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# ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

*in*

# ROMANS AND REVELATION

Towan Greene

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Department of History



## ABSTRACT

The aim of this investigation is to understand the place of Israel, and its relationship to the church, according to Romans and Revelation. Reflecting on the theological resonances and dissonances between these two texts allows us to hear what each has to say about Israel more clearly, and to begin to hear what the New Testament as a whole has to say about Israel more fully. The temporal distance between Romans and Revelation introduces a socio-historical dimension to such theological comparison, inviting us to ask, How did we get from the Israel-theology of Romans to the Israel-theology of Revelation? What is the nature of the trajectory and what were the forces and factors that shaped its development? Attempting to answer these questions highlights one particularly interesting point of intersection between the two texts, from which to further explore their engagement with Israel: the influence of Rome. It is in considering the dynamics of the Rome-Israel-church triad—and in particular the noxious effect of Nero's persecution—that the thesis makes its most distinctive contribution to understanding the theological and social relationship between Israel and the church in Romans and Revelation.



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# INTRODUCTION

The aim of the following investigation is to understand the place of Israel, and its relationship to the church, according to Romans and Revelation. In the first instance and for the bulk of the thesis this task takes an exegetical form. Comparative analysis of the conclusions reached in connection with each text then paves the way for a more historically-oriented discussion towards the close, with Romans and Revelation acting as markers in history that bookend a crucial period of development in the composition and theology of the early church. It is here that the thesis makes its most distinctive contribution to understanding the theological and social relationship between Israel and the church in the first century—these two texts not having been brought into sustained conversation on this subject before.

Romans and Revelation both represent exciting fields of enquiry, and particularly in connection with our Israel theme. Romans 9-11 is the only direct and detailed consideration of Israel in the New Testament, and yet this is but a concentrated confrontation of the Israel-related questions that reverberate everywhere through the letter. Engaging with Romans forces us to think about Israel in the past (if the gospel has definitively revealed the righteousness of God then what was the point of the Torah and its possessors?), Israel in the present (how are Gentiles to relate to Jews both within and without the Christ movement?) and Israel in the future (does God reserve a special plan and purpose for his once-chosen people?). As for the Book of Revelation, here we have a text positively saturated with images and phrases drawn from the Hebrew Bible. The appearance of “one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel” in Rev. 7:4 recommends Revelation to some as an oasis of promise for ethnic Israel amongst the relative wilderness of the New Testament in that regard, whilst many others insist that it strikes the most decisive blow of all to that position. That Revelation has the capacity to foster such contradictory convictions makes it a

fascinating and important text to interpret in connection with the place of Israel in New Testament theology.

Bringing precisely these two texts into conversation on the subject of Israel is appealing and productive for a number of reasons. Each is an eminent and exquisite work in its own right, though they represent quite different voices and traditions within the spectrum of New Testament thought. Reflecting on the theological resonances and dissonances between them allows us to hear what each has to say about Israel more clearly, and to begin to hear what the New Testament as a whole has to say about Israel more fully. The fact that Romans stands chronologically somewhere towards the beginning of the New Testament canon and Revelation somewhere towards the end introduces a socio-historical dimension to such theological comparison: How did we get from the Israel-theology of Romans to the Israel-theology of Revelation? What is the nature of the trajectory and what were the forces and factors that shaped its development? Attempting to answer these questions highlights one particularly interesting point of intersection between the two texts, from which to further explore their engagement with Israel: the influence of Rome. This is in an integral part of the context for every New Testament writing, but it comes to the fore in Romans and Revelation more so than elsewhere: in the former because the destination of the letter is the capital itself, and in the latter because the judgment of Rome is its great theme.

## **Outline**

The thesis has a simple tripartite structure of a section on Romans, a section on Revelation, and a section of comparative analysis. The Romans section treats in turn the three blocks of the text most relevant to the Israel question: the foundation established in chapters 1-4 relating to the role of the law and what it is to be a Jew; the argument sustained in chapters 9-11 relating to the question of whether God has rejected his ancient people; and the practices exhorted in chapters 14-15 relating to the social functioning of the church. The Revelation section likewise treats the three areas of greatest significance in connection with Israel: the references to ‘those who say they are Jews and are not’ in the messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia; the two appearances of the 144,000 who are introduced as being ‘sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel’ (7:4); and the enigmatic role of Jerusalem in Revelation 11. The question of what overall conclusions may be drawn from these individual investigations is largely left for

the third and final section of comparative analysis to explore. The disjunctures emerging from this analysis then propel us into a closing consideration of the influence of the Roman Empire on how Israel is perceived and treated in our two texts.

### **Additional notes**

Quotations from the Bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition).<sup>1</sup> In the cases where I have adapted the translation (usually so as to make it more literal), this has been indicated. Textual data comes from *The Greek New Testament*.<sup>2</sup>

Ancient sources were accessed through the *Loeb Classical Library*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, and *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*; see ‘Works Cited’ for a full breakdown. Abbreviated titles of ancient Jewish and Christian sources follow the conventions of the SBL Handbook of Style, and other ancient sources the conventions of the Oxford Classical Dictionary (though alternative forms of abbreviation have been preserved in quotations from other authors).

Double quotation marks are reserved for verbatim quotations and the titles of works cited, so that where these appear the reader can have confidence that the wording of the source is reproduced exactly. For everything else single quotation marks are used. This includes indicating that a word or brief phrase has been drawn from a proximate quotation, reference, or Bible verse, whilst allowing that the original wording may have been adapted so as to situate it in the flow of the target sentence.

For reasons of brevity and style I have used the anachronism ‘Christian(s)’ throughout, referring simply to belief in Jesus and without ethnic distinction. Where I am referring to Christian Jews or Christian Gentiles specifically I have made that clear. In speaking of Christians collectively I have used the language of ‘Christ movement’ at times, but since I have taken the position that by the time of Romans the Christians were meeting

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<sup>1</sup> The preface to this edition comments that “Readers may care to note that the verb ending *-ize*, in Britain sometimes regarded as American usage, has been retained where this is etymologically permissible” (*Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized Edition* [London: Collins, 2007], p. xiii). Why such retention should be not only permissible but also beneficial in an edition specifically aimed at reflecting British style is unexplained, and the special irony of the word ‘Anglicized’ unacknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> K. Aland *et al.* (eds), *The Greek New Testament* (4<sup>th</sup> revised edn; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2001).

separately from the synagogue, it has seemed unnecessary to use this phrase to the exclusion of ‘church’ language, and so the latter is also employed. Again, this is intended to carry no implication as regards ethnic composition, including when the church is set in apposition to Israel.

## INTENTION AND INTERPRETATION

Before launching into interpreting the relevant particulars of our two texts, there is some epistemological groundwork to be laid. We will begin briefly at the most general level, before looking at the matter of authorial intention specifically.

### Foundational Epistemology

If there is a protagonist among the dialogue partners taken in this thesis then it is surely N. T. Wright, in whose extensive and influential body of work the themes of Israel, the church, and the Roman Empire all play highly significant roles. Accordingly, it makes good sense to take Wright’s model and method as a starting point for discussion of issues relating to epistemology and authorial intention. The key material is found in the ‘Tools for the Task’ section of *The New Testament and the People of God*,<sup>3</sup> the introductory book in the ongoing series ‘Christian Origins and the Question of God.’

Wright begins his epistemological discussion with a call to sidestep the ‘naïve realism’ of “the positivist trap, the false either-or of full certainty *versus* mere unsubstantiated opinion.”<sup>4</sup> Positivism is viewed as the optimistic version of Enlightenment epistemology; the more pessimistic equivalent is phenomenalism, which holds that “The only thing of which I can really be sure when confronted by things in (what seems to be) the external world are my own sense-data.”<sup>5</sup> Whilst acknowledging that every epistemology is itself an (archetypally) unprovable hypothesis,<sup>6</sup> Wright advocates a synthesis of these two basic positions into a third known as ‘critical realism,’ which is

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<sup>3</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, 1; London: SPCK, 1993), pp. 29-144.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> “All epistemologies have to be, themselves, argued as hypotheses: they are tested not by their coherence with a fixed point agreed in advance, but (like other hypotheses, in fact), by their simplicity and their ability to make sense of a wide scope of experiences and events” (Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 45-46).

. . . a way of describing the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence ‘realism’), whilst also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence ‘critical’).<sup>7</sup>

Acceptance of the ‘critical’ element in critical realism means that it would perhaps be more appropriately cautious to say that it ‘holds’ rather than ‘acknowledges’ the reality of the thing known; but nevertheless it is clear that the synthesis does provide an epistemological framework that fosters constructive conversation. If the reality of things external to the knower is denied then there can be no shared object of debate, only the internal monologue of a lonely solipsism, whilst recognition of the all-influencing subjectivity of the knower engenders a posture of humility and critical self-reflection. It is on this model, then, and hopefully in this spirit, that we shall conduct the remainder of the investigation, the next step of which will be to consider some of the specific epistemological issues involved in interpreting a text. Does a text have a meaning, and can we know it?

### **Text, meaning, and authorial intention**

The Holy Spirit is the simplest writer and speaker in heaven and on earth. This is why his words can have no more than the one simplest meaning which we call the written one, or the literal meaning of the tongue. . . . [O]ne should not therefore say that Scripture or God’s word has more than one meaning.<sup>8</sup>

So wrote Martin Luther in 1521, and his words plunge us into some of the key issues surrounding the questions of text, meaning, and authorial intention. Luther expresses a concern for the determinacy (i.e. singularity) of meaning in scripture that has continued to be one of the characteristic features of Biblical interpretation at least within the Protestant tradition. Such concern naturally engenders the view that the meaning of a

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<sup>7</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, p. 35. Emphasis original. Similarly a little later: “This model allows fully for the actuality of knowledge beyond that of one’s own sense-data (that which the ‘objectivist’ desires to safeguard), while also fully allowing for the involvement of knower in the act of knowing (that upon which the ‘subjectivist’ will rightly insist)” (p. 45).

<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, *Church and Ministry*, vol. 1 (eds H. T. Lehmann and E. W. Gritsch; Luther’s Works, 39; trans. from 1521 German; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 178-179.

text is generated not in the interpretation of a reader but in the intention of an author, since the former is part of a potentially infinite multiplicity, whereas the latter represents a reassuring singularity. The classic scholarly defense of this basic position is in the work of E. D. Hirsch,<sup>9</sup> which although not specifically related to biblical interpretation, has subsequently been much employed in its service. The biblical canon as literary context does complicate the matter somewhat because of the tension between divine and human authorial intention (see further on this in the ‘Introduction to Revelation’ below). In Luther’s case determinacy of meaning is explicitly tied to divine agency (the Holy Spirit as the real ‘writer’ and ‘speaker’ of scripture); but even where Christian interpreters in subsequent generations have often preferred to focus on human authorial intention as the decisive restriction on dangerous indeterminacy, it is obviously belief in the divine inspiration of scripture that ultimately lends importance and impetus to the whole quest to establish any authentic and authoritative meaning in the text. But whatever the motivation, the focus on authorial intention has historically provided a unifying hermeneutical approach, as Vanhoozer reflects:

As we have seen, premodernity and modernity alike shared a similar aim in interpretation: to recover the meaning of the text, understood in terms of the intention of the author. Whether this was the intention of the human author (as in modernity) or of the divine author (as in much Medieval exegesis) was of secondary importance; up until fairly recently, there was a near consensus on the importance of the author’s intention.<sup>10</sup>

Since Luther’s avowal of the simplicity of meaning in scripture, and as Vanhoozer hints, the ‘near consensus’ in the prioritisation of authorial intention has incurred increasingly serious challenge from a number of quarters. Towards the beginning of *Evoking Scripture*, Steve Moyise notes that in particular the three ‘masters of suspicion’ Marx, Freud and Nietzsche have made it no longer possible to maintain the expedient illusion that an author’s intention can be fully reproduced by a text or fully understood by a reader.<sup>11</sup> He emphasises that “Texts are vehicles of communication and one cannot

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<sup>9</sup> E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (London: Yale University Press, 1967); E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a meaning in this text? The Bible, the reader and the morality of literary knowledge* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1998), p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Moyise, *Evoking Scripture: Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), p. 3.

talk of communication without speaking of both author and reader.”<sup>12</sup> This perspective is then manifested in the case studies that follow, and its implications explicitly explored in the final chapter of the book. Here attention is brought to the influential work of Wolfgang Iser, who argued that “The [literary] work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader.”<sup>13</sup> This levels two important correctives at an overly idealised concept and pursuit of authorial intention. Firstly, the emphasis on the actualising role of the reader enjoins a historical consciousness, since readers of texts are real people in real situations—just as authors are. Secondly, recognition of the influence of the reader’s own ‘disposition’ sounds a warning to those who would claim to have discovered the pure waters of the author’s original intention; all readers without exception bring to the text their own worldview, ideology, and agenda. The waters might be rather less pure and rather more reflective than the interpreter had hoped. Chastened thus, there yet remains a place for the conviction that a text does have an intended meaning that can legitimately be pursued and to a limited extent be retrieved; this is the shape of critical realism as applied to the interpretation of texts. Wright describes this as a ‘hermeneutic of love,’ in that love affirms the existence and validity of both the lover and the beloved, so that

. . . the text can be listened to on its own terms, without being reduced to the scale of what the reader can or cannot understand at the moment. . . . But however close the reader gets to understanding the text, the reading will still be peculiarly that reader’s reading: the subjective is never lost, nor is it necessary or desirable that it should be.<sup>14</sup>

This hermeneutical model recognises the importance of reader actualisation, though without thereby conceding the equivalence of all potential ‘meanings’ that a text might have: “though ‘meaning’ can never be separated from the minds of humans who suppose it, nor can it simply be reduced to terms of those humans themselves, whether

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<sup>12</sup> Moyise, *Evoking Scripture*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” *New Literary History* 3/2 (1972), pp. 279-299 (279).

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, p. 64. This broadly accords with Vanhoozer: “Just how confident can we be as interpreters that we have discovered the meaning of the text rather than ourselves and our own projections? The short response is to say both that *our knowledge must be tempered by humility, and that our skepticism must be countered with conviction*” (*Is there a meaning in this text?*, p. 463 – omitting the parenthetical cross-references to the parts of the book to which each element of the italicised segment pertains).

individuals or groups”<sup>15</sup>; it follows, then, that “There will be an appropriateness about certain potential meanings, and an inappropriateness about others. Discussion of where different suggested ‘meanings’ come on this scale of appropriateness can and must take place; this is not a private game.”<sup>16</sup>

What does all this mean in practice? How are we to bring it to bear on our attempt to interpret elements of Romans and Revelation? One way of approaching the attractive-yet-elusive determinacy of authorial intention and the undeniable importance of reader actualisation is to ask how these texts might have been interpreted by their original recipients. There are of course difficulties with this endeavour (Are the recipients that the text rhetorically implies the same as those to whom it was actually directed?<sup>17</sup> Can we assume that the author limited their intended meaning to the likely understanding of the intended recipients?<sup>18</sup>), but the great advantage is that it keeps author, text, and reader all in view, so that the mind of the author does not become illusorily accessible apart from the way in which the text was plausibly being read; the meaning of the text does not become ahistorically self-contained apart from the communicative interaction between author and reader in a particular time and context; and the actualisation of the reader does not become an exercise in narcissism independent of what the author originally intended the text to mean. Hence Moyise’s articulation of the task to construct “a hypothesis that seeks to do justice to what we know about Paul [or John], what we know (if anything) about the intended readers, and the various themes, signals, and codes in the letter.”<sup>19</sup> Our aim, then, will be to construct as coherent and persuasive an interpretation as possible of that which Paul and John apparently intended their respective texts to communicate to their original recipients on the subject of Israel and the church. There are certainly other worthy ways of seeking to ‘do justice’ to the texts (in Moyise’s phrase), or of appraising the ‘appropriateness of meanings’ (in Wright’s).

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<sup>15</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> See the discussion of empirical and encoded readers in the ‘Introduction to Romans’ below.

<sup>18</sup> Moyise judges that “It makes no sense to say that an author *intended* a particular meaning when she or he has withheld the information that would make such a meaning possible for the readers,” so that in such a case “one can only speak of ‘author satisfaction’ rather than ‘communicative intent’” (*Evoking Scripture*, p. 130). Wright is keen to defend the category of ‘author satisfaction,’ since “writers often put things in their works simply because they feel like it, whether or not anyone will get the point” (N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2 [Christian Origins and the Question of God; London: SPCK, 2013], pp. 1452-1453]), but sees it integrating more readily with the category of ‘communicative intent,’ in that “Paul’s letters were hardly meant to be read once and once only; and the context for further readings would inevitably have included discussion between audience, reader, and local leadership” (p. 1452).

<sup>19</sup> Moyise, *Evoking Scripture*, p. 129, originally referring specifically to the task of reconstructing Paul’s intent in his scriptural quotations.

Moyise is right that on a practical level, “We do not possess anything called “authorial intention” that will adjudicate between our interpretations. . . ,”<sup>20</sup> which means that it must be left to the reader to adjudicate whether or not the interpretations of the present thesis give a coherent and persuasive account of Paul or John’s probable authorial intention. As the quotation resumes: “. . . We simply offer it to the world and see if it convinces anyone.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Moyise, “Authorial Intention,” p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Moyise, “Authorial Intention,” p. 37.



## PART I

### ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH IN ROMANS



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

### AUTHORSHIP

The best part of a century ago, C. H. Dodd wrote that “The authenticity of the Epistle to the Romans is a closed question,”<sup>1</sup> and so it remains. There is no reason to doubt the stated authorship of Paul the Apostle (1:1) and every reason to affirm it. The role of his amanuensis Tertius (16:22) is not likely to include much or any autonomy of expression.<sup>2</sup> The only other complication is in connection with the variant recensions of Romans, a matter that will be considered below.

### DATE

The date of Romans is a more open question, though still relatively uncontroversial. The most helpful chapter in the dating endeavour is Romans 16 (on the inclusion of which as part of the original letter, see below), in that Gaius, Erastus, Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, and Phoebe may all be firmly connected to Corinth. This indicates that Paul wrote from Corinth or nearby, and combined with the fact that he was preparing to visit Jerusalem (15:25-33), the accounts of Paul’s movements in Acts have enabled

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<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (The Moffat New Testament Commentary; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> After deliberating over the question of Tertius’ likely influence on the letter, Cranfield concludes by denying “that someone capable of the highly original, closely-articulated and also extremely difficult thought which has gone into the Epistle to the Romans would ever have voluntarily entrusted the expression of it to another person” (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII [eds J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield; International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975], p. 4).

commentators to date the composition of Romans to the second half of the 50s CE almost without exception.<sup>3</sup> Paul Achtemeier extends that range to “somewhere in the time between A.D. 55-64,”<sup>4</sup> but Robert Jewett marshals enough arguments from Acts that their combined weight is sufficient to sink Achtemeier’s unnecessarily generous allowance.<sup>5</sup> Jewett’s two strongest points are as follows. Firstly, the latest possible date for Festus’ assumption of office in Jerusalem is July in 60 CE; according to Acts 24:27, Paul had already been held there for two years at that point, and if so then he could not have written from Corinth any later than 58 CE. Secondly, Josephus mentions that Ismael replaced Ananias as High Priest around 59 CE,<sup>6</sup> which means that Paul’s encounter with Ananias in Jerusalem (Acts 23:1-5) could not have been later than that. Beyond these strictures it is unnecessary for our exegetical purpose that we fix the date of Romans with more precision than the second half of the 50s. The key feature of this period is that it follows the reversal of the Edict of Claudius upon the commencement of Nero’s reign in 54 CE. We will return to discuss the relevance of the Edict after first pausing to make clear which form of the text of Romans we will be using.

## THE TEXT OF ROMANS

The first textual matter to comment on is the displacement of the doxology that traditionally closes Romans (16:25-27) to a position after 14:23 in A P 5 33 104 Ψ sy<sup>h</sup> vg<sup>1648,1792,2089</sup>. In the Vulgate texts the doxology is prefaced with 16:24 and closes the whole letter, whereas in the other texts the letter resumes from 15:1 after the insertion of the doxology. Did Romans then originally end with a doxology after 14:23, with chapters 15 and 16 only a later addition? It is very unlikely. As Dodd says,

. . . the chief difficulty of this view is that xiv. 23 is a most unlikely close for such a letter, even with the addition of a doxology. It does not bring the argument of chap. xiv to a conclusion worthy of the level on which it has been conducted; and it makes no attempt to round off the epistle as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Douglass Moo notes two exceptions: Gerd Lüdemann, who suggests a date as early as 51/52 CE, and J. R. Richards, who argues for 52-54 CE (in Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [ed. Gordon Fee; *NICNT*; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1996], p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (ed. E. J. Epp; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 20.179.

<sup>7</sup> Dodd, *Romans*, pp. xv-xvi.

The unsuitability of 14:23 as an end to the letter is only highlighted by the way that chapter 15 carefully draws together threads not only from chapter 14<sup>8</sup> but especially from chapters 9-11 too. This level of integration tells against the idea that chapters 15-16 are a later addition to a previously more generic letter or treatise. It is much easier to imagine instead that Paul originally wrote the long form of the letter specifically to Rome, and that the later excision of chapters 15-16 was intended to make it more general. If Origen is to be believed and Marcion was responsible for the excision<sup>9</sup> then it is a sensible leap to suppose, as many have, that he (or a follower) was also responsible for the composition of the doxology, the placement of which after 14:23 softens (slightly)<sup>10</sup> the abruptness of terminating the letter there.

Unrelated to turbulence in the textual tradition, other suspicions have been raised about the content of Romans 16. Why does Paul include so many greetings, and how did he know so many people in a church that he has never visited? And what of the stylistic and thematic dissonance between 16:17-20 and the rest of the letter? The latter question is not easily decided; there are persuasive arguments both for and against the authenticity of the exhortations. But since it would be most undesirable to let an interpolated 16:17-20 unduly influence interpretation of the rest of the letter, we will err on the side of caution and refrain from taking those verses into consideration. This tactic will not do, however, in connection with the first question(s) regarding the odd proliferation of greetings that comprises the first half of the chapter. This does not mean that we must closely inspect all of the different forms of the idea that Romans 16 was originally a letter or part of a letter to Ephesus.<sup>11</sup> If the contents of the chapter may be

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<sup>8</sup> So e.g. Moo: "Although there is definite evidence of a 14-chapter form of Romans in the early church, the intimate connection between chaps. 14 and 15 makes it impossible to think that Paul's original letter was without chap. 15" (*Romans*, p. 8).

<sup>9</sup> Though Harry Gamble's investigation contests Origen's claim, concluding that "being aware of Marcion as a falsifier of the NT text and having knowledge of the short text of Romans, Origen made the natural but certainly erroneous inference that Marcion himself removed the doxology and the final two chapters" (Harry Gamble, Jr., *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans* [ed. Irving Alan Sparks; Studies and Documents, 42; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977], p. 114). It matters little for our present purpose.

<sup>10</sup> Dodd comments memorably that "If we ask why the cut was so clumsily made at xiv. 23, there is perhaps no answer but the illimitable stupidity of editors" (*Romans*, p. xvi).

<sup>11</sup> Lampe helpfully summarises the four main problems with any form of the Ephesus hypothesis (and I quote): "(a) Why does Paul greet only his co-workers Urbanus, Aquila, and Prisca in "Ephesus" (Rom. 16:3, 9), when many others have been staying there? (b) Why was a letter to the Ephesians added to a letter to the Romans? This would be without parallel. It is true, 2 Cor. was comprised of several letters, but these separate letters were not addressed to different churches. (c) We know letters that consisted mainly of greetings. But can we picture *Paul* writing such a letter? (d) Why do the Romans 16 names "Urbanus," "Phlegon," "Persis," and "Asyncretus" not occur in any of the thousands of Ephesian

cogently explained as part of the original letter then the Ephesus hypothesis becomes an unnecessary conjecture. Such explanation is in fact available. Karl Donfried reminds us that although the long list of names is unusual, so is Romans itself—not least in that it is written to a church that Paul had neither founded nor visited. In this context, “What is more obvious than that Paul would try to marshal all the support he could by listing persons he had met along the way and who were now in Rome?”<sup>12</sup> J. B. Lightfoot had already reflected that such a dynamic is not only theoretically understandable but is also actually consonant with a discernible pattern in Paul’s letters:

In the Epistles to the Corinthians and Thessalonians no individuals are saluted. In the Epistle to the Philippians again there are no salutations properly so called, though a special warning is addressed to two persons by name and a commission given to another. On the other hand, in the Epistle to the Colossians, whom the Apostle had never visited, certain persons are saluted by name.<sup>13</sup>

He concludes then that “So far as the data are sufficient to establish any rule, it may be said that the number of names mentioned is in the inverse proportion to his familiarity with the church to which he is writing.”<sup>14</sup> To this Jewett adds the nuance that

The personal details concerning some of the persons he greets are formulated as if the congregation as a whole did not recognize their accomplishments, which is strange if Paul’s knowledge of them coincided with the congregation’s knowledge. It sounds like Paul is introducing and recommending them as reliable leaders in a congregation whether neither he nor they were very well known.<sup>15</sup>

This is sufficient to show that in terms of its content as well as its textual history, Romans 16 is readily comprehensible as an integral part of Paul’s original letter. But if

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inscriptions, while they do show up on epigraphs in the city of Rome?” (Peter Lampe, “The Roman Christians of Romans 16,” in K. P. Donfried [ed.], *The Romans Debate* [revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], pp. 216-230 [216]).

<sup>12</sup> Karl P. Donfried, “A Short Note on Romans 16,” in K. P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 44-52 (51).

<sup>13</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, “The Structure and Destination of the Epistle to the Romans,” in *Biblical Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), pp. 285-374 (298).

<sup>14</sup> Lightfoot, “Structure and Destination,” p. 298.

<sup>15</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 9. He also notes that “Other persons are named without any personal reference or intimate detail whatsoever, which seems absurd if Paul had worked with them for almost three years, as was the case in Ephesus” (p. 9).

so then we are faced with another problem: How did Paul know so many people in a community which he says he had never visited (1:13)? A glib answer would be that ‘all roads lead to Rome,’ so that Paul simply greets those Christians whom he had converted or met on his travels and who happened to be in Rome at the time of writing. But we may add conviction and precision to this idea with reference to the Edict of Claudius, which is what we shall now do.

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

What is the relationship between the context and the content of Romans? Asking this question thrusts us into the midst of a variety of competing ideas and interpretations. The first resource to hold our attention might be the armamentarium of articles collected in *The Romans Debate*,<sup>16</sup> in which the eclectic set of perspectives represented in the first section alone range from T. W. Manson’s proposition that the letter to the Romans was originally a series of verbal debates and penultimately a letter to Ephesus,<sup>17</sup> to Günther Bornkamm’s conception of Romans as Paul’s last will and testament,<sup>18</sup> to Jacob Jervell’s argument that Romans was written primarily in service of Paul’s forthcoming visit to Jerusalem,<sup>19</sup> and many more. We might glance also towards the contributions of some of the eminent commentaries of recent decades. James Dunn makes room for the overlap of missionary considerations oriented towards Paul’s proposed trip to Spain, apologetic considerations related particularly to his impending visit to Jerusalem, and pastoral considerations focussed on ethnic tensions within the Roman community.<sup>20</sup> Jewett mounts an impressive and persuasive attempt to integrate the second and third of these areas into the controlling context of the first, on which view the key function of the letter to the church in Rome is to combat the toxic culture of honour competition there that might otherwise prevent them from supporting Paul’s mission *to barbarians*

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<sup>16</sup> Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> T. W. Manson, “St Paul’s Letter to the Romans—and Others,” in K. P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 3-15.

<sup>18</sup> Günther Bornkamm, “The Letter to the Romans as Paul’s Last Will and Testament,” in K. P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 16-28.

<sup>19</sup> Jervell, Jacob, “The Letter to Jerusalem,” in K. P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 53-64.

<sup>20</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (eds David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker and Ralph P. Martin; Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38a; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988), pp. liv-lviii. The multiplicity of reasons for Romans is (as its title suggests) the theme of A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (ed. J. Riches; Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).

in Spain.<sup>21</sup> This might be seen as a recalibration and refinement of the conclusions reached by Douglass Moo, which likewise prioritise the missional aspect of Paul's reasons for writing, but which remain less developed and more diffuse:

Romans has several purposes. But the various purposes share a common denominator: Paul's missionary situation. The past battles in Galatia and Corinth; the coming crisis in Jerusalem; the desire to secure a missionary base for his work in Spain; the need to unify the Romans around "his" gospel to support his work in Spain—all these forced Paul to write a letter in which he carefully rehearsed his understanding of the gospel, especially as it related to the salvation-historical questions of Jew and Gentile and the continuity of the plan of salvation.<sup>22</sup>

E. Elizabeth Johnson manages to sum up much of this in a helpful metaphor: the letter to the Romans might be viewed as "the apostle's *curriculum vitae*, the credentials he lays before the Roman Christians as he asks for their support in his apostolic mission."<sup>23</sup> But despite the broad range of factors that contribute to the setting and purpose of Romans, and despite Jewett's success in arguing for the priority of the Spanish mission specifically, the Israel interest of the present thesis inclines us to focus rather on the contextual factors that directly relate to the exploration of 'the salvation-historical questions of Jew and Gentile.' First among these is the Edict of Claudius, consideration of which will thus dominate the remainder of our enquiry into the background and purpose of Romans. There is certainly a circularity to be recognised here: the interests of the thesis skew the selection of evidence for the interpretation of Romans, which in turn amplifies those parts of the text which cohere with the interests of the thesis. But this kind of circularity is inevitable, and need not trouble us overmuch, as long as we refrain from falling into the trap of assuming that the particular area of study so encircled is the systematic core of Romans, around which everything else must revolve.

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<sup>21</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, pp. 74-89 and throughout the commentary.

<sup>22</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 20-21. Where Jewett advances and refines this basic position is in detailing the (perception of) barbarity in Spain, and showing how the specific rhetorical strategies of the letter to Rome aim to produce in the Christians there the humility necessary to overcome those perceptions in support of Paul's proposed mission.

<sup>23</sup> E. Elizabeth Johnson, "God's Covenant Faithfulness to Israel," in J. L. Sumney (ed.), *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 157-167 (158).

## The Edict of Claudius

The Edict of Claudius is a contentious but important event for reconstructing the background to Paul's letter to the Romans. Suetonius relates that "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome."<sup>24</sup> We hear of the same event in Acts 18:2: "There [Corinth] he [Paul] found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome." According to Acts, Gallio became proconsul of Achaia during Paul's stay in Corinth; if Priscilla and Aquila had only 'recently' (προσφάτως) been expelled from Rome then this would give the late forties as the date of the expulsion. This accords with the witness of Paulus Orosius, who states that the expulsion took place in the ninth year of Claudius' reign (49 CE), referencing both Suetonius and a non-extant statement of Josephus.<sup>25</sup>

This 49 CE date of the Edict is sometimes challenged with reference to Cassius Dio, whose record of the first year of Claudius' reign (41 CE) includes the information that "As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he [Claudius] did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings."<sup>26</sup> But Dixon Slingerland comprehensively shows that this is not the same event as that recorded by Suetonius (either as an inaccurate rehearsal or a deliberate reversal):<sup>27</sup> to conclude as much is "to take two passages sharing significant elements in common, set them abstractly, i.e., without regard to time and circumstance, side by side and point out the supposed contradiction, using that contradiction to equate them."<sup>28</sup> He also mounts a convincing challenge to Wolfgang Wiefel's handling of Dio's statement, which precludes the 41 CE dating of the ban on the grounds that "this would contradict the emperor's initially cordial attitude towards the Jews,"<sup>29</sup> instead locating it *after* the expulsion and seeing it as "a first step in moderating the eviction

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<sup>24</sup> Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4.

<sup>25</sup> Irving W. Raymond, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans: The Apology of Paulus Orosius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 332.

<sup>26</sup> Cassius Dio, *History of Rome* 60.6.6.

<sup>27</sup> Dixon Slingerland, "Claudius 25.4 and Cassius Dio," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 79/4 (1989), pp. 305-322.

<sup>28</sup> Slingerland, "Claudius 25.4," p. 319. See also the arguments in A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 167-178.

<sup>29</sup> Wolfgang Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity," in K. P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 85-101 (94).

edict.”<sup>30</sup> Slingerland shows that Claudius’ attitude towards the Jews was not necessarily as ‘initially cordial’ as is often assumed,<sup>31</sup> arguing instead that his apparently sympathetic early decrees “do no more than restore rights granted to Jewish populations prior to Gaius but abrogated by him. In this sense they are simply an amplification by example of Dio’s claim (60.3.5-5.1) that Claudius undid many improper acts of his predecessor.”<sup>32</sup> This means that “there is no reason to think that the edicts of Claudius in Josephus reveal any special sympathy or friendliness toward the Jewish people; they only provide one example of the emperor’s desire to reestablish the old status quo.”<sup>33</sup> With this there is no longer any reason to question Dio’s statement that in Claudius’ first year he banned Jewish meetings in Rome, or to have to explain it by amalgamation with the Edict of Claudius recorded by Suetonius.

Who then were the targets of Claudius’ expulsion and what was its extent? We may start by ruling out a total expulsion of all Jews in Rome, which in Andrew Das’s phrase is “fraught with insurmountable problems.”<sup>34</sup> He assesses the logistical impossibility of such an operation, cites instances of impotent Roman expulsion orders that were aimed at political posturing rather than social restructuring, and points out that the absence of the expulsion in Josephus, Tacitus and Dio Cassius is highly conspicuous given that they *do* all record Tiberius’ expulsion of 4,000 Jewish men of draftable age in 19 CE.<sup>35</sup> Luke’s statement that Claudius ordered ‘all’ (πάντας) the Jews to leave Rome must be viewed as hyperbole. But if so then whom *did* Claudius expel? It is impossible to know the extent of the expulsion, but we can be confident that it affected (possibly exclusively) Jewish Christians. We should have no hesitation about identifying Suetonius’ *Chrestus* as Christ, in light of the comparable corruption of *Christianos* to *Chrestianos* evidenced in e.g. Tacitus (who introduces the *Chrestianos* whilst indicating

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<sup>30</sup> Wiefel, “Jewish Community,” p. 94.

<sup>31</sup> Slingerland actually begins by pointing out that the perception of Claudius’ sympathy towards Jews is based partly on edicts recorded by none other than Josephus (in *Ant.* 19.279-291), whose own purposes might be seen as suspiciously well-supported by the edicts as he represents them (Slingerland “*Claudius* 25.4,” pp. 308-309). But this is something of a false start to the argument, since Slingerland a) cannot prove that Josephus altered the edicts, b) concedes that “Most of what is contained in each of these statements has the ring of genuineness because Claudius expresses exactly the same sentiment in his 41 CE letter to Alexandria” (p. 310), and c) will in any case argue his point convincingly *from Josephus himself*.

<sup>32</sup> Slingerland, “*Claudius* 25.4,” p. 309. For example, the decree recorded by Josephus in *Ant.* 19.285 says that “I desire that none of their rights should be lost to the Jews on account of the madness of Gaius, but that their former privileges also be preserved to them.”

<sup>33</sup> Slingerland, “*Claudius* 25.4,” p. 309.

<sup>34</sup> Das, *Solving*, p. 163.

<sup>35</sup> Das, *Solving*, pp. 163-164.

immediately afterwards that he knows the name to have come from *Christus*<sup>36</sup>) and Sinaiticus (Acts 11:26; 1 Pe. 4:16).<sup>37</sup> The only individuals that we know were expelled by Claudius are Priscilla and Aquila; that they had come from Rome already as Christians is suggested by the absence of a report of Paul converting them in Acts 18:2, and because it is inconceivable that he would be hosted by unbelieving Jews whose contact with the Christian community and mission had recently resulted in their expulsion from their home!

With this we begin to see how it could be that in Romans 16 Paul is able to greet so many people in a church that he had never visited. If Aquila and Priscilla had originally been part of the church in Rome, had made Paul's acquaintance during their expulsion, and had returned to Rome after the edict lapsed at the start of Nero's reign in 54 CE, then might there not also be a similar story behind some of the other greetings in Romans 16? But this possibility invites us to reconstruct a historical scenario that has a much wider significance than just making sense of chapter 16:

The Roman church, initially consisting most likely of converted Jews and proselytes within the capital, had been heavily affected by Claudius's banishment of Jews in 49. Many of the Christians who were left would undoubtedly have been erstwhile godfearers or proselytes. Unlike the Galatian church, these Gentile Christians were not eager to keep the Jewish law, but would be inclined, not least from social pressures within pagan Rome, to distance themselves from it, and to use the opportunity of Claudius's decree to articulate their identity in non-Jewish terms. When the Jews returned to Rome in 54 upon Claudius's death . . . internal tensions, reflecting at least in part a Jew-Gentile split, were inevitable.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.

<sup>37</sup> Das, *Solving*, p. 150. T. S. Cauley points out that although the substitution of *χριστός* for *χρηστός* in 1 Pe. 2:3's reference to Ps. 33:9 is probably not original, its presence in the divergent manuscripts P.Oxy. 4934 and P.Bodm. VIII suggests a widespread or early tradition ("The *Chrestos/Christos* Pun [1 Pet 2:3] in P<sup>72</sup> and P<sup>1251</sup>," *Novum Testamentum* 53 [2011], pp. 376-387 [386]). If so then this may have 'abetted' the early Roman Chrestus/Christus confusion (p. 387).

<sup>38</sup> N. T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," in D. M. Hay and E. E. Johnson (eds), *Pauline Theology*, vol. III: Romans (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 30-67 (34-35). He goes on to note that "such internal tensions alone do not explain the letter that Paul actually wrote, any more than it is explained when treated as an abstract book of systematics. . . . I suggest that the far more plausible setting for the bulk of the letter, and its theological thrust, is the tension that Paul can see as at least a possibility in relation to his missionary strategy" ("Romans and the Theology of Paul," p. 35). The focus on ethnic issues in the present study is in no way an attempt to argue that these fully account for the purpose and occasion of Romans.

We shall not comment here on the ways in which this context makes a great deal of sense of a great deal of Romans, save to say that it does. The relationship between the context and the message of Romans will come into focus in the section on chapters 14-15; in the meantime we will simply take the fact of the Edict, with its obvious fertility for fomenting conflict between Jews and Gentiles, as an encouragement to read Romans with a particular sensitivity to ethnic issues.

## THE READERS OF ROMANS

At the outset of this section it is important to remember the distinction between encoded and empirical readers: the former are those implied by the text, and the latter are those who actually read the text. Stanley Stowers introduces the implications:

The encoded audience is a feature of the text itself. I can know with certainty that the audience in the text is gentiles at Rome who know something about Jewish scripture and Jesus Christ, but I can only speculate about who actually read the letter, their assumptions, knowledge, and reaction to the letter. This is true even if Paul knew the empirical audience well—and we do not know this to be true—and even if he had consciously or unconsciously identified the reader in the text with the empirical reader. . . . Separating the encoded reader from the empirical reader helps one to see that the encoded audience is always a rhetorical strategy of the text.<sup>39</sup>

This ‘separation’ of the encoded and empirical readers is methodologically useful, but we should also heed Caroline Johnson Hodge’s common-sense reminder:

Of course, when Paul wrote Romans, more than likely he was trying to construct plausible arguments for his Roman audience, so that the encoded and empirical readers are not entirely unrelated to each other. Because Paul and the historical recipients of his letter shared common cultural codes, it is reasonable to assume that there is some connection between Paul’s attempts to persuade and the frameworks of meaning the audience would bring to the text. Conceptually, it is

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<sup>39</sup> Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 22.

possible to appreciate this common ground while still recognizing the distinction between the encoded and empirical readers.<sup>40</sup>

We will begin, then, by enquiring as to the identity of the encoded readers. We will see that there are a number of features in Romans which strongly suggest that (as Stowers' words already assumed) Gentiles are the encoded readers, the primary targets of the whole.

### **Apostle to the Gentiles**

As might be hoped, the first clues about the implied readership come in the introductory section at the beginning of the letter (1:1-17). In the opening verse Paul characteristically identifies himself as 'an apostle' (1:1), his apostleship then being specified as having the aim of bringing about "the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called of Jesus Christ" (1:5-6). C. E. B. Cranfield paraphrases the thrust as being that "the Roman church, though not founded by him, is nevertheless within the sphere of his apostolic commission, and that he therefore has a right to address it in the way he is doing."<sup>41</sup> However, he then adds that

The words ἐν οἷς ἐστε καὶ ὑμεῖς are very often taken to be a clear indication that the Roman church was at this time predominantly Gentile; but they could quite as well refer simply to its geographical situation in the midst of the Gentile world. It would be reasonable for Paul to regard even a predominantly Jewish church, if situated at the heart of the Roman Empire, as within his sphere of responsibility.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly there is a geographical element to Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles, but the heartbeat of Paul's mission is not just that the gospel would spread geographically beyond Jerusalem and into the nations, but that Gentiles would be welcomed in as part of God's people. This is quite clear from the lengths he goes to in Romans in order to demonstrate that this was God's plan all along, and elsewhere is epitomised in Paul's

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<sup>40</sup> Caroline Johnson Hodge, "Olive Trees and Ethnicities: Judeans and Gentiles in Rom. 11:17-24," in J. Zangenberg and M. Labahn (eds), *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 77-89 (87).

<sup>41</sup> Cranfield, *Romans I-VIII*, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> Cranfield, *Romans I-VIII*, p. 68.

report that he and the Jerusalem apostles had agreed that “we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:9). The explicitly ethnic term ‘circumcised’ demonstrates that the term ‘Gentiles’ is likewise conceived ethnically and not purely geographically.<sup>43</sup> So too in Romans; Peter Lampe writes that “passages like 11:24f., combined with 11:30, 28, 17f., show that ἔθνη is nonetheless used *ethnically* for the urban Roman Christians, thus designating pagan birth.”<sup>44</sup> Whilst Cranfield is justified in cautioning that ἐν οἷς ἐστε καὶ ὑμεῖς *could* refer to a predominantly Jewish church in the midst of the Gentile world, I do not think it is justified to claim that it could do so ‘quite as well’ as to a predominantly Gentile church. The greater the degree to which the Roman church actually consisted of Gentiles, the greater the degree to which Paul might think it to come under his apostolic authority.

In 1:5-6 Paul’s apostolic authority would be primarily pastoral, but we have a missional parallel in 11:13-14: “Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them.” However emotionally invested Paul may be in the fate of the Jews (deeply, if we believe him at 9:1-3), he is conscious of being restrained by his apostleship to the Gentiles. His ministry to Jews is only indirect, as a result of his direct ministry to the Gentiles. So too vis-à-vis the saints in Rome, we may suppose. That he is confident of his charge to “bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles . . . including yourselves” suggests that the (encoded) recipients are Gentiles rather than Jews, even if Jews will be collaterally strengthened by the spiritual gift that Paul longs to impart (1:11).

This perspective is vindicated by 1:13-15, and later by 15:15-16. Regarding 1:13-15, it is clear that when Paul says he has long been intending to come to Rome “in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles,” he again places the recipients in the Gentile category. An alternative reading is that by ‘among you’ he really means ‘around you,’ so that the church is only ‘among’ Gentiles and does not necessarily consist of Gentiles. But this reading is punctured by v. 15, which specifies that it is ‘you who are at Rome’ to whom Paul will ‘proclaim the gospel.’ This shows that he categorises the saints in Rome among ‘Greeks and barbarians’ (v. 14), and confirms that the ‘harvest’ he speaks of in v. 13 is from the saints themselves, not primarily from unbelieving Gentiles waiting to be evangelised. Rom. 15:15-16 then

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<sup>43</sup> Das, *Solving*, p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (ed. M. D. Johnson; trans. from 1989 German 2<sup>nd</sup> edn; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 72. Emphasis original.

gives clear confirmation to the shape of the approach that we have been pursuing: the reason that Paul feels justified in addressing the Romans “rather boldly by way of reminder” is “because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.” Again it is possible to construe this as meaning that he wants his recipients to share in his grace (i.e. assist him in his ministry), but it is far more simple and natural to take him to mean that his (encoded) recipients come under his authority as apostle *to the Gentiles*.

### **Gentiles Directly Addressed**

Chapter 11 provides the clearest evidence that at least some of Paul’s encoded readers are Gentiles, as he expressly identifies them as such in 11:13 (“Now I am speaking to you Gentiles”), and it is clear that he continues to speak exclusively to Gentiles at least until v. 24. But does the turn to Gentiles in v. 13 imply that up to that point he has been addressing Jews also? It is unlikely. Firstly, the last time that Paul has directly addressed the audience lies many chapters back,<sup>45</sup> which means that at this point there is no prior and broader rhetorical ‘you’ within which to then specify a restricted group. Instead, the focus has been on the ‘they’ of unbelieving Israel, and it is this ‘they’ that provides the contextual counterpart to ‘you Gentiles.’<sup>46</sup> Secondly, the direct address to Gentiles in 11:13 only gives voice to the same orientation as is detectable in the rhetorical questions of chapter 9, which would be uncontroversial and inappropriate from the perspective of Jewish orthodoxy, but which might certainly emanate from

. . . gentiles who had found the whole story of Israel challenging in the very idea of there being a chosen people, let alone the Jewish people, and gentiles who, with a bit of moral philosophy in their heads or at least in their popular culture, would hear the story of Israel and at once begin to raise questions about what sort of God would behave in so unprincipled a fashion.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the other most significant verse to note in the present connection is Rom. 6:19, which describes the encoded readers as being formerly enslaved to lawlessness

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<sup>45</sup> Rom. 9:24 might include the readers but not as the objects of a direct second person address. It is debatable whether that verse implies that the recipients have been called from both Jews and also Gentiles. This is how Lampe takes it (*Paul to Valentinus*, p. 72), whilst Das holds that it refers to Christians generally rather than the recipients specifically (*Solving*, p. 103).

<sup>46</sup> Das, *Solving*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1186.

(ἀνομία). This would be an entirely inappropriate characterisation of Jews, and the surrounding verses confirm that Gentiles are indeed in view by virtue of the linguistic and thematic links with the indictment of Gentiles in 1:18-32<sup>48</sup> (see comments on that section below). This deserves to influence our reception of 7:1 a few verses later, in which the address to ‘those who know the law’ might otherwise seem to imply a Jewish readership.<sup>49</sup> The plain Gentile orientation of the preceding chapter urges us instead to understand it as referring to Gentiles who know the law. Lampe writes that “Even the Gentile Christians who are free from the Law may be persuaded through proofs from Scripture if they are holding the Old Testament in their hands as their Bible,”<sup>50</sup> and all the more so if (as is extremely likely) some of them were former Godfearers who had become familiar with the law in the environment of the synagogue.<sup>51</sup> The point about Godfearers has explaining power beyond just 7:1, which after all is only a distillation of the pervasive impression that Romans assumes and requires a robust familiarity with Jewish issues, scriptures and traditions. When this impression is set alongside the clear indications that Romans is addressed to Gentiles, we have the problem known as the ‘double character’ of Romans.<sup>52</sup> But as Lampe says, “The solution of the paradox is at hand if we assume that most people in the Roman church were of Gentile origin but had lived as sympathizers on the margins of the synagogues before they became Christian.”<sup>53</sup>

## The Empirical Readers

Overall, then, we are left with the strong impression that Romans directs its message firmly towards a Gentile Christian readership. However, this does not mean that we must extend this inflexibly to our assessment of the empirical readers, as does Das—in

<sup>48</sup> See Stowers, *Rereading*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>49</sup> The other verses that might seem to give the same impression (2:17-24 and 4:1) will be treated in the next section.

<sup>50</sup> Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus*, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus*, p. 70. He notes that “Juvenal (14.96-106) evidences some Roman (!) *sebomenoi* actively studying scripture: “*iudaicum ediscunt . . . ius*” (14.101), and that indeed *before* any proselyte circumcision (99). Similarly, Luke presupposes among the *sebomenoi* a knowledge of the Old Testament (Acts 13:16ff., also 8:27f.; in addition see also 17:2 and 17:4)” (p. 70). That those addressed in 7:1 were former Godfearers might be suggested by 7:9, if part of Paul’s intention there is to identify with his readers in being “once alive apart from the law.” I bury this point in a footnote because becoming entangled in the intricacies and controversies of Romans 7 is not one of the aims of this investigation!

<sup>52</sup> “Rom manifests a double character: it is essentially a debate between the Pauline gospel and Judaism, so that the conclusion seems obvious that the readers were Jewish Christians. Yet the letter contains statements which indicate specifically that the community was Gentile-Christian” (W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* [revised edn; trans. from 1973 German; London: SCM Press, 1975], p. 309).

<sup>53</sup> Lampe, “Roman Christians of Romans 16,” p. 225.

fact, we must not. Even leaving aside for the moment the evidence of chapters 14-15 (these will be treated in their own right in a later section), chapter 16 clearly shows that there are Jews among those whom Paul expects to read the letter. As well as Priscilla and Aquila, there is also Andronicus, Junia(s), Herodion, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, whom Paul refers to as his kinspeople (συγγενής).

Das attempts to stem this late breach of his Gentile-only reconstruction of the empirical readers by arguing that Priscilla and Aquila do not really count as Jewish readers because they are in Rome in their capacity as missionaries to the Gentiles, and that as with the use of ἀδελφός elsewhere, the term συγγενής should be taken metaphorically as it is applied to the remaining six individuals.<sup>54</sup> Regarding Priscilla and Aquila, we may say firstly that possible missionary capacity does not change the fact that they are Jews among the empirical readers of Romans, and secondly that (as mentioned above) their presence at Rome invites us to guess that there were other Jewish Christians who were likewise expelled by Claudius and who have likewise now returned—though probably not in such a clear capacity as missionaries to the Gentiles, and possibly still observing the law. Regarding the use of συγγενής, its explicitly ethnic meaning at 9:3 (the only other appearance outside chapter 16) is a powerful and persuasive indication that here it identifies Andronicus, Junia(s), Herodion, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater as Jews. Das argues that the function of συγγενής in chapter 16 should not be based on its appearance in 9:3, on the grounds that its ethnic significance there is contingent on the κατὰ σάρκα qualification.<sup>55</sup> This is a weak point. Rather, the κατὰ σάρκα qualification of συγγενής in 9:3 programmatically establishes its literal ethnic meaning so that the qualification need not be repeated every time συγγενής is used of Jews in chapter 16. Nor is the designation merely incidental, useful only for reconstructing the empirical readers of Romans. It also serves the rhetorical purpose of the letter, in that “Paul has a *special interest* in emphasizing the Jewish origin of Christians. . . . They are signs of hope that Israel is not yet lost.”<sup>56</sup> But with that we are getting ahead of ourselves, and we must turn to the text itself in order to catch up.

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<sup>54</sup> Das, *Solving*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>55</sup> Das, *Solving*, p. 91.

<sup>56</sup> Lampe, “Roman Christians of Romans 16,” p. 224.



## CHAPTER 2

### ROMANS 1-4

Romans 1-4 raises and begins to address some of the issues that are central to the letter and to our consideration of it. The better that we can understand the foundations that are laid in these chapters, the better we will be able to understand the structure that is erected in chapters 9-11. Because it is the latter chapters that are more the target of our attention, we must be selective in our treatment of chapters 1-4, dwelling only on the most salient issues and passages rather than attempting to closely analyse every verse and theme. With this in mind we may anticipate that for us the two most important questions that will be raised by these chapters are a) who is a Jew? and b) what is the problem with ‘works of the law’? With these questions we are landed in the thick of the debates surrounding the ‘New Perspective on Paul.’ If a touch of apophasis may be employed, it should not be necessary to rehearse again the publication of E. P. Sanders’ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977;<sup>1</sup> his challenge to Luther’s influential view of Paul as one who perceived (and had experienced) Judaism to be a legalistic system whose adherents sought to attain righteousness by accruing morally meritorious works; and his insistence that instead there is a pattern of ‘covenantal nomism’ common to both Judaism and Paul, whereby salvation is attained by gracious covenant and retained by grateful works. Nor should it be necessary to chronicle the fearsome array of debates catalysed by this work;<sup>2</sup> instead we will simply attempt to pick our way through the

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<sup>1</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> As Simon Gathercole says, “The task of charting the ongoing scholarly discussion is often as difficult as interpreting Paul: in mountains of articles, books, and commentaries, colleague rises up against colleague, unlikely alliances are made, and scholars are even known to change their minds. Any contribution to the debate that has the noble aim of clarification risks simply becoming part of the confusion” (Simon J. Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by his Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21-4:25,” in D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. A. Seifrid [eds], *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. II: The Paradoxes of Paul [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], pp. 147-184 [147]). Though it should be granted that

chapters at hand, asking what interpretation seems to most convincingly explain the text as we have it.

## ROMANS 1

The opening paragraph of Romans is the most elaborate introduction to any of Paul's letters. He declares himself to be an apostle to the Gentiles (vv. 1, 5) set apart for the gospel concerning God's son, "who was descended from David according to the flesh" (v. 3). That Paul considers his apostolic charge to be proclaiming the *Jewish* Messiah to the *Gentile* nations already contains the seed of the tension that underpins and energises the whole letter. Here, however, it remains buried, as Paul moves on to express his thanksgiving for the saints at Rome (v. 8) and his longstanding desire to visit them in person (vv. 10-15). The great prospective statement of the letter's themes in 1:16-17 then hints again at the particular ethnic dimensions and tensions of a gospel that is "salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (v. 16).<sup>3</sup> Moo reflects that "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the key to understanding Romans lies in successfully untangling the two connected strands of universalism — "to all who believe — and particularism — "to the Jew *first*.""<sup>4</sup> Paul does not address the tension here, and neither will we; it will come into focus in later passages.

For now, this is what we learn in the second half of Romans 1: God has wrath against wickedness (v. 18), because although people knew God (vv. 19-21), they have rejected him and chosen sin (vv. 21-32). That it is principally Gentile nations in view (or at least that the passage echoes traditional Jewish polemic against godless Gentile nations) is discernible throughout, with the most telling indicators being that it is God's revelation in creation rather than Torah that is the basis of human accountability (v. 19), that idolatry is singled out for denunciation (vv. 22-23), and that it is God's δικαίωμα that they know rather than his νόμος (v. 32). This point should not be pressed too hard, though, because when the opening paragraph of chapter 2 begins to draw out some of the implications of 1:18-32, it is Jews as well as Gentiles that are under consideration (2:9-11). Jews may have a special accountability to the Mosaic law (to be explored in

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in the same volume, Stephen Westerholm's excellent opening chapter "The "New Perspective" at Twenty-Five" certainly brings more clarity than confusion to the table (pp. 1-38).

<sup>3</sup> Moo follows Schlier in explaining that "Paul probably uses Ἕλληνα ("Greek") because he has no singular of ἔθνη ("Gentiles") as part of his own word stock" (Moo, *Romans*, p. 68).

<sup>4</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 68.

due course), but that does not mean that they are exempt from the responsibilities incumbent on all humanity. And now having glanced towards chapter 2, thither shall we go.

## ROMANS 2

The chapter begins by introducing the idea of intra-human judgment, which is exposed as inappropriate and self-destructive on the grounds that “you, the judge, are doing the very same things” (v. 1). Later, vv. 6-8 will detail the process whereby God “will repay according to each one’s deeds,” assuming an unproblematic dualism between ‘those who do good’ and ‘those who do evil.’ It is interesting that this moral dualism is retained as the overriding categorisation (and God’s corresponding judgment retained as proof of his impartiality) even when the ethnic categories of ‘Jew’ and ‘Greek’ are introduced in vv. 9-10: “There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.”

The summary at the end of the opening paragraph that “God shows no partiality” (v. 11) is then demonstrated in the second paragraph with reference to the law, which makes its first appearance in v. 12: “All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.” That this νόμος is *not* possessed by Gentiles (v. 14) leaves no room to doubt that it is the Mosaic law specifically rather than a moral law generally, especially since Paul has already stated that Gentiles do in fact possess a general moral law (1:32). The impression given by v. 12 that possessing the law is not much of an advantage in matters of judgment is explained in v. 13: “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” We learn in vv. 14-16 that Gentiles are theoretically able to do ‘what the law requires,’ though as yet with no explanation of that repeated phrase or of how the law would come to be ‘written on their hearts’ as foreseen in Jer. 31:33.

The rest of chapter 2 then begins to explicate the contrast between the ‘hearers’ and ‘doers’ of the law that was mooted in v. 13. First are the ‘hearers’: v. 17 launches a

castigation of the ‘Jew’<sup>5</sup> who relies on and boasts in the law but does not keep it. Whilst rhetorically addressed to a singular Ἰουδαῖος in the diatribe style, the content of the critique fully justifies Krister Stendahl’s then-revolutionary interpretation that “The actual transgressions in Israel—as a people, not in each and every individual—show that the Jews are not better than the Gentiles, in spite of circumcision and the proud possession of the Law.”<sup>6</sup> Dunn refines the point:

The argument is that the transgression of any individual Jew is enough to call in question the Jewish assumption that as a Jew he stands in a position of privilege and superiority before God as compared with the Gentile. The point is that once the typical Jew’s *a priori* status as Jew before God by virtue of his people’s election is seen to be called in question, then the broader indictment of man in general (1:18-32) can be seen to apply more clearly to Jew as well as Gentile (2:9-11).<sup>7</sup>

The national rather than individualistic lens of the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ is freshly and convincingly demonstrated in Wright’s recent *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, particularly in the analysis of the Pharisaic worldview in the second chapter.<sup>8</sup> Once the present passage has been viewed this way it is very difficult to revert back to seeing it individualistically. If the point was to demonstrate that it is impossible for any particular Jew to perfectly keep the whole law, then it is rather hard to believe that Paul could think of no offenses more difficult to avoid than stealing, committing adultery, or

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<sup>5</sup> David Frankfurter muses (tangentially to his focus on Revelation) that “We might well ask, who “calls oneself” a Jew anyway? Certainly not someone who is recognized as Jewish by birth or by community. Rather, this suggestion of self-chosen Jewishness would denote a Gentile who has taken to practicing certain elements of Jewish observance and thereby has come to claim that self-definition – as a constituent part of Jesus devotion” (David Frankfurter, “Jews or Not? Reconstructing the “Other” in Rev 2:9 and 3:9,” *Harvard Theology Review* 94/4 [2001], pp. 403-425 [419]). But this interpretation is undermined by the opening of Romans 3, where ‘the Jew’ is said to be advantaged by receipt of ‘the oracles of God’ (3:2). This emphasises heritage rather than *halakhah*, suggesting that Paul has ethnic Jews in mind there and so also in 2:17.

<sup>6</sup> Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 56/3 (1963), pp. 199-215 (201). Emphasis added. Stendahl anticipates e.g. Wright: “Paul is not for a moment suggesting anything so absurd as that all Jews steal, commit adultery, rob temples, and so forth. His point is rather that the national boast of ethnic Israel, that of being the creator’s chosen people, is falsified if theft, adultery and so forth are found within the nation” (N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. X [eds. L. E. Keck *et al.*; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002], p. 445).

<sup>7</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 116. Dunn’s first point is reminiscent of the words that close Philip Davies’ survey of Tobit, Judith, Aristeas, and 3 & 4 Maccabees: “In these stories, no Jew is an island, and in the fate of every Jew lies, potentially, the fate of the Jewish people” (P. R. Davies, “Didactic Stories,” in D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. A. Seifrid (eds), *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. I: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001], pp. 99-131 [131]).

<sup>8</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 1 (Christian Origins and the Question of God; London: SPCK, 2013), pp. 75-196.

robbing temples (vv. 21-22). We may note that in Rom. 7:7-25 it is *coveting* that is singled out as insidiously irresistible (even when that passage is decoupled from the introspective conscience of the West); the same would have served equally well in 2:17-24 as an example of an unkeepable command if that was what Paul required. Instead, the final verse of the paragraph adequately confirms its international rather than individualistic scope: “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (v. 24, quoting Isa. 52:5 LXX).<sup>9</sup>

Very well then, the ‘Jew’ of chapter 2 does not represent individual Jews but the Jewish nation as a whole. But is this national representative a legalist? That is, does ‘boasting in the law’ (v. 23) represent confidence in his own ability to keep the law as a means of accruing moral merit before God? A great deal of ink has been spilled over this question in recent decades, but the witness of the present chapter is remarkably clear. There is no indication at all that Paul is intending to censure his Jew for legalism of this kind. The theme of ‘boasting’ is introduced in v. 17, where it is specified as being ἐν θεῷ: ‘in God’ rather than ‘towards God’ as a claim to moral merit. The boasting is clearly directed towards other people—those to whom the Jew might consider himself a guide, light, corrector and teacher (vv. 19-20). This fits well with the last verse of the chapter: that the true inward Jew “receives praise not from others but from God” (v. 29) implies that the outward Jew of vv. 17-24 is looking to receive ‘praise from others.’<sup>10</sup> That Paul’s concept boasting is horizontal/relational rather than vertical/legalistic is clearly confirmed by chapter 11, which arraigns the Gentiles for ‘boasting’ *over those Jews* who for now have been cut out of the covenant (11:17-18; cf. 11:25).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hays reminds us that in the original context of Isaiah, the point of this charge is that “precisely because Israel’s oppressed condition allows the nations to despise the power of Israel’s God, the people can trust more surely that God will reveal himself and act to vindicate his own name” (Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [London: Yale University Press, 1989], p. 45). This means that “even in the portion of Paul’s argument that seems to threaten Jewish identity most radically, the scriptural quotation evokes, metaleptically, echoes of the promise that God, in vindicating his name, will also redeem Israel” (p. 46). Moyise allows that “Hays is surely correct that Paul is aware of what he is doing” (Steve Moyise, “Does Paul Respect the Context of His Quotations?” in C. D. Stanley [ed.], *Paul and Scripture: Extending the Conversation* [Early Christianity and Its Literature, 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012], pp. 97-114 [100]), but raises some serious questions about the extent to which Paul’s readers might be expected to follow such subtle hermeneutical strategies (see further the discussion in Moyise, *Evoking Scripture*, pp. 34-48).

<sup>10</sup> The use of καύχημα in 4:2 might seem to provide a damaging counter-example, but we shall see that this is not the case, and that in fact this is another example of a (non-)boast that is connected to the question of Jewish exclusivism rather than moral legalism.

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Beker, “The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986), pp. 10-16 (16).

What then is the content of the Jewish boast? Once again, if we look carefully at the text at hand then we are bound to agree with the New Perspective: the list of causes for boasting in vv. 17-20 nowhere mentions impressive obedience to the law, but only its possession and promulgation. The crowning boast of Paul's Jew is that he has in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth (v. 20). However, this should not lure us into assuming that Paul's critical response in vv. 21-24 censures Jewish boasting in and of itself. The actual faults that Paul finds are stealing, adultery, robbing temples; 'breaking the law' (v. 23), not misguided pride in maintaining its prescribed ethnic boundary markers. The thrust of the passage is therefore *not that the national boast in and of itself constitutes the national sin, but that the national sins puncture the national boast*. It is when this vital point is overlooked that the New Perspective on Paul is wont to lose its balance (though in fact this occurs much less frequently than its detractors are wont to assume).<sup>12</sup> The remainder of chapter 2 then advances the enigmatic references in vv. 14-16 to Gentiles who somehow keep the requirements of the law. We learn that such will be regarded as circumcised (v. 26), and that they "will condemn you who that have the written code and circumcision but break the law" (v. 27), since true Jewishness/circumcision is not external and physical (v. 28) but inward and spiritual (v. 29).

All of this is apt to raise questions and eyebrows. Sanders considers that "What is said about the law in Romans 2 cannot be fitted into a category otherwise known from Paul's letters, and for that reason it has been dealt with in an appendix."<sup>13</sup> The sharpest problem simply stated is that "in 2:12-15, 26 Paul entertains the possibility that some will be saved by works."<sup>14</sup> Of the four solutions that Sanders briefly raises and dismisses, in fact one does allow a coherent and robust way of understanding the discourse: the proposal that the language of 'doing the law' (as well as the 'true Jew/circumcision') refers to Gentile Christians. The primary rebuttal that Sanders offers here is that "The entire passage is about Jews and Gentiles – all humanity – and the law. The Gentiles are not Gentile Christians."<sup>15</sup> This is more an assertion than an argument, and it may be replied that whilst it is true that Paul's analysis of the *negative* relation of humanity to the law is universal, the positive possibility of keeping or 'doing' the law in

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Dunn states plainly that "it is the law as ethical standard which is commended here (vv 21-23), over against the law in its function as a boundary marking off Jews as an entity from the rest of humankind" (*Romans 1-8*, p. 108).

