This volume began as a 2009 PhD thesis at the University of Wales, Lampeter, U.K., under the supervision of William S. Campbell and Kathy Ehrensperger. As the subtitle indicates, it is primarily a review of the vigorous contemporary debate on the relationship of the church and Israel as envisaged by Paul, particularly the continuity/discontinuity issue.

The first main chapter (ch. 2) reviews the “developing debate.” The review begins with the traditional view, as represented by C. H. Dodd and Ernst Käsemann, summarized in terms of “supersessionism” or “replacement theology” and now challenged by “the new perspective.” The new perspective, emphasizing the continuity between Israel and church, however, poses fresh questions: Is a critique of Israel’s “ethnocentrism” any less anti-Jewish in character than the old perspective’s critique of “works righteousness”? If circumcision is now dispensable, does not that remove one of the defining identity marks of Israel? If “Israel” has now been absorbed into Christ, where does that leave ethnic Israel? Alternatively, if Paul does not redefine Israel in terms of Christ, and Torah-observant Jews alone constitute Israel, then how can one reckon adequately with Paul’s argument that Gentile believers are as much Abraham’s seed as Jews and that Gentile believers have been grafted into the one olive tree that grows from the roots of the patriarchs? Or if, to avoid all traces of anti-Judaism, one argues that Paul envisaged a
“Sonderweg” for Israel, Israel’s salvation as a consequence of Israel’s covenant, independently of Christ, then what does this say about Paul’s gospel and his insistence on justification by faith (alone)? The alternative views in the “developing debate” are clearly represented, and the points of critique, and the consequent puzzles as to Paul’s logic, well enough expressed.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the key texts: Rom 2:29; Gal 6:16 (ch. 3); and Rom 11:26 (ch. 4). On the first, Zoccali recognizes an implicit criticism by Paul of presumed privilege on the part of ethnic Israel but finds the critique of “ethnocentrism” overstated, since the criticism is in line with earlier prophetic rebuke, as in Isa 52:5. On Gal 6:16 Zoccali argues that the “Israel of God” is a reference to the church of Jews and Gentiles, though the question whether Paul’s reference to “Israel” in Galatians does not foreshadow his treatment of “Israel” in Romans needs fuller discussion.

On Rom 11:26 Zoccali finds five views in contemporary scholarship: (1) “eschatological miracle”: all Israel’s salvation effected by a final coming of “the Deliverer out of Zion”; (2) ecclesiological: “all Israel” as the multiethnic Christ community; (3) Roman mission: “all Israel” represents Jewish believers in Rome; (4) two covenant: the Sonderweg thesis that Israel will be saved without reference to Christ; (5) “total national elect”: “all Israel” refers to the complete number of elect from ethnic Israel. Zoccali’s critique of (3) and (4) is very effective, and he himself argues for (5); his case for reading the reference to “all Israel” as a reference to ethnic Israel is hard to dispute, though it does need to be stressed that Rom 9–11 is about Israel, not about the church and Israel! However, his argument against (1) is very strained, since it is so difficult to read Rom 10:14–11:32 as other than a chronological sequence: Israel’s hardening in part, salvation to Gentiles, full number of Gentiles, Israel’s jealousy, deliverer from Zion, all Israel saved. As becomes clear in chapter 5, Zoccali wants to read Rom 11:26 “as describing the eschatological process initiated by the resurrection of Christ” (121), but he largely ignores the rhetorical effect of Rom 9–11: of Paul’s grief for the bulk of his fellow Jews’ failure to respond to the gospel, answered little by little, until finally resolved in the mystery of what is happening (Israel’s hardening) and what is about to happen (not least through his own apostleship to Gentiles).

The main argument of chapter 5 is that Paul was “a Jewish reformer who remained personally connected with the synagogue and presumed an open relationship, at least in potential, between the Christ movement and greater Jewish community”; Paul did not seek separation from Judaism (126–27). I agree with him that there was probably a more positive relation between synagogues and house churches in Rome than is usually thought to be the case, but it is much harder to argue a similar case in relation to the churches in Galatia, since the imagery and language of Gal 4:17–5:12 seems to imply more a closing
of the door than an open relationship. In this chapter the use of “proselyte” is too casual, and “Judaism” is used in a confusing way, unrelated to Paul’s own and only use of the term in Gal 1:13–14.

Chapter 6 stirs the pot a little more, arguing against the false dichotomy between apocalyptic and salvation history and that Israel’s election, for Paul, was “representational and vocational.” A concluding chapter reflects for one last time on the paradox of Paul’s in effect double assertion that the church is Israel and that the church is not Israel—“Israel” being used by Paul in a multifaceted way, indicating “multiple identities—the continuity of church with Israel through Christ being decidedly not “replacement theology” but “inclusion theology.” A nineteen-page bibliography and indices of texts and modern authors complete the volume.

The discussion is rather repetitive, with the same issues coming up two or three times, and the critique of the various authors reviewed in chapter 2 is scattered over the following chapters. Going round the mulberry bush several times tends to blur the case being made rather than clarifying it. Further, the layout of the book is not helpful, in that the relation of text to footnotes leaves much to be desired: the text is often cluttered with several lines of source references, which would have been better in the footnotes, and the footnotes are regularly used to carry forward the discussion, which would be more appropriate in the text. Some editorial counsel would have been helpful.

In short, it is good that the subject of the relation between church and Israel in Paul has been given such close attention, but this treatment of the issues is only moderately satisfactory.