exclusivist soteriology of these remnant groups, and the motif of the vindication of the remnant by the majority of Israel, with a concomitant participation (to a limited extent) of this majority in the restoration:

'The faithful remnant of the present, having perceived an unprecedented degree of apostasy in the nation, and having voiced its protest against the present state of things in Israel, firmly believed that its message of protest and teachings about true righteousness would eventually be vindicated – not only by the Gentiles, but especially, even more significantly, by the 'elect' nation itself *as it honored the remnant and eventually joined their cause*. In this way the nation Israel would finally fulfill their calling, and the pious in Israel would then be able to make sense of all the distress, persecution and apostasy they were facing' (p. 637).<sup>4</sup>

The book ends with a conclusion outlining some of the implications of these results for New Testament studies. (There is a particularly interesting sub-section defending the authenticity of the Matthean *ekklesia* traditions). This conclusion proposes that the 'remnant theology' of the NT be seen in continuity with these texts that Elliott has analysed. Again, Elliott has E.P. Sanders in his sights, and opposes the notion that Jesus does not make a break with the traditional theology of the irrevocable election of Israel.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

The importance of Elliott's argument more than justifies this lengthy exposition. To turn to some analysis, Elliott shows particular skill both in handling the 'big picture', and in the exegesis of particular Jewish texts. His methodology is careful not to be one-sided: for example, he is well aware of the reductionism which results from the prioritising of sociological concerns over against other factors. This is shown particularly in his analysis of the history of 'reform and dissent' in Judaism from the early days right up to Herod's time. He astutely observes that to read the developments in this period merely as political (or, for that matter, merely religious) struggles cannot possibly do justice to their complexity. In the first place, Elliott notes that often sociological tools are brought to the study of Judaism from elsewhere (either from NT Studies, or from contemporary sociological theory), and are not particularly well suited to the study of Second-Temple Judaism. Secondly, he observes that

'If one adds to these considerations the fact that during the lengthy period covered by these writings (third century B.C. to second century A.D.) one

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4 Emphasis mine.

witnesses a *wide* spectrum of political situations, including periods of political and national rebuilding (Ezra and Nehemiah), of oppressive subjugation (Ptolemies and Seleucids, Romans), of national revival (Maccabees), of military destruction (the second Jewish war), and of consolidation (the Tannaites), it becomes obviously futile to try to apply with consistent or dependable results any single typology based on political considerations' (p. 202).

Elliott is also particularly adept in his use of sources, displaying admirable judgment in being swayed neither by the weight of the scholarly status quo, nor by a desire for novelty. He pursues his argument rigorously, but usually without stretching the texts on a procrustean bed of his own devising. *Survivors of Israel* continually sends the reader away to look up passages in the Pseudepigrapha and read them with new eyes again. For example, against those who would see 4 Ezra as a contributor to the broader debate within post-70 Judaism, he argues convincingly that 4 Ezra is in fact a kind of sectarian text, advocating adherence to 70 secret books which are revealed only to the wise (4 Ez 14.37-48: see pp. 137-138). Thus, the book belongs in a trajectory beginning with 1 Enoch and Jubilees, rather than having greater affinity with, for example, the Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition. Elliott tends not to speak in terms of historical trajectories, however, and opts for the more cautious approach of categorising texts (with Neusner) according to their traits (as a 'community of texts'), rather than trying to connect them by their historical origins (p. 8).

The reader does need constantly to remember that Elliott is only dealing with a small selection of texts in his analysis. Except in Chapter 5, there is no discussion of more 'nationalistic' texts such as Tobit, Sirach, or 1 and 2 Maccabees. Elliott is in grave danger of being misunderstood as claiming remnant theology as integral to *the* theology of Second-Temple Judaism. The book's subtitle, 'A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism', and the back cover's statement that the book 'argues that the intertestamental writings do not anticipate the salvation of all Jews but only of a faithful remnant within Israel' are misleading in this respect. Elliott is generally more careful in his expression in the book, but nevertheless, he is in danger of being heard as attributing remnant theology far more widely than he actually is. The reader can easily gain the impression that Jewish texts are all 'protest' with no 'establishment' to protest against.