<sup>13</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>15</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 126.

the second half of chapter 2 is attached more specifically to Gentiles. Furthermore, it is clear that what is envisaged cannot be obedience to all the surface stipulations of the law. If it did, the ‘uncircumcised’ would have to actually be circumcised (in obedience to that requirement in the law) to be ‘regarded as circumcision’ (v. 26); but instead, “real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal” (v. 29). This last pronouncement gives us the clue we need: the Gentiles who fulfil the law are Christians, who do so *in the Spirit*. Sanders’ contestation of this point is baffling: he acknowledges that “If we may judge by Philippians 3, Paul would say that those who glory in Christ Jesus are truly circumcised,”<sup>16</sup> but his denial that Rom. 2:25-29 reflects the same premise leads him to conclude that the Romans passage is uncharacteristically un-Pauline! He supplies that Paul must have failed to properly filter a recycled ‘synagogue sermon,’ and to such an extent that it torpedoes his main thesis of justification only by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.<sup>17</sup> This is an exegetical mess, but acceptance that the law-abiding Gentiles in 2:12-29 are Christians clears it up, whilst also anticipating the exploration of life in the Spirit in Romans 8, and especially the fuller exploration of the way that faith fulfils the law in 9:30-10:17. That is not to say that we must demand from Romans 2 the same level of clarity on these matters as we see in the subsequent discussions; Sanders is right at least that in the earlier passage the rhetorical function of the mysteriously righteous Gentiles is not primarily to arrive at a Christian theological climax<sup>18</sup> but “to lend force to the condemnation of the Jews (2:14: even Gentiles are better than you Jews!).”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the (undeveloped) idea that Christians somehow fulfil the law is enough to rehabilitate Romans 2 into the argumentative flow of the letter, clearing the way for Sanders’ appendix to be removed.

### ROMANS 3

The opening verse of Romans 3 anticipates two of the questions that chapter 2 may have raised. If a person is not (necessarily) a Jew who is one outwardly (2:28) then what advantage has the Jew? If physical circumcision will not necessarily be regarded as circumcision by God (2:25-26) then what is the value of circumcision? As Richard Hays says, “On the basis of Romans 2, we expect Paul to answer, “Nothing at all!” thus

<sup>16</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, pp. 129-132.

<sup>18</sup> This being the assumption that forces Käsemann’s analysis to rely on an unconvincingly intricate construction of the flow of Romans 2 (Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 127).

<sup>19</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 124.

breaking cleanly with Judaism.”<sup>20</sup> But he defies our expectations in v. 2, answering “Much, in every way.” Here it is only their receipt of the oracles of God that is brought in support of Jewish advantage; the *πρῶτον* gives this the appearance of being a random starting point in a list that Paul forgets to resume until 9:4-5, but Hays illuminates the significance of the lone proof produced here:

What tethers Paul to this devout ethnocentrism? Scripture is the tether, because Scripture tells the story of God’s election of Israel. If Paul’s gospel nullifies this election, it means that God’s past dealing with his people was false dealing, that he made promises on which he is now reneging.<sup>21</sup>

That this is indeed Paul’s line of thought is suggested by the further question raised by v. 2 and voiced in v. 3: does Jewish unfaithfulness compromise the faithfulness of God? He answers emphatically in the negative in vv. 4-8, but the response is clipped, awaiting fuller exploration in chapter 9.<sup>22</sup> For now, he moves on to reiterate that “all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin” (v. 9),<sup>23</sup> which is then given final proof by a catena of scriptural quotations spanning vv. 10-18, adequately summed up in the first line: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one” (v. 10, quoting Ps. 14:3). Wagner draws attention to the particular link between Paul’s collection and Isaiah 59, which contributes not only the words of vv. 15-17, but also the body-part structure of the whole.<sup>24</sup> But Wright argues that as at 2:24, the literary contexts of each quotation converge to contribute a (prohibitively?) subtle note of hope, in that the wretched state of those condemned consistently becomes the catalyst for the promise of Yahweh’s deliverance:

The surface meaning of the text is clear, that all who are “under the law” are condemned as sinners; but the subtext is saying all the time, “Yes; and in

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<sup>20</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Dodd is often singled out for reproof with regard to his view of Romans 9-11 as a pre-existing sermon inserted into a letter that could happily have done without, but we may agree with his comment on the connection between those chapters and these verses: “it is likely that Paul already knew he was going to use his sermon on the Rejection of Israel when he briefly dismissed the difficulties raised in iii. 1-9 (*Romans*, p. 149).

<sup>23</sup> Seifrid notes that “Here he finally speaks of “Jews” and “Greeks” in the plural,” as this cycle of the argument moves into its closing stages (Mark A. Seifrid, “Unrighteous by Faith: Apostolic Proclamation in Romans 1:18-3:20,” in D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and M. A. Seifrid [eds], *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. II: The Paradoxes of Paul [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], pp. 105-145 [139]).

<sup>24</sup> J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “In Concert” in the Letter to the Romans* (eds C. K. Barret et al.; Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 101; Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 287-288.

precisely this situation God will act, because of the divine righteousness, to judge the world, to rescue the helpless, to establish the covenant.”<sup>25</sup>

## Works of the Law

We inferred earlier that ‘doing the law’ in such a way so as to be justified (2:13) could not mean simply obeying its stipulations, since being uncircumcised would then represent stark failure in this regard; Rom. 3:20 now confirms the point. If it is “the doers of the law who will be justified” (2:13), and if “from works of the law all flesh will *not* be justified”<sup>26</sup> (3:20), then ‘doing the law’ cannot be the same thing as ‘works of the law.’<sup>27</sup> This leaves us with two questions: firstly, how *does* one ‘do the law’ in the positive sense hinted at in 2:12-16? And secondly, what then *are* the ‘works of the law’ by which no flesh will be justified? Regarding the first question, the present section declares and explains that God “justifies the one who has faith in Jesus” (v. 26), which leaves us to wonder whether having faith in Jesus is somehow equivalent to ‘doing the law.’ We will have to wait until we come to Romans 10 to explore that further. For now we must turn to the second question of what is meant by ἔργων νόμου. We begin by hearing the summary statements of Moo and Wright on the matter, as Traditional and New perspective representatives respectively.

First Moo:

“Works of the law” are inadequate not because they are “works of *the law*” but, ultimately, because they are “works.” This clearly removes the matter from the purely salvation-historical realm to the broader realm of anthropology. No person can gain a standing with God through works because no one is able to perform works to the degree needed to secure such a standing.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 458.

<sup>26</sup> NRSV amended here to follow the Greek more closely.

<sup>27</sup> Moo represents a different approach to solving the puzzle of how Paul can say both that the doers of the law will be justified (2:13) and that no-one will be justified by works of the law (3:20). He discounts the idea that they must refer to different things and asserts instead that “one must insert a step in the argument between the two statements, to the effect that “no-one can do the law”” (*Romans*, p. 211). But this solution does not work because as we have already noted, ‘doing the law’ in 2:13 cannot mean obedience to its surface stipulations; if it did then Gentiles would have to be circumcised to ‘do the law,’ which 2:26 explicitly denies.

<sup>28</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 217.

And now Wright:

“The Jew” of 2:17 will come into court, metaphorically speaking, and “rest in the Torah,” producing “works of Torah”; these, it will be claimed, demonstrate that he or she is indeed a member of Israel, part of God’s covenant people. No, says Paul. To cite one’s possession of Torah as support will not do. Torah will simply remind you that you are a sinner like the Gentiles.<sup>29</sup>

The basic similarity between these views is the recognition that the problem with works of the law comes down to failure to fully obey the law (i.e. the presence of sin). We might expect as much, since that is what Paul says: the reason that all flesh will not be justified by works of the law is that “through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (3:20). We must not fall into the trap of thinking that the New Perspective on Paul disregards that fact. The clash of perspectives arises when this basic dynamic yields different inferences and emphases to the different approaches. Moo is anxious that works of the law are not consigned to a ‘purely salvation-historical realm’ and so is quick to affirm the presence of a timeless anthropological insight. But this sets up a false dichotomy. There is no reason why works of the law should not have a salvation-historical significance as the basis of a timeless anthropological insight. In fact this is just what we find. It is clear from vv. 27-29 that a consciousness of the ethnic significance of the law as marking off Jews from Gentiles has been retained from chapter 2: if justification was based on the law, then God would be God of the Jews only.<sup>30</sup> This undermines Moo’s attempt to emphasise the *works* of the law at the expense of them being the works of *the [Mosaic] law*. Thus, in continuity with the critique of the Jew in chapter 2 (ethnic pride punctured by sin) and in recognition of the ongoing ethnic dimension of the law in chapter 3, we are bound to afford ‘the works of the law’ some ethnic significance. This does not eclipse the fact that sin is ultimately the problem. Wright holds both points together: “The badge of membership in the new people of God is faith, not works of the Torah, which would have restricted apparent membership to Jews and proselytes and would in any case have condemned everyone (since all alike are sinful).”<sup>31</sup> As for whether in this case ‘works of the law’ should be

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 459.

<sup>30</sup> The alternative punctuation of these verses suggested by R. B. Hays (““Have We Found Abraham to be our Forefather according to the Flesh?” A Reconsideration of Rom 4:1,” *Novum Testamentum* 27/1 [1985], pp. 76-98 [84-85]) would only strengthen the connection between justification and the oneness of God. See further on this below.

<sup>31</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 413.

seen as referring specifically or primarily to those things which mark out Jews from Gentiles,<sup>32</sup> I think that the importance of the question is often overstated. Firstly, if the problem with ‘works of the law’ is that they result in the knowledge of sin (3:20; similarly 4:15) then it does not matter too much whether these works are seen as the full gamut of Mosaic laws, or the boundary markers that make the Jews accountable to that full gamut.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, whilst the function of marking off Jews from Gentiles is performed especially by sabbath, food laws and circumcision, the other imperatives of the law (not least the summons to exclusive monotheism!) do also carry that same function.<sup>34</sup>

Romans 1-3 thus give no hint that Paul understood Jews to be obeying the law in order to accrue moral merit before God. Rom. 2:17-24 in particular accords much more with the New Perspective sketch of Torah obedience as a mark of and response to a pre-existing ‘relation to God’ (2:17). A merit-accrual mentality is not Paul’s problem with ‘works (of the law).’ However, as we have seen above, neither is ethnic pride and national boasting *per se*. Circumcision would be of value *if the law was obeyed* (2:25). The reason that ethnic pride and national boasting are ‘excluded’ (3:27) is because of the presence of sin in the Jewish nation. In other words, ‘works (of the law)’ fall short of the glory of God (3:23), and in the final count are only able to attain the negative purpose of the law, which is to produce the knowledge of sin (3:20b). That is why “all flesh will not be justified in his sight by works of the law”<sup>35</sup> (3:20a). In summary, then, Paul’s *problem* with ‘the Jew’ is proud ethnic exclusivism, especially as it centres on possession of the law; his *response* is to point out that the law only proves that Jews are sinners like Gentiles; and his *solution* is faith in Christ, which overcomes human guilt before God and therefore also every ethnic (or other) division and boast.

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<sup>32</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 102 and surrounding context. The thesis is now closely associated with James D. G. Dunn.

<sup>33</sup> As Wright recently wrote: “if what you want is ‘righteousness under Torah’, a covenant status marked out by Torah itself, there is only one way forward: you have to ‘do’ the whole thing. He has stated often enough, in this letter and elsewhere, the problem with that ambition: it’s impossible” (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1171).

<sup>34</sup> So Watson: “Israel is differentiated from the Gentiles not by individual observances such as circumcision *per se*, but by the attempt to practise the law’s requirements in their entirety” (Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* [London: T&T Clark, 2004], p. 334).

<sup>35</sup> NRSV amended here to follow the Greek more closely.

## ROMANS 4

In chapter 4, Paul shows how the climax that he has reached in the second half of chapter 3—that God justifies all who have faith in Jesus regardless of ethnicity or law-abidance—is the appropriate fulfillment of what had been promised to and experienced by Abraham all along. The covenant made with Abraham was not dependent on works (vv. 2-8), circumcision (vv. 9-12) or the law (vv. 13-15). This means that he is “the father of all of us” (v. 16), and that everyone who believes in Jesus receives the same verdict as Abraham, whose faith was reckoned to him as righteousness (vv. 22-25). Of these things we cannot speak now in detail. Close consideration of just the opening verse of the chapter will suffice to raise the issues and make the points which will be relevant for our investigation as it progresses.

Romans 4:1 in the NRSV reads “What then are we to say was gained by Abraham,<sup>36</sup> our ancestor according to the flesh?” Richard Hays devotes an article to the grammar and interpretation of the verse,<sup>37</sup> proposing the alternative translation, “What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?” On a grammatical level the key issues at play are the function of τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν and the subject of εὐρηκέναι. Regarding the former, Hays surveys the six other uses of the phrase in Romans,<sup>38</sup> then making the following observations (and I quote):

1. In every case except Rom 8:31, τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν constitutes a complete sentence, to be punctuated with a question mark immediately following ἐροῦμεν.
2. In all six instances, this formulation introduces another rhetorical question.
3. In all six instances, the second rhetorical question articulates an inference which might be drawn from the foregoing discussion.
4. In four of the six cases, this inference is a false one.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> I concur with Wright that it is not necessary to posit an (anticipated or known) Abraham-oriented Judaizing opposition in order to account for Paul’s introduction of that figure: “Here, not as an aside, a semi-apologetic or semi-polemical exegetical footnote, but as his own choice of passage and topic, he presents the story of Abraham to show that, in Jesus Christ, God has done what had been promised from the beginning and has thereby created the family whose defining mark is faith in God the life-giver” (“Letter to the Romans,” p. 488).

<sup>37</sup> Hays, “Reconsideration of Rom 4:1,” pp. 76-98. See also Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 61-84.

<sup>38</sup> He includes Rom. 3:5 though it lacks οὖν. He makes the interesting note that the τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν formulation is absent from Paul’s other letters.

<sup>39</sup> Hays, “Reconsideration of Rom 4:1,” p. 79.

These indicators are extremely suggestive and already begin to make Hays' translation of Rom. 4:1 look more appropriate and convincing than the traditional reading. He is then able to press home his advantage with regard to the troublesome εὐρηκέναι. In the inherited reading, Abraham is the subject of εὐρηκέναι, so that the verse is a question about what he found. Hays problematizes this with the reminder that "the use of εὐρίσκειν in the sense of "gain, acquire" with no expressed object is unparalleled in Paul's usage,"<sup>40</sup> which clears the way for him to reconsider its function:

If we understand Ἀβραάμ not as the subject but as the direct *object* of the infinitive εὐρηκέναι, whose subject would then be understood as the "we" of the immediately preceding ἐροῦμεν, we could translate the verse in the following way: "What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham (to be) our forefather according to the flesh?"<sup>41</sup>

It is a clinical and convincing overthrow of the inherited translation that Jewett's protestations are insufficient to impede. His objection is that "Hays' hypothesis requires an overly subtle argument that must insert the word "only" to make a link between the rhetorical question and the more immediate context of 4:2-10: "Look, do you think that we Jews have considered Abraham our forefather only according to the flesh?"<sup>42</sup> But as Hays points out, by the time that chapter 4 closes it has become clear that its main subject is Abraham as the father of those who have faith.<sup>43</sup> Hays' translation of 4:1 is eminently appropriate to the destination of the discussion (vv. 9-25), and so it should matter little if it connects less directly with vv. 2-8, which intervene to lay the necessary groundwork for the closing climax of the chapter. But in fact Jewett's objection may be countered even more decisively if we accept (as did Hays<sup>44</sup>) Wright's amendment, which is that the 'we' of "Have we found Abraham . . ." includes both Jews and

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<sup>40</sup> Hays, "Reconsideration of Rom 4:1," p. 80. I have made an editorial decision to end the quotation before the words ". . . or, indeed, in the NT," because Hays will note immediately afterwards that "The verb is used absolutely, with no explicit object, in expressions such as ζητεῖτε καὶ εὐρήσατε (Matt. 7:7 = Luke 11:9)!" (p. 80, n. 16).

<sup>41</sup> Hays, "Reconsideration of Rom 4:1," p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 307.

<sup>43</sup> Hays, "Reconsideration of Rom 4:1," p. 89. Likewise Wright: "The chapter is, in fact, a full-dress exposition of the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15, showing at every point how God always intended and promised that the covenant family of Abraham would include Gentiles as well as Jews. . . . [I]n his present argument this is the main topic, to which "justification by faith" makes a vital contribution, rather than the other way round" ("Letter to the Romans," p. 487).

<sup>44</sup> Richard B. Hays, "Adam, Israel, Christ: The Question of Covenant in the Theology of Romans," in D. M. Hay and E. E. Johnson (eds), *Pauline Theology*, vol. III: Romans (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 68-86 (81).

Gentiles,<sup>45</sup> and not only ‘we Jews’ as Hays had originally thought.<sup>46</sup> This makes better sense in the immediate context of 3:27-31, allowing the explicit focus there on the multi-ethnic inclusivity of justification by faith to flow unobstructed into chapter 4. More importantly, though,<sup>47</sup> it dispenses with the need for the insertion of the “only” to which Jewett objected; those Gentiles whom God has justified (3:29-30) can only answer ‘no’ to the question “have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?” as it stands.

This opens up the way for us to understand the connection between v. 1 and v. 2—as we must if we are to account for the γὰρ which begins the latter. Wright identifies the key in 3:28-29, verses which clearly reflect the conviction that if justification were by works of the law, then God would be the God of the Jews only; likewise, then, if Abraham were justified by works (of the law) then he would be father of the Jews only. Not only does this explain the movement from the false inference of v. 1b to the false hypothetical scenario of v. 2, it also makes perfect sense of the ‘boasting’ motif that reappears there: if Abraham was justified by works (of the law), then (by extension) Israel’s ethnic ‘boast’ would thereby be sustained.<sup>48</sup> Tellingly, this coheres with the significance of ‘boasting’ in previous chapters, where it clearly designates not an attitude of legalism towards God but an attitude of superiority towards Gentiles. This is so even granted the introduction in 4:4 of the analogy of works to wages, which might be susceptible to seizure as evidence that Paul’s critique of ‘boasting’ and ‘works of the law’ does after all target an attitude of merit-oriented self-effort. Sanders deftly parries: having acknowledged that the verse does indeed show that “Paul was against claiming the “reward” as if God owed it and in favor of accepting righteousness as a gracious gift,”<sup>49</sup> he writes that

There is here, however, no indication that Paul thought the law had failed *because* keeping it leads to the wrong attitude or that his opposition to boasting *accounts* for his saying that righteousness is not by law. The unbroken argument of Rom. 3:27-4:25 concerns not the attitude of self-righteousness, but God’s

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<sup>45</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” pp. 489-490.

<sup>46</sup> Hays, “Reconsideration of Rom 4:1,” p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> Rom. 4:1 lacks γὰρ, which reduces the need to demonstrate that it resumes the ethnic-inclusive perspective of 3:27-31, even if such demonstration is still valuable.

<sup>48</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 490.

<sup>49</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 35.

plan of salvation, which is clearly stated in the Abraham story and which is now made available to those who have faith in Christ, without distinction.<sup>50</sup>

Being thus convinced of the basic accuracy of the New Perspective on Paul, though still in possession of a collection of unanswered questions, it is time that we turned to chapters 9-11, which command the core of our concern in this part of the thesis.

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<sup>50</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 35.



## CHAPTER 3

### ROMANS 9:1-11:15

What happens when the unstoppable force meets the immovable object? By the time that we arrive at the border of Romans 9, we have already been exposed to eight chapters setting out Paul's vision of the gospel as the unstoppable force that is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.<sup>1</sup> But all along there has been an immovable object lurking on the horizon: God's faithfulness to his covenant people, Israel. How can the gospel really reveal the righteousness of God if Israel has mostly failed to believe it? Has the word of God failed? Has God rejected his people? If so then why should God be trusted to bring final salvation to those who have faith in Jesus? This is the collision and these are the questions that determine the substance of Romans 9-11. Far from being a superfluous insertion into the logical flow of the letter,<sup>2</sup> these chapters both face the tensions raised by what has gone before and shape the exhortations to follow. The great enigmatic climax of the chapters is the proclamation in 11:26 that "all Israel will be saved," and since it is prefaced with the encouraging statement that "I want you to understand this mystery," the main hope of this section will be to do just that. With this goal in mind our examination of the text will become

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson notes five direct assertions of God's impartiality: 1:16; 2:11; 3:9, 22; 10:12 ("God's Covenant Faithfulness to Israel," p. 158). She also notes nine instances of Jew and Gentile being named 'side-by-side' (1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9, 29; 9:24, 30-31; 10:12; 11:25; 15:10), but it is somewhat misleading to do so as though these were all illustrations of God's ethnic impartiality (as implied by the phrase 'side-by-side'). Five might be taken as such (3:9, 29; 9:24; 10:12; 15:10), but the other verses not.

<sup>2</sup> Dodd often serves as 'Exhibit A' for this discredited view; he wrote that chapters 9-11 represent "the kind of sermon that Paul must often have had occasion to deliver, in defining his attitude to what we may call the Jewish question. It is quite possible that he kept by him a MS. of such a sermon, for use as occasion demanded, and inserted it here" (*Romans*, p. 149). But Dodd is outdone in this connection by F. W. Beare, who comments thus: "We have left out of consideration three chapters (9-11) of this letter, chiefly because they do not form an integral part of the main argument. They are a kind of supplement in which Paul struggles with the problem of the failure of his own nation. We cannot feel that the apostle is at his best here, and we are inclined to ask if he has not got himself into inextricable (and needless) difficulties by attempting to salvage some remnant of racial privilege for the historic Israel" (F. W. Beare, *St. Paul and His Letters* [London: A. & C. Black, 1962], pp. 103-104).

increasingly detailed as that verse approaches. Having found good reason to assent to the main tenets of the New Perspective on Paul in the previous section, it is the voices from that quarter that are given more heed in the present one.

## ROMANS 9:1-5

Paul begins with a solemn witness to his own truthfulness (v. 1), in which the οὐ ψεύδομαι might imply a note of protestation; in 2 Cor. 11:31, Gal. 1:20, and 1 Tim. 2:7 the expression asserts Paul's truthfulness in contexts where it might have been challenged.<sup>3</sup> Here the formulation introduces the avowal that "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh" (vv. 2-3 NRSV, though see below for acceptance of Jewett's modification). The barrenness of the language in vv.1-3 is intensified by the still lingering note of triumph from 8:39; having there exulted in the unchallengeable security in the love of God for those 'in Christ Jesus our Lord,' Paul now abruptly and astonishingly declares that (in some sense) all this he would forfeit for the sake of his kindred (Israel, v. 4). The parallel with Moses' prayer in Ex. 32:32 is often noted and may well have been in Paul's mind.<sup>4</sup> Wright suggests that "by describing himself as "I myself" he intends not so much to stress "this really is me, Paul, speaking" but rather to hint, as perhaps in 7:25, that this is what "I, left to myself" might think as opposed to "I, speaking as a man in Christ.""<sup>5</sup> But that he is 'speaking as a man in Christ' is exactly what he has asserted in v. 1, and it seems very unlikely that he would be willing to so quickly impede the force and undermine the sincerity of that assurance by 'hinting' to the contrary immediately afterwards. Jewett's interpretation is therefore to be preferred: "It is better in this context to translate, "I used to pray that I myself be banned . . ." implying actual prayer requests made sometime before the moment of writing, requests that God has thus far chosen not to fulfill."<sup>6</sup> This allows us to see the contrast between the αὐτὸς ἐγὼ who has wished to be cut off and the συγγενῶν who actually are so. For it will become clear that

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (ed. Moisés Silva; Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 6; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), pp. 478-479.

<sup>4</sup> We might alternatively think of Kate Bush's prayer in 'Running up that hill' ("If I only could, I'd make a deal with God / And I'd get him to swap our places").

<sup>5</sup> Wright, "Letter to the Romans," p. 628.

<sup>6</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 560.

it is Israel's separation from Christ that is the cause of Paul's anguish;<sup>7</sup> he seeks to overcome the separation and alleviate the anguish by his prayers (10:1), his practice (11:13-14), and ultimately by a prediction (11:26-27).

The keen distress expressed on Israel's account in 9:1-3 renders the list of her privileges which follows in vv. 4-5 potentially bittersweet, with each enumeration of blessing failing to assail the central problem and instead compounding the question which drives the rest of chapters 9-11: how could God in his righteousness let this separation afflict his chosen and privileged people? There is no hint here that the privileges are viewed as forfeited claims of a bygone era (confirmed by 11:29). The plural διαθήκαι<sup>8</sup> raises the possibility that even the 'new covenant' is included; if so then the sense would be not that Jews are automatically saved but that salvation is from the Jews (not least in that the 'new covenant' word of Jer. 31:31-34 is one of those ἐπαγγελίαι that the Israelites possess<sup>9</sup>). The point should not be pressed though, firstly because Eph. 2:12 provides an example of a New Testament plural usage of διαθήκη that evidently excludes the new covenant,<sup>10</sup> and secondly because a passing reference to the new covenant in the middle of v. 4 might be thought to detract from the climactic appearance of ὁ χριστὸς at the end of the list in v. 5. That the Messiah is 'from them according to the flesh' is the blessing that most keenly expresses both the intimacy and insufficiency of Israel's relationship with God and his promises, anticipating the synopsis that "As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved" (11:28).

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<sup>7</sup> Eager to stamp out the possible germination of a two-covenant hypothesis at this tender stage of Romans 9-11, Longenecker writes that "It is true that these verses do not expressly attribute Paul's sorrow to the lack of faith in Christ among his own people, and in this silence there is a foothold for seeing his sorrow only in relation to Jewish opposition to the gentile mission. But only the notion of a salvific deficiency among non-Christian Jews seems adequate to explain Paul's deeply rooted anxieties regarding non-Christian Jews" (Bruce W. Longenecker, "On Israel's God and God's Israel: Assessing Supersessionism in Paul," *JST* 58/1 [2007], pp. 26-44 [30]). Quite so, though it would seem unnecessary to rely on the strength of Paul's expressed anxiety in 9:1-5 to show that it is related to Israel's (non-)salvation rather than a deficient attitude to the Gentile mission, especially since the former is explicitly the subject of the equally passionate prayer in 10:1.

<sup>8</sup> Both the singular and plural of διαθήκη have strong manuscript support, but the latter is to be preferred as the more difficult reading, in context of the strong preference for the singular in the Hebrew Bible, and the theological difficulties posed to the early church by a reference that could be taken to include the new covenant (Jewett, *Romans*, p. 555). The first reason that Jewett gives for the difficulty of the plural reading is that "it breaks out of the pattern of singular nouns in the series" (p. 555), but this is not a strong point since there are only two singular nouns prior to διαθήκαι – hardly enough to establish a clear pattern.

<sup>9</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 564.

<sup>10</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 563.

## ROMANS 9:6-18

If Israel was so favoured as to produce the Messiah according to the flesh (v. 5) and yet is not on the whole ‘in Christ’ (8:39), then has the word of God failed?<sup>11</sup> No, explains Paul, because not all who are associated with Christ by flesh were chosen as recipients of the promise (because the promise did not come on the basis of flesh); accordingly, the word of God is not accountable for the response of those to whom it was not sent. Having an eye as we do on 11:25-26, the opening verse of the present section is of particular interest because of its double ‘Israel’ distinction. Wright introduces us to the key issues:

Paul has set down a marker that from this point on the word “Israel” has two referents, just as with the word “Jew” in 2:28-29. Additionally, if that earlier passage is a precedent, the second “Israel” need not be simply a subset of the first, a “true Israel” taken from within the larger group of the physical family. That, to be sure, is what we find in the next verses; but by the time we get to v. 24 the picture has broadened out as it did, proleptically, in 2:29.<sup>12</sup>

The suggestion that the second Ἰσραήλ of 9:6 might be more than simply a subset of the first (i.e. including also Gentiles) is an unpopular reading, but I suspect that this is at least partly because of an anxiety to protect πᾶς Ἰσραήλ in 11:26 from the same assessment.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Wright appears to have retreated from a Gentile-inclusive understanding of the second ‘Israel’ in 9:6,<sup>14</sup> though crucially without revising his view that the pattern of this verse sets the

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<sup>11</sup> Käsemann draws out what is under the surface here, observing that “The theological depth of the problem was already disclosed in 3:5: Does not God himself fail if his promises remain empty? There the objection was indignantly dismissed, but the problem remains open” (Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* [trans. from 1973 German; London: SCM Press, 1980], p. 261).

<sup>12</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 636. Wright elsewhere contends that his interpretation of 9:6 is suggested not only by the verses that directly follow but also those that directly precede, on the understanding that “The list of Jewish privileges in 9.4f is not arbitrary, but echoes precisely those privileges which, throughout Romans up to this point, Paul has shown to be transferred to the Jews’ representative Messiah, and, through him, to all those who are ‘in him,’ be they Jewish or Gentile” (N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], p. 237). I do not think that this is a strong point because I do not think that the ‘echoes’ are ‘precise.’

<sup>13</sup> Longenecker showcases such anxiety: “the terminological play of 9.6 is not carried any further than that verse, and has no part in his larger case” (Bruce W. Longenecker, “Different Answers To Different Issues: Israel, the Gentiles and Salvation History in Romans 9-11,” *JSNT* 36 [1989], pp. 95-123 [96]).

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1225: the remnant of Israel in 11:7 is equivalent to the second ‘Israel’ of 9:6.

scene for understanding the second 'Israel' of 11:25-26 as Gentile-inclusive.<sup>15</sup> In fact the clues that are available to us do indeed point to a Gentile-inclusive second Ἰσραήλ in 9:6. Wright mentions 2:28-29, where we saw Paul aver that “a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart.” Alone this could be interpreted in support of the ‘subset’ idea (‘a person is a Jew who is one inwardly as well as outwardly’), but the preceding statements in 2:26-27 place some Gentiles firmly in the ‘true Jew’ category: “if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?” (2:26).

If it be protested that the ‘Jew’ terminology of chapter 2 should not be too readily assimilated to the ‘Israel’ terminology of 9:6,<sup>16</sup> then no such charge can be brought against the evidence of 9:7. There “The cross-reference to Romans 4 in particular shows how unwise it is to imagine that the true ‘seed’ of Abraham in 9:7 is simply a subset of ethnic Israel.”<sup>17</sup> Rom. 4:11-12 has stated that Abraham is the father of all who have faith, explicitly specifying both Gentiles (4:11) and Jews (4:12), with the same point reformulated in 4:16-17. Thus when 9:7-8 takes up again the language and argument of Abraham’s descendants there is every reason to suppose that the ‘true descendants’ include Gentiles, and therefore that this is also true of the second Ἰσραήλ of 9:6. This makes us all the more ready for the ‘broadened out’ picture of ‘us whom he has called’ in 9:24: “not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.”<sup>18</sup> In summary, if Gentiles have been expressly included in the categories of ‘circumcision’ (2:26), ‘Jew’ (2:29), ‘descendants of Abraham’ (9:7-8 looking back to 4:12, 16-7), and ‘us whom he has called’ (9:24), what justification is there for preserving ethnic exclusivity in the second ‘Israel’ of 9:6? What this should contribute to our reading of 11:25-27 remains to be seen.

The principle that the promise is not ethnic-automatic is reinforced in vv. 10-13 with reference to the story of Jacob and Esau, which also serves to add the clarification that

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<sup>15</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 142-1246. See further on this below.

<sup>16</sup> Dunn reminds us that the word ‘Jew’ is generally reflective of an outside perspective looking in, whereas the word ‘Israel’ reflects “a *self*-understanding, a covenant understanding” (James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998], p. 505).

<sup>17</sup> Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 238.

<sup>18</sup> It remains the fact that 9:24 is when Paul first specifies both Gentiles and Jews in this passage, and we need not claim him to have been explicit prior to this point. Staples is too exuberant in declaring that Paul “makes it abundantly clear in Rom 9:6 that when he says “Israel,” he does not restrict his meaning to ethnic Jews, nor does he think all who are born Jews are “Israel”” (Joseph A. Staples, “What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with ‘All Israel’? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25-27,” *JBL* 130/2 [2011], pp. 371-390 [378]). The latter point is quite clear but the former is hardly ‘abundantly’ so.

God's purpose of election is carried out 'not by works but by his call' (v. 12). If then God's call is arbitrary, based on neither descent nor works, is he unjust? Paul's answer is to cite God's words to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (v. 15). This may well be thought to restate the problem rather than supply a solution, but clearly for Paul God's 'justice' is to be located primarily in his faithfulness to his word rather than in an expectation that he will act even-handedly towards all people (though the latter is surely the implicit assumption of the voiced objection). The fact that v. 15 focuses on mercy and compassion perhaps initially softens the refusal to engage with the fairness question (inviting the palatable conclusion that since mercy is by definition undeserved, God is *more* than just not less than just), but then vv. 17-18 go on to introduce the other side of selective mercy, which is the concept of hardening. This had to surface, because the problem of Israel according to the flesh still broods. It has not been solved in this section, because although Paul may have got the word of God off the hook by showing that it was not beholden to all Abraham's physical children, this does not abrogate their election as possessors of the privileges named in vv. 4-5. Here the hardening theme is not openly linked with Israel according to the flesh as it will be from 11:7 onwards; but it moots the idea that even when his word is shunned, God may still have a contingency purpose in motion (v. 17).

## ROMANS 9:19-29

Paul realises that the preceding section may have raised as many questions as it answered, and here he returns to the diatribe style (though with a less specific interlocutor than the 'Jew' of chapter 2<sup>19</sup>) in order to voice and address the one which v. 18 in particular can hardly fail to provoke: if God chooses to have mercy on some and to harden others, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" (v. 19). This is essentially the same complaint of injustice as is found in v. 14, in light of God's arbitrary selection of Jacob and rejection of Esau. Paul's answer there was less than accommodating to the most obvious thrust of the objection ('has God not been unjust in the sense of unfair?'), and here the immediate response possesses an even

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<sup>19</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 590: The questions represent 'skeptical arrogance' rather than Jewish orthodoxy, to which they would appear 'unacceptable.'

more pronounced lack of sympathy for the imaginary partner of his diatribe. Not only are the questions themselves censured (v. 20), but ‘Who can resist his will?’ seems to be answered in v. 21 as ‘no-one,’ because the potter has the right to fashion creations unlike in dignity out of the same clay.<sup>20</sup> This answer would seem to vindicate rather than refute the governing grievance of the question. But before we become too concerned about Paul’s rhetorical relationship with his imaginary friend, it will be well to hear Wright’s words of caution: “Reading this part of Romans is like riding a bicycle: if you stand still for more than a moment, forgetting the onward movement of the story both of 9:6-10:21 and of the letter as a whole, you are liable to lose your balance—or, perhaps, to accuse Paul of losing his.”<sup>21</sup> Richard Hays is on hand as ever to provide an intertextual reflection that will help us ‘keep our balance’ at this point. Among the ‘complex echoes from numerous scriptural antecedents’ of the image of the potter and the clay, there is a special role for the story of Jeremiah and the potter in Jer. 18:3-6:

The parable suggests that the potter’s power is not destructive but creative: the vessel may fall, but the potter reshapes it. . . . The reader who recognizes the allusion will not slip into the error of reading Rom. 9:14-29 as an excursus on the doctrine of the predestination of individuals to salvation or damnation, because the prophetic subtexts keep the concern with which the chapter began—the fate of Israel—sharply in focus.<sup>22</sup>

Douglass Moo rather seems to slip into the error that Hays is attempting to steer us away from:

In Rom. 11 Paul is arguing about the position of Israel as a nation in the plan of God: how God called that people (11:2), hardened much of it (11:7), and will eventually remove that hardening so as to save it (11:26). Here, however, Paul is speaking about the work of God in individuals.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> As Moo reflects, “In the face of the accusation that his stress on the initiative of God in determining who would be his people turns God into an unjust tyrant, Paul retreats not one step. On the contrary, he goes on the offensive and strengthens his teaching about the unconstrained freedom of God” (*Romans*, p. 609).

<sup>21</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 639. Such an ‘accusation’ is particularly pronounced in Dodd’s comments on Paul’s employment of the potter and clay analogy: Paul has represented God as “a non-moral despot,” and “the trouble is that a man is not a pot; he *will* ask, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ and he will not be bludgeoned into silence. It is the weakest point in the whole epistle” (*Romans*, p. 159).

<sup>22</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>23</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 599.

This artificial distinction between the supposedly individual focus of the present section and the corporate focus of chapter 11 is all the more unintelligible when we remember that the opening paragraphs of chapter 9 have already made it quite clear that the problem Paul is addressing is the status and fate of unbelieving Israel, not the fate of generic individuals. That does not mean that we must excise or ignore the abstract or general dimensions of the theological questions raised by Paul's truculent interlocutor. What we have is a subtle triple-layered agenda. On the surface, glaringly, are the explicitly theological questions put in the mouth of a diatribal partner, and the surface answers are abrupt and apparently dismissive. Underneath this is the story and problem of Israel, which we must not allow to become obscured from our view by the weight and difficulty of the questions comprising the first layer. But underneath both, the same theological questions are buried, stripped of any argumentative petulance that they may have had in their top-layer rhetorical form and still awaiting answers. These cannot be given glibly, which is why the questions have the appearance of going unanswered; the answers can only be given as part of a story—the story of Israel. This is why it is misleading for Dunn to say that

It is the recognition that Paul refuses to be drawn into a discussion of the fairness or unfairness of God's judgment, and that he is intent on using Israel's history to illuminate God's purpose in salvation-history, which provides the key to the difficult verses 22-23/24.<sup>24</sup>

Rather, Paul has deliberately set himself up to be drawn into a discussion of the (un)fairness of God's judgment, but on his own terms, i.e. through a consideration of God's purposes in salvation history. Thus it is that the hypothetical scenario of vv. 22-23—what if God has patiently endured the objects of his wrath in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of his mercy?—is suddenly grounded in present historical reality: the objects of mercy are “us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles” (v. 24). There is some ambiguity in the way that this is supported from scripture in vv. 25-29. The melded Hosea quotes in vv. 25-26 seem employed by Paul in order to foreground the Gentiles as the surprising new recipients of God's mercy, when in the mouth of the prophet they pertained not to the Gentiles but to wayward Israel. Having acknowledged this as an audacious ‘hermeneutical coup’ (“It is

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<sup>24</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (eds David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker and Ralph P. Martin; Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988), p. 566.

as though the light of the gospel shining through the text has illuminated a latent sense so brilliant that the opaque original sense has vanished altogether”<sup>25</sup>), Hays then questions whether the new context in Romans might not invite us to listen to the words afresh and hear their original significance again:

[T]he whole argument of Romans 9-11 presupposes that, *para doxan*, the Jews have in fact stumbled or been broken off so that it is now they who are “not my people,” despite their birthright . . . It is they who have experienced hardening and rejection, so that their contemporary situation is exactly analogous to the situation of the unfaithful Israel addressed by Hosea. But if that is so, then may they not also be included in the number of the nonpeople whom God calls and loves?<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the extent to which we assent to the presence of this subtle layer of meaning—and beyond that, the likelihood of its detection by the saints at Rome—it is certainly consonant with the mixture of judgment and salvation spoken over Israel by the Isaiah quotes in vv. 27-29. The ‘remnant’ (ὀπόλειμμα in some mss; κατάλειμμα in others) that we meet there seems to be temporarily subsumed under the unbelieving mass when Israel is characterised in vv. 31-32 as ‘stumbling’ and failing to attain the law, but it will reappear in a key role in chapter 11. Permitting ourselves a glance in that direction from the perspective of the present chapter allows us to see with wonder that “the ultimate purpose of divine wrath and power, as Rom 9:23 and 11:26-32 will show, is to change “vessels of wrath” into “vessels of mercy” through the power of the gospel.”<sup>27</sup> Before that, though, we have more to learn about how and why Israel came to be a vessel of wrath in the first place.

## ROMANS 9:30-10:4

Here we see a shift in perspective from divine election to human responsibility,<sup>28</sup> though still within the story of salvation history and without any need to make those

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<sup>25</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 596.

<sup>28</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (ed. Leon Morris; The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), p. 198. Watson comments that “it is notable that, in Romans 9, the citations that inform Paul’s reflection on the people of

categories absolute. The ‘Jews’ among ‘us whom he has called’ (9:24) have temporarily disappeared from view, so that the discussion may rest squarely on the problem of unbelieving Israel. The contrast with believing Gentiles that was first raised at 2:14 is now renewed by means of the antithetical parallelism in vv. 30-31, highlighting the irony that Gentiles have attained what they did not pursue and Israel have not attained what they did pursue. It is δικαιοσύνην that the Gentiles did not pursue but have attained (through faith), and therefore it is this that we expect to be named as the goal of Israel’s failed pursuit. Instead it is more specifically the νόμον δικαιοσύνης that Israel pursued, and the νόμον that they did not attain. This clearly implies the desirability of attaining the law, justifying Wright’s comment:

Paul does not suppose that the Jewish law, the Torah, is bad, shabby, or even second-rate, to be pushed out of the way in favor of something else. The law is God’s law, and covenant membership is marked out by attaining to it. The only question is, what counts as “attaining to it”?<sup>29</sup>

The start of an answer given in v. 32 should not surprise us: the reason that Israel did not attain the law of righteousness is because they pursued it “not by faith, but as though by works” (v. 32). This implies that the ‘faith’ of the Gentiles (v. 30) has attained not just any righteousness, but in fact the very ‘law of righteousness’ which Israel sought by works. We already saw this strange state of affairs hinted at in chapters 2 and 3, since “it is the doers of the law who will be justified” (2:13), and God “justifies the one who has faith in Jesus” (3:26). So we know *that* faith somehow attains the law of righteousness, but not yet exactly *how*. For now, however, Paul stays primarily focused on Israel’s failure to attain the law by works. Again, this echoes the earlier pronouncement that “all flesh will not be justified by works of the law”<sup>30</sup> (3:20). Here as there, the key problem is sin—the law of righteousness cannot be attained by works because works of the law produce the knowledge of sin—but this context like that suggests the significance of the ethnic exclusivity dimension of the law. The argumentation of chapter 9 up to this point assumes that there is a strong consciousness of ethnic election that must be modified or reinterpreted according to the revelation of the gospel.

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God all refer to God’s *action* in salvation or judgment, mostly in the form of first person singular divine discourse” (*Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 19; illustrative list on p. 20).

<sup>29</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 649.

<sup>30</sup> NRSV amended here to follow the Greek more closely.

The next thing we learn is that ‘pursuing the law as if by works’ constitutes stumbling over the stumbling-stone (vv. 32b-33), which introduces a quotation on that subject from Isa. 28:16. There is some ambiguity in the referent of the last line (“whoever believes in it/him will not be put to shame”); does the stone refer to Torah<sup>31</sup> or Messiah? Wright argues for ‘Torah’ in this instance of the Isaiah quotation<sup>32</sup> but ‘Messiah’ in the next (Rom. 10:11),<sup>33</sup> adding that “It is wrong to play off the two possibilities, Torah and Messiah, against one another. Paul allows resonances of both to jangle together before resolving them in chapter 10 into a new and previously unsuspected harmony.”<sup>34</sup> It is better, though, to let the ambiguous first instance be informed by and conformed to the clarity of the referent in the second instance (certainly Jesus), especially since the stone is introduced in 9:33 as the stumbling block that *prevents* Israel from attaining ‘the law of righteousness’ which it pursued. Rather than cast the law itself as both goal and stumbling stone, it makes better sense to view the Messiah as the one who—particularly in the shame of his crucifixion and as patron of the Gentile mission—is a scandal to Jews, rendering Israel (mostly) unable to pursue the law in the way that Paul is slowly unveiling.<sup>35</sup> This is both ironic and tragic, and it elicits the passionate declaration of desire for the salvation of Israel in 10:1. The dynamic of pursuing the law not by faith but as though by works is then diagnosed as resulting from zeal for God but without knowledge (10:2)—specifically, without knowledge of ‘the righteousness of God’ so that instead they sought to establish ‘their own’ (v. 3). If we remember that the ‘boasting’ of ‘the Jew’ in chapter 2 was primarily directed towards Gentiles (as an expression of ethnic superiority) rather than towards God (as a claim to moral merit) then we are bound to agree with Sanders’ assessment of the dynamics at play in v. 3:

*“Their own righteousness,” in other words, means “that righteousness which the Jews alone are privileged to obtain” rather than “self-righteousness which consists in individuals’ presenting their merits as a claim upon God.”* The

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<sup>31</sup> So e.g. C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 144.

<sup>32</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1178.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1179.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1179.

<sup>35</sup> Johnson takes essentially the same view of the function of the stumbling stone, though identifying it more narrowly as “the gospel message of God’s impartial treatment of all by means of the death and resurrection of Jesus” (“God’s Covenant Faithfulness to Israel,” p. 161). Thus she would amend NRSV’s “trust in him” to “trust in it” at 9:33 (p. 161); but as a translation this would reintroduce the ambiguity of the possible reference to Torah, in service of an overly specific understanding of the stumbling stone, the subtleties of which are in any case crushed by the straightforward reference to Jesus in 10:11.

argument is christological and is oriented around the principle of equality of Jew and Gentile.<sup>36</sup>

Wright points out that this interpretation of Israel's 'own righteousness' is consonant with the use of the phrase in Deut. 9:4-7, where it is denounced primarily *in relation to the non-Israelite nations*.<sup>37</sup> Here in Rom. 10:3, since Israel's (attempt at) self-righteousness stands in antithetical relationship to the 'righteousness of God,' the ethnic restrictiveness of the former suggests that ethnic inclusiveness is a specific element of the latter. This steers us away from a purely ahistorical and individualistic understanding of God's righteousness as a status imparted to believers, and towards a more salvation-historical perspective: God's righteousness refers to his covenant faithfulness to his promises, and especially the promise given to Abraham of a worldwide and multi-ethnic family of faith.<sup>38</sup>

Turning now to 10:4, we meet with some outstanding reasons for accepting the interpretation that Christ is the 'goal' rather than the 'end' of the law.<sup>39</sup> Christopher Bryan reminds us that this understanding of τέλος is held not only by early Greek interpreters such as Origen, Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, but also indeed by both Luther and Calvin.<sup>40</sup> Its accuracy is suggested first of all on the macro level by

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<sup>36</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 38. Emphasis original. Similarly (though more specifically) Jewett: "Although the reference to τὴν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην ("their own righteousness") has often been construed in an individualistic manner as the sin of "self-righteousness" and pride in one's religious accomplishments, it is more likely a reference to the sense of ethnic or sectarian righteousness claimed by Jewish groups as well as by various other groups in the Mediterranean world" (*Romans*, p. 618).

<sup>37</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1171-1172.

<sup>38</sup> Wright lays out this understanding in the introduction to "Letter to the Romans" (pp. 397-406), which is later distilled into the following definition: "God's righteousness is God's own equitable covenant faithfulness, God's utterly reliable loyalty to the promises to Abraham" (p. 654). See also now Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1167-1171.

<sup>39</sup> So e.g. Wright, "Letter to the Romans," pp. 656-657, *Climax of the Covenant*, pp. 238-246, and *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1172; Jewett, *Romans*, p. 619; Christopher Bryan, *A Preface to Romans: Notes on the Epistle in its Literary and Cultural Setting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 171-172; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, pp. 75-77. This does not mean of course that nothing 'ends' with Christ. Particularly relevant in the context of Romans is that "The cross brings to a halt any suggestion of Jewish national privilege" (Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 242). Sanders inclines towards understanding τέλος as 'end' rather than 'goal,' though obviously without embracing any Lutheran dichotomy, thereby illustrating his point that the translation of τέλος "is not decisive for understanding the general argument" (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 39). Similarly Johnson: "When he says at 10:4 that 'Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes,' he means that the Christian message is the goal, the destination, the end towards which God's law, God's covenant with Israel, has always been directed" ("God's Covenant Faithfulness to Israel," p. 162).

<sup>40</sup> Bryan, *Preface*, p. 171. He comments that "No doubt this unanimity of interpretation was in part a result of the influence of Matt. 5.17 (so Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica* 8.2.33), but it remains impressive" (p. 171).

Paul's campaign to show that his gospel was "promised beforehand . . . in the holy scriptures" (1:2); he is constantly rooting and expressing his arguments in the words and witness of the law (and nowhere more consistently or compactly than in the present chapters), which clearly reveals a conviction that the law points to and is fulfilled in Christ rather than simply terminating with him. Paul has already asserted (without explanation) that faith in Jesus 'upholds' rather than 'overthrows' the law (3:31), and it creates a glaring contradiction if 10:4 is taken to be saying that this 'faith' does in fact overthrow ('end') the law after all. But setting Christ forth as the 'goal' of the law goes beyond just covering Paul's back against the aspersion that his gospel overthrows the law; it finally discloses the mystery of how it is that the uncircumcised can 'keep' (not bypass or dismiss) the requirements of the law as mooted in 2:14, 25-29. The implication of 9:32 is that Israel would have succeeded in fulfilling the law if they had only pursued it by faith. The appearance of πιστεύοντι at the end of 10:4 invites us to understand this verse to mean that believing in Christ *is* attaining the 'law of righteousness.'<sup>41</sup> This means that the law can be fulfilled and righteousness attained not by Jews engaged in works of the law, but by 'everyone who believes.' When we view 2:25-29 again in light of this great disclosure, we see that it can only be those who believe in Jesus who 'keep the requirements of the law,' and thus only they who will be 'regarded as circumcision,' and who are 'Jews inwardly.'

It is a significant weakness of Sanders' *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* that he misses the vital revelation that faith in Jesus *is* the only way to successfully fulfil or 'do' the law. We saw above that this revelation salvages the intelligibility of Romans 2 and would have freed it from the confines of Sanders' appendix. As it is, he goes on to comment on 3:27 that "The *nomos* which is the means by which such boasting is excluded is "faith"—hardly "the law when practiced in the right spirit," but faith in the atoning death of Jesus,"<sup>42</sup> failing to see that the two halves of his dichotomy were one and the same for Paul. Likewise later he writes that "Israel's failure is not that they do not obey the law in the correct way, but that they do not have faith in Christ."<sup>43</sup> Rather, Israel's failure is that they do not obey the law in the correct way: they do not have faith in Christ.<sup>44</sup> This means that whilst Sanders' section titled 'Doing the Law'<sup>45</sup> is

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<sup>41</sup> This is one of the main theses of the eponymous concluding chapter of Wright's *Climax of the Covenant* (pp. 231-257).

<sup>42</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Recognition of this point would have delivered Sanders from being forced to conclude that when Paul said Israel did not obtain 'the law' (9:31) he should rather have said that they did not obtain

brilliantly perceptive in a number of ways—not least in the groundbreaking observation that the laws which Paul elsewhere specifically precludes or downplays are those which most readily mark off Jews from Gentiles<sup>46</sup>—it suffers from the narrowness of a focus on the ethical imperatives of the law that should have been contextualised within Paul’s exclusively christological understanding of its true fulfilment. What must now be acknowledged is that if the works of the law both identified and separated Jew from Gentile, then it certainly follows that the one who truly fulfils the law (through faith in Christ) is the one who is truly a Jew – just as 2:25-29 hinted but did not fully explain.

## ROMANS 10:5-21

Though starting here a new section of analysis, this is not intended to reflect any break in Paul’s argument; as Watson warns, “it is a serious methodological mistake to detach the *telos nomou* statement from its sequel,”<sup>47</sup> as the γὰρ which opens v. 5 should be seen to indicate. But having heeded Watson’s Warning, we are bound to diverge from his reading of the relationship between statement (v. 4) and sequel (v. 5), which is that “Since the regime represented by the Leviticus text has been terminated by the righteousness of faith, the contested term *telos* should be translated ‘end,’ not ‘goal.’”<sup>48</sup> This is very circular indeed. If we were to argue (as above) that in Romans the relationship between gospel and law is properly one of fulfilment more than termination, then Watson’s own logic suggests that ‘goal’ is in fact the best translation of τέλος. He is right, however, to link interpretation of the Leviticus reference in 10:5 not only to the τέλος of the law in v. 4 but also to ‘the righteousness from faith’<sup>49</sup> that is given Deuteronomic voice in vv. 6-8. Does the apparently antithetical juxtaposition (δὲ) between Moses and the righteousness from faith not suggest after all that the relationship is fundamentally one of disjuncture and discontinuity rather than continuity? Yes and no. But before explaining that answer, and reflecting on what it

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‘righteousness by faith’ (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 42). It might be wondered whether there are two terms which Paul would be less likely to mix up in this way—unless, of course, faith in Christ *is* attaining the law. As it is, Sanders acknowledges that he exposes himself to “Cranfield’s broadside against scholars who want to change what Paul wrote so that it agrees with what he thought” (p. 42). What he does *not* acknowledge is that we only know what Paul thought from what he wrote, which does raise the stakes somewhat.

<sup>45</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, pp. 93-105.

<sup>46</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, pp. 332-333.

<sup>48</sup> Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 332.

<sup>49</sup> Amending “the righteousness *that comes* from faith” in NRSV.

means for how we understand the meaning and intent of the reference to Lev. 18:5, we will first look at the few verses that follow.

On first glance at the appeal to Deut. 30:12-14 that constitutes Rom. 10:6-8, “It would not be easy to find another text in the Old Testament that looks less promising for Paul’s purposes.”<sup>50</sup> That is, until he introduces the character/voice/perspective of ‘the righteousness from faith’ in order to help him construct a daring *peshet* that will lead up to the crucial and climactic v. 9: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” This is startlingly clear and direct; but what is the connection with the preclusion of ascending to heaven or descending to the abyss (vv. 6-7, quoting from Deut. 30:12, 13)? Jewett’s explanation of the function of the ‘ascending’ phrase is highly convincing: the desire to ascend to heaven so as to bring Christ down refers to law-oriented programmes whereby Jewish groups sought to usher in the reign of the Messiah.<sup>51</sup> Paul uses Deuteronomy to explain that “Righteousness by Faith shows that these zealous programs to usher in the messianic age through obedience to this or that law were repudiated by Scripture itself.”<sup>52</sup> Instead, the witness of scripture is that Jesus is the one sent from God: the Christ has already come, the messianic age already begun (even if there is another glorious descent from heaven yet ahead). So Wright:

Deuteronomy 30, in other words, is being read as a prediction of the eschatological time when God restores the fortunes of Israel after the exile. . . . For Paul, the thing that marks out members of the renewed covenant, the people envisaged by Deuteronomy 30, over against all others, Jews and pagans alike, is Christian faith.<sup>53</sup>

However, when we turn to the meaning of the ‘descending’ phrase, Jewett’s explanation is much less persuasive:

There was a widespread expectation that Elijah, Enoch, and other deceased figures of Israel’s history would return from the dead at the inception of the messianic age. . . . This raises the possibility that Paul had in mind sectarian

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<sup>50</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, pp. 626-627. In this context he sees it as significant that vv. 6 and 7 refer to ‘Christ’ rather than ‘Jesus Christ’ (p. 627).

<sup>52</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 627.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 661.

efforts to hasten the return of these figures in order to ensure the favorable return of the Messiah.<sup>54</sup>

This somehow overlooks the simple fact that Paul's *peshet* explains that the question "Who will descend into the abyss?" means "to bring *Christ* up from the dead," rather than only some other accessory to his parousia. It is better, then, to take Christ coming up from the dead at face value as referring to his resurrection, the counterpart to his 'coming down from heaven,' and that which declares him with power to be the Messiah, the Son of God (1:4). The key common element is that in both Christ's descent from heaven and his ascent from the dead, it is the divine initiative and action that is emphasised. This leads us back into the question of the meaning of v. 5 (especially in its relationship to what follows), and back into a partial confrontation with Watson's perspective:

If the divine-human relationship was ever based on Moses' principle that "the person who does these things will live by them", it is so no longer. Moses' statement places a specific human praxis in the foreground, whereas faith speaks exclusively of the divine praxis that has established Jesus as Lord.<sup>55</sup>

Resuming from above: Yes and no. 'No' because throughout Romans up to this point, Paul has carefully developed the explosive theme that (despite the apparently contrary original meaning of texts such as both Lev. 18:5 and Deut. 30:12-14!) it was never the law's intent to invite pursuit by works; the true τέλος of the law is faith in Christ, which thus somehow fulfils it. The juxtaposition here of Moses and the righteousness from faith coheres with the theme; as Wagner says, "by using the second quotation to interpret the first, Paul *redefines* 'doing' as 'believing/trusting in what God has done in Christ.'"<sup>56</sup> Watson objects that if Wagner is right then "it is hard to see why the Leviticus quotation is introduced as a statement of 'the righteousness which is of the law' (Rom. 10.5)."<sup>57</sup> But this has already been answered by 9:31: the righteousness which is of the law is exactly what Israel pursued but did not obtain, with the clear

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<sup>54</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 628.

<sup>55</sup> Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 335.

<sup>56</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, p. 160. Similarly Whittle: "the gospel sustains an identity with Torah as it transposes obedience to the commandments to hearing and obeying the gospel of Christ" (Sarah Whittle, *Covenant Renewal and the Consecration of the Gentiles in Romans* [SNTSMS, 161; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015], p. 53).

<sup>57</sup> Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 331, n. 35.

implication that in fact if they would have obtained this righteousness if they had pursued it by faith (like the Gentiles) and not as though by works. In other words, the righteousness which is of the law (9:31; 10:5) *is the same* as the righteousness from faith (9:30; 10:6). There is only one righteousness, and it is only in Christ. Another possible protestation is that the singularity of trusting in Christ is incompatible with the plurality of ‘things’ that Leviticus proclaims must be done. But we must remember that this is only a reoccurrence of the same tension that appeared at 2:26: there is a way in which the uncircumcised may keep the ‘requirements’ of the law, which may now be seen as referring to faith in Christ. From the perspective of this redefinition, then, Wagner is absolutely right to stress the continuity between the references to Leviticus and Deuteronomy here.

However, this does not permit us to dismiss Watson’s insistence on the existence of (Yes) antithesis; the δὲ at the beginning of v. 6 stubbornly disrupts a would-be untroubled continuity between Moses and the righteousness from faith. The explanation for this is that *unbelieving Israel continues to pursue the law not by faith but as though by works* (9:32), as Jewett perceives:

Rather than a “contrast to Moses,” which would undermine the validity of the premise that the law must be performed and would counter the thesis of 9:6 that God’s word has not failed, the change of voice substantiates the antithesis between the misguided zeal of 10:2 and the [true] intent of the Mosaic revelation.<sup>58</sup>

The light thrown by the Levitical assertion that ‘the person who does these things will live by them’ is thus refracted, since its meaning is being simultaneously understood as a summons to works (by the hardened of Israel) and as a summons to faith (by the believing remnant).<sup>59</sup> That is why there is (Yes) discontinuity between 10:5 and 10:6-8, but (No) not exclusively so. As Wright says, “This is precisely what gives Romans 9-11 the combined sense of celebration and tragedy: Deuteronomy 30 has happened, but Deuteronomy 32 is still true of unbelieving Israel.”<sup>60</sup> This comes as part of a response to Watson which challenges the tendency to the abstract in his ‘two voices in the text’

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<sup>58</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 625.

<sup>59</sup> As Watson himself tells us, “the possibility of disagreement is inherent in the practice of textual interpretation: for if a text needs to be interpreted at all, its meaning is not self-evident and there is always room for more than one account of what that meaning is” (*Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 25).

<sup>60</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1464.

paradigm, by proposing instead that whatever strains of antithesis exist are best viewed (along with much else) as elements in Israel's *story*. On this reading, "what Paul discerns are *two moments in Israel's covenantal narrative*, two moments which have now strangely, but as Paul believes providentially, overlapped,"<sup>61</sup> so that "The 'two voices' are not two alternative ways of operating, two competing systems of salvation."<sup>62</sup> This cuts across Watson's assertion that "The antithetical structure of Paul's language appears to rule out the possibility that the one could develop into the other in some kind of linear process."<sup>63</sup> But (in reply to both Wright and Watson) there is no reason that elements of a story cannot be antithetical in character. Where I side with Wright over against Watson is in understanding that (in Paul's view) the 'doing of the law' (as per Lev. 18:5) *is only antithetical to 'righteousness from faith' where that 'doing' is misunderstood by Israel as pertaining to 'works.'*

The quotation from Deut. 31:10 in v. 8 irresistibly calls the new covenant promise of Jer. 31:33 to mind, and v. 9 gives it specific substance: the renewal of the covenant and the fulfilment of the law is attained and proclaimed in the confession that 'Jesus is Lord' by those who believe that God raised him from the dead. The remaining verses of the section are a christological concentration of the claims made at the end of chapter 3 regarding the oneness of God and his justification of the Jews and Gentiles alike. The statement that "God is one" (3:30a) has become "the same Lord [Jesus]<sup>64</sup> is Lord of all" (10:12b); the statement that "he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (3:30b) has become "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek . . . For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved'" (10:12a, 13).

The tenor of the closing stages of the section (vv. 14-21) can be taken in different ways depending on who the subject of the three questions in v. 14 is thought to be. Is it Israel,

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<sup>61</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1464-1465.

<sup>62</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1465. The criticism is taken up by e.g. Lincicum: "Watson may be correct that Paul discovers two major tensions in the Torah, namely, 'between the unconditional promise and the Sinai legislation' and 'between the law's offer of life and its curse,' [but] these tensions are arguably resolved *diachronically* for the apostle—in the unfolding story of the old covenant and the gospel. At times Watson transposes this into starkly synchronic categories to posit an absolute dichotomy between law and promise" (David Lincicum, "Paul's Engagement with Deuteronomy: Snapshots and Signposts," *Currents in Biblical Research* 7/1 [2008], pp. 37-67 [56]. Emphasis original).

<sup>63</sup> Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 332.

<sup>64</sup> That it is Jesus who is the 'Lord of all' in 10:12 is doubly suggested by 10:9: firstly because that verse stated plainly that 'Jesus is Lord,' and secondly because that statement is a verbal confession, which dovetails with the qualification in 10:12 that the 'Lord . . . is generous to all who *call on him.*'

picking up where v. 1 left off? Or the Gentiles, with the emphasis lying on the fourth question in v. 15 and Paul’s apostolic ministry? Wright argues for the latter on the grounds that it is not until v. 19 that ‘Israel’ is specified, and that “had that been the subject all along, Paul would most likely have been content, as in vv. 16 and 18, with a simply third-person plural verb, “they . . .””<sup>65</sup> It is true that the specification of ‘Israel’ in v. 19 suggests that they have not been the exclusive focus up to that point. However, it makes more sense to assume that Paul had both Israel and the Gentiles in mind in vv. 14-18, given that these verses directly follow the statements in vv. 12-13 which explicitly include both ‘Jew and Greek’ within their scope. In any case, it is clear that vv. 19-21 then look again at the situation already sketched in 9:30-31, which is that the Gentiles have found God though they did not seek him, whilst Israel has remained ‘disobedient and contrary.’<sup>66</sup> This time, though, a new and important element is introduced: the fact of the Gentiles finding God is not an event independent from Israel’s fate, but was foreseen long ago by Moses as a means of making Israel ‘jealous’ and ‘angry’ (v. 19). This hints that the situation considered in 9:32—that God might bear with patience the objects of his wrath for the benefit of his objects of mercy—is only half the story; the fate of the objects of wrath may yet be affected by exposure to the objects of mercy. However, Paul is not quite ready to fully develop this theme of interdependence yet, and chapter 10 closes on a glum note indeed: “of Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people’” (v. 21).

## ROMANS 11:1-10

With the note of resignation still sounding from the last verse of chapter 10, it is no surprise that chapter 11 begins by anticipating and refuting the possible inference that God has rejected Israel (v. 1). This is fended off first with a forceful exclamation (‘By no means!’), and then by Paul proffering himself—“an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin”—as proof that “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew” (v. 2).<sup>67</sup> Given that the only other time Paul uses the word προγινώσκω (‘foreknow’) is Rom. 8:29, there may be a hint here that God has already

<sup>65</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 667.

<sup>66</sup> Hays calls this a ‘remarkable misreading’ of Isa. 65:1-2, which, though originally referring uniformly to Israel, Paul splits it down the middle in order to take the first verse as referring to Gentiles and the second as referring to Israel (*Echoes of Scripture*, pp. 74-75).

<sup>67</sup> This completes the set of three references to Paul’s own person which open each chapter of Romans 9-11 (Oda Wischmeyer, “The Letter to the Romans,” in O. Wischmeyer [ed.], *Paul: Life, Setting, Work, Letters* [London: T&T Clark, 2012], pp. 245-276 [270]).

predestined Israel to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. In that case, this ‘likeness’ may be expected to reflect the Messiah’s suffering unto death, but also his resurrection unto glorification. The second half of v. 2 then introduces Elijah into the argument. Just as Elijah’s cry of desolate isolation received the answer that God has kept seven thousand for himself, “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (v. 5). Elizabeth Johnson identifies Paul with the seven thousand rather than with Elijah himself,<sup>68</sup> in contention with Ernst Käsemann, who suggests that “Paul saw his mission as having a salvation-historical character and he could thus see in himself the Elijah of the end time.”<sup>69</sup> We should probably be cautious of pressing the Paul-Elijah analogy too far,<sup>70</sup> but it is certainly the prophet rather than the remnant with whom Paul identifies himself in this context: the movement from Elijah to the seven thousand (vv. 2-4) is paralleled and bookended by the movement from Paul (v. 1) to the remnant (vv. 5-6), and it is already clear from the strong echoes of Moses’ prayer in 9:3 that Paul feels some connection with the figure of the lonesome prophet.

