

## 6. Israel and the Law in Romans 5–11: Interaction with the New Perspective

by

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In a story that is by now very well known (and which other essays in this volume tell in more detail), the publication of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977 launched a new era in the interpretation of Paul. Most immediately and obviously affected was Paul's teaching on Judaism and the law, as scholars scrambled to relate Paul's varied teaching on these matters to Sanders's depiction of second-temple Jewish soteriology ("covenantal nomism"). But so closely entwined is Paul's teaching on Judaism and the law with his major theological emphases in letters such as Romans and Galatians that the Sanders "revolution" inevitably and quickly spawned a series of fresh readings of those letters and their theological emphases. These new interpretations naturally took many different shapes. But the most plausible and ultimately the most popular of these interpretations has been dubbed "the new perspective." James Dunn, a leading proponent of this new way of reading Paul, gave the movement its name in a 1983 article, but his ideas were in many ways anticipated by N. T. Wright in a 1978 lecture.<sup>1</sup> These two scholars are the best representatives of the "new perspective," and both have written commentaries on Romans, the book with which this essay deals. They will serve therefore as my major "sparring partners" as we look at Romans 5–11.<sup>2</sup> However, even a quick perusal of these two leading new perspective scholars' interpretations of Paul and of Romans reveals significant differences in their approaches and conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> See, respectively, "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65 (1983): 95–122 (republished with additional notes in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990], 183–214); and N. T. Wright, "The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith," *TynBul* 29 (1978): 61–88.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn's commentary was published in 1988: *Romans* (WBC; 2 vols.; Waco: Word); Wright's appeared in the *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10, 395–770 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002). Some of the issues we treat in this essay are also closely related to broad interpretive themes that Wright has identified in his major three-volume (to date) exploration of the NT, entitled "Christian Origins and the Question of God": *The New Testament and the People of God*, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 1996, and 2003).

Such differences would be multiplied considerably if other scholars generally considered “new perspective” in their approach were included. All this makes for a problem of definition. One scholar’s “new perspective” may be quite different than another’s. What, then, are the defining characteristics of the “new perspective”?

At the center of the new paradigm is a rotation of Paul’s central theological axis from a vertical to a horizontal orientation. New perspective advocates often fault the interpretive tradition derived especially from the Reformation (and from Luther in particular) for a myopic and anachronistic preoccupation with the individual and his or her status before God. Paul’s cultural context, religious background, and theological concerns suggest, rather, that his immediate concern was with the people of God, and especially with the integration of Gentiles into the people of God. An ethnocentric reading of Paul takes center stage, displacing to a more subordinate role an anthropocentric reading. Paul’s gospel is not, at least, first of all, the story of the individual’s transformation from sinner to saint – or even the story of humankind’s restoration. Rather, the gospel proclaims Israel’s restoration, a restoration that takes place in and through the ministry of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and representative, and that extends God’s grace to the Gentiles. The books that most explicitly reveal this ethnocentric concern – Galatians and Romans – are also the ones that feature significant teaching on the Mosaic law and justification. A re-interpretation of these doctrines both fuels the new paradigm and emerges, in turn, from the paradigm. Most new perspective advocates agree that Paul attacked a misuse of the law among his fellow Jews. But, contra the Reformers and their heirs, this misuse was not a legalistic attempt to find justification through doing what it required. Rather, Jews were misusing the law by turning it into a charter of national privilege, insisting that it virtually guaranteed the salvation of Israel while at the same time it excluded Gentiles.<sup>3</sup> The dichotomy that lies at the heart of Paul’s teaching on the law, then, is not, as the Reformers and their heirs mistakenly thought, human doing (“works” or “works of the law”) vs. human believing (“faith”) but works of covenant identification (confined by definition to Israel) vs. new covenant faith (open to all without distinction).<sup>4</sup> As Timo

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<sup>3</sup> “. . . (I)n attacking the covenantal nomism of the Judaism of his day Paul was attacking neither the law, nor the covenant . . . , but a *covenantal nomism which insisted on treating the law as a boundary marker round Israel, marking off Jew from Gentile, with only those inside as heirs of God’s promise to Abraham*. In short, it was the law abused to which Paul objected, not the law itself.” James D. G. Dunn, “Paul and ‘Covenantal Nomism,’” in *The Partings of the Ways* (London: SCM, 1991), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Some interpreters shift the latter dichotomy a bit further toward a salvation-historical context by interpreting some of Paul’s key references to “faith” as referring to the faith or faithfulness of Christ (esp. Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16; also Rom 1:17; 3:26; Gal 3:22). For a recent defense of the traditional “faith in Christ” interpretation, see R. Barry Matlock, “Detheologizing the πίστις

Laato nicely puts it, new perspective advocates insist that the key issue is not “performance” of the law (this was the Reformers’ focus) but “possession” of the law.<sup>5</sup> Since, on this reading, Paul’s problem with the law was restricted mainly to this Jewish misunderstanding, new perspective proponents in general tend to find a more positive role for the law in salvation history than was typical of (especially) the Lutheran stream of Reformation teaching. Freed from its Jewish perversion into a nationalistic document, the law was free to function positively in the new age of universal redemption.<sup>6</sup>

The basic thrust of Paul’s justification teaching is also shifted from a vertical to a horizontal concern. Paul’s justification language, drawn as it is from Old Testament teaching about covenant status, is not fundamentally about the transfer of a human being from the status of condemned sinner to the status of one “just before God.” Rather, justification for Paul is the declaration that one belongs to the people of God.<sup>7</sup> The new perspective in general therefore emphasizes a quite significantly greater degree of continuity between Paul and first-century Judaism than has been typical in Christian interpretation. Some interpreters, though not fairly classified within mainstream “new perspective” viewpoints, have taken this tendency toward finding greater continuity to an extreme. Typical of this more extreme approach is the view that Paul upholds the continuing validity of the “Torah covenant” for Jews. Paul’s polemic against the law has to do only with his insistence that it not be imposed on Gentiles, while Jews themselves will still be saved via the Torah covenant that God instituted with Israel long ago.<sup>8</sup>

As applied specifically to Romans, the new perspective (following Krister Stendahl and others<sup>9</sup>) faults Luther for initiating a traditional interpretation of the letter that focuses on the question, “How can I, a condemned and

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Χριστοῦ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective,” *NovT* 42 (2000): 1–23, and the essay by Moisés Silva in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> Timo Laato, *Paulus und das Judentum: Anthropologische Erwägungen* (Åbo: Åbo Academy, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> “. . . I would argue that my distinction between ‘works of the law’ and ‘the law’ is important, because ‘works of the law’ denotes that way of regarding the law (as an identity and boundary marker defining the people of God) which Paul rejects – but not the law itself. . . .” (James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, 211).

<sup>7</sup> See especially James D. G. Dunn, “Paul and Justification by Faith,” in *The Road from Damascus* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 85–101; Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 95–133.

<sup>8</sup> See especially John Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000); Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987). While insisting that Christ remains fundamental to salvation for both Jews and Gentiles, Mark Nanos also follows this general approach, arguing that Paul in Romans is insisting that Gentiles must respect the Jews’ continuing status as God’s people and adopt that pattern of behavior required by the Jewish law for “righteous Gentiles” (*The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996]).

<sup>9</sup> Stendahl’s essay “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” (*HTR* 56 [1963]:

helpless sinner, find grace with God”? To be sure, this question arises in Romans – and is answered. But the thrust of the letter moves in a different direction. As revealed particularly in chs. 9–11 and 15:7–13 (highlighted in recent interpretation as a key summary of the letter’s theme<sup>10</sup>), Paul is concerned to show how the gospel manifests God’s covenant faithfulness and how that covenant faithfulness expands to include Gentiles on an equal footing with Jews.<sup>11</sup>

Before turning to critique of the new perspective, it is important to register my own appreciation for many of the emphases that this new approach has brought to light. The more nuanced view of Judaism presupposed in the new perspective, while itself somewhat simplistic and imbalanced (see the first volume in this series), has served to correct unfortunate stereotypes in Christian interpretations of Judaism. The movement’s emphasis on the importance of “people” issues in Paul’s theological agenda is also an important correction of a traditional neglect of such themes. My quarrel with new perspective advocates is often not so much over what they say but about what they do not say – or, perhaps better, the overall balance that they give to certain issues. Romans, for instance, is without doubt deeply concerned with the “people” or “national” question: how God’s grace in Christ embraces both Israel and the Gentiles – as Paul announces the theme in 1:16, “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.” But this national breakdown follows and explicates the immediate recipient of the salvation which Paul’s gospel both proclaims and effects: “everyone who believes.” Individual human beings here and, I would assert, in Romans generally are the immediate concern of Paul. The specific referents “Jews” and “Gentiles,” representing the key salvation-historical categories of “human being,” are a very important but secondary concern. New perspective advocates, I think, exchange background and foreground in their overall reading of Romans.

This over-simplified sketch of the new perspective helps to set the agenda for this paper. The length and complexity of the passage assigned to me requires quite severe limitations on scope and focus. I will focus on three general issues, which will serve to divide the paper: 1) the implications of the argument of chs. 5–8 for our overall reading of Romans; 2) the significance of the “restoration of Israel” theme in chs. 9–11; and 3) the focus and implications of Paul’s polemic against the law in Romans 5–11. As we move into this discussion, a sound methodological reminder from Brendan Byrne

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199–215) is regularly cited as a key indicator of the new focus. See also his *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Dunn, *Romans*, 2:844–5; Wright, “Romans,” 404, 744.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Wright, “Romans,” 403–4, on the “covenant faithfulness” theme; and Dunn, *Romans*, 1:lviii–lxiii on “to the Jew first but also to the Greek” as the “integrating motif” of the letter.

should be kept in mind: “The supreme test of an interpretation of Romans is seeing how it accounts for *all* the elements in the letter. . . .”<sup>12</sup>

### 1. *Romans 5–8 Within the Argument of the Letter*

I begin by summarizing my own reading of these chapters as a basis for the discussion that follows.

Most Romans commentators now agree that a shift of focus occurs at 5:1.<sup>13</sup> The transitional phrase “Since we have been justified through faith”<sup>14</sup> signals that Paul will now begin to draw out various implications of the new state of affairs that God’s justifying work in Christ has produced. Another indication of the transition is a shift from the dialogical and argumentative style so prominent in chs. 1–4 to the “confessional” style of chs. 5–8: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith. . . .”<sup>15</sup> There is considerably less consensus about the overall topic of these chapters, but a good case can be made for assurance. The idea that justified Christians have secured for them (negatively put) deliverance from God’s wrath and (positively put) glory on the day of judgment yet to come chiastically dominates the opening (5:1–11) and closing (8:18–30, 31–39) sections of chs. 5–8.<sup>16</sup> The place of the Adam-

<sup>12</sup> Brendan Byrne, “Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post-‘New Perspective’ Perspective,” *HTR* 94 (2001): 231.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 290–95; Wright, “Romans,” 508; Dunn maintains, on the other hand, that ch. 5 looks back to chs. 1–4 more than it looks ahead to chs. 6–8 (*Romans*, 1:242–3; cf. also U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* [EKKNT; 3 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener and Zürich: Benziger, 1878–81], 1:286–7 and Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1–5* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 252–5, who points to the many contacts between 5:1–11 and the preceding and the significance of the climactic statement in 5:11 as an important point of conclusion in the letter).

