

**Already/Not Yet: Continuity & Discontinuity in Romans 9-11**

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## Already/Not Yet: Continuity & Discontinuity in Romans 9-11<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

My subject is suggested by an exchange between Charles Cousar and Frank Thielman<sup>2</sup> in which Dr. Cousar states the issue as follows: "whether there is a discernable line of continuity [in Paul's letters] between Israel's story in the past and the death and resurrection of Christ or whether the apocalyptic character of God's discourse in Christ precipitates an irreparable rupture in the story that makes any smooth notion of continuity difficult to discern."<sup>3</sup> Their exchange is part of a larger scholarly debate that is fueled in part by concerns for the perceived supersessionism (and inferred anti-Semitism) of the so-called "salvation history" position represented by Thielman and, more notably, N.T. Wright.<sup>4</sup> Full examination of the issues of this debate exceeds the scope of this essay, as does engagement with the various scholars who have addressed the issues. Rather, this essay will attempt a preliminary<sup>5</sup> interpretation of Rom 9-11 in its context with an awareness of the questions in this debate, formulated as follows:

1. What, for Paul, are the implications of the death and resurrection of Christ for Israel's hope in the promises of God to Abraham?
2. Does Paul think Israel can realize this hope only by belief in Jesus as the Messiah and incorporation into the church?
3. Does he think that the church effectively supersedes Israel as the people of God?

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are from *The Revised Standard Version*. "MT" indicates my translations.

<sup>2</sup> Thielman's article is "The Story of Israel and the Theology of Romans 5-8." Cousar's response is "Continuity and Discontinuity: Reflections on Romans 5-8." David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Pauline Theology: Romans*, vol. 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 169-210.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Douglas K. Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 151ff. I qualify this characterization as "perceived" and "inferred" because I have not studied the matter sufficiently to form my own judgment.

<sup>5</sup> By "preliminary," I mean my own interpretation largely unconstrained and uninformed (for good or ill) by the work of others, though I have relied more heavily on others for introductory matters.

## II. Occasion

The letter to the Romans promotes Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles (see 1:5, 13-15, 11:13-14, 15:15-32, 16:25-27).<sup>6</sup> Except for his delivery of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul views his work in the eastern Mediterranean as complete and is looking west toward Spain (1:5; 15:18-29). Rome lies between East and West, not merely as a waypoint, but as a launching pad. Paul hopes for the Romans' assistance with his mission to Spain (1:13; 15:24) and desires their prayers for his ministry to Jerusalem (15:31). There is, however, a slight problem: though Paul and a few Christians in Rome are well acquainted (see 16:3-15), the church in Rome has not met Paul (see 1:9-13). Given the controversies in First Century Christianity, Paul cannot reasonably expect support from those who are not confident of the gospel he preaches. Moreover, it appears that the Romans have already heard at least one disturbing rumor about Paul (see 3:8). Perhaps they have also heard something of his letter to the churches in Galatia.<sup>7</sup>

Given the content of this rumor (that Paul is advocating lawlessness) and the letter's thematic focus on the Jews and Torah, we may reasonably infer that Paul sees a need to lay before the Romans the gospel that he preaches with particular attention to the implications of his preaching for the Jews and for Torah observance. This focus is puzzling since Paul apparently views the church at Rome as primarily a Gentile church (see 1:5-6, 13-15, 11:13-24; cf. 9:4-5, 10:1-3; but see 9:24).<sup>8</sup> The question that naturally arises from this construction of his intended audience is why would an exclusively or, at least, a predominantly Gentile audience be

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<sup>6</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 1st ed., *The Anchor Bible Reference Library* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 563-64; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 343-45.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Brown, 562.

<sup>8</sup> I have excluded such passages as 2:17ff and 11:17ff because they seem not to be evidence of Paul's intended audience but of his use of the rhetorical technique of diatribe, which sometimes features direct address to an imaginary interlocutor rather than to the intended audience. Stanley K. Stowers, "Diatribe," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), II:190, 193.

concerned about Paul's treatment of the law and the Jews. Since Paul regards his intended audience as Gentiles who "know the law" (7:1)<sup>9</sup> and is confident enough of their familiarity with and regard for Jewish scripture to cite it extensively to support his arguments, some significant interaction between the Roman church and Jews or Jewish Christians may be inferred. We can only speculate about the nature or occasion for that interaction. Given the large Jewish population in Rome, the close ties between Rome and Palestine, and the presence of the Jewish Christians (*e.g.*, Prisca and Aquila again in Rome after the earlier expulsion of Jews from Rome – 16:3, Acts 18:1-3), perhaps the Roman church originated among Jews in Rome or in response to preaching by missionaries from Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it has been heavily influenced by non-Pauline, Jewish Christianity<sup>11</sup> and has close ties to the church in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>