A number of points of detail could be debated. For example, in his treatment of 1 Enoch, Elliott makes frequent reference to 1 Enoch 108. Since, however, both the Greek manuscript and the Qumran fragments conclude with the end of chapter 107, it seems very likely that the last chapter is only added at some point in the Ethiopic transmission of the text. Again, in his treatment of 4 Ezra, Elliott is per-

haps harsh in his evaluation of 'divine disinterest in Ezra's arguments' (p. 103). Rather, Richard Bauckham is probably correct to speak of the text taking seriously Ezra's arguments, without actually endorsing them.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Elliott seems to endorse (p. 178) the often-repeated misunderstanding of Ezra's statement that God can be merciful 'to those who have no store of good works' (8.36), a statement which is repudiated by the angel Uriel shortly afterwards (8.47 *et al*). Elliott overplays his hand in his treatment of Psalms of Solomon, and overinterprets some of more sectarian-sounding statements arguing that 'there is evidence, for example, that the standard understanding of the Law is not felt to be enough' (p. 141). The basis for this is reference to the faithful community as 'those who know your righteous judgments' (Pss. Sol. 5.1) who confess God's name 'in truth' (15.2). However, this is more likely to refer to those who are steadfast in holding to the public Torah, in contrast with those who live in wickedness, and have thereby renounced those righteous judgments. There is no real justification for seeing reference to a 'group that has been granted insight into crucially important revelations' (p. 141).

These criticisms, however, do not detract from the fact that Elliott's overall argument is ultimately persuasive. He navigates his way remarkably skilfully through a vast range of secondary literature, and is perceptive in his evaluation of currents of research in different areas. To be acquainted with secondary material in such a number of areas of Second-Temple Judaism (eschatology, election, the calendar, messianology, pneumatology – the list could go on) is impressive to say the least.

But it is Elliott's sustained analysis of the primary sources that makes the book what it is. The organisation of the chapters means that the case becomes stronger as the book progresses, and each chapter is packed with detailed examination of the relevant texts. Elliott is always approaching these texts from fresh angles, which are nevertheless not so 'fresh' that the results are far-fetched. His discussion is a model of what analysis of Second-Temple Judaism should be.

### Wider Implications

Briefly, some implications for NT studies in particular. One of the positions which Elliott struggles against is what he perceives to be a downplaying of remnant theology by scholars such as J. Jeremias and

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5 R.J. Bauckham, 'The Conflict of Justice and Mercy: Attitudes to the Damned in Apocalyptic Literature', in *idem*, *The Fate of the Dead* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 138.



W.D. Davies, because of its supposed *inferiority*. This raises an issue of particular sensitivity, as it relates to the ideological status of certain portrayals of Judaism. One might also want to pose to some New Perspective scholars the similar question of why their portrait of Judaism (irrespective of whether it is true or not) is more ideologically sound than the Lutheran caricature. Many modern scholars, particularly in Pauline Studies but also in Gospels scholarship and Jewish studies more widely, see the old Lutheran paradigm of a Judaism of works-righteousness as intrinsically anti-Jewish. It has even had responsibility for the holocaust laid on its shoulders. However, why is an exclusivist, nationalistic understanding of Judaism *less* anti-Jewish? Elliott wisely avoids any such claim to the moral high ground for his reconstruction, and it is hoped that Elliott's reconstruction will not be regarded as 'negative'.

One way in which Elliott's study contributes to the frequently debated issue of 'works' in Judaism is in his setting of obedience in its *cosmological* context. This is now being increasingly emphasised by scholars. This setting raises problems both for the traditional understandings of works as abstract moral good deeds, or as good deeds which earn salvation *tout simple*, but also for the New Perspective on Paul's focus on the *national* dimensions of works as boundary markers which mark off Israel from the gentiles, or in the case of texts like 4QMMT, properly Torah-observant Israelites from misguided, heterodox Israelites. Two (inseparable) dimensions of the relationship between obedience and cosmology call for a re-evaluation of both these positions. 'New Perspective' scholars often argue for an emphasis on the *covenantal* character of obedience in Jewish texts from the Second-Temple period, and rightly so. Elliott himself sternly criticises those who downplay the importance of the covenant (see e.g. pp. 245-246). But Elliott also rightly emphasises the cosmological background to the covenant (see esp. p. 157). He draws on such texts as the Book of Watchers (in 1 Enoch 2.1) which draws attention to the harmony which should exist between the stars which move according to their seasons and observe the festivals, and the righteous, who observe the festivals according to the same pattern (p. 84). The other aspect of cosmology relates not to the patterns of stars, but to the heavenly organisation of angelic worship. Here Elliott draws on the work of Jaubert, who sees in the Dead Sea Scrolls in particular 'a vitally important and ongoing attempt to synchronize the heavenly and earthly worship in perfect unison' (p. 160, as with pp. 414-415 noted above). These two dimensions, the astronomical and the angelic, share of course considerable overlap. Thus cosmology becomes a more fundamental basis for obedience than covenantal commands (which are *based on* cosmology). Hence the importance of