The remnant is specified as being “chosen by grace” (v. 5), which perhaps suggests itself as the implication of Paul’s addition of ἐμαυτῶν to the quotation from 1 Kings 19:18 (“I have kept *for myself* seven thousand”). As well as emphasising God’s initiative, this also evokes the traditional idea of God acting sovereignly for the sake of his own name. With 2:17-3:20 and 9:30-10:21 particularly in mind, the clarification that the remnant is constituted by grace and not by ‘works’ (v. 6) clearly shows that they are “not a small minority for whom the way of national status actually worked,”<sup>71</sup> but rather simply those Jews who (like Paul himself, v. 1) believe in Jesus. The statement that “Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened” (v. 7) puts us strongly in mind of 10:30-31, except that here the division is certainly internal to Israel and does not include Gentiles at all. But the way that the elect of Israel obtained what Israel was seeking can only be the same as the way that the Gentiles obtained it: by faith in Christ (10:4). Paul has already made references to the ‘hardening’ idea (9:17-18 and perhaps 9:22-23), but in vv. 8-10 it comes into full focus

<sup>68</sup> E. Elizabeth Johnson, *The Function of Apocalyptic and Wisdom Traditions in Romans 9-11* (SBL Dissertation Series, no. 109; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), p. 160.

<sup>69</sup> Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 301.

<sup>70</sup> “[I]f an Elijah typology is present, it is submerged and fractured: as the embattled prophet, Paul is Elijah; as the defender of God’s faithfulness, Paul is Elijah’s harshest critic, who cares not for himself (9:3) but for fellow Israelites who continue in unbelief” (Bruce N. Fisk, “Paul among the Storytellers: Reading Romans 11 in the Context of Rewritten Bible,” in C. D. Stanley [ed.], *Paul and Scripture: Extending the Conversation* [Early Christianity and Its Literature, 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012], pp. 55-94 [87]).

<sup>71</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 676.

in the quotations from Isa. 29:10, Deut. 29:4 and Ps. 69:22-23, and it will remain a key concept throughout the rest of chapter 11. The implications of how exactly this ‘hardening’ is understood are considerable. Wright interprets as follows:

Paul is drawing on the Jewish tradition that runs like this: when God delays outstanding judgment, those who do not use this time of delay to repent and turn back to him will be hardened, so that their final judgment, when it comes, will be seen as just. . . . As the analogy with Pharaoh in 9:17-18 indicates, this “hardening” is not something that comes for a while, during which something else happens, and which is then removed. . . . [U]nbelieving Israel is hardened permanently; that is, there are no promises to be made of a reversal of the “hardening,” except in the context of a coming to faith (see 11:23).<sup>72</sup>

Remembering both the function of hardening in Jewish apocalyptic tradition and the analogy to Pharaoh in 9:17-18 does puncture a complacent assumption that Israel’s hardening is only temporary, or at least force reflection on that interpretation. However, Wright’s closing caveat (‘except in the context of a coming to faith’) is a far-reaching one, serving to shift the question of how ultimately damaging Israel’s hardening will turn out to be on to what extent Israel will ‘come to faith.’ If, say, *all Israel* were to come to faith, then in what sense would the hardening still be operative? To this we shall return. Here, Wright looks back to the analogy of Pharaoh, but this should not be taken too programmatically, since the word used with reference to him in 9:18 is σκληρύνω (hardening in connection with stubbornness and obstinacy), whereas 11:7 has πωρόω (linked to ‘callousing’ and the idea of ‘dulled understanding’; this is brought out in the quotation in v. 8, which speaks of ‘eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear’). If Pharaoh were meant to be the direct model for the hardening of Israel then it would have made sense for Paul to use the same word in both cases. But a positive and persuasive reason for downgrading the interpretative influence of the negative Pharaoh analogy is found close at hand, at the beginning of the next section.

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<sup>72</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 677; reiterated in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1237.

## ROMANS 11:11-15

The opening verse of this section is quite firm in steering the reader away from one conclusion that could be drawn from the pessimistic note that closes the preceding section: granted the quotations from Isaiah, Deuteronomy and Psalm 69 throw a gloomy light on the present situation, but in fact Israel has *not* stumbled so as to fall (v. 11a).<sup>73</sup> Hardening may steer its victims inevitably towards judgment in its traditional function, but this verse alone clearly shows that this is not the trajectory that Paul discerns for the hardened of Israel. Wright fails to take sufficient notice of this, arguing instead that judgment must be seen as the default end of Israel's hardening, since Paul's anguish and prayers (9:1-3; 10:1) would be otherwise inexplicable.<sup>74</sup> We will be in a better position to counter this exegetically once the present section is behind us and the issue of hardening reappears in 11:25, but for now we may simply note the fallacy of assuming that present anguish means future failure. What if when Paul prays "that they may be saved" (10:1), this is an expression of confident anticipation rather than the admission of defeat that Wright takes it at heart to be?

The hope held out for Israel is confirmed and developed throughout the rest of the section, the main thrust and thesis of which is summarised in the second half of v. 11: "through their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make them [Israel] jealous." This brings into focus the hints of interdependence between Israel and the Gentiles found already at 9:22-24 and 10:19, and it raises three important questions: How exactly does the transgression of Israel result in salvation for the Gentiles? What exactly is it that will make Israel jealous? And where exactly will this all end up? It is the last of these questions that will occupy the greatest part of our attention here.

Granted that the present section alludes to some kind of redemption for Israel (vv. 12, 15), and granted that the 'mystery' of 11:25-27 has extremely close ties with the rest of the chapter, it is absolutely vital that we are careful to establish what is being envisaged here. In other words, if we are to resist Wright (in part) on the meaning of the 'mystery,'

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<sup>73</sup> Hence the judgment of Wischmeyer that "Paul only comes in 11.11-34 to his true *Theology of Israel*" (Oda Wischmeyer, "Themes of Pauline Theology," in O. Wischmeyer [ed.], *Paul: Life, Setting, Work, Letters* [London: T&T Clark, 2012], pp. 277-304 [300]).

<sup>74</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1238-1239.

then this section is where the battle must be fought. First, though, the questions of the transgression and jealousy of Israel.

### **How exactly does the transgression of Israel result in salvation for the Gentiles?**

Paul is not precise about this and Richard Bell lists five possible understandings:<sup>75</sup>

1. Jewish rejection of the gospel message is what caused its messengers to turn to Gentiles.<sup>76</sup> This can be seen as the basic perspective of Acts, though Bell notes H. L. Ellison's challenge that "the beginning of the mission to the Gentiles had really taken place in Antioch before there could be any question of a definite refusal by the *diaspora* Jews."<sup>77</sup>
2. If Israel had been the gospel's 'early adopter' then the invitation of the Gentiles to faith could have become dominated and diluted by Jewish customs. Bell cites Ellison and Lagrange; we might mention also Charles Cosgrove, who comments with reference to the olive tree metaphor of vv. 17-24 that "In order that Jews will not dominate gentile Christians and require them to Judaize, God has temporarily pruned the vast majority of Israelites to make what we might call "political space" for those of other nations."<sup>78</sup>
3. Israel's transgression was in rejecting and crucifying Jesus, resulting in salvation for the Gentiles through his sacrificial death. This might be suggested by the fact that the only use of *καταλλαγή* in Romans other than 11:15 is in 5:11, where it is connected with 'the death of his Son.' To this it is added that 2 Cor. 5:19 supplies the idea that there is a 'reconciling word' as well as a 'reconciling act,'

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<sup>75</sup> Richard H. Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9-11* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), pp. 111-113.

<sup>76</sup> Jewett's comments on 11:30 add a temporal dimension into this logical sequence: "the message of divine mercy, which overcame the disobedience of Gentiles, could be preached only because Israel's rejection of the gospel granted time for the Gentile mission" (*Romans*, p. 710).

<sup>77</sup> H. L. Ellison, *The Mystery of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 80-81.

<sup>78</sup> Charles H. Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel: The Puzzle of Election in Romans* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1997), p. 87. At greater length: "God, Paul implies, has pruned the mass of living Israelites from the "tree" where the promises made to the patriarchs are now being fulfilled, so that these Israelites do not join the church and then dominate the gentiles, compelling Judaizing assimilation, excluding gentiles from assuming positions of status and authority, and effectively curtailing any significant incorporation of gentiles into the new people of God in Christ. . . . The hardening of the nation as a whole makes political space for these gentiles, whose independent spiritual flourishing, apart from the approbation and supervision of Israel, is also a sign of the full equality of Gentiles with Jews as elect children of God" (p. 89).

meaning that “Rom. 11.15 does not have to refer exclusively to the reconciling act of Christ’s death.”<sup>79</sup> It would certainly be a mistake to prize apart the ‘reconciling word’ and the ‘reconciling act’ given that the former testifies to the latter (as suggested by the summary sentence in 2 Cor. 5:21), but Bell is careful to note that they are ‘intimately related.’

4. Under point four, Bell criticises Wright for too strongly pressing the idea that Paul sees Israel enacting the death and resurrection of the Messiah. I do not think that it is a strong critique; already the resonances that Wright had explored were numerous and suggestive, and now all the more so with the extra depth and detail added to this motif throughout *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*.<sup>80</sup> Bell’s argument that “The redemptive effects of Israel’s casting aside are due to her disobedience . . . The Messiah on the other hand works redemption through his obedience (Rom. 5.18)”<sup>81</sup> is weakened by the fact that Christ on the cross is seen by Paul as (yes) righteous and obedient, but also as ‘sinful flesh’ (8:3). The paradox is summed up in (again) 2 Cor. 5:21: “he made him to be sin who knew no sin.” The Messiah may be obedient and Israel disobedient, but both are in some way cast aside. But in any case, whether Wright’s Israel-Messiah parallel is seen as convincing or not, it is not actually an explanation of *how* the transgression of Israel would mean salvation for the Gentiles. In fact Wright’s basic position on this would seem to fall under point 3: “the “hardening” that has come upon Israel, as in 9:14-24, was the necessary context for the Messiah’s death, and as such has become part of the saving plan.”<sup>82</sup>
5. Bell’s own suggestion is that Paul understands the transgression of Israel to bring salvation to the Gentiles based on his reading of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32.<sup>83</sup> As with point 4 above, this may contribute to understanding the genesis of the pattern in Paul’s thought, but it does not satisfactorily explain the mechanics of how it functions. Saying that “On the basis of the scripture [Dt.

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<sup>79</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, p. 111.

<sup>80</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2; see esp. pp. 1181-1194 on Rom. 9:6-29.

<sup>81</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, p. 112.

<sup>82</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 683. This increases both in force and scope in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2: “whether we want to hear this or not, Paul has said in 1 Thessalonians 2 that the full height of that [Israel’s] sin was the handing over of Jesus to the Romans and so to his death, and the similar opposition to God’s purposes which consisted of trying to stop the Gentile mission going ahead” (p. 1190).

<sup>83</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, pp. 112-113; also chapter 7, pp. 200-285.

32], Paul argued that it was necessary for Israel to disobey the gospel. Only in that way can the Gentiles be included in the people of God<sup>84</sup> still leaves unanswered the question of what exactly ‘in that way’ means. Bell is clear that Israel’s ‘transgression’ is failure to believe (or ‘obey,’ in light of 10:16) the gospel; this would exclude solution 3 above, but does not rule between solutions 1 and 2.

The reason that there is room for a number of different explanations of why the transgression of Israel results in salvation for the Gentiles is because Paul does not directly address the point. This should deter us from being too zealous in championing one solution over against another. In reverse order, solutions 5 and 4 make convincing and helpful arguments but do not really constitute explanations of *how* the stumbling of Israel results in salvation for the Gentiles. Solution 3 has substantial merit and should contribute to our understanding of the transgression of Israel and its effect, but the fact that Israel’s hardening is *ongoing* should warn us against restricting the significance of their transgression too narrowly to the one-off event of the crucifixion. Solution 2 fits badly with the overall thrust of chapter 11, which is to challenge Gentiles arrogance towards stumbling Israel, not to encourage it!<sup>85</sup> And if we glance ahead to chapter 14 then we find Paul specifically urging the Gentile strong not to ‘despise’ Jewish customs—hardly compatible with the idea that the danger of these customs is the very reason that Israel was hardened. Cosgrove’s discussion of ‘political space’ comes in context of discussing the olive tree metaphor in vv. 17-24, but is catalysed by reflection on the way that in Galatians 2 Paul details the damage his ministry suffered at the hands of a small number of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. Perhaps therein lies the problem, because the dynamics of the situation in Galatia (Gentiles tempted to Judaize) are reversed in Rome (Gentiles tempted to despise Judaism). That leaves solution 1, which provides the strongest basic explanation: the message and possibility of salvation has gone to the Gentiles because it was spurned by Israel. This takes seriously the theme of the proclamation of the gospel, which is prominent at various points in Romans, not least at 1:16 (where it is linked to ‘the Jew first and also to the Greek’) and throughout chapter 10.

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<sup>84</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, p. 112.

<sup>85</sup> Cosgrove’s argument rather falls foul of the crucial axiom that “it is not you that supports the root, but the root that supports you” (11:18); the problem is precisely that the Gentiles are being puffed up on a little too much ‘political space’ and need to be reminded that they exist only within the context of Israel’s heritage and inheritance.

## What exactly is it that will make Israel jealous?

The section 11:11-15 specifies two things that Paul expects will provoke Israel to jealousy. The first is the ‘salvation’ of the Gentiles (v. 11b). In line with much of Romans up to this point, this should be understood in corporate more than individualistic terms. Paul has just established that there is a remnant in Israel (vv. 1-6), and so there is no reason why Gentiles specifically should be the objects of jealousy if individual possession of salvation was all that was in view. Rather, the Gentiles have unexpectedly displaced the nation of Israel as the protagonists of Isaiah’s prophecy:

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest,  
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
and her salvation like a burning torch.  
The nations shall see your vindication,  
and all the kings your glory . . . (Isa. 62:1-2)

‘Salvation’ was meant to be a burning torch in *Israel*, a sign and a wonder to the nations. That it is these very nations who are bearing the torch of salvation should sting Israel into jealousy and so to salvation. But how did the torch of salvation actually get to the Gentiles? This is where the second provocation to jealousy comes in. Mark Nanos emphasises that Paul—inasmuch as he is an apostle to the Gentiles—is in fact taking the torch of salvation to the nations as all Israel was called to do:

[T]he fact that gentiles are becoming coparticipants in the eschatological blessings through *Paul’s* ministry as Israel’s representative and *not their own* quenches the rejoicing, for it bears witness against them. It signifies that *they* are those suffering the eschatological curse, that *they* are standing outside the promised blessing, while *Paul* is fulfilling Israel’s eschatological privilege of bringing light to the gentiles.<sup>86</sup>

Paul’s Gentile mission as the object of jealousy should be seen as a feature within (rather than a challenge to) the interpretation that the salvation of the nations is expected

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<sup>86</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 250. Emphasis original.

to provoke Israel to jealousy. Nanos' attempt to displace the latter with the former<sup>87</sup> suffers a pre-emptive strike from the words of Moses quoted in 10:19, where it is not Paul's ministry but specifically the foolish (non-)nation that will make Israel jealous.

### **Where exactly will this all end up?**

Here is the point from which we may glimpse the shape of the 'mystery' that approaches further along the chapter, and the point at which we must respond to some of Wright's foundational interpretations. Both v. 12 and v. 15 state the expectation that the process of provoking to jealousy will succeed in overturning Israel's current transgression/defeat/rejection, resulting in their πλήρωμα (v. 12) or πρόσλημψις (v. 15). But what exactly is being envisaged here? What is the πλήρωμα of Israel? Wright notes the instructive parallel with v. 25, where πλήρωμα means 'the total number (of Gentiles) who believe the gospel of Jesus.' He goes on to comment that

He is well aware that large numbers of Gentiles do not believe it, and never will. The "fullness" will consist of all those who eventually do. There is no reason to suppose that "the fullness" of Israel will mean anything more than this: the complete number of Jews, many more than at present, who likewise come to faith in the gospel.<sup>88</sup>

The key question, then, is 'how many more than at present?' Technically, Wright's definition of 'the fullness of Israel' could cover the most enthusiastic of expectations, if it be held that every Jew will at some point 'come to faith in the gospel.' But the comparison ('likewise') with the Gentiles—large numbers of whom do not believe the gospel and never will—indicates a much more moderate understanding than that. It is this conservative estimation of the nature and extent of the acceptance/fullness/salvation of Israel that we must pause to probe.

Wright's conservatism regarding what Israel's 'fullness' and 'acceptance' might mean turns on the fact that between v. 12 and v. 15 stands v. 14, in which Paul expresses his expectation that glorifying his ministry to the Gentiles might save only 'some' (τινάς) of Israel (lit. 'my flesh'). Wright expounds as follows:

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<sup>87</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 248-249.

<sup>88</sup> Wright, "Letter to the Romans," p. 681.

He does not expect that all his fellow Jews, or even most of them, will travel this route [of salvation]. Verse 14 has a sober realism about it, parallel to that of 1 Cor. 9:22, where the rhetoric cried out for him to say “all” but theology and missionary experience knew he had to say “some” (“I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I might save . . . some”).<sup>89</sup>

This ‘some’ in v. 14 would then seem to clash with the ‘fullness’ of Israel in v. 12 (and ‘all Israel’ in v. 26). The way that Wright seeks to solve the problem is basically by reducing ‘fullness’ and ‘all’ to the level of ‘some’:

But even “some” [of Israel saved] will enable him to answer “no” to the double question of 11:1 and 11:11: God will always be faithful to the promise to Abraham. This is not, then, a contrast with “fullness” in 11:12 and “all Israel” in 11:26. There will always be some of Abraham’s physical descendants who are included in the true “seed.” That is all that the promise envisaged; that is the whole point of 9:6-29; and God will be true to the promise.<sup>90</sup>

But this is totally unsatisfactory.<sup>91</sup> Rom. 9:6-29 may have interpreted the promise only to guarantee that there will always be some of Abraham’s physical descendants who are included in the true seed, but chapter 11 goes much further than this. Again, the ‘stumbling’ ends not in ‘fall’ but ‘fullness.’ Then how does the ‘some’ of v. 14 fit in? Bell argues that it means not a small number but ‘an indeterminate number,’ for three reasons.<sup>92</sup> Firstly, *τινες* is used in 11:17 and 3:3 to refer (euphemistically) to the vast majority of unbelieving Jews, not a small minority. Secondly and similarly, 9:6 and 10:16 employ understatements relating to the Jews (though with *οὐ πάντες* rather than *τινες*). Finally, the *τινὰς* of 1 Cor. 9:22 that we saw Wright adduce above as a supporting example of realistic missionary conservatism, Bell sees as another case of understatement in light of v. 19 there: “I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more (*πλείονας*) of them.”<sup>93</sup> These arguments are unconvincing. Rom. 11:17 and

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<sup>89</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 682.

<sup>90</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 682.

<sup>91</sup> So too Wright on the olive tree metaphor: “His point is not ‘so they are automatically saved’. His point, here and throughout the section, is that they are not automatically *not* saved. That is the rhetorical thrust of the entire chapter, and in a measure of the whole of chapters 9-11” (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1213). This is far too weak!

<sup>92</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, p. 161.

<sup>93</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, p. 161.

3:3 do helpfully show that *τινές* may be used euphemistically to understate a large proportion, and 9:6 and 10:16 do show the same tendency in different phrasing, but none of this has much purchase on the *τινὰς* of 11:14. The four supporting examples of understatement in Romans all relate to *unbelieving* Jews; it is easy to see why Paul would want to understate this body, whose very existence raised the question of whether the word of God had failed (9:6), but why should he want to understate the numbers of people that he hoped to ‘save,’ either in Rom. 11:14 or 1 Cor. 15:22?

This means that I do not see Wright’s mistake as an underestimation of what *τινὰς* signifies in 11:14, but only in allowing it to control and diminish the meaning of the ‘fullness,’ ‘acceptance,’ and ‘salvation’ of Israel in 11:12, 15 and 26 respectively. Wright takes the *γάρ* which opens v. 15 to indicate that this verse “*explains* v. 14 (*gar*), and must then somehow be correlated with ‘and save some of them.’ It is not meant to be a new, different or larger point. . . . [I]t is the ‘saving some of them’, in other words, that is picked up by the ‘what will their acceptance mean.’”<sup>94</sup> He goes on to say that

This would not of itself rule out the possibility that Paul had in mind two different (though related) events, first the steady coming-to-faith of ‘some’ Jews during the course of his own gentile ministry as a result of ‘jealousy’, and second a larger-scale conversion of Jews at the time of, or as the signal for, the general resurrection. But what he has written up to this point gives no suggestion whatever of the latter, which has to be read back into the present passage, if at all, from verses 25-27 . . . .<sup>95</sup>

This demands a full response. It is not true that the view Wright outlines here must be imported into the present context from an interpretation of vv. 25-27. We will see that those verses do indeed accord with and confirm the view, but all the groundwork is already laid in the verses now under consideration. Firstly, it might be the mark of a significant transition between the ‘save some’ of v. 14 and the ‘acceptance’ of Israel in v. 15 that there is a shift from present tense to future.<sup>96</sup> But much more weightily, there are very good reasons for thinking that v. 15 does indeed look ahead all the way to the resurrection, tying the ‘acceptance’ of Israel in some way to that climactic event: for “if

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<sup>94</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1200.

<sup>95</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1200.

<sup>96</sup> Stepping on the toes of Wright’s conception of “‘life from the dead’, happening here and now” (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1201).

their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!” Dunn simply states that “the eschatological force here is put beyond dispute by the ἐκ νεκρῶν, which elsewhere always denotes resurrection.”<sup>97</sup> Not quite ‘beyond dispute’; Wright advances a number of alternative resonances of the phrase, all aimed at supporting his more moderate understanding of ‘life from the dead’ as referring in some way to a limited number of Jews believing in Jesus as Messiah in the normal course of the apostolic mission: perhaps it picks up the language of life from death in Paul’s discussion of baptism (6:11),<sup>98</sup> perhaps it reflects the Galatian theme of dying to the law but living in the Messiah (Gal. 2:19-20);<sup>99</sup> or perhaps “He is saying what 4:17 had already indicated: Abraham’s family will consist of those who are brought back from the dead (i.e., Jewish converts) and those who are created out of nothing (i.e., Gentile converts).”<sup>100</sup> Each of these is a legitimate resonance and may contribute to the picture that Paul is sketching, but the problem with each of them is that they do not move the meaning of ‘life from the dead’ beyond the ‘acceptance’ of Israel on which it is predicated. This is a move that must be made if this second half of the verse is to parallel the first half, in which the connection between Israel’s ‘rejection’ and ‘the reconciliation of the world’ is obviously causal not synonymous. To reiterate: Israel’s ‘rejection’ clearly *catalyses rather than constitutes* ‘the reconciliation of the world’; just so, Israel’s ‘acceptance’ will at heart catalyse rather than constitute ‘life from the dead.’

Not only does the rhetorical structure of the verse make this point, it also demands that, in Dunn’s words,

the final phrase should describe something which outstrips the earlier. . . . Paul therefore must mean by ζῶη ἐκ νεκρῶν the final resurrection at the end of the

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<sup>97</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 658. Likewise e.g. E. Elizabeth Johnson: “Paul shares with several of his Jewish and Christian contemporaries a conviction that Israel’s repentance and faithfulness to God will inaugurate the eschaton,” citing 4 Ezra 4:35-37; 2 Bar. 23:4-5; *T. Dan.* 6:4; Acts 3:19-20; 2 Pe. 3:11-12 (“The Faithfulness and Impartiality of God,” in D. M. Hay and E. E. Johnson [eds], *Pauline Theology*, vol. III: Romans [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], pp. 211-239 [232]).

<sup>98</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1199.

<sup>99</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1199-1200.

<sup>100</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 683. Likewise *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1200. But if this is the governing idea then why does v. 15 picture Gentiles as ‘reconciled’ rather than ‘created out of nothing,’ or something else that would reflect the 4:17 pattern?

age/history; a symbolical sense (spiritual blessings already enjoyed; the conversion of Israel) would be an anticlimax after καταλλαγή κόσμου.<sup>101</sup>

Wright makes exactly the same oversight with 11:12, writing that “How much more, then—this is the force of 11:12—should Israel receive ‘fullness,’”<sup>102</sup> when in fact the pattern established by the effect of Israel’s ‘stumbling’ (‘riches for the world’) and ‘defeat’ (‘riches for the Gentiles’) clearly shows that the effect of the ‘fullness’ cannot be restricted to within Israel itself (hence NIV: “how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”). In *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* we find Wright conceding some of this ground, though his overall interpretation forces him to stop short of the obvious conclusion:

Paul hints at something else, something beyond even the *plērōma* or the *proslēmpsis* of his kinsfolk according to the flesh: there will be a ‘how much more’ in terms of benefits for the Gentiles as well. Just as the Messiah’s death won great blessings, but his resurrection even more so (5.10), so if Israel’s ‘diminution’ has brought blessings to the world, their fullness will mean something more, something Paul does not name except in the language of resurrection (11.15), which as we have seen itself remains, perhaps deliberately, ambiguous if evocative.<sup>103</sup>

It is Wright rather than Paul who is being deliberately ambiguous here. If the ‘rejection’ of Israel catalysed the *inauguration* of the messianic kingdom (‘the reconciliation of the world’) then the counterpart can only be that their acceptance will catalyse its *consummation*: ‘life from the dead,’ the resurrection.

One more criticism of Wright’s position remains to be made at this juncture. We found his three alternative suggestions for understanding ‘life from the dead’ in 11:15 (baptism; freedom from the law; redemption of Jews in contrast with that of Gentiles created as though from nothing)<sup>104</sup> as insufficient when set against the usual and natural understanding of that phrase as referring to the resurrection. But we did not there mention his fourth and final suggestion, which is the most telling of all. “Fourth,” says

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<sup>101</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 658. Likewise Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (trans. from 1989 German; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 166-167.

<sup>102</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 681.

<sup>103</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1209.

<sup>104</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1199-1200.

Wright, “Paul is here, in any case, at a particular point in the spiral argument of the letter, and is talking here about a *national*, corporate, ‘casting away’ and ‘receiving back.’”<sup>105</sup> Indeed! But this fits badly into the sequence of suggestions, in which the previous three all relate to the salvation of individual Jews more than the salvation of Israel as a whole, and it shines a spotlight on the same problem found at the heart of Wright’s view of the fullness/acceptance/salvation of Israel. One of the themes woven into the warp and woof of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* is the idea that Israel is above all the people of the Messiah: that their history and destiny uniquely reflects the messianic vocation, not least as it is drawn out in Isaiah’s servant songs. What is noticeable, and problematic, about Wright’s exposition of this illuminating theme is that it founders when it moves from cross to resurrection. It is not that affirmations that Israel shares or reflects the Messiah’s resurrection are absent: “Israel is called to be part of the people of the risen Messiah”<sup>106</sup>; “if Israel has embodied the *casting away* of the Messiah, Israel will now find a way to share his *resurrection* as well”<sup>107</sup>; “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.*”<sup>108</sup> The problem is that Wright repeatedly advances an uncharacteristically individualistic understanding of what such resurrection might mean in practice.<sup>109</sup> The following is typical:

[W]henver one or more Jews become ‘jealous’, and turn in faith to the God who has now revealed his covenant plan and purpose in the Messiah (10.1-13), that event ought to be understood by the church, particularly its gentile members, not as a peculiar or even unwelcome event but as another bit of ‘resurrection’, to be celebrated as such.<sup>110</sup>

The phrase ‘another bit of resurrection’ jars. If Israel as a whole has shared the Messiah’s death, and if currently it is only ‘one or more Jews’ at a time who are provoked to jealousy and salvation by Paul’s Gentile mission, then it simply cannot be the end of the story yet. That can only come when Israel as a whole shares the Messiah’s resurrection. What this means and how it will happen awaits investigation in our next chapter.

<sup>105</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1200. Emphasis original.

<sup>106</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1198.

<sup>107</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1198.

<sup>108</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1199.

<sup>109</sup> Wagner makes the same criticism of some of Wright’s earlier statements on this matter, in which his “individualization of Israel” is “quite out of step with Paul’s usage elsewhere in Romans 9-11” (*Heralds of Good News*, p. 279, n. 194).

<sup>110</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1200-1201.

## CHAPTER 4

### ROMANS 11:16-36

#### ROMANS 11:16-24

Here we come to the fascinating olive tree allegory that explores the past, present and future interrelationship between God, Israel and the Gentiles. From this point we will proceed verse-by-verse in order to carefully consider how the argument in the present section progresses towards its τέλος in the next.

***16 If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.***

This verse has strong thematic and rhetorical links with vv. 1-7 and 15, but “Since the motif of the “root” in 11:16c is picked up in 11:17c and 18b, it is inappropriate to separate the analogies in 11:16 from 11:17-24, as in many commentaries.”<sup>1</sup> It will be argued below that in subsequent verses this ‘root’ is best identified as the patriarchs (particularly Abraham), and so also here.<sup>2</sup> The ‘whole batch’ (v. 16a) and the ‘branches’ (v. 16b) both clearly stand for Israel according to the flesh, since this is the entity that Paul is concerned to defend against the accusation or assumption that they are not ‘holy.’ This he does by employing analogies predicated on the understanding that “a

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<sup>1</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 671.

<sup>2</sup> Jewett claims that identifying the root as Abraham/the patriarchs “contradicts the development in subsequent verses in which Israel is the root and a Gentile believer is the branch” (*Romans*, p. 683). But v. 17 will show that all of Israel is accounted for between the limited proportion of branches that were broken off and those that are implied to remain. The ‘root,’ then, is not the Israel of Paul’s day.

small portion has a determining influence on a considerable whole.”<sup>3</sup> Who or what then is the ‘first fruits’ (an image borrowed from Num. 15:19-20)? If it be insisted that the parallelism in the two halves of v. 16 is synonymous, then the first fruits must be the same as the root, i.e. Abraham/the patriarchs.<sup>4</sup> But there is no reason that the parallelism should not be seen as complementary rather than synonymous,<sup>5</sup> and it is preferable to interpret the first fruits as the Christ-believing Jewish remnant. This is the more immediate motif that Paul laid as the foundation of his discussion in chapter 11 (vv. 1-6); the patriarchs’ appearances lie further behind (chapter 9) and yet ahead (11:28). This allows us to see that v. 16a is a condensed version of the pattern of attention that he has just traced: from the ‘first fruits’ remnant in vv. 1-6 (starring Paul himself) to the ‘lump’ of hardened Israel in vv. 7-15.

***17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree . . .***

This verse introduces the main components of the allegory (branches, wild olive shoot, root), and requires us to begin forming an understanding of what they represent as they begin to act and interact. The identification of the branches is not problematic. The ‘some’ broken off are those of Israel who have ‘stumbled’ (11:11—though not so as to fall). The passive ‘were broken off’ certainly assumes divine action, as becomes explicit in v. 21: “God did not spare the natural branches.” That only ‘some’ were broken off implies that others were not; these are those who comprise the Christ-believing remnant of Israel. This is why the remnant cannot be represented by the ‘root,’ as Nanos had originally posited.<sup>6</sup> As discussed above, the euphemistic use of ‘some’ here serves the rhetorical purpose of the metaphor, which is to level a humbling imperative to arrogant Gentiles tempted to boast over the branches broken off. In light of v. 13 (“Now I am

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<sup>3</sup> J. C. T. Havemann, “Cultivated olive — wild olive: the olive tree metaphor in Romans 11:16-24,” *Neotestamentica* 31/1 (1997), pp. 87-106 (94). Or in Jewett’s phrase, “The principle of extended holiness provides the premise for Paul’s enthymeme” (*Romans*, p. 683). Gale points out that the ‘extended holiness’ idea is actually absent from Numbers itself (Herbert M. Gale, *The Use of Analogy in the Letters of Paul* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964], p. 206). Cranfield notes, however, that according to Lev. 19.23-25, tree fruit is to be regarded as ‘uncircumcised’ until the first fruits offering, suggesting that “it would be quite natural for the Jew to think of the offering of the first-fruit cake as purifying the rest of his dough” (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II: Commentary on Romans IX-XVI and Essays [eds J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield; International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979], p. 564).

<sup>4</sup> So e.g. Gale, *Use of Analogy*, p. 206.

<sup>5</sup> So e.g. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 672; Cranfield, *Romans IX-XVI*, p. 564; Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 683.

<sup>6</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, p. 252; though in “Broken Branches” he declared himself to be “reconsidering it in light of the present research” (p. 11, n. 30).

speaking to you Gentiles”), the fact that the ‘wild olive shoot’ is directly addressed already makes it clear that this stands for the Gentiles. Philip Esler notes that “In opting for the wild olive, when he and his readers well knew that its branches did not bear edible fruit, Paul was consciously crafting an image most unflattering to the non-Judaeans.”<sup>7</sup> We find this nuanced by W. D. Davies, who proposed that Paul’s characterisation of the Gentile world as a wild olive in contrast to Israel’s cultured olive is a subversion of the cultured olive as a traditional symbol of Athens—flagship of Greek culture and prestige.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to tell whether or not this is intended here, though perhaps it is significant in this connection that Paul frequently uses Ἑλλην rather than ἔθνος as the ethnic antithesis of Ἰουδαῖος in Romans (1:14, 16; 2:9, 10; 3:9; 10:12). The suggestion is certainly commensurate with the rhetorical thrust of the metaphor.

The translation and meaning of ἐν αὐτοῖς is an interesting puzzle. It could be taken to mean that the wild shoot was grafted ‘among them,’ i.e. among the branches that are implied to remain in the tree. In this case Paul expresses himself “imprecisely”<sup>9</sup> or “laconically and clumsily,”<sup>10</sup> since it is only the branches broken *off* that have been named in the text and thus are available as the subject of αὐτοῖς grammatically. I think it is preferable rather to interpret the ἐν αὐτοῖς as ‘in place of them’ if it means that we are able to maintain the broken branches as the logical subject of αὐτοῖς (so NRSV), given that they are also the continued subject of v. 18. The picture of Gentiles grafted in to the place once occupied by natural branches that were broken off carries a subtle warning; think of the classic film peril motif whereby the heroes realise that they are co-inhabiting a place with the skeletons of those who have perished there before. Should the Gentiles not assume a posture of humility and trepidation if they are standing in the very place where there is already precedent for the breaking off of branches? This warning will of course be expressed more directly in v. 21.

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<sup>7</sup> Philip F. Esler, “Ancient Oleiculture and Ethnic Differentiation: The Meaning of the Olive-Tree Image in Romans 11,” *JSNT* 26/1 (2003), pp. 103-124 (122). This follows up W. D. Davies: “That Paul represents the Gentiles as a wild olive is a most forceful indictment of their lives” (“Paul and the Gentiles: A Suggestion Concerning Romans 11:13-24,” in *Jewish and Pauline Studies* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], pp. 153-163 [160]).

<sup>8</sup> Davies, “Paul and the Gentiles,” pp. 159-163.

<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 567.

<sup>10</sup> Davies, “Paul and the Gentiles,” p. 155.

It should be noted that Nanos has argued that the branches are only *broken*, and not *broken off* as is usually assumed.<sup>11</sup> This provides an ingenious solution to the ἐν αὐτοῖς puzzle, allowing both the ἐν and the αὐτοῖς to carry their most natural meaning: the wild shoot is grafted *among* the branches *broken*. This really is delightfully elegant grammatically, but three considerations make it clear that the branches really are broken off. Firstly, in vv. 19-20 Paul will concede the truth of the claim that “Branches were broken (off) *so that* I might be grafted in,” the narrative logic of which requires that ἐξεκλάσθησαν means ‘broken off’ (to make room) and not only ‘broken.’ Secondly, the καί (‘also’) in the last phrase of v. 22, which warns that Gentiles should continue in God’s kindness ἐπεὶ καὶ σὺ ἐκκοπήσῃ (‘otherwise you will also be cut off’), shows that ἐκκόπτω is used there as a synonymous alternative to ἐκκλάω (used in vv. 17, 19, 20), thereby confirming the narrow sense of the latter: ‘broken off.’ Thirdly and most simply, the fact that the branches will be ‘re-grafted’ (v. 24) rather than ‘healed’ clearly indicates that they were ‘broken off’ rather than merely ‘broken.’

***18 do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.***

This verse gives a clear glimpse of the rhetorical purpose that runs throughout the metaphor. Jewett notes that

In light of the fact that such a reference would have been insulting in the allegory if it had no basis in the current behavior of the audience, this is clear evidence of residual anti-Semitism within the Roman churches, which Paul addresses more directly in 14:1-15:7. Here he addresses only the interlocutor, in a non-polemical manner.”<sup>12</sup>

Elsewhere he reflects further on the rhetorical dynamic at work:

The technique of speech-in-character allows Paul to discuss the issues with an imaginary interlocutor whose traits are sufficiently exaggerated that the audience

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<sup>11</sup> Mark D. Nanos, “‘Broken Branches’: A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry?” [<http://www.marknanos.com/brokenbranches-8-1-08.pdf>]. First presented at the International Symposium “Romans 9-11 at the Interface Between the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ and Jewish-Christian Dialog” (Göttingen, May 2008); revised 1/8/2008, pp. 1-28 (12).

<sup>12</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 686.

does not feel attacked, but sufficiently analogous that the audience can grasp the allegorical relevance.<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly the diatribe technique does soften the impact of the polemic, but we should remember that Paul did consider that “on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder” (15:15). The clear ‘boldness’ in this discourse should not be allowed to become too muted. The language in this verse is flatly intolerant of Gentile arrogance, and only becomes more harsh as the metaphor unfolds, culminating in the severe warning “otherwise you too will be cut off” (11:22).

The rationale given for exclusion of Gentile boasting should give us a clue as to the identity of the ‘root.’ Holding that the ‘root’ is Jesus the Messiah, Wright wrote that “They do not support the root, as though Jesus Christ were now the private possession of Gentile Christians. He, Israel’s Messiah according to the flesh, supports them.”<sup>14</sup> This exposes the weakness of the Messiah identification, because construing ‘supporting’ as equating to ‘having private possession of’ is bizarre. Better rather to see the root as Abraham/the patriarchs as is most commonly done.<sup>15</sup> If pushed to define that relationship then we may judge that it is Abraham who takes centre stage, as the one to whom the nourishing sap of the promises were given and who modeled the response of faith which they require and reward. But the discussion of Isaac and Jacob in chapter 9 and the mention of plural *πατέρας* at 9:5 and 11:28 warns us not to view Abraham too much in isolation from his immediate progeny. In any case, the point is that the Gentiles do not monopolise the manifestation of God’s faithfulness to his promises; the promises and God’s faithfulness to them were operative long before the Gentiles were ever on the scene, and the continuing place of their primary manifestation is in the Jewish remnant. Gentiles are dependent on Jewish heritage for the promises and covenant they enjoy, and on the Jewish remnant—and indeed even those stumbling—for the gospel they have received. Bachmann comments of the church that “because it arises in Judaism and out of Judaism, it is, according to the apostle, something like a universalization of the Jewish people.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, pp. 683-684.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 685.

<sup>15</sup> In fact Wright has now adopted this position (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1212).

<sup>16</sup> Michael Bachmann, “Paul, Israel and the Gentiles: Hermeneutical and Exegetical Notes,” in R. Bieringer and D. Pollefeyt (eds), *Paul and Judaism: Crosscurrents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Library of New Testament Studies, 463; London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 72-105 (103). Similarly Paula Fredrikson: “God’s universalism, in short, is a very Jewish universalism” (“The Question of Worship: Gods, Pagans, and the Redemption of Israel,” in M. D. Nanos and M.

***19 You will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’***

In the verse after this Paul will acknowledge with a *καλῶς* that there is truth in this statement that he places in the mouth of his imaginary Gentile interlocutor, but he clearly does not condone its attitude or implications. Nanos is right to identify Paul’s fundamental problem with the Gentile ‘wild shoot’ as being that “it supposes its own gain is of greater concern to God than the loss of the others to which God had been committed previously.”<sup>17</sup> The idea of Israel’s branches being broken off so that Gentile branches can be grafted in is consistent with the pattern that underlies all of chapter 11, surfacing especially at vv. 11, 12, 15, 30: Gentiles benefit from the vicarious suffering of Israel. We saw with reference to 11:11-15 that the best basic understanding of this dynamic is probably that Israel has rejected the gospel so that its messengers have turned to the Gentiles, offering them its power unto salvation.

***20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.***

The opening *καλῶς* acknowledges the truth of the claim that Jewish branches were broken off so that Gentile branches might be grafted in. Jewett comments that this

... preserves the wit of this discourse, in that Paul accepts the transparently arrogant comment that he himself has invented for the interlocutor from the words of his own previous argument. The audience would enjoy Paul’s admission that a sharp riposte was made at his own expense by such an undiscerning Christian blockhead.<sup>18</sup>

Equally sharp is Paul’s rejoinder, the main thrust of which will be delivered in the next verse. Here the necessary groundwork is laid: it was not because of anything inherent in the Gentiles’ identity that the natural branches were broken off to make way for the wild shoot, but only because faith is the governing principle of God’s dealings with people.

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Zetterholm [eds], *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015], pp. 175-202 [198]).

<sup>17</sup> Nanos, “Broken Branches,” p. 18. He also notes the interesting parallel that Isa. 10:5-15 and 37:24-25 give voice to the presumptuousness of the Assyrian king, likewise employing a tree metaphor to indicate that it will bring judgment upon him (Nanos, “Broken Branches,” p. 18).

<sup>18</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 687.

Their new position is not automatic or guaranteed. In light of v. 22 Nanos is right to see the idea of ongoing faithfulness behind the call to faith here:

[F]aithfulness to the covenant relationship with God in Christ seems to be the point. The mere confession of convictions can be self-serving, especially when set out in contrast to another. . . . The people of God, regardless of their faithfulness to date, must remain faithful rather than presuming favor, or they will experience disfavor instead.<sup>19</sup>

***21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you.***

This is the crystallization of the threat subtly implied in v. 17, in which Gentiles stood in the very place where branches had already once been broken off. How much more readily will Gentiles go the same way, given that they are—here by implication and later by explicit designation—unnatural branches in the context of Israel’s olive tree. As Wright notes, “This is what happens if you regard yourself as automatically part of God’s people, instead of continuing by faith alone. Faith remains the only valid badge of membership; anything else will lead inevitably to ‘boasting.’”<sup>20</sup> However, he goes on to argue that Gentile branches being ‘cut off’ would not mean from salvation, but perhaps that the particular church would not last another generation if it did not change its attitude. This is a bewildering interpretation because a) salvation is a dominant theme and concern of the whole of Romans, not least chapters 9-11 and certainly including chapter 11 (the word itself surfaces at vv. 11, 14, 26), and b) it is beyond doubt that when Paul describes some of Israel’s branches as ‘broken off,’ he means nothing less than cut off from the covenant community that will inherit salvation.

Hays points out that here Paul speaks of the fate of some of Israel in the same language (‘not being spared’) that he used of Jesus in 8:32, which in turn invokes the Akedah: “The parallels between these three beloved ones “not spared” are too rich to be fortuitous . . . In each case the rejection/acceptance pattern plays itself out to the vicarious benefit of others.”<sup>21</sup> The ‘vicarious benefit’ concept is readily identifiable elsewhere in this chapter (vv. 11, 12, 15, 19, 30), and the promise of resurrection

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<sup>19</sup> Nanos, “Broken Branches,” p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 685.

<sup>21</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 62.

inherent in the echoes of Jesus and Isaac in Paul's description of the fate of Israel surfaces explicitly in 11:15.

***22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off.***

This is an expanded reiteration of the previous verse. The idea of 'continuing' in kindness confirms the emphasis on 'faithfulness' rather than confessional 'faith,' as stressed by Nanos with regards to v. 20.

Whereas in 11:11 Paul stated emphatically that his kinsmen had 'by no means' stumbled so as to fall, here they are indeed pictured as fallen. The clue to this conundrum may not be so much in where they are on the spectrum between 'stumbling' and 'falling' (as Nanos assumes must be the case) but in what the end result of the fall will be. Directly preceding Paul's refutation of the idea that they have stumbled so as to fall in 11:11 is the Psalm 69 quotation that ends with the words ". . . bend their back *for ever*." Thus might Paul not be qualifying this with a temporal delimitation, anticipating the question it irresistibly provokes: 'Have they really stumbled so as to fall *permanently and irreversibly*?' The answer is 'By no means!' and he goes on to show that the process beginning with 'their trespass' (11:11) is in fact destined to finish with 'their full inclusion' (11:12). Thus, Paul is willing to picture them as 'fallen' here in v. 22 (serving the rhetorical purpose of providing a threatening precedent for the Gentiles to contemplate) because he will then move on to affirm once again that Israel's breaking off is not the end of the story as God wills it.

***23 And even those [of Israel], if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.***

The confirmation of what has been hinted at throughout the metaphor: God's 'breaking off' of some of Israel is not intended to be permanent. Again we see Paul link unbelief here with a conscious ongoing process—a 'persistence'—just as he spoke of 'continuing in kindness' in the previous verse. God's power is readily available for the regrafting of those broken off, but it is wholly contingent on them desisting in unbelief and beginning to persist in faith, and so to access God's 'kindness.' Here Paul's

emphasis on human responsibility even over against the power of God seems to put him in a less optimistic tone than we find him in 11:12, 15 (where Israel's 'inclusion'/'acceptance' seemed not so much an 'if' as a 'when'), aligning more with the statement of 11:14 that Paul can hope to save only 'some.' Rom. 11:23 reads from context like it should contain an optimistic expectation that will necessitate a drastic re-assessment of the fate of Israel on the part of the Gentiles he addresses, but in fact it is more moderate than that.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, this verse is crucial in reaffirming the necessity of faith in Christ for the salvation of Israel, since it can only be Christ who is the object of present unbelief.

***24 For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.***

As v. 22 was an expanded reiteration of v. 21, so too v. 24 expands upon the basic message of v. 23. The added element is the contrast between the Gentile branches that were grafted in 'contrary to nature' and the 'natural' Israelite branches.<sup>23</sup> This strengthens what might otherwise have seemed like a fairly tame expression of expectation in the previous verse: not only does God have power to graft the broken branches back in if they desist in unbelief (v. 23), but the fact that these are the *natural* branches indicates that this desisting is more natural and therefore actually more logically likely than that which has already taken place (the unnatural ingrafting of wild Gentiles).<sup>24</sup>

The argument of this verse, and indeed the whole olive tree metaphor, has attracted some discussion because of its dubious relationship to actual horticultural practice, which is to graft a cultivated olive branch onto a wild olive tree.<sup>25</sup> The puzzle of Paul's metaphor is that he pictures instead a wild olive shoot being grafted into a cultivated olive tree. Ancient mention of this practice is limited to Columella:

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<sup>22</sup> Barclay comments that "The future passive ('*will be grafted*,' that is, by God) is remarkably confident" (John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* [Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2015], p. 554), which rather seems to overlook the preceding *ἐάν* clause on which this grafting is predicated.

<sup>23</sup> Likewise, where before the olive tree was simply 'the' olive tree, now it is the Jews' 'own' (*ἰδίᾳ*) olive tree.

<sup>24</sup> In Jean-Noël Aletti's (translated) phrase, vv. 16-24 communicate "a favorable probability for the salvation of Israel" (*New Approaches for Interpreting the Letters of Saint Paul, Collected Essays: Rhetoric, Soteriology, Christology and Ecclesiology* [trans. from French; Subsidia Biblica, 43; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2012], p. 151).

<sup>25</sup> Theophrastus, *On the Causes of Plants* 1.6.10.

It happens also frequently, that though the trees are thriving well, they fail to bear fruit. It is a good plan to bore them with a Gallic auger and to put tightly into the hole a green slip taken from a wild olive-tree; the result is that the tree, being as it were impregnated with fruitful offspring, becomes more productive.<sup>26</sup>

This instance has been used in support of the theory that Paul considered his metaphor to be horticulturally uncontroversial, and that his readers would have recognised the practice described therein as the ‘recuperative oleiculture’ described here by Columella. The force of the metaphor is then construed as emphasising the exhausted, fruitless state of ethnic Israel, desperately in need of the injection of Gentiles that will galvanise it back into life and fruitfulness.<sup>27</sup> This interpretation must be roundly rejected. Firstly, the likelihood that the practice would have been known to Paul or his readers is highly questionable.<sup>28</sup> At the very least we can say that grafting cultivated olive shoots onto wild olive trees was overwhelmingly the standard practice. For Paul’s metaphor to work in the way outlined above requires not only that the minority practice is known, but that it is understood to have recuperative intent,<sup>29</sup> which is then to be inferred as the meaning behind the process that Paul outlines. This places a rather high demand on the reader to make each conceptual connection, and therefore also on our credulity if we are to believe that this is really what Paul means. Secondly and more importantly, the idea that Paul envisages Gentile branches as re-galvanising an exhausted Israel is not just foreign to the thrust of the whole chapter but flatly contradicts it: “If you (Gentiles) do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you” (11:18). This verse alone should categorically exclude the notion that Paul affirms the Gentiles as Israel’s recuperative benefactor.

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<sup>26</sup> Columella, *De re rustica* 5.9.16

<sup>27</sup> A. G. Baxter and J. A. Ziesler, “Paul and Arboriculture: Romans 11.17-24,” *JSNT* 24 (1985), pp. 25-32; followed by e.g. Mark Reasoner, “The Redemptive Inversions of Jeremiah in Romans 9–11,” *Biblica* 95/3 (2014), pp. 388-404 (403-404).

<sup>28</sup> “[T]here is no mention of this technique in the writings of Theophrastus, and it is really quite inconsistent with his views on the inability of wild olive branches to contribute to a tree’s fruitfulness. Even in the West it passes unnoticed by Cato and Varro. Thus, there is little reason to believe that Paul was even aware of it” (Esler, “Ancient Oleiculture,” p. 121).

<sup>29</sup> Against which Esler notes that “Since the context is one in which Columella is describing how to establish and then maintain an olive grove, the problem appears to concern how to kick-start a fairly young tree that has reached maturity but failed to come into production, rather than an old tree that has become fruitless” (“Ancient Oleiculture,” p. 119).

How then to explain the glaring discrepancy between Paul's scheme and the actual grafting practice from which the imagery is drawn? Dodd's characteristically forthright explanation was that Paul "had not the curiosity to inquire what went on in the olive-yards which fringed every road he walked,"<sup>30</sup> which is often countered with the assertion that by terming the process he was tracing as 'contrary to nature,' Paul was acknowledging that it did not conform to normal practice. But I concur with Cranfield that the point of this phrase is not so much that it goes against arboricultural practice as that the wild branches belong to the wild olive, and are being grafted in to something to which they do not by nature belong, in contrast with the natural branches which do by nature belong to the cultivated tree.<sup>31</sup> Grafting in reverse of the usual way would after all not be so much against nature as against practice (is any grafting really 'according to nature'?). The significance of the metaphor is internally constructed and operates largely independently of its similarity or dissimilarity to standard arboricultural practice, whether Paul knew what that was or not.

A closing comment from a more sociological angle: One of the key matters on which Paul's olive tree metaphor invites reflection is ethnic differentiation of prestige within the Christ-movement. On this point there is fairly widespread agreement that Paul does maintain some kind of ethnic differentiation between Jews and Gentiles even as he emphatically asserts their fundamental togetherness and the exclusion of boasting and arrogance that is the practical corollary. Thus Beker's succinct phrase: "not uniformity, but unity in diversity."<sup>32</sup> This has been a detectable reality since the programmatic statement of 1:16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The 'unity' there is centred on the *gospel* as the power of God for salvation, anticipating 3:22-24: "there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The 'diversity' is found in the temporal priority afforded 'the Jew': the gospel is 'first' to them. Much of Nanos' *Mystery of Romans* is taken up in defending the proposition that Paul never abandons this pattern throughout Romans, which he does by emphasizing that both parts of Israel (hardened and remnant) maintain a paradoxical priority in the purposes of God:

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<sup>30</sup> Dodd, *Romans*, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Cranfield, *Romans IX-XVI*, p. 571.

<sup>32</sup> Beker, "Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel," p. 13.

The fate of Israel precedes and supports the fate of the nations. The “Yes” of the believing “root” as well as the “No” of those “cut off” precedes and supports the “Yes” of the wild olives grafted in, but there is still more—both the believing root and the wild olives are not the end of God’s plan but now must recognize their responsibility to those of Israel who initially said “No.”<sup>33</sup>

However, ethnic differentiation does not have to be seen only in terms of temporal priority. From a different point of view entirely, Esler concludes, “That Israelites and non-Israelites form one social category in Christ in no way means that the differences between these subgroups have been erased, or that one is not superior to the other.”<sup>34</sup> In fact Esler sees some form of ongoing ethnic differentiation—even if it entails the superiority of one subgroup over the other—as vital to the success of their unity: “he is establishing a common superordinate identity while simultaneously maintaining the salience of subgroup identities . . . [E]fforts at social recategorization may fail if this strategy is not adopted by those leading the process.”<sup>35</sup> The function of Rom. 11:17-24 in this effort, then, is that

The allegory of the olive tree offers a textualized image of the recategorization of two subgroups in which Paul is engaged throughout Romans. But this is a form of unity, just like the simile of the body he will present in Rom. 12.4-8, which caters for internal differentiation. The Judaeans and non-Judaeans are separable and maintain their original identity in relation to the olive tree.<sup>36</sup>

Another perspective that leads to essentially the same conclusion is found in Caroline Johnson Hodge’s work, which draws on the theory of ‘aggregative self-definition,’ whereby “ethnic identity is constructed not by contrast with others [which is termed ‘*oppositional* ethnic self-definition’] but by affiliation with others, usually to gain some advantage, such as a higher pedigree.”<sup>37</sup> One way that this finds expression is in ‘ethnic genealogies,’ in which “various ethnic groups link themselves together as descendants of a common ancestor,”<sup>38</sup> with the more direct the genealogical descent, the higher the

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<sup>33</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 253-254. See further on this in the Comparative Analysis below.

<sup>34</sup> Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 305.

<sup>35</sup> Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, p. 300.

<sup>36</sup> Esler, “Ancient Oleiculture,” p. 123.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson Hodge, “Olive Trees and Ethnicities,” p. 85.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson Hodge, “Olive Trees and Ethnicities,” p. 85.

status of the group. She thus writes that “Judeans and gentiles are distinct people and remain so; the Judeans claim their link to Abraham by birth and the gentiles by adoption.”<sup>39</sup> This statement is in dire need of qualification, because (in Wright’s words) “Paul makes it abundantly clear that there is no covenant membership, and consequently no salvation, for those who simply rest on their ancestral privilege.”<sup>40</sup> A paragraph by Johnson Hodge in a later publication exposes (all the more clearly because of the non-technical remit of the volume) a foundational fallacy in her reading of Paul:

If his audience [for Romans] includes Gentiles only, then the reading changes. If Paul’s advice is aimed at this specific group, then his critique of the law pertains to *Gentile* use of Jewish law, and Paul argues that keeping the law the way the Jews do is not right for Gentiles. . . . Paul’s task is not to fix Jews, but to fix Gentiles.<sup>41</sup>

We have already found in favour of a Gentile target audience (‘Introduction to Romans’ above), but it is a huge leap in the wrong direction to claim that this means that everything Paul says in Romans is true only for them. Even allowing for his famous dictum regarding becoming “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22), it is preposterous to suppose that when Paul makes explicitly inclusive statements such as that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16), he only really considers this to be true for the latter group since they are the ones principally addressed. Nevertheless (to reign ourselves back in again to the matter in hand), perhaps we could arrive at synthesis in which the olive tree metaphor is taken to suggest that Paul affords higher prestige and priority to those *within* the Christ group who are *also* physical descendants of Abraham,<sup>42</sup> i.e. those branches that are in the tree as ‘natural’ branches and not wild olive branches that are grafted in only ‘contrary to nature.’ Such ‘branches’ enjoy not only the blessings of the gospel but also the privileges listed in 9:4-5. After all, circumcision is indeed of value if

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson Hodge, “Olive Trees and Ethnicities,” p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 246.

<sup>41</sup> Caroline Johnson Hodge, “The Role of Israel in Romans 9-11,” in J. L. Sumney (ed.), *Reading Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 169-186 (171-172). Emphasis original.

<sup>42</sup> So Watson: “Yet in 11:1-2 and indeed throughout this chapter, Paul reverts to a view of the people of God that he had previously seemed to reject—a view in which descent from the patriarchs bestows a privileged standing before God” (Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* [revised edn; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2007], p. 335).

the law is kept (2:25), and faith in Jesus not only upholds the law (3:31) but fulfils it (10:4).

## ROMANS 11:25-27

These are the verses in which chapters 9-11 come to a head. The first thing to note is that it opens with a γὰρ, which Jewett takes to indicate that “This pericope dealing with the mystery of salvation serves to explain the allusion in 11:23-24 about the future engrafting of Israel alongside Gentile converts.”<sup>43</sup> Wright assents to the special relevance of 11:23-24 for setting up the mystery that follows, but also emphasises the close links stretching further back into the present chapters, so that “Every element in verse 25 is thus simply a summary of what has gone before”<sup>44</sup>: the aim that Gentiles might not think themselves too wise picks up the thrust of the whole of 11:11-24; the ‘hardening’ motif picks up from 11:7 and 9:14-23; and the interdependence of Jews and Gentiles in the plan of salvation picks up from 11:11-15.<sup>45</sup> The special link with 11:23-24 is then seen as pertaining particularly to 11:26-27:

Likewise, the possibility of restoration for Jews at present ‘hardened’, of their sins being taken away, as in the combined scriptural quotations of 11.26b-27, is held out in the generalized terms of verses 12, 14 and 15, and becomes a key subject in 11.23-4, at the climax of the ‘olive tree’ allegory and the lead-in to the present short passage.<sup>46</sup>

The main development in 11:25-27, then, might be seen not as the fresh suggestion that Israel will be saved, but in a direct affirmation of the certainty of that event.<sup>47</sup> In v. 23 God has power to graft Israel’s branches back in, if they do not persist in unbelief, and in v. 24 this regrafting is shown to be theoretically more natural than the grafting of

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<sup>43</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 695.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1232. Extending the scope of the exercise beyond just v. 25, Jean-Noël Aletti provides an instructive list of the key verbal links between v. 25-32 and the material that precedes it, starting from 9:6 (*God’s Justice in Romans: Keys for Interpreting the Epistle to the Romans* [trans. from 1991 French; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2010], p. 217).

<sup>45</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1232.

<sup>46</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1233.

<sup>47</sup> Wagner: “Paul is convinced both that God is able to take away Israel’s unbelief and that God has committed himself to doing this very thing. Consequently, what in vv. 23-24 Paul entertains as a possibility, in vv. 25ff. he immediately depicts as a certain future reality” (*Heralds of Good News*, p. 276).

Gentile branches that has actually taken place. But in v. 26 the regrafting of Israel's branches is not only natural, it is certain: 'all Israel *will* be saved.' Likewise, in vv. 11-12 and 15-16, the promises of Israel's salvation are in some way muted, in that the main focus is on the logic of its worldwide effect rather than on the nature or certainty of the salvation itself. Thus we can see that this section by no means constitutes an independent or even unexpected stage in Romans 11, and that is why it was vital to challenge Wright's interpretation of Israel's 'fullness' and 'acceptance' there if we are to resist him here, in part.

It is important to note that the close links between the content of chapter 11 in general and vv. 25-27 in particular do not preclude the possibility of the latter introducing any new information at all; the introductory phrase "I do not want you to be ignorant" (v. 25) might suggest just such a possibility by analogy with its function in Rom. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Thess. 4:13.<sup>48</sup> This sense that the content of the 'mystery' in vv. 25-27 might be expected to be both familiar and surprising is confirmed and encapsulated by the very use of that word; Wagner notes that "In employing the term *μυστήριον*, Paul implies that what follows has been revealed to him by God,"<sup>49</sup> but also that "in the very next verse, he emphasizes that this 'mystery' is consonant with the witness of the scriptures to God's eschatological redemption of Israel."<sup>50</sup> In other words, though the 'mystery' might be freshly revealed it has long been concealed, in accordance with Dodd's interpretation that Paul's use of that word indicates in particular "a truth divined by religious intuition in the facts of the Gospel—the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the emergence of the Church."<sup>51</sup> Brendan Byrne is less convinced that the substance of the mystery has really been revealed to Paul at all, and reverts to using the word in its less technical sense:

At the end of Romans 11, however, he has hardly resolved the issue of Israel in a satisfactory way. The status, present situation, and destiny of Israel remains a mystery (11:25–27)—as it does to this day. If as seems to be the case, Romans

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<sup>48</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 276, n. 185.

<sup>49</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 276.

<sup>50</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, pp. 276-277. When we reach that verse below Wagner's analysis shall be gainfully employed.

<sup>51</sup> Dodd, *Romans*, p. 182. Wagner does also acknowledge that "The term *μυστήριον* is often associated in Paul's writings with "gospel" (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:1, 7; 4:1; cf. Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19; Col 1:26-27)" (*Heralds of Good News*, p. 276, n. 186). Jewett's excursus on the precise experiential origin of Paul's revelation (*Romans*, pp. 697-699) results only in the conclusion that "it is best to acknowledge that Paul's use of the word "mystery" in this context reflects the perspective of a mystic whose "revelation experiences" remain partially beyond analysis" (p. 699).

really leaves the whole matter open-ended—within the fundamental assertion that God is faithful—that is perhaps where Christian theology should leave it also.<sup>52</sup>

This vagueness is both unsatisfactory and unnecessary, since it seems to rather ignore Paul's express desire that the mystery be understood (v. 25). We may press on, then, to enquire into its particulars.

### **Introducing the Issues**

Firstly, who are the 'you' that are addressed in v. 25? Jewett writes that

Paul makes no distinction here between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians, both of whom may have had reasons to resist evangelization that would result in the conversion of additional Gentiles and previously zealous Jews. But since the majority of Gentile Christians perceived their interests to counter the mystery of Israel's conversion, as is evident in the preceding pericope, this is where the main criticism must lie.<sup>53</sup>

I think we can go beyond saying that with Gentiles is where the main criticism lies. We saw in the 'Introduction to Romans' above that the whole letter betrays an orientation towards a Gentile readership, and here also two considerations suggest that Paul is in fact making 'a distinction here between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians,' addressing the former and not the latter. Firstly, the return to the second person plural after the use of the second person singular throughout vv. 17-24 returns us to the viewpoint of v. 13, which announced that "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles." Secondly, the fact that v. 25 generalises Israel as hardened and Gentiles as incoming (cf. 9:30-31) shows that the 'you' addressed from v. 28 onwards—those who have already received mercy—are Gentiles. The 'mystery' may produce humility in Jews as a collateral effect, but here its delivery is aimed firmly at the Gentiles.

The significance of the mystery may be linked to vv. 23-24 (and further back) by its opening γὰρ, but in terms of its direct content Wright notes that the τοῦτο looks forward

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<sup>52</sup> Brendan Byrne, "Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post- 'New Perspective' Perspective," *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2001), pp. 227-241 (240).

<sup>53</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 699.

to the ὅτι later in the verse: “*this* mystery, namely the fact *that* . . .”<sup>54</sup> The mystery then is comprised of three main elements:

- a) a hardening has come upon part of Israel,
- b) until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.
- c) And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written . . .

What we already know about the unveiling of the mystery is that it should motivate Gentiles to humility (v. 25a). When we view these three elements through this lens, it becomes clear that each element takes us a step closer to the real core of the mystery, which is that ‘all Israel will be saved’ (v. 26a). The information that ‘a hardening has come upon part of Israel’ does not provide any reason for Gentiles to reconsider any arrogant attitude, and thus cannot constitute the heart of the mystery. Jewett is adamant that ἀπὸ μέρους here must be taken adjectivally with Ἰσραὴλ (so his translation ‘obtuseness has occurred in a part of Israel’), in light of the ‘divided Israel’ theme found earlier at 9:27 and 11:7, 14, 17.<sup>55</sup> Undoubtedly divided Israel is indeed the point, but ἀπὸ μέρους may also produce this sense in adverbial attachment with γέγονεν—‘a hardening has happened in part’ (i.e. to a part of Israel)—and this reading is probably preferable because ἀπὸ μέρους tends to function adverbially rather than adjectivally elsewhere in Paul.<sup>56</sup>

The second element of the mystery builds on the first, revisiting the notion that the ‘hardening’ of Israel is intimately entwined with God’s purpose for the Gentiles (11:12-15), who are now pictured as ‘coming in.’ The NRSV’s interpretative rendering of πλήρωμα as ‘full number’ here is probably justified: whilst the function of πλήρωμα in v. 12 is admittedly more qualitative than this, the most immediate clue in the present context is the quantitative qualification provided by the εἰσέλθη that directly follows. It is Gentiles themselves rather than some abstract ‘fullness’ that may properly be said to

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<sup>54</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 687. NRSV rearranges the clauses so as to remove ἵνα μὴ ᾦτε ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι from in between the introductory τοῦτο and the explanatory ὅτι (though the latter is left unvoiced).