A related question is what issues, if any, does Paul perceive to be troublesome in the Roman church? In other words, does Paul have any pastoral objectives in writing other than acquainting the Roman church with his ministry to the Gentiles? Perhaps, he thinks that it has been struggling with issues similar to those that troubled the churches of Galatia. Though he does not mention particular opponents in Romans as pointedly as he does in Galatians (Gal 1:7, 5:12, 6:12), he does recognize the presence of some "who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught ..." (16:17),<sup>13</sup> and he does devote

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<sup>9</sup> The parenthetical in 7:1 might be read as an aside to Jewish Christians among Paul's readers, especially in light of his use of the second person to address them in 7:4 ("you have died to the law ..."). There seems, however, to be no reason for such a shift in Paul's audience, and given 2:14-15, Paul could say that his Gentile readers had "died to the law."

<sup>10</sup> See Brown, 561-62.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 560-62.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 79.

<sup>13</sup> In this connection, it is intriguing (though certainly not conclusive) that of all the terms that Paul might have chosen from his catalogs of vices to describe those whose sinful behavior brings "wrath and fury" (see 1:29-31; cf. Gal 5:19-21, 2 Cor 12:20) in the impartial judgment of God, he chooses τοῖς ἐξ ἐριθείας (2:8), which the RSV translates "those who are factious" and the NSRV "those who are self-seeking." See also Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 392. The few times that Paul uses this term in other

significant attention to circumcision (see 2:25-29, 4:1-12). Perhaps, the presence of Gentiles converted by preaching like Paul's and others converted by non-Pauline Jewish Christians has contributed to friction between those with a more Jewish orientation and those without (see ch. 14-15).<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the Jewish connections of the Roman church or the situation of the church contemplated in the letter, it is clear that something about the Roman church prompts Paul to exposit the gospel's implications for the Jews and for God's promises to them, suggesting that he regards these topics as matters of concern in the Roman church. Indeed, something prompts him first to exposit the gospel in a manner that deliberately raises the Jewish problem and then to address the problem in ch. 9-11. Presumably, he knows (or assumes) that the Romans understand that his preaching creates this problem and that they find it disturbing. Thus, if Paul is to cultivate their sponsorship of his mission, he must address the problem to their satisfaction, while upholding the gospel, which "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16). In pursuing this goal, Paul does not minimize the aspects of his preaching that give rise to these concerns but highlights them repeatedly and dramatically.

### **III. Setting Up the Problem**

Paul's opening words set the stage for his exploration of the problem of the Jews (1:1-6):

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ ....

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letters (2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20, Phil 1:17, 2:3), there is evidence of contentious behavior on the part of some in or about the intended audience, and Paul's use of the term is part of his rhetorical effort to combat such behavior.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzmyer, 96.

These words link the gospel and Paul's Gentile mission to Israel's past and to its hope for the future. Linking the gospel to promise and prophecy, he describes the gospel as that which God "promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures ..." (see also 3:21, 4:18, 9:7, 9, 12, 26-29, 10:11, 13, 11:26-27, 15:9, 11-12, 21). Linking the gospel to Israel's hope for deliverance from her enemies, he says the gospel is about God's Son, "who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord ..." (see 9:4-5; cf., e.g., Ps 2, Isa 9:1-6, 11:1-9, Amos 9:11, Mic 5:2-5, Jer 23:5-6, 33:14-26, Ezek 37, Dan 12:1-4).

That Paul regards the gospel concerning Jesus as good news for the Jews, as well as for the nations, or the Gentiles, he affirms yet more clearly and concisely in his thesis (1:16-17):

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek [apparently a synonym for "Gentile"<sup>15</sup>]. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

Paul juxtaposes the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel with the revelation of God's wrath "against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" of God (1:18ff). Paul sees two stages to the revelation of God's wrath. The first has already occurred and is a present reality (cf. 1:32). When humankind willingly refused to acknowledge and worship the Creator, God "gave them up," or handed them over (*παρέδωκεν*),<sup>16</sup> "to impurity" (1:24), "to dishonorable passions" (1:26), and "to a base mind and to improper conduct" (1:28). The second is future. Speaking to those who hypocritically judge those whom God has handed over, Paul says, "By your hard and impenitent heart you are

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<sup>15</sup> See Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, ed. S.J. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 6, *Sacrina Pagina* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1996), 56-57; Fitzmyer, 256-57.

<sup>16</sup> See *παράδιδωμι* in Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, 761.

storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (2:5; see also 2:16, 3:6, 19, 5:9, 11:22, 28, 12:19, 14:10).