<sup>14</sup> English quotations of the Bible, unless otherwise noted, are from the *Today’s New International Version*.

<sup>15</sup> Third-person descriptions of the human condition and the results of God’s act in Christ dominate 1:18–32 and 3:9–4:25, while ch. 2 uses the second-person address of the “diatribe.” Paul is arguing a case before his Roman audience. Beginning in 5:1, however, the central argument is carried forward in first-person plural verbs (especially prominent in 5:1–11; but also 6:1–9, 15; 7:5–6, 14; 8:4, 12, 15b–26, 31–39). See, e.g., J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 78.

<sup>16</sup> Nils Alstrup Dahl stresses the similarities between 5:1–11 and 8:18–39 (*Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977], 82–91); the theme of assurance is singled out by, inter alia, Brendan Byrne, “Living Out the Righteousness of God: The Contribution of Romans 6:1–8:13 to an Understanding of Paul’s Ethical Presuppositions,” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 557–8; Barnabas Lindars, “Paul and the Law in Romans 5–8: An Actantial Analysis,” in *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* (ed. Barnabas Lindars; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988), 130, 140; Wright, “Romans,” 508–9.



Christ analogy in 5:12–21 in the argument of the section is disputed, but once we recognize that the focus in this paragraph is on the overwhelming power of God’s grace in Christ to more than cancel the effects of Adam’s sin and the death he introduced into the world and that διὰ τοῦτο in v. 12 can signify “in order to accomplish this,”<sup>17</sup> the way is cleared to view this paragraph as supporting the keynote of assurance in 5:1–11: “in order to secure this future salvation (see vv. 9 and 10), God’s grace is reigning over those who believe (cf. v. 17) so that they might attain eternal life (see esp. v. 21).” Having set forth his initial case for Christian assurance, Paul in chs. 6 and 7 deals with possible objections to his argument: sin and the law. Each has played an important – and negative – role in Romans up to this point. All human beings stand under the power of sin (3:9), preventing them from enjoying the glory of God (3:23). The law, for its part, brings not rescue from the judgment of God’s wrath, but “the realization of sin” (3:20)<sup>18</sup> and, indeed, creates even more wrath (4:15). In a manner typical of his argument in these chapters, therefore, Paul pictures both sin and the law as powers that hold sway over human beings who are outside of Christ. For those who belong to Christ, however, sin and the law no longer “rule” (6:2, 6, 14, 18, 22; 7:4, 6) – that is, they no longer have the power to keep those united with Christ from experiencing the righteousness that has always been the standard for God’s people (6:16, 18; 7:4, 6) and eventual eternal life (6:23; cf. 7:24–25). Paul’s polemic against sin requires no further explanation – its wholly negative character would be acknowledged on all sides. But crying out for explanation is the negative, death-dealing, role to which Paul has assigned the law in 7:1–6 (which itself brings to a climax a series of such negative assertions in Romans: 3:20, 27–28, 4:15; 5:13–14, 20; and, as the immediate prod to 7:1–6, 6:14 and 15). How could the law, the Torah, God’s own commandments, have taken on so dark a character? As he so often does in Romans, Paul is aware that his readers will be asking such a question; so he himself raises the issue in 7:7 and then responds to it. The law, Paul affirms, is “holy” (v. 12); it is “intended to bring life” (v. 10). The real culprit, it becomes clear, is sin, which uses the law to bring death to Jews like Paul (and, by extension, to all human beings; cf. vv. 8–11). And sin has such power because Paul, the representative Jew, is “unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” (v. 14). As much,

<sup>17</sup> That is, I take διὰ to indicate “final cause,” with the antecedent of τοῦτο being the promise of eventual salvation that is the key point of 5:1–11. To be sure, διὰ, without a following ἵνα, does not often have such a telic sense, but there are parallels in the New Testament (John 12:27; 1 Cor 4:17).

<sup>18</sup> In claiming that the law brings ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας, Paul might mean that the law actually creates sinning (“knowing” in its occasional biblical sense of “experience”) (e.g., Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 89–90) but probably means rather that the “law gives to people an understanding of ‘sin’ (singular) as a power that holds everyone in bondage and brings guilt and condemnation” (Moo, *Romans*, 210).

therefore, as Paul may honor and seek to obey God's law (vv. 21–22), he finds himself "a prisoner of the law of sin" (v. 23) and helpless, apart from Christ, to rescue himself from his plight (vv. 24–25a).

Romans 8:1–13<sup>19</sup> contributes to the argument of these chapters in at least three ways. First, it resumes the celebration of rescue from "condemnation" that was central to 5:12–21. Second, it elaborates the tantalizing hint of 7:6 to the effect that believers "serve in the new way of the Spirit." Third, and most immediately, vv. 1–13 assert explicitly the rescue from the sin and law nexus that was implicit in 7:7–25. What the law, because of sin, could not do, God has done by the sending of his son as a "sin offering" (v. 3)<sup>20</sup>: he condemned sin, allowing believers to be set free from "the law of sin and death" (v. 2) and to meet the "righteous requirement of the law" (v. 4). Occupying center stage in vv. 5–13 (and picked up especially from 7:5–6) is the contrast between "Spirit" and "flesh" (σάρξ; TNIV "sinful nature"). Reflecting Paul's dominant salvation-historical scheme of opposing realms, Paul summarizes the human condition in the old realm with the word "flesh," while "Spirit," the distinctive gift of eschatological realization, is the dominant power for those who live in the new realm. In this context, Paul applies this typical "flesh"/Spirit antithesis to illuminate the condition of human beings. The Spirit brings both freedom from spiritual death (e.g., "condemnation") and eventual freedom from physical death (v. 11). As the power of the new realm, the Spirit also confers "sonship" on believers (vv. 14–16). But to be a child of God is also to be an heir (v. 17); and so Paul returns finally to where he began in these chapters: the hope of glory (see 5:2; and vv. 18 and 30 especially). The present time of frustrated longing (for all of creation as well as for Christians) will give way to freedom and glory (vv. 18–25). And believers can be confident about this future glory because God has decreed it (vv. 29–30) and because he is even now working to bring it about (vv. 28, 31–39).

Richard Longenecker may overstate the matter when he argues that Romans 5–8 contains the basic content of the gospel that Paul presents in Romans,<sup>21</sup> but he is certainly right to draw attention to the importance of these chapters in the letter. For it is here that Paul elaborates the way in which the good news of God's intervention through Jesus Christ is indeed the

<sup>19</sup> Most commentators and versions place a significant paragraph break between vv. 11 and 12. But the theme of rescue from death that is central to vv. 1–11 continues in vv. 12–13. These latter verses are the "imperative" side of the indicative argument of vv. 1–11.

<sup>20</sup> "Sin offering" is the TNIV rendering of *περὶ ἁμαρτίας*, a phrase used in most of its LXX occurrences to translate Hebrew words referring to sacrifice (see esp. N. T. Wright, "The Meaning of *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* in Romans 8:3," in *Studia Biblica 1978* III, 453–9).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Longenecker, "The Focus of Romans: The Central Role of 5:1–8:39 in the Argument of the Letter," in *Romans and the People of God* (Fs. Gordon D. Fee; ed. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 49–69.

“power of God for salvation.”<sup>22</sup> For our purposes, the point that needs to be emphasized is that the focus of these chapters is not on the “people” issue of Jews and Gentiles. The chapters of course have implications for the corporate body of believers in Christ; but it appears to be the human being turned believer, without reference to ethnic or national background, that is Paul’s concern throughout. This focus raises questions about the degree to which an ethnocentric reading of Romans can successfully accommodate these chapters. In an article on the interpretation of Romans in a “post-‘New Perspective’” era, Brendan Byrne comments:

... [T]he representatives of the new perspective are limited in their accounting for the intense exploration of sin and human alienation from God in the early part of the letter (1:16–3:20), the insistence upon faith as the vehicle of righteousness for all (Jew and Gentile) in 3:21–4:25, and the long exposition on Christian hope that, around a central core contrasting life under the law with life in the Spirit (6:1–8:13), forms the unifying theme of chapters 5–8.<sup>23</sup>

Earlier essays have elaborated the problems that Byrne highlights in 1:18–3:20 and 3:21–4:25. Here we focus on chs. 5–8.

As I noted earlier – and the point needs to be stressed so that we do not unfairly caricature the situation – the best representatives of the new perspective, such as Dunn and Wright, do not deny that the individual human being figures importantly in Romans. Indeed, their sketch of the overall argument of chs. 5–8, while differing on points of detail, is significantly similar to the one above.<sup>24</sup> But I am not sure that they are successful in integrating the individual orientation of chs. 5–8 into their reading of Romans, which makes the inclusion of Gentiles the dominant element in the argument. “Jew” and “Gentile” drop completely from sight in these chapters, as the Adamic human being, qua human being, takes center stage.<sup>25</sup> To be sure, the specifics of salvation-historical development are by no means ignored, as recurring references to the law reveal (5:13–14, 20; 6:14, 15; 8:2–4, 7; and, of course, ch. 7). It is the Torah, not law in general, that Paul refers to throughout; the people whom he addresses in 7:1 as “those who know the law” (7:1) are probably Jews and Gentile god-fearers;<sup>26</sup> and 7:7–25 is about Jewish experience with the law. But these references do not function to distinguish Jews from Gentiles but to illustrate the general human

<sup>22</sup> See 1:16. “Salvation” language, while not prominent in chs. 5–8, occurs as the central point of the two verses that perhaps best summarize the argument of the chapters as a whole (5:9–10; cf. 8:24). And the word group is missing entirely in 1:18–4:25.

<sup>23</sup> Byrne, “Interpreting Romans Theologically,” 231.

<sup>24</sup> See Dunn, *Romans*, 1:301–3 (on chs. 6–8; and note the title Dunn gives the section: “The Outworking of the Gospel in Relation to the Individual”); Wright, “Romans,” 508–9.

