

PAUL
AND THE
FAITHFULNESS OF GOD
N.T. WRIGHT



'Paul and the Faithfulness of God is the *summa* (but surely not the final work) of a great mind and indefatigable scholar who has devoted decades to understanding the New Testament and particularly, as here, the letters of Paul in their fullest historical and theological contexts. This book will surely be the defining standard, the Bultmann for our age, the text from which everyone will work and argue and revise their (and his) thinking about Paul for the next decade at least.'

*Daniel Boyarin, Professor of Talmudic Culture
University of California, Berkeley*

'A wonderful book! It has all the marks of a classic. Wright tackles the most interesting and difficult issues surrounding Paul, integrating historical, literary, philosophical and theological approaches superbly, and drawing us deep into the complex world of the first urban Christians. He explores Paul's extraordinary achievement in reworking his Judaism around Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah, uniting theology, prayer, politics, community-building and inspired improvisation. Wright's language is as fresh, intense and at times combative as Paul's, conveying its 'messianic newness'. He bridges the gap between Paul and today in a way that does justice to the strangeness of the first-century world while also enabling Paul to speak powerfully and relevantly now. Above all, he illuminates the multi-dimensional reconciliation – with God, one another, and all creation – at the heart of Paul's thought and practice, and opens up the most radical, embracing mystery of all: the love of God in Jesus.'

*David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity
University of Cambridge*

'Only once in every other generation or so does a project approaching the size, scope, and significance of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* appear. Paul's world(s), worldview, controlling stories and theology spring to life through Tom Wright's brilliant scholarship and spirited writing. Arguing for

narrative and theological coherence in Paul's thought, Wright seeks to overcome numerous dichotomies that have characterized recent Pauline scholarship. Readers will be richly rewarded and challenged at every turn – even when they do not fully agree. Most importantly, each chapter of this book reveals something profound about the surprising faithfulness of the God freshly revealed in Jesus the Messiah and conveyed to Paul's communities, and to us, by the Spirit.'

*Michael J. Gorman, Professor of Biblical Studies and Theology
St Mary's Seminary and University, Baltimore, Maryland*

'Breathtaking, mind-expanding, ground-breaking and more – it is easy to run out of adjectives to describe what N. T. Wright has already accomplished in his multi-volume account of New Testament history and theology. This fourth volume in the series is likewise a game-changer, above all for its adventurous presentation of Paul's "mindset" and theology, so thoroughly contextualized at the confluence of the apostle's Jewish, Roman and Greek worlds. This is Wright at his best – part historian, part exegete, part theologian, part pedagogue.'

*Joel B. Green, Professor of New Testament Interpretation
Fuller Theological Seminary, California*

'This long-awaited book is the fruit of more than thirty years of Tom Wright's intense, loving and imaginative engagement with the apostle Paul. In a magisterial reading of Paul's letters, Wright integrates sustained, fine-grained exegesis into a sweeping interpretation that places Paul on the map of Mediterranean antiquity in fresh and sometimes surprising ways. The apostle that he portrays is deeply grounded in Israel's faith and, at the same time, passionately concerned to carry the gospel of Israel's Messiah Jesus to the pagan world of his day. Everyone who reads these pages will be drawn into deep and provocative reflection on the historical figure of Paul. But there is more: no one can grapple seriously with Wright's readings without

also being brought face to face with the world-transforming message that Paul proclaimed.'

*Richard B. Hays, Professor of New Testament
The Divinity School, Duke University, North Carolina*

'Tom Wright's big book on Paul has long been eagerly awaited. And here it is! Massive in every sense of the word, this is a synthetic, scholarly and comprehensive analysis of Paul, worked out using the key categories outlined in *The New Testament and the People of God*, showing how Paul, as a Jew in the Roman Empire, reworked the framework of monotheism, election, and eschatology around Jesus and the Spirit. Written with elegance and humour, full of detailed exegesis and engaging with a wide range of contemporary scholarship, this major achievement will be a landmark in the field of Pauline studies for many years to come.'

*David G. Horrell, Professor of New Testament Studies
University of Exeter*

'Endorsing this book would be an exercise in superfluity. Even saying that Wright's *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* is without peers is simply to state the obvious.'

*Bruce W. Longenecker, Professor of Religion
Baylor University, Texas*

'Breathtaking! The integrated theological imagination of both the apostle and his twenty-first century interpreter is amazing.'

*Brian Walsh, Adjunct Professor of Theology of Culture
Wycliffe College, University of Toronto*

‘With magisterial vision, energetic scholarship and lucid illustration, Tom Wright unveils the mysteries of Paul’s theological imagination. This compellingly argued and absorbing study takes us beyond the bifurcation of salvation and participation that has long pervaded Pauline studies. Combining the passion of Augustine with the ambition of Barth, Wright’s Christian Origins series has inscribed itself into the canon of scripturally soaked theology, where it will remain for generations to come.’