While observant Jews (or Gentile Christians sympathetic to the way of Torah) might look at Paul's description of the present revelation of God's wrath and see only the pagan Gentiles of their day, Paul will not permit them to exclude themselves from the future revelation of God's wrath (2:6-11):<sup>17</sup>

For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, **the Jew first and also the Greek**, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, **the Jew first and also the Greek**. For God shows no partiality. [Emphasis added.]

When judgment is according to works, Jews fare no better than Gentiles do (2:17-24):

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed in the law, and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth — you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Indeed, failure to obey the law renders a Jew's circumcision meaningless, while a Gentile's keeping the precepts of the law causes his uncircumcision to be reckoned as circumcision (2:25-26), such that uncircumcised law-keepers will condemn circumcised law-breakers (2:27). If this were not enough of a blow to Jewish boasting, Paul goes for a knock-out (2:28-29):

For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God.

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<sup>17</sup> In ch. 9-11, it will become clear also that Paul does not regard the Jews as exempt from the first stage of God's wrath.

If Paul is trying to convince the Roman church that he is not hostile to the Jews, he seems to have taken just the opposite tact. One can hardly imagine a more severe attack on the piety of the Jews. It is small wonder that Paul's imaginary interlocutor<sup>18</sup> responds (3:1): "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?"

**A:** Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God. (3:2; see also 9:4-5)

This advantage soon fades against Paul's glaring conclusion (3:9-20):

**Q:** What then? Are we Jews any better off?

**A:** No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one." [cf. Pss 14:1-3, 53:1-3, Eccl 7:20]

"Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive." [Ps 5:9]

"The venom of asps is under their lips." [Ps 140:3]

"Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." [Ps 10:7]

"Their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know." [Isa 59:7-8]

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." [Ps 36:1]

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Paul pulls no punches in his description of the standing of Jew and Gentile before God.

For the sake of the gospel, he must not. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>18</sup> See Stowers.

<sup>19</sup> Paul emphasizes God's impartiality toward Jew and Greek (Gentile) by repetition. In 1.16-17, salvation is for all who believe, "the Jew first and also the Greek." In 2:9-11, because "God shows no partiality," "[t]here will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek." In 3:9, "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin ...." In 10:12, "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all ...." Similarly, in 3:29-31, God is God of the Jews and the Gentiles.



existential situation of both Jew and Gentile is identical: both are “under the power of sin” (3:9); both have sinned and fall short of God’s glory (3:23). Neither can lay a claim against God.

Because the situation of Jew and Gentile is identical, the remedy for both is identical: it is God’s gracious gift, “the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe” (3:22-24, MT) [hereinafter “justification by faith”]. It is righteousness apart from the law, for by the law no one, Jew or Gentile, can be justified (3:20-21, 28). It is, moreover, a righteousness that settles questions of the righteousness (or justice or faithfulness) of God’s dealings with humanity in the past: it demonstrates in the “present time” (ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ) that God is just, as well as the one who justifies “the one who is of the faith of Jesus” (3:25-26, MT). It is the same for all because God is one and is God of both Jew and Gentile (3:29-30; see also 10:12; cf. 14:6-9).

#### **IV. Defining the Problem**

Paul’s gospel gives rise to two big problems: (1) What are the implications of justification by faith for the law? (2) What are the implications of justification by faith for God’s promises to the Jews? The first problem breaks down into two questions: (a) Does justification by faith invalidate the law (3:31)? (b) Does justification by faith license lawlessness (3:8, 6:1, 15)? Paul answers both questions emphatically in the negative.

(a) Justification by faith, rather than invalidating the law, validates it (3:31). Paul makes the case for this point in ch. 4 by arguing that the law (used broadly to encompass Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets) as scripture (cf. 1:2, 3:21, 15:4, 16:26) teaches justification by faith for those under the law, like David (4:6-8), as well as for Abraham (4:1-5, 9-12, 18-25) and for those who share Abraham’s faith, whether circumcised or uncircumcised (4:13-17). In validating the law, however, Paul again seems to undercut any advantage of the Jew.

(b) Justification by faith does not license lawlessness. Continuation in sin is antithetical to the believer's union with Christ in his death; justification consists in newness of life in freedom from sin (6:2-23). Justification by faith brings not only reconciliation with God but also the gift of the Holy Spirit, which does set us free from the dominion of sin and death (5:1-5, 8:2-16). Justification by faith does, however, mean being discharged<sup>20</sup> from the law (7:6), for the law brings knowledge of sin, but being "weakened by the flesh," is powerless to set us free from the dominion of sin and death (3:20, 7:7-12, 8:2-3).

The second problem – What are the implications of justification by faith for God's promises to the Jews? – is the subject of this essay. It is, of course, related to the first problem, since it is the Jews who have been "entrusted with the oracles of God" (3:2; cf. 2:17-20) and to whom belongs "the giving of the law" (9:4). Thus, any undermining of the law arguably undermines the Jews' advantage. This problem also consists of two questions: (a) What is the advantage of the Jew? (b) Has God been faithful to the promise?