<sup>25</sup> To be sure, Paul consistently uses plural forms in 5:12–21. But the plurals are individualizing, not collective.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 411–12; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:359; Wright, “Romans,” 558.



condition that interaction with God's law reveals. Jewish experience with the law in these chapters becomes paradigmatic of the generally human experience with God's "law" in its various forms, as, for instance, the "us" of Romans 8:4 makes clear (see also Rom 6:14, 15). It is also true that a significant sub-theme in these chapters, emerging especially clearly in ch. 8, is the way in which blessings and privileges originally promised to Israel are now "transferred" to Christians (e.g., possession of the Spirit, resurrection, sonship, inheritance). But as our brief overview above revealed, the ostensible focus of these chapters is on the assurance that each individual believer can have for the day of judgment to come, despite the continuing threats posed by sin, the law, and the tribulations of life. Romans 5–8 is not about how a sinner can find a gracious God. But it *is* about how a justified sinner, living in the realm of grace, will find salvation in the day of judgment. That these justified sinners fall into the key salvation-historical categories of Jew and Gentile is a point that is not entirely ignored in these chapters. But it recedes very much into the background, as the axis of the divine-human relationship takes center stage.

An attempt to integrate chapters 5–8 more effectively with the overall theme of God's covenant faithfulness has been made by N. T. Wright.<sup>27</sup> Wright builds on the argument of Frank Thielman, who argues that "Paul draws the language and the theological symbols he uses to accomplish this purpose [describe the new eschatological era of life] in large measure from the biblical story of Israel's disobedience to the law given as Sinai, Israel's punishment in the exile for that disobedience, and Israel's eschatological restoration."<sup>28</sup> But while Thielman points mainly to the many echoes of Deuteronomic restoration language in chs. 5–8, Wright argues that the "story" of Israel provides the underlying framework for the sequence of topics that we find in Romans 3–8. According to Wright, "redemption" language in ch. 3 (esp. v. 24) alludes to the exodus, with ch. 4, via Genesis 15:6, focusing on covenant establishment. Allusion to baptism in 6:3–4 suggests that the story of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea lies behind ch. 6, since Paul makes just this connection between the two elsewhere (1 Cor 10:2). And the prominence of slavery imagery in this chapter confirms the allusion, since "in Judaism in general any story about slaves and how they come to be free must be seen at once as an allusion to the events of the Exodus."<sup>29</sup> Discussion of the law in ch. 7 comes, then, as no surprise, as Paul continues to follow the story-line

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<sup>27</sup> N. T. Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8," in *Romans and the People of God*, 26–35.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Thielman, "The Story of Israel and the Theology of Romans 5–8," in *Pauline Theology*, Vol. 3: *Romans* (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 169–95 (176–7).

<sup>29</sup> "New Exodus, New Inheritance," 29.

of Israel. This story of the “new exodus” climaxes in ch. 8, as the children of God receive the inheritance (e.g., entrance into the promised land) that God has promised them. In these chapters, then, Paul is “telling the story of the people of the Messiah in terms of the new exodus.”<sup>30</sup> The theme of God’s covenant faithfulness (announced in 1:17) continues unbroken from chs. 3–4 into chs. 5–8.

Wright justly notes that the acceptance of this theory rests not with the strength of any one of the allusions but with the degree to which the theory satisfactorily explains the train of thought in these chapters. While both Thielman and Wright correctly note that Paul describes the experience of Christian salvation in terms often drawn from the story of Israel, we must question whether it is the story of Israel that provides the basic underpinning for the sequence of thought in these chapters. First, while it is true that a theory such as Wright’s must be judged by its overall heuristic power, some of the specific points of contact are very tenuous. Baptism, for instance, plays a minor role in ch. 6, and the one indirect connection in Paul between baptism and the crossing of the Red Sea is hardly sufficient to establish a connection. Nor is it clear that slavery language would inevitably point to the exodus. In the same manner, the one reference to “redemption” in ch. 3 provides a tenuous basis to suggest that ch. 3 is “about” the new exodus. Second, while there is a rough parallel between the sequence of some of the topics in these chapters and the story of Israel, other topics do not fit the scheme very well at all. Chapter 4 is quite obviously about Abraham, not about covenant initiation in general, still less about Sinai; and, of course the story of Abraham precedes the exodus (ch. 3). Nor is Wright very successfully able to integrate the subjects of ch. 5 into the “story of Israel” background. That biblical authors, consciously or unconsciously, sometimes follow the biblical story line in structuring their writings need not be doubted. But the evidence that they do so must come either from explicit textual indication or from a consistently clear pattern of allusions. Neither is present in this case.

Wright’s proposal raises a further, and more basic question: How does Paul’s focus on the epochal nature of the cross and the new act of God in Christ cohere with an underlying “story of Israel” theme, with all the continuities that this theme suggests? This question is raised insistently by those who pursue a certain kind of “apocalyptic” reading of Paul whereby the “Christ-event” creates a break in the continuity of salvation history itself.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, I do not want to travel too far down this road, for Paul is quite obviously concerned to root the “Christ-event” very firmly in the soil of a

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<sup>30</sup> “Romans,” 510.

<sup>31</sup> On the larger problem of “apocalyptic” as it is applied to Paul’s theology, see R. Barry Matlock, *Unveiling the Apocalyptic Paul: Paul’s Interpreters and the Rhetoric of Criticism* (JSNTSup 127; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996).

single and unbroken salvation history. But it is a salvation history that very basically divides into two parts; and this two-age or, perhaps better, “two realm” scheme provides a much more obvious framework for Romans 5–8 than a story of Israel framework.<sup>32</sup> Adam vs. Christ, death vs. life, sin vs. righteousness, torah vs. grace, flesh (or “letter”) vs. Spirit: these are the contrasts that provide the underlying “logic” of these chapters. This is not to minimize the degree to which Paul alludes to the Old Testament narrative of Israel in his presentation, but to suggest that that narrative does not play the role of a “structuring” foundation. Francis Watson, commenting generally on the significance of narratives for Paul’s gospel, says,

Paul’s gospel, then, is not itself a ‘story,’ since its vertical construal of God’s act as a movement of descent and ascent inhibits the linear, temporal extension that a ‘story of Jesus’ would require. Nor does this gospel become part of a story, its climax indeed, through its insertion into a scriptural metanarrative. Paul characteristically appeals to individual scriptural stories rather than to the scriptural story as a whole, and he appeals to them with the sole aim of uncovering their testimony to a divine act that lies beyond the scope of human storytelling.<sup>33</sup>

Again, I would want to nuance Watson a bit, adding an emphasis on the degree to which Paul remains concerned to interpret this climax as the climax of a particular story. But Watson does point out a basic problem with the construals of Thielman and Wright: their view of the underlying narrative does not sufficiently allow for the degree to which God’s act in Christ forces Paul to reevaluate and recast the story of Israel. The issue may be illustrated by noting Thielman’s comment, based on 5:13–14, that “Israel, then, is the middle term between Adam and Christ.”<sup>34</sup> “Middle term” suggests that Israel and the law figure as part of a continuous story from Adam to Christ, whereas Paul treats the law in vv. 12–21 as an aside in the story that he is telling (cf. v. 20: “the law was brought in”).

The argument of Romans 5–8, then, suggests that the more individual, vertical-oriented, reading of Romans typical of the Reformation paradigm is to some extent justified.<sup>35</sup> An interpretation of Romans that focuses too much attention on the application of God’s righteousness to the “people” question runs the danger of doing to chs. 5–8 what new perspective advocates often accuse some traditional approaches of doing to chs. 9–11: turning them into an excursus.

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<sup>32</sup> See Moo, *Romans*, 351–3.

<sup>33</sup> Francis Watson, “Is There a Story in These Texts?” in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Bruce Longenecker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 239.

<sup>34</sup> Thielman, “Story of Israel,” 182.

<sup>35</sup> An important defense of the significance of the “individual” in Paul’s world and letters is Gary W. Burnett, *Paul and the Salvation of the Individual* (ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff; BIS 57; Leiden: Brill, 2001).

## 2. *Israel's Restoration in Romans 9–11*

The benign neglect that Romans 9–11 sometimes suffered in past interpretations of Romans<sup>36</sup> has been more than corrected in recent interpretations of Romans – especially those indebted to the new perspective. These chapters, with their focus on the relationship between Gentiles and Jews in the history of salvation, are now often seen as the climax of the letter.<sup>37</sup> Here, if anywhere in Romans, is evidence that “people” concerns dominate Paul’s theological concern. “To the Jew first and then the Gentile” receives its classic elaboration in these chapters, as Paul weaves Old Testament quotations and allusions into a complex defense of God’s faithfulness to his promises to Israel. I have no wish to deny this point. But the way in which this ethnocentric elaboration contributes to the argument of the letter must still be investigated. I will begin to probe this issue through an interpretive survey of the chapters, after which I will comment directly on some of the key issues.

No interpreter questions the integrity of Romans 9–11 as a discrete unit of thought within Romans. The section is framed by the juxtaposition of Israel’s many salvation-historical advantages (9:4–5; 11:32: “loved on account of the patriarchs”) and her present state of separation from God (9:1–3; 11:32: “as far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies”). Despite Israel’s many prerogatives and blessings, the nation as a whole is estranged from God. Such a situation creates a significant problem for Paul’s presentation of the gospel: if the message he proclaims among the Gentiles is indeed “the gospel of God,” a word of salvation that brings to fulfillment the Old Testament promises (e.g., 1:2; 3:21), why is Israel, the prime recipient of those Old Testament promises, now disenfranchised? Salvation history has taken a strange turn, with comparatively few Jews finding salvation in Christ while many Gentiles are streaming into the kingdom. The root problem comes to

<sup>36</sup> C. H. Dodd is the most famous (and dare we say notorious) example of such neglect; he viewed the chapters as a pre-existing sermon that Paul inserted here on the basis of a personal agenda (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* [MNTC; New York: Harper and Bros., 1932], 149–50); but cf. also Otto Kuss, *Der Römerbrief* (3 vols.; Regensburg: Pustet, 1963–78), 3:644–5. Sanday-Headlam claim that, with ch. 8, “Paul has now finished his main argument” (William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902], 225).