(and controversy around) the calendar in the Second-Temple period, to which Elliott devotes considerable attention (see esp. pp. 144-162).

One criticism which I would make, however, is of Elliott's emphasis on these texts identifying their communities so closely with the loci of salvation. Various factors problematise a blanket equation of the community with 'the saved'. First, the Community Rule, for example, is well aware of the community member who nevertheless is not a community member in his *heart*. In reciting the curses of the covenant, the priests announce: 'Cursed be the man who enters the Covenant while walking among the idols of his heart, who sets up before himself his stumbling-block of sin so that he may backslide!' (1QS 2:11-12). This clearly envisions the possibility of the community containing those who are secretly unrighteous. Similarly, there is the real possibility of the members of this *visible* community falling into sin, and leaving the community. From the perspective of the divine predeterminism of 1QS, however, the person would have never really have been righteous. Less significantly, new recruits could always join the community. These points make the people of God and the community of God not categorically co-extensive, *contra*, for example Elliott's virtual equation of the Qumran community with the 'centre of salvation' leading to the conclusion that soteriology was to a point *defined* in terms of corporate *identity*' (p. 347). Or again, 'The question of soteriology, accordingly, is virtually reduced to whether one *belongs to the saved* (i.e. the proper, or right) *community* (or confession)' (p. 175).

Elliott confesses not to be interested in unravelling the 'mercy-merit dialectic' (pp. 178-179), and even sees attempts to resolve the tension between 'gift' and 'demand' in the covenant as 'somewhat pointless' (p. 246). Nevertheless, Elliott's conclusions cut very much against Sanders' understanding of covenantal nomism. Elliott shares with Sanders, however, an emphasis on the covenant as a locus of a realised salvation (although they disagree on whether it obtains for the nation or the remnant). Special election and revelation play such an all-embracing role in soteriology that there is, concomitantly, a downplaying – even a suspicion – of obedience to Torah being a criterion for final vindication. Elliott's work requires some modification in this area. These two issues, of equating communities with 'the saved' and of the downplaying of the role of obedience in the final vindication of the righteous, are related. They are perhaps both a function of the point raised above, that Elliott is contrasting criteria for punishment of the wicked *at the eschaton* with criteria for *present* membership of the righteous community. These, if not apples and oranges, are not self-evidently ripe for direct comparison.

The second set of implications arises out of Elliott's identification of some of the central elements of earliest Christianity as already present in Second-Temple Judaism:

'There can now be found suitable explanations *from Judaism* for many basic attitudes found in the New Testament – including that Israel, God's chosen people, is in danger of judgment and in this regard has been placed on a par with gentiles; that the historical covenants are not unqualifiedly valid for all who consider themselves participants in them' (p. 664).

This is a significant conclusion for a number of reasons. First, if true, it means that the NT cannot reasonably be open to the charge of anti-Judaism/ anti-Semitism. As Martin Hengel and N.T. Wright have emphasised, if early Christians saw themselves as the true Israel (just as the Qumran community, for example, also did), such discourse *elevates* the importance of the category of 'Israel' rather than denigrating it.

Second, it forces consideration of the issue of whether early Christians, as the implication of seeing themselves as authentic Israel, regarded Jews who did not believe in Christ as apostate. Reading commentaries on, for example, Rom 2.25-29, it is evident that traditional and 'New Perspective' exegetes alike are very reluctant to see Paul as charging his Jewish contemporaries with a form of apostasy. Within Elliott's framework, however, such a charge seems eminently plausible.

In conclusion, this is a very well-researched, and very significant piece of work. I sincerely hope that the size of book will attract, rather than deter attention. Many scholars, I am sure, would be pleased to produce a book of this quality at the end of their careers. To do so in a first publication is an outstanding achievement.

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