(a) By the end of ch. 4, the issue of the Jews is squarely before Paul's readers. Paul frames it in terms of whether the Jew has any advantage. In the face of his calculated leveling of Jews and Gentiles,<sup>21</sup> Paul maintains that the Jew's advantage is "much in every way." What is the evidence of this advantage? It is that "the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God" (3:2). In the context, a Jewish auditor of this letter might be hard-pressed to take Paul seriously. Has he not charged at least some Jews with causing blasphemy of God's name among the Gentiles (2:24)? Does he not accuse the Jews of being venomous lawbreakers (3:10-19)? Does he not say

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<sup>20</sup> Perhaps it is only accidental, but there seems to be some irony also in Paul's use of the same verb (*katargevw*) to declare here that we are "discharged" from the law and in 3:31 to say that faith does not "invalidate" the law.

<sup>21</sup> Paul acknowledges the priority of the Jews (see Byrne, 52, 57.), but denies any preference. They are "first," but in the apocalypse of God's righteousness and of God's wrath (1.17-18, 2:9-11), there is finally no distinction.

that that works of the law cannot justify, that the law only brings knowledge of sin (3:20, 28)? Will he not say before the letter ends that the law is powerless (8:3)?

(b) Paul also frames the issue of the Jews in terms of God's faithfulness to the promise (3:3-4). If the Jew's advantage is powerless to justify and if justification is through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe without distinction between Jew and Gentile (3:21-22), what about the Jews who do not believe? Has God's promise failed for them (3:3, 9:6)? If God's righteousness is manifested in the present time, how is it that some of the people of the promise are now cut off from the bearer of the promise (3:24-25, 4:24-25, 9:5)?

## **V. Addressing the Problem**

At the end of ch. 4, Paul leaves the question of the Jews and the promise, but clearly has not forgotten the issue nor assumed that he has already dealt with the issue satisfactorily. He takes the question up again in ch. 9-11.

### **A. *The Predicate***

Though the shift of subject from ch. 8 to ch. 9 seems abrupt, ch. 8 lays the predicate for Paul's return to the issue of the Jews. First, ch. 8 deals with the presence of "the sufferings of this present time" (τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ) (8:17-39; cf. Gal 1:4). If the present time is the time of the revelation of God's righteousness, why do the children of God suffer in this time? Paul does not deny suffering or minimize it. Rather he uses its presence to bring to climax an idea already present in the letter, *viz.*, that in the present time we are both justified "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:24) and waiting "for the redemption of our bodies" (8:23). We are both "children of God" (8:16-17) and waiting "for adoption as sons" (8:23). This idea has increased in prominence as the letter has unfolded:

- As noted already (*supra*, 6-7), the negative parallel to the idea (*i.e.*, the present and future wrath of God) has been present since ch. 1.
- In ch. 3, which focuses on what God has done in the present time in justifying those who are of the faith of Jesus (3:26), Paul also uses the future tense to speak of God's justifying work (3:30; cf. 5:19).
- In ch. 4, the faith of Abraham rested entirely in what God had promised to do, but not yet done (4:13, 16-22), and was maintained in hope and against hope (4:18). For Abraham, the only present reality was the word of promise and the sign of circumcision (4:11). His faith in God's not-yet is a pattern for our faith (4:23-24; cf. Heb 11:8-12).
- Not all is not-yet, however, for Christ is raised (4:24-25), we are now justified (5:1, 9), we now have peace with God (5:1, 10-11), we have access to grace and stand in grace (5:2), and we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit (5:5). God has given these signs in the time of our weakness: "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (5:6). They are both present realities and signs of salvation to come, for we live "in hope of sharing the glory of God" (5:2): "Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (5:9). Already, the "grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ" have "abounded for many" (5:15). Yet to come, "those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness" will "reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (5:17), by whose "obedience many will be made righteous" (5:19).
- In ch. 6, when Paul says that "we were buried ... with [Christ Jesus] by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (6:4) and when he says "you have been set free from sin" (6:22;

see also 6:7), he speaks of the now. Also in the now, our bodies, unlike that of Christ (6:9-10), remain mortal (6:12), and the hope of resurrection remains in the future (6:5, 8). This in-between-ness of our mortal state is implicit in such exhortations as this: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (6:12; see also 6:13, 19). Freedom from sin and its wages and possession of the gift of eternal life may be present realities in Christ Jesus our Lord (6:22-23), but in the present believers experience the real possibility of yielding the members of our mortal bodies to sin.