<sup>37</sup> F. C. Baur paved the way for this view of the centrality of Romans 9–11. He contested the “dogmatic” interpretation of Romans, with its focus on justification by faith in chs. 1–8 and argued for a historical interpretation of the letter, focused on the debates between Jews and Christians and with 9–11 the “germ and centre” of the letter (*Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine* [2 vols.; 2d ed.; London: Williams and Norgate, 1876], 315–41 (315)). For recent defenses of the centrality of Romans 9–11, see Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 4; Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 87; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:lxii (“the climax of the theological exposition”).

expression in v. 6a, which summarizes the central argument of these chapters: “It is not as though God’s word had failed.”<sup>38</sup> Paul elaborates this response in four broad stages. First, in 9:6b–29, he provides his own interpretation of the nature of the promises that Israel received from God. The key words, prominent especially in the two paragraphs that frame this argument (vv. 6b–13 and vv. 24–29), are “calling” and “seed” / “children” / “people.” It is God’s “call” (vv. 7, 24, 26; cf. “election” [ἐκλογή] in v. 11) that creates the true “seed,” the people of God destined for salvation (vv. 8, 9, 24, 26, 27). Both the patriarchal history (vv. 6b–13) and the prophetic witness (vv. 24–29) testify to the fact that God’s true people have always been created by a sovereign act of God’s own choosing, a selection that rests on “grace,” not “race.”<sup>39</sup> Paul’s contemporary Jews would have had little quarrel with his argument so far. But Paul goes beyond the normal expectation of the Judaism of his day by taking his argument to its logical conclusion: if being Jewish is not the basis for God’s election, God is free to extend that electing grace to Gentiles as well as Jews (vv. 24–26). The very strong insistence on divine sovereign election in these verses provokes reactions about the fairness of God, to which Paul responds in vv. 14–23.

In the second stage of his argument for the integrity of God’s word, Paul shifts the focus from God’s decision to human response (9:30–10:21). The section begins and ends with a contrast between Israel, which has not attained the salvation apparently granted to it, and the Gentiles, the surprising recipients of that same salvation (9:30–31; 10:20–21). If divine election is the explanation for this turn of events in 9:6b–29, faith or its lack accounts in this new section for the situation. Dominating 9:30–10:13 is a contrast between two kinds of “righteousness”: the “righteousness of faith,” “God’s righteousness,” and the righteousness bound up with the law: “their own righteousness” (9:30–31; 10:3; 10:5–6).<sup>40</sup> By their faith Gentiles experience God’s righteousness and so are saved (9:30): for “everyone” who calls on the Lord can be saved (10:9–13). But Israel has stubbornly insisted on pursuing God’s righteousness as if (note the ὥς in v. 32) it could be attained by works (9:32; 10:3)<sup>41</sup> and has therefore missed the true climax of the law and the salvation history of which it was a part: Christ (10:4).<sup>42</sup> Nor does Israel have an excuse for failing to see what God was doing in Christ, for the message has gone out

<sup>38</sup> On the thematic importance of 9:6a, see, e.g., Dunn, *Romans*, 2:518.

<sup>39</sup> To employ Wright’s memorable way of putting the matter (*The Climax of the Covenant* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 238).

<sup>40</sup> As Dunn notes, this section (9:30–10:13) reverts to the dominant vocabulary of 3:20–5:21 (*Romans*, 2:577), and especially to 1:17 and the elaboration in 3:21–31.

<sup>41</sup> I will defend this reading of 9:31–32 below.

<sup>42</sup> A general trend toward cutting through the “end” vs. “goal” debate by combining them in the sense of “climax” or “culmination” marks recent interpretation of the τέλος in Rom 10:4 (e.g.,



to all the world and that message is itself rooted in the Old Testament witness to the fulfillment that has come in Christ (10:14–21). The third stage of the argument resumes the argument from the end of the first stage. The “remnant” of Israel that God promises to save (cf. 9:27) is already in existence and stands as evidence for the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promise to Israel (11:1–10). As Paul made clear earlier, this remnant exists only in and through God’s grace (11:5–6). And, as he also made clear earlier, the flip side of God’s gracious election is his “hardening,” evident in the many Jews who have not responded to Christ (11:7–10).

By common agreement, the pinnacle of Romans 9–11 is reached in 11:11–32, and especially in Paul’s claim that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26a). Here is the final and decisive answer to the question about God’s faithfulness in carrying out his promise to Israel. The meaning of this claim is, of course, very controversial, but I agree with the large majority of interpreters who take “Israel” to refer to ethnic Israel in a corporate sense (not every Israelite, but a representative number).<sup>43</sup> More difficult is the question whether “all Israel” is to be understood synchronically – the Israel as it exists at one time, at the time of the parousia – or diachronically – the sum of Israel as it has existed throughout time. The temporal language of vv. 25–26, along with the probable allusion to final resurrection in v. 15 lead me slightly to prefer the former.<sup>44</sup> In any case, the salvation of all Israel is the result of a process that Paul describes several times in these verses: Israel’s rejection of the message brings Gentile inclusion, an inclusion that itself stimulates Israel to jealousy and to her own eventual inclusion (vv. 11–12, 15, 17–23, 30–31). As Paul makes clear, the elaboration of this salvation-historical sequence has the apologetic purpose of demonstrating Paul’s continued allegiance – precisely insofar as he is the “apostle to the Gentiles” – to Israel (11:13–14) and the pastoral purpose of restraining a tendency to arrogance toward Jews and Jewish Christians among the Gentiles (11:18–24, 25).

Several issues relevant to our purposes emerge from this argument and require at least brief comment.

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Dunn, *Romans*, 2:589–90; Wright, “Romans,” 656–8; Moo, *Romans*, 638–42; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul* [WUNT 16; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1985], 291–2; the trend is reflected in the TNIV rendering “culmination”).

<sup>43</sup> See the careful study on “all Israel” by James M. Scott, “‘And Then All Israel Will Be Saved’ (Rom 11:26),” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (JSJSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 489–527; see also Michael G. Vanlaningham, “Romans 11:25–27 and the Future of Israel in Paul’s Thought,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 3 (1992): 141–74.

<sup>44</sup> See, for more detail, *Romans*, 719–26. Dunn (*Romans*, 2:681–3) adopts this view also, while Wright thinks that “all Israel” refers to the people of God generally, both Jews and Gentiles (“Romans,” 690; cf. also his *Climax of the Covenant*, 249–50; and note also J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul ‘in Concert’ in the Letter to the Romans* (NovTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2002), who thinks the phrase at least implicitly includes all the elect (277–9).

First, as we noted above, the tendency among current interpreters (including but not limited to the new perspective) to stress continuity between Judaism and Christianity has been taken to its extreme by some who confine Paul's critique of Judaism solely to the issue of Gentile inclusion. Paul's concern for his fellow Jews (9:1–3) has to do with their failure to support the Gentile mission, not with their failure to believe in Christ for salvation.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the salvation of "all Israel" in 11:26 is a specific reaffirmation of Israel's salvific election in and through the "torah covenant" ("as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs" [11:28]).<sup>46</sup> This so-called *Sonderweg* viewpoint has been severely and successfully criticized by many interpreters, who point out, among other things, that "saved" in 11:26 must be defined Christologically, as it has been throughout Romans (e.g., 10:8–13), and that it is precisely the issue of Israel's salvation that creates Paul's concern in these chapters (10:1; cf. the implications of Paul's willingness to be "accursed" in 9:3).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it must be stressed that "mainstream" new perspective advocates (e.g., Dunn, Wright; even Sanders) reject the view quite forcefully.

A second issue has sparked significant discussion among a wide variety of interpreters: the apparent contradiction between Paul's claim in ch. 9 that only a "remnant" of Israel would be saved (v. 27) and his claim in ch. 11 that "all Israel" would be saved. Wright has pointed to just this tension as one of the advantages of his interpretation of "all Israel" in terms of the people of God, both Jew and Gentile. Another way to resolve the tension is to dismiss any idea of a restriction in the scope of Israel in ch. 9.<sup>48</sup> But the text more naturally points in just this direction.<sup>49</sup> A more fruitful approach is to highlight the distinction between corporate and individual election within Paul's argument. The Old Testament and many Jewish traditions focused on the corporate election of Israel as God's people. There arose within the intertestamental period, however, in response especially to instances of

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<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 135–50; B. Klappert, "Traktat für Israel: Die paulinische Verhältnisbestimmung von Israel und Kirche als Kriterium neutestamentlicher Sachaussagen über die Juden," in *Jüdische Existenz und die Erneuerung der christlichen Theologie: Versuch der Bilanz des christlich-jüdischen Dialogs für die Systematische Theologie* (ed. Martin Stöhr; Munich: Kaiser, 1981), 73–76; Sidney G. Hall, III, *Christian Anti-Semitism and Paul's Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 88–93, 113–27.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Stendahl, "Paul Among Jews and Gentiles," in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*; F. Mussner, "'Ganz Israel wird gerettet werden (Röm 11,26): Versuch einer Auslegung,'" *Kairos* 18 (1976): 245–53.

<sup>47</sup> See esp. Reidar Hvalvik, "A 'Sonderweg' for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11.25–27," *JSNT* 38 (1990): 87–107.

<sup>48</sup> See E. Elizabeth Johnson, "Romans 9–11: The Faithfulness and Impartiality of God," in *Pauline Theology*, 222–7.

<sup>49</sup> See my response to Johnson's essay: "The Theology of Romans 9–11: A Response to E. Elizabeth Johnson," *Pauline Theology*, 250–52.

widespread apostasy, a restriction of the scope of election to particular individuals within national Israel.<sup>50</sup> The validity of God's election of the nation was reasserted at the same time as the identity of those who would experience that election was restricted, on various grounds, to the "in group." Paul follows a similar logic, asserting the continuing validity of Israel's election as a whole (9:4–5; 11:1–2, 28) but then both restricting that election to only some within Israel and expanding the election to include Gentiles. It is always the case, then, that it is the "remnant" – those from Israel truly chosen by God – that is saved. What 11:26 affirms, in accordance with widespread Old Testament and Jewish expectation, is that what is at present a small and inconsequential remnant will grow in the last days to encompass a significantly larger number of Israelites.<sup>51</sup>

An issue a bit more germane to our topic in this paper is the broader reading of Old Testament eschatological expectation that Paul's argument in these chapters appears to assume. Paul appeals extensively to Old Testament restoration expectations to document his understanding of the course of salvation history.<sup>52</sup> According to Paul, the Old Testament anticipated both the reduction of Israel to a remnant (Isa 10:22, 23 [9:27–28]; Isa 1:9 [9:29]; Isa 65:2 [10:21]; cf. Deut 29:4 / Isa 29:10 [11:8]; Ps 69:22, 23 [11:9–10]) and the inclusion of Gentiles (Hos 2:23 and 1:10 [9:24–25]; Isa 65:1 [10:20]). It also predicted that God would use the Gentiles to stimulate the Jews to jealousy (Deut 32:21 [10:19]; cf. 11:11, 14) and that "all Israel" would be saved (Isa 59:20, 21; 27:9; cf. Jer 31:33–34 [11:26–27]). Paul is obviously at pains to show that the turn salvation history has taken with the coming of Christ stands in continuity with prophetic restoration expectation.

Paul's application of prophecies from the Old Testament that may often be interpreted as having in view the restoration of Israel after the exile gives some credence to the increasingly popular view that the New Testament in general follows through on a widespread Jewish assumption that the nation, despite her return to the land, was still "in exile." According to N. T. Wright, who has especially popularized this view, the Jews who returned to the land

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<sup>50</sup> See especially Mark Adam Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Elliott challenges the widespread assumption that the national election of Israel was a fundamental tenet among first-century Jews.