*Samuel Wells, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square
and Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics at King’s College London*

‘Tom Wright’s long-awaited full-length study of St Paul will not in any way disappoint the high expectations that surround it. From the very first sentence, it holds the attention, arguing a strong, persuasive, coherent and fresh case, supported by immense scholarship and comprehensive theological intelligence. It is a worthy successor to his earlier magisterial studies of the themes of the kingdom and the resurrection: lively, passionate and deeply constructive, laying out again very plainly the ways in which the faith of the New Testament is focused on God’s purpose to re-create, through the fact of Jesus crucified and risen, our entire understanding of authority and social identity.’

Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge

CHRISTIAN ORIGINS AND THE QUESTION OF GOD
VOLUME 4

PAUL AND THE FAITHFULNESS
OF GOD

N. T. Wright

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PAUL AND THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

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For Richard Hays

a prince among exegetes

a jewel among friends

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Abbreviations

1. Stylistic Shorthands

2. Primary Sources

3. Secondary Sources, etc.

A Primary Sources

1. Bible

2. Other Jewish Texts

3. Other Early Christian and Related Texts

4. Pagan Texts

B Secondary Literature

Search items for ancient sources

1. Old Testament
2. Apocrypha
3. Pseudepigrapha
4. Qumran
5. Josephus
6. Philo
7. Rabbinic Works
8. New Testament
9. Christian and/or Gnostic Works
10. Pagan Sources

Search names for modern authors

Search items for selected topics

PREFACE

Anyone embarking on a book of this size would be well advised to consult the map before setting out. Here it is:

Part I	Part II	Part III	Part IV
Paul's World	Paul's Mindset	Paul's Theology	Paul in His World
		6, 7, 8	9, 10, 11
	5: first-century empire		12: Paul and empire
	4: ancient religion		13: Paul and religion
	3: ancient philosophy		14: Paul and philosophy
2: Paul's Jewish world			15: Paul in his Jewish world
1: Introduction			16: Conclusion

The way up and the way down are one and the same. The real climax of the book is Part III (chapters 9–11), where I have offered a fresh account of Paul's theology, using as controlling categories the three main theological themes within the Jewish world both of his day and of our own, and proposing that his entire theology is best understood in terms of his reworking of those themes in the light of the Messiah and the spirit. But for that to make the sense that it made to Paul we have to understand him historically, that is, within the complex and confusing world of his day. Or rather, worlds. I have tried in Part I to give as reasonably detailed a description of Paul's multiple contexts – Jewish, Greek, Roman – as I can within the space available. That I regard as essential. Without it, too many generalizations creep in, too many hostages are given to fortune. I have some particular arguments to make in relation to his Jewish world in chapter 2, but for much of chapters 3, 4 and 5 I am not proposing any very novel ideas (though the idea of a Roman *Heilsgeschichte* is not normally drawn out as such). But if we are to understand Paul within his own actual context there are certain features which have to be put in place.

C. S. Lewis, speaking of what he had learned from literary historians, described the effect for which I am striving. Such writers have helped me, he says, by placing works in their proper setting,

thus showing me what demands they were meant to satisfy, what furniture they presupposed in the minds of their readers. They have headed me off from false approaches, taught me what to look for, enabled me in some degree to put myself into the frame of mind of those to whom they were addressed.¹

If Part I has that effect for readers of Paul, I shall be glad. Then, having examined Paul's worldview and theology in the two central Parts of the book, my aim has been to work back through the same contexts and see what can be said, at least in a preliminary way, about where Paul belongs in relation to them all. Of course, since part of the overall argument of the book is that Paul remains a decidedly and determinedly Jewish thinker, his relationship to his Jewish context has a different character from his relationships to the other 'worlds' in which he lived. But there are still important issues to be faced when we get to that point.