- In addition to elaborating on Paul’s earlier statement that “no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (3:20, 7:7-13), ch. 7:1-8:17 continues Paul’s treatment of the experience of living between discharge from the law (7:6) – being set free from sin (6:18, 22, 8:2) – and glorification with Christ (8:17). As with ch. 6, the very existence of exhortation that the intended audience “walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:4) constitutes a recognition of the in-between-ness of life in our “mortal bodies” (8:10-11).

As the foregoing survey shows, Paul’s entire treatment of God’s work in Jesus Christ, whether the work of salvation or the work of judgment, manifests his recognition that the present time – the time in which he and the Romans lived, the time between Good Friday/ Easter/ Pentecost and the future events detailed above – is a time in which God’s work in Christ is a present reality and a future hope, a time of “already/not-yet,”<sup>22</sup> a time of in-between-ness. This recognition – that, while there is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1), God has not yet completed the work that she has begun in us in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 1:6) – reaches its climax in 8:18-39 as Paul confronts the present reality of suffering.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Craig C. Hill, “Romans,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 1087.

Here Paul is explicit that now is a time of hope, in which we do not see that for which we hope (8:24-25). The present time is a time of suffering and waiting for “the glory that is to be revealed” (8:18), for “the revealing of the sons of God” (8:19), for “adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (8:23). Paul’s vision here is not confined to the suffering and hope of Christians. It encompasses the suffering and hope of the whole creation, which has a vital stake in “the revealing of the sons of God” (8:19-22). Now is a time in which we groan with the creation in anticipation of what God will bring forth from this birthing labor (8:22) and in which we continue to experience our weakness, but do so in hope and confidence with the help of the Spirit (8:24-39). Paul’s vision here is pregnant with cosmic potential infinitely beyond the hope of any individual, race, nation, or people, though inextricably linked to the hope of all. It is a vision that partakes of the wideness of that in ch. 5: “Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation of all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men” (5:18). God is working a work that far exceeds our pitiful imagination and our hope for personal salvation. It is not an accidental work. It is a purposeful work (8:28). It is a premeditated work (8:29). It is an accomplished work (8:30).<sup>23</sup> Shall this God, whose purpose embraces all of creation and who did not spare her own Son (8:32), not keep faith with those whom she has elected and called according to her purpose (8:28-30)?

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of

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<sup>23</sup> At first glance, 8:29-30 seems anomalous to the already/not-yet framework, for each verb in these verses, including “he glorified” (ἐδόξασεν), is in the aorist tense, as if all is already complete with nothing remaining for the future. To be sure, he speaks in 8:18 of “the glory that is to be revealed to us” (see also 2:7, 10, 5:2, 8:21) and does not elsewhere in Romans speak of glorification as having already occurred (but cf. Eph. 2:6, Col. 2:12-13). The use of the aorist for all of the verbs, including “glorified,” is not, however, inconsistent with the already/not-yet framework, for in this framework it is the full scope of God’s redemptive work in us that is both present and future. For example, Paul treats justification as already (3:26) and not yet (3:30, 5:19). One could infer from 8:10-11 that Paul regards the work of glorification as already begun through the Spirit’s indwelling. Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 245.

Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:33-39)

With these words, Paul completes the predicate for his treatment of the problem of the Jews and brings the problem back into the foreground. Ch. 8 repeatedly implies the problem:

- Has the law of “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” set us “free from the law of sin and death” and fulfilled “the just requirement of the law” (8:2, 4)? What has become of the advantage of the Jew (9:4, cf. 3:2)?
- Have we received “the spirit of sonship” (8:15)? Do we wait for adoption (8:23)? What has become of the Israel’s sonship (9:4)?
- Do we await the revelation of glory (8:17-18)? What has become of Israel’s glory (9:4)?
- Are we children and heirs of God and joint heirs with the Christ (8:16-17; cf. 4:13-14)? What has become of Israel’s promises and messianic hope (9:4-5)?
- Have we been foreknown by God (8:29)? Has she forgotten Israel, whom (11:2)?
- Are we God’s elect (8:33)? What has become of Israel’s election?

Any reader sensitive to God’s promises to the patriarchs and his covenant with Israel (9:4-5) cannot read such applications of the blessedness of Israel to Gentiles without wondering what the present situation of Israel means for the reliability of God’s promises to the church. If Paul’s argument – that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek – and his case for his apostleship to the Gentiles are to succeed, he must deal with the problem of the Jews.

## ***B. Chapters 9-11***

Implicit in Paul's wish that he himself might be anathema from Christ for the sake of Israel (9:3) is the recognition that some of his kin in the flesh, the Israelites, are separated from Christ – and apparently “from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39). For Paul, this means that some are not “children of Abraham” (9:7), “children of God” (9:8), or “saved” (9:27, 10:1, 13, 11:14). They have stumbled (9:32, 11:11) and suffered loss (11:12). They have been rejected (11:15) and broken off (11:17-20). They have been hardened (11:25; cf. 9:18). They have stumbled (9:32). Yet, “to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ” (9:4-5).