<sup>51</sup> See Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 264. Bruce W. Longenecker ("Different Answers to Different Issues: Israel, the Gentiles and Salvation History in Romans 9–11," *JSNT* 36 [1989]: 95–123) correctly emphasizes the importance of temporality in Paul's teaching about the place of Israel and the Gentiles in salvation history (although I am not sure that we can apply it to the issue of ethnicity and election in the way that he does).

<sup>52</sup> Almost a third of all Paul's Old Testament quotations are found in Romans 9–11 (see, e.g., Dietrich A. Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus* [BHT 69; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1986], 21–23).

after the return from exile quickly realized that the glorious language used by the prophets to characterize the return could hardly be applied to their rather inglorious circumstances: few in number, often dominated by Gentile powers, and failing to exhibit the righteousness that was to be the ultimate hallmark of a restored Israel. Wright, and others who have followed his lead, cite the many post-exilic Old Testament and Jewish texts that bemoan Israel's continuing state of disobedience and subservience to Gentiles and anticipate a restoration yet in the future.<sup>53</sup> Central to Jesus' preaching, then, was the proclamation that God was through him bringing Israel's exile to an end. And this same scheme, it is said, appears to lie behind the scriptural argument of Romans 9–11.

Evaluations of the 'return from exile' interpretation have varied from enthusiastic support to rather serious critiques. My own evaluation of the OT, Jewish, and New Testament data suggests that the thesis needs to be modified at some points. First, while post-exilic texts that predict a future restoration and which therefore presuppose that the return to the land had not fulfilled the prophetic expectation are, of course, numerous, far fewer actually speak in terms of a continuing exile.<sup>54</sup> And while the *language* of exile itself need not be present to justify the *concept*, these data at least give us pause in thinking that the category "still in exile" is a dominant category in second-temple Jewish eschatological consciousness. Second, Wright's claim that "This perception of Israel's present condition [still in exile] was shared by

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<sup>53</sup> The clearest Old Testament texts are Neh 9:6–37; Ezra 9:6–15; Zech 8:1–23; 10:8–12; the best Jewish evidence comes from Sirach 36:5–16; Tobit 13:3; 14:5–7; 2 Macc 1:27–29; 4 Ezra 6:55–59; Bar 2:7–10; 3:6–8; 2 Bar. 68:5–7; 1 Enoch 89–90; T. Mos. 4:8–9; 2:5–18; CD 1:1–10; 4Q504–506. See, e.g., Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 268–72; James M. Scott, "For as Many as are of the Works of the Law are under a Curse" (Galatians 3:10)", in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; JSNTSup 83; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 197–213; Craig A. Evans, "Aspects of Exile and Restoration in the Proclamation of Jesus and the Gospels," in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 264–93; and see also the series of essays in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (JSJSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1997). Paving the way for this analysis was Michael A. Knibb, "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period," *HeyJ* 17 [1976]: 253–72.

<sup>54</sup> As Seyoon Kim suggests, "... it may be necessary to distinguish between a well-articulated and coherent theory of the continuing exile and the widespread expectation of the eschatological restoration" (*Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 138 n. 47). Note also that James C. Vanderkam finds several different strands of teaching about the exile in apocalyptic books ("Exile in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, 89–109). Moreover, several texts often cited to support the idea of "Israel still in exile" (e.g., Tobit 13:3; 14:5; Bar 2:7–10; T. Mos. 4:8–9) are set in an exilic context. The question, therefore, is whether these texts reflect a past situation or a present one. Evans argues for the latter ("Aspects of Exile," 270–71), but the case is not clear-cut.

writers across the board in second-temple Judaism”<sup>55</sup> may require qualification. The texts he cites do not make clear that “still in exile” was the standard means by which Israel’s present condition was interpreted. Those outside the mainstream, such as the Qumran covenanters, apparently stressed the idea (at least in some form; CD 1:3–10, which Wright cites, is fraught with difficulties). But we might suppose that those in positions of power in Jerusalem were much less intrigued with the idea. Third, many of the prophecies about a restoration appear to imply an “already-not yet” perspective: the return of Israel to the land and rebuilding of the temple represents a partial fulfillment of restoration prophecies, with a keen anticipation of more to come.<sup>56</sup> Note, for instance, 2 Maccabees 2:17–18:

It is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance to all, and the consecration, as he promised through the law. We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has rescued us from great evils and has purified the place.

Here a partial return and restoration is the occasion for a renewed hope in a climactic regathering and restoration. Similarly, though Wright and others regularly cite the language of Ezra 9:9 – “we are slaves . . . in bondage” – as evidence that post-exilic Jews still saw themselves in exile, the context also celebrates God’s grace in “leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary” (9:8; Neh 9:36 is roughly parallel). Such texts suggest that some Jews, at least, thought that the exile, in at least one important sense, was ended – and, after all, “exile” is first of all at least geographically oriented! This is not to minimize the fact that the return of the exiles is often seen as a down payment or prelude to a greater return to come. But it might be an over-simplification to characterize the situation simply as “Israel still in exile.”<sup>57</sup> Fourth, the “Israel in exile” theme may oversimplify in another way. The concept is, of course, national and corporate, focusing our attention on the fact that prophecies about Israel’s national restoration had not yet been fulfilled. But along with varying degrees of frustration with the failure of these national prophecies yet to be fulfilled, we find evidence that many individual Jews were quite confident about their personal spiritual condition. Paul appears to have been one of these (Phil 3:2–11).

Wright and others have done us a service in reminding us that first-century Judaism was characterized by a more national-oriented focus than modern

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<sup>55</sup> *The New Testament and the People of God*, 269.

<sup>56</sup> For instance, Sirach, while predicting a restoration yet to come (36:5–16) also speaks in very laudatory terms of the current priest, Simon (ch. 50). The DSS are something of an exception here, of course; the community is anxious to defend its *raison d’être* by painting the status of current Israel as darkly as possible.

<sup>57</sup> See Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 138.



readers of the New Testament might be aware of; but their zeal has perhaps led them to give insufficient attention to the degree to which Jews at that time were also deeply concerned about individual soteriology and eschatology. Finally, then, we might wonder whether the wholesale application of the “Israel in exile” background to the New Testament runs the risk of imposing a category on the material that the material itself does not clearly support. Contemporary interpretations of Jesus, for instance, often insist on interpreting his teaching about restoration, in contrast to traditional interpretations, in strongly nationalistic terms.<sup>58</sup> Wright, for example, insists that imagery from Jesus’ parables be seen against the backdrop of national restoration – a restoration, of course, that Jesus fairly radically reinterprets. We can readily grant that Jesus often uses language and concepts drawn from the Old Testament and Jewish expectation of national deliverance (as, for example, with his focus on the “twelve”). But the question is the degree to which this background informs his teaching and the degree to which he remains indebted to the national and corporate categories set by “Israel in exile” language.<sup>59</sup>

In Romans 9–11, of course, such a national focus would seem to be quite justified: these chapters are certainly, in some basic sense, “about” Israel.<sup>60</sup> Clearly, especially in 11:11–32, Paul is referring to a national restoration. Moreover, as we have seen, Paul draws extensively on Old Testament prophetic expectations about Israel’s restoration to develop his understanding of salvation history.<sup>61</sup> But the question must still be asked about the extent to which Paul’s application of these prophecies remains in the domain of their original national context and the degree to which they are re-interpreted to speak to a broader and, at times, more individual context. One possible pointer in the latter direction is the way in which Paul appears to re-interpret two of the prophecies that we cited above. Paul applies language drawn from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 to vindicate the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God (9:24–25). Yet in their original context, these prophecies speak of a return of the ten northern tribes. Similarly, “those who did not seek me”/“those who did not ask for me” in Isaiah 65:1 (10:20) are Israelites, whereas

<sup>58</sup> In addition to Wright, see especially Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) (though differing on some matters).

<sup>59</sup> On Jesus’ parables, see, for instance, Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Reading and Overreading the Parables in *Jesus and the Victory of God*,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. Carey C. Newman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 61–76; and, on Jesus’ teaching in general, Craig Blomberg, “The Wright Stuff: A Critical Overview of *Jesus and the Victory of God*,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, 19–39.

<sup>60</sup> It is instructive to note that the language of “Jews,” so prominent in chs. 1–8, virtually disappears in favor of the corporate category “Israel” in chs. 9–11.

<sup>61</sup> Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News* has illustrated abundantly the degree to which Paul’s argument in Romans 9–11 depends on the latter part of Isaiah.

Paul applies the language to the Gentiles.<sup>62</sup> Our point here is simply that these texts reveal a Paul quite prepared to re-interpret prophetic Scripture in light of the gospel. We should not therefore assume that an appeal to Old Testament prophecies of national restoration must retain that national focus. A particularly important case in point is the argument of 9:6–29. Because Paul quotes a prophecy about Israel and Edom (Mal 1:2–3 in 9:13) and because, it is alleged, Paul’s Jewish context would lead him to think in corporate categories, modern interpreters regularly claim that these verses cannot be applied to individual salvation.<sup>63</sup> Yet the overall point that Paul must establish in this stage of his argument as well as the actual language that Paul uses vindicates the individual interpretation.<sup>64</sup>

Without dismissing the helpfulness of the “Israel in exile” concept as *one* useful lens through which we can interpret the New Testament appropriation of the Old Testament and reaction with Judaism, I worry that some are using this one lens to over-interpret the degree to which national categories play a role in the NT. In Romans, for instance, Paul does not explicitly isolate the national category “exile” but the personal category “sin.” It is the power under which all human beings stand (3:9) and from which they are liberated through the cross of Jesus Christ and through faith (3:24). The base-line of argument is strongly (though not, of course, exclusively) individualistic – as we have already noted in Romans 5–8. Romans 9–11 certainly introduces a greater focus on national categories, yet it is just this focus that sets the chapters apart as distinctive both in Romans and in the letters of Paul. Certainly we can agree that, from the standpoint of Romans 9–11, Paul views Israel as still awaiting the fulfillment of the prophetic promises of restoration. And, as long as we understand how broadly the term is being used, “still in

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<sup>62</sup> Various explanations for this re-interpretation may be suggested. They are part of a larger “universalizing hermeneutic” that underlies much of Paul’s appropriation of the Old Testament both in these chapters and throughout Romans to vindicate his view of salvation history. Abraham’s story, and especially the divine promises that are basic to that story, provide Paul with an important foundation for his hermeneutic, not least in Romans 9–11 (9:4–5; 11:16, 28). Once we recognize the foundational nature of the Abrahamic promise for Paul, we can find warrant for Paul’s application of Hos 1:10 to the Gentiles, since the prophecy echoes the Abrahamic promise of Genesis. The opening words of Hos 1:10 (which Paul does not quote) predict that the “Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted.” This theme of innumerable descendants is a constant refrain in the Abrahamic promise texts of Genesis, and the analogy with the “dust of the earth” or “the sand on the sea shore” is used four times. Other Old Testament texts use the language in the same way, and one of those texts, Isa 10:22, is quoted by Paul in the very next verse (27). It is then perhaps via Hosea’s “not my people” that Isa 65:1 is drawn into Paul’s hermeneutical net.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., most recently, Wright, “Romans,” 634.