I should perhaps add here that though there is thus a chiasmic balance between Parts I and IV there is no similar balance between Parts II (chapters 6, 7 and 8, on Paul's worldview) and III (chapters 9, 10 and 11, on his theology). But I hope that the overall structure will help the intrepid reader keep his or her own balance in following the shape of the argument. Part of the point of this structure is to highlight rhetorically the main thesis of the book, which can be briefly stated thus: Paul developed something we can appropriately call his 'theology', a radical mutation in the core beliefs of his Jewish world, because only so could he sustain what we can appropriately call the 'worldview' which he held himself and which he longed for his churches to hold as well. Other worldviews have their sustaining and shaping practices, but for Paul these markers (circumcision, the food laws, and so on) had been set aside as inappropriate for the new messianic day, for the new messianic people. Only a robust reappropriation of the Jewish *beliefs* – monotheism, election and eschatology, all rethought around the Messiah and the spirit – would do. 'Theology' – a category not unknown in the wider non-Jewish world, but never before loadbearing in this way – was necessary if the church, otherwise adrift in a world of a thousand cultural pressures, was to stay united and holy. My proposal is that Paul actually *invents* something we may call 'Christian theology', in this

particular way (Jewish beliefs about God, reworked around Messiah and spirit), for this particular purpose (maintaining the new messianic people in good order). We only understand the need for Part III, in other words, when we have understood Part II; and we only truly understand both of these together when we see them within the wider world mapped in Part I and engaged with in Part IV.

Here we may note one particular result of this proposal. Most works on 'Pauline theology' have made soteriology, including justification, central. So, in a sense, does this one. But in the Jewish context 'soteriology' is firmly located within the understanding of the people of God. God calls Abraham's family, and rescues them from Egypt. That is how the story works, and that is the story Paul sees being reworked around Jesus and the spirit. This explains why chapter 10, on 'election', is what it is, and why it is the longest in the book. I hasten to add, as readers of that chapter will discover, that this does not (as some have suggested) collapse soteriology into ecclesiology. Rather, it pays attention to the Jewish belief which Paul himself firmly endorses, that God's solution to the plight of the world begins with the call of Abraham. Nor does this mean that 'the people of God' are defined, smugly as it were, simply as the *beneficiaries* of salvation. The point of the Jewish vocation as Paul understood it was that they were to be the *bearers* of salvation to the rest of the world. That, in turn, lies at the heart of his own vocation, issuing in his own characteristic praxis.

Readers of my earlier works have been reminding me for some while that this book has been a long time coming. It is the fourth 'volume' (for all it now appears in two physical volumes) of the series *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, which SPCK in London commissioned in 1990 and whose first three volumes, *The New Testament and the People of God*, *Jesus and the Victory of God* and *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, appeared in 1992, 1996 and 2003 respectively, each being published in the USA by Fortress Press in Minneapolis. These volumes are designed to form neither a 'New Testament Theology' nor a 'New Testament History', but a kind of dialogue between the two, aiming always at practical as well as theoretical

synthesis. As the time-lag between volumes has increased – four years, then seven, and now ten – I may perhaps be excused the sense that I have been measuring out my life, not in coffee-spoons, but in ever larger soup-ladles. I hope I shall live long enough to complete the series, but since my earliest intention in relation to these projects was principally to write about Jesus and Paul the present volume may after all be regarded as an important milestone. And I must express at once my gratitude to my friends and colleagues at both SPCK and Fortress for their patience while it has all been going on.

It is important to note that the present book really does belong as part of this series; in other words, that all kinds of things I might have said by way of preliminaries are to be found in the earlier volumes, particularly in *NTPG*. Chapter 2 of the present volume represents a sharpening and a bringing into closer focus of *NTPG* Part III, but there is much in that earlier treatment that is simply presupposed (for instance, the question of ‘Who were the Pharisees?’). Nor has it been possible or desirable constantly to refer back to this or that point. I have done quite enough self-referencing in the present book as it is (partly because reviewers often say, ‘But why did you not deal with this, or that?’, when I have done, but elsewhere). For the same reason there is considerably less in the present book about Paul’s view of resurrection than there would otherwise have been, since that was the main subject of *RSG* Part II. I have repeated a certain amount about what I mean by the contested term ‘worldview’, and the closely related ‘mindset’ (I use ‘worldview’ in relation to communities and ‘mindset’ in relation to individuals within communities), since they are so important for both the structure and the content of the present book. But the basic principles were set out in *NTPG* Parts I and II, and remain constant. These discussions, I discover, are coming into their own here and there as a new generation asks fundamental questions once more. One of the great difficulties in present-day biblical scholarship is the explosion of aims, methods and approaches, so that true debate becomes difficult, there being fewer and fewer fixed points from which to begin. It is important to be clear about one’s own starting-points, and that is what those earlier treatments were meant to offer.

In particular, I would like to stress that my picture of Paul's complex world, Jewish and non-Jewish, has put itself together in my mind over many decades, through many twists and turns of reading texts both ancient and modern, with different elements making their presence felt in different combinations, and with different emphases, at different times. Critics have sometimes accused me of first inventing a picture, or a 'controlling story', and then superimposing it on the early Christian writers. This is naive. Everyone comes to the text with pictures and controlling stories – and indeed with philosophical, theological, cultural, social and political assumptions and presuppositions. The question is whether these are laid out for discussion, and whether the subject-matter under investigation is given the chance as it were to object or answer back. The picture I have of Paul's multiple and overlapping worlds, especially but not only his Jewish world, is necessarily complicated (though nowhere near as complicated as the reality must have been; that is the curse of all history, modern as well as ancient), and I have developed it over the years in constant dialogue with the texts themselves. To suggest that I started with one idea and simply forced the texts to fit into it is the kind of charge that sometimes rebounds.