The question provoked by this contrast between Israel's present state and God's word to Israel is “what happened?” Paul's answer to this implied question interleaves two considerations: what God is doing and what Israel is doing (or not doing).

He starts with God: has God's word, by which Israel has possessed the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the law, the worship, the promises, and the hope of the Messiah, failed? His answer is straightforward: “No” (9:6). He appeals to scripture to show what God's word says and thus that it has not failed:

- First, he argues from scripture that physical lineage does not assure election (9:6-13; cf. 2:28). The expected determinants of descent and inheritance, whether fertility (9:7, 9; cf. 4:19), behavior (9:11), or primogeniture (9:12), are inoperative.
- Second, he argues from scripture that what is determinative is God's elective purpose (9:14-18), God's desire “to show his wrath and make know his power” (9:22; cf. 9:17), which we are unqualified to question, even though it may seem arbitrary and unfair (9:19-21). Some of Israel are “vessels of wrath made [by God] for destruction” (9:22).



- Third, he argues from scripture that God prepared some “beforehand for glory” and called them “not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles” (9:23-28).

Paul’s argument by this point seems, at best, paradoxical and, at worst, contradictory. Do the blessings enumerated in 9:4-5 belong to the Israelites or not? If they do, how can he argue that God has chosen to give his blessings only to some? We shall, however, suspend judgment.

If God’s word has not failed, what has happened? The Jews have stumbled over Christ (9:32-33) and consequently over the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, without distinction (3:22), which not only justifies the one who has faith in Jesus but also demonstrates in the present time the justness of God (3:26). This was not the righteousness the Jews knew (10:2). They knew the law as righteousness (9:31, 10:5; cf. 7:12), and they pursued it as if it were from works, not from faith (9:32).<sup>24</sup> They preferred the righteousness they knew to the righteousness that ended that which they knew (10:3): “For the *telos*<sup>25</sup> of the law is Christ unto righteousness for all who believe” (10:4, MT). Regardless of how the Jews conceived of the law as the vehicle of their righteousness, the Christ who is for both Jews and Gentiles without distinction upsets that conception (10:12). However Jews might have seen the law as establishing their righteousness, it was theirs peculiarly (cf. 3:2, 9:4). Christ puts an end to peculiar righteousness, declaring righteousness to all who believe (10:13).

Paul continues his case that the word of God has not failed (10:5-21). Salvation rests not on human will or exertion to do the righteousness of the law (cf. 9:16), as Paul shows by his comparison of what Moses wrote (10:5; referring to Lev 18:5) with his interpretation of Deut

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<sup>24</sup> I deliberately leave ambiguous the interpretation of what Paul regards as the error of the Jews in their conception of the law and works. For my purposes, it is sufficient to know that their critical error was not in their conception of law, but in their rejection of Christ. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 139-43.

<sup>25</sup> I take *tevlō* to have the complex connotation suggested in BDAG that Christ is “the goal and the termination of the law at the same time.” Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, 998.

30:12-14. It depends on acceptance of the word preached: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (10:8-10). Scripture confirms that this word of salvation is to all who believe in him (10:11; citing Isa 28:16), to everyone who takes his name upon their lips (10:13; citing Joel 2:32). As scripture shows, Israel has heard the preaching of this word, including the word about God’s calling the Gentiles (10:14-20; citing Ps 19:4, Deut 32:21, Isa 65:1), but has not obeyed (*i.e.*, believed) it (10:16, 21; citing Isa 53:1, 65:2).

By this point in Paul’s argument, the reader is likely to be asking whether Israel’s separation from Christ results from God’s elective purpose or Israel’s unbelief. For Paul, this dichotomy does not present a problem, for it is God’s elective purpose that results in the hardening of unbelief (cf. 9:18, 11:7). Thus, Israel’s partial unbelief is in accordance with God’s purpose (cf. 9:22-24). Apparently, Paul is aware of the puzzling effect of what he has been saying, for he opens ch. 11 with the question: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people?” (11:1). His answer – “By no means!” – relies for support on the obvious fact that Paul himself is a Jew (11:1) and on the history of Israel. Throughout Israel’s history of disobedience (*e.g.*, Elijah, 1 Kgs 19), God has chosen and preserved a faithful remnant (11:2-4). In the same way, God has chosen a remnant in the present time, and the election is solely a matter of God’s grace (11:5-6, cf. 9:11-13, 15). Those chosen obtain salvation; the rest God hardens (11:7-10; citing Isa 29:1, Ps 69:22-23). So it is that some of Israel believe the gospel, and some do not.