<sup>64</sup> See John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), esp. 45–54; and see also Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections,” *JETS* 36 (1993): 25–40; Moo, *Romans*, 571–2.

exile” is not necessarily an incorrect way to describe the plight from which Israel still awaits rescue. It becomes, in fact, a shorthand to describe Israel’s state as not yet enjoying the final fulfillment of her restoration prophecies. Indeed, some would argue that the logic of Romans 9–11 implies rather that the coming of Christ brings a “new exile” to Israel.<sup>65</sup> Texts such as 9:32–33, which speak of Jews stumbling over the stumbling stone of Christ, could support such a notion. And, of course, Paul himself, as perhaps many other Jews in his day, seems to have viewed his pre-Christian Jewish state not negatively, as “exile” would suggest, but quite positively. Nevertheless, it would seem more appropriate to speak of the coming of Christ as a further reconfirmation of Israel’s “exilic” condition. It is very unlikely that Jews like Paul, however self-satisfied, thought that they were living in the age of eschatological restoration. The Jews’ failure to recognize that Jesus Christ initiated the eschatological “righteousness of God” was itself due to a continuing and persistent preoccupation with the law (10:3, 4; 9:31–32). Here again, we see the problem in using “exile” as an overall explanatory concept. The satisfaction that Paul and many Jews expressed with respect to their personal religious condition suggests that they were certainly not thinking of themselves as personally “still in exile,” even as they, undoubtedly to varying degrees, would have recognized that their mere residence in the land of Israel did not bring an end to exile in the way that the prophets had foretold.

### 3. *The Law in Romans 5–11*

Central to the new perspective is a revision in the traditional Reformation interpretation of Paul’s view of the Mosaic law. James Dunn has made the most significant contribution on this point, arguing in a series of articles, in his commentaries on Romans and Galatians, and in his theology of Paul that Paul’s quarrel with Judaism over the law had to do not with individual legalism but with national nomism. That is, Paul did not criticize Jews because they were seeking to find salvation through the law (a view for which there is little evidence in the Judaism of Paul’s day) but because they viewed it as a charter of national privilege. Jews in general have failed to understand that the coming of Christ spells the end of any such national exclusiveness, that faith in Christ, not fidelity to the Mosaic law, marks out new covenant believers, that the law as barrier to Gentile inclusion has been decisively and forever removed. And because Paul’s critique of the law has to do more with a Jewish misuse of the law than with the law itself, the way is open to

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<sup>65</sup> E.g., Mark Seifrid, “Blind Alleys in the Controversy over the Paul of History,” *TynBul* 45 (1994): 86–92; A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 154.

interpret Paul as being more positive about the law – when rightly used – than has been typical in many strands of Pauline interpretation. Other essays in this volume deal with texts that are directly germane to these issues. But Romans 5–11, with both occasional references (5:13–14, 20; 6:14, 15; 8:7; 9:11–12; 11:5–6) and two sustained passages (7:1–8:4; 9:30–10:8), also contributes significantly to our understanding of Paul’s view of the law. Two matters relevant to our concerns emerge from these chapters: the focus of Paul’s law-critique and the law as a positive factor in salvation history.

Dunn and others are quite right to point out that Paul criticizes the law because, as God’s gift to Israel, it excludes Gentiles from the people of God. The logic of Romans 3:29–30 is particularly clear in this regard: justification by faith, because it provides equal access to God for both circumcised and uncircumcised, is consonant with the fact that God is the God for both Jews and Gentiles (see also Rom 4:13–17). The easily neglected conclusion of Romans 10:4, which finds significant elaboration in vv. 11–13, moves in the same direction: “Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for *everyone who believes*” (see the “anyone” of v. 11, the “everyone” of v. 13 and the explicit reference to Jew and Gentile in v. 12). By bringing to its climax the salvation-historical era during which the law, given to Israel, played a central role, Christ has opened the way for Gentiles and Jews, without distinction, to access God’s righteousness. As Dunn and the many others who have followed his basic interpretation have shown, the Reformers and some of their heirs can justly be criticized for neglecting this salvation-historical dimension in Paul’s interaction with Jewish views about the law. But in his zeal to correct an imbalance, Dunn has created an imbalance in the other direction. In fact, I would argue, as have others in this volume, that he has turned an admittedly important sub-theme in Paul’s treatment of the law in Romans into the main theme. Fundamental to Paul’s critique of the law in Romans is not its social function – the law, because it is basically *Israel’s* law, excludes Gentiles – but its soteriological function – the law, because Jews could not live up to its demands in the “flesh,” cannot deliver them – or any other human being – from the power of sin and death. To be sure, both themes are present in Romans 1–4; but the latter is, I think, the more basic to Paul’s argument.<sup>66</sup> Romans 5–11 reinforces this impression at two particular points: the nature of the law critique in 7:1–8:4; and the references to “works” in Romans 9:12 and 11:6.

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<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that both Dunn and Wright do not want to exclude some of the universal human interpretations associated with the Reformation tradition. Wright, for, instance, commenting on Rom 3:20, rightly criticizes the Reformation tradition for too quickly moving to universal human conclusions in the interest of the application of the gospel. And he acknowledges that the essentially national interpretation allows for certain “overtones” of the sort that the Reformation tradition highlighted. (Wright, “Romans,” 463–4.) But it is to my mind unclear how one moves validly from Wright’s exegesis of Romans 3:20 to these “overtones.”

The sustained argument about the law in 7:1–8:4, as virtually all interpreters agree, focuses on the way that sin has used the law to produce death. This point is made clearly in vv. 1–6, where we find the basic “positive” point Paul wants to make here. Believers need to be released from the law’s binding authority (7:4, 6) because the law unleashes the power of sin and therefore brings death (7:5). In 7:7–25, Paul defends the law, asserting its essential goodness (v. 12) at the same time as he elaborates the involvement of the law in the sin-death nexus (vv. 7–12). In vv. 13–25 especially, it becomes clear that human inability to do the law, caused by sin, is the root problem: the “I” agrees that the law is good and wills to do the law but is unable to accomplish it. The result is helplessness and defeat. As we noted above, the beginning of ch. 8 reasserts the believer’s security in Christ (see 5:12–21) in light of the discussion of sin and the law in chs. 6–7. Believers are forever rescued from “condemnation” (κατακρίμα, a key word in 5:12–21) because “the law of the Spirit of life” has rescued them from “the law of sin and death” (the spiritual death caused by sin and both revealed and exacerbated by the law; cf. ch. 7). What the law could not do, God has done by sending his Son as a sacrifice for sin (v. 3), thus providing for the fulfillment of the law (v. 4). Nothing in this argument suggests that the problem with the law was that Jews were (mis-) using it to preserve their unique covenant status. “What the law was powerless to do” was rescue sinners from the sin-death nexus; and the law was powerless to do so because human beings are powerless to obey it (7:14–25). Into this situation steps Christ, who in his sacrificial death (v. 3) provides for the true fulfillment of the law among those who live by the Spirit of God.<sup>67</sup> Also to be noted is that this argument, while ultimately applying to all human beings, focuses especially on Jews.<sup>68</sup> It is certainly Jews (though not only Jews; as we noted above, Gentile “god-fearers” are probably included) who “know the law” (7:1) and who, because they were those placed under the law’s supervision (see 2:12; 3:19; Gal 3:15–4:7), needed to be released from its binding authority (7:4, 6). Romans 7:7–12 focuses on the significance of the giving of the law to the Jewish people and 7:13–25 on the situation of Jews who lived under the law.<sup>69</sup> Here, then, in the major sustained treatment of the law

<sup>67</sup> Despite considerable criticism, and the recognition that it is a minority view, I continue to think that v. 4 refers not to a fulfilling of the law by Christians as they live by the Spirit (e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 404–5) but to the complete fulfillment of the law provided by Christ for those who belong to him (Moo, *Romans*, 481–84).

<sup>68</sup> To be mentioned only to be dismissed is the characteristically idiosyncratic view of Gager (*Reinventing Paul*, 126–8) that Romans 7 is about the Gentiles and the law.

<sup>69</sup> There is no need here to enter into the controversy over these verses. For the view that they refer to Jews under the law, see Moo, *Romans*, 442–51; Wright, “Romans,” 551–54. For the view that the verses refer to the “normal” Christian, see, e.g., Dunn, *Romans*, 1:387–99.



in Romans, we find not a whisper of concern about the law as a barrier to Gentiles. Rather, Paul's attention is completely on the law as a barrier to fellowship with God, a point he illustrates by focusing particularly on Jews. Human inability, not Gentile exclusion, is the issue. Do we not have some right to expect that this theme, so dominant here, is also central in Paul's discussion of the law earlier in the letter?<sup>70</sup>

The case for thinking that Paul has in mind the law in its social function in the earlier part of Romans is built especially on the popular new perspective interpretation of the phrase "works of the law." Dunn has argued that this phrase, while including anything done in obedience to the law, focuses on that obedience from a certain perspective. It refers not to the law per se, nor is it shorthand for the more general "works." Rather it highlights Jewish obedience to the law in its social function, a doing of the law that serves to distinguish Jews from Gentiles and reinforce the Jews' unique covenant status. This interpretation enables Dunn and the many who have taken a similar tack to shift the key Pauline "works of the law" vs. faith antithesis from the realm of anthropology to the realm of salvation history. This is not the place to explore this very significant phrase any further, nor to offer a critique of the view. We bring up the matter only because it is relevant to the interpretation of two passages in Romans 9–11 that refer to "works." In 9:6b–13, Paul uses patriarchal history to show that God has, from the beginning, been working to create an "Israel within Israel." Not all the biological heirs of Abraham, or of Isaac, are the true "seed," the inheritors of God's promise, but only those whom God "calls" (vv. 7 and 12). As he illustrates this point with reference to Jacob and Esau, Paul insists that the reversal of their birth order in the spiritual realm was decreed "before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad" (v. 11). The blessing inherited by Jacob came on the basis of God's call, not on the basis of "works." A context in which "works" appears to be explicitly elaborated in terms of "anything" done, good or bad, and where the reference, in any case, is to a time long before the Mosaic law was given would seem to point decisively to a broad meaning for the word. Nevertheless, both Dunn and Wright argue that "works" here is shorthand for "works of the law," interpreted as we have explained above. Dunn claims, "Paul certainly means, as always with the ἐξ ἔργων formulation, works of *the law*," and goes on to claim that Paul's point here is to deny that God's call depends on "covenant keeping (ἔργα)."<sup>71</sup> Paul's overall point in this section has to do with the

<sup>70</sup> On this point, see also Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 73.