<sup>55</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 700.

<sup>56</sup> Both Wright (“Letter to the Romans,” p. 688) and Dunn (*Romans 9-16*, p. 679) note the adverbial norm of ἀπὸ μέρους, though curiously in Dunn’s discussion the adverbial option is considered in connection not with the verb γίνομαι but with the noun πώρωσις. The advantage of this reading, he says, is that “It is not unimportant that Paul still retains a concept of Israel as a unified whole: the people suffering partial blindness, rather than only part of the people suffering blindness” (p. 679). Agreed, the unified whole concept is important, but it is hard to see that it is Paul’s point here; after all, what does ‘the people suffering partial blindness’ actually mean in practical terms if not ‘only part of the people suffering blindness’?

‘come in,’ in line with the traditional apocalyptic idea of a set number of those to be saved/slain/born according to God’s foreknowledge and plan.<sup>57</sup> This might temper Gentile arrogance towards Israel after the manner of vv. 11-15 (Gentiles should be grateful towards Israel because her hardening/transgression has brought them salvation), but this is not sufficient as an anchor for the call to Gentile humility, because it may just as easily produce the condescension anticipated in the statement of the proud Gentile interlocutor in v. 19: “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” But even if Gentiles respond to the redemptive effect of Israel’s hardening with appropriate gratitude, this hardening might still be presumed to fit her for the judgment now postponed but to be enacted once the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. I accept Wright’s point that such would align with the usual function of hardening in Jewish tradition,<sup>58</sup> and with the example of Pharaoh in 9:17. I accept his insistence that “The ‘until’ clause (‘until the fullness of the nations comes in’) does indeed provide a temporal marker, but it is not a marker which of itself can tell us what happens to the ‘hardened’ part of Israel once that time is reached.”<sup>59</sup> However, I cannot accept his conclusions as to what in fact *does* happen at that time, i.e. the meaning of the climactic third element of the mystery, in which the possible presumption of Israel’s impending judgment is overturned, the full significance of the first two elements revealed, and the function of the mystery to motivate Gentiles to humility fulfilled. The statement that “all Israel will be saved” is one of the most stunning and controversial verses of the letter. We will tackle it with two questions: firstly, what is the composition of ‘all Israel’? Secondly, how and when will all Israel be saved?<sup>60</sup>

### **What is the composition of ‘all Israel’?**

It has been argued above that the Gentiles who mysteriously fulfil the law in Romans 2 do so as Christians (though not at that point revealed as such); that 10:4 is intended to confirm that it is only faith in Christ which attains the law; and that the second ‘Israel’ of 9:6 includes those whom God has called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles. All this might be assumed to anticipate an acceptance of Wright’s Gentile-inclusive understanding of ‘all Israel’ here, as he insists that (largely on the strength of

<sup>57</sup> So e.g. Moo, *Romans*, pp. 718-719. See Rev. 6:11; 2 Bar. 23.4; 30.2; 75.6; *Apoc. Ab.* 29:17.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1236-1238.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1237.

<sup>60</sup> Still useful as an introduction to and overview of the debate is Christopher Zoccali, “‘And so all Israel will be saved’: Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship,” *JSNT* 30/3 (2008), pp. 289-318.

9:6) “It is impermissible to argue that ‘Israel’ cannot change its referent within the space of two verses.”<sup>61</sup> Yes; I will not argue that the referent of ‘Israel’ categorically *cannot* have shifted between v. 25 and v. 26, only that it clearly *has* not. It is vital to be able to acknowledge the strength of some of Wright’s earlier arguments and still resist him at this point, rather than let a reaction against his view of ‘all Israel’ unduly bias assessment of the interpretative moves that may have pointed him in that direction from previous passages.

The main challenge to Wright’s Gentile-inclusive understanding of all Israel (still held in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*)<sup>62</sup> is that, in Zoccali’s words, “it is inconsistent with Paul’s rhetorical purpose in this section of the letter, namely, to undercut a ‘Gentile supersessionism’ taking hold in the church at Rome.”<sup>63</sup> It is a case of shooting oneself in the foot for Wright to appeal to Phil. 3.3 and (his reading of) Gal. 6.16 in calling ‘all Israel’ in Rom. 11:26a “a typically Pauline polemical redefinition”<sup>64</sup>; in both of those cases the context is the need to strengthen Gentiles against a Judaizing threat, and a polemical redefinition of ‘Israel’ language is understandable, whereas the opposite context in Romans (Gentiles tempted to despise Israel) justifies Zoccali’s criticism quoted above. However, this context swims into focus only slowly as the letter unfolds, until Paul is ready to speak to it directly in Romans 11. This gives him room to lay the groundwork of a (yes) polemical redefinition of the words ‘Jew’ and ‘circumcision’ in 2:25-29, as part of a long demonstration of how Gentiles were always destined to be included in God’s people through the Messiah, whilst still being able to round here on any Gentile pretension arising from that reality. The declaration that all Israel—ethnic Israel—will be saved is the final nail in the coffin of that pretension (even if there remain some funeral arrangements to be made in vv. 26b-32, and indeed chapters 14-15). On the interpretative influence of the double ‘Israel’ of 9:6, Watson is careful to show that Paul is not “systematizing a distinction between a “fleshly” and a “spiritual” Israel,”<sup>65</sup> as 2:25-29 might have set him up to do. Instead,

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<sup>61</sup> Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 250.

<sup>62</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1243-1246.

<sup>63</sup> Zoccali, “And so all Israel will be saved,” p. 295. Likewise e.g. Nanos: “Is this not an example of the very supplanting of empirical Israel that Paul is arguing against in this text?” (*Mystery*, p. 256).

<sup>64</sup> Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, p. 250. Likewise *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1242-1243.

<sup>65</sup> Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, p. 336.

In spite of v. 6, Paul in Romans 9-11 consistently uses “Israel” to refer to the Jewish people as a whole and not to the remnant, let alone to the Gentile church. . . . “Israel may contain “the elect” (ἐκλογή) and “the rest” (11:7), but “the rest” still belong to Israel even in their temporary “hardened” state (11:25). Ultimately it is “all Israel” that will be saved (11:26).<sup>66</sup>

Consideration of the immediate rhetorical context in which the phrase ‘all Israel’ appears in 11:26 powerfully confirms that it refers only to ethnic Israel. As we have already seen, the ‘mystery’ of 11:25-27 continues and develops most directly vv. 23-24, which anticipated the regrafting of the ‘natural branches’ of Israel. That this is picked up directly in v. 26 is suggested by the way that vv. 25-26 form a distillation of the pattern already present in the olive tree allegory:

| <i>Stage</i> | <i>Olive tree (11:16-24)</i>  | <i>Mystery (11:25-26)</i>                       |
|--------------|---|---|
| <b>1</b>     | Some branches were broken off,  | a hardening has come upon Israel in part,       |
| <b>2</b>     | and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree . . . | until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. |
| <b>3</b>     | how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.                    | And so all Israel will be saved . . .           |

This parallel, strengthened by the presence of exactly the same pattern elsewhere in chapter 11 (vv. 12, 15, 32 – though with the addition of a worldwide, multi-ethnic fourth stage), urges the most straightforward reading of the terminology in v. 26: ‘all Israel’ is equivalent to the Jewish ‘natural branches.’ Thus we can see that Wright’s Gentile-inclusive ‘all Israel’ awkwardly bucks the trend:

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<sup>66</sup> Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, pp. 335-336.

| <i>Stage</i> | <i>Olive tree (11:16-24)</i>  | <i>11:25-26 in Wright's scheme</i>                        |
|--------------|---|---|
| 1            | Some branches were broken off,  | a hardening has come upon Israel in part,                 |
| 2            | and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree . . . | until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.           |
| 3            | how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.                    | ???   |
| 4            |   | And so all Israel [Jews and Gentiles] will be saved . . . |

The gaping hole in Wright's scheme where stage 3 should be tells heavily against his multi-ethnic reading of 'all Israel' in v. 26a. Wright acknowledges that he must insert something here from 11:12-15 in order to make his interpretation work, though without recognising this as an indication that the 'mystery' has been misread:

[W]e could gloss verse 25b-25a as follows, with the italicised portion imported from 11.11-15 and 11.23-24:

A hardening has come upon part of 'Israel', until the fullness of the gentiles has 'come in' to that same 'Israel', *causing a much greater number of those presently 'hardened' to become 'jealous' and to swell the present small 'remnant' to a 'fullness' out of all proportion to its present diminution;* and that is the means by which, in the traditional phrase, 'All Israel shall be saved'.<sup>67</sup>

The content of the insertion bears such a vital load that it is simply incredible to suppose that Paul was relying on it to be read from between the lines of what he has actually written at this incomparably crucial point in the letter. Rather, the 'fullness' of ethnic Israel is directly adumbrated in the promise that 'all Israel will be saved.'

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<sup>67</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1243.

The ethnic-exclusive nature of ‘all Israel’ in 11:26 is confirmed by the verses that directly follow. The composite quotation in vv. 26b-27 indicates that all Israel being saved involves ungodliness being banished from ‘Jacob,’ that word being foregrounded as the point of overlap between the two Isianic source texts here combined (see further below). ‘Jacob’ is an unmistakably ethnic-specific term for the Jewish people, affirming that ‘Israel’ in v. 26 retains its usual ethnic sense. Broadening the field of view to take in the original literary contexts of the words of Isaiah that Paul employs, Sarah Whittle’s emphasis on the reoccurrence of the idea that “the Gentiles and Israel are intrinsically bound up in Israel’s covenant-renewal texts”<sup>68</sup> leads her into a sympathetic assessment of Wright’s Gentile-inclusive reading of ‘all Israel.’<sup>69</sup> The repeated presence of the Gentile-inclusion motif in proximity to the verses in Isaiah which Paul chooses to quote fits with the theme of ethnic interdependence found throughout Romans 9-11, but Whittle overestimates the importance of this for interpreting the function of the quotations as they appear in Rom. 11:26-27. In their new setting, far more telling is the way in which vv. 28-29 take unbelieving ethnic Israel as their subject, clearly presupposing that such was also the subject of vv. 26b-27, which in turn clearly indicates that the whole discussion was focussed in that direction by the statement that ‘all Israel will be saved.’<sup>70</sup>

Having made a ruling on the ethnic composition of ‘all Israel,’ we must now enquire as to its extent. Does it refer diachronically to Israel through time, or synchronically to one generation? Does it refer to every individual without exception, or corporately to the people as a whole? This first of these questions is simple to answer: ‘all Israel’ in 11:26 is certainly synchronic rather than diachronic. It is utterly inconceivable that Paul is propounding salvation outside the context of faith in Christ (see further on this below), which clearly excludes those who have died in unbelief. Furthermore, the phrase  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$  Ἰσραὴλ is synchronic in every one of its 334 LXX appearances—an extremely formidable uniformity of precedent for Paul’s usage here.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Whittle, *Covenant Renewal*, p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> Whittle, *Covenant Renewal*, pp. 64-75.

<sup>70</sup> *Contra* Wagner, who wants to have his cake and eat it: “While I follow Wright in seeing Gentiles included implicitly in the phrase “all Israel,” I would stress that Paul’s focus in the following verses remains on “the rest” of ethnic Israel” (*Heralds of Good News*, p. 278, n. 193).

<sup>71</sup> This uniformity in the LXX comprehensively outweighs the significance of possible diachronic-usage parallels (not precedents) elsewhere (e.g. *T. Benj.* 10.11; *m. Sanh.* 10:1). There is a possible diachronic usage in the Masoretic Text of Mal. 4:4 (“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for *all Israel*”), but “The LXX diverges considerably from the MT here and the phrase  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$  Ἰσραὴλ is not used” (Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, p. 141).

The next matter to address is the significance of the reference to ‘all Israel.’ Does this mean every individual Jew, or only the nation as a whole? There is no reason to spurn the common move of appealing to the parallel with the later *m. Sanh.* 10:1-3 in seeking to answer this question. Not only does the phrase  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma \text{ Ἰσραὴλ}$  appear there, but it does so in an eschatological context not dissimilar from Rom. 11:26. It also displays a robustly corporate understanding of Israel, in that the statement that “All Israel has a share in the world to come” is followed paradoxically by a list of exceptions and exclusions. Sanders judges that the immediately following group (“he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law, and that the Law is not from Heaven, and an Epicurean”) may always have been part of the original;<sup>72</sup> subsequent glosses (some anonymous and some from Rabbi Akiba and Abba Saul) exclude whole *generations* (e.g. that of the flood, the wilderness, and the dispersion) from the salvation promised to every Israelite. The point is that there is no indication that any of this is thought to impugn the original statement that ‘all Israel’ has a share in the world to come. The parallel encourages us to allow the same phrase in Rom. 11:26 the same flexibility, i.e. to view it as referring to the salvation of the nation as a collective whole, without necessarily referring to every individual therein. This fully accords with the corporate rather than individualistic lens that we have seen Paul to be using throughout the letter.

On the question of what ‘all Israel’ means, there is a recent suggestion that merits mention. Jason A. Staples argues in a 2011 article that  $\tau\acute{o} \pi\lambda\acute{\eta}\rho\omega\mu\alpha \tau\acute{\omega}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\theta\nu\acute{\omega}\nu$  in 11:25 is a reference to Gen. 48:19, in which the phrase (in its Hebrew form) pertains to the offspring of Ephraim according to Jacob’s prophetic blessing. This sets up the breathtaking interpretation that

. . . the Gentiles now receiving the Spirit are the fulfilment of Jacob’s prophecy—they are Ephraim’s seed, they are Israel, restored through the new covenant. . . . God has promised to restore all Israel, and Ephraim—that is, “the fullness of the nations/Gentiles”—must be reincorporated into Israel and reunited with his Jewish brothers. All Israel can be saved only through the ingathering of the nations.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p. 147.

<sup>73</sup> Staples, “A Fresh Look,” p. 387.

Though this is an exciting proposition, it must be refused. Not only is it subject to many of the arguments against Wright's Gentile-inclusive understanding of 'all Israel,' it also brings with it particular problems of its own. The fleeting verbal link between Rom. 11:25 and Gen. 48:19 is insufficient to carry the interpretative load that it is forced to bear. Staples argues that the reason this resonance has long been overlooked is because of the beguiling influence of the LXX, which translates  $\text{קָרַבְתָּ אֶלְלֵךְ}$  as  $\text{πληθος ἐθνῶν}$  rather than the  $\text{πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν}$  of Rom. 11:25; but then it is extremely difficult to imagine the Greek-speaking readers of Romans escaping that snare. More importantly, it beggars belief that if "By citing this prophecy at the climax of his argument, Paul has placed his cards on the table in grand style,"<sup>74</sup> he would do so without having already announced what was in his hand. In other words, the appearance of a reunited-tribes-of-Israel revelation at vv. 25-26 would come totally out of the blue, and as such would have to be considered a viable interpretative option only if we were totally bereft of a more contextualised explanation for what 'all Israel' might mean. As it is, there is an obvious and compelling alternative. It is true that divided Israel stands at the heart of Romans 9-11, but not as Staples understands it, for the division is not tribal but messianic. For Paul it is of course faith in Jesus that separates the wheat from the chaff, the objects of mercy from the objects of wrath, the remnant of Israel from the hardened of Israel. In the reference to the collective whole of Israel in 11:26, Paul welcomes the unification to be enacted in the abolition of the current partition, so that in this sense 'all Israel' means 'both parts of Israel.'<sup>75</sup> The anticipation that even the now-hardened of Israel will come at last to faith in Jesus provides a satisfying resolution to the division still present in v. 25, and anticipates the unifying function of  $\text{παῖς}$  in vv. 32, where it indicates the great bringing together of Jew and Gentile in the universal mercy of God.

### **How and when will all Israel be saved?**

We may begin by hacking a clearing in the theological thickets enclosing this question with the confident assertion that Israel's salvation absolutely must be a result of faith in Christ. It is inconceivable that Paul suddenly dispenses with his consistent and insistent claim that in Christ alone is God's righteousness revealed and his salvation received. R. David Kaylor reminds us that Paul has just reiterated this claim in connection with Israel specifically:

<sup>74</sup> Staples, "A Fresh Look," p. 387.

<sup>75</sup> So e.g. Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, pp. 277-278.

It is in Chapter 10 that Paul expresses the current problem of Israel's unbelief, and that chapter is thoroughly christological. Here Paul emphasises that Christ is the end of the Torah; he calls for the central confession, "Jesus is Lord," as the believing response of those who read the Torah correctly.<sup>76</sup>

This is already conclusive, but if we need confirmation that this perspective is not suddenly abandoned at 11:26 then we might look at the even more immediate context of the olive tree metaphor, in which it is perfectly clear that (as Sanders says) "there is only one olive tree, and the condition of being a 'branch' is 'faith.'"<sup>77</sup> Nor can this 'faith' be generalised away from faith in Christ specifically, for Israel's 'unbelief' (v. 23) can only be with regards to Christ (who else are they not believing in?), and the comment in v. 23b that δυνατὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν ἐνκεντρίσαι αὐτούς echoes the language of the gospel's grand introduction in 1:16.<sup>78</sup>

The means and mode of Israel's salvation, then, is faith in Christ, but we must be more specific about its nature and timing. For this we need to delve into the quotations that comprise vv. 26b-27, appending and explaining (καθὼς γέγραπται) the statement in v. 26a that "all Israel will be saved." We will allow J. Ross Wagner to guide us through this process, his analysis coming as it does with all the weight of a full-length study of *Isaiah and Paul "In Concert" in the Letter to the Romans* behind it.

The combination quotation in Rom. 11:26b-27 is "a rather deft conflation"<sup>79</sup> of Isa. 59:20-21 and Isa. 27:9, the double-tradition word Ἰακώβ acting as the latent pivot from one to the other. The result:

Out of Zion will come the Deliverer;  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.

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<sup>76</sup> R. David Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community: Jew and Gentile in Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 187.

<sup>77</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 195.

<sup>78</sup> Reidar Hvalvik, "A 'Sonderweg' for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11.25-27," *JSNT* 38 (1990), pp. 87-107 (91). This article gives many other cogent arguments against the *Sonderweg* idea. Likewise Chae: "There cannot be any *Sonderweg* for Israel; Israel will be saved by faith in Christ in the same manner (καὶ οὕτως) in which both τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν and the Jewish remnant were saved (i.e. by faith in Jesus Christ)" (Daniel Jong-Sang Chae, *Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles: His Apostolic Self-Awareness and Its Influence on the Soteriological Argument in Romans* [Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997], p. 287).

<sup>79</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 280.

And this is my covenant with them,  
when I take away their sins.

To the crucial and curious ἐκ Σιῶν we will return; Wagner notes that aside from this both quotations agree very substantially with the LXX against other traditions, including the MT.<sup>80</sup> There is no evidence to suggest and no reason to suppose that Paul took over the combination of Isa. 59:20-21 and Isa. 27:9 from another source.<sup>81</sup> The minor alteration of the singular ἁμαρτία in Isa. 27:9 to its plural form in Rom. 11:27 accords with Paul's preference for the singular to refer specifically to personified Sin, thus making it generally unsuitable for modification by a possessive pronoun as here (αὐτῶν);<sup>82</sup> furthermore, it may have influenced Paul that the plural ἁμαρτίας strengthens the parallel with ἀσεβείας in v. 26.<sup>83</sup> Taking a step back, Wagner comments that "Beyond the striking resemblance that Isaiah 59:20-21 and 27:9 bear to one another, their larger literary settings tell remarkably similar stories about Israel's future deliverance by God,"<sup>84</sup> so that "In claiming that God will be faithful to redeem all Israel, Paul does not lean on the isolated testimony of a few verses from Isaiah. Rather, he taps into a broad and deep stream of thought that is characteristic of Isaiah's vision."<sup>85</sup> The key sites of convergence between the two Isaiah texts in view here are the ideas that "it is God's power alone that will ultimately overcome his people's apostasy,"<sup>86</sup> and that the working of this mighty power will touch not only Israel but

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<sup>80</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>81</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, pp. 280-281, *contra* Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (SNTSMS, 74; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 166-171; cf. his "The Redeemer Will Come ἐκ Σιῶν': Romans 11.26-27 Revisited," in C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders (eds), *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (JSNTSup., 83/SSEJC, 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 118-142. Attributing the combination to Paul is not to say that it was necessarily intentional on his part. Wagner judges an unintentional slippage from Isa. 59:20-21 to Isa. 27:9 'not inconceivable' in view of their structural and thematic similarity, though he prefers to think that the point is simply to deliberately emphasise the distinctive theme of removal of sin (*Heralds of Good News*, p. 294). Whilst unintentional slippage is the most convenient way of explaining why Paul does not proceed with the eminently appropriate ending of Isa. 59:21 ("my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth"), Romans 11 (and not least its climactic 'mystery') is simply too crucial, too intricate, and too personal to accommodate the supposition that Paul never checked his references.

<sup>82</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 283, n. 203.

<sup>83</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 283.

<sup>84</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 286.

<sup>85</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 297.

<sup>86</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 292. He notes later on that the specific outworking of the removal of sin in Isa. 27:9 is the destruction of the paraphernalia of idolatry, which might subtly evoke elements of Paul's self-presentation in Romans 9-11: in the role of Moses, interceding for Israel after the people had idolised the golden calf (9:3, 15), and in the role of Elijah, denouncing Israel's worship of Baal (11:1-6) (p. 296). The only explicit reference to idolatry in Paul's critique of Israel is in 2:22, but perhaps it could be said that he views Israel's doomed fixation with 'works of the law' as idolisation of Torah (Bibolatrty?).

also thereby the nations that surround.<sup>87</sup> The former theme finds clear expression particularly at this point in Romans, though we have seen that the latter is employed only in a modified form: the order is reversed, so that it will be as Israel sees the nations touched with the power of the gospel that she is aroused to jealousy and so to salvation.

The most significant departure in 11:26b-27 from the wording of the source texts, and thus the one which might yield the keenest insight into Paul's meaning and intent, is that now the Deliverer will come ἐκ Σιὼν (*out of Zion*) rather than ἕνεκεν Σιὼν (*to/for the sake of Zion*) as in Isa. 59:20 LXX. Wagner notes that although the substitution is unlikely to be dependent on a prior tradition,<sup>88</sup> the language and idea of the Deliverer coming ἐκ Σιὼν may have been suggested to Paul by other texts in which this is the trajectory of Yahweh's salvation or law. He references in this connection the LXX of Isa. 2:3-4,<sup>89</sup> Joel 3:16, Ps. 13:7 and Ps. 109:2, but overlooked is the striking Ps. 52:7 LXX:

τίς δώσει ἐκ Σιων τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ Ἰσραηλ;  
ἐν τῷ ἐπιστρέψαι κύριον τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ,  
ἀγαλλιάσεται Ἰακωβ καὶ εὐφρανθήσεται Ἰσραηλ.

The cluster of terms ἐκ Σιων, Ἰσραηλ and Ἰακωβ strikes a harmonious triple chime with Rom. 11:26-27, but how does Paul answer David's opening question of who shall deliver Israel? What does it mean that the Deliverer will come ἐκ Σιων to banish ungodliness from Jacob? Chae writes that Paul's textual alteration

. . . undermines the notion that the Deliverer comes on the sole and special behalf of the Jews. . . The Redeemer comes *from Zion* (thus Israel will benefit first, of course) and goes *out for others outside* Israel. Paul regards Zion as a centrifugal point rather than as a centripetal centre."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> The new covenant promise of Isa. 59:20-21 is directly followed by a chapter permeated with imagery of Israel reaping the glory and wealth of the nations; the oracles leading up to Isa. 27:9 have the Gentiles sharing in Israel's blessings and worship (Isa. 24:14-16; 25:6-10).

<sup>88</sup> "With the exception of a few witnesses to the Greek text that may well depend on Paul's quotation, no other ancient version of Isaiah 59:20 supports this reading" (Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 284), referencing 22<sup>c</sup>-93 564\* 407 534 Bohairic; Epiphanius; Hilary; Jerome (p. 284, n. 204).

<sup>89</sup> On the influence of Isa. 2:3 see further Christopher R. Bruno, "The Deliverer from Zion: The Source(s) and Functions of Paul's Citation in Romans 11:26-27," *Tyndale Bulletin* 59 (2008), pp. 119-134.

<sup>90</sup> Chae, *Paul as Apostle*, p. 278. The centrifugal/centripetal analogy is picked up in Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1250.

The great problem with this interpretation is that it ignores the very next line of the quotation: the Deliverer will come from Zion to banish ungodliness from *Jacob*. This is not to deny that in Paul's scenario the Deliverer might bring a salvation that stretches beyond Israel, but nevertheless it is clearly Israel that is firmly in focus here. Chae's point stands that with the alteration to ἐκ Σιών 'Paul regards Zion as a centrifugal point rather than as a centripetal centre,' but the inference drawn by Wagner makes much better sense:

The variant ἐκ Σιών reflects a fundamental interpretative shift, in which the events narrated in these verses are viewed from the standpoint of the Diaspora. Rather than focus on the Lord's victorious return *to* Zion, as does LXX Isaiah 59:20, Paul's quotation depicts the Lord's coming in person *from* a restored Zion to bring deliverance to his people who are scattered among the nations.<sup>91</sup>

In other words, it is Jacob to whom the Deliverer will come, but Jacob unrestricted to Zion. What is vital here is that we are indeed dealing with 'the Lord's coming in person,' the parousia itself. The emphasis is clearly on divine act rather than human response: it is the Deliverer who comes to Jacob and not the other way around; it is he who will banish ungodliness and take away sins; and the covenant belongs to him.<sup>92</sup> We will return to the question of how this integrates with the immutable principle of faith in Christ as the only means of Israel's salvation, but first we must pause to remember that the eschaton is not a new feature at this point in Romans 11. This is where the challenge to Wright at vv. 11-15 above comes into its own, because just as we saw him attempt to downplay the most virulently eschatological strains of Paul's expectation there, he attempts to introduce the same obfuscating vagueness here: "Perhaps once more, as in 11:11-15, Paul is deliberately leaving the prediction imprecise. What matters is that scripture will be fulfilled, the sin-forgiving covenant will be enacted and God's word will not have failed."<sup>93</sup> These things do indeed matter, but the point is that the fulfilment

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<sup>91</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 284. Emphasis original. Wagner is not dogmatic about whether the Deliverer is Christ or God (p. 297, n. 236). Likewise, he does not make it axiomatic that 'Zion' is restored Jerusalem rather than heavenly Jerusalem, since it makes little difference to his main point. For what it is worth I favour the latter; Gal 4:26 is the most ready point of reference, but also 1 Thess. 1:9-10, in which ῥύομαι appears in explicit connection with the parousia of Jesus from heaven. Hvalvik objects that "Not too much importance should be attached to the occurrence [of ῥύομαι] in 1 Thess. 1.10 since that text probably is part of a traditional, pre-Pauline formula" ("A 'Sonderweg' for Israel," p. 92). This is a weak argument and also rather cheeky: Hvalvik has just relied on the wording of 1 Thess. 1:9 to make another point (see p. 90)!

<sup>92</sup> So Wagner: "Paul's focus in Romans 11:25-27 remains fixed on *God's* action in the redemption of Israel" (Wagner, *Heralds of Good News*, p. 298. Emphasis original).

<sup>93</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1251.

of the scriptures combined here is *not* ‘imprecise’: it is the glorious coming of the Lord to effect the promised salvation of Israel. Wright’s argument that the whole point of Romans 11, even its climactic mystery, is to insist on “the saveability of Jews within the *continuing* purposes of God”<sup>94</sup> is intolerably timid and individualistic. We saw that vv. 12, 15 welcomed from a distance the coming restoration of Israel *as a whole*, the glorious counterpart to their participation in the death of the Messiah through their own transgression; now the ‘mystery’ proclaimed in vv. 25-27 makes the hope sure. Furthermore, it is perfectly in line with the way that Israel’s hardening in vv. 7-10 gives way to the metaphor of stumbling *but ‘by no means’ so as to fall* (v. 11) that here Israel’s partial hardening (v. 25) does in fact give way to full salvation (v. 26).

The piece of the puzzle that 11:25-26 adds to the picture already assembled earlier in the chapter is the direct tying together of the jealousy motif and the corporate resurrection motif that both appeared already in vv. 11-15—yes in suggestive proximity, but not yet combined in unveiled mystery. The key signal is the καὶ οὕτως (‘in this manner’)<sup>95</sup> that opens v. 26, introducing the statement that ‘all Israel will be saved.’ This invites us to recognise that the preceding verse holds the clue(s) to the way in which the salvation will come about, so that the connection of this dramatic finale with the fullness of the Gentiles coming in is not just sequential but consequential. The crucial signpost is vv. 13-14 (itself looking back to 10:19), in which we discovered that Paul expects his present ministry to the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy and so save ‘some.’ Is it not quite natural, then, for Paul to hold that the *fullness* of the Gentiles coming will provoke *all* Israel to jealousy unto salvation? This brings us into line with the interpretation of the ‘mystery’ advanced by Bell, in light of his extended investigation of the jealousy theme:

When Israel sees that the Gentiles are enjoying her privileges, she will be provoked to jealousy (manifested as emulation), and this prepares Israel for her

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<sup>94</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1251.

<sup>95</sup> Pieter W. van der Horst ably demonstrates that it is *possible* for καὶ οὕτως to have a temporal rather than modal function, producing the translation which titles his article (““Only then will All Israel be Saved”: A Short Note on the Meaning of καὶ οὕτως in Romans 11:26,” *JBL* 119/3 [2000], pp. 521-525). But the very fact that he has to work to prove the existence of such usage attests its rarity, and Romans is no exception: καὶ οὕτως functions modally throughout the letter (1:15; 4:18; 5:12, 15, 18-19, 21; 6:4, 11, 19; 9:20; 10:6; 11:5, 31; 12:5; 15:20). In any case, reading καὶ οὕτως modally in 11:26 does not debar it from expressing temporal sequence, since its field of reference includes the latent ἄχρις of v. 25.

salvation when she hears the gospel in the apostolic mission or when she receives the gospel directly from the coming Christ at his parousia.<sup>96</sup>

This the best overall solution to the meaning of the ‘mystery,’ as it allows room on the one hand for the enduring importance of faith in Christ through the normal course of Paul’s ministry and gospel (thus side-stepping the insurmountable exegetical problems that beset an exclusive sovereign-divine-act line of interpretation),<sup>97</sup> and on the other hand for the unavoidably sovereign-eschatological dimension of the quotations that follow in vv. 26b-27 (thus doing justice to that element of the whole chapter, not least in the reference to ‘life from the dead’ in 11:15). Wright attempts to fend off anything resembling this solution with the accusation that it would represent a badly incongruous resurgence of the ‘favoured nation’ clause that undermines everything that Paul has said in the letter up to this point.<sup>98</sup> But Paul’s critique of Israel’s complacent ‘favoured nation’ mentality has never been based on the argument that they are actually indistinct from everyone else, but on the insistence that (as demonstrated by Torah itself) their special status does not mean moral superiority or automatic salvation. The point all along has been that justification comes only through faith in Christ, and there is no good reason that this should exclude faith in Christ at the point of his parousia. *If the primacy of faith in Christ survives into the 11:25-27 scenario then no uniqueness of volume or timing in the salvation of Israel therein can be construed as a reversion to the efficacy of their ‘national righteousness.’*<sup>99</sup> It is still in Christ alone that their hope is found.

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<sup>96</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, pp. 165-166. The understanding that Israel’s jealousy is preparatory rather than synonymous with salvation is *contra* Watson: “Yet this jealousy is overcome as soon as it arises, for it is nothing other than the recognition of the fulfilment of Israel’s ancestral blessings in the midst of the Gentile world – and to recognize this is already to participate in it and so to be ‘saved’” (*Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 448). Closer to Bell’s position is Dunn, who writes of “A mounting climax with the incoming of the Gentiles as a trigger for the final end in which Israel’s conversion, Christ’s Parousia, and the final resurrection would all be involved” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 680).

<sup>97</sup> On these, see especially Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1221-1222. Where Hvalvik’s critique in “A ‘Sonderweg’ for Israel” pertains only to those interpretations which deny the role of faith in Christ as part of Israel’s salvation, Wright’s thorns stick in the side also of those more apocalyptically-oriented interpretations which “would allow Christian gentiles in Rome to shrug their shoulders, to turn their backs on Jews for the present – which is the very opposite of what Paul is so eager to stress” (Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1222).

<sup>98</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” pp. 688-693.

<sup>99</sup> This answers the objection of e.g. Merkle: “in 10:12 Paul writes, ‘For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.’ Paul is stating that as far as obtaining salvation is concerned, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. If God has a separate plan for saving Israel in the future, this view would seem to go contrary to Paul’s statement in verse 12” (Ben L. Merkle, “Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43/4 [2000], pp. 709-721 [712]). This wrongly assumes that ‘a separate plan for saving Israel’ necessarily entails a separate *basis* for saving Israel.

## ROMANS 11:28-36

Watson notes that Rom. 11:28-29 reiterates and intensifies the perspective of v. 16 (“If the root is holy, then the branches also are holy”), in that

It is in fact the promises to the patriarchs that guarantee the salvation of the Jewish people as a whole (11:28-29). It is because “as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers” and because “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” that Paul can be so confident that “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26).<sup>100</sup>

In the first half of v. 28 it is not entirely clear whether the ‘enmity’ mentioned is of God towards the Jews, of the Jews towards the gospel, or of the Jews towards the Gentiles. Perhaps we should not be anxious to push for one interpretation to the exclusion of the others, since all three have their merits: God’s enmity towards the Jews, because this resonates with 5:10 and 8:7,<sup>101</sup> and because it would form a neat rhetorical and thematic balance with God’s love in the second half of the verse;<sup>102</sup> the gospel, because it features in the sentence itself and because Israel’s rejection of the gospel is what necessitated the entire section;<sup>103</sup> and the Gentiles, because

. . . the reason that zealous Jews rejected the gospel was precisely because it placed Gentiles and Jews on the same footing before God. Zealous resistance against the gospel was directed against Gentiles and all who would accept their polluting presence in the realm of God.<sup>104</sup>

In any case, despite the present enmity (whatever its exact form), the main point is that unbelieving Israel is still nevertheless ‘beloved.’ for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (vv. 28b-29). The reappearance of the word *πατέρες* here (and of the word *διαθήκη* in 11:27) forms an *inclusio* with the list of Israel’s gifts in 9:4-5, suggesting that the salvation of Israel (11:26) was always the goal

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<sup>100</sup> Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>101</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 707.

<sup>102</sup> John Ziesler, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (eds H. C. Kee and D. Nineham; TPI New Testament Commentaries; London: SCM Press, 1989), p. 286.

<sup>103</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 693.

<sup>104</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 707. If the Gentiles are the object of Israel’s enmity then it could be that is what is indicated by *δι’ ὑμᾶς*, though it seems more natural to take it as ‘for your sake’ (so NRSV).

of their election and privileges in the past.<sup>105</sup> The dynamic of Israel being beloved despite their present rejection of the gospel has a parallel in 5:8: “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”<sup>106</sup>

To return briefly to a previous point of discussion, we may note Bell’s comment that “If the gifts and call of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29), it would seem natural to take πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ in 11.26 as diachronic.”<sup>107</sup> But it becomes clear that the arguments in favour of synchronic interpretation are vindicated rather than destabilised in the present verses when we remember that v. 29 comes in context of a reference to the gospel in v. 28. This firmly establishes the group Paul is focusing on as belonging to the age of the gospel (a single generation when Paul wrote) and not any other.

The next sentences in vv. 30-32 elegantly distil the pattern of interdependence between Israel and the Gentiles that Paul has been carefully crafting up to this point. Two main points of interpretative contention arise. The first concerns whether the phrase ‘by the mercy shown to you’ (v. 31) should be taken with what precedes (producing the meaning that ‘the mercy shown to you produced disobedience in them’) or what follows (so NRSV: the mercy Israel will receive is a result of the mercy already shown to Gentiles). The conundrum is that the former is much more natural grammatically, and the latter seems much more understandable thematically. Happily, Jewett identifies the best solution as that which manages to link the phrase backwards grammatically and forwards thematically, by taking it as a dative of advantage: “so they also have now been disobedient *because of* [i.e. in order to produce] *the mercy you received*.”<sup>108</sup>

The second contentious issue is the matter of the  $\nu\tilde{\nu}$  towards the end of v. 31: ‘in order that they too may *now* receive mercy.’ Its manuscript attestation varies, but Wright notes simply and persuasively that “the fact that a few lesser ones read “subsequently” suggests that there was a word at that point that some scribes have seen fit to alter.”<sup>109</sup> Wright considers this  $\nu\tilde{\nu}$  to support his view that

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<sup>105</sup> Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (ed. E. R. Clendenen; NAC Studies in Bible & Theology, vol. 6; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), p. 178.

<sup>106</sup> Susan Grove Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9-11,” *New Testament Studies* 56 (2010), pp. 367-395 (384).

<sup>107</sup> Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy*, p. 141.

<sup>108</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 710, crediting Dunn and others; Dunn himself acknowledges Käsemann, Schlier, Wilckens, Siegert.

<sup>109</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 694.

The mercy that is shown to Israel according to the flesh is not something for which they will have to wait until some putative final day . . . It is available “now”; and Paul’s kinsfolk can, he hopes and believes, be provoked into seeing it by being “jealous” of the way in which Israel’s privileges are being enjoyed by Gentiles.<sup>110</sup>

But as we saw above, this assessment is simply too tame in light of vv. 26-27, and Käsemann’s apocalyptic understanding of the final  $\nu\acute{o}\nu$  in v. 31 is to be preferred: “The end-time is so far advanced that the  $\pi\lambda\acute{\eta}\rho\omega\mu\alpha$  τῶν ἐθνῶν will soon be completed and the parousia is at hand. Paul expects the parousia, probably in his own lifetime.”<sup>111</sup> The final sentence of the section (v. 32) then sums up not only the present section, but also the present chapters, the present letter, and indeed the present age: ‘God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.’ It is little wonder that Paul defers the ‘appeal’ into which this adumbration of God’s mercies will lead (12:1) in order to close the first half of the letter with a jubilant doxology:

***33 O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!***

***34 ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counsellor?’***

***35 ‘Or who has given a gift to him,  
to receive a gift in return?’***

***36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.***

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<sup>110</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 695.

<sup>111</sup> Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 316.



## CHAPTER 5

### ROMANS 14-15

The main issue of interest for our purposes that it remains to address from the remainder of Romans is the nature of the relationship between the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ in 14:1-15:13. In this section we will take a more thematic approach than the commentary style of the previous sections.

#### WHAT IS 14:1-15:23 ALL ABOUT?

In his contribution to *The Romans Debate*, Robert J. Karris asserts that “Rom. 14:1-15:13 should be analyzed for what it is: general, Pauline paraenesis and not so many pieces of polemic from which a scholar may reconstruct the positions of the parties in Rome who occasioned this letter.”<sup>1</sup> He begins by attempting to demonstrate “the bankruptcy of the history of religions approach to Rom. 14:1-15:13.”<sup>2</sup> This attempt culminates with the statement that

The situation within the Roman community is obscure at best, and mirror-reading from the epistle itself will not dispel that obscurity. Not one of the history of religions identifications of “the weak” or “the strong” communities/parties in Rome can claim more for itself than the designation “conjecture.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Karris, “Romans 14:1-15:13 and the Occasion of Romans,” in K. P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 65-84 (66).

<sup>2</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” pp. 66-70.

<sup>3</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 70.

This conclusion is based on passing critiques of Minear and Rauer as divergent representatives of a history of religions approach, but there is a distinct circularity at play, since the fundamental objections raised against those two are only applications of the conclusion itself. Thus “His [Minear’s] statement that there were many communities in Rome simply goes beyond the facts. The beginnings and early development of the Roman churches are obscure,”<sup>4</sup> and “When Rauer tries to explain why the converted pagans retained their praxis of abstinence when they became Christians, he has to resort to conjectures not founded in the text of Romans.”<sup>5</sup> The early development of the Roman churches may be obscure, but that does not mean it does not hold the answer to the question of what Romans 14-15 is all about—only that if it *does* then reconstructing the relationship between these chapters and the situation that they presuppose will indeed involve a degree of conjecture. Clearly Karris assumes that the presence of conjecture demonstrates the bankruptcy of the underlying interpretative approach, but this assumption is not defended and is highly questionable as the whole foundation and thrust of his critique.

Nevertheless, Karris then moves on to make his own counter-proposal, which he will later summarise as follows: “Romans 14:1-15:13 is better explained as general Pauline paraenesis, which is adapted and generalized especially from Paul’s discussion in 1 Cor. 8-10 and is addressed to a problem that may arise in any community.”<sup>6</sup> Karris’ table of parallels between the two texts is sufficiently persuasive that Romans 14:1-15:13 does recycle elements of 1 Cor. 8-10, but this persuasiveness does not extend to the idea that this is a process of generalisation rather than Rome-specific adaptation. That is, the parallels do *not* “confirm Hanz Conzelmann’s observation that Rom. 14:1-15:6 is a theoretic development of the actual treatment of 1 Cor. 8-10.”<sup>7</sup> Rom. 14:15 shows that Paul has *not* “eliminated the circumstantial “if” clauses which apply his general principles to particular concrete instances within the community.”<sup>8</sup> It is extremely unclear why the fact that “Paul has given names to two different types of individuals in Rom. 14:1-15:13 whereas in 1 Cor. he mentions “the weak” only”<sup>9</sup> should be taken as an indication of generalisation (quite the opposite!). Perhaps the most telling of Karris’

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<sup>4</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 75. No reason is given why the development of the themes in Romans should be seen as more theoretic than in Corinthians.

<sup>8</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 75. Rom. 14:15 reads, “If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.”

<sup>9</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 75.

arguments, however, is the point that Paul has “omitted references to the catchwords of the Corinthians,”<sup>10</sup> which is followed later by the comment that “one could argue that the idea of conscience has been omitted in Rom. 14 because it seems to have been introduced into the discussion in 1 Cor. 8; 10:21-11:1 by the Corinthians and not by Paul.”<sup>11</sup> This is the clearest manifestation of a prevailing pattern in Karris’ argumentation, whereby evidence that the material in Rom. 14:1-15:13 has been stripped of those features that were specific to its original Corinthian context is taken to show that it has been generalised, when in fact this phenomenon is equally explicable by the supposition that it has only been transmuted from its original context to a new context that may be equally as specific in its own way. It is hardly surprising or significant (for example) that Paul has ‘omitted references to the catchwords of the Corinthians’ when he is no longer addressing them! Such points do nothing to demonstrate that the material has been generalised rather than recontextualised. That decision will have to rest on other points than those mentioned above.

Is there, then, any reason to think that the migration of material from 1 Corinthians 8-10 to Rom. 14:1-15:13 should be seen as a process of recontextualisation rather than generalisation? Yes. This is suggested at the outset by the opening verse of the section. Writes Lampe: “That Paul deals with a concrete problem between “weak” and “strong” in the Roman church community and does not just echo 1 Corinthians 8-10 seems to me proved by the direct address in the second person (14:1, 10, 13, et. al).”<sup>12</sup> That deduction receives convincing vindication when we shift to the end of the section to consider the significance of 15:7-13 in relation to what has gone before. That these verses belong with and advance the preceding discussion is discernible from the catchword *προσλαμβάνεσθε* (‘welcome’) that we meet at both 14:1 and 15:7.<sup>13</sup> On the latter occasion the imperative is to “welcome one another just as Christ has welcomed you.” This is then set in light of the revelation that “Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (15:8-9), which is shown to be ‘as it is written’ by a compilation of quotations picturing and promising that eschatological reality. Karris attempts to limit the significance of this

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<sup>10</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 75. The catchwords listed are “All of us possess knowledge” (1 Cor. 8:1); “All things are lawful” (1 Cor. 10:23); “liberty, freedom” (1 Cor. 8:9; 10:29b); “conscience” (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12; 10:25, 27, 28, 29).

<sup>11</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 730.

closing section to the setting forth of Christ as the example of love that overcomes boundaries;<sup>14</sup> but if this were the extent of its function then the opening exhortation to “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ welcomed you” (15:7) would suffice. Rather, the focus of the quotations is not on the servanthood of Christ as such, but on the effect it has in winning the worship of the Gentiles.

The introduction and prominence of the ethnic unity theme in 15:7-13 strongly suggests that this has been at issue throughout 14:1-15:6.<sup>15</sup> It shows us that the ‘togetherness’ of the ‘one voice’ in 15:6 is a specifically *ethnic* harmony, and that whatever material in 14:1-15:13 might have been drawn from 1 Corinthians 8-10, it has been employed here with reference to an actual situation of ethnically-related tension and conflict in the Roman church. This does not necessarily mean that the conflict is simply Jews vs Gentiles, but rather that (to quote Wright) “the matters about which disagreement has arisen, threatening to thwart united worship of the one God from people of all sorts, stem not principally from other types of cultural pressures, but from the continuing varied influence of the Jewish law within parts of the Christian community.”<sup>16</sup> The weak are Christians who consider themselves (and others) still bound to obey some form of the Jewish law, whilst the strong consider themselves and others to be free from the Jewish law in Christ. This theological division is creating social divisions that Paul feels himself compelled to address and resolve. That is what 14:1-15:13 is all about.

## WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE TENSION?

Rom. 14:5-6 shows that observance of special days (presumably feasts and fasts, possibly sabbaths) is one particular point of controversy, but much more attention is paid to questions around food. The words κοινός and καθαρός in 14:14 and 14:20

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<sup>14</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> So e.g. Watson: “15:7-13 speaks unambiguously of the duty of Jews and Gentiles to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed them. There is no break between 14:1-15:6 and this passage, and it is therefore natural to conclude that the whole passage concerns the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Indeed, this final point puts this identification virtually beyond doubt” (Francis Watson, “The Two Roman Congregations: Romans 14:1-15:13,” in K. P. Donfried [ed.], *The Romans Debate* [revised edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], pp. 203-215 [205]). As for why ethnic language is reserved for 15:7-13 rather than being employed throughout, Wright supposes that “to mention too early that there was an element of ethnicity about the whole business would have emphasized the very thing he wanted to avoid, drawing the line more firmly in the sand and polarizing those on either side, rather than doing his best to blur the line that was in danger of being drawn, and to insist that people from either side of it should learn to live together and especially to worship together” (“Letter to the Romans,” p. 731).

<sup>16</sup> Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” p. 731.

respectively confirm that the food issue is related to the Jewish law in some way,<sup>17</sup> and the parallels with 1 Corinthians 8-10 suggest that it is food sacrificed to idols that is at issue here as there. We saw that this is contested by Karris, who holds that the references to this concrete situation in Corinth have been expunged from the material as it appears in Romans.<sup>18</sup> However, the absence of the phrase ‘food sacrificed to idols’ does not mean the absence of the issue. This is especially so since the introduction of that phrase in 1 Cor. 8:1 is part of a ‘Now concerning . . .’ formula, each iteration of which is a direct response to ‘the matters about which you wrote’ (1 Cor. 7:1). This might suggest that Paul’s use of the phrase ‘food sacrificed to idols’ in 1 Corinthians 8 is a case of him reflecting the Corinthians’ own phraseology, which would make the absence of the phrase in Rom. 14:1-15:13 of even less moment. But in any case, the evidence of generalisation that Karris sees in the removal of the phrase in Romans is countered by the very presence of the same material there. Why would Paul reuse material about food sacrificed to idols unless he knew this to be an issue for the Roman congregation(s)? There is a wealth of teaching in 1 Corinthians and elsewhere that is not incorporated into Romans, just as there is a wealth of general exhortation in Romans 12 and 13 that does not receive the same detailed development as the food issue is given in chapter 14.

The other possible objection to seeing food sacrificed to idols as the issue at stake is the mention of wine in 14:21, which might not seem relevant to the matter at hand. Francis Watson supplies a possible reply, pointing out that Jewish abstention from meat and wine is found in several other texts.<sup>19</sup> He reflects that “In all these examples, Jews are in a Gentile environment, cut off from their community, in which ceremonially pure meat and wine might be obtained.”<sup>20</sup> Encouraged by these instances, he suggests a reconstruction of that situation of the ‘weak’ in Rome:

Suetonius tells us that there was constant unrest in the Jewish quarter of Rome because of Christian preaching. . . . The situation would have been exacerbated by the expulsion [by Claudius]. Non-Christian Jews would blame the Christians for what had happened, and the ill-feeling might well have been sufficient to prevent the Christians re-settling in the Jewish quarter when the return to Rome

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<sup>17</sup> Watson, “Two Roman Congregations,” p. 205; Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Karris, “Occasion of Romans,” p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> Dan. 1:8-16; Jud. 12:1-4; Esth. 14:17 LXX; Josephus, *Life* 14.

<sup>20</sup> Watson, “Two Roman Congregations,” p. 204.

took place. They would therefore be forced to live in another part of Rome, where they would be unable to obtain the ceremonially pure meat and wine which was available only in the Jewish quarter. They therefore did what Daniel, Judith, Esther and the priests did when in a Gentile environment: they abstained from meat and wine.<sup>21</sup>

This serves as a reasonable rejoinder to critics of the Torah-focussed interpretation of Rom. 14:1-15:13 who would see the mention of ‘wine’ as a stumbling block to that approach. But I am not sure that the reference to wine actually requires such a detailed response. The context in which the word appears is the summary statement that “it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble” (14:21). This is the only time that wine is mentioned in a discussion otherwise dominated by food, and since it appears between the specific (‘eat meat’) and the general (‘do anything’), might we not see it as a stepping stone between the two, rather than adding detail to the former? In this case it would serve as one possible example (perhaps in connection with drunkenness rather than idolatry) of the ‘anything’ that it is better not to do if it will cause a brother to stumble. In either case, the mention of wine does not puncture the picture of the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ as those who do and do not consider themselves bound to obey the law respectively, with the eating of food sacrificed to idols being the most prominent bone of contention.

## WHO ARE THE WEAK AND THE STRONG?

Before we come to consider the likely ethnic identities of the weak and the strong, we cannot ignore the issue of their religious convictions, given Mark Nanos’ controversial proposal that the weak are *unbelieving* Jews.<sup>22</sup> This suggestion is innovative and exciting, but ultimately unsuccessful. Of the problems raised by e.g. Robert Gagnon<sup>23</sup> and Andrew Das,<sup>24</sup> two stand out as being particularly sharp. Firstly, the Χριστός at 14:9 is devastating to Nanos’ claim that the passage uses deliberately generic (i.e. non-Christian) language so as to be accessible to unbelieving Jews.<sup>25</sup> It shows that *Jesus* (the

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<sup>21</sup> Watson, “Two Roman Congregations,” p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 85-165.

<sup>23</sup> Robert J. Gagnon, “Why the ‘Weak’ at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews,” *CBQ* 62 (2000), pp. 64-82.

<sup>24</sup> Das, *Solving*, pp. 115-148.

<sup>25</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 113-114.

one who ‘died and lived again’—not just an unspecified Messiah) is the subject of κυριεύση in this verse and thus that he is surely also the κύριος elsewhere in the passage. That Paul has been using κύριος in distinction to θεός is perfectly clear from 14:6; that it has been referring specifically to Jesus is strongly suggested by the emphatic κύριον Ἰησοῦν that still reverberates from 10:9. Secondly, Nanos’ argument that “the issue is not Christian freedom from the Law. Rather, the implicit critique is of [‘weak’] *faith* that fails to recognize that Jesus is the Christ”<sup>26</sup> runs aground on 14:22, in which πίστις clearly relates to food laws and has nothing to do with the identity of the Messiah. As in 1 Corinthians 8, the ‘weak’ do believe in Jesus, and *contra* Nanos the issue is indeed Christian freedom from the law.

What then is the distribution of Jews and Gentiles between the weak and the strong? An obvious starting point is that if the weak are law-abiding and the strong are not, then Jews are more likely to be found among the weak and Gentiles among the strong. Clearly this is not a watertight division, since Paul himself is a Jew among the strong (15:1), and surely likewise Priscilla and Aquila. But it remains the case that law-obedience is the Jewish norm, and so any Jesus-believing Jews would have to also make the radical step of actively embracing the new perspective of Paul on the law if they were to cross over into the camp of the strong; conversely, freedom from the law is the norm for Gentiles, and they would have to make the radical step of actively Judaizing in order to cross over into the camp of the weak. The expectation that the strong will be mostly Gentiles is encouraged by the fact that 14:1-15:13 is mainly addressed to the strong (see below), and the letter as a whole is mainly addressed to Gentiles (see ‘Introduction to Romans’ above). That the weak are mainly Jews might be suggested by the way that Paul declines to directly correct their unnecessary law-observance, in contrast with the way that in other letters he remonstrates with Gentiles who are tempted to Judaize (Galatians; 1 Cor. 7:18-20). But these categorisations should not be pressed too hard, especially in the case of the weak. Paul’s unwillingness to correct the abstention of the weak is not necessarily incompatible with the existence of a Gentile component in that group. What if there were Gentiles among the weak who were former Godfearers, retaining the same measure of law-abidance that they had adopted in connection with the synagogue before coming to Christ?<sup>27</sup> It is easy to see that this

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<sup>26</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> Lampe even states that “It is not imperative to assume a Jewish-Christian majority even in the party of the “weak,” because the characteristics of the “weak ones” also suit former *sebomenoi*” (*Paul to Valentinus*, p. 74). Not imperative, no, but still advisable.

would be far less troubling to Paul than the thought of (e.g. the Galatian) Gentiles who had already become Christians later embracing the Jewish law as though it was a necessary stage in salvation. Alternatively or additionally, we could account for Paul's argumentative restraint in 14:1-15:13 with reference to his more modest level of authority and relationship in Rome compared with those churches to which he writes with more force. In summary, then: we cannot know the composition of the weak and the strong with precision; it is certainly possible to envisage some Gentiles among the weak and Jews among the strong; but the reverse remains most likely to be the dominant distribution.

We have not yet addressed the question of whether we should see the 'weak' and the 'strong' as different viewpoints within the same congregation, or as two or more separate groups. Karris argues for the former, on the grounds that "within Rom. 14:1-15:13 Paul quite frequently addresses the same imperatives and arguments to the entire community,"<sup>28</sup> but "only ten out of twenty-eight verses specifically to "the weak" (14:3c, 4, 14) and to "the strong" (14:1, 13bc, 14, 15, 20, 21; 15:1)."<sup>29</sup> This is hardly convincing. Ten out of twenty-eight is a substantial proportion of verses to be specifically directed to one group or the other, and that the remainder are addressed to both groups simultaneously does not show that they are indistinct, only that Paul has certain things to say that apply to everyone. But there is also positive evidence in 14:1-15:13 that the group(ing)s are in fact distinct: the recurring injunction to 'welcome' (14:1; 15:7), which implies that they are not currently meeting together; the prayer in 15:5-6, which implies that they are not currently sharing worship and are in need of God's intervention to 'live in harmony with one another'; and, as we saw above, the emphatic vision in 15:7-13 of Gentiles worshiping together with Jews, which implies that this was not the current state of affairs in Rome.

It would seem, then, that the theological division between the weak and the strong over the role of the law had produced social division also. This is hardly surprising, since the adherence to food laws that prevented the weak from eating meat sacrificed to idols would also prevent them from sharing table fellowship with those were so doing. Recognition of this division does not mean that we must accept Watson's theory of only

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<sup>28</sup> Karris, "Occasion of Romans," p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> Karris, "Occasion of Romans," p. 79.

two Roman congregations.<sup>30</sup> We can affirm that the tensions presupposed in Rom. 14:1-15:13 are sufficient to disrupt mutual fellowship—and are implied to in fact be doing so—without needing to posit such a binary division. The picture that we get from Romans 16 is of a multiplicity of households,<sup>31</sup> and so it is easy to imagine that whole households would either be ‘weak’ or ‘strong,’ and that individuals would gravitate towards a household that shared their convictions about the role of the law. In such a context it could be that alliances emerged between households of similar disposition, but even so it would still be misleading to speak of two ‘congregations.’ And if the picture were this simple then might we not expect to find a partition between Jewish and Gentile names in Romans 16, rather than the apparent intermingling that we see?<sup>32</sup>

## THE PURPOSE OF PAUL’S ADDRESS

Unfortunately, we must now disagree with another of Watson’s conclusions on Rom. 14:1-15:13, which is as follows:

Paul’s aim is thus to create a single “Paulinist” congregation in Rome—  
“Paulinist” in the sense that the Pauline principle of freedom from the law is  
accepted. To put it another way, he wishes to convert the Jewish Christian  
congregation to Paulinism—to the theory of freedom from the law, if not the  
practice.<sup>33</sup>

Undoubtedly Paul would warmly welcome this result and there is much in Romans that is conducive to it, but we simply cannot assent to seeing this as the main thrust of 14:1-15:13. In the first place it is addressed much more towards the strong than the weak. This is indicated at the very outset of the section, as it opens with the command to the strong to “Welcome those who are weak in faith” (14:1). Later in 14:13-23, it is the strong (‘the eaters’) who are addressed in the second person, whilst the weak are

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<sup>30</sup> Watson, “Two Roman Congregations,” pp. 203-215.

<sup>31</sup> Lampe calls these households ‘islands of Christianity,’ and posits that there were ‘at least seven’: five directly mentioned in Romans 16, and at least another two necessary to account for the remaining fourteen people who are named but not allocated to one of the other five households (*Paul to Valentinus*, p. 359). Similarly Cranfield: “we ought to reckon with the possibility that there may have been little, if any, central organisation and even that Phoebe may have had to make contact with a number of separate churches rather than just to deliver Paul’s letter to the leadership of one single Roman church (*Romans I-VIII*, p. 22).

<sup>32</sup> Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. lvii.

<sup>33</sup> Watson, “Two Roman Congregations,” p. 207.

referred to in the third person. Rom. 15:1 then compounds the sense that the whole passage is directed to the strong, as Paul makes explicit his own identification with that group, implied already in 14:14. This should influence our reception of the material that sits between 14:1 and 14:13: although it apparently reflects on and legislates to the weak and the strong even-handedly, the preponderant concern for the attitude and actions of the strong elsewhere suggests that this is also the real thrust of even those verses that appear more evenly addressed. In other words, we have reason to suspect that the charges given to the weak in 14:2-12 provide rhetorical balance to the charges given to the strong rather than constituting crucial admonition in themselves, since it is only the response incumbent upon the strong that is then explored with greater detail and force in 14:13-15:6. The same applies to the other admonitions that seem neutral or inclusive in their scope. By itself, the summons to “pursue what makes for peace and mutual edification” (14:19) would seem to be inclusively addressed, but in fact must be considered to be more directed to the strong since it summarises admonitions directed specifically to them (14:13-18). Exactly the same goes for 15:2: “Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour.” Alone it looks inclusive, but it follows the statement that “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (15:1). The repeated catchword ἀρέσκω links the two verses and strongly suggests that 15:2 is directed specifically to the strong, who are then urged to consider that in doing as Paul suggests they are following the example of Christ himself, who ‘did not please himself’ (15:3). In Paul’s view, the burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining the unity of the weak and the strong falls firmly on the latter.<sup>34</sup>

This preoccupation with instructing the strong—and the inadequacy of the rhetorically inclusive admonitions to truly instruct the weak—becomes even more pronounced when we consider Watson’s own reflection that

. . . by far the greater concession is demanded of the [weak] Jews. They are required to abandon the idea that the law is the authoritative, binding law of

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<sup>34</sup> The weight of this burden dramatically increases if we accept one of the central tenets of Wright’s *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*: Paul’s intangible redefinition of the central Jewish symbols (Temple, Torah, Land) shifts enormous symbolic significance onto the unity and holiness of the church as practically the only remaining visible symbol of the new worldview that he is forging (see esp. vol. 1 ch. 6, ‘A Bird in the Hand? The Symbolic Praxis of Paul’s World,’ pp. 351-455).

God, to which all must submit, and to regard it instead as purely optional, a matter of individual choice and of private piety.<sup>35</sup>

In fact this concession is so demanding that it is simply incredible to suppose that it is the aim of the present chapters to communicate its necessity. Not only is the great concession raised only incidentally, but it should not escape our notice that those of whom it would be required are labeled rather unflatteringly as ‘the weak!’ That would seem no way for Paul to endear himself to those on whose radical response depends the unity of the community, if such were indeed the case.

Perhaps Paul’s aim in 14:1-15:13 goes some way to accounting for why he has previously (in chapters 1-11) gone to such trouble to establish the legitimacy of his gospel as fulfilling the Jewish law, despite addressing himself principally to Gentiles. If Paul’s chief strategy for creating harmony in the divided community is that the strong voluntarily adopt the law-observance of the weak, it is vital that this is done from a place of comprehensive security in the legitimacy of their ‘strong’ theology and praxis. Unless Paul can be confident that the Gentiles at Rome possess this security then his pronouncement in 14:21 becomes in effect only an invitation for them to Judaize! The groundwork that he lays in the first half of the letter—the impressive unfolding of how the gospel fulfils the law—guards against this dynamic by showing the Gentiles the great irony of Paul’s command to accommodate the weak: the law that the weak adamantly embrace is the same law which, rightly understood, in fact vindicates the position of the strong. Of course, this revelation is also available for the collateral comprehension of the weak themselves, even if we are unable to assent to Watson’s thesis that this is the whole point of the letter. On balance, it would seem that Paul’s hopes for unity of the church at Rome rest firmly on the shoulders of the strong, as they learn to sacrifice their liberty on the altar of love, “so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:6).

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<sup>35</sup> Watson, “Two Roman Congregations,” pp. 205-206. By way of a counterpoint, Johnson Hodge writes the following: “Think about the differences of being “in-Christ” for gentiles and Jews. Jews do not cross ethnic boundaries by virtue of their commitment to Christ; they do not change their God, their ancestry, or their ancestral customs. Gentiles do” (Caroline Johnson Hodge, “The Question of Identity: Gentiles as Gentiles—but also Not—in Pauline Communities,” in M. D. Nanos and M. Zetterholm [eds], *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015], pp. 153-174 [172]). This overlooks the vital point that if Gentiles ‘in Christ’ cross (in some way) the ancient ethnic boundary, then this in itself absolutely constitutes a change in Jewish ancestral customs.



## PART II

### ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH IN REVELATION



## CHAPTER 6

### INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION

#### AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

That Revelation managed (though not without a struggle) to attain canonical status despite conflicting views on its authorship in the early church<sup>1</sup> indicates both the difficulty of identifying ‘John’ (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8) and the relative unimportance of that endeavour. Accordingly, we will dwell only for the briefest of moments on the question of the authorship of Revelation, reserving our attention for the question of its date, which is of far greater significance for the interpretation of the book. The most striking thing about John’s authorial persona is that he does *not* assert his authority by means of conventional apocalyptic or apostolic pseudonymity.<sup>2</sup> This suggests to Alan Garrow that “In this respect John’s authority surpasses even that of the apostle Paul, who often had to restate the basis of his authority (e.g. Galatians 1.1). This kind of automatic authority is more likely to have been enjoyed by an apostle than a non-apostle.”<sup>3</sup> Garrow’s

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<sup>1</sup> There is evidence that by the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, Revelation was widely (though by no means totally) accepted across Christendom: in Asia (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26, referring to a lost work by Melito of Sardis, *On the Devil and the Apocalypse of John*); in Syria (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.24, referring to the use of Revelation by Theophilus Bishop of Antioch); in Egypt (the references to Rev. 1:8 and 4:4 in Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.6 and *Strom.* 6.13 respectively); in Italy (Justin, *1 Apol.* 28; *Dial.* 81); in North Africa (Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.14, 24; *Res.* 25; 27; 38; 58); and in Gaul (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.11; 4.30.4; 5.26.1; 5.30).

<sup>2</sup> In light of the way that some of John’s visions and self-conception display an intimate affinity with those of Ezekiel, Steve Moyise suggests that John has “absorbed something of the mind and character of the prophet” and taken on his ‘persona’ (*The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* [JSNTSup, 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], p. 78). This might be described as a kind of internalisation of pseudonymity, though Moyise does note that “The presence of so many Old Testament traditions in Revelation undoubtedly weakens the argument that he has particularly adopted the ‘persona’ of any one of them” (p. 80). This may be seen as a necessary concession when we remember that in the previous chapter he has criticised Beale for unbalanced prioritisation of Daniel since “Revelation is a fresh composition which has used Daniel as *one* of its significant sources” (p. 63).

<sup>3</sup> A. J. P. Garrow, *Revelation* (ed. J. Court; New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1997), p. 56.

affirmation of apostolic authorship is supported by Tertullian, Justin, Hippolytus, and Irenaeus,<sup>4</sup> but it remains a strongly contested conclusion, and one that raises a magnificent array of problems about the complex of theological and stylistic interrelationships within the Johannine literature.<sup>5</sup> These contestations and problems we will politely decline to address; apostolic authorship is gently affirmed, but will not be used as an interpretative point of reference in anything that follows.