For Paul, however, this is not the end of the story. As we have seen already, he has a vision of God’s work that is universal, even cosmic, in scope (5:18, 8:19-23). There is too a universal aspect to God’s promises to Abraham, to which Paul has already alluded: “The promise

to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world ...” (4:13).<sup>26</sup> So far, ch. 9-11 has focused on God’s work in the present time to fulfill through the calling of the Gentiles what we might characterize as a precursor of that universal promise: “I have made you the father of many nations” (4:17-18). That “only a remnant of [the Jews] will be saved” (9:27) may conform to God’s program of election and calling, but it seems to fall short of the scope and scale of God’s promises to Abraham. In spite of his argument about how God’s election works, he affirms the election of the hardened part of Israel, for “the gifts and call of God are irrevocable” (11:28-29). So, does Paul’s earlier argument misconstrue the testimony of scripture concerning God’s program? I suggest that he does not, but that he intends to describe only how God’s program works in the present time (see 11:5), the time when God’s righteousness is manifested (3:21), but also the time of suffering and waiting for the glory that is to be revealed (8:18, 22) – the time of already/not-yet.

In the remaining verses of ch. 11, Paul moves toward a universal view of how God is working to save both Jew and Gentile. He does so in two steps. The first pertains to the present time. The second peers hopefully beyond the present time. In both, Paul is concerned with whether God has finished with the Jews: “have they stumbled so as to fall?” (11:11). Paul’s immediate answer to this question is firmly negative and looks to how he expects God will use the salvation of the Gentiles to make Israel “jealous, and thus save some of them” (11:12-14). Paul’s expectation of this saving of some is so immediate that he can link it to his own mission to the Gentiles (and implicitly to his purpose in writing to the Romans).

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<sup>26</sup> Genesis does not report the promise in these terms, but does report the promise in terms that might be interpreted in this way, particularly those pertaining to the blessing of all nations (Gen 12:3, 22:18, 26:4) and to Abraham’s innumerable descendants (Gen 13:16, 15:5, 17:2-5, 22:17, 26:4, 23, 28:14). Interestingly, Paul does not mention the promise of the land in Romans or Galatians, where he speaks of God’s promises to Abraham. Perhaps he regards that promise as inconsequential compared to inheriting the world, or perhaps it simply has no relevance to his Gentile audiences.

His expectation for the present time bleeds into a more encompassing expectation for the future (11:12, 15, 25-26, 30-32):

Now if their [Israel's] trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! ...

For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches....

I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved ....”

Just as you [Gentiles] once were disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their [the Jews'] disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.

His expectation takes on eschatological overtones in 11:15: reconciliation pertains to the present (see 5:11), but life from the dead spans the already (the resurrection of Christ – 1:4, 4:24-25, 6:4, 9, 7:4, 8:11, 10:9) and the not-yet (the resurrection of other humans – 5:17-18, 21, 6:5, 8, 8:11; cf. 1 Cor 15:51). Ch. 11:25-27 also seems to look beyond the present time to the coming of the Deliverer. In the present time, part of Israel (a remnant) is saved, and part is hardened (9:27, 11:5), but when the full number of the Gentiles comes in, all of Israel will be saved.<sup>27</sup> Finally the “full number” of Gentiles (11:25) and the “full number” of the Jews (11:12) will be saved, and God will have mercy upon all (11:32). Here is an eschatological universalism that mirrors Paul's view of the scope and scale of God's work in reconciliation and redemption in 5:18 and 8:19-21. In the end, it seems, Paul expects God's redemptive work in Christ to match the scope and scale of humanity's disobedience and the creation's involuntary futility, for which he can only exclaim the unsearchableness and inscrutability of God's ways (11:33-36). To have a vision of the outline of God's elective purpose is not to understand it or to secure a claim against God (11:34-35).

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Sanders, 143-44.

On the way to his startling conclusion, Paul takes a slight detour for the sake of Gentile humility. It builds on one of the metaphors that Paul offers in 11:16 to communicate that the Gentiles' salvation depends absolutely on God's prior calling of Israel: "If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches." By these metaphors and the elaboration that follows, Paul gives substance to his thematic phrase "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." By God's calling, the priority of the Jews is not merely a priority of order in time. It is not as if God were calling different groups for salvation in sequence but otherwise independently of each other. God's calling (or, sanctification) of the Jews is foundational for the Gentiles, a pre-condition to their own calling (or, sanctification). If, in the process of God's elective program, some of the original branches are broken off and others grafted in, the late additions must never forget that it is they who are grafted into the fecund root of the olive tree or that they depend for their life on that root (11:17-18). They must not think that they are now the indefeasible owners of the root or that God will not graft the broken-off branches back into the tree (11:19-24). In the present time, continuity with the root depends on faith for both Jew and Gentile, and discontinuity results from unbelief (11:20, 23). In the future, it will not be some who are hardened and some who are shown mercy (cf. 9:18), but God will have mercy upon all (11:32) in, we might add, a single cultivated olive tree nourished by the root of Jesse (cf. 15:8, 12), the Deliverer and the stumbling stone of Zion (9:33, 11:26).