<sup>71</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 2:543, 544. Wright is less clear on this than Dunn. He admits the emphasis in this context is on "the doing of good rather than evil," but nevertheless insists that the "primary emphasis" in Paul's use of the word "works" in Romans is on "works of Torah," and that Paul is presuming the rabbinic teaching that the patriarchs obeyed the law before it was given (637).

status of Israel, and we should therefore expect, Dunn argues, that the polemic re the law in its social function is indicated by the reference to “works.” Essentially the same argument is applied to the roughly parallel – though more generalized – contrast between “grace” and “works” in 11:6: “ἐξ ἔργων is, of course, short for ἐξ ἔργων νόμου”; “the remnant is not constituted as a group within Israel by their faithfulness of the law.”<sup>72</sup>

The argument is a bit strained. Having established the point that “works of the law” is a peculiar technical phrase denoting a particular attitude toward law observance, Dunn then claims that this meaning is to be applied to every occurrence of the bare word “works” (or at least the formulation “on the basis of works”) that follows in Romans. Justification for such a conclusion could come only if it were established that Romans, from beginning to end, and in all its parts, is oriented around the axis of Jewish nationalism. In essence, of course, this is exactly what Dunn and Wright would argue. But the case for such a reading must come from a careful interpretation of the letter as a whole; and we have already suggested a number of points at which such a reading does not seem to be well-grounded in the text.<sup>73</sup> In the present instance, then, it seems to be methodologically appropriate to begin the study of Paul’s language “works”/“works of the law” with three points that are explicit in Paul’s teaching: 1) the law was given to Israel “430 years after” the promise to Abraham (Gal 3:17; the same point is made implicitly in Romans [5:13–14]); 2) “works” include “anything” one does, whether good or bad (9:12); and 3) “works”/“works of the law” are often contrasted with both faith (Rom 3:28; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:5) and grace (Rom 11:6; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5 [“mercy”]; Eph 2:8–9 [both grace and faith]; cf. Rom 4:4–5).

This last point requires a brief comment. Here is Dunn’s own (very fine) summary of the meaning of “justification by faith” in Paul:

It was a profound conception of the relation between God and humankind – a relation of utter dependence, of unconditional trust. Human dependence on divine grace had to be unqualified or else it was not Abraham’s faith, the faith through which God could work his own work. That was why Paul was so fiercely hostile to the qualification which he saw confronting him all the time in any attempt to insist on works of the law as a necessary accompaniment of or addition to faith. God would not justify, could not sustain in relationship with him, those who did not rely wholly on him. Justification was by faith, by faith alone.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 2:639. Again, Wright is not as explicit as Dunn. He speaks of Paul denying the possibility that some Jews might have escaped the general condemnation and succeeded in establishing their status “based on their belonging to Abraham’s physical family and maintaining its distinctive outward markers” (“Romans,” 676).

<sup>73</sup> See also Donald A. Hagner, “Paul and Judaism: Testing the New Perspective,” in *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (by Peter Stuhlmacher; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 100.

<sup>74</sup> *The Theology of Paul*, 379.

Is it simply because we are reading Paul through lenses inherited from the reformation that we are to conclude on the basis of such a summary that the natural contrast to “faith” is human activity in general?<sup>75</sup> Taken together, these three points suggest that, rather than reading an alleged specific, technical meaning of “works of the law” into “works,” we should view “works of the law” as a subset of the more general category “works.”<sup>76</sup>

A general interpretation of “works” in 9:12 has implications for other relevant texts within Romans 9–11. As Stephen Westerholm has pointed out, the “works” to which Paul refers in 9:32 with reference to Israel’s pursuit of “the law of righteousness” are probably to be understood along the lines of the earlier mention of those same “works” in ch. 9.<sup>77</sup> The interpretation is complicated by the difficulty of defining the phrase “the law of righteousness” (see below). But what can be said at this point is that, however we finally identify the object which Israel is pursuing, Paul seems to be saying not that Israel was wrong to be seeking it on the basis of her special covenant status, but because she was seeking it on the basis of human effort. The same issue arises in this context with respect to the interpretation of the phrase “their own righteousness” (set in contrast to “God’s righteousness”) in 10:3. Most interpreters have taken this phrase to refer to a righteousness that Israel (or Israelites) sought to establish (at least partially) through her (or their) own efforts. Dunn and Wright, on the other hand, representing at this point a widespread new perspective approach, insist that the phrase must, in light of the argument of the letter and their construal of first-century Judaism, refer to the Jews’ “national righteousness” – “the covenant status that Israel according to the flesh had thought to set up for itself.”<sup>78</sup> Dunn further argues that this interpretation does most justice to the adjective *ἰδίαν* (“their own”), since the word suggests not that the righteousness is “based on one’s own efforts” but that it “belongs” to one. But this latter point cannot be sustained: either interpretation does full justice to *ἴδιος*, in the sense that the righteousness, whether the product of covenant status or human effort, “belongs” to the Jews. Moreover, since the antithesis to “their own” is “God’s,” we would

<sup>75</sup> See, on this same point with reference to Romans 11:6, Stephen Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996), 229.

<sup>76</sup> These points are elaborated in my article, “‘Law,’ ‘Works of the Law’ and Legalism in Paul,” *WTJ* 45 (1983): 73–100; such a general meaning of “works” seems well-supported in the latter Pauline epistles (see I. Howard Marshall, “Salvation, Grace and Works in the Later Writings in the Pauline Corpus,” *NTS* 42 [1996]: 339–58; this argument is, of course, complicated by the alleged non-Pauline status of these letters). Note also C. H. Talbert: “. . . Paul’s theological struggle is between divine grace and human self-sufficiency” (“Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists,” *CBO* 63 [2001]: 15).

<sup>77</sup> Westerholm, “Paul and the Law in Romans 9–11,” 228.

<sup>78</sup> The quotation is from Wright, “Romans,” 654.

expect the basic contrast to lie not between two groups of humans – Jews vs. Gentiles – but between God and human beings.<sup>79</sup> Two other arguments point toward the traditional view: 1) “their own” would appear, because of the evident parallelism in these verses, to have a connection with the “works” of 9:32 and the law (which Paul says explicitly involves “doing”);<sup>80</sup> and 2) the closest parallel to “their own righteousness” of 10:3 is “a righteousness of my own” (ἐμῆν δικαιοσύνην) in Philippians 3:9, a personal righteousness further defined as “based on the law” and contrasted with “the righteousness from God,” that is based on faith.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the focus on “national” issues in Romans 9–11, therefore, Paul gives clear indications that Israel’s problem is bound up with a larger human problem, a human problem that he has diagnosed earlier in the letter: because people are sinful and unable to meet the demands of the law, their own “works” must always fall short of bringing acceptance with God. God’s work in Christ, appropriated by faith, stands opposed to Israel’s “works,” then, not because (or at least only) because Jews wrongly viewed their covenant works as giving them an exclusive track on salvation but because Israel’s works fall into the general category of human works.

We turn finally to two passages on the law within Romans 5–11 that have an indirect bearing on new perspective interpretations. I say “indirect,” because the issue we are examining is by no means confined to the new perspective. The reformation interpretation of the law was, of course, quite diverse on a number of key points. But on one matter there was general agreement: as faith is related to gospel and promise, so works are related to law. The law by its nature requires works; and this was the problem with the law. It could not save because the works it demanded could not be done by sinful human beings (as I understand the logic of Romans 2–3 [esp. the sequence 2:13; 3:9; 3:20]; see also Gal 3:10–14). But this principial distinction appeared to run into problems in three texts in Romans, where νόμος is linked to faith and to the Spirit: 3:27, 8:2, 9:31–32. Interpreters have usually avoided this awkward situation by a combination of two strategies: 1) interpreting νόμος as “principle” in 3:27 (cf. NAB; RSV; NJB; TNIV) and 8:2, and, occasionally, in 9:31; and/or 2) re-interpreting “the law of righteousness” in 9:31 to mean, in effect, “the righteousness of the law” (cf. RSV; NRSV; NJB). Many interpreters, and not all of them by any means “new perspective” interpreters, have branded these interpretive moves as futile

<sup>79</sup> Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, 78–79.

<sup>80</sup> See, e.g., Robert H. Gundry, “Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul,” *Bib* 66 (1985): 18; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New On Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 312–3; Laato, *Paul und das Judentum*, 250–54.

<sup>81</sup> On Philippians 3:9 and the parallel, see Mark Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 174–5.

attempts to evade the obvious. They point out that the “default” meaning of νόμος is “law” and that its usual referent is the Mosaic law, the Torah; and that Paul plainly wrote in 9:31 νόμον δικαιοσύνης, not δικαιοσύνην νόμου (which, of course, he could easily have done [cf. 10:5]). These textual phenomena suggest that Paul’s intent in this passage was not to fault Jews for seeking righteousness based on the law, but to fault them for pursuing the law itself in the wrong way. In other words, once we look at these texts without our reformation doctrinal spectacles, it becomes clear that the principial distinction between law and promise or law and gospel cannot stand. Faith and the law are not always antithetical but are sometimes ranged on the same, positive, side of salvation history. For new perspective interpreters, this furnishes further evidence that Paul’s problem with the law was not with the law per se, but only with the law as interpreted by Jews as a charter of national righteousness. Freed from such a misuse, from the law understood in terms of “works of the law,” and viewed more broadly, the law itself could be seen as demanding faith (3:27; 9:31–32) and as an instrument of liberation for the people of God (8:2). As Dunn comments on 8:2, “‘the law of the Spirit’ is simply a summary of speaking of the requirement of the law fulfilled by those who walk in accordance with the Spirit. . . . It is the law thus rightly perceived and experienced which sets free from the law of sin and death.”<sup>82</sup>

I must skip over 3:27, since it falls outside the purview of this essay. But at the risk of again appearing to force Paul into pre-chosen doctrinal categories, I will vigorously challenge the “Torah” interpretation of 8:2 and more hesitantly raise some questions about the “law of faith” interpretation of 9:31–32.