We may move on, then, to discussing the date of Revelation. Once laid, this foundation should help us to approach the text with greater precision and confidence. Whether these qualities will serve the goal of accuracy depends on whether the foundation laid is good, i.e. whether the date we will argue for is in fact correct. This is impossible to know conclusively, as the ongoing debate around the matter testifies, and will have to be left to the judgment of the reader. The following discussion is necessarily dotted with certain presuppositions that it must be left for later sections to justify, most importantly the identification of the seven heads of the beast as Roman emperors, and the wounded head as specifically the emperor Nero. Let us commence, then, by looking first at the date for Revelation that currently carries the most favour among its interpreters.

### **The 95 CE Domitianic Date**

It is Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, who provides the most important piece of external evidence for the 95 CE dating of Revelation that is favoured by a scholarly majority: “[the Apocalypse] was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.”<sup>6</sup> Domitian reigned from 81-96 CE, producing the approximate dating of 95 CE. Is Irenaeus’ date accurate? I do not think so. At this point it is not uncommon to find the Irenaeus-doubters first launching into a vigorous exposé of the protested paucity of evidence for a Domitianic persecution of Christians such as would provide a persuasive context for a text strongly concerned with martyrdom, and then backtracking in order to argue that it doesn’t matter anyway because in Revelation persecution and martyrdom is more of a future anticipation than a past experience. For example, after close and critical scrutiny of the evidence for a Domitianic persecution, Albert Bell waits until the 8<sup>th</sup> page of 10 to ask,

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<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.14; Justin, *Dial.* 81; Hippolytus, *Antichr.* 36; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.22.5; 3.11.1; 4.20.11.

<sup>5</sup> These contestations and problems were initially set down by Dionysius of Alexandria (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25).

<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3.

But does the Apocalypse, upon closer examination, really reflect a simple persecution of Christians? I would suggest that the letters to the seven churches in chapters ii and iii do not refer to any persecution in the past or at the time of writing that can rightfully be called widespread or severe.<sup>7</sup>

In this case, would a widespread and severe Domitianic persecution of the type that he strenuously denies not actually strengthen his case for the incompatibility of Revelation with the traditional 95 CE date? In fact John Sweet makes it a point that “Revelation was written at a time when some Christians were disposed to forget what John took to be the true character of the ‘great city’; they needed reminding of her inherent idolatrousness, and of what she had done to God’s people,”<sup>8</sup> which means that “Domitian’s reign, when there was more apparent justification for the imperial titles of Saviour and Benefactor and Roman claims to eternity, provides from this point of view a more plausible setting [than the hostile environment of Nero’s reign].”<sup>9</sup> But we need not wade into the contentious task of assessing the extent to which the assumptions and message of Revelation fit into a Domitianic context. Instead, we will follow Garrow in pausing first to reflect on Irenaeus’ testimony, and so to let the resulting suspicions carry us into the consideration of alternative dates that appropriately prioritise internal evidence rather than later external evidence.<sup>10</sup>

Where did Irenaeus get his date from? He does not identify his sources or explain his reasoning, and so we are left to make our own enquiries if we are to test his claim at all. First we may flesh out a little of the context of the all-important statement (here italicised):

It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfilment of the [Antichrist] prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found

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<sup>7</sup> Albert A. Bell, “The Date of John’s Apocalypse: The Evidence of some Roman Historians Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 25/1 (1978), pp. 93-102 (100).

<sup>8</sup> John Sweet, *Revelation* (ed. D. E. Nineham; SCM Pelican Commentaries; London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, pp. 66-72.

possessing the number mentioned [666]; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved.<sup>11</sup>

[ . . . Here the potential names ‘Evanthas,’ ‘Lateinos,’ and ‘Teitan’ are considered, and afforded escalating degrees of merit . . . ]

We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. *For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.*<sup>12</sup>

But he indicates the number of the name now, that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is: the name, however, is suppressed, because it is not worthy of being proclaimed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

It is easier to follow the logic of Irenaeus’ argument when it is reproduced in reverse order:

*since*

a) the Apocalypse was seen fairly recently

*and*

b) the name of the Antichrist was not at that time announced,

*then*

c) the name cannot and should not be deduced at the present time;

*rather*

d) the evident fulfillment of the prophecy should be awaited.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3.

<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3.

<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.4.

<sup>14</sup> Based on Garrow, *Revelation*, pp. 67-68. Irenaeus is more specific about what it means to ‘await the fulfillment of the prophecy’ in the previous section: “let them await, in the first place, the division of the kingdom into ten; then, in the next place, when these kings are reigning, and beginning to set their affairs in order, and advance their kingdom, to acknowledge that he who shall come claiming the kingdom for himself, and shall terrify those men of whom we have been speaking, having a name containing the aforesaid number, is truly the abomination of desolation” (*Haer.* 5.30.2).

As Garrow summarises, “The expressed motive for dating Revelation to *c.* AD 95 is to suggest that the non-interpretation of the name behind the number still holds good for his own times (*c.* AD 180).”<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus cannot date Revelation much later than ‘towards the end of Domitian’s reign’ because *Haer.* 2.22.5 and 3.3.4 indicate that he holds that John was off Patmos and in Ephesus during the reign of Domitian’s successor Nerva (who reigned 96-98 CE). He steers the reader towards assenting to the recency of Revelation by prefacing his date with assurances that it ‘was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day.’ However, these persuasive preparatory phrases are not enormously convincing given that the date Irenaeus bequeaths Revelation looks back a minimum of some 80 years – perhaps 35 years before Irenaeus himself was born. This intervening period would provide ample opportunity for the forebears of Irenaeus’ reviled opponents to divine, discover, deduce or—worst of all—perhaps even discuss with John the name of the beast long before Irenaeus could claim that John had never announced it. What if it *were* ‘necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time,’ and so *was* ‘announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision’ – not with pen and ink but face to face? Irenaeus holds a trump card against this damaging possibility: a vital link to an old bishop called Polycarp.

Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE; Irenaeus recollects observing him and listening to his discourses in ‘early youth.’<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus repeatedly asserts that Polycarp interacted with the apostles, with an emphasis on his contact with John.<sup>17</sup> Earlier on in the same chapter as his ruling on the date of Revelation, and having just made a scriptural-allegorical defense of the provenance of the ‘666’ reading of the number of the beast, he then seeks to shore up his position against the ‘616’ alternative reading with the following point:

Such, then, being the state of the case, and this number being found in all the most approved and ancient copies, and those men who saw John face to face bearing their testimony [to it]; while reason also leads us to conclude that the number of the name of the beast, according to the Greek mode of calculation by

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<sup>15</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 68. The remainder of this paragraph follows his argument.

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.4.

<sup>17</sup> This connection is explicit in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.4 and the fragments preserved in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20 and 5.24, and is probably also behind the references the ‘those who heard the apostles’ in *Haer.* 2.22.5 and 5.30.1.

the [value of the] letters contained in it, will amount to six hundred and sixty and six . . .<sup>18</sup>

This strategy of calling those who saw John as witnesses testifying to the orthodoxy and accuracy of Irenaeus' understanding of Revelation sets the scene for Garrow to make a suggestive observation:

That *c.* AD 95 represents the beginning of Polycarp's acquaintance with John is suggested by Irenaeus' emphasis on his witnesses' contact in Trajan's reign (*A.H.* 2.22.5 and 3.3.4). The lack of references to events in John's life prior to the end of Domitian's reign also suggests that Irenaeus' witnesses do not predate this point.<sup>19</sup>

This in turn leads to a suggestion of a possible ulterior motive for Irenaeus' dating of Revelation:

If Irenaeus had allowed for the possibility that Revelation was written earlier than *c.* AD 95, then his opponents could have claimed knowledge of an interpretation of the number of the beast which predated that which could have been passed on to Irenaeus by his witnesses. In an attempt to close off this possibility Irenaeus claims that there was little or no gap between the arrival of Revelation and his witnesses' contact with it. Hence, Irenaeus claims, the name behind the number has *never* been known.<sup>20</sup>

This is an intriguing hypothetical reconstruction of Irenaeus' motives, but we need not get carried away; as Garrow notes, "It need not be the case that there was a conflict between a persuasive [i.e. expedient] date and an accurate date."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the purpose of reviewing Garrow's argument has not been to categorically discount the usual 95 CE date, but only to notice that it may align with Irenaeus' rhetorical interests, and thus merit a little more suspicion and a little less uncritical acceptance than it usually garners. The effect of this is that it invites us to prioritise evidence that is internal to Revelation, if such may be found.

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<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.1.

<sup>19</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 67.

## The Beast with Seven Heads

There are three verses in Revelation 17 that alone contain enough information to narrow the dating of the book to one of two possibilities, precluding every other. The widely accepted 95 CE date unfortunately does not make the cut. In Revelation 17 John sees a woman sitting atop a scarlet beast with seven heads. A helpful angel tells us what we need to know in vv. 9-11:

This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

Abstraction,<sup>22</sup> backdating,<sup>23</sup> unjustified omission of certain emperors;<sup>24</sup> these are the strategies that are inescapably produced when the sixth king who 'is' must be Domitian in order to agree with Irenaeus' dating. This muddle testifies that the identification is incorrect. Making sense of the internal evidence with as little complication as possible is a better approach than constructing more difficult schemes in order to accommodate Irenaeus' later testimony. Thus instead of forcing the sequence of kings to produce Domitian as the sixth, it is better to ask where we might begin counting, and see what options that leads us towards for the identity of the sixth king and thus the approximate date of Revelation.

### Galba: 68-9 CE

The most obvious place to begin counting emperors is with the first emperor. The opening lines of Tacitus' *Annals* identifies Augustus as such, though it is sometimes

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<sup>22</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (New Century Bible; London: Oliphants, 1974), p. 38; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (eds I. H. Marshall and D. A. Hagner; The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 23-24.

<sup>23</sup> T. F. Glasson, *The Revelation of John* (eds P. R. Ackroyd, A. R. C. Leaney, and J. W. Packer; The Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), p. 64; Jonathan Knight, *Revelation* (ed. J. Jarick; Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p. 19.

pointed out that Suetonius begins his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* with Julius. But Julius cannot be the first head of the beast, because if we begin counting there then we arrive at Nero as the sixth head who ‘now is.’ This is not correct, because (as we shall see) Revelation makes use of the myth of Nero’s return that presupposes his death/disappearance. Kenneth Gentry attempts to circumnavigate this pitfall of a Neronian dating by claiming that the use of the Nero myth is somewhere between intuitive and predictive: John took up astrological prophecies of Nero’s impending fall and return which, according to Suetonius, emerged whilst Nero was still reigning.<sup>25</sup> Even if we were to allow that these prophecies really were uttered during Nero’s lifetime rather than projected back into his reign by Suetonius in view of the posthumous popularity of the myth, there is still the insuperable problem posed by 17:8, 11: if the Nero head epitomises the beast as the referent of 666 (as Gentry does hold) then how can he be currently reigning if the beast ‘is not’? Starting the count with Augustus, then, we reach the following succession:

|                       | <i>Emperor</i>  | <i>Dates of reign</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
|                       | (Julius Caesar) |                       |
| 1 <sup>st</sup>       | Augustus        | 31 BCE–14 CE          |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>       | Tiberius        | 14–37 CE              |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>       | Caligula        | 37–41 CE              |
| 4 <sup>th</sup>       | Claudius        | 41–54 CE              |
| 5 <sup>th</sup>       | Nero            | 54–68 CE              |
| <b>6<sup>th</sup></b> | <b>Galba</b>    | <b>68–69 CE</b>       |

Thus on this reading of the beast’s heads, John would be writing during the short reign of Galba, around 68 CE. The most striking thing about this dating is that it is upstream of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Proponents of a pre-70 date<sup>26</sup> are generally quick to brandish 11:1-2 as evidence that Revelation “presupposes that the Temple is standing.”<sup>27</sup> This assumes that these verses intend to make a historical prediction about the literal Jerusalem temple, but we will see in due course that 11:1-2 yields a coherent

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 304-306.

<sup>26</sup> Some recent monographs arguing for a pre-70 dating for Revelation are David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987); Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989); Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, “Problem of the Domitianic Date,” p. 604.

and compelling meaning when interpreted symbolically. This does not totally rule out the possibility of a historical prediction, but at the very least it does mean that we are not reliant on interpreting the imagery as such in order to make sense of the passage. If Revelation was written after the destruction of the Temple then perhaps John reworks a previously existing prophecy or text, but as Robert Mounce reminds us, “Since we have seen that John makes use of his sources with a sort of sovereign freedom, it is far more important to understand what he is saying than to reconstruct the originals.”<sup>28</sup> With this in mind, we must agree with Garrow’s comment that

... if 11:1-13 were written before AD 70, then it could be seen as casting the Jews of Jerusalem as perfect exemplars of God’s faithful people. This is highly unlikely to be John’s intention in light of his description of the Jews as a synagogue of Satan in 2.9 and 3.9. It is therefore preferable to suppose that the prophecy was written after AD 70.<sup>29</sup>

Another factor that tells against a pre-70 date for Revelation is the use of the name ‘Babylon’ for Rome. Although it is possible that John could have made this identification before the destruction of the temple—Babylon in the Hebrew Bible is rich with associations that could be profitably applied to the city of John’s censure, from its genesis in Genesis as the city daring to defy the dwelling of God<sup>30</sup> to its looming presence in later times as the conqueror and captor of the people of God—but that Babylon and Rome were the destroyers of the first and second Jerusalem Temples respectively is the most exact and powerful correlation between the two. This means that the suitability of their identification is dramatically strengthened and sharpened after 70 CE, which invites us to look in that direction for a more satisfying solution to the dating of Revelation.

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<sup>28</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (ed. F. F. Bruce; New London Commentaries; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1977), p. 219.

<sup>29</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the language-scattering judgment on Babel is dimly evoked every time Revelation designates the inhabitants of the earth by their multiplicity of languages (tongues).

## Titus: c. 80 CE

This is a dating that has occasionally been entertained before,<sup>31</sup> and which has more recently received a persuasive defense by Garrow.<sup>32</sup> He identifies the wounded and healed head of the beast as Nero with reference to the popular myth of his return,<sup>33</sup> and argues that “the locus of the beast’s Antichristian character resides wholly in the wounded head that revives.”<sup>34</sup> The widely accepted identification of Nero with the beast is most readily deducible from a) the references in 17:9-18 to the contemporaneous myth and expectation of Nero’s return to execute the anti-imperial vengeance of the East; b) the appearance in 13:18 of the 666 gematria riddle with its 616 textual variant in C (yielding respectively נרון קסר transliterated from Greek or נרו קסר transliterated from Latin); and c) the character of the beast as vicious persecutor of the saints, Nero being the pre-eminent offender in this regard.<sup>35</sup> It is the unique affinity between Nero and the beast that (alone) explains how it is possible that the Beast ‘is not’ (17:8, 11) even whilst its sixth head ‘is living.’<sup>36</sup> It follows then that “the beast is only active/visible when Nero (the wounded head) is reigning, and so *the initial appearance of the beast must have coincided with Nero’s first reign.*”<sup>37</sup> This is a stunningly simple suggestion. The idea that the first head of the sequence is Nero might already be hinted at in the *μίαν* of 13:3 (καὶ *μίαν* ἐκ τῶν κεφαλῶν αὐτοῦ ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον), which it is possible to translate as ‘first’ (cf. 6:1 in light of 6:3 etc.) rather than the usual ‘one of’ (thus ‘the *first* of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow’).<sup>38</sup> If we take

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<sup>31</sup> E.g. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 256; John M. Court, *Revelation* (New Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 100-1; Beale, *Revelation*, p. 873. Beale here mentions the Titus-as-sixth-king idea without any comment or assessment at all, and it is then curiously absent from the otherwise comprehensive tabulation of possible enumerations of the seven kings on the following page.

<sup>32</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, pp. 76-78.

<sup>33</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 85, following e.g. Sweet: this head “expresses the beast’s whole character” (*Revelation*, p. 120); Caird: “John identifies the beast with one of its seven heads, the emperor who especially embodied the demonic quality of the Monster, who was to come to life again after having received a mortal wound” (G. B. Caird, “On Deciphering the Book of Revelation: II. Past and Future,” *The Expository Times* 74/2 [1962], pp. 51-53 [52]).

<sup>35</sup> For excellent explorations of all of these points, see Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 384-452. For an earlier and impressive defense of the beast as Nero *redivivus* see Ibson T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919), pp. 400-408.

<sup>36</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 87. Emphasis added.

<sup>38</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 209. The observation is connected with the Nero myth to produce the possibility of the Titus date (p. 256), but in the end Irenaeus’ testimony is given precedence and the suggestion is dropped. Wilson likewise notes that Rev. 13:3 might be translated as specifying that the *first* head (rather than just one of the heads) had a fatal wound, but rather than combining this with the Nero myth, instead he reverts to the conclusion that “Since Julius was assassinated, he would be the head with the mortal wound. Thus Revelation would begin the enumeration of emperors with Julius” (J. Christian Wilson,

Nero as the first king-head in the sequence then we arrive at Titus as the sixth head, and c. 80 CE as the date of Revelation:

|                 | <i>Emperor</i> | <i>Dates of reign</i> |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> | Nero           | 54–68 CE              |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Galba          | 68–69                 |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Otho           | 69–69                 |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | Vitellius      | 69–69                 |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> | Vespasian      | 69–79                 |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> | <b>Titus</b>   | <b>79–81</b>          |

This is an attractive and elegant solution to the problem of the identity of the sixth king, and one that does not produce the difficulties of a pre-70 date. Consideration of some of Suetonius' comments on Titus and his reign strengthens the suitability of the date:

There were some dreadful disasters during his reign, such as the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Campania, a fire at Rome which continued three days and as many nights, and a plague the like of which had hardly ever been known before. In these many great calamities he showed not merely the concern of an emperor, but even a father's surpassing love, now offering consolation in edicts, and now lending aid so far as his means allowed.<sup>39</sup>

Suetonius' admiration of Titus holds right to the end of his account, which he closes with an emphatic commendation:

When his death was made known, the whole populace mourned as they would for a loss in their own families, the senate hastened to the House before it was summoned by proclamation, and with the doors still shut, and then with them open, rendered such thanks to him and heaped such praise on him after death as they had never done even when he was alive and present.<sup>40</sup>

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"The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39/4 [1993], pp. 587-605 [600]).

<sup>39</sup> Suetonius, *Tit.* 8.3.

<sup>40</sup> Suetonius, *Tit.* 11.1.

Garrow argues that the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE is the only historical event that could conceivably lie behind the imagery of the sixth seal, which would thus render the hearers powerfully and inescapably confronted with the imminence of all that unfolds thereafter.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the popularity of Titus' reign accords well with the worldwide allegiance and worship commanded by the beast,<sup>42</sup> and with John's anxiety lest his readers become or remain carried along by that groundswell of affection and acceptance. Revelation is a message of warning to the seven churches lest they too easily forget the true character of Rome as revealed by Nero's traumatising persecutions. Such times have not been left behind forever, but will erupt again with far greater scope and intensity at Nero's diabolical return.

These ways in which Titus' reign matches some of the features of Revelation are suggestive that it is a viable dating rather than conclusive that it is the correct dating, since other reigns (including Domitian's) command similar merit. But the great strength of the Titus date is the simplicity of its solving power with regard to the riddle of the seven-head sequence, and I judge this strength sufficient to merit its acceptance above the date given by Irenaeus many decades after the fact.

## FEMINIST CRITICISM

The overall epistemological and interpretative approach outlined in the 'Introduction' to the thesis above goes some way to determining (or at least limiting the options for) how we will approach the interpretation of Revelation specifically. Earlier we set our course to sail as close as possible to Paul and John's original authorial intention, treating Romans and Revelation as vehicles of communication between author and intended recipients. We anticipated that convincingly accounting for the content and intent of these communications would involve reconstructing the historical context in which they

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<sup>41</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 78. The connection between the eruption of Vesuvius and some of the imagery in Revelation 6 is noted by e.g. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 24. As Sweet comments, the connection does not prove the proximity of Revelation to that event, only (if accepted) that we cannot entertain a pre-70 date. But since Titus is the only feasible post-70 candidate for the identity of the sixth head of the beast, the Vesuvius connection does specifically add weight to the case for dating Revelation to around 80 CE. Bauckham notes the general pattern of which the proposed Vesuvius reference is one example: "John has taken some of his contemporaries' worst experiences and worst fears of wars and natural disasters, blown them up to apocalyptic proportions, and cast them in biblically allusive terms" (Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* [ed. J. D. G. Dunn; New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], p. 20).

<sup>42</sup> Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 79.

originally took place, enabling an attempt to interpret the text as its intended recipients might most reasonably be expected to have done. But before we thus put out into Revelation's deep waters, that particular text presents particular interpretative issues and perils for our prior consideration.

One of the distinct dangers of pursuing a historical-critical approach to Revelation along the lines set forth above is that the interpreter becomes so deliberately absorbed in the world(view) of the text that the whole enterprise is rather more historical than critical. In other words, it is easy for an approach that seeks to understand the text as much as possible on its own terms to leave potentially objectionable elements of its (conscious or unconscious) message totally unchallenged. Since one of the most potentially objectionable elements of Revelation is its symbolic use of women (especially as victims of violence), a singularly important corrective to this tendency is the growing body of feminist criticism of Revelation, the shape of which will now be traced, so that its cautionary counsel to the historical-critical approach of the present thesis may then be heard.

The Book of Revelation was exposed to brief and blistering feminist criticism by one of the pioneers of the approach, Mary Daly.<sup>43</sup> She anticipates one of the central foci of subsequent feminist criticism of Revelation in her introductory comment that “a major feature of this panoramic vision is the punishment of a famous prostitute (supposedly representing the large, wicked city of Babylon), who is stripped naked and eaten, and whose remains are thrown into the fire, according to god's intention.”<sup>44</sup> The paragraphs

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 102-105.

<sup>44</sup> Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 102. See e.g. Shanell T. Smith, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire: Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambivalence* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014); Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (eds D. N. Fewell and D. M. Gunn; Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 57-68; Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 92-97; Stephen D. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation: Sex and Gender, Empire and Ecology* (ed. T. Thatcher; Resources for Biblical Study, 79; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), pp. 103-154; Surekha Nelavala, “‘Babylon the Great Mother of Whores’: A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective,” *Expository Times* 121/2 (2009), pp. 60-65; Marion Carson, “The Harlot, the Beast and the Sex Trafficker: Reflections on some Recent Feminist Interpretations of Revelation 17-18,” *Expository Times* 122/5 (2011), pp. 218-227; Jean K. Kim, “‘Uncovering Her Wickedness’: An Inter(con)textual reading of Revelation 17 from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective,” *JSNT* 21/73 (1999), pp. 61-81; Lynn R. Huber, *Thinking and Seeing with Women in Revelation* (Library of New Testament Studies; London: T&T Clark, 2013), pp. 56-126; and the following chapters in A.-J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings, 13; London: T&T Clark, 2009): John W. Marshall, “Gender and Empire: Sexualized Violence in John's Anti-Imperial Apocalypse,” pp. 17-32; Caroline Vander Stichele, “Re-membering the Whore: The Fate of Babylon According to Revelation 17.16,” pp. 106-120; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Feminine Symbolism in

that follow appear to forget the Woman Babylon, turning aside to consider and condemn the unholy matrimony between patriarchal Christianity/government and inevitable nuclear destruction, until Daly returns to reflect that in fact the perpetrators of this apocalyptic alliance “are participant observers in the stripping, eating, and burning of the ‘famous prostitute,’ the whore hated by god and by the kings (leaders) he has inspired.”<sup>45</sup> This precipitates the ironic comment that

The harlot “deserves” to be hated and destroyed, of course, for she symbolizes the uncontrollable Babylon, the wicked city. No one asks who are the agents of wickedness. It is enough to have a scapegoat, a victim for dismemberment.

Everyone knows that the woman is at fault: the christian fathers have always spread this word, beginning with the story of Eve’s “disobedience”, and father Freud proved that it was true.<sup>46</sup>

The section then closes with the rallying cry that “The ultimate contest was wrongly described in the Book of Revelation, however,”<sup>47</sup> since that contest is more truly “the wrenching free of female energy which has been captured and forced into prostitution by patriarchy, degraded into fuel for continuing its necrophilic processions.”<sup>48</sup>

Daly’s treatment of Revelation acts as a forerunner to the much more extensive feminist reading found in Tina Pippin’s seminal (!) 1992 monograph *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John*. This in turn acts as an important and invigorating influence on many of the contributions to Amy-Jill Levine’s 2009 *Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*; but the advantage of Pippin’s work for the purposes of the present discussion is that she does come to touch directly on the question of the relationship between feminist and historical criticism of the Bible. *Death and Desire*, then, “moves from more general ideological/political readings to an

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the Book of Revelation,” pp. 121-130; and Greg Carey, “A Man’s Choice: Wealth Imagery and the Two Cities of the Book of Revelation,” pp. 147-158.

<sup>45</sup> Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 104.

<sup>46</sup> Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, pp. 104-105. Catherine Keller comments that “since the text has named kings, merchants, and false prophets, it is not quite right to say that ‘no-one asks who are the agents of wickedness’” (*Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005], p. 77). However, that the kings and merchants are able to ‘stand far off’ to mourn the destruction of Babylon (Revelation 18) does *distance* them from the city itself, thus leaving the image of the woman as the lone scapegoat, the only true ‘victim for dismemberment.’

<sup>47</sup> Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 105.

<sup>48</sup> Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p. 105. In a similar vein, Pippin declares that “The transformation of society in the Apocalypse is only partial transformation,” because “The male decides the fate of all the women in the Apocalypse” (*Death and Desire*, p. 98).

incorporation of Marxist-feminist readings, using the discourse with studies in the fantastic as central.”<sup>49</sup> The foundational ‘ideological/political’ readings in chapter 2 are conducted in close conversation with Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson, and are not wholly critical of Revelation’s political theology; but the gender-oriented readings which comprise the preponderant remainder of the book eschew the reconstructive optimism of (e.g.) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Adela Yarbro Collins in favour of a sustained and withering critique of the way in which Revelation constructs its female characters.<sup>50</sup> The internal interplay of responses to Revelation’s attractive anti-imperialism on the one hand and its unpalatable gender ideology on the other is poetically put later in the book: “Having studied the evils of Roman imperial policy in the colonies, I find the violent destruction of Babylon very cathartic. But when I looked into the face of Babylon, I saw a woman.”<sup>51</sup> Like Daly, to the Woman Babylon we shall return; but one of the points at which Daly is excelled by Pippin is that the latter brings feminist critique to bear not only on this obvious target, but also on the other images of women that are often assumed to be redeemingly positive: the Woman Clothed with the Sun (Revelation 12) and the Bride of the Lamb (Revelation 21). Pippin points out that the Woman Clothed with the Sun is “speechless except for her cries of pain in childbirth,”<sup>52</sup> encoding the message that “females are productive only when they are reproductive”<sup>53</sup> and “reaffirming traditional stereotypes of the good woman who is obedient and long-suffering”<sup>54</sup>; the displacement of the Woman to the wilderness is supremely an act of marginalisation, so that

The Woman Clothed with the Sun is a goddess subdued, tamed, and under control. After her reproductive activity she is no longer useful. The traditional female values that accompany the act of mothering (nurture and caretaking) are

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<sup>49</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> At the turning point of the book Pippin states that “I think it is possible to read for gender and politics at the same time, even though I am more optimistic that a purely political reading of the apocalypse can be reconstructive on at least some levels in some contexts” (*Death and Desire*, p. 46). Pippin comments that Schüssler Fiorenza “is positive on both fronts, connecting a feminist reading with a political/liberationist reading” (p. 47; see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* [ed. G. Krodel; Proclamation Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991]); Pippin dissents from the connection on the grounds that “ultimately, I do not find ‘humanist values and visions’ in the apocalypse” (p. 47). She later states plainly that “the Apocalypse is not liberating for women readers” (p. 80).

<sup>51</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 80. The mention of catharsis picks up on the extended discussion of that concept on pp. 16-21; for Revelation as ‘resistance literature,’ see especially pp. 28-30.

<sup>52</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 75.

<sup>53</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 75.

suppressed; the child is taken to live in heaven, and traditional male values of competition and separation come to the foreground.<sup>55</sup>

As for the would-be virtuous Bride of the Lamb, Pippin argues that she is still utterly defined (in name and nature) in relation to the male, and that the idea of the virginal 144,000 males entering the Bride “is disturbing because the imagery is that of mass intercourse.”<sup>56</sup> In sum, then, “The maternal and bride images are often the points of redeeming the text for women, but both these images are patriarchal and heterosexist.”<sup>57</sup>

We turn now from the Bride to the Whore, and from our brief look at feminist criticism of Revelation to a consideration of what challenges it might put to its historical-critical counterpart. Revelation 17 perhaps forms the nexus for historical criticism of the book, because it gives the clearest clues as to the historical time and context in which it was written. So it is that interpreters pore over the details of the Woman and the Beast on which she sits, combing the text for points of historical reference to use as the basis of further extrapolation and postulation. Investigations are conducted into the iconography and mythology of the goddess Roma as a possible source of imagery for the Woman Babylon, and into the literary relationship between Daniel’s four beasts and John’s teratoid amalgam. The heads of the beast are interrogated as to the specifics of their imperial identity. And the desolation, devouring, and incineration of the Whore by the beast and his horns is skilfully related to the figure of Nero *redivivus* as totemic threat to the former city of his rule.

All of these endeavours reflect the historical-critical attempt to peer *through* the text into the world behind it, and especially into the intentions of its author. But here is the

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<sup>55</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 76. A little later she allows that “there is some magic in the scene in Apocalypse 12 when the Woman Clothed with the Sun puts on the great eagle’s wings and flies into the wilderness. The earth (Gaia) comes to the aid of the Woman—‘it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth’ (Apoc 12:16). The spiritual feminine is seen as subduing the material masculine. This view of the Woman is positive and helpful in revisioning goddesses in this powerful scene” (p. 79).

<sup>56</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 80. In *Apocalyptic Bodies* she states that “I now think that the 144,000 do not want to have the Bride but instead want to *be* the Bride” (p. 121), which leads into a discussion of the ambiguous and unstable gender configuration of not only this group but also the Whore and the souls under the altar—all set in juxtaposition to the consummate hypermasculinity of Christ on the cross and God on the throne (pp. 121-125; on divine hypermasculinity see further Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* [London: Routledge, 1996]; the discussion therein of divine hypermasculinity in Revelation can also be found in Stephen D. Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” in A.-J. Levine [ed.], *A Feminist Companion to The Apocalypse of John* [Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings, 13; London: T&T Clark, 2009], pp. 180-204).

<sup>57</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 80.

point at which the feminist voice must be heard. In *Death and Desire* Pippin states that “I am not concerned with recovering the historical context or the ‘original audience,’”<sup>58</sup> and in *Apocalyptic Bodies* that “I want a critical dialogue not a monologue of ‘Truth’ and what the text ‘means’ or ‘intends.’”<sup>59</sup> This directly confronts the historical-critical approach, and in the latter text Pippin goes on to explain why: traditional readings of the Book of Revelation have sought to manage and control it “by pin-pointing the historical context of the text (if the text is linked effectively to the past, it is neutralized).”<sup>60</sup> The case of the Woman Babylon bears out the point: an unselfconscious preoccupation with the Neronic background and ‘meaning’ of her horrific demise—a peering through the text rather than a gazing directly at it—rarely leaves room for weighing the possible message and effect of the imagery itself. But as Pippin irresistibly insists, “The symbolism matters, and the symbolism of a woman’s body that is attacked is important.”<sup>61</sup> Not important to John, perhaps, but precisely therein lies the ethical trap of the historical-critical approach. Assuming that (a limited and subjective reconstruction of) authorial intention has an inherent and legitimate monopoly on what a text really *means* runs the distinct risk of neglecting what the text actually *does*, i.e. the effect that it has on actual people. Catherine Keller puts it well: “to claim that because the text does not intend misogyny it is innocent of its metaphoric subtext is to sweep *women’s* ashes under the carpet.”<sup>62</sup>

What then are we to say in response to this? If we adopt the feminist fondness for parenthetical wordplay then we might say that the way the text (en)genders violence must be (en)countered. The first step in this process is simply to recognise that Revelation’s imagery does carry the ugly potential to express and legitimise misogynistic forms of theology and society. This recognition must then be transferred and applied to the concern of the wider thesis, so that it does not escape notice or mention that texts relating to the relationship between Israel and the church are currently being used in some quarters of the latter to justify either shocking anti-Semitism or the displacement and degradation of the Palestinian people. And yet, recognising the noxious potential of a text is only the starting point for combatting it, rather than the act of combat itself. Since the basic approach of this thesis remains historical-critical, recognition is the most that we can muster, and the actual combat

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<sup>58</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, p. 113.

<sup>60</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, p. 113.

<sup>61</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, p. 94.

<sup>62</sup> Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, p. 77. Emphasis original.

must be left for another writer or another time. This is important and humbling to realise. The best that we can do is to conduct historical-critical enquiry with all possible integrity and care, and in the spirit of humility that comes from accepting that one's own task is not the only one that matters. Whether the historical-critical task does in fact matter is a large and subjective question that it is not the present intention to pursue; but whatever its merits and limitations are judged to be, it will be at its best when it is not too self-absorbed to hear the voices of women, the voices of the oppressed, the voices from the margin.

## INTERPRETATION OF SYMBOLISM

One of the most important things to get in place before coming to the text of Revelation is the interpretative approach to its abundant imagery. Should our hermeneutical default be to interpret the language literally, unless forced to read symbolically in certain cases? Or should we assume that images are symbols, and look for a literal interpretation only if no symbolical meaning can be found? Reading Revelation literally has a certain appeal. It would seem to promise both simplicity and objectivity of interpretation. What could be simpler than taking 'two witnesses' to be two witnesses? What could be more objective? This is the approach championed by the late John F. Walvoord in his commentary on Revelation.<sup>63</sup> Lest his literal reading be thought to have sunk before it sails, he is ready to accommodate those points at which the text explicitly states that an image is symbolic (stars for angels and lampstands for church in 1:20, etc.), even construing such instances as evidence of the basic validity of his literal-when-possible approach:

In many instances, where symbols are explained in the book of Revelation, they establish a pattern of interpretation which casts a great deal of light upon the meaning of the book as a whole. This introduces a presumption that, where expressions are not explained, they can normally be interpreted according to their natural meaning unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> John F. Walvoord, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" [<http://www.walvoord.com/series/341>] (print version Chicago: Moody Press, 1966). All references to Walvoord are taken from the online version of the commentary; specific subsections are given in place of page numbers.

<sup>64</sup> Walvoord, "Revelation," Introduction: Symbolism. Likewise, when discussing numbers in Revelation he maintains that "the general rule should be followed to interpret numbers literally unless there is clear evidence to the contrary" ("Revelation," Introduction: Symbolism).

From the first sentence, one might assume that the ‘pattern of interpretation’ established is that Revelation’s images are symbols. If the stars seen in 1:16 are explained in 1:20 as representing angels, then the next time we encounter the image of a star (2:28) we have cause to wonder whether it might also represent an angel;<sup>65</sup> the principle may be generalised so that whenever we encounter any image we may normatively expect it to be a symbol of something else. But Walvoord’s response to Revelation’s explicit explanation of certain symbols is rather to postulate that these images have been singled out as uniquely in need of symbolic explanation because the rest of the images are generally non-symbolic. In practice this rule cannot be applied consistently. We only have to look at the image of the Lamb throughout Revelation—so obviously a symbol for Jesus that it never needs explicitly explaining as such—to realise that we cannot rely only on explicit explanation alone as an indicator that symbolism is operative. That is why Walvoord must add that an image may be understood symbolically ‘if clearly indicated by context.’ But this is a costly concession, because it begins to unravel the claims of the hermeneutic of literal interpretation to simplicity and objectivity. However simple the method itself may be, if there is complexity and confusion in when to apply it then simplicity is lost; if there is subjectivity involved in deciding when to apply it then objectivity is lost.

Walvoord holds that “the patient exegete must resolve each occurrence in some form of consistent interpretation,”<sup>66</sup> but strikingly the word ‘genre’ does not appear in his reflections on how we might find this form of consistent interpretation, nor anywhere in the entire 10,000-word introduction to his Revelation commentary. The fact is that the apocalyptic, visionary genre of Revelation already recommends that we approach the text with an expectation of pervasive symbolism, and Greg Beale has shown how this expectation is specifically encouraged by the programmatic appearance of the word *σημαίνω* in the opening verse of the book.<sup>67</sup> Against the background of the visionary

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<sup>65</sup> Though in 2:28 the star in question is the ‘morning star,’ which 22:16 directly interprets as Jesus himself.

<sup>66</sup> Walvoord, “Revelation,” Introduction: Interpretation.

<sup>67</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 50-55. In struggling to defend a literal hermeneutic, Robert Thomas makes the borderline comical statement that “Rev 1:1 furnishes an advanced notice of the symbolic nature of God’s communication with John. This has nothing to do with how the resultant communication should be interpreted, however” (Robert L. Thomas, “Literary Genre and Hermeneutics of the Apocalypse,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 2/1 [1991], pp. 79-92 [90]).

genre, any literal interpretation at all begins to look potentially out of place.<sup>68</sup> Time and time again the expectation that Revelation's images are symbolic is vindicated by the theological coherence and literary artistry uncovered when they are so interpreted, and in reality a symbolic approach may be pursued with a much higher degree of consistency than an attempt to interpret literally. It is true that there may not be consistency in the interpretations of symbols produced by different commentators—and it is this which attracts the anxiety or disdain of many literalists<sup>69</sup>—but as Vern Sheridan Poythress says,

The recognition of pervasively symbolic, visionary mode of communication in Revelation does not result in abandoning objective meaning or objective referents. It does make the determination of referents a matter of greater subtlety. But such is bound to be the case in a genre where the specification of referents is not the exclusive concern.<sup>70</sup>

Yes, this 'subtlety' is conducive to subjectivity, but Poythress deftly counters that "it is just as subjective to impose a pedestrian, nonsymbolical reading on a visionary genre to which such reading is alien."<sup>71</sup>

We proceed, then, with the expectation of finding symbolism at every turn. Within this, it will be useful to note the distinction that is sometimes drawn between 'steno-symbols' and 'tensive symbols,' following the work of literary theorist Philip Wheelwright.<sup>72</sup> A steno-symbol represents one specific referent; a tensive symbol poetically evokes a range of meanings and associations, which may overlap or conflict with one another.

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<sup>68</sup> Wright points out that even where apocalyptic imagery is intended literally, it is frequently employed as an *omen*; in other words, even a literally-interpreted image may carry a metaphorical meaning (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 1, p. 173).

<sup>69</sup> So e.g. Thomas, who laments "how uncontrolled interpretation can be when one forsakes a literal method of understanding Revelation" (Robert L. Thomas, "Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 19/1 [2008], pp. 29-49 [48]).

<sup>70</sup> Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36/1 (1993), pp. 41-54 (54).

<sup>71</sup> Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics," p. 51. Regarding the 'subtlety' required in the interpretation of symbolism, Caird draws attention to Mark's statement that when Jesus died, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mk. 15:38), and the difficulty of determining whether or not the obvious symbolic significance means that he does not intend a literal reference at all (G. B. Caird, "On Deciphering the Book of Revelation: I. Heaven and Earth," *The Expository Times* 74/1 [1962], pp. 13-15 [14]). He also returns to the question of symbolism in the third article of the mini-series, arguing particularly against the "the naive notion that, where we find both a literal and a symbolic interpretation of a saying or event, the literal must necessarily be the more primitive" (G. B. Caird, "On Deciphering the Book of Revelation: III. The First and the Last," *The Expository Times* 74/3 [1962], pp. 82-84 [83]).

<sup>72</sup> See Philip E. Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (London: Indiana University Press, 1962), esp. chapters 1 and 2.

Eugene Boring's influential implementation of these categories leads him to conclude that Revelation's images are "tensive, evocative, and polyvalent."<sup>73</sup> This is undoubtedly true, but it need not be affirmed to the exclusion of the idea that Revelation's images may also have specific referents;<sup>74</sup> as Ian Paul comments, "it does not seem to me that the images of Roman imperial power as a ravenous beast, the churches as lamp stands, and Christ as a slaughtered lamb should be any the less evocative for each having a single, fairly clear, referent."<sup>75</sup> Instead, the specific referent becomes invested with all the power and subtlety of the 'tensive, evocative, polyvalent' associations of the image employed to represent it. The great charm of Disney's *Peter and the Wolf* is that the emotive, expressive power of its music is brought to bear on specific characters by the instruments and themes that pertain recognisably to them. Or, for a scientific analogy, pressure equals force divided by area; high pressure is created by a large force concentrated in a small area. In Revelation, the force of powerful tensive symbolism concentrated narrowly in a recognisable steno-referent exerts a high degree of pressure on the psyche of the reader, demanding a radical change of perception and behaviour.

## VISIONARY EXPERIENCE

One of the problems of interpretation that pertains particularly to Revelation and not to Romans is that the former presents itself as reporting John's visionary experience. The hints in this direction in the opening verses of the book (the word ἀποκάλυψις; the mention of a messenger angel; the reference to 'all that he [John] saw') are made good from 1:10-11 onwards. There we learn that John was "in the spirit on the Lord's day,"<sup>76</sup> and that he was instructed to "Write in a book what you see;" thereafter we duly encounter the written record of a series of visions and visionary experiences explicitly framed as such. The visionary context is constantly reinforced by the refrain 'I looked/saw' (the word ὀράω occurs 62 times in Revelation), and John's mandate to write down what he sees and hears is reiterated or reflected at 1:19; 10:4; 14:13; 19:9;

<sup>73</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (eds J. L. Mays and P. J. Achtemeier; Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 54.

<sup>74</sup> For criticism of Boring on this point see Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 65-69.

<sup>75</sup> Ian Paul, "The Book of Revelation: Image, Symbol, and Metaphor," in S. Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke), pp. 131-147 (136).

<sup>76</sup> José Adriano Filho notes that "the expression 'I was in the Spirit' (1.10; 4.1-2a; 17.3) indicates the most important moments in the visionary experience that the book presents, involving changes of place and subject" ("The Apocalypse of John as an Account of a Visionary Experience: Notes on the Book's Structure," *JSNT* 25/2 [2002], pp. 213-234 [229]).

21:5. How are we to respond to the visionary element of Revelation? Should it affect our understanding of authorial intention and hermeneutical strategy?

The first question to treat is whether we are to believe the claims of Revelation to contain a record of genuine visionary experience.<sup>77</sup> In some Christian readings, of course, the fact that the book represents itself as such is enough to settle the matter, and the question is somewhere between a resounding non-issue and an outright affront; but in the present investigation we have committed to following the course of a critical rather than confessional approach. It is vital, however, that a critical approach does not automatically mean philosophical materialism (in which the possibility of genuine visionary experience might be dismissed *a priori*), since such would qualify as inappropriate acceptance of a vast and unproved assumption. All we have is the text, and all we can do is read it and reflect on some of its possible implications in relation to visionary experience and authorial intention. The work of Christopher Rowland will aid us in this endeavour. In his book *The Open Heaven*, Rowland discusses a number of criteria for discerning genuine visionary experience in texts that claim to derive from such. These might usefully be subdivided into narrative indicators, exegetical indicators, and rhetorical indicators.

The main *narrative indicators* that Rowland argues might alert us to genuine visionary experience are an account of any preparation for visionary experience undertaken by the hopeful recipient, and details about the psychological or physiological state of the visionary during or after the experience. In connection with the former he notices the particular prominence of prayerful fasting (Dan. 10:2-3, 12; *Apoc. Ab.* 9; 2 *Bar.* 5:7; 9:2; 12:5; 21:1; 47:2),<sup>78</sup> and in connection with the latter he looks especially for instances that do not conform to the conventional motifs of theophany (e.g. 4 Ezra 6:29: “while he spake to me, behold little by little, the place whereon I stood rocked to and fro.”);<sup>79</sup> his overall argument is that

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<sup>77</sup> I use the term ‘genuine visionary experience’ in contradistinction to a fabricated report of such, not as a judgment on the actual nature and source of the experience (i.e. whether divine, demonic, or psychological).

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 228. He also cites 4 Ezra 9:23, though here the visionary is commanded *not* to fast in preparation for the experience that awaits him!

<sup>79</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 231. This interest in the effect of the heavenly world upon the visionary’s person is anticipated in Christopher Rowland, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10/2 (1979), pp. 137-154 (141).

If it is thought that the apocalypses are merely repositories of a particular message, with no evidence of religious experience at all, why should these brief comments find any place within them? . . . It is hard to believe that they are deliberate attempts to add a touch of realism to the account, especially when several of the elements actually do coincide with the way in which mystical experiences were described in later mystical writings.<sup>80</sup>

The Book of Revelation certainly contains narrative indicators of genuine visionary experience (not least the episode that constitutes the entirety of chapter 10), and Rowland notes that “these have a much stronger claim to be considered as the products of the actual experience of an apocalyptic seer for the simple reason that consideration of them is not complicated by the pseudonymous form which complicates consideration of Jewish apocalypses.”<sup>81</sup>

Regarding *exegetical indicators* of genuine visionary experience, Rowland emphasises instances in which a visionary account seems to have its basis in reflection on a particular piece of scripture, whilst developing it in creative ways not necessarily suggested by the source text itself.<sup>82</sup> Thus, for example, the surprising juxtaposition in 4 Ezra 13 of images pertaining to God’s chosen deliverer with the reference to him arising from the sea is “most unlikely” to have been made by “a careful interpreter of Daniel 7” (in which the sea is the demonic abode), but could conceivably have arisen “in the circumstances of a vision.”<sup>83</sup> Rowland also compares the visions of God in Revelation 4 and 1 Enoch 14 with the vision in Ezekiel 1 to which they are both clearly indebted; the fact that they develop the source vision in divergent and unsystematic ways leads to the ‘reasonable hypothesis’ that “these apocalypses are in fact what they purport to be: the descriptions of visions of visionaries who believed that it was possible for them to pierce the vault of heaven and be shown the most intimate secrets of God and his world.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 234.

<sup>81</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 235, though he is still willing to entertain the (unconvincing) possibility that in the pseudonymous apocalypses, “the visionaries placed their experiences in the context of the lives of some great figures of the past” (p. 240).

<sup>82</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, pp. 217-228.

<sup>83</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, pp. 218.

<sup>84</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 226. On this (and related) point(s) Rowland has recently been followed by Ian Boxhall: “the author resorts to simile upon simile, as if struggling to articulate a profound visionary experience rather than exegete a previous text” (*The Revelation of St John* [ed. M. D. Hooker; Black’s New Testament Commentaries; London: Continuum, 2006], p. 4).

The *rhetorical indicators* of genuine visionary experience concern the relationship between the content of a vision and the rhetorical use to which it is subsequently put. Rowland considers that genuine experience might be suggested by instances in which the account of the vision contains “superfluous material which has little or no significance for the apocalypticist either when he comes to reflect on the meaning of what he has seen or in the interpretation,”<sup>85</sup> in contrast to visions which “contain a series of complicated images whose presence seems to be dictated by their significance for the later interpretation.”<sup>86</sup> This is somewhat similar to the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* (‘the harder reading is stronger’) native to textual criticism; if significant features of a vision seem to be irrelevant or even contradictory to the rhetorical purpose to which it is supposed to contribute, this could indicate that the vision has been included on the strength of its provenance rather than having been artificially constructed so as to reflect and advance a predetermined message. The main example that Rowland discusses is the vision and interpretation in Revelation 17. He detects both superfluity and intransigence (and thus likely authenticity) in the vision of vv. 1-6 when it is considered in relation to its interpretation in vv. 6-18: superfluity in that “the various aspects of the woman’s dress and appearance are not interpreted in the vision, nor for that matter is the colour of the beast,”<sup>87</sup> and in that “the interpretation reveals that the interest of the seer centred on the beast which supported the woman rather than the woman herself, whereas the vision mentions the beast only briefly”<sup>88</sup>; intransigence in that the vision’s fairly straightforward statement that the beast has seven heads and ten horns (v. 3) does not particularly suggest or easily conform to the specific points which the more convoluted interpretation (vv. 9-14) desires to make.<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that a vision which perfectly illustrates its interpretation is necessarily spurious, only that it is much more difficult to convincingly defend against that charge.

The quest to identify traces of genuine visionary experience in the Book of Revelation (or other visionary texts) is a fascinating one, and Rowland’s discussion yields as good a framework for carrying it out as the ambiguities and complexities of the subject

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<sup>85</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 237.

<sup>86</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 237. In such instances “one must suppose that what purports to be a vision is in fact an artificial construction which has been put together to coincide exactly with the message which the seer wants to get across to his readers. But the point should be made that it cannot be assumed without further investigation that all the visions in the apocalypses arose in this way” (p. 234).

<sup>87</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 237.

<sup>88</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 238.

<sup>89</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 238. In his words: “the convoluted explanation of the heads of the beast in vv. 9-11 attempts to make its particular point conform to the details of the vision without in any way altering the details of the latter.”

permit; but bearing these in mind, it would seem optimistic to think that “Application of a method of this sort to the visions of the apocalypses should enable us to ascertain which visions can be considered to be the result of actual experience.”<sup>90</sup> There are simply too many factors and unknowns in the construction of a visionary report ever to reach firm conclusions about its experiential provenance. The Book of Revelation may sidestep some of the problems that automatically attend pseudepigraphical works in this matter, but its distinctive saturation with scriptural images and themes does present unique difficulties of its own. Features which according to Rowland’s criteria might represent clear narrative, exegetical or rhetorical indicators of genuine visionary experience frequently turn out to be at least partially explicable instead as reference or deference to the themes, words, and episodes of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>91</sup> This is not at all to say that genuine visionary experience cannot or does not lie behind the book of Revelation; only to illustrate the point that the application of the available criteria is too inconclusive to recommend a hermeneutical strategy that relies on drawing sharp distinctions between visions that are genuine and those that are artificially constructed. However, the combined witness of the various indicators of genuine visionary experience in Revelation *is* sufficient to require some reflection on the implications of this phenomenon at the level of overall epistemological and hermeneutical approach, as follows.

In the ‘Introduction’ to the thesis above, we outlined the goal of historical-critical reconstruction of what an author intended a text to communicate to its intended recipients; but if some of the substance of Revelation derives from visions then does this undermine, restrict or otherwise modify the role of John’s authorial intention?

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<sup>90</sup> Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 239. The opening of his commentary on Revelation (published 16 years after *The Open Heaven*) finds him perhaps slightly less optimistic in this respect, though still convinced of the kernel of genuine visionary experience: “John’s book demands attention, but its arresting manner cannot mask the fact that it, too, is only indirectly related to that awesome apocalyptic experience that took place on Patmos. . . . It may momentarily seem to beckon us into the visionary’s unconscious, but, whatever the sophistication of our psychoanalytic tools, that path into the mind of the prophet is barred to us” (Christopher Rowland, “The Book of Revelation,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XII [eds L. E. Keck *et al.*; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998], p. 504).

<sup>91</sup> To return again to previous examples, the accounts of the experiences of Ezekiel and Daniel substantially shape the ostensible *narrative indicators* of genuine visionary experience in Revelation 10; Isaiah 6 has a role to play in the *exegetical indicators* of creative visionary divergence from Ezekiel 1 in Revelation 4; and the vision of the beasts in Daniel 7 clearly shapes the concerns of Revelation 17, perhaps accounting for those *rhetorical indicators* of genuine visionary experience that Rowland considered to arise from the disjuncture between vision and interpretation in that chapter. As Kovacs and Rowland state, “The christophany at its opening, the visions of heaven, the dirge over Babylon, the war against Gog and Magog, and the vision of the New Jerusalem – all exhibit the influence of the written forms of ancient prophecies on the more recent prophetic imagination of John of Patmos” (Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* [Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004], p. 6).

Again, some Christian readings might answer this question with such a strong affirmative that John's authorial intention is rendered effectively non-existent: he simply related what he heard and saw, with no interference whatsoever from his own understanding or context. The next section (and the remainder of Part II) will show in more detail why this position is untenable, but we may briefly raise some key points. Firstly and most basically, it is vital to recognise that every part of Revelation is necessarily under John's authorial intention by simple virtue of its inclusion in his final composition. This is so even if there are elements that are apparently incongruous or irrelevant, and even if John does include visions which he does not himself fully understand. Such cases might enjoin us to conceive of John's 'intention' more broadly than only conveyance of a tightly controlled 'message' or 'meaning,' but then so should the whole character and function of poetic visionary symbolism per se. This being said, the manifold indications that the final form of Revelation is the product of extensive reflection and painstaking composition tell heavily against the idea that John had little control or understanding of the book which he wrote.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Rowland reminds us that it would be arbitrary to attribute divine inspiration only to visionary experience itself, and not to the subsequent process of careful reflection and composition.<sup>93</sup> With this in mind we can see that consideration of authorial intention and divine inspiration in Revelation should not be removed from the wider debates relating to those matters, as though Revelation formed a totally anomalous case amongst the books of the canon. Perhaps we could say that for Christian readings of Revelation, its distinctive visionary basis is uniquely conducive to and encouraging of investigations into a *sensus plenior*; but this should not negate or affect the task of historical-critical interpretation, to which—the necessary groundwork having been laid—we may now turn in earnest.

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<sup>92</sup> Rowland emphasises "the considerable amount of later reflection which has gone on in the construction of the book" (*The Open Heaven*, p. 235). Later he writes that "Although there are one or two perplexing passages, the work has a unity of style and purpose which demands that we take seriously the possibility that its present form is in the main the responsibility of one author. Although we would want to argue that a substantial number of authentic visions have been included, there is no doubt that redaction of that material took place to enable the book to have the considerable degree of order which it manifests" (p. 414).

<sup>93</sup> "No doubt the visionary believed that the interpretation itself was just as much under the influence of divine guidance as the original vision. Hence we find him talking about the interpretation of visions in terms of angelic revelation" (Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, p. 240).

## CHAPTER 7

### THE JEWS IN THE MESSAGES

The first instance of rhetorical contact between Christians and Jews in Revelation is in the cold references to ‘those who say that they are Jews and are not’ in the messages to Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13). Since the message to Smyrna gives more indication of the social dynamics of the conflict between Christians and Jews, and the message to Philadelphia more indication of John’s theological response to that conflict, we will follow the same pattern of emphasis in our discussions.

#### THE MESSAGE TO SMYRNA

The message to Smyrna, like all the other messages, begins with an instruction to John to write to the angel of that church. What he is to write are the words of Jesus, who is described in this instance as “the first and the last, who was dead and came to life” (2:8). As with the other messages, the description of Jesus picks up the language of the christophany in chapter 1. Although Moyise has demonstrated that this christophany is much more likely to have been generated by the scriptural seams that it draws together (especially from Dan. 10:5-6) than by collecting the images separately suggested by the local contexts to which they are applied in chapters 2-3,<sup>1</sup> there is still room for William Ramsay’s observation that the death/life image is particularly pertinent to the history of Smyrna:

All Smyrnaean readers would at once appreciate the striking analogy to the early history of their own city which lies in that form of address. Strabo, as usual,

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<sup>1</sup> Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 29-36.

furnishes the best commentary. He relates that the Lydians destroyed the ancient city of Smyrna, and that for four hundred years there was no “city,” but merely a state composed of villages scattered over the plain and the hillsides around. Like Him who addresses it, Smyrna literally “became dead and yet lived.”<sup>2</sup>

This relevant resonance certainly does not prove that it was the history of Smyrna which first suggested the death/life image to John, unless we are to suppose that he was more preoccupied with local history than with the death and resurrection of Jesus! From the rest of Revelation we can see that this is clearly not the case, which demonstrates the fallacy of according the local references primacy and vindicates Moyise’s argument that these appear downstream of the christophany hermeneutically as well as structurally. Nevertheless, the image selected *is* particularly appropriate to Smyrna (as are many of the other images applied to the other congregations), which strengthens the impression that what follows in the rest of the message pertains to an actual situation there, and with this we come to the core of our concern. Jesus assures the Smyrnaeans that “I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (2:9). What are we able to learn from this?

In denying the Jews<sup>3</sup> that name here, John certainly implies that it rightfully belongs to those whom they are seen to be slandering. Leonard Thompson suggests that βλασφημία should be read here as ‘blasphemy’ (against Jesus) rather than ‘slander’ (against the saints), on the basis of its usage elsewhere in Revelation.<sup>4</sup> But immediate literary context must be allowed hermeneutical priority, and it is ‘slander’ rather than ‘blasphemy’ that best coheres with the rest of the message to Smyrna. (It is telling that in the message to Philadelphia, where references to the not-Jews reoccur but references to persecution are absent, the word βλασφημία does not appear.) What is less clear is the exact nature of the ‘slander’ and how it should be related to what precedes it (the

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<sup>2</sup> W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, and their place in the plan of the Apocalypse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), pp. 269-270. The link between the death of Smyrna and of Jesus may also have been suggested by the meaning of its name: ‘myrrh’ (Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 84).

<sup>3</sup> The assumption here that ‘those who say they are Jews and are not’ are in fact Jews and not some other group is defended in dialogue with David Frankfurter below.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation* (ed. V. P. Furnish; Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 68.

affliction and poverty of the Smyrnaeans)<sup>5</sup> and what follows it (the warning of imminent imprisonment and death). In this connection it is often noted that Smyrna boasted both a particularly enthusiastic allegiance to Rome<sup>6</sup> as well as a strong Jewish community.<sup>7</sup> Against that background it is hypothesised that the Smyranean synagogue(s) might have welcomed opportunities to actively and publicly highlight the church's probable failure to display the same enthusiasm towards Rome. If so then perhaps the message to Smyrna reflects a situation in which Jewish antagonism had already entailed economic hardship for the saints (2:9a), and would shortly begin to precipitate their anticipated imprisonment and execution (2:10).

This interpretation is resisted in Richard Ascough's *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna*, in which both Lloyd Gaston<sup>8</sup> and Dietmar Neufeld<sup>9</sup> protest the scarcity or unreliability of evidence for Jewish antagonism towards Christians in Smyrna or elsewhere, and argue that such a reading of the message to Smyrna only reflects the prior assumptions of a controlling 'Jewish conflict' theory. It is true that the evidence of Jewish-Christian relations in Smyrna from this period is far from abundant, but this only means that we must content ourselves with reconstructing scenarios that are plausible rather than provable. I judge the traditional interpretation that the saints at Smyrna were suffering hardship at the hands of the Jewish community to be the most plausible reconstruction available, for the following reasons.

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<sup>5</sup> Because of its close association with 'affliction,' the *πρωξείτων* of the church is better seen as a circumstantial development rather than as a reference to a pre-existing low economic status (Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 92).

<sup>6</sup> The key source being Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.54-55. He describes "deputies from Asia debating which of their communities was to erect his [Tiberius'] temple;" the eventual success of Smyrna's bid was secured above all by its impressively evidence-based demonstration of "good offices towards the Roman people."

<sup>7</sup> This is less well-established, though it would accord with Philo's mention of the "vast numbers of Jews scattered over every city of Asia and Syria" (*Legat.* 33.245). The pieces of evidence specific to Smyrna are the depiction of prominent (negative) Jewish influence in *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and a 2<sup>nd</sup> century inscription (*ISmyrna* 697) recording a 10,000 drachma donation for the public good from οἱ ποτε Ἰουδαῖοι, though there is some debate as to whether this designates those who were no longer Jews, or Jews who were no longer living in Judaea (in Philip A. Harland, "Spheres of Contention, Claims of Pre-eminence: Rivalries among Associations in Sardis and Smyrna," in R. S. Ascough [ed.], *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* [Studies in Christianity and Judaism, 14; Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005], pp. 53-63 [57]).

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd Gaston, "Jewish Communities in Sardis and Smyrna," in R. S. Ascough (ed.), *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism, 14; Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), pp. 17-24.

<sup>9</sup> Dietmar Neufeld, "Christian Communities in Sardis and Smyrna," in R. S. Ascough (ed.), *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism, 14; Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), pp. 25-39.

## Christians, Jews, and Romans

Rome had long afforded the Jews unique privileges and exemptions in a system that otherwise prohibited religions outside their country of origin, granting them gathering rights and assenting to the compromise that the Jews would sacrifice *for* the emperor but not *to* him.<sup>10</sup> Whilst the Jesus movement began as a Jewish sect, being viewed that way by the Roman authorities and enjoying Jewish privileges accordingly, this arrangement would begin to become fatally strained. Perhaps the increasingly Gentile composition and flavour of the Jesus movement in the first century might eventually have induced the Romans to question the legitimacy of its participation in the privileges granted uniquely to Jews, but such issues of demographic classification would hardly have been important or urgent to the Romans' generally pragmatic governance. A. N. Sherwin-White argues for "the extreme insignificance of the Christian communities in the vast framework of the empire,"<sup>11</sup> and the precious evidence of Pliny the Younger's correspondence with Trajan shows the emperor counselling Pliny that Christians "are not to be sought out" for trial.<sup>12</sup> By what means, then, did the early church begin to lose its initial Jewish political covering? Trajan's very next words give us the clue we need, as he adds that "if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished."<sup>13</sup> Who might want to denounce Christians to the Romans? Before we leap to the conclusion 'the Jews!' (though that is indeed where we will arrive), let us pause to take stock of the Roman legal context into which we peer. Loveday Alexander reminds us that

All prosecutions had to be brought by a *delator*, a private *prosecutor*, who had to appear in person to state the case against the accused . . . . The Roman empire was not a police state. The governor did not have the resources to seek out and prosecute offenders on his own initiative, and Trajan actively discouraged Pliny from doing so (*conquirendi non sunt*).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.77.

<sup>11</sup> A. N. Sherwin-White, "Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again," *Journal of Theological Studies* 3/2 (1952), pp. 199-213 (201).

<sup>12</sup> Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96.

<sup>13</sup> Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96.

<sup>14</sup> Loveday Alexander, "Silent Witness: Paul's Troubles with Roman Authorities in the Book of Acts," in A. P. Tárrech, J. M. G. Barclay, and J. Frey (eds), *The Last Years of Paul: Essays from the Tarragona Conference, June 2013* (WUNT, 352; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), pp. 153-174 (156).

This arrangement relies on prosecutors with a vested interest in the outcome of the case, and clearly the outside group with the most consistent vested interest in the fate of the Christians, and especially the question of whether they could continue to share the political privileges of the Jewish community, was the Jewish community itself. Nanos offers a deft analogy:

[C]onsider the dynamics likely to arise if some small group within the Amish community began to teach non-Amish neighbours that they could avoid military service if they but attended Amish meetings without actually becoming Amish. . . . Amish leaders, upon learning of it, would likely seek to stop this breach of policy, for it posed a threat to their rights if they did not maintain compliance with the government's definition of who was Amish and thus entitled to avoid service, and it undermined communal identity standards.<sup>15</sup>

And so it is that in Acts find Jews in the role of Paul's prosecutors in both Thessalonica (ch. 17) and Corinth (ch. 18). They do not have the monopoly on this role—it is played by the slave girl's owners and Demetrius & co. respectively in the episodes at Philippi and Ephesus that bookend those at Thessalonica and Corinth—but especially in the wake of Nero's persecution and the hostility towards Christians that the persecution must have both reflected and propagated,<sup>16</sup> it is easy to see why synagogues would wish to divest themselves of any affiliation to that group. If our Titus dating of Revelation is correct then it is worth noting that Suetonius makes a point of the presence of informers during that reign (among others):

Among the evils of the times were the informers and their instigators, who had enjoyed a long-standing licence. After these had been soundly beaten in the Forum with scourges and cudgels, and finally led in procession across the arena of the amphitheatre, he had some of them put up and sold, and others deported to the wildest of the islands. To further discourage for all time any who might think of venturing on similar practices, among other precautions he made it unlawful

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<sup>15</sup> Mark D. Nanos, "To the Churches within the Synagogues of Rome," in J. L. Sumney (ed.), *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 11-28 (13, n. 8).

<sup>16</sup> For Nero to choose Christians as plausible scapegoats for the fire he must have judged them to have been already widely distrusted, and this choice can only have fanned the flames of the existing reproach. It is interesting that Tacitus seems to think that the punishment of the Christians was fully deserved, though for their vices and misanthropy rather than for arson (*Ann.* 44)! See further on Nero's persecution below.

for anyone to be tried under several laws for the same offence, or for any inquiry to be made as to the legal status of any deceased person after a stated number of years.<sup>17</sup>

In considering the issue of private prosecution and Roman-Christian relations, Alexander reminds us of the important distinction between “the underlying motives (perhaps complex and unstated) that led neighbours and fellow-citizens to instigate a private prosecution against Christians, and the actual legal charges (*scelera*, *flagitia*) on which a prosecution could be brought before a judge.”<sup>18</sup> That the underlying motives may be complex and unstated makes them very difficult to confidently reconstruct, and since it is unnecessary to be precise on this question we will be content to assent to the reasonableness of Beale’s reflections:

Perhaps Jews were motivated to inform on Christians because they were irritated that some of their Jewish brethren or Gentile “godfearers” were converting to Christianity. Jews would have viewed Christianity as a religion distorting the Jewish law and offering a perversely easy way of salvation. They also considered the Christian worship of a crucified criminal as the divine Messiah a blasphemy.<sup>19</sup>

As for the actual charges that might have been brought, Beale proposes that “The specific accusations of Jews before government authorities were probably that Christians were upsetting the peace of the *status quo*, were not a Jewish sect, and refused to pay homage to Caesar as Lord.”<sup>20</sup> It is the last of these that stands out most prominently in the context of Asia Minor, in whose cities the emperor cult was embraced and advanced with an unusual alacrity and sincerity even in comparison with its burgeoning presence elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Suetonius, *Tit.* 8.5. Unfortunately Titus did not succeed in ‘discouraging for all time any who might think of venturing on similar practices’; Suetonius records that his successor Domitian also “checked false accusations designed for the profit of the privy purse and inflicted severe penalties on offenders; and a saying of his was current, that an emperor who does not punish informers hounds them on” (*Dom.* 9.3).