## **VI. Conclusion**

We return now to the questions with which we began (*supra*, 1). If asked in terms of whether Paul perceived continuity or discontinuity between Israel's past and God's redemptive

work in Christ,<sup>28</sup> what we have seen in ch. 9-11 (and throughout Romans) leads to a “yes” and to a “no.” Paul clearly regards what God has done in Christ to be in continuity with, or fulfillment of, God’s promises to Israel and prophecy (*supra*, 4-5, 8, 15-17). Indeed, it is now clear why Paul insists that the Jews have a very real and substantial advantage in their being entrusted with the oracles of God: in scripture, the Jews have long possessed the pre-*evangelium*, the declaration of the gospel beforehand (1:2). Paul also sees the children of God as one people made up of Jews and Gentiles whom God has elected and called in continuity with his election of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob according to her purpose (*supra*, 8, 19-20). In the present time part (indeed most) of Israel is, however, cut off from Christ (*supra*, 9-10, 14-16). If this situation did not represent for Paul a glaring discontinuity with God’s promises, there would have been no reason for ch. 9-11 or much else in the letter as written. In both cases, however, Paul anticipates a future restoration of the continuity, not only for the Jews but also for the entire creation (*supra*, 10-14, 17-20). Having come down firmly on both sides of the general continuity/discontinuity question, we now turn to the specific questions:

1. *What, for Paul, are the implications of the death and resurrection of Christ for Israel’s hope in the promises of God to Abraham?*

In Paul’s view, the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ is the fulfillment of Israel’s hope in the promises of God to Abraham. Nothing we have seen in Romans indicates otherwise. Indeed, Paul reiterates this point as he nears the conclusion of the letter (15:8-12):

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name”;

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<sup>28</sup> Here I make no pretense of conforming my use of these terms to Dr. Cousar’s or of engaging the question in a way that responds to or defends his work. I do, however, intend that my treatment of the question be pertinent to same general area of inquiry, but in terms with which I can work.

and again it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

and again,

“Praise the Lord, all Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”;

and further Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope.”

Yet, as obvious as Paul paints the matter (see 10:18-21), it is significant that he regards the gospel as a “revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages ...” (16:25; cf. 1:17). It is noteworthy also that Paul does not use the term “revelation” lightly. The only other occurrences of it in Romans (in either the noun or verb forms) is in connection with eschatological (or like) occurrences, such as judgment or resurrection (see 1:18, 2:5, 8:18-19). Moreover, it is hard to forget that in his earlier letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of his own conversion, not as a matter of reading Isaiah, but as a revelation (Gal 1:12, 16, 2:2; cf. Gal 3:23). As diligently as Paul works to see the gospel in Jewish scripture, he does so only in light of the death and resurrection of Christ, suggesting that discontinuity between the Jews’ prior experience of God and the gospel is massive. The Damascus Road is more than a stone’s throw from the rabbi’s desk.

Paul’s delicate conjoining of discontinuity and continuity is most obvious in the image of the olive tree (11:16-24), to which we look for insight into the remaining questions:

2. *Does Paul think Israel can realize this hope only by believing in Jesus as the Messiah and being incorporated into the church?*
3. *Does he think that the church effectively supersedes Israel as the people of God?*

If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the

branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off. And even the others, if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

It is quite clear that, in Paul’s view, God in the present time justifies, from both Jew and Gentile, those who are of the faith of Jesus (τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ) (3:26) and that for both Jew and Gentile being of the faith of Jesus (10:6) entails confessing “with your lips that Jesus is Lord” and believing “in your heart that God raised him from the dead” (10:8-13). It would be a mistake, however, to infer from this that Paul expects Jews to “join” the church. To the contrary, the church results from God’s joining Gentiles to Israel, the cultivated olive tree. Some Jews have, for the present time, been cut off from the tree because of their unbelief, but the tree and its root remain the same. The tree never becomes a Gentile tree or the root a Gentile root, regardless of its demographic make-up at any particular moment. Moreover, even those Jews who now “are enemies of God” are so for the sake of the Gentiles and will not forever be so, for they remain “beloved for the sake of their forefathers” (11:28.) Despite the unbelief of some or many, “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (11:29). In the unsearchableness of God’s judgments and the inscrutability of her ways, God’s purpose will be done (11:30-32). This deep truth of God leaves no room for hostility or denigration of Jews, even in their time of unbelief (11:17-18), or for thinking that the church replaces Israel as God’s people. Without Israel, we are not the church.



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