The phrase ὁ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος in 8:2 must be set in its wider context. Throughout Romans 7, as we have seen, Paul focuses on the way that the Mosaic law has become allied with sin and death. In v. 21, he begins to summarize the situation: “So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”<sup>83</sup> He then goes on to contrast the work of two different “laws”: the “law of God” (vv. 22 and 25), or the “law of my mind” (v. 23) and “the law of sin at work within me” (vv. 23 and 25). The

<sup>82</sup> “‘The Law of Faith,’ ‘The Law of the Spirit,’ and ‘the Law of Christ,’” in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and his Interpreters* (Fs. Victor Paul Furnish; ed. Eugene H. Lovering and Jerry L. Sumney; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 73. Among others who follow this general line of interpretation are Klyne Snodgrass, “Spheres of Influence: A Possible Solution for the Problem of Paul and the Law,” *JSNT* 32 (1988): 93–113; Peter von der Osten-Sacken, “Befreiung durch das Gesetz,” in *Richte unsere Füße auf den Weg des Friedens* (ed. Andreas Baudis et al.; Munich: Kaiser, 1979), 349–55.

<sup>83</sup> There is debate about whether νόμος in v. 21 refers to the Torah, εἰς νόμον becoming, then, an accusative of respect (e.g., Wright, “Romans,” 570) or to a general “principle” (e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 460) – but the issue is not vital to our argument.



“law of God” is clearly the Torah.<sup>84</sup> But what about “the law of sin”? Many interpreters think that the reference is to the Torah, as Paul summarizes in this phrase his teaching about the way the law of God has been suborned by sin. But there is a very strong objection to this interpretation: Paul contrasts this law of sin with “the law of God” (vv. 22–23), calling it “another law” (ἕτερον νόμον). Paul’s use of the word ἕτερος demonstrates that this “law of sin” is a different law altogether from “the law of God” – no New Testament occurrence of the word warrants the idea that it could here signify the idea of “the same law viewed from a different perspective.” I would contend, then, that “law of sin” involves a play on words: opposed to the “law of God” is another “law,” a directive force that stands opposed to God’s law and prevents that law from being obeyed. The importance of this conclusion for our interpretation of 8:2 should be obvious: it establishes that Paul, in this context, is already using νομός for something other than the law of God, the Torah.

But is he doing so also in 8:2? Despite the fact that Paul clearly refers to the law of God, the Torah, in this context (“what the law was powerless to do” in 8:3; “the righteous requirement of the law” in 8:4; perhaps “the law of sin and death” in 8:2b), a very good case can be made for a rhetorical interpretation of “the law of the Spirit.” The case rests above all on the biblical understanding of the limits of the law, limits well summarized by Dunn himself: “The role of ‘making alive’ in biblical usage in almost exclusively that of God or of his Spirit, whereas, as we have now seen, the role of the law was to *regulate* life already given, not to *give* life where none was before.”<sup>85</sup> Paul, while acknowledging that the law was “for life” (7:10), clearly endorses this general biblical perspective on the limitations of the law (Gal 3:21). But this limitation renders it very unlikely that Paul would attribute to the law the power to liberate human beings from “the law of sin and death.”<sup>86</sup> Again, this denial rests not on a peculiarly reformational doctrinal bias; it rests on the united testimony of Scripture and of Paul. It is therefore both contextually and theologically more likely that Paul again here

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<sup>84</sup> Most modern interpreters agree also that the “law of my mind” refers to the Torah: it is the law with which the mind agrees (cf. vv. 16, 22). A few interpreters think that “law of God” could more broadly refer to divine law in general (André Feuillet, “Loi de Dieu, loi du Christ et loi de l’Esprit d’après les épîtres pauliniennes: Les rapports de ces trois lois avec la loi mosaïque,” *NovT* 22 [1980]: 33–42; T. J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality in Paul* [AnBib 89; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981], 199, 203).

<sup>85</sup> *The Theology of Paul*, 154.

<sup>86</sup> Among others, see esp. Heikki Räisänen, “Das ‘Gesetz des Glaubens’ (Röm. 3:27) und das ‘Gesetz des Geistes’ (Röm. 8:2),” *NTS* 26 (1979): 101–17; Michael Winger, *By What Law? The Meaning of Νόμος in the Letters of Paul* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 195; Leander E. Keck, “The Law and ‘The Law of Sin and Death’ (Rom 8:1–4): Reflections on the Spirit and Ethics in Paul,” in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God’s Control of Human Events, Presented to Lou H. Silberman* (ed. James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel; New York: KTAV, 1980), 41–57.

indulges in a rhetorical *tour de force*, using the word “law” to characterize, on the one hand, the life-giving Spirit and, on the other, death-dealing sin, as the two powers that struggle for the mastery over human beings.<sup>87</sup> Torah could not break the hold that sin and death held on humans (v. 3a); but God, by sending his Son, has unleashed the Spirit to bring liberation.<sup>88</sup>

The situation in 9:31–32 is admittedly much less clear. Paul is here contrasting Gentiles, who obtained righteousness by faith even though they were not pursuing it, with Jews, who “pursued the law of righteousness but did not obtain the law.”<sup>89</sup> And why did the Jews not obtain it? Because they were pursuing it “not by faith but as if it were by works” (v. 32a).<sup>90</sup>

Our first reading of this passage would certainly tend to suggest that Paul here faults Israel for a wrong attitude toward the law: whereas they should have responded to the law in faith, they have wrongly sought to obtain it by “works.” These “works” are variously defined by interpreters, but new perspective advocates (as we noted above) generally tend to think they are equivalent to the “works of the law.” Paul would then be scolding the Jews for thinking that the true intent of the law could be confined to Israel’s distinctive torah-keeping, whereas it ultimately is to be truly achieved by faith in Christ, the climax of the law (10:4, 6–8).<sup>91</sup> Again, then, it is not the law *per se* that is the problem but a narrow and restricted view of the law. Viewed from the perspective of faith or in terms of its call for faith, the law can have a positive role in salvation history.

I have already argued that “works” here must probably refer to the Jews’ general human effort and not to their distinctive task of covenant-keeping. But the larger issue here is the question of whether Paul connects the law with faith. I should make clear at this point that our quarrel is not with those

<sup>87</sup> Some who think that the first νόμος in v. 2 refers to a “principle” or “force” think that the second refers to the Mosaic law (e.g., C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [New York: Harper & Row, 1957], 155).

<sup>88</sup> The general sense of νόμος, as a “principle” or “force,” has been established in ancient Greek by Heikki Räisänen, “Sprachliches zum Spiel des Paulus mit NOMOS,” in *The Torah and Christ* (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 45; Helsinki: Kiflapaino Rammattutalu, 1986), 119–47.

<sup>89</sup> I depart from the TNIV here to give my own literal interpretation.

<sup>90</sup> The syntax of vv. 31b–32a is difficult, with various options found in the literature (for a useful survey, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975, 1979], 2:508–9). Schreiner, for instance, suggests that “righteousness” is the implicit object of οὐκ ἔφθασεν, with εἰς νόμον taken as an accusative of reference (*Romans*, 538). But the verb φθάνω is regularly followed by εἰς, making it more natural to see νόμον as the object. The translation above reflects the usual reading.

<sup>91</sup> See for this view Wright, “Romans,” 649. For quite a different perspective, interpreting works in term of legalism, see Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 71–79; cf. also Cranfield, *Romans* 2:509–10.

who quite properly emphasize that the OT, as well as the Pentateuch itself, repeatedly demands what we can appropriately call “faith” as the fundamental response that Israel is to make to God. The issue here is one that arises more narrowly from the perspective of Pauline usage: does he think of the Mosaic law as demanding faith? My reason for thinking that he may not is rooted in his own language: in Galatians 3:12, for instance, he cites Leviticus 18:5 to demonstrate that “the law is not of faith.” I take this to mean that the law, by its very nature, is something to be “done”: it calls for works and not faith. This basic distinction appears to hold true throughout Paul’s teaching. It might appear, however, that Romans 9:31–32 is an exception, revealing that the dichotomy is not as strict as some have supposed.

But there are reasons to hesitate before drawing this conclusion. Romans 10:6–8 is notoriously difficult, but it is at least worth noting that Paul’s creative application of the language from Deuteronomy 30 about the “commandment” refers not to the law but to “the righteousness that is by faith.” Paul does not so much suggest that the true meaning of the commandment is to be found in “believing” but that the language about the “nearness” of the commandment finds its ultimate fulfillment in the message of righteousness by faith that Paul preaches. Similarly, the new salvation-historical openness for all to believe and receive righteousness comes not via a new understanding of the law but via the bringing of that law to its climax in Christ (10:4). Nowhere else in this context, in other words, does Paul suggest that the solution to Israel’s problem lies in a new and more appropriate way of understanding the law. The solution Paul offers is resolutely Christological. But perhaps the most important reason for resisting the idea that Paul thinks of the law itself as being attained by faith has to do with the prominence of righteousness language both in this context and in similar expressions elsewhere in Paul. “The law of righteousness” appears to be paralleled by “their own righteousness” in 10:3 and “the righteousness that is by the law” in 10:5. Paul elsewhere regularly contrasts faith and works as alternate avenues to righteousness; never does he elsewhere contrast faith and works as alternate approaches to the law. Based on these considerations, some suggest that we reverse the terms in the phrase, translating, as NRSV does, “the righteousness that is based on the law.”<sup>92</sup> However, while grammatically possible, this rendering is unlikely because Paul abbreviates the phrase later in the verse with νόμον, not δικαιοσύνην. Nevertheless, the factors we have cited above give reason to think that the ruling idea throughout these verses is “righteousness” and that Paul uses the phrase “the law of righteousness” to say two things at once: that Israel failed to attain righteousness because she pursued it as if it could be attained through works

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<sup>92</sup> Otfried Hofius, “‘All Israel Will be Saved’: Divine Salvation and Israel’s Deliverance in Romans 9–11,” *PSB* 1 (1990): 24–25.

rather than through faith; and that Israel's pursuit was set off course in the direction of works because she viewed righteousness as inextricably bound up with the law.<sup>93</sup>

I conclude that these passages in Romans 5–11 suggest that new perspective interpretation of Romans is wrong to conclude that Paul's polemic against the law has to do basically with its "social function" of providing Israel as special covenant status marked out from Gentiles. Paul's criticism of the law goes deeper, focusing on its failure to deliver sinful Jews from the nexus of sin and death – a criticism that extends ultimately to all human beings, who find their best representation in the Jewish people. Of course, the law also functions to mark out Israel's special status among the Gentiles; and there is no doubt that this function was often highlighted among Jews who were fighting to maintain their distinctiveness in the Gentile world. But the law remained first and foremost something that the Jew was called upon to do as a means of reinforcing his or her covenant status. It was just because the law functioned to reinforce this special relationship to God that it also functioned, as a secondary matter, to separate Jews from Gentiles. Paul's critique focused on this fundamental role of the law in Jewish life, as he insists that the very best doing of that law can never serve to establish one's relationship to God.

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<sup>93</sup> The "law of righteousness" will then mean "the law whose object is righteousness" (see Rom 2:13 and 10:5) (Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* [NovTSup 62; Leiden: Brill, 1989], 137–8; Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New*, 325–6).