<sup>18</sup> Alexander, “Silent Witness.”

<sup>19</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, p. 240. That Ignatius mentions “His saints and believers, whether among Jews or Gentiles” in his letter to the *Smyrnaeans* (1.2) might possibly suggest that that city was a particularly ripe ground for missionary competition between church and synagogue, though this is probably more than counterbalanced by the lack of any other reference to contact with Judaism, when such does feature in his *Philadelphians* 6 and *Magnesians* 10.

<sup>20</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, p. 240.

<sup>21</sup> The strength of the imperial cult in Asia Minor is discussed in S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), especially pp. 1-22.

## Back to Smyrna

That the conflict between Christians and Jews in Smyrna was not confined to religious disputes but had spilled into the political arena is strongly suggested by the way that the reference to imprisonment in 2:10 (which could only be effected by the Roman authorities) comes in context of the reference to the βλασφημίαν of the Jews in 2:9. In this case some of the strength of ill feeling towards the Jews expressed in the message to Smyrna would derive from recognition of their power and predisposition to bring the Christians into disfavour with the Romans.<sup>22</sup> Of the three possible charges mentioned by Beale, we can guess that it might be refusal to pay homage to Caesar as Lord that would be most likely to provoke the kind of aggressive reaction towards the Jews that we see in the message to Smyrna. The central conflict that Revelation seeks to depict is between the Lamb who is King of Kings, and the beast who is not but who says that he is, with the question of which one the saints will choose to worship being the crucial decision that John presses them to recognise and to make. With this dualistic framework in mind, if the Jews had become unwilling for Christians to share the arrangement that allowed them to stop short of emperor-worship without incurring punishment from the Romans, and much more if they were actively bringing charges against the Christians (such as that they were now illegally refusing to worship the emperor), then we can see how John would view them as fundamentally allied with the purposes of the devil as a synagogue of Satan.

We can summarise, then, that John perceives a link between Jewish antagonism and Roman persecution; perhaps he was predisposed to do so because of that pattern in the

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More recent surveys may be found in Philip A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life Among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 77 (2000), pp. 99-121; Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (eds J. C. Exum, J. Økland, and S. D. Moore; *The Bible in the Modern World*, 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp. 102-105; Michael Naylor, "The Roman Imperial Cult and Revelation," *Currents in Biblical Research* 18/2 (2010), pp. 207-239. Looking westward, Wright calls the imperial cult "the fastest growing religion in the Mediterranean world" (N. T. Wright, "Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans" [[http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Paul\\_Caesar\\_Romans.htm#\\_ednref6](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Paul_Caesar_Romans.htm#_ednref6)]. Originally in C. Bartholomew [ed.], *A Royal Priesthood: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically* [Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002], pp. 173-193).

<sup>22</sup> Thompson suggests an additional, ethical reason for John's contempt towards the Jews: "he is also condemning Jewish accommodation to Greek city life, just as he condemns Christians who do the same (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; cf. 2:14, 21)" (Leonhard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], p. 138). Such condemnation would certainly flow easily from John's outlook, but the messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia do not specifically seize on Jewish assimilation and so it should not be seen as constituting the heart of the matter.

passion of the Lamb. But does he look to the past or to the future for this connection? Have the Smyrnaean saints already suffered official action against any of their number, or does John only anticipate this development on the basis of current tensions that are confined to the Jews themselves? Sweet affirms that “they [the Jews] are in league with the Roman power; their attacks would have no cutting edge but for the Roman sword,”<sup>23</sup> whereas G. B. Caird holds that although Jewish hostility incited other parts of the community against the Christians, it fell short of catalysing Roman persecution:

We may judge from what John says that there has been as yet no official action taken by the Roman government against the church. . . . The Christians have been subjected to active hostility from the community, instigated by the Jews. Their poverty must have been due in part to mob violence and looting (cf. Heb. x. 35), in part to the difficulty of making a living in an antagonistic environment.<sup>24</sup>

The reason that Caird precludes official Roman action from the Smyrnaeans’ past experience is that “Even when Polycarp was burnt alive some sixty or seventy years later [more if Titus dating accurate], he was only twelfth in the combined roll of martyrs for Smyrna and Philadelphia.”<sup>25</sup> The likelihood that no Smyrnaeans have yet been martyred at the time of Revelation is already suggested by the fact that although the book as a whole holds martyrdom in high esteem, of all the messages to the churches it is only that to Pergamum which is able to hold up an example of an actual martyr, Antipas (2:13). Execution is warned to be ahead of the Smyrnaeans but is not hinted to lie behind. But this is not sufficient to establish that Rome has had no prior role in the existing friction between the church at Smyrna and the ‘synagogue of Satan,’ since the ‘affliction and poverty’ that the church has already suffered could easily include official sanctions and beatings. It is possible that the past hardship consisted entirely and directly of Jewish antagonism in the form of social and economic discrimination,<sup>26</sup> but

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<sup>23</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (ed. H. Chadwick; Black’s New Testament Commentaries; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Caird, *Revelation*, p. 35. The source text reads, “Such was the lot of the blessed Polycarp, who though he was, together with those from Philadelphia, the twelfth martyr in Smyrna, is alone especially remembered by all, so that he is spoken of in every place, even by the heathen” (*Mart. Polyc.* xix. 1). It is interesting that Smyrna and Philadelphia are the two cities singled out in connection with martyrdom here, when these are the locations of the two churches in conflict with ‘those who say they are Jews and are not’ (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

<sup>26</sup> Along the lines of *t. Hull. 2.20-12*, which Dunn notes “seems to indicate that a key weapon used by the rabbis against the Jewish Christians was ostracism” (James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*

the confident expectation of imminent Roman persecution suggests that at minimum the seeds of such a scenario are already present, so that what is warned to be ahead of the church at Smyrna is not an entirely new phenomenon but only an escalation of the troubles that they have already begun to endure.

## THE MESSAGE TO PHILADELPHIA

Jesus' self-reference in the opening words of the message to Philadelphia does not reuse any of the language of chapter 1 as precisely as in some of the other messages, but it does thematically echo and develop the description there of him as the one who holds the keys of death and Hades (1:18). The 'key' though is now 'the key of David' (3:7), casting Jesus as the new Eliakim by virtue of a reference to Isa. 22:22. This is the sole example of 'Informal, Indirectly Prophetic (Typological) Fulfillment Uses of the Old Testament' that Beale explores in a section thus named.<sup>27</sup> We will have cause to give the category of typology more consideration a little later, so here we will note only that if Christ is the antitype of Eliakim then the church is the antitype of Israel. The application of the opening/shutting motif to the Philadelphians in v. 8 ("I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut") suggests already a particular new significance to Isaiah's imagery:

The quotation could be a polemic against the local synagogue, which claimed that only those worshiping within their doors could be considered God's true people and which may even have excommunicated Christian Jews. . . . Ethnic Israel, which was claiming to be the divine agent wielding the power of salvation and judgment, no longer held this position. Christ's followers could be assured that the doors to the true synagogue were open to them, whereas the doors remained closed to those who rejected Christ.<sup>28</sup>

It is unnecessary to interpret the door imagery narrowly along these lines—the message to Laodicea will associate an open door with intimacy and fellowship between Christ

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*Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* [London: SCM Press, 1991], p. 237). Among other prohibitions and polemics, it rules that "We [Jews] do not sell to them [Jewish Christians], nor do we buy from them. We do not take from them, nor do we give to them, and we do not teach their sons a craft."

<sup>27</sup> G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (ed. S. E. Porter; JSNTSup., 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 116-121.

<sup>28</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, p. 284.

and the church without sign of an anti-synagogue subtext (3:20)—but the note of polemical ecclesiology implicit in the Christ-Eliakim type is then dramatically amplified in 3:9, as we hear that “I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you” (3:9). The reappearance of the phrases τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ and τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι that were used to censure the Jewish community in the message to Smyrna suggests that there might have been comparable tension in Philadelphia. On this occasion, though, there is no mention of ‘slander’ and instead of being promised further trials, Jesus says that he will keep the faithful Philadelphians from the hour of trial that is to come on the whole world (3:10). Perhaps this could be because the message to Philadelphia envisages not an escalation of the conflict with the Jews (and therefore the Romans) as does the message to Smyrna, but an unexpected resolution whereby the Jews “will come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you” (3:9) This represents a role-reversal of the cherished hope and expectation that one day the nations will prostrate themselves before Israel and her God (e.g. Ps. 86:9; Isa. 45:15; 49:23; 60:14).<sup>29</sup> What then is the thrust of the allusion as it has been creatively rehabilitated in the present text? Beale sees future Jewish conversion as firmly in view, citing the missionary associations of the ‘open door’ image elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col 4:3; Acts 14:27), and suggesting that these associations are brought to bear on the fate of the synagogue of Satan by virtue of the way that ἰδοὺ διδῶ (3:9a) parallels ἰδοὺ δέδωκα (3:8a).<sup>30</sup> Consequently, “The force of the Isaiah allusions shows that this is not to be a begrudging recognition by the Jews.”<sup>31</sup> This is in opposition to e.g. Sweet:

It is attractive to see here a prediction that the Jews will be *converted*. . . . If he had written ‘I will make them bow down *before God*’ (cf. 15:4), this interpretation might stand, but *before your feet* must mean Christian vindication, not Jewish conversion; and the sense of ‘access’ for *door*, which is indicated by

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<sup>29</sup> These are the texts most closely echoed by the language of Rev. 3:9, but as Draper says, “The belief that, in the final age, all nations would be gathered in to Jerusalem runs like a golden thread through the prophetic writings” (J. A. Draper, “The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1-17,” *JSNT* 19 [1983], pp. 133-147 [135-136]. Cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-4; Tob. 13.9-11; *Ps. Sol.* 17:32-36.

<sup>30</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>31</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, p. 288.

Christ's title, is confirmed by the promises in v. 12 of secure belonging in the New Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup>

My judgment is that Beale places too much emphasis on Jewish conversion, and Sweet too little. In reply to the former, there is a distinct limit to what may be established by an appeal to 'the force of the Isaiah allusions' when the most striking feature of the allusion is precisely the way that John turns the force of the source text absolutely upside down. Now it is the Jews who will flock to the (church drawn from the) nations rather than the other way round, and so if the original flocking was to be ungrudging then how can we be know whether that feature, too, has not been inverted? After all, although Isaiah may take satisfaction in emphasising that the nations who will come are "the descendants of those who oppressed you . . . and all who despised you" (Isa. 60:14), this does not come close in savageness to the description of the Philadelphian Jews as τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ. In agreement with Sweet, then, the phrase προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου does indeed confirm that it is supremely the vindication of the church that constitutes the core of the promise. But we cannot assent to Sweet's corollary that this means Jewish conversion is not in view. For what else could effect the scenario that the message to Philadelphia envisages? Jewish recognition of Christ himself is a necessary precondition to learning that "I [Christ] have loved you" (3:9). In other words, Jewish salvation is inescapably implied, but functions only as a means to an end: it is a mere technicality in the process of vindicating the faithful witness of the church at Philadelphia. Perhaps the best we may say of being made to bow down at the feet of the church is that it is better than being struck dead (2:23), and that this might suggest fractionally more latent warmth towards the Jews than towards 'Jezebel' and her 'children.'

## ANSWERING FRANKFURTER

We will finish this chapter by defending one of its key assumptions, which is that τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ is John's designation for the Jewish community in both Smyrna and Philadelphia. This will be done in dialogue with the challenge to that assumption

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<sup>32</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 102. This interpretation is followed by e.g. Frankfurter, who refers to the scenario envisaged simply as 'eschatological humiliation' for the Jews ("Jews or Not?" p. 404); Aune, who translates 3:9b as "I will force them to come and grovel at your feet" (David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* [ed. R. P. Martin *et al.*; Word Biblical Commentary, 52a; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997], p. 228).

that comes (for example) from David Frankfurter in a 2001 article in *Harvard Theological Review*.<sup>33</sup> He defends the viewpoint that

. . . the “so-called Jews” would have been Gentiles who were observing some degree of Jewish practice according to Pauline instruction; hence “acting the Jew.” Like “Jezebel” and the “Nicolaitans,” these opponents were part of the Pauline or neo-Pauline wing of the Jesus movement. But while the former opponents are objectionable to John because of their teachings, the “so-called Jews” are objectionable because they are Gentiles who are insufficiently observant of Jewish practice. Both of John’s objections revolve around issues of purity—purity in preparation for the parousia, purity for intimacy with the heavenly world, and purity necessary for receiving visions of Christ.<sup>34</sup>

This conclusion is built on shaky foundations. Frankfurter begins by seeking to undermine the standard idea that the letter to Smyrna reflects a background of Jewish antagonism, a reconstruction which he considers “an elaborate historical scenario” assembled out of “obscure sectarian rants.”<sup>35</sup> It is true, as he is quick to emphasise and as we have already acknowledged, that external evidence for Jewish persecution of Christians at Smyrna in the first century is ‘sparse’ and that such a background “must be reconstructed more on the basis of what is historically likely than on what the [external] texts actually claim.”<sup>36</sup> However, he seems to take the need to rely on what is historically likely as evidence that the Jewish persecution scenario is historically unlikely. This does not follow; rather, and as we have seen, the legal context of Rome’s reliance on private prosecution and the way that this role falls to the Jews in Acts 17 and 18 makes the classic reconstruction of the situation at Smyrna historically comparable and historically plausible.

Turning now to the text of Revelation itself, Frankfurter plays down the extent to which the letter to Smyrna suggests a background of tensions with Jews in the following words:

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<sup>33</sup> Frankfurter, “Jews or Not?” pp. 403–425.

<sup>34</sup> Frankfurter, “Jews or Not?” p. 422.

<sup>35</sup> Frankfurter, “Jews or Not?” p. 404.

<sup>36</sup> Frankfurter, “Jews or Not?” p. 406.

Tribulation and persecution language belongs to a category of motifs that characterize apocalypticism and do not necessarily bespeak historical experience. Thus John's references to "slander," imminent suffering, and imprisonment should not necessarily be taken as accurate indicators of historical events but rather as part of an overall "tribulation scenario" into which his opponents are also woven.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst it is true that Revelation sets the characters and experiences that are familiar to the recipients in a cosmic, apocalyptic context and narrative, that familiarity must not be lost if the strategy is to have its desired effect. If the Smyrnaeans cannot identify with their own situation as it is presented in the message addressed to them, then why should they believe any prediction made by the one who claims to 'know' their affliction and poverty? Thus we are compelled to assume that the mention of 'slander' would have been intelligible to the Smyrnaeans as part of what they had experienced in the past, even if that word does represent an emotive interpretation or exaggeration of reality. This is consistent with the other messages, where the situations or 'deeds' that Jesus claims to 'know' may be clothed in colourful rhetoric, but at heart reflect the dynamics of localised power struggles. The idea that members of the synagogue might have been provoking Roman or community persecution towards the Smyrnaeans, resulting in their 'affliction and poverty,' is hardly a wild vision of epic tribulation. The same is true of the warning that "the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until the point of death and I will give you the crown of life" (2:10). There is a degree of predicted escalation here from the current situation of the Smyrnaeans—affliction has given way to death and the synagogue of Satan has given way to the direct agency of Satan himself—but again the events envisaged are by no means so fantastical as to merit being consigned to the realm of hyperbolic apocalyptic fantasy totally divorced from the actual situation of the Smyrnaeans.

In summary, recognising with Frankfurter that John does use emotive apocalyptic language and imagery to communicate his message (another example would be the Daniel-esque 10 days of the Smyranean's predicted imprisonment) should not at all invite us to automatically conclude that the subject of the communication is unreal; this must be established on a case-by-case basis, and in the specific case of the message to

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<sup>37</sup> Frankfurter, "Jews or Not?" p. 407.

Smyrna, there is no good reason to doubt or seek alternative interpretations of its clear and plausible implication that the Smyrnaeans had begun to suffer affliction at the agency or instigation of the Jews.

Having attempted to undermine the traditional reconstruction of Jewish-Christian tensions at Smyrna, Frankfurter then moves on to propose that ‘those who say that they are Jews and are not’ were Gentile believers who (as adherents to the Pauline position on idol meat and marriage) were not sufficiently pure for John’s strict sense of *halakhah*.<sup>38</sup> John is seen as “not only Jewish but Jewish in a sectarian, rigorous sense. His visions of the heavenly Christ and his Jesus devotion seem indeed to be extensions, or consequences, of his Jewish hyperpurity.”<sup>39</sup> This conception of John and its application to the interpretation of the message to Smyrna are both highly questionable. There is undoubtedly a strong theme of purity running through Revelation, but it is (like every other theme that John uses) radically Lamb-oriented. The reason that the great multitude are robed in white is because “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14); like him they have been faithful even to death. Frankfurter appeals to the detail that the 144,000 had “not defiled themselves with women” (14:4) as evidence that John is sympathetic to the ‘elaborate extensions of Jewish purity laws’ that characterise the Qumran writings, 1 Enoch, and the Testament of Levi.<sup>40</sup> He references Richard Bauckham’s purity-oriented ‘holy army’ interpretation of this feature, but crucially without mentioning its *symbolic* function as Bauckham perceives it:

John no doubt similarly views the Christian calling as such to involve readiness for and engagement in the Lamb’s holy war. This does not mean that he expects Christians to be literally celibate, like Essenes, but that he uses lifelong celibacy for the sake of ritual purity as a *metaphor* for a characteristic of Christian life.<sup>41</sup>

But even if the celibacy motif here were taken literally, it would be inappropriate to allow it determinative influence in the process of reconstructing the Smyranean

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<sup>38</sup> In this context *halakhah* refers to those Jewish laws which are seen to be incumbent also on Gentile followers of Jesus.

<sup>39</sup> Frankfurter, “Jews or Not?” p. 412.

<sup>40</sup> Frankfurter, “Jews or Not?” p. 410.

<sup>41</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 231. Emphasis handily original. The point is reinforced in the conclusion to the chapter: “Revelation makes lavish use of holy war *language* while transferring its *meaning* to non-military means of triumph over evil” (p. 233).

situation, such that John's problem with 'those who say they are Jews and are not' is construed as being their failure (as Pauline Gentile believers) to adequately obey *halakhic* purity laws. It could certainly be argued that a *halakhic* consciousness is present in the messages to Thyatira and Pergamum, since they both specifically address the questions of idol meat and sexual purity; but this only highlights the fact that no such concern is found in the message to Smyrna. If John's problem with 'those who say they are Jews and are not' is centred around purity related to food and sex then why is there no indication whatsoever that that is the case? Instead, the theme of the message is persecution, which only makes sense as being at the instigation of Jews who consider themselves as distinct from the Smyrnaean saints rather than Gentile believers who consider themselves part of the same group.

This leads onto the final problem with Frankfurter's argumentation, which is his insistence that the vitriolic designation of the perceived opponents as a 'synagogue of Satan' is commensurate only with the strength of feeling aroused by sectarian infighting.<sup>42</sup> The sociological premise is deftly defended, but its application to the perceived opponents in Smyrna totally runs aground on the rocks of the attack on Rome that will occupy much of the rest of Revelation, and that employs some of the most savage language and images of all. In his concluding reflections Frankfurter recognises the problem ("how could the greater Roman empire be an "intimate enemy" like the Pauline Jesus believers?"<sup>43</sup>), but his answer is unsatisfactory:

Perhaps we should see in both polemics a larger concern for separation from the seductions and impurity of this world in order to join the heavenly saints. Certainly the characterization of Babylon/Rome as a whore (17-18) and the second Beast as a deceptive prophet (13) reflect such sentiments, such boundary formation. From this perspective, the Pauline believers who were Gentile (despite Jewish appearances) and adopted "assimilationist" practices, would be only the most intimate form of the danger unclear boundaries posed to the community.<sup>44</sup>

This admirably reinforces the purity themes that Frankfurter has previously sought to develop, but it does nothing to block the blow that the virulence of the polemic against

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<sup>42</sup> Frankfurter, "Jews or Not?" pp. 412-416.

<sup>43</sup> Frankfurter, "Jews or Not?" pp. 424.

<sup>44</sup> Frankfurter, "Jews or Not?" pp. 424.

distant Rome strikes against the idea that the not-Jews must be an intimate part of the Jesus movement since they are so bitingly reviled. Finally, if Frankfurter's hypothesis were accurate then we would have to wonder why the angels of the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia were not arraigned for accommodating the poisonous Pauline believers when the preservation of the community against unwelcome teaching is such an urgent concern of the other messages. The particular contrast in response to the not-Jews and the Nicolaitans confirms that the former are viewed as an external threat (as non-Christian Jews) rather than an internal cancer, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza observes:

Whereas John praises these two churches [Smyrna and Philadelphia] for resisting the persecution of the so-called Jews, he does not criticize the other churches for giving in to persecution by the Nicolaitans, but for being invaded by them. Whereas some Jews endanger the church by persecution from the outside, the Nicolaitans endanger them from within by means of "heretical" teachings.<sup>45</sup>

In all, then, we are left with no good reason to reject or revise our reconstruction of the situation at Smyrna, which is that the Christians there had probably begun to feel the sting of sanctions imposed on them by Roman government, and that such action had been (at least in John's perception) enacted, encouraged or actively enabled by the local Jewish community.

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<sup>45</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 118.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE 144,000

If we are to gain a fair picture of the attitudes towards Jews and Israel in Revelation then the next passage that demands to be treated is in chapter 7. Here the sequence of unsealing the Lamb's scroll is interrupted after the sixth seal has been broken, in order for us to hear an articulation of "one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel" (7:4). This has sometimes been taken to show that despite his castigation of the 'synagogue of Satan' at Smyrna and Philadelphia, in this passage John reserves a special place exclusively for certain Jews, "the godly remnant of Israel on earth."<sup>1</sup> This will be refuted and other avenues of interpretation explored.

#### NOT ONLY JEWS

There are a number of good reasons for interpreting the 144,000 as representing the church rather than being literally from the twelve tribes of Israel. Some of these stem from our very first introduction to the group, as an angel ascends from the rising of the sun and instructs the four angels who have power to damage the earth and sea that they are not to do so "until we have marked the servants [δούλους] of our God with a seal [σφραγίσωμεν] on their foreheads" (7:3). Here the word σφραγίσωμεν confirms what the word δούλους suggests: that the group to be described will represent all of the saints and not only Jews or Jewish Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, "Revelation," Chapter 7: The Saints of the Great Tribulation.

## Sealed Servants

The appearance of the word *δοῦλος* in 7:3 might suggest an inclusive multi-ethnic rather than Jewish-exclusive group because that is how it functions in its prominent appearance in the title of the book: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to show his servants [*δούλοις*] what must soon take place” (1:1). Since Revelation turns out to be addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor—churches with a heritage in the Pauline mission to Gentiles and certainly now including Gentiles within their congregations—the word *δοῦλος* is clearly not restricted to Jews in this important first instance. We find similar usage of *δοῦλος* to refer to the saints at large in 2:20; 11:18; 19:5; 22:3, 6.<sup>2</sup> The other uses of *δοῦλος* focus particularly on individuals (John, 1:1; Moses, 15:3; John’s angelic guide, 19:10; 22:9), martyrs (6:11; 19:2) and prophets (10:7; possibly 11:18; 22:6), but never with the function of demarcating ethnic boundaries. This means that if *δοῦλος* in 7:3 were limited to Jews then it would be an uncharacteristic usage, and especially if it was referring only to Jews regardless of their relationship to Christ. That we do *not* have such uncharacteristic usage of *δοῦλος* here is strongly suggested by its association with the word *σφραγίζω*, as we shall now see.

These *δούλους* are to be ‘sealed’ (*σφραγίζω*) on their foreheads. This is strongly reminiscent of Ezek. 9:4, where God instructs an angel to “Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.”<sup>3</sup> It is only those so marked who will escape the judgment of God that is to be meted out by his six executioners, which firmly suggests that the seal in Revelation has a similarly protective function. But against what exactly? At no point after this episode do we see the winds unleashed, which leads Boring to conclude that “This image is forgotten; John never returns to tell of a plague of hurricanes or tornadoes. All his attention is focused on the sealing of God’s servants.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is debated whether *δοῦλος* in 11:18 and 22:6 refers rather to the prophets specifically, but as Beale comments, “In the new age of the latter days the Spirit endows all in the covenant community with a prophetic status in their relationship with God. . . . Furthermore, 19:10 affirms that “the *testimony* of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Therefore, the entire church carries a prophetic stamp” (*Revelation*, p. 617).

<sup>3</sup> Boring notes that ‘sealing’ also “has particular overtones within the Pauline stream of tradition to which John and his churches belong. Incorporation into the body of Christ by baptism (1 Cor. 12:13) was sometimes pictured in Pauline churches as the seal which stamped the new Christian as belonging to God (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30)” (Boring, *Revelation*, p. 129). Moyise judges that this association is “inevitable” but mistaken (*Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 71); likewise Caird: “there is no thought of baptism” here (*Revelation*, p. 96). Since John’s symbols are so frequently so multi-layered perhaps there is little harm in leaving open the possibility of a reference to baptism, but the protection motif stemming from the Ezekiel background is certainly primary.

<sup>4</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, p. 128.

It is far preferable to accept instead Caird's identification of the four winds of the earth with the four horsemen of the previous chapter (6:1-8) on the basis of their close association in Zech. 6:1-8,<sup>5</sup> i.e. to interpret the sealing in chapter 7 to *precede* the events of chapter 6. This sidesteps Moyise's comment that the seal "does not appear to be protection against physical attacks, given that they have already had to endure the effects of the first six seals,"<sup>6</sup> though this does not dictate that we must see physical protection as the heart of the seal's function. Caird holds that its specific purpose is to prevent those sealed from dying prematurely in the ravages of the four horsemen instead of attaining their honourable destiny of being martyred by the beast,<sup>7</sup> but it is problematic to insist on this too narrowly in light of the role of the seal in chapter 9. If its purpose there is only to prevent the would-be martyrs from dying prematurely then why does it protect them against the locusts, when inflicting death is expressly *not* within their power (9:5-6)? Overall it makes more sense to see the primary function of the seal as a spiritual protection, empowering the followers of the Lamb to remain faithful to him even unto death.

We gain more information about the seal-bearers in chapter 14, which sees the reappearance of the 144,000 (14:1). That it is the same group in view is sometimes contested in view of the missing definite article that might be expected to be present in 14:1 if this were a second reference to the group already introduced in chapter 7. But as I. T. Beckwith replies,

The absence of the art. in the first mention of the 144,000 [in ch. 14] shows only that the writer does not here specifically point out the identity of these with those before mentioned (7:1-8), though he may have the same persons in mind. The indefiniteness is characteristic of visions; e.g. in 17:3 'a woman' is the one before mentioned in v. 1; in 15:2 'a sea of glass' is that mentioned in 4:6; in 14:14 the 'one like unto a son of man' is the one mentioned in 1:13.<sup>8</sup>

In a book that uses numbers so strategically, the 144,000 of chapter 14 must be viewed as the same group as in chapter 7. The new information that they "had his [the Lamb's] name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (14:1) is significant. That the

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<sup>5</sup> Caird, *Revelation*, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>7</sup> Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 94-98.

<sup>8</sup> Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 650.

names are ‘written on their foreheads’ sufficiently establishes the equivalence of these names with the seal ‘on their foreheads’ in 7:3, thus also confirming the equivalence of the two groups. That the seal is now seen as a name (or names) confirms that this group is not limited to Jews. This name-mark has already been promised to all those who overcome at Philadelphia (3:12), and something similar to the overcomers at Pergamum (2:17). It is clearly the counterpart to the mark of the beast, which is his name (13:17; 14:11), specified as being given to “all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave” (13:16). It would be an odd imbalance if the corresponding seal of the name of God were given only to a select group of Jews, rather than to all who refused to worship the beast and take his mark. Finally and decisively, Rev. 22:3-4 picks up the ‘servants of God’ designation from the 144,000 in chapter 7, the ‘name of God’ image from the 144,000 in chapter 14, and the ‘on their foreheads’ phrase from both. This is further evidence that the two groups are the same, and that the 144,000 is not an exclusive group made up only of Jews as in the literal sense of its introduction in chapter 7, but represents the whole people of God. Rev. 22:3-4 is the most full and final image of consummation in the whole book, the blessed hope held out to all the recipients and all the saints through all time. In its light we can clearly see that the 144,000 ‘sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel’ is not meant literally, but is figurative for the whole people of God, all those who in the end ‘will see his face’ (22:4).

Further indication that those sealed in 7:4 do not represent Jews exclusively is produced when we give consideration to the only other time that the words σφραγίζω and μέτωπον appear in combination. This is in 9:4, where it is only those who bear the seal of God on their foreheads that will escape the five-month torment of the fearsome locusts. Walvoord’s comments on this episode inadvertently pull the rug from under his previous identification of the 144,000 as literally Jews:

Apparently the entire human race is open to their [the locusts’] activity except those who are sealed by God in their foreheads. This obviously excludes [i.e. protects] the 144,000 of Revelation 7, and the protection may extend as far as this plague is concerned to all who know the Lord in that day. . . . It would seem

improbable that any true believer in that day would be subject to the torment of the locusts; the torment is rather a judgment upon Christ-rejecting men.<sup>9</sup>

Walvoord thus rightly struggles to believe that protection attributed to τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ in 9:4 could really fail to include faithful Gentiles, though this places him in an awkward position as he has previously interpreted the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7 to refer only to Jews.<sup>10</sup> His response is to posit that the scope of the seal's protection must have been silently extended in the space between chapter 7 and chapter 9, so that by the time we reach the onslaught of the locusts it includes 'all who know the Lord in that day.' Since there is no indication in the text that such an extension was required or performed, it is more simple and natural to hold rather that the seal always pertained to all of the saints of whatever race, and hence that both the enumeration and ethnicity of the 144,000 in 7:4-8 is symbolic rather than literal.

## FACTORING IN THE MULTITUDE

One argument for taking the 144,000 as being literally from the twelve tribes of Israel is that their sealing is juxtaposed with the contrasting vision of a great multitude (7:9-17), which is specifically said to be innumerable and drawn from every nation (7:9):

[T]he contradistinction is as plain and positive as words can make it, between the sealed numbers out of Israel and the innumerable multitude from all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues. So that the mystical theory, when closely examined, cannot escape the charge of absurdity; for it identifies the sealed Israelites with the palm-bearing Gentiles, in spite of the evident and expressed contrasts on the face of the chapter.<sup>11</sup>

This argument fails to convince not only because of the general hermeneutical problems that are common to all such literal interpretation (see 'Introduction to Revelation' above), but also because the pattern of *hearing* (the call for the sealing of the 144,000) followed by *seeing* (the innumerable multitude) is modeled after the same pattern as it

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<sup>9</sup> Walvoord, "Revelation," Chapter 5: Demonic Torment Loosed upon the Earth (9:3-6).

<sup>10</sup> Walvoord, "Revelation," Chapter 7: The Sealing of the Twelve Tribes (7:4-8).

<sup>11</sup> William Kelly, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (London: W. H. Broom, 1871), p. 158. The page is rather brashly titled 'Absurdity of Identifying Israel and the Gentiles'!

pertains to the Lion and the Lamb in 5:5-6.<sup>12</sup> That we are invited to see the same dynamic also in the juxtaposition of the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude is suggested not only by the parallel in the hearing/seeing motif but also in the particular details that link the Lion with the former and the Lamb with the latter, as Bauckham observes:

To the Lion *of the tribe of Judah* corresponds to a list of the sealed of the tribes of Israel, headed by those *of the tribe of Judah*. To the Lamb standing (5:6), who has ransomed people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (5:9), corresponds the multitude from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the Lamb.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of the Lion and the Lamb the two images represent the same person (Jesus), which is sufficient to take the sting out of the idea that the two groups in chapter 7 must be fundamentally distinct since they are described in contrasting terms. However, Moyise forces us to confront the reality that it is too conveniently simplistic to assume that Lamb has altogether replaced Lion.<sup>14</sup> Rather, the pastoral and sacrificial associations pertaining to the image of the Lamb subvert the image of the Lion as messianic conqueror, but without suppressing it altogether; in reading through the rest of Revelation it is quite clear from the ‘surplus of violence’ that the roar of the conquering Lion still resounds in the bleating of the sacrificial Lamb.<sup>15</sup> This warns us away from assuming that the image of the 144,000 is so comprehensively superseded by the image of the great multitude that there is nothing to be gained by considering the function of the former. Thus with the help of the second appearance of the 144,000 in chapter 14, Bauckham interprets them as the church symbolically viewed as the eschatological army of the Lion, set in the narrowly Jewish framework of that tradition

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<sup>12</sup> Caird brilliantly illumines the hearing/seeing hermeneutical structure as it pertains to the Lion and the Lamb (*Revelation*, pp. 73-75), but does not consider it in connection with the 144,000 and the great multitude (as does e.g. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 215-216).

<sup>13</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 215-216. Emphasis original.

<sup>14</sup> So, famously, Caird: “It is almost as if John were saying to us at one point after another: “Wherever the Old Testament says “Lion”, read “Lamb”” (*Revelation*, p. 75).

<sup>15</sup> Steve Moyise, “Does the Lion Lie down with the Lamb?” in S. Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke), pp. 181-194; Moyise, *Evoking Scripture*, pp. 96-110. He seeks to challenge and correct the frequent tendency to overstate the hermeneutical traction of the Lamb on the Lion in Revelation. A rarer example of skewed *understatement* of the same is provided by Geysler, who attempts to argue that “the book’s predominant concern is with the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel, their restoration as a twelve-tribe kingdom, in a renewed and purified city of David, under the rule of the victorious ‘Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David’ (5.5; 22.16)” (Albert Geysler, “The Twelve Tribes in Revelation: Judean and Judeo-Christian Apocalypticism,” *New Testament Studies* 28/3 [1982], pp. 388-399 [389]).

but then pictured anew from a different perspective as the vision turns to the innumerable multitude:

By reinterpreting the militant Messiah and his army John does not mean simply to set aside Israel's hopes for eschatological triumph: in the Lamb and his followers these hopes are both fulfilled and transformed. The Lamb really does conquer, though not by force of arms, and his followers really do share his victory, though not by violence. The combination of the Lamb and the 144,000 conveys the sense that there is a holy war to be fought, but to be fought and won by sacrificial death.<sup>16</sup>

This follows Caird in arguably making the reinterpretative power of the Lamb too absolute—Moyise points out that it is difficult to see what role self-sacrifice plays in (e.g.) the Lamb's coming conquest of the confederacy of Kings that will make war on him (17:14)<sup>17</sup>—but the relevance of the persuasive 'holy army' interpretation of the 144,000 for our present interest is that it is able to neatly account for *why* the church is pictured in the guise of Israel here: the roll call of the twelve tribes in 7:4-8 reflects the military census of Numbers 1.<sup>18</sup> With this we are left with no room or reason to interpret the 144,000 as preserving for literal Israel a special place in the pages of the Apocalypse.

### **Feast of Tabernacles**

There remains another way of looking at the relationship between the 144,000 and the great multitude to explore. This we may do with reference to J. A. Draper's 1983 article dealing with the influence of Zechariah 14 on Revelation 7.<sup>19</sup> He affirms the recognition of Sweet and others that the way that the great multitude is pictured "is dominated by

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<sup>16</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 230. Frederick J. Murphy observes that "The messages to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 are a realistic view of the church, but now that the author has passed into eschatological visions, he adopts an idealised apocalyptic view" (*Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* [eds H. C. Kee and J. A. Overman; The New Testament in Context; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998], p. 222).

<sup>17</sup> Moyise, "Does the Lion Lie down with the Lamb?" p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 217-218. The holy army interpretation of the 144,000 also sheds some light on why they are commended as not having "defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins" (14:4): this reflects the ritual purity incumbent upon Israel's soldiers at war (Deut. 23:9-10; 1 Sam. 21:5; 2 Sam. 11:11) (p. 231).

<sup>19</sup> Draper, "Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles."

the imagery of the Feast of Tabernacles.”<sup>20</sup> The palm branches of 7:9 are a telltale mark of this, but the heart of the analogy is the promise of the eschatological intimacy between God and his people as he tabernacles with them, summed up here in the declaration that “the one who is seated on the throne will shelter [σκηνώσει] them” (7:15).

What Draper convincingly shows is that the influence of Feast of Tabernacles imagery on Revelation 7 is not general but is based specifically on its function in Zechariah 14, where a sequence of events with multiple resonances with the storyline of Revelation results in the declaration that “Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year by year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the festival of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16). Draper argues that if the thrust of 7:9-17 is that “the great multitude ‘which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues,’ representing the ‘survivors’ of the Gentiles, comes up to the heavenly Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles,”<sup>21</sup> then the corresponding conclusion is that “The 144,000, representing the fulness of Israel, have taken the place of the Levites in the temple service of the Feast.”<sup>22</sup> He notes that this would also explain the singing and purity motifs in 14:1-5.<sup>23</sup> These observations are convincing, but the conclusion that “If the perspective of Zechariah 14 is the correct one, then the 144,000 must represent Jews or at least Jewish Christians”<sup>24</sup> is not, because it fatally fails to take into account the radical inversion of the pilgrim nations tradition already wrought by 3:9. There, as we have seen, it is the Jews who will come and bow down at the feet of the church and not the other way around. It is intolerable to suppose that chapter 7 could revert back to the original Jewish nationalistic form of the expectation once it has been so savagely transformed.<sup>25</sup>

What then is the function of Zechariah’s Feast of Tabernacles prediction in Revelation 7? To answer that question it will help to recall that Richard Bauckham has convincingly shown that Revelation contains a vision and strategy for ‘the conversion

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<sup>20</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 151.

<sup>21</sup> Draper, “Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles,” p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> Draper, “Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles,” p. 136.

<sup>23</sup> Draper, “Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles,” pp. 136-137.

<sup>24</sup> Draper, “Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles,” p. 136.

<sup>25</sup> Moyise touches on the idea of the influence exerted on the interpretation of a particular passage by a prior passage in the same text (‘intratextuality’) in *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 126; Garro treats the same idea under the term ‘co-text’ (as a counterpart to historical context) as one of his primary methodological principles (*Revelation*, pp. 2-4).

of the nations.<sup>26</sup> Central to this is his analysis of the function of the scroll as it is revealed *in nuce* in chapter 11. We will explore this in more detail when we come to examine the place of Jerusalem in Revelation, but for now a summary will suffice:

God's kingdom will come, not simply by the deliverance of the church and the judgment of the nations, but primarily by the repentance of the nations as a result of the church's witness. The Lamb's conquest, which had the initial effect of redeeming the church from all the nations, has the aim of bringing all the nations to repentance and the worship of God. It achieves this aim as the followers of the Lamb participate in his victory by their suffering witness. This is what the scroll reveals.<sup>27</sup>

Applying this understanding to chapter 14, Bauckham holds that "The connexion between the martyrs as first fruits and the harvest as the gathering of the nations into the kingdom of God establishes that it is the faithful witness of the church, maintained as far as death, which leads to the conversion of the nations,"<sup>28</sup> and he sees the same idea encapsulated in 21:3:

Revelation takes up the most universalistic form of the hope of the Old Testament. It will not be Israel alone that will be God's people with whom he dwells. It will not even be the eschatological Israel, redeemed from every nation. Rather, as a result of the witness of the church called from every nation, all nations will be God's peoples.<sup>29</sup>

Alertness to this pattern whereby the church is first drawn from the nations, and then becomes an effective witness to those nations, helps us to understand the influence of Zechariah's Feast of Tabernacles/pilgrim nations motif on Revelation 7, but without it forcing us to conclude as Draper does that the 144,000 must therefore be 'Jews or at least Jewish Christians.' Rather, the 144,000 are the saints in John's present, possessing the esteemed position and priority that Zechariah and others expected the Jews to enjoy. They are the nucleus and firstfruits of the great multitude, which will assemble in the New Jerusalem to worship the Lamb as a result of their faithful witness even unto death.

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<sup>26</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 238-337.

<sup>27</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 258.

<sup>28</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 311.

They represent no reversion to Jewish nationalistic expectation, no bastion of promise for ethnic Israel, no caveat to the redefinition of the 'Jew' enacted in the letters to the churches. And having thus summed up the findings of our investigation into the *people* of Israel in Revelation, we may now turn our attention to the city of Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER 9

### JERUSALEM

Our gaze will presently come to rest on the crucial 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Revelation, but before that we must first deal with the controversial proposal that Babylon represents Jerusalem rather than Rome as is usually thought.

#### IS BABYLON JERUSALEM?

The ‘preterist’ reading of Revelation is that “the Apocalypse is only the reproduction and expansion of our Lord’s prophecy on the Mount of Olives, which is mainly occupied with the approaching judgment of Israel and Jerusalem.”<sup>1</sup> This Babylon-as-apostate-Jerusalem scheme is generally internally consistent and has streaks of attractive interpretative brilliance. However, on the whole it is simply not as convincing or coherent as the usual identification of Babylon with Rome. This will be demonstrated with reference to the main issues on which each viewpoint rests. We will take James Stuart Russell as our main dialogue partner; though others have defended the Babylon-as-Jerusalem reading much more recently, he generally does so in much more detail.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming* (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co., 1878), p. 485.

<sup>2</sup> Oddly given that it is absolutely foundational to his thesis, Gentry relegates a summary of arguments for the identity of Babylon with Jerusalem to a footnote (*Before Jerusalem Fell*, p. 240, n. 26), pointing the reader to more detailed cases made by other scholars, of whom Russell is the first listed. Chilton (*Days of Vengeance*) generally takes a less remonstrative tone than Russell, who seems constantly conscious that he is sailing against the prevailing winds of orthodox interpretation, resulting in detailed argumentation of every point made.

## **Things which must shortly come to pass**

Russell's opening argument against identifying Babylon as Rome is as follows:

Rome, Heathen or Christian, lies altogether outside the apocalyptic field of view, which is restricted to 'things which must shortly come to pass.' To wander into all ages and countries in the interpretation of these visions is absolutely forbidden by the express and fundamental limitations laid down in the book itself.<sup>3</sup>

Since 'Rome Christian' (i.e. the seat of the papacy) has far outlasted 'Rome Heathen,' it is the identification of Babylon with the former that is the principal target of Russell's reproach.<sup>4</sup> However, this is a reproach that emanates from a certain presupposition: that Revelation makes predictions which must be fulfilled by the historical occurrence of the events foreseen. The idea that Revelation intends to make historical predictions is not necessarily at odds with the historical-critical approach, but insisting on historical fulfillment as a criterion of interpretation certainly is. In other words, the historical fact that Rome did not fall in the manner and within the timescale seemingly predicted by Revelation should not force us to conclude that it could never have been Rome in view after all. Instead, we should seek to understand Revelation on its own terms, in its own time, and worry about problems of fulfillment and inspiration only after that task has been carried out as diligently and objectively as possible.

## **The Beast on which the Woman sits**

Revelation 17 is a crucial chapter for exploring the identity of Babylon, as it seems intended to provide some degree of explanation for the imagery and events that swirl around it on both sides. The city is pictured as a great harlot, sat atop a scarlet beast (17:1-3). We will address the significance of the harlot imagery below, but before that there is much to be learned from her relationship with the beast on which she sits.

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<sup>3</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, pp. 484-485.

<sup>4</sup> "There is an *a priori* presumption of the strongest kind against Rome being the Babylon of the Apocalypse. The improbability is great with regard even to Rome pagan, but far greater with regard to Rome papal" (Russell, *Parousia*, p. 484).

Revelation's sinister beast has long been identified with the Roman Empire, characterised by its emperors and especially by the infamous emperor Nero. The Roman character of the beast is evident throughout its career in Revelation, and not least in 17:9, where we are told that "the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also they are seven kings . . ." Despite the generally pervasive symbolism in Revelation, in this instance it is unjustified to take either the 'mountains' or the 'kings' purely symbolically. It is ironic that in a commentary that generally suffers from wooden literalism, Walvoord should in this instance opt for an inappropriately symbolic reading, holding that the heads as both mountains and kings stand for a succession of kingdoms that spans the breadth of human history.<sup>5</sup> The reason for the Walvoord's uncharacteristic reversion to symbolic interpretation is not difficult to discern: his commitment to literalism has been subjugated to his commitment to futurism. For Walvoord the woman-city cannot be anything as unfuturistic as ancient Rome, and so the mountains and kings must not point in that direction. Even if we were to accept a symbolic approach to the interpretation of the mountains and kings, it would be unjustified to see them as univocal interpretations of the heads of the beast, since each term receives its own qualification. It is the *mountains* on which the woman sits, and the *kings* of whom five have fallen; this suggests that the referents are distinct rather than synonymous. But the reason that we should not look for an overly symbolic interpretation in this case is that the mention of mountains and kings is part of an angelic explanation that *x* is *y*, where in other instances of the same formula elsewhere in chapter 17 and throughout Revelation, *y* would seem to be the literal referent of the image. The seven lampstands are the seven churches, and the seven stars are their angels (1:20; N.B. the literality of the sevens, whatever symbolic function they also have); the golden bowls full of incense are the prayers of the saints (5:8); fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (19:8), etc. The explanatory entities in these constructions do not lend themselves to further symbolic interpretation.<sup>6</sup> On principle of analogy, then, we should fully expect our 'mountains' and 'kings' to be more literal than symbolic.

The expectation of relative literalism is vindicated in practice. David Aune marshals various ancient sources to show that "The phrase "seven hills" or "seven mountains" was widely used during the late first century B.C. (after Varro) and the first century A.D.

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<sup>5</sup> Walvoord, "Revelation," Chapter 17: The Destruction of the Woman (17:16-18).

<sup>6</sup> 11:8 is a clear and interesting exception to this rule.

and would be instantly recognisable as a metaphor for Rome.”<sup>7</sup> The cogency of the king-heads as Roman emperors compounds and confirms the veracity of the Roman interpretation. By this point in Revelation we have already been given good reason to suppose that there is a special affinity between Nero and the beast, as discussed above. That the beast is associated especially with Nero is generally accepted by proponents of the Babylon-as-Jerusalem reading.<sup>8</sup> What is denied is that this automatically means that the ‘great city’ is Rome; instead, the picture of the woman sat atop the beast is said to signify that “apostate Judaism, centered in the City of Jerusalem, is supported by the Roman Empire.”<sup>9</sup> It is true that the harlot-city astride Nero and the emperors need not automatically be Rome, but it is *prima facie* by far the most probable identification, given the obvious and unique intimacy between Rome and its emperors. This is powerfully substantiated by Bauckham’s analysis of the ways in which Revelation takes up and adapts existing traditions relating to Nero’s survival and anticipated return.<sup>10</sup> He argues convincingly that two different Nero traditions lie behind chapters 13 and 17 of Revelation, and consideration of each of these traditions and the way that they are used in these two chapters provides two good reasons for understanding the relationship between the woman and beast on which she sits as pointing to an identification of the former as Rome and not Jerusalem.

Firstly, then, the tradition underlying Revelation 17, which finds its most comparable expression in the fifth Sibylline Oracle, is that

Nero is a threat to the Empire, returning to wreak vengeance on the city of Rome that had brought about his downfall. He embodies the hopes of the east for reversing the supremacy of west over east. In the Jewish forms of the legend,

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<sup>7</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (ed. R. P. Martin *et al.*; Word Biblical Commentary, 52c; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 944. Vout supplies that “The number seven, with all of the antiquity and mystery it implies, lent a universal significance to Rome’s geography which made the city comprehensible to those beyond its boundaries. Poets from Virgil to Claudian developed this, using the hills to celebrate the power and permanence of the city. . . . Poets pitted themselves against one another for a definitive version. The seven hills were the measure of Rome” (Caroline Vout, *The Hills of Rome: Signature of an Eternal City* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], pp. 229-230). She emphasises the way that Rome as the city of seven hills was a romantic concept with a life of its own rather than simply a stable empirical identification. But however negotiable or subjective the individual membership in the canon of Roman hills might have been, it is the currency of the concept of their sevenfold totality that John utilises in Rev. 17:9.

<sup>8</sup> Though Russell does attempt to judaize the beast somewhat, conceding its Neronic identity whilst arguing very tendentiously and unconvincingly that its seven heads as hills could be Jerusalem’s (*Parousia*, pp. 491-492), and that its kings are Nero’s viceroys in Judea (pp. 499-502).

<sup>9</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 175, n. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 423-431.

this picture is continued and Nero is seen as an instrument of divine vengeance on Rome, destroying the city of Rome and conquering the empire.<sup>11</sup>

The scenario envisaged by Revelation 17 clearly reflects this tradition, urging us to understand that the woman-city that begins perched on top of the beast and that is then hated and destroyed by him visualises the divine paradox that God will use the emperor who made Rome guilty of bloodshed as the agent of his judgment on that city. If the scenario had been reinvented so that it was Jerusalem and not Rome that was the victim of the beast, then the divergence from the tradition would need to be signaled in order to be recognisable. In the absence of any such indication, we must conclude that Rome retains its traditional position as the target and victim of Nero's diabolical return.

Bauckham then reflects that

In Revelation 13 it is quite the contrary. . . . The implication of the identification of the eschatological adversary with Nero is not here to identify the eschatological adversary with the threat to Rome but to identify the eschatological adversary with the power of Rome.<sup>12</sup>

The significance of this for understanding the relationship between the woman-city and the beast on which she sits in chapter 17 is that there she is described as being "drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus" (17:6). David Chilton heralds this as proof that she can be none other than Jerusalem, "the persecutor of the prophets *par excellence*."<sup>13</sup> Both Chilton and Russell support this identification with verses which highlight and condemn this unfortunate propensity in Jerusalem (Mt. 21:33-44; 23:29-35; Lk. 11:49-51; Acts 7:51-53). The harmonisation with external New Testament texts is attractive, but the weakness of the argument is the fact that this is where it must find support, rather than primarily on the basis of Revelation itself. If we stay at first within the bounds of Revelation, we will notice that 18:24 expands on the indictment of 17:6 with the information that the blood of the prophets and saints is mixed with the blood of "all who have been slaughtered on the earth." The Jews may be indirectly associated with persecution in 2:9-10, and the New Testament may furnish various examples of Jerusalem being associated with the persecution of the saints, but

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<sup>11</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 429.

<sup>12</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 429.

<sup>13</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 174.

what share does Jerusalem have in the blood of all who have been slaughtered on the earth? Rather, it is the *beast* that is the great warmonger and persecutor in Revelation, ‘the eschatological adversary’ of the people of God. The threat of persecution permeates all of Revelation, but it comes to a (wounded) head in chapter 13. The association of the beast there with the language and imagery not only of persecution but of war (13:4, 7<sup>14</sup>; cf. 11:7; 19:19) corresponds with the scale of the bloodshed that cries out Babylon’s guilt. The blood that is found in Babylon can only be that spilled by the beast, and this confirms the identification of the Woman as Rome, since there is scant reason to suppose that Jerusalem should be held accountable for the blood shed by the beast.

In conclusion, then, the relationship between the woman and the beast on which she sits is that

Roman civilization, as a corrupting influence, rides on the back of Roman military power. . . . John never forgets that Rome’s power is founded on war and conquest, but he also recognizes that it cannot be reduced to this. As well as the irresistible military might of the beast, there are the deceptive wiles of the great harlot.<sup>15</sup>

We must now ignore Solomon’s instruction and approach the harlot’s door to inspect these deceptive wiles for ourselves.

### **The Harlot**

An argument which Russell considers “decisive against Rome being the Babylon of the Apocalypse, and at the same time proving the identity between Jerusalem and Babylon”<sup>16</sup> is the character of the great city as a harlot:

Rome was a heathen city, and consequently incapable of that great and damning sin which was possible, and, alas, actual, for Jerusalem. Rome was not capable of violating the covenant of her God, of being false to her divine Husband, for

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase *καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικῆσαι αὐτούς* is missing in P<sup>47</sup> A C 2053 M<sup>A</sup>, but as Beale says, “that is not the preferred reading. The omission entered the textual tradition early. A scribe’s eye skipped from the first *καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ* at the beginning of v 7 to the second occurrence of the same phrase in the middle of the verse” (*Revelation*, p. 698).

<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 343.

<sup>16</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, pp. 488-489.

she never was the married wife of Jehovah. This was the crowning guilt of Jerusalem alone among all the nations of the earth, and it is *the sin* for which all through her history she is arraigned and condemned.<sup>17</sup>

There is sleight of hand to recognise here: Russell silently equates harlotry with marital unfaithfulness, when they are not the same thing. Babylon is accused of harlotry but—just as Russell notes of Rome!—there is no indication that she was ever ‘the married wife of Jehovah.’<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it is true that Jerusalem is by far the most prominent harlot-city in the Hebrew Bible, and that much of Revelation’s harlot imagery is drawn from the denunciations of Jerusalem in just those terms that are found in Ezekiel 16 and 23. But the problem with Russell’s triumphant inference from that connection is that he assumes that Jerusalem harlot imagery must retain its traditional reference to the covenant people, whilst simultaneously requiring the very name ‘Babylon’ and all associated imagery to transgress the boundaries of its original reference to the pagan power. Since both covenant (‘harlot’) and pagan (‘Babylon’) terms are applied to the selfsame city in Revelation, it is impossible that both images are taken up in consonance with their traditional use. We must accept that Revelation either applies some traditionally pagan-descriptive imagery to Jerusalem, or some traditionally covenant-descriptive imagery to Rome. That we see the latter rather than the former is suggested by a number of considerations, as follows.

Firstly, harlot Jerusalem is classically disdained for coming under the influence and oppression of her foreign lovers, whereas harlot Babylon is in the role of oppressor not victim. She is “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (17:18), rather than the other way around as would be expected if Babylon represented Jerusalem. Secondly, the specific indictment lying behind the harlotry metaphor of Israel’s prophets is frequently idolatry. In Revelation it is *the Roman beast* that is the focus of diabolical worship (ch. 13), and in that connection it must be Rome that is properly the harlot city, the centre and receptacle of the idolatry of the nations. Thirdly, the harlot imagery in Revelation 17 might well have evoked the goddess Roma, the personification and deification of Rome.<sup>19</sup> Finally, it should not be overlooked that Jerusalem is not the only

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<sup>17</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, p. 489. Likewise Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, p. 241, n. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979), pp. 148-152. Bauckham cautions that “The point should not be pressed too far. If the picture of the great harlot owes something to the goddess Roma, John does not actually portray her as an object of worship, as he does the

city to be convicted of harlotry in the Hebrew Bible. Tyre is likewise arraigned in Isa. 23:15-18, and it is significant that these verses contain the promise that “At the end of the seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her trade, and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth” (Isa. 23:17). The association of harlotry and trade suggests that this passage was the impetus behind the development of that same association in Revelation 17-18, especially when we consider that the judgment of Babylon in Revelation 18 has numerous points of connection with the judgment of Tyre in Ezekiel 26-27. The thrust of the comparison is that, like Tyre, “Rome is a harlot because her associations with the peoples of her empire are for her own economic benefit. . . . The *Pax Romana* is really a system of economic exploitation of the empire.”<sup>20</sup> This is the final nail in the coffin of Russell’s argument, because it shows the irrelevance of his central point that ‘Rome was not capable of violating the covenant of her God.’ The divine covenant is always the context for the rehearsals of Jerusalem’s harlotry in the Hebrew Bible, but Revelation’s concern is rather with the harlotry of exploitative trade and of idolatrous worship. Both of these point away from Jerusalem and towards Rome, the great city that has never been a wife and has always been a harlot.

### **Babylon’s Worldwide Economic Influence**

Following on from the previous section is the related issue of the worldwide scope of Babylon’s economic influence. It is a distinct problem for the Babylon-as-Jerusalem hypothesis that this shoe fits Rome rather better than it fits Jerusalem. Russell responds that

The influence exercised by the Jewish race in all parts of the Roman Empire previous to the destruction of Jerusalem was immense; their synagogues were to be found in every city, and their colonies took root in every land . . . Jerusalem might truly be said to ‘sit upon many waters,’ that is, to exercise a mighty influence upon ‘peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.’<sup>21</sup>

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beast” (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 344). He does note though that “Babylon comes close to self-deification in her proud boast, ‘A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see’ (18:7), which echoes not only ancient Babylon’s boast (Isa 47:7-8) but also contemporary Rome’s self-promoted reputation as the eternal city” (p. 344).

<sup>20</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 347.

<sup>21</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, p. 504. Chilton condenses and repeats the thought (*Days of Vengeance*, p. 176).

Even allowing a pre-70 dating for a moment, if Jerusalem was a city of ‘mighty influence’ in the Roman Empire, then what of the eponymous imperial city itself? The only evidence adduced by Russell or Chilton for this supposed influence is that the international Jewish conglomerate in Acts 2 implies that Jerusalem held influence over Jews living in every part of the Roman Empire.<sup>22</sup> This is a very far cry from the level of international economic power afforded Babylon in Revelation 18, which is commensurate only with the pre-eminent position of Rome. As Beale comments,

Ford proposes that the list of trade goods in 18:12-13 and the economic descriptions of the context are best understood against the background of the economic situation in Jerusalem and especially its temple. But she shows only that “foreign trade had a great influence on Jerusalem,” not that Jerusalem was the centre of trade in the Mediterranean world, which is the focus of ch. 18.<sup>23</sup>

And whilst it may be possible to fit the goods and descriptions of Revelation 18 into a Temple context, Bauckham’s detailed treatment of Revelation 18 in its Roman context<sup>24</sup> fully justifies his claim that the list of cargoes there is “one of the best pieces of evidence for John’s engagement with the realities of Roman power as experienced by his contemporaries.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Babylon’s Worldwide Rule**

In Rev. 17:18 an angel explains that “the woman that you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” Again this would seem to point obviously and irresistibly to Rome, and therefore must elicit some resistance from those who would see the reference rather to Jerusalem. Russell and Chilton take divergent defensive strategies, each of which we will engage in turn.

Russell’s response is to argue that τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς should be translated ‘the kings of the *land* [of Israel]’ rather than ‘the kings of the earth.’ This is awkward and unconvincing in light of the thoroughly international scope discernible throughout Revelation. This scope is emphasised seven times over in what Bauckham calls ‘the

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<sup>22</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, pp. 503-504; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, p. 925.

<sup>24</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 338-383.

<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 351.

fourfold formula for the nations,’ each instance of which explicitly refers to the whole world in variations on ‘every tribe and tongue and people and nation’ (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).<sup>26</sup> When “God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath,” it is not only the great city which falls but also “the cities of the nations” (16:19). This worldwide purview frequently exposes ‘land’ as an inappropriately narrow translation of γῆ, most decisively or programmatically in the following three instances.

**1.** κόπονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς (1:7).

Russell actually attempts to seize on this verse for his argument, lamenting that “With incredible carelessness they render πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς, ‘all the kindreds of the earth,’ instead of ‘all the tribes of the land.’”<sup>27</sup> Beale crushes the complaint with the observation that “γῆ cannot be a limited reference to the land of Israel but has a universal denotation, since the latter is the only meaning that πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς has in the OT,”<sup>28</sup> citing Gen. 12:3; 28:14; Ps. 72:17; Zech 14:17.

**2.** οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον (5:3).

That ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς stands in apposition to οὐρανῷ and ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς emphatically implies its terrestrial universality. Likewise in 5:13 and 10:6; cf. also 14:7, where ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς is replaced by the equally universal θάλασσαν καὶ πηγὰς ὑδάτων.

**3.** βασιλεύουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (5:10).

Who will reign (or is reigning, in some mss)? Those purchased ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους. To posit a leap from explicit multinationalism to geographic exclusivism is unacceptable. Once again γῆς must refer to the whole earth and not only to the land Israel.

Turning now to the use of γῆ in 17:18, there is every reason to suppose that the same universal sense applies. Just a few verses earlier we were told that “the waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages”

<sup>26</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 326-337.

<sup>27</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, p. 494.

<sup>28</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, p. 197.

(17:15). The explicitly international scope of the whore's dominion exposes the perversity of reading 17:18 as though it was referring only to Babylon's dominion over the rulers of Israel. The great city rules over the kings of the earth, which means that it can only be Rome.

This leads us on to Chilton's alternative strategy for fitting Jerusalem into 17:18. He accepts that γῆ here is 'earth' and not 'land,' which precipitates the following:

If the City is Jerusalem, how can she be said to wield this kind of worldwide political power? The answer is that *Revelation is not a book about politics; it is a book about the Covenant*. Jerusalem *did* reign over the nations. She *did* possess a Kingdom which was above all the kingdoms of the world. She had a covenantal priority over the kingdoms of the earth. Israel was a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6), exercising a priestly ministry of guardianship, instruction, and intercession on behalf of the nations of the world.<sup>29</sup>

As we saw above, John declines to explore the traditional covenantal dimension of the harlotry metaphor that he applies to Babylon, which already undermines Chilton's attempt to elevate that theme. Moreover, the claim that 'Revelation is not a book about politics' smacks of expediency, and is exposed as such by comparison with Chilton's earlier remarks:

It would have been much easier on the early Christians, of course, if they had preached the popular retreatist doctrine that Jesus is Lord of the "heart," that He is concerned with "spiritual" (meaning non-earthly) conquests, but isn't the least bit interested in political questions; that He is content to be "Lord" in the realm of the spirit, while Caesar is Lord everywhere else. . . . Instead, it taught the Biblical doctrine of Christ's Lordship – that He is Lord of all, "Ruler of the kings of the earth." It was this that guaranteed their persecution, torture, and death at the hands of the State.<sup>30</sup>

Even if we turned a blind eye to Chilton's convenient de-politicising of 17:18, his covenantal explanation of the key phrase is hardly satisfactory. Chilton's whole thesis is

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<sup>29</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, pp. 177-178. Emphasis original.

<sup>30</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 38.

that Jerusalem has radically forfeited exactly that ‘covenantal priority’ which he must now ascribe to her in order to cast her as ruling over the kings of the earth. The unwise use of the claim that “Israel was a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6)” impales the argument it is meant to prove, because in Revelation precisely this privilege has been unmistakably transferred to the church in 1:6 and 5:10. Jerusalem rules over the nations neither politically nor covenantally; but Rome has arisen as the great political, religious, and economic power, without question “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

### **The New/Old Jerusalem antithesis**

Another argument sometimes given for identifying Babylon as Jerusalem is as follows:

There can be no room for doubt as to what is signified by the *new Jerusalem*: it is the city of God, the heavenly habitation, the inheritance of the saints in light. But what, then, is the proper antithesis to the *new Jerusalem*? Surely, it can be no other than the *old Jerusalem*.<sup>31</sup>

As often with Russell, support for the conclusion comes not from Revelation but from elsewhere in the New Testament: “this antithesis between the old Jerusalem and the new is drawn out for us so distinctly by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians, that he puts into our hand a key to the interpretation of this symbol in the Apocalypse.”<sup>32</sup> It is certainly true that the new/old Jerusalem antithesis is more ‘distinct’ in Galatians than Revelation. The best that can be said about the possibility of its presence in the latter is that it would be one way of eliciting a satisfyingly poetic relationship between its two great cities. But the poetry of Revelation’s concern is that which springs from the

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<sup>31</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, p. 485. Likewise Wright in N. T. Wright, “Jerusalem in the New Testament” [[http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Jerusalem\\_New\\_Testament.pdf](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Jerusalem_New_Testament.pdf)]. Originally in P. W. L. Walker (ed.), *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God* (2nd edn; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), pp. 53–77. Interestingly, in this 1994 article he briefly defends the Babylon-as-Jerusalem hypothesis (though with the caveat that “As with any interpretation of Revelation there are problems with this”); by 1999 he writes that “Babylon is the metaphor; but what for? Rome, say most commentators ancient and modern. . . . Some, however, have argued cogently of late that the passage really refers to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The debate continues” (N. T. Wright, *The Myth of the Millennium* [London: SPCK, 1999], p. 29); and by 2011 he has settled on the understanding that “the ‘city’ is Rome itself” (N. T. Wright, *Revelation For Everyone* [London: SPCK, 2011], p. 100). *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* shows no change of heart (see vol. 2, p. 1317).

<sup>32</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, p. 485. He also adduces Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22. These verses are less than persuasive for his point, since they contrast the hope of the heavenly city not with the old/earthly Jerusalem but with the tents of the patriarchs’ sojourn, the land from which they had come (Haran), and Mount Sinai respectively.

language and patterns and images of the Hebrew Bible, in which the archetypal enemy of the people of God is the great *pagan* power. The antithesis of the New Jerusalem is not the Old Jerusalem but the New Babylon. The enemy of the people of God is Rome.

### **Conclusion: Rome not Jerusalem**

Every argument that Russell is able to rustle up for identifying Babylon as Jerusalem turns out to point the other way under further scrutiny. An ingenious minority interpretation always holds a degree of romantic appeal, but the dominance of the standard Roman understanding of Babylon is well justified. Rome alone fits every aspect of Babylon's character as portrayed in Revelation.

## JERUSALEM IN CHAPTER 11

There is one argument for identifying Babylon as Jerusalem—the sharpest argument in the quiver, in fact—that has been left out of consideration from the discussion above. This is the argument that since 11:1-14 pictures Jerusalem and names it there as ‘the great city’ (11:8), a phrase which always refers to Babylon in subsequent chapters, then Babylon and Jerusalem must be one and the same.<sup>33</sup> We address this challenge as the start of a new section because facing it will propel us into new and important territory.

The first point to make clear is that 11:1-14 certainly does take Jerusalem and not Rome as its visionary location. Before this assertion is defended we should note that it pertains only to the first ‘level of meaning’ out of the four proposed by Poythress (see ‘Introduction to Revelation’ above). That is, the claim here is that the ‘linguistic level’ (i.e. textual record) of Rev. 11:1-14 pictures Jerusalem rather than Rome. This might be assumed to determine also the substance of the ‘visionary level’ of John's experience, or not; it does not make a difference to the present discussion. The point is that identifying Jerusalem as the subject of Rev. 11:1-14 at the linguistic level is *not* to claim that this is also the true subject at the referential level (of historical reference). The symbolical level (why was the particular historical referent pictured in the particular language which it was?) will only become relevant and accessible in the wake of enquiry into the linguistic and referential levels.

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<sup>33</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, pp. 486-487.

We may now qualify, clarify and defend the opening claim that 11:1-14 takes Jerusalem and not Rome as its visionary location—at the linguistic level. This is unmistakable from a number of details. In the opening verses John is instructed to measure the ‘temple of God.’ We must stave off for now symbolical reflection, pausing first to acknowledge that what is pictured is the earthly temple in Jerusalem. (That one or some of its courts are accessible to nations-a-trampling makes it sufficiently clear that the image is not of the heavenly temple that features elsewhere, which is presumably above such indignity.<sup>34</sup>) Jerusalem is then pinpointed even more clearly in 11:8, which specifies that the city is “where also their Lord was crucified.” Beale argues that despite appearances it is Rome that is in view here, viewing the phrase ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη as resuming not τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης but πνευματικῶς. This results in the reading that ‘where also their Lord was crucified’ is only a further elucidation of the prophetic character painted by the names ‘Sodom’ and ‘Egypt.’ The problem with this is that πνευματικῶς specifically qualifies καλεῖται, which clashes awkwardly with ὅπου if they are seen as being part of the same phrase. In other words, the names ‘Sodom’ and ‘Egypt’ appropriately follow πνευματικῶς καλεῖται, but the location of Jerusalem does not. Thus it makes more sense to view ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη as resuming and qualifying τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης, identifying the city as Jerusalem with a directness that could be surpassed only if John had explicitly so named it.

We have thus become lured into asserting that in chapter 11 ‘the great city’ is Jerusalem, but that everywhere else in Revelation it is Babylon (Rome). There are three possible responses to this troublesome state of affairs: we could preserve the referential consistency of ‘the great city’ by concluding that it must mean Rome here after all (at the linguistic and/or symbolical level);<sup>35</sup> or by concluding that it must mean Jerusalem elsewhere after all; or we could judge that although seeing ‘the great city’ in 11:8 as a uniquely inconsistent usage is potentially awkward in such a carefully-composed book, this is a price worth paying in order to accommodate the compelling indications that Revelation 11 pictures Jerusalem, and that Babylon is Rome.<sup>36</sup> The wisdom of the third response is confirmed by further reflection. There is a glowing opportunity for the city

<sup>34</sup> Matthijs den Dulk, “Measuring the Temple of God: Revelation 11.1–2 and the Destruction of Jerusalem,” *New Testament Studies* 54 (2008), pp. 436-449 (437).

<sup>35</sup> So e.g. Caird (*Revelation*, p. 138); Beale (*Revelation*, p. 591); Garrow (*Revelation*, p. 74).

<sup>36</sup> This being the judgment made by e.g. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (ed. R. P. Martin *et al.*; Word Biblical Commentary, 52b; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 620; John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), p. 240.

to be named ‘Babylon’ in 11:8—which would put the consistent identity of ‘the great city’ beyond reasonable doubt and force us to take one of the first two responses to the problem—but instead we learn that it ‘is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt.’

Russell objects that the city being so named “is no reason why she may not be also styled Babylon,”<sup>37</sup> but this is an oversimplification; it is true that the names Sodom and Egypt do not preclude the name Babylon, but their presence does highlight its absence. The most natural effect of this is to suggest that the ‘great city’ in chapter 11 is distinct from the one that is prophetically called ‘Babylon.’ If it were meant to be Babylon that is introduced in chapter 11 then it would certainly be a confusing advent.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately, probing the absence of the name ‘Babylon’ can only result in an argument from silence, and so if we are going to defend the conviction that it is not Babylon that we see here, then it is rather the presence of the name τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης that must be explained. This may be done with reference to the fact that the city of chapter 11 is also called τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν (11:2).<sup>39</sup> The first effect of this appellation is to confirm that this is not Babylon, to which the remainder of Revelation ascribes not a shred of holiness. The second effect is subtler and more significant. The name ‘the holy city’ is also given to the New Jerusalem in 21:2, 10, which shows that the phrase is not used with strict consistency, since the city of chapter 11 is clearly not the New Jerusalem. This should mollify the urge to understand the usage of ‘the great city’ in 11:8 as strictly consistent with its usage elsewhere, i.e. as referring to Rome. The effect of naming both Jerusalem (chapter 11) and the New Jerusalem (chapter 21) as ‘the holy city’ is not to identify them as one and the same, but to imbue the former with some of the bright virtue of the latter. Likewise, then, the point of the phrase ‘the great city’ in 11:8 is not identification as Rome but association with the sin and persecution of Rome. (That ‘Babylon’ has other cities associated with its sin and judgment is made clear in 16:19, where the great earthquake which splits the great city in three also causes ‘the cities of the nations’ to fall.) The dual association signified by Jerusalem being termed

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<sup>37</sup> Russell, *Parousia*, p. 486.

<sup>38</sup> If it be protested that the abrupt and unexplained appearance of the beast in 11:7 should discourage us from demanding too much clarity from a possible first mention of Babylon in 11:8, we may reply that this only reinforces the point: even in the abrupt and unexplained appearance of the beast, at least he is so named, whereas Babylon is conspicuously not.

<sup>39</sup> Whatever source might be thought to lie behind 11:1-2 originally, we should not hesitate to use it as context for interpreting 11:3-13. Though Aune judges that 11:1-2 is only ‘tenuously linked’ to the preceding unit, he supplies that “It is more clearly linked to the text unit that follows in 11:3-13 (the story of the two witnesses) by the temporal reference to forty-two months specified for the subjugation of the outer court and the holy city to the Gentiles (v 2), which is equivalent to the 1,260 days of the ministry of the two witnesses (v 3), and by the reference to “the holy city” in v 2, which is matched by the reference to “the great city” in v 8” (*Revelation 6-16*, p. 594).

both 'great' and 'holy' manifests in the narrative: like the great city Babylon it is associated with persecution and rebellion (11:2, 7-10), but like the holy city New Jerusalem it is a place of repentance and worship (11:13). But with this we are straying into territory reserved to the next section, to which we must therefore give way.

## THE SYMBOLICAL FUNCTION OF JERUSALEM

In the preceding pair of sections, we have established that Babylon does not represent Jerusalem, and that chapter 11 does. The next issue then is what Jerusalem is doing there, i.e. what its historical referent and symbolical function is. We need to take a long run up at this question, because it is intimately tied up with the fascinating quest to determine the contents and significance of the Lamb's scroll that we first meet at the beginning of chapter 5. Richard Bauckham's chapter 'The conversion of the nations' in his *Climax of Prophecy* contains an excellent analysis of this topic, which we will trace and allow to steer us towards a consideration of the symbolical function of Jerusalem.

### **The Lamb's Scroll**

The way that a scroll bursts onto the throne room scene in 5:1, and the acclamation received by the Lamb for being worthy to take and open it, attest to its significance and might well kindle our curiosity as to its contents. The effect is heightened in chapter 6 as the Lamb starts to open its seven seals one by one, with each broken seal releasing ominous scenes of crisis and catastrophe upon the earth. But the actual contents of the scroll will only be accessible once all the seals have been broken, and the drama surrounding this process heightens the suspense, not least because after the opening of the sixth seal the denouement is tantalisingly deferred whilst we are shown the vision of 144,000 sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel, as well as the great multitude in white robes. At last in chapter 8 the seventh seal is opened, but no explanation or acknowledgment of the contents of the scroll is offered. Instead there is silence in heaven for half an hour, whilst the prayers of the saints are heard and seven angels prepare to sound seven trumpets. As with the seals, six of the trumpets are sounded in succession, releasing a series of even greater blights upon the earth. Again the sequence is interrupted after the sixth installment, and what an interesting interruption it is.

## The Little Scroll

In chapter 10 we see a mighty angel come down from heaven, holding a little scroll that lies open in his hand. John is told to eat the scroll, and when he has done so he is told that he must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings. That this little scroll is the very same scroll which the Lamb took from the hand of God is suggested by four main clues.

The first clue is that the opening verse of Revelation declares it to be “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John” (1:1). The sequence of revelation from originator to recipient is thus 1) God, 2) Jesus, 3) angel, 4) John. We see this pattern replicated exactly if we recognise the little scroll of chapter 10 as resuming the career of the Lamb’s scroll from chapter 5:<sup>40</sup>

### 5:7

He [the Lamb] went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne . . .

### 10:1, 10

I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven . . .

So I [John] took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it.

The second clue is that the angel who gives the little scroll to John in chapter 10 is referred to as ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν. The only other ‘mighty angel’ that we have met prior to this is the one back in 5:2 who proclaims in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” This instantly associates the Lamb’s scroll of chapter 5 and the little scroll of chapter 10, and gives the first hint that it could be the same scroll in view.<sup>41</sup>

The third clue is that much of the action involving the Lamb’s scroll was focused on the opening of its seals, and the little scroll of chapter 10 is specified as being ἠνεωγμένον in the angel’s hand, so that “the scroll whose last seal is broken at 8:1 then appears

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<sup>40</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>41</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 245. The first mighty angel is a distant enough antecedent of ἄλλον for that adjective to be omitted in 025 046 Oecumenius<sup>2053</sup> fam 1006<sup>911</sup> Andr a c f i 94; Byzantine Victorinus (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 548).

opened at 10:2.”<sup>42</sup> Since John will eat the scroll rather than read it, the fact that it lies open is an irrelevant detail unless it is deliberately making a link back to the once-sealed scroll of chapter 5. The link is confirmed when we remember that the image of a sealed scroll comes from Dan. 12:4, 9, in context of an angelic conversation which is then alluded to in Rev. 10:5-7:

Thus, the relationship between Revelation 10 and Daniel 12:6-9 shows that John thought of the scroll of Revelation 10 as a scroll which had been sealed, but has now been opened. It follows that the scroll of Revelation 5:1 is sealed because it is this same scroll.<sup>43</sup>

The fourth clue is that just as the common Danielic elements of the Lamb’s scroll and the little scroll point to their identity, the same obtains with reference to the scroll given to Ezekiel. We may observe that the consecutive stages of the scroll episode and its context in Ezekiel are retained in Revelation, as long as we recognise that chapter 10 resumes the story of the scroll that was first introduced in chapter 5:<sup>44</sup>

| <b>Ezekiel</b> | <b>Common elements</b>  | <b>Revelation</b> |
|----------------|---|-------------------|
| Ezek 1         | Vision of God   | Rev 4             |
| Ezek 2 (v. 10) | A scroll (with writing on both sides)                             | Rev 5 (v. 1)      |
| Ezek 3 (v. 3)  | Prophet eats the scroll (which is as sweet as honey in the mouth) | Rev 10 (v. 10)    |

The most common objection to the idea that the scroll of chapter 5 reappears in chapter 10 is that in the latter it is called a βιβλαρίδιον, which is the diminutive form of βιβλίον, whereas in chapter 5 the usual form βιβλίον is consistently used. Bauckham downplays the significance of this by pointing out that a) the term βιβλίον does appear in chapter

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<sup>42</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 250.

<sup>43</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 252.

<sup>44</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 246-247. Likewise Moyise: “The sealed scroll of Revelation 5 has been opened (Rev. 6-8) and is now given to John to digest. Thus it seems clear that Ezekiel’s scroll is the main inspiration behind Revelation 5 and Revelation 10” (*Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 77).

10 (v. 8) amidst the βιβλαρίδιον usages there,<sup>45</sup> suggesting that the terms are synonymous; b) likewise in *Shepherd of Hermas* (vision 2), βιβλαρίδιον is used interchangeably with βιβλίον and βιβλίδιον; and c) in Revelation both ἀρνίον and θηρίον are also formally diminutive but do not carry the sense of ‘little lamb’ and ‘little beast.’<sup>46</sup> These are persuasive indicators that it would be unwise to read too much into the switch to βιβλαρίδιον in chapter 10. If pressed for an explanation then it could be suggested that the shift in terminology reflects the shift in visionary location from heaven in chapter 5 to earth in chapter 10. The lone use of βιβλίον in chapter 10 (v. 8) would then be accounted for with the consideration that it comes in context of speech from heaven rather than events on earth.

### **The Witness of the Church**

This tracing of the path of the one scroll from God to the Lamb (chapter 5) and then from the angel to John (chapter 10) has profound implications for how we understand chapter 11, because it shows is that “Everything which precedes John’s consumption of the scroll is preparatory to the real message of his prophecy,”<sup>47</sup> and suggests that “11:1-13 contains the revelation of the scroll *in nuce*.”<sup>48</sup> Chapter 11 is thus where we discover what unique contribution the scroll’s revelation makes to the dramatic events that have already accompanied its introduction and unsealing. The last we saw of the process, before the interjection of the scroll-eating episode, was the blowing of the sixth trumpet in 9:13-21. This culminates the other trumpet judgment scenes, and contains one of the most devastating images in the whole book, as John sees angels released to kill a third of humankind (9:15). But despite such drastic measures, the bleak synopsis of the effect achieved by the six trumpet blasts is that “The rest of humankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent” (9:20). Bauckham links this to the revelation of the contents of the scroll as follows:

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<sup>45</sup> Bauckham acknowledges the textual confusion but concludes that “It is likely that John called the scroll of chapter 10 βιβλίον (10:8) as well as βιβλαρίδιον (10:2, 9-10). This in itself strongly suggests that too much importance should not be attached to the distinction between βιβλίον in 5:1-9 and βιβλαρίδιον in 10:2, 9-10” (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 243).

<sup>46</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 243-245.

<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy* p. 255. Garrow reaches a similar conclusion as to the preparatory nature of Rev. 6:1-17; 7:9-17; 8:2-9:21; 10:3-4, which he understands to have the function of foreshadowing the contents of the Lamb’s scroll (*Revelation*, pp. 15-35). However, he differs from Bauckham in that he denies the identity of the two scrolls, and sees 11:1-13 as maintaining a foreshadowing function rather than revealing the contents of the scroll *in nuce* (pp. 25-32). Garrow’s interest here is in the overall structural of Revelation, but for our present focus it is difficult to see what difference it makes whether 11:1-13 is understood to foreshadow what will subsequently be revealed or to summarise what will subsequently be expanded.

<sup>48</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 266.

These limited judgments [seals and trumpets] are intended to bring sinful humanity to repentance. This becomes clear in 9:20-21, which indicates that they have failed in this purpose. . . . The point is that, whereas judgments alone have failed to bring the world to repentance and faith in God, the scroll is to reveal a more effective strategy.<sup>49</sup>

That a more effective strategy has indeed been implemented in 11:1-13 is shown by the result of the deadly earthquake in 11:13. Instead of producing only a stubborn refusal to repent as in 9:20-21, here the survivors of the earthquake “were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” At first glance this might not seem like a substantially positive outcome, but in the language of Revelation it certainly is: “The expression corresponds closely to the positive response that is invited by the angel in 14:7, to the response to God which characterizes the worship of all the nations in 15:4, and to the response which the unrepentant fail to give in 16:9.”<sup>50</sup> And though it might seem a little galling that 7,000 have to perish in the earthquake to produce the desired response from the rest, the number plays on a reference to Elijah. In his day the godly remnant was 7,000 and the rest were wicked; here the relationship is reversed and 7,000 die whilst the rest repent. ‘The rest’ are clearly meant to vastly outnumber the 7,000 because only a tenth of the city falls in the earthquake.<sup>51</sup>

What is the new element, then, that is revealed by the scroll and that effects this profound change on those from whom God seeks repentance? Why does the earthquake in chapter 11 produce a response of repentance and worship rather than hardening and cursing? It can only be the ministry of the two witnesses as they witness to and imitate the sacrificial victory of the Lamb. That they represent the church is clear in their depiction as lampstands, the image used to represent the seven churches in 1:20. The duality of the witnesses is probably designed principally to emphasise the theme of their testimony with reference to the well-known law of Deut. 19:15, whilst their attributes and appellations in the narrative that unfolds also make it clear that they are intended to evoke associations with the pairs Moses-Elijah<sup>52</sup> and Zerubbabel-Joshua.<sup>53</sup> The

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<sup>49</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy* p. 258.

<sup>50</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy* p. 278.

<sup>51</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>52</sup> The idea that the two witnesses are intended to evoke Moses and Elijah is subtly strengthened by the way that the two condemnatory pseudonyms forced upon the opponents of the church are ‘Balaam’ (2:14) and ‘Jezebel’ (2:20), the notorious opponents of Moses and Elijah respectively (Stephen Pattemore, *The*

distinctive revelation contained in the scroll, then, is that as the followers of the Lamb follow his example of faithful witness even to the point of sharing in his death at the hands of the beast of Rome, a) like him their apparent defeat will be turned to victory and vindication, and b) they will succeed in bringing the nations to repentance where judgments alone had not:

God's kingdom will come, not simply by the deliverance of the church and the judgment of the nations, but primarily by the repentance of the nations as a result of the church's witness. The Lamb's conquest, which had the initial effect of redeeming the church from all the nations, has the aim of bringing all the nations to repentance and the worship of God. It achieves this aim as the followers of the Lamb participate in his victory by their suffering witness. This is what the scroll reveals.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Symbolical Function of Jerusalem**

Armed with the paradigm of witness that arises from attention to the function of the scroll, we are now in a position to return to the consideration of the role of Jerusalem in chapter 11. Firstly, it is very unlikely that the city of Jerusalem is the subject of 11:1-14 at the referential level as well as the linguistic level. Collins notes in connection with 11:1-2 that

There is no interest in the historical, earthly temple elsewhere in the book. In 3:12 the phrase "the temple of God" is used in quite a different way. Christ promises that he will make the one who conquers a pillar in the temple of God. This language implies that the author of Revelation conceives of the Christian

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*People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis* [Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 128; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], p. 162). For more on the function of the Elijah-Jezebel motif in Revelation, see Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 120-125.

<sup>53</sup> H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn; London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), p. 134, *contra* Caird, who holds that "the martyrs are symbolized by two lampstands, in contrast with the seven lampstands which represent the church in its fulness" (*Revelation*, p. 96, followed e.g. by Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* [ed. D. J. Harrington; Sacra Pagina, 16; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993], p. 121). But whatever proportion of the church John actually expects to die a martyr's death, for all the saints martyrdom is the ultimate symbol and the logical end of a life of uncompromised allegiance to the Lamb that was slain.

<sup>54</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy* p. 258.

community, either in his own time or in the new age, as the real or new temple of God.<sup>55</sup>

Bauckham shows that the temple in 11:1-2 is likewise used as a symbol for the Christian community by demonstrating that John is interpreting ‘the shattering of the holy people’ in Dan. 12:7.<sup>56</sup> The point of the contrast between the protected worshipers and the trampled outer court is that “The church will be kept safe in its hidden spiritual reality, while suffering persecution and martyrdom.”<sup>57</sup> This interpretation is supported by comparable instances elsewhere of the same pattern expressed in different images: the 144,000 receive a protective seal and yet are certainly not exempt from martyrdom; the Woman of chapter 12 is protected in the wilderness and yet the Dragon is able to make war on her children (12:17) and conquer them (13:7). This helps explain the function of Jerusalem as the location of the ministry of the two witnesses in 11:3-13. Where else could this bittersweet story of persecution and vindication be situated but Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city where their Lord was crucified and raised to life as the supreme example of a faithful witness?

In summary, then, Jerusalem symbolises the collision between the great city Babylon and the holy city New Jerusalem, the place where the evil of the beast meets the resistance of those who will not worship him or take his mark. The scroll reveals what will happen at this meeting: the beast will appear to be triumphant and the power of the holy people shattered; but as the church has shared in the death of the Lamb, so will they share in his conquest of death; this will testify to the nations that despite how things may appear on earth, ultimately the victory belongs to the Lamb; and as a result they will fear God and give him glory. This is the promise and challenge that Revelation holds out to the seven churches as they wrestle with the pressures and tensions of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar’s (or not), and to God what is God’s.

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<sup>55</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 273.

<sup>57</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 272.

## PART III

# ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH IN ROMANS AND REVELATION



## CHAPTER 10

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: ISRAEL IN ROMANS AND REVELATION

Comparison of Romans and Revelation reveals numerous interesting interplays in their attitudes towards Israel. In these concluding sections we will examine some of the points around which the two texts may be brought into conversation: the typological relationship between Israel and the church; the practical function of the law; redefinition of the 'Jew'; and the eschatological sequence of salvation.

### ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH IN TYPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is a growing recognition of the significance of typology for understanding the Bible, and attendant wrangling over its features and boundaries, but David Baker provides us with some basic and basically accepted definitions:

[A] type is a biblical event, person or institution which serves as an example or pattern for other events, persons or institutions; typology is the study of types and the historical and theological correspondences between them; the basis of typology is God's consistent activity in the history of his chosen people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Baker, "Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29/2 (1976), pp. 137-157 (153). He supplies that the 'correspondences' may be classified as either vertical or horizontal. A vertical correspondence moves on a spatial axis between a heavenly archetype and its earthly antitype; Hebrews 9 furnishes a classic example with regards to the sanctuary. A horizontal correspondence moves instead on a temporal axis between a historical prototype and its subsequent antitype; on the whole "the Bible is more interested in horizontal than vertical typology, as is most modern writing on the subject" (pp. 147-148), and the present writing is no exception.

Typology should not be seen as a structured exegetical system, since the New Testament does not use it as such.<sup>2</sup> Its characteristics and boundaries are often described in contradistinction to its cousin, allegory. ‘Cousin’ because both approaches perceive meaning in texts beyond the literal sense; ‘contradistinction’ because the perceived meanings differ in their relationship to text and history. Leonhard Goppelt, whose *Typos* remains the foremost text on the subject, defines allegory as

. . . a narrative that was composed originally for the single purpose of presenting certain higher truths than are found in the literal sense, or when facts are reported for that same reason. Allegorical interpretation, therefore, is not concerned with the truthfulness or factuality of the things described.<sup>3</sup>

Allegorical interpretation is able to find Christ or Christian realities concealed in the language of any Hebrew Bible (or other) text if sufficient ingenuity is applied with sufficient determination, and as such it was a powerful apologetic tool in the hands of early Christian polemicists. But perhaps this could be typologically described as a Pyrrhic victory; the cost of deriving from the text a preconceived and alien meaning as if this were the point all along was that “the Old Testament was stripped of both “offence” and meaning.”<sup>4</sup> Allegory thus depreciated allows typology to be appreciated.<sup>5</sup> To resume the Goppelt quotation from above:

. . . For typological interpretation, however, the reality of the things described is indispensable. The typical meaning is not really a different or higher meaning, but a different or higher use of the same meaning that is comprehended in type and antitype.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Baker observes that “There is no biblical equivalent to the word ‘typology’ for the simple reason that the biblical writers did not analyse or systematise types” (“Typology,” p. 144).

<sup>3</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (trans. from 1939 German; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> H. L. Ellison, “Typology,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 25/3 (1953), pp. 158-166 (159).

<sup>5</sup> Though Baker reminds us that “although we should certainly not adopt such exegetical methods [as allegory] neither should we despise those who used them; it was the allegorical school in the early Church who preserved the Old Testament for the Christian Church” (Baker, “Typology,” p. 154).

<sup>6</sup> Goppelt, *Typos*, p. 13. Put another way: “Typology requires a real correspondence between the events, persons and institutions in question, but allegory can find ‘spiritual’ significance in unimportant details or words” (Baker, “Typology,” p. 150).

Whereas texts like *The Epistle of Barnabas* may attempt to establish the unity of Old and New Testaments on the basis of an artificial and allegorical ‘Christianization’ of Hebrew Bible texts, typology affirms this unity on a different basis: the consistency of God and his self-manifestation in history. In other words, typological interpretation of a text is not properly ‘what the text really meant’ but ‘what the history really pointed to.’<sup>7</sup> The classic expression of the typological view of history is the New Testament confidence that the Christ event that it narrates and explicates was prophetically prefigured in history as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, so that “Like a newly formed star that pulls the surrounding matter into its orbit, the life of Jesus became the focal point for the interpretation of prophecy.”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most obvious example of New Testament typology is in Romans 5, in that there Paul explicitly designates Adam as a τύπος of him who was to come (v. 14).<sup>9</sup> The position of Adam in relation to the rest of the human race, whereby one act of the former affects the whole of the latter, prefigures the same position as it belongs to Christ, in whom the pattern is redeemed. Another important New Testament usage of the word τύπος, and one which demonstrates that Christ is not the only one capable of being an antitype, is in 1 Corinthians 10. Here Paul brings out some of the typological similarities between the Israelites in the desert and the church in his present, in order to explain that “these things occurred as examples (τύποι) for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did” (v. 6).<sup>10</sup> Sanders notes that Paul’s choice to employ a typological argument here is all the more striking when we consider that his point (against idolatry) could certainly have alternatively been made by

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<sup>7</sup> Goppelt asserts that “Only historical facts—persons, actions, events, and institutions—are material for typological interpretation; words and narratives can be utilized only insofar as they deal with such matters” (*Typos*, p. 18; cf. Stanley N. Gundry, “Typology as a Means of Interpretation: Past And Present,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12/4 [1969], pp. 233-240 [234]). It may be true that as a theoretical ideal a type consists purely in a historical connection between disparate entities, but we must acknowledge that where those entities are accessed through the mediation of a text, a typological correspondence necessarily relies not on history itself but on historically-oriented and historically-interpreted texts.

<sup>8</sup> David Lincicum, “Reading Scripture in the Messianic Community,” *The Expository Times* 126/6 (2015), pp. 296-300 (299). Though it is widely noted that we find the phenomenon of typologically-framed prophecy nascent already in the Hebrew Bible itself, with the Exodus event enjoying particular prominence. See G. W. H. Lampe, “The Reasonableness of Typology,” in *Essays on Typology* (Studies in Biblical Theology; London: SCM Press, 1917), pp. 9-38 [26-27]; G. B. Caird, “On Deciphering the Book of Revelation: IV. Myth and Legend,” *The Expository Times* 74/4 (1963), pp. 103-105 (104); Goppelt, *Typos*, p. 226.

<sup>9</sup> Though the word τύπος need not be present for the idea to be so. The Gospels furnish various examples of the person and work of Christ being conceived as an antitypal fulfilment—of the Passover lamb (Jn 19:36; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), or of Jonah’s spell in the belly of the fish (Mt 12:40), or of the wisdom and glory of Solomon as the son of David (Mt 12:42).

<sup>10</sup> This raises an interesting question: “Is Israel in every aspect of its existence a type of the Church, or only in specific instances and experiences where the Bible develops a typological connection?” (W. Edward Glenny, “Typology: A Summary Of The Present Evangelical Discussion,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/4 [1997], pp. 627-638 [632]).

direct appeal to the first two commandments.<sup>11</sup> The advantage of typology is that it engages the reader imaginatively and empathetically in a *narrative*, in which context ethical imperatives possess a power and penetration that may be lacking in an apparently impersonal command.

### **Typology in Revelation**

Revelation is saturated with Hebrew Bible allusions but without a single sustained quotation. Paradoxically, a typological mindset is both obscured and suggested by John's allusive and elusive use of scripture: obscured because Revelation has nothing akin to those instances in the Gospels where Jesus makes a typological connection explicit by drawing attention to his relationship to a figure or event of the past; but suggested because the absence of quotations from scripture shows that John spurns an allegorical approach (which would seek to discover hidden meaning in the exact words of the source text), forcing us to look elsewhere in order to understand his hermeneutic. A typological approach helps us reflect on John's use of scripture generally and his attitude to Israel specifically.

The most prominent and consistent typological motif in Revelation is the coming deliverance of the church as eschatological exodus:

There is a Pharaoh (the beast) and an Egypt (Babylon) that oppress God's people and enslave them. There are plagues modeled on the plagues at Egypt at the time of the Exodus (cf. 15:1-16:21). The new Israelites pass through a Red Sea of blood on their way to the promised land, and they sing a new song, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb on the shores of this figurative Red Sea.<sup>12</sup>

Thus in the same vein as Isaiah 51, John looks back to the sequence of oppression followed by deliverance and judgment that characterised the Exodus from Egypt, and prophesies that this pattern will be repeated and climactically fulfilled in the future of the community. He predicts that though the oppression currently experienced by seven churches is about to dramatically intensify, they can be assured that, based on the Exodus prototype, what lies beyond oppression is deliverance for them and judgment

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<sup>11</sup> Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (eds R. A. Culpepper and R. Rendtorff, *Biblical Interpretation*, 32; Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 207.

for their oppressors. Furthermore, the intensification stage of this oppression is also conceived typologically, this time not with reference to Hebrew Bible history but as the eschatologically heightened recapitulation of Nero's past reign of terror. He is singled out as the figure in the living memory of the congregations whose rule most exemplified the nature of the beast in diabolical cruelty and divine counterfeit. Nero was a prototype, Revelation explains, and his antitype the Antichrist is about to ascend from the abyss and go to his destruction with the triumphant return of the Lord.<sup>13</sup> As regards Jesus himself, his repeated depiction as the Lamb from chapter 5 onwards relies on or at least contains a typological connection. The reason he is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals is because he was slaughtered, and by his blood he ransomed for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). The typology is not laboured but it is present: Jesus' death is conceived in the imagery of the sacrificial lamb of the Israelite cultic system as its antitypal and atoning fulfilment. Furthermore, Beale picks out the reference to the key of David in Rev. 3:7 as an example of a typological use of the Hebrew Bible, in that "John compares the historical situation of Eliakim in relation to Israel with that of Christ to the church in order to help the readers better understand the position which Christ now holds as head of the true Israel and how this affects them."<sup>14</sup>

This last example introduces the Israel-church type, which is the main target of our typological approach. The only direct reference to the historical people of Israel in Revelation is in 2:14, where those at Pergamum are warned that "you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling-block before the people of Israel." This is important because it shows that whatever else John might do with Israel language and imagery, in his mind this does not abrogate the position of historical Israel as the people of God *in the past*. But even here a typological understanding is already implicit. It is clear that Balaam is employed as a prototype of those members or influencers of the community at Pergamum whose teachings John

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<sup>13</sup> We noted earlier on the argument that the eruption of Vesuvius is what stands behind the imagery of the sixth seal in Rev. 6:12-17 (e.g. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 24; Garrow, *Revelation*, p. 78); if so then this would serve as another example of events in the living memory of the seven churches being worked into a typological framework in which they become prototypes of events that the churches are told they will shortly face. Garrow also has a brush with typology in reflecting on the first four seals: "it is possible to point to events in the past as foreshadowing events in the future. This appears to be the case with the rider visions in that the disasters which the riders bring are likely to have had echoes in the real past experience of John's hearers. It is therefore possible that John intended to use the riders as a means of suggesting to his hearers that past disasters were sent by God to warn of the imminence and nature of the final judgments contained in the scroll" (Revelation, p. 19).

<sup>14</sup> Beale, *Use of the Old Testament*, p. 117.

wishes to censure, and the logic of the type requires that the community be viewed as now occupying the place that once belonged to the people of Israel. If this typological conception of the church as the new Israel is implicit here then it is unmistakable elsewhere. Early on in 1:5-6, we learn that it is those whom Jesus has freed from their sins by his blood (i.e. the church) who have been made a kingdom and priests, a role originally promised specifically to the Israelites in Ex. 19:6. Thus the church occupies the position in relation to God and humankind that was prefigured in history by Israel. Then as we have seen, in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia, the phrase ‘those who say they are Jews and are not’ (2:9; 3:9) certainly implies that it is the recipients who are truly Jews, those whom God has loved. This brings us back again to the 144,000, who serve to confirm the idea that we have been exploring: they are the church typologically depicted as the new Israel.<sup>15</sup> This is something of a double-edged sword, in that it validates Israel’s position as the historical people of God, whilst leaving no room for the unchanging continuation of that position once it has been baptised in the blood of the Lamb. Now it is only the people of Jesus who are the people of God.

### **(Non-)Typology in Romans**

Paul asserts the scriptural authority behind his gospel at the very outset of Romans: it was “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures” (1:2). We have already encountered numerous indications that Paul is not thinking only of a collection of messianic proof texts, but of something much more fundamental than that. This is foundational to Francis Watson’s *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, the introduction to which declares that

. . . scripture is not external to the Christ-event but is constitutive of it, the matrix within which it takes shape and comes to be what it is. Paul proclaims not a pure, unmediated experience of Christ, but rather a Christ whose death and resurrection occur “according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15.3-14). Without scripture, there is no gospel; apart from the scriptural matrix, there is no Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Watson makes much reference to Hays, who had already insisted and repeatedly demonstrated that Paul’s ‘prevailing concern’ as an interpreter is not to ‘excavate

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<sup>15</sup> Goppelt, *Typos*, p. 197, n. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 17.

messianic prophecies’ but “to show how the church is prefigured and guided by Scripture.”<sup>17</sup> This distillation comes at the end of a chapter (‘Children of Promise’) that focuses on Galatians and both letters to the Corinthians, and so it is interesting to consider whether it applies equally well to Romans too. Can the church be said to be ‘prefigured by scripture’ according to Romans? In other words, does Romans use Israel as a prototype of the church in the way that Revelation does? Certainly this element merits its place in Hays’ summary statement given Paul’s explicit use of Israel-church typology in 1 Corinthians 10 (“these things occurred as examples [τύποι] for us,” v. 6), but it is noticeable that Paul does *not* employ the same interpretative strategy when it comes to Romans. He certainly has ample opportunity to treat Israel as a prototype of the church, as he explores the relationship between the two entities in more depth and detail in Romans than anywhere else. That typology *is* used in the discussion of Christ and Adam (Adam being “a type [τύπος] of the one who was to come,” 5:14) only highlights its non-employment in relation to Israel and the church. This restraint may be guessed as being the result of the rhetorical context of Romans. In writing to Gentiles with the primary purpose of challenging their arrogance towards Jews, a typological interpretation of Israel in the scriptures may have seemed all too likely to be co-opted by the mentality that he sought to combat. If the historical experiences of Israel in the past are interpreted as prefiguring the situation of the church in the present then it leaves the door open to the assumption that Israel has no more part to play once the church has been constituted—exactly the mindset that Paul seeks to counter in Romans 9-11.

Instead of finding the church typologically prefigured by the story of Israel, then, Paul prefers to highlight verses in which the literal sense of the words may be interpreted to look ahead to the formation of the church. This strategy largely revolves around the use of the word ‘Gentiles,’ the presence of which in those Hebrew Bible texts that Paul treats is generally taken by him to mean that the multi-ethnic church is what is ultimately in view. In 15:9-12 he collects a treasure trove of such references, all linked together by their reference to ἔθνη. This implies and highlights that where the literal sense of the scriptures pertains to Israel’s own history, this is likewise to be taken at face value in the first instance. Thus the reality and significance of Israel’s history is preserved, even whilst there may be hints of the church to be found in its telling.

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<sup>17</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 121. This ‘prevailing concern’ does of course still leave room for attention to messianic prophecies; Watson reminds us that “Christ is announced not only in the water-producing and strangely mobile rock in the desert (1 Cor. 10.4) but also and more importantly in the promise to Abraham of a singular seed (Gal. 3.16)” (*Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, p. 19).

Paul's strategy of finding the multi-ethnic church predicted in the literal sense of the scriptures sheds some light on the two instances that might otherwise be taken as typological readings of Israel's place in scripture. The first of these is in Rom. 9:25, where Hosea's words concerning the promised reversal of the 'not my people' and 'not beloved' epithets are applied to Gentiles, when they refer rather to Israel in the original context. The second is in Rom. 10:20, where Isaiah's words concerning 'those who did not seek me' are applied to Gentiles (in line with Rom. 9:30), when in their original context they referred to Israel, in consonance (rather than Paul's contrast) with the statement that "all day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (quoted in Rom. 10:21). In both cases, Paul has seized on language which, when interpreted literally rather than context-sensitively, may be made to refer to Gentiles rather than Israel. This is not typology; he makes no reference to the place of Israel in the original context of the texts, which shows that he is not attempting to argue that the church now stands in the place that Israel once occupied. Rather, these statements are made to chime in with the others scattered throughout Romans that reveal Paul's conviction that "the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand" (Gal. 3:8). Thus in this regard Paul's use of scripture in Romans conforms to the pattern that he is at pains to make clear in his discussion of the metaphorical olive tree: the church is the continuation of Israel, not its replacement. Or in Hays' words, "The insistent echoing voice of Scripture in and behind Paul's letter presses home a single theme relentlessly: the gospel is the fulfilment, not the negation, of God's word to Israel."<sup>18</sup>

What then of Paul's sweeping statement that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction" (15:4)? At first glance it might seem to relativise to the point of destruction the importance of Israel past as the historical people of God. If what was written in the past appeared at first to be for the instruction of Israel but may now be seen as being for the instruction of the church, then what place is left for Israel? But if we set the statement of 15:4 in context of Paul's previous argumentation up to this point then we can see that in fact it does not entail a denial or downplaying of the experiences of the historical Israel. Rom. 9:4-5 makes it adequately clear that the gifts bestowed on Israel in the past (adoption, glory, covenants, law, worship, promises, patriarchs) still 'belong' to them in the present, and have not been abrogated just because they may

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<sup>18</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 34.

have found transformed meaning in their receipt by the church. So too then as regards their scriptures. Indeed, it is Israel's possession of the scriptures that stands behind the mention here of 'law,' 'covenants' and 'promises,' and the same is emphasised elsewhere: the Jew 'has in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth' (2:20). Tellingly, 'the value of circumcision' (3:1) may be 'much in every way' (3:2a), but the only 'advantage' that Paul actually gets round to mentioning at this point (presumably then somewhere near the top of the list) is that "the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God" (3:2b). Clearly Paul does not view Israel to have forfeited their claim on the scriptures just because he is also able to view those scriptures as being written for the instruction of the church.

## THE PRACTICAL FUNCTION OF THE LAW

The role of the law in the life of the church represents one of the areas related to Israel in which our two texts may seem least alike. The disjuncture is immediately apparent from the number of appearances of the word νόμος: fifty in Romans and *none* in Revelation. Why this mismatch?

In Romans, consideration of the role of the law in God's purposes is a crucial element, especially in chapters 2-4 and 7-8, and the argumentation there shapes much of the remainder of the letter. The first time that the law comes directly into focus in Romans is in 2:12, which characterises the Gentiles who were the subjects of the preceding discussion as ἀνόμως ἥμαρτον, sinning without law. Their judgment then is that ἀνόμως . . . ἀπολοῦνται, they will perish apart from the law. This paves the way for the correlating statement that ὅσοι ἐν νόμῳ ἥμαρτον, διὰ νόμου κριθήσονται, which introduces Paul's first direct pass at the topic of the law: the assertion that "it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (2:13). He begins to explore the implications of this in the remainder of the chapter, but will not follow them to their resolution (which is that faith in Christ fulfils the law) until he considers them afresh in 9:30-10:13. In between those two poles lies Romans 7, which provides suggestive evidence that among the implied Gentile audience there were those for whom law-obedience was a part of their faith in Jesus. Reading Paul as imaginatively adopting a persona representative of that group in order to identify with them seems the most satisfactory way of accounting for the flow of 7:7-

25, and especially the statement that “I was once alive apart from the law” (7:9). It is difficult to ignore Das’s insistence that “The pathos of the “I” does not correspond to Paul’s clearly autobiographical descriptions elsewhere,”<sup>19</sup> and that instead “A God-fearer’s experience would match the experience of a unified “I” throughout Rom 7:7-25.”<sup>20</sup> Chapters 7-8 having developed the groundwork laid in chapters 2-3, chapters 14-15 will then return to the question of the practical role of the law in the life of the community (via a positive mention of the ethical role of the law in 13:8-10). As we saw, Paul addresses himself primarily to the strong, those who recognise that their faith in Jesus frees them from the obligation to obey the law; but he must engage with and accommodate the convictions and concerns of the weak, those who believe themselves and others still obliged to obey the law. Watson’s insight is illuminating: “Paul can be entirely positive about the law and its place within the Christian life, in contexts where its subsidiary status in relation to the gospel is clear.”<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, Revelation makes no mention of the law whatsoever. We have already refuted Frankfurter’s contention that the not-Jews of the letters represent Pauline ‘strong’ Gentiles who have cut loose from the bounds of the law, and that this has brought them into conflict with John’s view that *halakhic* purity is an integral part of allegiance to Jesus. This is a misunderstanding of both parties, as is already indicated by the total absence of νόμος language anywhere in Revelation. Whereas in Romans the primary anthropological dichotomy is ‘Jew and Gentile/Greek’ (even if those categories are reimagined and in some ways transcended), in Revelation humanity is fundamentally divided into those who worship the Lamb and those who worship the beast, with no rhetorical space left for any ambiguity or middle ground.<sup>22</sup> This displaces the role of law as the boundary marker between the two humanities as they are conceived in Romans; in Revelation the demarcation is instead performed by the image of sealing, whereby the followers of the beast take his mark (which is his name or the number of his name), and the saints are marked on the forehead with the seal/name of God. This means that the ethical questions confronting the congregations are not about

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<sup>19</sup> Das, *Solving*, p. 226.

<sup>20</sup> Das, *Solving*, p. 221.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Watson, “The Law in Romans,” in J. L. Sumney (ed.), *Reading Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 93-107 (105).

<sup>22</sup> Though that is not to say that entities might not pass from one category to the other. Richard Bauckham shows that Revelation holds out two comprehensive and contradictory visions: one of the condemnation of the nations, and one of their salvation (*Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 101-104). The fate of any given nation will hang on its response to the Lamb, the crucial test of which will be its response to his people as they maintain a faithful witness unto death. It is this that will be the great catalyst of the opportunity to ‘fear God and give him glory.’

obedience to the law but about aspects of participation with the culture of Rome. It would be impossible to engage with the former without it raising questions around the latter, but not so the reverse. In Revelation the horror of compromise with the arrogance and idolatry of Rome is totally uncoupled from all explicit reference to the framework of the Jewish law.

Is the absence of the law in Revelation the inevitable result of the positions that Paul takes in Romans? I think perhaps so. The reason that the law features so prominently in Romans is because it is relevant to Paul's purpose and because he takes time to argue his positions in depth and detail, as he must if he is to exert apostolic authority in a community that he did not found and has not visited. He must address the ethical role of the law in the life of the community because of the division between the weak and the strong. We noted earlier that Paul's unification strategy—making submission to the misdirected scruples of the weak incumbent upon the strong—requires that those thus encumbered are absolutely confident in the veracity of their 'strong' theology, or else Paul runs the distinct risk of effectively inviting them to Judaize! Thus it is that the call to submission in Romans 14-15 is issued only once the preceding chapters have brilliantly established that the law *does* attest to the gospel, and that Christ *is* the climax of the covenant. The problem is that however convincingly, creatively and comprehensively Paul might weave the law into his theological argumentation, his hard-won conclusions, once established, hardly necessitate an ongoing consciousness of the law. Once the discussion is taken beyond a context in which the scruples of the weak keep the law in focus, there becomes no reason to think on its ethical role at all. We see the fruit of this trajectory in Revelation, in which the only function of the law is to provide a rich vein of prophetic imagery. If already in Romans it is the Spirit that will now lead those who are sons of God (8:14), it is little surprise that in Revelation it is not the law but the Spirit that speaks to the churches.

## REDEFINITION OF THE 'JEW'

One of the most striking overlaps in the ways that Romans and Revelation relate to Israel is that they both exhibit a redefinition of the term Ἰουδαῖος. This invites us to consider the relationship between the redefinitions and what they might reveal about the wider attitudes to Israel in each text. The key verses are as follows:

For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God. (Rom. 2:28-29)

I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (Rev. 2:9)

I will make those of the Synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. (Rev. 3:9)

In Romans the definition of the people of God in the present and how this relates to the people of God in the past is a central issue. This operates both at the deepest theological level (how can God be righteous if his word to Israel has failed?) and at the most pressing social level (how should Gentiles relate to Jews and the Jewish law within the new covenant community? And how should they relate to unbelieving Israel?). The gravity of the matter sees Paul employing immense care and skill in raising and exploring the theological issues connected with Israel throughout chapters 1-8 and especially in chapters 9-11, before explicating the socio-ethnic implications in chapters 14-15. The great length of Romans and the multi-staged nature of its argument is reflected in the way that the redefinition of Ἰουδαῖος is introduced and developed. In the Romans verses quoted above it is assumed that physical circumcision is what identifies an ‘outward’ Jew, but what exactly Jeremiah’s ‘circumcision of the heart’ motif is now being taken to entail—and thus who may be identified as a ‘true Jew’ according to that measure—is left unclear. By the time that the cumulative witness of Rom. 3:21-26, 4:16, 9:6-8 and 9:30-10:4 have revealed that it is faith in Jesus which fulfils the law and obtains the promise, and that this must then be the substance of the true circumcision spoken of in chapter 2, the redefinition of Ἰουδαῖος begun there has been left behind and is never explicitly resumed. After the end of chapter 2, Ἰουδαῖος always retains its literal sense, being used to refer to ethnic Jews (Rom. 3:1, 9, 29; 9:24; 10:12). It is only on subsequent readings of the text that we may connect the dots in order to understand that the way in which the physically uncircumcised are able to keep the requirements of the law and thus be regarded as circumcised (2:26) is by having faith in the one who is

the goal of the law (10:4). That this move does not precipitate a return to and consummation of the redefinition of Ἰουδαῖος hinted at in chapter 2 is reflective of the way that Paul retains a special place and purpose for ethnic Israel even after its greatest calling has been shown to have found expression only in those who believe in Jesus the Messiah. Indeed, the word Ἰσραήλ itself displays a similar pattern to Ἰουδαῖος: radically redefined in 9:6 to include Gentiles as well as Jews (see comments on that verse above), and yet thereafter returning to its usual function of referring exclusively to ethnic Israel, including at 11:26. Thus we may say that both Ἰουδαῖος and Ἰσραήλ are partially redefined in Romans, reflecting both the way God has constituted his new people around his Messiah and the way that he still retains for Israel according to the flesh a special position and purpose.

This summary helps us begin to reflect on the redefinition of Ἰουδαῖος in the Revelation verses quoted above. As in Romans, the initial statements a) are explicit in denying Jews that name, b) do not explicitly transfer it to those who believe in Jesus, and c) certainly carry that implication. When Rev. 2:9 and 3:9 are viewed in conjunction with the treatment of Israel elsewhere in the book, it is clear that it is the people of Jesus who are now to be regarded as ‘Jews,’ and anyone who claims that name but fails to worship him (and worse, contributes to the persecution of his people) is ‘not’ a Jew and must be ‘lying.’ The key difference between Romans and Revelation in this area is that whereas Romans maintains and explores the tension of this bifurcated meaning, in Revelation it quickly becomes apparent that no special place has been left for the Jews once they have been so savagely denied that name in 2:9 and 3:9. After these chapters, Revelation consistently applies Israel language and promises to the church without qualification or explanation. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in chapter 7, where the church is announced as being drawn out of the twelve tribes of Israel, the eschatological army of the Lord. As we have already noted, both this move and the comments about the not-Jews in chapters 2 and 3 are anticipated and facilitated by the programmatic Israel-typology of Rev. 1:5-6: it is only those whom Jesus has freed from their sins by his blood that are now a kingdom and priests (cf. Ex. 19:6). This helps us see that as in Romans so too in Revelation the redefinition of Ἰουδαῖος has a christological underpinning, so that Hays’ comment on Romans could be applied also to Revelation:

“Gentiles have become—in a remarkable metonymic transfer—Abraham’s seed, heirs of God’s word to Israel, as a result of God’s act in Jesus Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Rhetorical considerations**

If there are theological similarities in the redefinition of Ἰουδαῖος in Romans and Revelation, it highlights just how differently they express those convictions. The tone of the redefinition in Revelation is passionate, polemical, and scathing, whereas in Romans it is much more measured. There are three key rhetorical considerations which help explain this disparity, as follows.

1) The first thing to consider is the rhetorical form in which the respective redefinitions are found. Interestingly, in both Romans and Revelation the passages in which the redefinitions of ‘Jew’ are found are rhetorically addressed to someone other than the actual recipients. In Rom. 2:17 Paul commences a diatribe with an imaginary interlocutor who calls himself a Jew, and in Revelation 2-3 the messages to the churches are formally addressed to the angel (Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ) of each assembly. However, whilst the diatribe style employed by Paul allows him to maintain a playful edge that softens what might otherwise be a potentially confrontational piece of argumentation,<sup>24</sup> the rhetorical displacement of the messages in Revelation is (deliberately) insufficient to restrain the force of the savage redefinition of the Jews. These contrasting impressions may owe something to the relational context obtaining between speaker/writer and reader. The messages to the churches in Revelation are said to be spoken by Jesus himself, which is commensurate with their unflinching exertion of authority; behind this it seems likely that John has personal knowledge of his recipients and the situations in which the message will find them. Conversely, in Romans Paul is conscious of writing to a church that he has *not* founded (Rom. 1:8-15), and accordingly exercises a degree of rhetorical restraint, even if he is still willing to address them ‘boldly on some points’ in his role as apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:15-16).

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<sup>23</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> This dynamic becomes especially important for Paul in 11:17-24, where, unlike in chapter 2, the imaginary interlocutor is representing his actual target recipients. There “The technique of speech-in-character allows Paul to discuss the issues with an imaginary interlocutor whose traits are sufficiently exaggerated that the audience does not feel attacked, but sufficiently analogous that the audience can grasp the allegorical relevance” (Jewett, *Romans*, pp. 683-684).

2) The way that the redefinitions of ‘Jew’ come across is profoundly influenced by the proximity of related statements. Here Revelation and Romans substantially diverge. On both occasions where John redefines ‘Jew,’ he is not content to strip the Jews of that name, but replaces it with another: they are a ‘synagogue of Satan.’ This makes it abundantly clear that for John it is not that those who ‘say they are Jews and are not’ have made an honest or tolerable mistake, but that in his eyes they have culpably forfeited that name, and as such are fully deserving of the scorn incurred. Conversely, the force of the redefinition in Romans is substantially tempered by other statements elsewhere. The closest at hand is just a few verses after the redefinition of the word ‘Jew’ (and in logical response to it), as Paul clarifies that circumcision has “much value in every way” (3:2). A similarly positive tone towards Jews and Judaism then follows too in later statements: the law is holy, just and good (7:12); Paul cares passionately about the Jews, who are his flesh (9:1-3; 10:1); his ministry to the Gentiles aims at the salvation of the Jews (11:13-14); Gentiles must humbly remember their indebtedness to Israel (11:17-24); and, supremely, in the end “all Israel will be saved” (11:26).

3) There is a disparity in the conflicts related to the redefinitions of ‘Jew’ in Romans and Revelation, and in the responses that it was the two writers’ intent to produce. The Jews associated with the persecution of the Smyrnaeans in Rev. 2:8-11 and with the witness of the Philadelphians in Rev. 3:7-13 are external to the group that John addresses, and as such he has no reason to be diplomatic in his expression of anger or his vision of vindication. We might characterise John’s rhetorical purpose throughout Revelation to be propounding ‘purity through polarity’: he creates binary categories of good and evil, Lamb and beast, and into one of these two categories every person and practice must fit. The effect of this polarity on his consideration of conflict with the Jews is that if they are opposing the people of the Lamb then they must belong to the beast—they must be a synagogue of Satan.<sup>25</sup> Thus the redefinition of ‘Jew’ in Revelation is both polemical and polarising. Paul is capable and in need of rather more subtlety than that. The presence of unbelieving Jews in Rome is more interconnected with his audience and purpose, and therefore must be treated with more care and sensitivity. Even more critically, the pastoral issues that he addresses in chapters 14 and 15 are intimately linked to the relationship between Gentiles and Jews *within* the community. Thus even though he addresses himself principally to the Gentiles, he must speak of the Jews in terms that are tolerable to them. This means that his redefinition of

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<sup>25</sup> This point awaits more detailed exploration in the next chapter.

‘Jew’ in chapter 2 requires a more temperate approach, and more detailed theological justification if it is to have any traction with the church as a whole.

Paul walks something of a tightrope in Romans, offering a radical redefinition of ‘Jew’ whilst simultaneously holding on to an affirmation of the special status of ethnic Israel in the past, present and future. However, it is the former strand that stands out in the development of Christianity rather than the latter, since (as Dunn notes) “‘Israel’ became an exclusive and polemical claim, already in Barnabas and Melito – the church as the ‘new Israel’ replacing the Israel of old.”<sup>26</sup> Dunn’s resigned conclusion is that “When that happened, the theological hope (as well as the missionary strategy) of Romans 9-11 was already doomed, and the theology which Paul offered there was left prey to endless confusion and misunderstanding.”<sup>27</sup> Was this an inevitable trajectory? We must answer affirmatively, along similar lines as above in connection with the role of the law: once Paul had taken the step of redefining the term Ἰουδαῖος (and indeed the term Ἰσραήλ in Rom. 9:6-8), the passage of time and the tensions around the birth of a new movement were bound to erode whatever caveats and subtleties temper the redefinition in Romans. Even the great caveat of the future salvation of Israel fails to survive into Revelation, as we explore in the next section. Furthermore, it is perhaps worth noting that of the two elements that Paul seeks to hold in tension in Romans—a) true Jews are believers in Jesus, and b) ethnic Israel remains distinctively loved—only the former directly concerns the recipients, and so it is perhaps not surprising that this seems ultimately to have been the more influential. It is the nature of both the individual ego and the group mentality to be more concerned with the standing and identity of the self than of the other. Certainly by the time of Revelation we can see that a strong consciousness of the way in which the people of the Lamb are the new people of God has left no room for holding ethnic Israel in special esteem. It is assumed that if God has a plan for the Jews then it can only be that they finally recognise that his favour has deserted them and come to rest instead on his church. It is not hard to imagine that many of the Gentile recipients of Revelation—not least those at Smyrna or Philadelphia—might well ‘vaunt themselves over those branches now broken off,’ with little thought that those branches might one day be grafted back into their own olive tree as the apostle Paul had once gone to such lengths to insist.

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<sup>26</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, p. 531.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn, *Theology*, pp. 531-532.

## ESCHATOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

Romans and Revelation both make interesting adaptations of one of the traditions that “runs like a golden thread through the prophetic writings”<sup>28</sup>: the expectation that one day the glorious restoration of Israel would catalyse a great ingathering of the nations to Jerusalem in reverence of Israel’s God.<sup>29</sup> We may reflect on these adaptations and what they might reveal about the wider attitude to Israel in these two texts.

### **Revelation: The lost tribes of Israel**

We saw that to an extent Revelation 7 assumes the form of Israel’s traditional expectation, beginning with a description of the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 1-8) and ending with a vision of an innumerable multitude of people from every nation, gathered before the Lamb (vv. 9-17). Draper traces the influence of Zechariah 14’s Feast of Tabernacles imagery on the chapter and argues on that basis that “If the perspective of Zechariah 14 is the correct one, then the 144,000 must represent Jews or at least Jewish Christians.”<sup>30</sup> However, we saw that this fatally fails to take into account the promise to the Philadelphians that “I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you” (Rev. 3:9). This is a powerful and deliberate subversion and inversion of the traditional expectation, and it must be allowed to exert interpretative influence on chapter 7. When John hears the twelve tribes sealed in 7:4-8, it is the multi-ethnic church that is symbolically evoked; the innumerable multitude then encompasses also those who will become God’s ‘peoples’ (21:3) as a result of the faithful witness of the church, as explored most directly in 11:1-13.

To what extent does the reversal effected by Rev. 3:9 mean that we should see Israel as singled out among the nations that will flock to the Lamb as they hear and see the faithful witness of his followers? The answer must be only minimally if at all. In looking at the promise to those at Philadelphia, we noted that although Jewish conversion might be the implied premise of the scenario envisaged (since the ‘I’ whose

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<sup>28</sup> Draper, “Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles,” pp. 135-136.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Ps. 86:9; Isa. 2:2-4; 45:15; 49:23; 60:14; Mic. 4:1-4; Tob. 13.9-11; *Pss. Sol.* 17:32-36.

<sup>30</sup> Draper, “Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles,” p. 136.

love for the Philadelphians they are to acknowledge is Jesus), this is not at all where the emphasis lies. Ultimately Jesus' promise is that they will bow down at 'your' feet rather than 'mine.' The point of any envisaged conversion, then, is not that the Jews are favoured but that such a scenario would vindicate the favoured position of the church. At the most perhaps we could say that this implies an acknowledgement of Israel's favoured status in the past, but again the point is not that this secures them favour and status in the present, but that them bowing down at the feet of the church will signify the transfer of favour and status that has already taken place.

Even if we allow some expectation of Jewish conversion at Philadelphia, there would be little justification for extending this beyond that particular context. That there is no hint of salvation anticipated for the Jews at Smyrna confirms that any collateral conversion implied at Philadelphia is rooted not in the Jewishness of those to be converted but in the particulars of their situation in relation to the church in that locality. There is no indication elsewhere in Revelation of the priority of Israel as part of the to-be-repentant nations. Because the main thrust of the inversion in Rev. 3:9 is the vindication of the church rather than the salvation of Israel, it is the former that takes centre stage in chapter 7, without retaining the logical corollary that it should be principally Jews who are redeemed as a result of the witness of the church. Even in Jerusalem (chapter 11), the demographic is not the Jews but 'members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations' (11:9), and the point of the scene is not to make a prediction about that city but to articulate something of the church's call to witness. Thus whilst Revelation does reverse the traditional eschatological sequence of salvation so that the church is the firstfruits rather than Israel, there is little special place retained for Israel thereafter. It is only the application of an inappropriately literal hermeneutic to Revelation 7 and 11 that is able to salvage some residual priority for the people and place of empirical Israel. That coherent symbolic (and ecclesiological) interpretations of these passages are readily available confirms the *a priori* misgivings about literal interpretation expressed in the 'Introduction to Revelation' above. According to Revelation, those who will be drawn in to the New Jerusalem by the faithful witness of the church are not specifically or especially the Jews, but 'the nations' and 'the kings of the earth' (21:24).

## Romans: To the Jew first?

The question of whether Romans propounds a reversal of the traditional eschatological sequence of salvation is a matter of debate. Having declared in the opening chapter that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16), does Paul stand by this scheme or does he abandon it? Does it constitute a reversal of the sequence when he reveals the ‘mystery’ that “a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (11:25-26)?

Mark Nanos is insistent that the two-step pattern laid down in Rom. 1:16 is operative throughout the letter, opposing the view that Paul displaces Israel backwards in the sequence of salvation history.<sup>31</sup> In the language of the olive tree metaphor:

The fate of Israel precedes and supports the fate of the nations. The “Yes” of the believing “root” as well as the “No” of those “cut off” precedes and supports the “Yes” of the wild olives grafted in, but there is still more—both the believing root and the wild olives are not the end of God’s plan but now must recognize their responsibility to those of Israel who initially said “No.”<sup>32</sup>

This means that “The ‘mystery’ Paul reveals [in 11:25-26] is that Israel has been divided and thus the two-step pattern is operative in spite of appearances to the contrary: God is still committed to the program of ‘to the Jew first and also to the Greek.’”<sup>33</sup> The criterion by which Nanos analyses the mystery and rejects alternative interpretations of its content is its ability to motivate Gentiles to humility. The criterion is appropriate, since Paul explicitly says that his purpose in setting it forth is “So that you [Gentiles] may not claim to be wiser than you are . . .” (11:25). But the problem with Nanos’ reading is that he finds emphasis where Paul does not provide it. If it was Paul’s primary concern to demonstrate that ‘the fate of Israel precedes and supports the fate of the nations’—if this was the very heart of the ‘mystery’—then in the preceding olive tree metaphor we would expect the reason that the Gentiles should not vaunt themselves over the branches broken off to be that their own inclusion was dependent on that very breaking off. Instead their gaze is directed to the supporting *root*, which

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<sup>31</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 239-288.

<sup>32</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>33</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, p. 259.

does not represent the divided response of Israel in the present but the nourishing heritage of Israel's past. It is then the arrogant Gentile who voices the position that Nanos is arguing as Paul's own: "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in" (11:19). Paul does acknowledge the point with a *καλῶς* but it is clearly not where his own emphasis lies, as he immediately seeks to shift the focus on to the *reason* for the breaking of the branches, which is unbelief. This then becomes his second argument for Gentile humility: their position is no more guaranteed than the forfeited position of the branches broken off, since the only grounds on which any branch is connected is faith. Paul's third argument for Gentile humility then emerges at the end of the metaphor: if the Gentiles have been grafted in contrary to nature, then they can expect God to graft the Jewish branches back in all the more readily (11:23-24). This amply demonstrates that an affirmation of Israel's ongoing sequential priority is *not* the only (and not Paul's preferred) grounds on which the 'mystery' might fulfil its function of motivating Gentiles to humility.

All this is not to say that Paul totally abandons the usual pattern of 'Jew first and then Gentile,' and indeed it would be fairly startling if he did, especially having first mooted it at such a key moment in 1:16. Nanos is right to insist that the gospel going to the Gentiles is in some way dependent on or linked to *both halves* of Israel's prior response to it (the rejection of hardened and the acceptance of the elect). But he is wrong to insist that this must be the very heart of the mystery in 11:25-26, which does after all unequivocally state that the full salvation of the Gentiles does precede the full salvation of Israel. Nanos protests as follows:

How does revealing an inverted order of gentile first before Jew differ from what the gentiles already believe? . . . And how would the knowledge of that motivate a change of heart? Learning that their salvation now precedes Israel's stands a better chance of feeding conceit than it does of checking it.<sup>34</sup>

The answer to this objection is this: revealing an inverted order of Gentile before Jew (in terms of ultimate corporate salvation) differs from what the Gentiles already believe in that their proud preconception had no place for Israel at all. The mystery reveals that far from being rejected and forgotten, Israel's salvation is the climax and in some ways

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<sup>34</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 258-259.

even the goal of the Gentiles' own ingathering. For Paul the priority of Israel in the scheme of salvation is more a matter of ontology than chronology.

### **Concluding reflection**

Both Romans and Revelation see the church as occupying the place that Israel's prophets envisaged for Israel: the light of the world, which will provoke others to jealousy unto salvation. In Romans these 'others' are specifically the Jews; in Revelation they are a great multitude from every nation. The difference in attitude towards the eschatological fate of Israel in our two texts is perhaps most poignantly manifest in this: Romans declares that '*you* (the church) will see that *they* (unbelieving Jews) are loved' (Rom. 11:25-29), whereas the promise in Revelation is that '*they* (unbelieving Jews) will see that *you* (the church) are loved' (Rev. 3:9). Romans aims to check a proud Gentile supersessionist tendency, whereas Revelation surely both reflects and fuels it.

The fact that Romans and Revelation both start from a similar ecclesiology that sees the church as inheriting the place and promises of Israel (though this is expressed in different ways) makes it all the more striking that they contain such contrasting attitudes towards ethnic Israel. Romans demonstrates the possibility of having an Israel-oriented ecclesiology that nevertheless leaves room for appreciation of ethnic Israel in the past, compassion on ethnic Israel in the present, and hope for ethnic Israel in the future. This shows that the antipathy towards Jews in Revelation cannot be accounted for as an automatic by-product of its strong Israel-ecclesiology, inviting us to look elsewhere for an explanation. And there is one particular 'elsewhere' that lays first claim on our investigative attention. In the present section we have pursued a number of different avenues of enquiry, but in their own ways all avenues lead, of course, to Rome.



# CHAPTER 11

## HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: NERO'S PERSECUTION

Having made some initial reflections on the points at which the treatment of Israel in Romans and Revelation may most fruitfully be compared, we now prepare to zoom out from the texts themselves and take another look at the particular sweep of history in which we find them. Though destined for churches separated by thousands of miles, Romans and Revelation share the Roman Empire as one of their primary contexts. Consideration of the different forms of Rome assumed and encountered by each will equip us to dig a little deeper into some of the underlying reasons behind the contrasting responses to Israel that we have already observed.

### NERO'S PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS

Nero's persecution in connection with the Great Fire of Rome is the first time that we have evidence of Roman authorities identifying Christians as such. The Book of Acts provides the best evidence for the interaction of Christians and Romans prior to this point, and there we find the latter consistently relating to Paul as a troublesome case *inside* rather than outside the framework of Judaism.<sup>1</sup> Suetonius' mention of the Edict of Claudius<sup>2</sup> bespeaks the same dynamic: whether intended to refer to the expulsion of

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<sup>1</sup> The clearest example of course being Gallio's refusal to entertain a case brought by Jews against Paul, stating that "since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I do not wish to be a judge of these matters" (Acts 18:15).

<sup>2</sup> Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4.

all the Jews or only those involved in the disturbances, either way the unrest related to Christ (see below) is connected only with the *Iudaeos* and not with a new religion or even a new sect. There is nothing to suggest that the general restraint and benevolence of Nero's early years under the tutelage of Seneca and Burrus faltered with respect to the young Christ movement;<sup>3</sup> it would seem rather, as far as its relationship with the Empire was concerned, that the church enjoyed a time of peace and was built up, living in the fear of the Lord and growing in numbers. This apparent peace was shattered by Nero's persecution in 64 CE. Various mentions are made of this event in ancient writings, but the account in Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44 provides by far the most detailed evidence, as well as connecting the persecution with the great fire of Rome:

But neither human help, nor imperial munificence, nor all the modes of placating Heaven, could stifle scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order [of Nero]. Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. . . . First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.

Before leaping to explore the implications of this event, we must probe its veracity. If Tacitus is right in framing Nero's persecution of Christians as retribution for the Great Fire of Rome, then why is this connection absent elsewhere? William Benjamin Smith asks of the pagan authors, "why do Suetonius (*Ner.* 38) and Dio Cassius (62, 16, 1) and

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<sup>3</sup> Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (trans. from 1983 Italian; London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 26; William L. Lane, "Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, *1 Clement*," in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson (eds), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 196-244 (202), noting that even Tacitus concedes the fairness that characterised this early part of Nero's reign (*Ann.* 13.51), despite the dim view of Nero that he takes elsewhere.

Pliny [the Elder] (*N. H.* 17: 1, 1, 5), who all have no doubt that Nero himself ordered the conflagration, and who must have known of such a long continued slaughter of innocents, why do they never even remotely allude to such a tremendous matter?”<sup>4</sup> And regarding the Christian apologists, Paul Keresztes notes that Eusebius places the fire and the persecution four years apart, and judges that “It is entirely impossible to believe that Tertullian—the great Tertullian engaged in his great work of defending Christianity against all imaginable accusations by its enemies—it is simply impossible to accept that he would not so much as have mentioned the fire if Christians had been punished for it or in connection with it.”<sup>5</sup> Smith’s solution to the problem is that the whole chapter is a later Christian interpolation and that Nero never persecuted Christians in connection with the fire;<sup>6</sup> Keresztes’ is that

Tacitus was wrong in connecting the Great Fire of Rome with Nero’s punishment of the Christians. Ever purposeful in his choice of themes and characters, Tacitus shows himself in his writings as a supreme dramatist and a tragic writer of history. By joining together the Christians, the outcasts of Roman society, and Nero, equally, if not more, hated by the Romans, and by joining together the fire of Rome and the massacre of the Christians, the Roman historian paints a tragedy in sheer black – and all this only, perhaps, to make the character of Nero appear even blacker.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst it is true that (as Stephen Benko says) “Tacitus did not seek to deal with the problem of Christianity but rather to illustrate the depravity of Nero,”<sup>8</sup> in fact it is not necessary to cast doubt on either the authorship or the accuracy of Tacitus’ account in order to explain how it is that he connects the fire and the persecution when others do not. There are a number of dynamics in Tacitus’ account that might prevent or dissuade other writers from connecting the two events as he has done. Smith treads on his own toes when he highlights that in between Tacitus’ record of the fire in *Ann.* 15.38-41 and his report of the punishment of Christians in 15.44 there is his account of Nero’s architectural reconstructions in 15.42-43.<sup>9</sup> Smith’s point is that according to Tacitus,

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<sup>4</sup> William Benjamin Smith, “The Silence of Josephus and Tacitus,” *The Monist* 20/4 (1910), pp. 515-550 (536-537).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Keresztes, “Nero, the Christians and the Jews in Tacitus and Clement of Rome,” *Latomus* 43/2 (1984), pp. 404-413 (408).

<sup>6</sup> Smith, “Silence of Josephus and Tacitus,” pp. 525-540.

<sup>7</sup> Keresztes, “Nero, the Christians and the Jews,” p. 408.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1984), p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, “Silence of Josephus and Tacitus,” p. 537.

Nero “took severe measures not, as would be natural [i.e. believable], in the heated state of public feeling, but only long after and because the report refused to abate.”<sup>10</sup> But this observation far more keenly supports Tacitus’ account than undermines it; we hardly require a moment of high crisis to provide cause or context for an act of Neronian cruelty, and the thought that his action against Christians might have followed the fire at some considerable remove makes it much more understandable that other writers might not make or record the connection between the two. But even if the persecution began closely on the heels of the fire, the same origin-obscuring effect would be produced if it continued for a long time thereafter. Tacitus’ detail that there ‘arose a sentiment of pity’ might be taken to suggest just such a scenario, since as Ramsay says, “it can have been no inconsiderable number and no short period which brought satiety to a populace accustomed to find their greatest amusement in public butcheries, frequently recurring on a colossal scale.”<sup>11</sup> Finally there is the possibility that the connection between the fire and the persecution was real though unofficial, so that

. . . the charge of incendiarism may have been merely implied in the imperial propaganda, in the sequence of events (the trials immediately following the fire) and in popular comment, which was equally hostile to Nero and the Christians, and probably more ready than any self-respecting historian could be to have two mutually exclusive scapegoats for the same calamity.<sup>12</sup>

These reconstructions pave the way for harmonisation solutions to the problem of the apparent discrepancies in the ancient record of Nero’s persecution, such as those offered by Marta Sordi (“Tacitus’ account completes the picture given by the other authors, giving an account of a dramatic but limited incident that none of the others happened to mention”<sup>13</sup>) and Ramsay (“Suetonius gives merely a brief statement of the permanent administrative principle into which Nero’s action ultimately resolved itself”<sup>14</sup>). It is easy to imagine that other writers simply did not make the connection between the fire and the persecution that Tacitus made. Did not or would not: F. W. Clayton even suggests

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, “Silence of Josephus and Tacitus,” p. 537.

<sup>11</sup> Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 241. He had already noted that “In the words of Tacitus, taken by themselves, there is nothing to suggest that the prosecution of the Christians continued for several years; but at the same time there is nothing inconsistent with this conclusion, which was suggested by the words of Suetonius” (p. 240).

<sup>12</sup> F. W. Clayton, “Tacitus and Nero’s Persecutions of the Christians,” *The Classical Quarterly* 41/3-4 (1947), pp. 81-85 (83).

<sup>13</sup> Sordi, *Christians and the Roman Empire*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170* (Mansfield College Lectures; 9<sup>th</sup> ed.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), p. 232.

that the connection in Tacitus might be taken as evidence of his objectivity in comparison with the other writers mentioned above, if “Christian writers preferred to believe that Nero’s victims perished for the faith, and the faith alone, while other pagan writers, hating Nero and the Christians equally, gave the guilt of incendiarism to the emperor.”<sup>15</sup> This may overstate the case, but the fact remains that the absence of the persecution-fire connection in other writers cannot be viewed as sufficient reason to doubt the accuracy of Tacitus’ account. It remains the most detailed and reliable source on Nero’s persecution that we possess.

How then are we to interpret the events recorded by Tacitus? Whilst we cannot rule out entirely the possibility that some Christians really were guilty of starting the fire, it seems extremely unlikely. Tacitus clearly does not believe the Christians to be the true culprits. He states that the second group of arrestees were convicted “not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race.” As for the first group—those *qui fatebantur*—it is unquestionable that they confessed to Christianity and not to arson (though it is clear that Nero was intent on equating the two).<sup>16</sup> If Tacitus had intended to say that they confessed to arson then this would create an intolerable inconsistency with the close of his account, in that “the revulsion of popular feeling which finally occurred was due to the growing conviction that the Christians were innocent and ill-treated. Such a conviction could never have grown up if the Christians had in numbers confessed the crime.”<sup>17</sup> The same problem neuters Rose’s suggestion that the *qui fatebantur* conundrum could be solved on the supposition that this first group was comprised of Neronian agents whose job was to pose as Christians and confess to the arson, thus creating a pretext and a demand for further arrests of actual Christians.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the situation described by Tacitus seems parallel to that famously recorded by Pliny the Younger: a first wave of arrests for the most outspoken Christians who willingly confessed themselves as such, and then a second and broader wave of arrests for those who were brought to the attention of the authorities not of their own volition but at the instigation of informers (whether other Christians as in Tacitus or anonymous ill-wishers as in Pliny).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Clayton, “Tacitus and Nero’s Persecutions,” p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> T. D. Barnes, “Legislation Against the Christians,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 58/1-2 (1968), pp. 32-50 (34).

<sup>17</sup> Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 238.

<sup>18</sup> K. F. C. Rose, “Tacitus, Annals XV. 44. 3-8,” *The Classical Review* 10/3 (1960), p. 195 (195).

<sup>19</sup> The parallel is noted by Ramsay (*Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 239).

It remains to comment on what effect Nero's persecution had on the legal status of the church in the Empire. The uncertainty in this area that Pliny the Younger would later express to Trajan—and Trajan's reply that no definite rule existed—makes it difficult to accept Sordi's view that Nero's persecution either reflected or precipitated an official categorisation of Christianity as a *superstitio illicita*.<sup>20</sup> But neither can we dismiss it as a one-off incident exclusively connected with retribution for the Great Fire. We have seen that a more sustained and concerted action better accounts for the eventual sympathy of the populace as recorded by Tacitus, and for the absence of the fire context altogether in other writers. It seems best, then, to side with Ramsay's judgment that "the persecution of Nero, begun for the sake of diverting popular attention, was continued as a permanent police measure under the form of a general prosecution of Christians as a sect dangerous to the public safety,"<sup>21</sup> and that this laid down a dangerous precedent for other governors to follow, even if they were not necessarily obliged to do so.<sup>22</sup> As for the probable social ramifications, Lampe distills them well:

The events under Nero presuppose that the Christians already existed in a considerable number, that they were publically known, and in general made a bad impression. Therefore they could easily be made into scapegoats. . . . The Neronian penal measures heightened the negative image of the Christians still more. Through these Neronian measures, the Christians were stamped as outsiders to society. From then on, they were regarded as potentially dangerous (possibly arsonists!), having to face the possibility of punishment by the authorities.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the precise legal effect of Nero's persecution, it is clear that it forms a decisive divider between the Rome encountered by Paul in Romans and the Rome encountered by John in Revelation. It is to the examination of these encounters that we now turn.

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<sup>20</sup> Sordi, *Christians and the Roman Empire*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 241. Likewise e.g. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Sherwin-White, "Early Persecutions," p. 209; Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 245.

<sup>23</sup> Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 84.

## THE ROLE OF THE JEWS IN NERO'S PERSECUTION

Earlier on we heard (and rejected) Keresztes' argument that the connection between Nero's persecution and the Great Fire was only the product of Tacitus' poetical and political imagination. In fact this is only a prelude to the main thesis of his article, which is that the catalyst of the persecution was not the fire but the Jews.<sup>24</sup> This preferences the evidence of *I Clement* over the evidence of *Ann.* 15.44, so that "Tacitus' Christians would have suffered, I suggest, in the wrong context, the context of the Great Fire of Rome, while the Christians of Clement, a few years after the fire, in fact, suffered in the right context, the context of the deadly hatred of the Synagogue and the outlawing of Christianity by the Emperor Nero."<sup>25</sup> We have seen that there is insufficient reason to reject Tacitus' fire context, but the question remains as to whether it was nevertheless 'the deadly hatred of the Synagogue' that first presented Nero with the idea of using the Christians as scapegoats. Lampe favourably entertains this position:

That Nero came upon the idea of maltreating the Christians as arsonists based on hints from the Jews is possible: *I Clem.* 5:2ff designates "jealousy and envy" as causing the Neronian persecution; especially the missionaries Peter and Paul were viewed jealously. By whom? In the first place the Jews who were aware of their competition in the mission field.<sup>26</sup>

Benko concurs with the postulation of Jewish intervention in Nero turning to the Christians, though only as a diversion of blame away from themselves by Synagogue leaders who were "alarmed by official investigations that blamed Jewish fanatics and so placed the entire Jewish community in danger."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Keresztes, "Nero, the Christians and the Jews," pp. 409-413.

<sup>25</sup> Keresztes, "Nero, the Christians and the Jews," p. 413.

<sup>26</sup> Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 47, n. 75. He defends the contested characterisation of Jews as 'aware of their competition in the mission field' with the comment that "mission activity of urban Roman Jews is attested, e.g., by Cassius Dio 57.18.5a: Tiberius in 19 C.E. expelled the urban Roman Jews because they converted so many Romans. Cf. also Horace, *Sat.* 1.4.142f," also noting that "Tertullian (*Scorp.* 10) names the synagogues as "fontes persecutionum"" (p. 47, n. 75).

<sup>27</sup> Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, p. 20.

That the church of the first century at points incurred the ill-feeling of the Jews is not to be disputed—indeed we have accepted this as the best context for reconstructing the trials of the community at Smyrna according to Rev. 2:8-11—but we must be cautious about how we apply this to the issue of Nero’s persecution. Although it may well be the Jews who are principally in mind as the subjects of Clement’s repeated reference to ‘jealousy’ once he turns from ‘ancient examples’ to those ‘nearer our time,’<sup>28</sup> if it were his intention to expose the Jews as the true instigators of Nero’s persecution then it is curious that the jealousy passage culminates not with that accusation but with the more general pronouncement that “Jealousy and strife overturned great cities and uprooted great nations.”<sup>29</sup> This gives the impression that it is jealousy itself that is Clement’s theme, not specifically the culpability of the Jews as its chief bearers. As for the idea of using the Christians as scapegoats for the Fire, Michael Gray-Fow is persuasive that it is unlikely to have been purely the product of a malicious Jewish suggestion:

[I]t would have been a dangerous manoeuvre. To many Romans the Jewish and Christian communities were hardly distinguishable; indeed probably many Roman Christians were Jewish in origin. An onslaught directed against the Christians could easily engulf the Jews as well.<sup>30</sup>

However, precisely this possible danger to the Jews of being engulfed in an onslaught against the Christians makes it very likely that once such an onslaught was launched, it would have been diligently aided by a Jewish community eager to distinguish and disassociate itself from its intended target.<sup>31</sup> And although we cannot be sure, it is probably preferable to suppose that Nero launched a punishment of Christians that was

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<sup>28</sup> *1 Clem.* 5.1.

<sup>29</sup> *1 Clem.* 6.4.

<sup>30</sup> Michael J. G. Gray-Fow, “Why the Christians? Nero and the Great Fire,” *Latomus* 57/3 (1998), pp. 595-616 (613). We may note that Smith also asks, “if the Jews had slandered the Christians in such infamous and ruinous fashion, why does not at least one among so many Christian authors, all of whom would have eagerly exploited any such fact or any such rumor, make some mention or give some hint of such a prodigious iniquity?” (“Silence of Josephus and Tacitus,” p. 549). But we have argued above that the apologists were probably unaware of the original fire context of the persecution.

<sup>31</sup> So Gray-Fow, “Why the Christians?” p. 612. Indeed, Walters convincingly demonstrates that the Jewish community would have had ample reason to want to distance themselves from the Christians throughout the Julio-Claudian period (James C. Walters, “Romans, Jews, and Christians: The Impact of the Romans on Jewish/Christian Relations in First-Century Rome,” in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson [eds], *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* [Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998], pp. 175-195 [176-183]). He notes that “The behaviors that seem to have the most capacity for putting the Jews at risk with the Romans during this period are riots, messianism, and especially proselytism. . . . It is precisely here that Christians posed the greatest threat: their aggressive proselytizing risked attracting the scrutiny of Roman administrators whose attention would be occupied elsewhere were it not for the Christians” (pp. 181-182).

then aided by Jews, rather than that he launched an investigation of Jews that was diverted on to the Christians as Benko suggests. The first reason is that the joint lobby of Nero's influential Jewish courtiers Poppaea and Aliturus is likely to have blocked any suggestion of laying the blame on the Jews that might have arisen from other quarters.<sup>32</sup> The second is that Tacitus states that the evils of the Christians were already known to the populace (and therefore surely to Nero also). It is of course possible that Tacitus projects or embellishes here from the standpoint of his own time, but there is nothing inherently unlikely about the claim that the Christians were known, and if so then it is likely that they would be selected as scapegoats above the Jews aside from any intervention from the latter. Like the Jews, the Christians were generally mistrusted by the populace—in fact they were 'loathed for their vices,' if Tacitus is to be believed, and in particular their perceived 'atheism' (i.e. refusal to acknowledge the gods of others)<sup>33</sup> might make them a most poetically pleasing propitiation where other 'modes of placating Heaven' had failed.<sup>34</sup> But unlike the Jews, and thus making them even more eligible candidates for blame, they no longer enjoyed (or were in the process of losing) the legal protection of belonging to a *religio licita*; "Their faith divided families and communities, and they themselves confessed a founder who had been crucified by the legitimate Roman authority of his day,"<sup>35</sup> few of their number could take refuge in the protection of Roman citizenship,<sup>36</sup> and most crucially of all, they had no synagogues and less property, and thus much less to lose from the fire.<sup>37</sup>

To sum up, then, the Christians were ideal scapegoats for the fire. It seems unlikely that the Jews were responsible for first introducing Nero to the fact of their existence and/or to the idea of making them the scapegoats, but extremely likely that the subsequent identification and punishment of the Christians would have been aided by Jews eager to

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<sup>32</sup> Gray-Fow's detailed and persuasive investigation assesses Poppaea and Aliturus as "two people very close to Nero with a definite interest in the Jews and a probable awareness about Christianity" ("Why the Christians?" p. 606). He goes on to judge that "On balance it is more likely [than original Jewish instigation] that once the persecution of Christians began the Jewish leaders exerted whatever influence they may have possessed through Poppaea or Aliturus to maintain a distinction in the mind of the authorities between Christians and Jews. Certainly such a distinction was made" (p. 613).

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*.

<sup>34</sup> It is often overlooked that the opening of Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44 shows that the context of the Christians' execution was appeasement of the *gods* as well as the populace (Edward Champlin, *Nero* [London: Belknap Press, 2003], p. 122).

<sup>35</sup> Gray-Fow, "Why the Christians?" p. 615.

<sup>36</sup> Lampe, *Paul to Valentinus*, pp. 82-84. Lampe draws a contrast with the evidence for a comparatively high rate of citizenship amongst Jews (p. 83).

<sup>37</sup> Whereas "given the presence of some synagogues in the poorer quarters they [the Jews] must also have been badly affected by the Fire, so it would have been difficult to represent them as arsonists in this case" (Gray-Fow, "Why the Christians?" p. 615).

avoid being rendered guilty by association. From the standpoint of the Christians so treated and of those who would hear of Nero's action, it would surely matter little whether or not the Jews were in fact innocent of the initial suggestion of where Nero might fasten the blame. Any Jewish compliance in the traumatic process thereafter—however reasonable as a form of self-defense—must have raised the existing level of tension between Christians and Jews to new and irreversible heights of toxic enmity.

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUDING ANALYSIS: ISRAEL, THE CHURCH, AND ROME

This is where we seek to bring together text (Chapter 10) and history (Chapter 11) in a concluding analysis. How do our texts engage with Rome? And what is the effect of this on how they engage with Israel?

#### ROME IN ROMANS AND REVELATION

Having looked at Nero's persecution from a historical standpoint, we may now turn to examine the different ways that Rome is viewed in our two texts, falling as they do either side of that crucial point in time. Having had less cause to explore this subject in relation to Romans than Revelation thus far, it is the former which predominates in the present section, as we prepare to bring it into concluding comparison with the latter.

#### **Rome in Romans**

The relationship between the gospel of Paul and the empire of Rome is one which increasingly demands to be recognised and explored, as a growing movement of scholars seek to demonstrate its importance for understanding the world and work of the Apostle.<sup>1</sup> The enterprise is energised by the explosive idea that "For Paul, Jesus is what

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<sup>1</sup> Among the key texts are the edited volumes of Richard A. Horsley: *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997); *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (London: Trinity Press International, 2004); and *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. G. A. Yee; Semeia

the *princeps* claimed to be: representative of humanity, reconciler and ruler of the world.”<sup>2</sup> This sounds an invitation to read Romans (and Paul’s other letters) for the points at which Christ and his kingdom are brought into subversive contact with Caesar and his empire, on the understanding that “If the terms chosen by Paul for his Roman readers have associations with the slogans of Caesar religion, then Paul’s gospel must be understood as competing with the gospel of the Caesars.”<sup>3</sup> A prominent voice amongst the proponents of this perspective is Neil Elliott, who writes that

The questions at the heart of Paul’s theology do not center on how the conscience-stricken individual may be saved, or on how a movement that includes Gentiles as well as Jews may be legitimized. His questions are the questions of his fellow apocalypticists: How shall God’s justice be realized in a world dominated by evil powers?<sup>4</sup>

These are provocative words indeed, since they indicate an intention to sweep aside not only the individualistically oriented Lutheran perspective on Paul, but the ethnically oriented New Perspective as well, in favour of an apocalyptically and imperially oriented understanding. In this Elliott overextends himself; in our study of Romans we have seen ample reason to part ways with elements of Luther’s reading of Paul, but frequent indications that one of Paul’s prevailing concerns is indeed “how a movement that includes Gentiles as well as Jews may be [theologically] legitimized.” A reading of Paul which is so narrowly focussed on empire that it cannot integrate that theme into other ways of looking at him will do nothing to dispel the doubts of those raising questions about the value of the whole approach. One such voice is John Barclay, who

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Studies, 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004). See also Christopher D. Stanley (ed.), *The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011). Significant monographs include Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Harry O. Maier, *Picturing Paul in Empire: Imperial Image, Text and Persuasion in Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. On Romans specifically see Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Ian E. Rock, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans and Roman Imperialism: An Ideological Analysis of the Exordium (Romans 1:1-17)* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012); Robert Brian Lewis, *Paul’s ‘Spirit of Adoption’ in its Roman Imperial Context* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Dieter Georgi, “God Turned Upside Down,” in R. A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 148-157 (154).

<sup>3</sup> Georgi, “God Turned Upside Down,” p. 152, with particular reference to εὐαγγέλιον, πίστις, δικαιοσύνη, and εἰρήνη.

<sup>4</sup> Neil Elliott, “The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross,” in R. A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 167-183 (182).

has argued that for Paul the Roman empire is just one facet of the multi(ne)farious powers of Sin, Death, and Flesh, which are the true cosmic enemies of God and casualties of the cross; and that if Paul had a specific strategy for subverting the claims of Rome then it was by pointedly refusing to acknowledge them, rather than inflating their significance by everywhere alluding to them.<sup>5</sup> Barclay sets his argument against Wright in particular, who is better placed than Elliott to offer a robust and persuasive presentation of the ways in which Paul seeks to subvert Rome, in that he integrates this idea into his continuing commitment to the ethnically oriented readings of Paul that he helped to popularise in the post-Sanders years. Wright accepts Barclay's point that for Paul the political realm is one layer of a cosmic power-struggle, but denies that the significance of Rome is thereby reduced:

Paul undoubtedly believed that 'the powers,' however we describe them, were at work in Rome, providing the real energy and identity behind statues and soldiers, armies and temples, and even Caesar himself. But that simply shows just how *significant* Rome itself, uniquely and shockingly, really was for Paul.<sup>6</sup>

Wright sees a fundamental connection and clash between the kingdom of God and the empire of Rome not only at the obvious and vital point of the crucifixion, but also at the all-encompassing levels of language, story, and power: "In no previous empire, after all, had 'gospel,' 'son of God' and so on come together at the climax of a centuries-long narrative which now claimed world rulership and the possession of, and distribution rights over, freedom, justice and peace."<sup>7</sup> He maintains that Paul would have joined his contemporaries in viewing Rome as Daniel's fourth beast (the great climax of evil at the end of the age),<sup>8</sup> and suggests that he deliberately took the bounds of the Roman empire as marking out the territory for his apostolic proclamation.<sup>9</sup> These arguments arise in the first instance not so much from the text of Paul's letters as from the fabric of his context(s) and worldview as they are masterfully reconstructed in parts I and II of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Wright brings into crisp colour a world in which at every turn Paul's Jewish covenantal convictions are confronted and affronted by the

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<sup>5</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT, 275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 363-388.

<sup>6</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1311. Emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1311.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1281, 1306-1311.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, pp. 1503-1504, an attempted advance on the speculations of Sanders (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, p. 189).

blasphemous pretensions of Roman power, as perpetually reinforced in its pervasive propaganda—a world in which it is inviting, inevitable, to interpret Paul’s letters as speaking truth to this power. But it is proper for this interpretation to begin not with the silences and gaps in Paul’s letters, in which an inclined ear might hear seditious whispers, but with that thorny passage where Paul speaks most directly of Rome.

### **Romans 13:1-7**

The opening words of Rom. 13:1-7 come straight to the point: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (v. 1). But before we can explore the content and implications of this exhortation, we must ask who these ‘governing authorities’ are. Many more recent commentaries mention the rise and fall of the idea that Paul’s reference is to heavenly powers and principalities. The fallen fortunes of this interpretation are deserved. If Paul meant to speak of heavenly powers then why is there no echo of the language used at 8:38-39?<sup>10</sup> How could an exhortation to submit to heavenly powers be squared with the witness of other Pauline letters, in which “angelic powers are not spoken of as servants in the work of the divine creation but as forces which are hostile, or at least dangerous, to the community and the faith”<sup>11</sup>? As Bryan concludes, “the exhortation to believers to ‘subject themselves’ to the *exousiai* would, on the ‘angelic’ understanding, imply that having first been ‘subjected’ to Christ the angelic powers are now in some way ‘recommissioned’ in Christ and given authority over believers—a development in mythology for which the New Testament gives not the slightest encouragement.”<sup>12</sup> Finally and decisively, it is extremely unclear what use angelic authorities would have for taxes (v. 6)!

The ἐξουσίας ὑπερεχούσας of Rom. 13:1 are certainly human authorities, then, but the next question is whether Paul’s discussion is abstract-timeless or context-specific. Chrys Caragounis argues that “The detail with which Paul goes into this problem in 13:1-7 surely makes it impossible to explain this as a general, timeless, academic treatment. It

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<sup>10</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 788.

<sup>11</sup> Käsemann, *Romans*, p. 353. He also closes off the possibility of the angelic powers idea being smuggled back in under the cloak of Christ’s exaltation: “This does not emerge from the text and it contradicts the reality depicted in 8:37ff.; 1 Cor 15:24, according to which Christ’s final victory is expected only at the parousia. If it is for the most part already closely connected with the exaltation, it relates to that glory of the Kyrios which gives believers a certain hope in their earthly tribulation. A heavenly rule with the help of angelic powers is unthinkable in Paul” (p. 353).

<sup>12</sup> Bryan, *Preface to Romans*, p. 209.

makes best sense if it is taken as a much needed admonition.”<sup>13</sup> This represents a convincing conclusion based on an unconvincing point. Whilst the subject of subjection to authority might receive a slightly more extended treatment in 13:1-7 than some of the issues raised in the immediately surrounding material, the level of detail is still a far cry from e.g. that in the discussion of 14:1-15:13 that will follow shortly after. However, both the position of Rom. 13:1-7 amidst the practical exhortations of 12:1-15:13 and some of the particulars of its detail strongly suggest that it is indeed ‘much needed admonition’ rather than ‘general, timeless, academic treatment;’ that (as Dunn says) “Paul speaks not of the state as such but of political and civic authority as it would actually bear upon his readers.”<sup>14</sup> This is in keeping with the whole character of Romans as a real letter rather than a general treatise.

It has seemed self-evident to most commentators that if Paul speaks specifically to the situation of his first recipients then the ‘authorities’ in 13:1-7 can only be Roman. This has been challenged by Nanos, who contends that the passage refers instead to *synagogue* authority.<sup>15</sup> Our previous rejection of Nanos’ thesis regarding the ‘weak’ at Rome already sets us on course to respond in like manner here, and in fact there are good reasons for doing so. Pre-eminent among these is Paul’s reminder that “the authority does not bear the sword in vain” (13:4), which would seem to point irresistibly to Rome rather than synagogue. Nanos responds firstly that the sword could “fittingly describe the disciplinary function of the synagogue ‘authorities,’”<sup>16</sup> but this is seriously undermined by his admission that it is “questionable” whether the synagogues had the power of capital punishment.<sup>17</sup> (A glance at Jn 18:31 makes even ‘questionable’ look generous.) His alternative suggestion is that the ‘sword’ could be figurative for the word of God, so that the reference is to the synagogue authorities in their function of “interpreting Torah and halakhot for the community.”<sup>18</sup> But this would create an intolerable tension with Paul’s conviction that Israel’s misstep proceeds from a failure to understand that *faith in Christ* is the goal and fulfillment of the law. If the Torah-interpretation of the synagogue authorities denies Christ then how could Paul possibly instruct the saints to ‘submit’ to it?

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<sup>13</sup> Chrys C. Caragounis, “From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church between Romans and *I Clement*,” in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson (eds), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 245-279 (261).

<sup>14</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 759.

<sup>15</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 289-336.

<sup>16</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, pp. 310-311.

<sup>17</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, p. 311.

<sup>18</sup> Nanos, *Mystery*, p. 312.

We are left to affirm, then, the usual view that in the context of Paul's recipients, the 'authority' of which he speaks is embodied and enacted by the local magistrates in Rome.<sup>19</sup> It is only they who can be said to 'bear the sword' (v. 4), and the background of tax unrest in Rome<sup>20</sup> helpfully explains why the section culminates with that issue (v. 7). This being so, how can we make sense of Paul's summons to submission (v. 1)? How can we countenance his affirmation that God has appointed the imperial authorities as his servants (vv. 1-2, 4, 6), and that they will act justly in doing good to those who do good, and punishing those who do evil (vv. 3-6)? Christopher Bryan picks up on the tax issue as a possible key to interpreting the passage:

Was Paul anxious lest believers, living, as they knew themselves to be, in the new age, would have strong feelings about this—and an immediate temptation to resist payment? Did he fear that they might bring themselves into dispute with the authorities over an issue that did not have any direct bearing on the gospel?<sup>21</sup>

Wright then picks up the basic point, politicising Bryan's 'new age' premise and generalising its application beyond the boundaries of the tax issue:

If the gospel of Jesus, God's Son, the King who will rule the nations (1:3-4; 5:12) does indeed reveal God's justice and salvation, which put to shame the similar claims of Caesar (1:16-17; Phil 2:5-11; 3:19-21) . . . then it is all the more important to make clear that this does not mean a holy anarchy in the present, an over-realized eschatology in which the rule of Christ has already abolished all earthly government and magistrates.<sup>22</sup>

This cleverly contains the damage that Rom. 13:1-7 might do to Wright's wider thesis, making it the exception that proves and balances the anti-imperial rule of Paul's theology elsewhere. The idea of a caution against misdirected eschatological zeal makes sense of the look ahead to the parousia in 13:11-12, which reminds the readers that the full consummation of Christ's victory has not yet come; it might also help explain why the argument of 13:1-7 proceeds exclusively with reference to 'God' rather than

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<sup>19</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, p. 788.

<sup>20</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.50.

<sup>21</sup> Bryan, *Preface to Romans*, p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, "Letter to the Romans," p. 719, attributing the point to David Wenham.

‘Christ,’ emphasising that the same principles for relating to pagan governments that had become woven into Jewish tradition still hold good even after the Christ event and the new age that it inaugurated.<sup>23</sup> Here Dunn adds a pragmatic note: the great eschatological sign of the times according to Paul’s gospel—the free and full inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God—is the very issue that is energising the extraction or expulsion of the Christ movement out of the synagogues, and thus into new political territory in which it is exposed and defenseless.<sup>24</sup> The church must start to “remember the political realities of the politically powerless and live accordingly.”<sup>25</sup>

The eschatologically contextualised reading has been singled out as the most robust framework for interpreting what remains a difficult passage, but other suggestions also deserve a glance: that Rom. 13:1-7 might yet leave room for civil disobedience in exceptional circumstances;<sup>26</sup> that it is “subject to the premises set forth in the introductory pericope of the fourth proof (12:1-2), not to ‘be conformed to this world’ but to be ‘transformed’ as the congregation assesses ‘what is the will of God’ in particular situations;”<sup>27</sup> and that in accordance with Jewish tradition, the high estimate of civil authority is designed to cut both ways, in that if the authorities are God’s servants then not only are the saints liable to be judged by them, but the authorities themselves are ultimately liable to be judged by God.<sup>28</sup> But it remains to consider in particular the idea of the ‘hidden transcript,’ a term and concept drawn from James C. Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, and applied to the study of the New Testament especially in Richard Horsley’s edited volume *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance*. Scott’s monograph aims to challenge and complicate the common

<sup>23</sup> So Dunn: “the argument is theological, not Christological; it is expressed in terms of the normal circumstances of social order, not in terms of salvation-history” (*Romans 9-16*, p. 772). In this connection, ‘God’ and ‘Christ’ correlate respectively with what Dorothea Bertschmann terms ‘commonsensical’ and ‘counterintuitive’ approaches to good and evil: “The authorities embody and imitate God’s commonsensical approach to good and evil . . . [E]ven after God’s deeply *counter-intuitive* and asymmetrical approach to good and evil in Christ the moral structure of the universe stays firmly in place and judgment is to be expected” (Dorothea H. Bertschmann, “The Good, the Bad and the State – Rom 13.1–7 and the Dynamics of Love,” *New Testament Studies* 60/2 [2014], pp. 232-249 [244]). The use of the term ‘counter-intuitive’ to describe God’s action in Christ anticipates Barclay’s use of ‘incongruity’ in *Paul and the Gift*.

<sup>24</sup> “Whatever he might claim about Gentiles being grafted into the olive tree of Israel, the political reality was that the new congregations were in process of shedding the identity of ethnic Israel, and the sociological reality was that the believers in Jesus as the Christ were breaking down or ignoring the very boundaries which had given the Jews their distinctiveness and thus their protection” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 769).

<sup>25</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 770.

<sup>26</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 797.

<sup>27</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, pp. 788-789.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Jewett, *Romans*, p. 790; N. T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire” [[http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Paul\\_Caesar\\_Empire.pdf](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Paul_Caesar_Empire.pdf)]. Centre of Theological Enquiry; accessed 18/12/14, p. 6.

tendency to view the posture of subjugated people in binary terms as either quiet quiescence or violent revolt. Between these two extremes is a broad and complex spectrum of resistance, which Scott aims to map and analyse through the categories of ‘public transcript’ and ‘hidden transcript.’ The former refers to

. . . a domain of material appropriation (for example, of labor, grain, taxes), a domain of public mastery and subordination (for example, rituals of hierarchy, deference, speech, punishment, and humiliation), and, finally, a domain of ideological justification for inequalities (for example, the public religious and political world view of the dominant elite) . . . .<sup>29</sup>

The ‘hidden transcript,’ then, is “the offstage responses and rejoinders to that public transcript. It is, if you will, the portion of an acrimonious dialogue that domination has driven off the immediate stage.”<sup>30</sup> The assumption and argument that underpins Horsley’s consequent volume is that “the earliest documents later included in the New Testament clearly represent movements of resistance and the hidden transcripts of those movements.”<sup>31</sup> It is Neil Elliott who steps forth to apply this conviction to Rom. 13:1-7, augmenting his earlier assessments of that passage as being aimed at averting a situation in Rome akin to that which had recently erupted in Alexandria: Jews violently scapegoated for their rankling privileges by an overtaxed public powerless to challenge the imperial order directly.<sup>32</sup> The relevant public transcript (against which any hidden transcript must be understood) was the pervasive imperial propaganda, the assumption and goal of which was ever that “Citizens would naturally yield their happy consent”<sup>33</sup> to being dominated and exploited. Elliott draws out a number of ways in which Rom.

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<sup>29</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Richard A. Horsley, “Introduction: Jesus, Paul, and the ‘Arts of Resistance’: Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott,” in R. A. Horsley (ed.), *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. G. A. Yee; Semeia Studies, 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), pp. 1-26 (14).

<sup>32</sup> See; Neil Elliott, “Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda,” in R. A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 184-204 (188-196); Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, pp. 221-226; Elliott, *Arrogance of Nations*, pp. 93-96. An advantage of this reading of Rom. 13:1-7 is that it makes sense within “The broad rhetorical movement across chapters 12-15, like that across chapters 8-11, [which] is meant to quell gentile-Christian arrogance and evoke sympathy and solidarity with Israel” (Elliott, “Romans 13:1-7,” p. 196).

<sup>33</sup> Neil Elliott, “Strategies of Resistance and Hidden Transcripts in the Pauline Communities,” in R. A. Horsley (ed.), *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. G. A. Yee; Semeia Studies, 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), pp. 97-122 (120).

13:1-7 distinctly and deliberately fails to display the expected servility—in other words, the ways in which it expresses a hidden transcript.<sup>34</sup>

Firstly and crucially there is the opening summons to submission as regards the governing authorities. Elliott points out that when we reflect that the only other alternative considered is open resistance (v. 2), it becomes clear that Paul holds a view of the empire in which ‘happy consent’ is quite out of the question.<sup>35</sup> Openly resisting authority might be an understandable desire, but a “grudging compliance”<sup>36</sup> is the wiser response. Elliott notes elsewhere that the language of submission in Rom. 13:1 calls to mind the subjection of creation to ‘futility’ and ‘decay’ (8:20-21)—and its groaning for the coming liberation.<sup>37</sup> It could also be added that the injunction to “be subject to the governing authorities” takes on a rather more subversive quality if read as an application of the preceding verse (12:21), i.e. as a way of ‘overcoming evil with good,’ in which Rome is ‘evil’ but submission is ‘good.’ Secondly and subtly, the apparent naïvety of the statement that it is only wrongdoers who need ‘fear’ the authority (vv. 3-4) is (Elliott suggests) overturned by the inclusion of φόβος in the list of things that are ‘due’ (v. 7), hinting that in fact terror inheres in the empire. Thirdly and perhaps most convincingly there is the statement that “the authority does not bear the sword in vain” (v. 4). This Elliott deftly sets against the fulsome publicity accompanying the accession and early reign of Emperor Nero, a mainstay of which was the proclamation that just as he had come to power without resort to violence, so would his reign be a golden age of clemency, all repeatedly symbolised by the language of *the undrawn sword*.<sup>38</sup> The context of this public transcript turns the apparent deferential timidity of v. 4 into a delightful slight of the imperial propaganda—a fine example of a hidden transcript at work.

If these elements of Rom. 13:1-7 reveal glimpses of a hidden transcript, then is it possible that other elements which seem to uncritically repeat the imperial public

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<sup>34</sup> Though we castigated Elliott above for unwise totalisation of the Empire lens, that is no reason to spurn his treatment of that subject itself.

<sup>35</sup> “While Roman propaganda leads us to expect that a beneficiary of the Roman order would extol *consent* and *agreement*, Paul speaks, with what would have sounded like the ingratitude of the uncivilized, of two alternatives: subjection or revolt” (Elliott, “Strategies of Resistance,” p. 120, with parenthetical Greek transliterations omitted).

<sup>36</sup> Elliott, “Strategies of Resistance,” p. 120.

<sup>37</sup> Elliott, *Arrogance of Nations*, p. 153. But his comment there that Rom. 13:1 “is the only point in the letter where Paul declares that his hearers’ obedience to God will require their *submission*” (p. 153) overlooks exactly that dynamic at the heart of chapters 14-15 also.

<sup>38</sup> Elliott, “Strategies of Resistance,” p. 120. Examples from Calpurnius Siculus and Seneca are reproduced in Elliott, “Romans 13:1-7,” pp. 202-203.

transcript are meant to be taken ironically? This is just the suggestion of T. L. Carter (though without recourse to the language of hidden and public transcripts),<sup>39</sup> who maintains that “Paul’s commendation of the authorities is sufficiently overstated for his readers to understand it as a covert exposure of the shortcomings of Roman rule: the apostle adopts the ironic policy of ‘blaming through apparent praise.’”<sup>40</sup> This an attractive proposal insofar as it would totally reverse any unpalatable imperialism that the passage might have, but unfortunately it fails to convince. The opening verse is so fundamentally orthodox that it would amount to a radical rejection of Jewish political theology if it were meant ironically. The rest of the letter shows that Paul is perfectly capable of executing breathtaking reworkings of Jewish ideas, but also that this only comes by way of rich, lengthy, complex argumentation.

Perhaps it could be said that the interplay between the public and hidden transcripts that are both encoded in Rom. 13:1-7 is reflective of the way that the passage itself is both public and hidden (i.e. private). The moment that Tertius set down Paul’s words in writing, they became potentially public, external, subject to transmission beyond the bounds of the author’s control—perhaps even into the hands of the empire.<sup>41</sup> And yet they remain also private, personal, Paul’s—entrusted to Phoebe to be smuggled to the outpost of the kingdom of God at the heart of the kingdom of Rome, and perhaps intimating some of the resentment and defiance born of that precarious coexistence. But our overall conclusion must be that the plain sense of Rom. 13:1 programmatically prevails upon the rest of the passage, within which the glimpses of a hidden transcript that subtly communicate an element of displeasure and discontent are insufficient to overturn the clear basic message that God does require submission to the authorities that currently govern his world. Or, in the words of Allen Callahan: “As long as flatulent subalterns bow downwind no one is the wiser, and both resentment and regime remain intact.”<sup>42</sup> Rom. 13:1-7 may smell somewhat suspicious when we get up close, but the

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<sup>39</sup> Despite referring to *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* in the conclusion of the article (T. L. Carter, “The Irony of Romans 13,” *Novum Testamentum* 46/3 [2004], pp. 209-228 [226, n. 66]).

<sup>40</sup> Carter, “Irony of Romans 13,” p. 226. For Elliott’s reply see *Arrogance of Nations*, pp. 154-156.

<sup>41</sup> Wright points out that “Outsiders could and did come into Christian assemblies (cf. 1 Cor. 14.23). A letter designed to be read in different assemblies, and no doubt read aloud several times in the same assembly, becomes potentially more ‘public’ with each reading” (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2, p. 1315).

<sup>42</sup> Allen Dwight Callahan, “The Arts of Resistance in an Age of Revolt,” in R. A. Horsley (ed.), *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. G. A. Yee; Semeia Studies, 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), pp. 29-40 (39), with reference to the Ethiopian proverb that prefaces Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*: “When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts.”

first and abiding impression on its first recipients was surely the stoop of Paul's back as he paid respect to whom respect is due.

### **The Effect of Nero's Persecution**

Wright offers us a convenient segue from Romans 13 into a comparison with the book of Revelation:

Reading Rom. 13:1-7 in the context of 12:14-21 raises a question, which Paul does not here even touch on: what happens when the "persecutors" (12:14) are the same people as "the governing authorities," and are using their God-given power for that purpose?<sup>43</sup>

The brief treatment of civil authority in Rom. 13:1-7 leaves no room to consider the question of how to respond to a persecuting tyrant; if such were allowed then the basis of the exhortation to submission would be confused and undermined. But if we fast-forward a decade in time then the question becomes a clamour as Rom. 13:1-7 is dashed on the rocks of Nero's persecution against the Christians. Can it hold together? If not then what would a post-persecution consideration of the responsibility of Christians in relation to the Roman empire look like? The Book of Revelation gives a possible answer.

We saw above William Benjamin Smith's attempt to discredit the accuracy and authenticity of Tacitus' account of Nero's persecution (*Ann.* 15.44). Smith makes therein the following notable statements:

Such a remarkable persecution as here described, and such a passage from such an author, must have deeply impressed the early Christian mind. . . . It is inconceivable, then, that an event so supremely memorable should have escaped all record and all reference.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Wright, "Letter to the Romans," p. 719.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, "Silence of Josephus and Tacitus," pp. 526-527.

Not even in the Apocalypse do we find any clear or even probable allusion to an event that would have bulked so hugely in the early Christian consciousness.<sup>45</sup>

In our first brush with Smith above we found reason to reject his proposal that *Ann.* 15.44 is a later Christian interpolation, and now in connection with Revelation we must also reject the claim that it contains no ‘clear or even probable allusion’ to Nero’s persecution. We have already seen that the figure of Nero and the legend of his return is the key that best makes sense of the wounded-and-healed head of the beast (Rev. 13:3), best solves the 666 riddle (13:18), and best explains how it is that the beast ‘is not’ even whilst its sixth head ‘is’ (17:9-11). Nero’s persecution has certainly not ‘escaped all record and reference,’ and has indeed ‘deeply impressed the early Christian mind.’ Revelation is everywhere permeated with the threat and expectation of martyrdom, a threat that takes the shape of a monstrous beast (Nero *redivivus*) and his false prophet. If even Tacitus (who clearly considers the Christians to be deservedly ‘loathed for their vices’) judges that Nero’s action amounted to expedient brutality, then how much more detestable he would have seemed to the victims and their communities, and how irreparable the damage done to the relationship between the Empire and the Christians. Granted, at the time when Revelation was written (on Garrow’s reading adopted above) Titus’ Rome was not actively marked and marred by this kind of persecution, but for John this only means that the beast is in remission. Nero’s persecution has definitively revealed the true colours of Rome, and the seven churches must not forget it, must not fall into complacent compromise with the diabolical ruling power. John warns that the horror and brutality of Nero’s past persecution is but a prototype of the imminent apocalyptic climax of history as he sees it.

This invites us to reflect that Nero is the figure and his persecution the event that most decisively divides Romans and Revelation in their assessment of Rome’s character and destiny. We have seen that whatever subversive undercurrent Paul’s gospel might possess—whatever he thought and felt as he sojourned through city after city bearing the marks of blasphemous imperial domination—in Romans he is nevertheless resolute in presenting the Roman authorities as God’s servants who may be relied on to do good to those who do good (13:1-7); accordingly, he is able to recommend and require a posture of (at least outward) submission from the saints. We noted, however, that relating to Rome as God’s servant (13:4) does also have the effect of severely restricting

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<sup>45</sup> Smith, “Silence of Josephus and Tacitus,” p. 528.

the level of authority and even autonomy that Rome assumed itself to possess. Counselling submission to Rome is a reflection rather than compromise of the view that all authority stems from God and that ultimately justice and judgment belongs to him alone. Remembering this allows us to put Romans and Revelation on the same theological map, even if the routes that they take diverge, as Bryan astutely reflects:

For all the well-nigh unbridgeable gap of *attitude* and *emotion* between Paul and the Apocalypse, it does not seem to me that there is here an essential *theological* difference; or, to put it another way, here is the point at which an intellectual bridge can be built between them. Paul is counselling respect for the state perceived *as God's agent*. The Apocalypse opposes the state perceived as *claiming for itself divine honors* (Rev. 13:1-18).<sup>46</sup>

In other words, by the time that John writes, the advanced self-aggrandisement of Rome (manifest most starkly in the blossoming imperial cult) makes it impossible for him to view Rome as fulfilling the role of God's servant and thus being the appropriate recipient of the submission of the saints on those grounds. We can only say that if Paul did in fact balk at the imperial cult with the same strength of feeling as John then he does not do enough to show it. Again, the glimpses of a hidden transcript in Rom. 13:1-7 are all but eclipsed by its intractable call for the saints to submit to the state. Such a call is anathema to John; and if the imperial cult shows him that Rome has drastically forfeited its position as God's servant, then the contribution of Nero's persecution is to demonstrate that Rome has irreversibly sabotaged any vestige of credibility in Paul's optimistic claim that "rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad" (Rom. 13:3). It is one of Revelation's controlling assumptions that maintaining a faithful witness to Jesus is the sure path to martyrdom at the hands of the Roman beast. With this, all possibility of preserving the submissive elements of Paul's attitude to Rome is gone. Instead, anything in Romans that might be interpreted as a murmur of dissent is so dramatically amplified in Revelation as to become a strident denunciation. Where the narrative and terminology of Paul's gospel might implicitly subvert comparable features of the imperial ideology, Revelation 13 uncompromisingly exposes the true blasphemy and horror of the fusion between Rome's awe-inspiring military might and the pervasive machinery of the diabolical Caesar cult. Where the hints of a hidden transcript

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<sup>46</sup> Bryan, *Preface to Romans*, p. 206, n. 49. Emphasis original. This comment represents a rare and valuable example of Romans and Revelation being brought into conversation together. See also Rowland, "Book of Revelation," pp. 529-530, though with reference more to ethics than empire.

in Romans 13 might communicate an internal undertone of dissatisfaction and dissent, it is the whole function of Revelation 17 to make it unmistakable that the imagery of beast and whore is a ruthless indictment of the power, immorality, and destiny of Rome.

Where the positioning of Rom. 13:11-12 might subtly suggest that Rome's authority belongs to the 'night' that is almost over, Revelation 18 openly decries the arrogant injustice on which the imperial wealth is based, and jubilantly welcomes its impending cataclysmic collapse. Romans may carry seeds of resistance, but it is not until they are watered with the blood of the martyrs that they can bear in the Book of Revelation their seditious fruit.

In summary, where Paul calls for *submission* to Rome with the goal of *love* (Rom. 13:1-7, 8-10),<sup>47</sup> all of Revelation cries out for *separation* from Rome, with the goal of *purity*. Perhaps it is Paul's tendency to focus on what is internal (most prominently at Rom. 2:28-29) that frees him to counsel outward submission even to that which he does not fully approve. This pattern obtains not only with regards to Rome but also with regards to the weak and the strong in Romans 14-15. Even though Paul's own view aligns with the strong (Rom. 15:1), his insistent counsel to that group is that they submit to the misguided scruples of the latter—again, for the sake of love (Rom. 14:15). It is difficult to imagine that John would view this as anything other than a contemptible compromise, given the scorn that he reserves for those (such as 'Jezebel') who might claim to follow the Lamb but whose actions or teachings he perceives to amount to dangerous accommodation to the cult(ure) of the beast; after all, it is the ἔργα of the churches that Jesus knows (Rev. 2:2, 19; 3:1, 8, 15) and not their καρδία as we might be conditioned to expect.<sup>48</sup> John fears the contamination of the congregations with the idolatrous culture of Rome, which produces (or reflects) a thoroughgoing mentality of separation. This is most clearly manifest in the command of Rev. 18:4: "Come out of her [Babylon], my people, so that you do not take part in her sins." The appearance here of the word ἐξέλθατε calls to mind the angel's explanation that those whom John sees

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<sup>47</sup> Bertschmann considers the connection between Paul's summons to submission and his summons to love: "Love takes its cue from somewhere other than civil obligations and is played out in a different key altogether, often going far beyond the demands of civic decency. But at the same time love does nothing bad to anybody and is therefore compatible with a broad and basic notion of civic good. . . . The Christian paradigm of love, then, is the greater reality which encloses almost as a 'by-product' good and generally approved behaviour in the civic and political world" ("Good, the Bad and the State," p. 248). This last point echoes Bryan's comment: "Having exhorted proper behavior toward those inside and those outside the church, Paul plays on the notion of what is owed (*opheilas*) to bring him full circle back to the point from which he began. It is all—even paying the proper taxes, and certainly the giving of proper honour—a part of love" (*Preface to Romans*, p. 207).

<sup>48</sup> Even when Jesus declares himself to be "the one who searches minds and hearts," it is immediately followed with the promise that "I will give to each of you as your *works* deserve" (Rev. 2:23).

clothed in white in 7:9 are *οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης* (7:14), confirming what the whole structure of Revelation's worldview suggests: the way to most nobly and totally 'come out' of Babylon is to die at her hands. We may conclude that where Romans seeks to find a way of life under Rome, Revelation knows only a call to death.

## THE EFFECT OF ROME ON ISRAEL IN ROMANS AND REVELATION

It is the contention of this concluding analysis that the different forms of Rome encountered by Paul and John have powerfully affected the way that they relate to Israel. This is so both on a social level (the attitudes that they express towards actual Jews) and on a theological level (the convictions that they hold about the place of Israel in the purposes of God).

In the historical backdrop to Romans the most dramatic imperial intervention into the milieu of Jewish-Christian relations was the expulsion of (at least) Jewish Christian leaders under Claudius, which disrupted the Jewish element of the Christian community and provided a context conducive to the nascent Gentile supersessionism that Paul moves to combat throughout the letter. Evidently he considers this task important enough to merit the depth and detail of argumentation with which he carries it out, both in connection with unbelieving Israel and with those (predominantly Jewish) elements of the Christian community that still advocated the necessity of Torah observance. But with Nero's crucifixion of Christians a decade later the stakes had been raised (so to speak), so that Jewish-Christian tensions in the imperial context are no longer a matter of competing for security, success, and authority, but are a matter of life and death. The relational situation in the Rome-Church-Synagogue triad can only have become more strained in the wake of the Jewish rebellion against Rome in the years following Nero's persecution. Not only did the fall of Jerusalem have immediate, obvious and disastrous consequences for the Jews in Palestine, but the long and torrid build-up to the eventual defeat of the rebels also constituted a serious military and psychological strain on the Empire itself. Around one seventh of the whole imperial army had to be diverted to Titus for the task of completing the siege, which still took five months to complete; when the official triumph was eventually celebrated in 71 CE it was the only one ever to mark the subjugation of an existing Roman province rather than the conquest of a new

one, and commemorative coins continued to be issued until ten years after the victory.<sup>49</sup> The Jews of Asia Minor may have exhibited some degree of passive allegiance to Rome by failing to fulfil the hopes of the Palestinian Jews that support for the rebel cause would flood in from the Euphrates,<sup>50</sup> but they must still have sustained a wave of public and administrative retribution wherever they resided.<sup>51</sup>

We may reflect, then, that whereas in connection with Nero's persecution it was the Jews who had reason to distance themselves from the Christians in the eyes of the Empire, the Jewish rebellion meant that the reverse was also true. This monumental double development—downstream of Romans and upstream of Revelation—has made a profound difference to the way that the Jews are regarded in these two texts. In Romans we find Paul bewailing the plight of the Israelites and declaring that he would be accursed for them (Rom. 9:1-5); by the time that we get to the Book of Revelation the Jews are rejected and reviled with surpassing ferocity (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). In particular, the acute effect that Nero's persecution has had on the worldview and content of Revelation suggests that a collective Christian memory or perception of Jewish involvement in that action might well have conditioned its extreme response to the 'Synagogue(s) of Satan,' especially since the perceived alliance between State and Synagogue has been shown to obtain in the message to Smyrna. To summarise the impact of Rome on the social response to Israel in Romans and Revelation: whereas Paul reacts to Claudius' expulsion with a pressing concern to make solidarity between Jews and Christians incumbent on the latter, John reacts to Nero's persecution by holding the Jews guilty by association with it, adding bitter blows to the existing wedge between synagogue and church.

We close with consideration of the theological impact of Rome on Israel and the church in Romans and Revelation. In previous sections we have seen the demonisation of Rome in Revelation; here we may observe that this goes hand in hand with the polarisation of the world. If there is one true King, Jesus, and if there is one great climactic counterfeit, the Emperor(s) of Rome, then the world may be categorised in

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<sup>49</sup> See Walters, "Impact of the Romans," pp. 184-185.

<sup>50</sup> See Josephus' preface to *Jewish War*.

<sup>51</sup> Josephus' rendition of Agrippa's warning speech to the rebels includes the prediction that "The peril, moreover, threatens not only us Jews here, but also all who inhabit foreign cities; for there is not a people in the world which does not contain a portion of our race. All these, if you go to war, will be butchered by your adversaries, and through the folly of a handful of men every city will be drenched with Jewish blood" (*J.W.* 2.16.4). Josephus goes on to record just such scenes in *J.W.* 2.18-20; Asia Minor is not considered specifically, but there is no reason to think that it would be exempt.

binary terms along those lines, so that “The rhetoric of the text moves, pushes, even terrorizes the reader to make a choice between the lamb and the beast.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, the Book of Revelation perceives and promulgates an apocalyptic dichotomy, and this is the framework that helps us understand the ferocity of the denunciations of (what John perceives as) assimilationist teaching and practice within the church, as Moore deftly reflects:

In order that Revelation’s blanket critique of empire acquire full rhetorical force, the distinction between the agents of empire, on the one hand, and the victims of empire, on the other, must be asserted at an absolute, and hence metaphysical, level, and such a distinction is necessarily menaced by any manifestation of Christian hybridity [with Rome], however innocuous.<sup>53</sup>

The polarisation between the agents and victims of the Roman Empire is not an even split; rather, the perceived or actual threat of Rome fosters the sectarian mentality whereby there is a small, clearly defined ‘insider’ group corresponding to the Lamb (those who maintain a faithful witness in John’s eyes), which means that everyone extraneous to that group must correspond to the beast. The exclusivity of the Lamb category is exemplified and symbolised in the numerical limitation of the faithful to 144,000 in chapter 7 and chapter 14, and by the motif of setting apart that is present in the measuring of the temple in chapter 11 and the removal of the woman to the desert in chapter 12. (It is significant that each of these instances employs Israel imagery to describe and distinguish the church, showing that John’s vision of the church retains the Hebrew Bible emphasis that Israel has been chosen out of and set apart from the surrounding nations.) Conversely, the inclusivity of the beast category is anticipated in the sweeping specification that “the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free” are to come under the wrath of the Lamb (6:15-17), and is plainly shown when we are told that “the whole earth followed the beast” (13:3). It is only in certain visions of the ultimate future that we see this same kind of inclusivity applied to the followers of the Lamb (the

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<sup>52</sup> Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, pp. 117-118. However, the real thrust of Moore’s argument is that Revelation’s attempt to totally separate Rome’s empire and God’s is self-defeating, in that “parody or mockery of the imperial order constantly threatens to topple over into mimicry, imitation, and replication. . . . But if the Roman imperial order is the ultimate object of imitation in Revelation, then, in accordance with the book’s own implicit logic, it remains the ultimate authority, despite the book’s explicit attempts to unseat it” (pp. 112-113).

innumerable multitude in 7:9-17; the ingathering of nations and kings in 21:24). Prior to this, the dynamics of the groupings on earth are best encapsulated in the scene directly following the millennium, which shows the saints besieged and beleaguered, menaced by countless foes:

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. (Rev. 20:7-9)

The pattern of a small, closely defined in-group enclave contrasted with an out-group composed of an inchoate jumble of evil is present throughout the rest of the book, including in visions of the ultimate future:

Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death. (Rev. 21:7-8)

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Rev. 22:14-15)

In both these cases the in-group may be described according to one defining characteristic ('those who conquer'; 'those who wash their robes'), whereas the out-group is explicitly multifarious.

What is the significance of this lopsided polarisation for how Revelation relates to Israel? The logical and actual effect is that there is no room for Israel to have a special category of its own. The Lamb/beast dualism is all-encompassing and knows of no middle ground or special status for God's historic people. What then happens to them? We have seen that the actual Jews encountered by (at least) the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia are placed unambiguously onto the wrong side of the Lamb/beast split.

Jews are simply, like the rest of humanity, either followers of the Lamb or followers of the beast. If they do not recognise Jesus as Messiah—and especially if they are perceived to be actually complicit in the persecuting activity of the beast—then they can only be a Synagogue of Satan, just one of the many peoples to fall under his deception. What of Israel past? The imagery pertaining to it in the Hebrew Bible is surrendered in Revelation to those on both sides of the eschatological dichotomy—predominantly to the church (most notably in its guise as the 144,000) but also to Babylon (as the harlot)—and Israel retains no further place in its own right. We have seen that the same dynamic is encapsulated in the role of Jerusalem in chapter 11: part symbol for the church, part vassal of the beast. All of its significance lies in symbolically expressing aspects of those two parties, with none remaining for the historical city itself.

All of this highlights for us how differently Paul is able to view Israel in Romans. Whereas in Revelation the reaction between the fervent expectation of Christ's soon return and the (perceived) apocalyptic crisis/threat of Rome produces a rigid and all-encompassing dichotomy into which everything must fit, in Romans the chemistry is somewhat different. There is still a strong eschatological consciousness, but this arises more from the past event of the cross than the future event of the parousia; and crucially, the comparatively (if uneasily) peaceful relationship between Rome and the young church means that there is not the corresponding consciousness of consuming apocalyptic crisis/threat attached to its empire and emperors. However much it might be argued that just such a consciousness lurks below the surface of Paul's discourse, the very fact that it is able to remain subterranean shows that he does not feel the eschatological pressure of Rome's presence with the same suffocating urgency as does John. The primary lens and mentality in Romans is not apocalyptic but *covenantal*. The Roman empire may be the implied, unnamed target of Paul's gospel, but in Romans it is abundantly clear that his foremost concern is the way in which the gospel interacts with *Israel*. Yes, this concern itself may be subtly anti-imperial, in that "Paul is asserting that history has been working not primarily through Rome, but through Israel, and that the fulfillment of history has now come about in the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham;"<sup>54</sup> but we must not get things back to front by privileging implication over explication. It is Israel and not Rome that commands the theological attention of Romans, even if the shape of the latter may be glimpsed in the shadow of the former.

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<sup>54</sup> Richard A. Horsley, "General Introduction," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. R. A. Horsley; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 1-9 (6-7); followed by Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 1, pp. 382-383.

It is instructive to consider the nature, as well as the fact, of Paul's focus on Israel in Romans: he is concerned with its transformation. The first element of this transformation has already taken place in the formation of the church, but the second lies yet ahead, as God orchestrates the salvation of all (ethnic) Israel after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. We have seen that Revelation shares the former conviction whilst disavowing the latter, in accordance with the strictures of its apocalyptic dichotomy. But unlike John, Paul's covenantal consideration of Israel operates with enough 'political space' to allow a sympathetic, nuanced, and multi-staged understanding of that nation to emerge. Comparatively free from Rome as the immanent, imminent apocalyptic presence that it was for John, Paul therefore has space and time to accommodate a people who at present are admittedly "enemies as regards the gospel" (Rom. 11:28). We have seen that his response to the Israel question is to go into careful detail about how God's family has always been based on faith and not merit or lineage, how God has chosen ethnic Israel to broker his purposes *even in their unbelief*, and how one day this unbelief will be overturned, when the Deliverer comes from Zion to banish ungodliness from Jacob.

The key point is that in Romans the 'enmity' of Israel as regards the gospel need not propel them irreversibly into the category of 'outside' and 'other,' and indeed it must not, since the unbelief of Israel (with its potential to impugn the righteousness of God) is the great theological problem that Paul is bound to address. Revelation's rejection of Israel (epitomised in the censure of 'those who say they are Jews and are not') is both more final and more glib, since here Jewish unbelief does not pose the same kind of unique and central problem. If in Romans the failure of God's chosen people to believe his chosen Messiah is the great covenantal catastrophe (even if it was foreseen and outmaneuvered), Revelation's Big Problem is the international Roman empire and its apparently successful challenge to the dominion of Jesus. How can Christ really be the ruler of the earth if most of its inhabitants are following and worshiping the beast, whilst his own faithful followers are persecuted and oppressed? In this context the nation of Israel is only one among the many that have come under Satan's sway; and since the church has already inherited and transformed all of Israel's important functions, Jewish unbelief constitutes no special problem in its own right. In light of this, and in view of the imminent parousia, the Book of Revelation is content to "Let the

evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy” (22:11)—and to let unbelieving Israel remain in unbelief.

We may summarise and conclude that where Paul must show that the unbelief of Israel does not compromise the righteousness of God, John must show that the dominion of Rome does not have the same effect a generation later. We have seen that Paul’s response is to account for Israel’s unbelief in God’s strategic purpose, and to declare their coming salvation; likewise John seeks to convey God’s plan for the conversion of the nations through the faithful witness of the church, but alongside this there is also a much more prominent place for God’s terrible judgment as a means of reasserting his power and reign. It is this tension between the predominantly covenantal perspective of Paul and the predominantly apocalyptic perspective of John—decisively shaped by the different forms of Rome encountered by each—that determines and defines the relationship between Israel and the Church in Romans and Revelation.



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