Much of this has to do with the method of argument I have explained and justified earlier, which can loosely be called 'critical realism'. What I mean by this is the application to history of the same overall procedure as is used in the hard sciences: not simply the mere assemblage of 'facts', but the attempt to make sense of them through forming hypotheses and then testing them against the evidence.² Unless we are explicit about this there is a constant danger that exegetes will simply talk past one another, labelling one another's proposals as 'unconvincing' because they have not glimpsed the larger hypotheses within which those proposals might make sense.

Even when one does recognize those larger hypotheses, however, sometimes the best thing to do is to attempt an outflanking move, rather than engage in hand-to-hand fighting. That is the effect that I hope this book will have over against some of the other large proposals that have been advanced in recent years. The problem is, of course, that in arts disciplines in general (as opposed, say, to engineering or mathematics) people do not

normally take any notice of the fact that they have been outflanked unless the move is backed up with detailed refutation. (One of the virtues of analytic philosophy is that its practitioners could see only too clearly what was going on. I remember the refreshing answer given by the then elderly A. J. Ayer, the doyen of mid-century logical positivists, to the question of what had been the problem with his philosophy. Basically, he said, it was wrong.) Since there is often no space for detailed engagement, we must be patient. Some weeds can be rooted out in one go. Others will creep back time and again. With some, all you can do is cut them back and hope they will die off. Some, of course, may turn out to be flowers, awaiting recognition as such ...

Something similar must be said about the problem of diachronic and synchronic readings of Paul: about whether, in other words, we should first study the letters one by one (diachronic, going through time) and only later attempt a single overall presentation (synchronic, placing all the different 'times' together). One of the most thorough recent books on Paul's theology attempts exactly that.³ There is a noble vision behind that sequence, but a glance at the size of the present volume(s) raises natural questions about its practicability. In any case, I have written this book in my sixties, having studied, taught and preached Paul for the past forty years, including producing a series of popular commentaries on every book of the New Testament, more substantial commentaries on Colossians and Romans, and numerous articles on individual passages and books. Thus, though I have not collected that diachronic work together as the explicit foundation for the present book, I think it is fair to assume it.

There are in any case, however, two problems with the ideal of beginning diachronically. First, we do not know the exact order in which Paul wrote his letters. We have some idea. We all think 1 Thessalonians was early (though perhaps not the earliest?) and Romans late (though perhaps not the latest?). We assume that 1 Corinthians was written before 2 Corinthians. But beyond that it is hard to proceed. Second, most scholars place all the 'main' letters within quite a short period, a decade at most out of a missionary career spanning at least thirty years. Granted (a) that Paul had

been an evangelist, teacher, missionary and pastor for a long time before he wrote anything that we still possess, and (b) that almost all his time was taken up, not with writing letters, but with that complex and never-ending personal ministry, especially in teaching, it is misleading to imagine his letters as successive ‘statements’ or ‘publications’ in which, like a research scientist, he was setting out his latest ‘findings’. That is part of the problem of scholars imagining the apostles after their own image.⁴

Pastors can make the same mistake. ‘Pastoral work’ may be quite different in a first-century tentmaker’s shop from what it is in a clergy study in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, many pastors find that, though a particular situation may force them to think something through in a new way, they are normally drawing on and attempting to condense years of study, training and experience into a short interview, or letter, or email. As I argue in chapter 11 below, I find it inconceivable that Paul had not faced and pondered a thousand times the questions he deals with in Romans in general and chapters 9—11 in particular. He has arranged his presentation in such a way as to lead from one difficult question to another; but that, I am convinced, is not because he is thinking these things through afresh as he writes the letter. It is because he wants *his hearers* to think them through in that way, to sense the drama of the argument. The letters consist of a few bucketfuls of water drawn from a deep well, poured out into whichever vessels Paul thought appropriate for the audience and the occasion.

We should therefore expect to find that Paul says briefly and cryptically in one place what elsewhere he spells out in more detail. We should expect to be able to interpret one letter with the help of another, while of course respecting the flow of argument proper to each. In other words, diachronic study is important and must everywhere be presupposed, but synchronic presentation, at least in the forming of hypotheses, is always necessary too. After all, even the most resolutely diachronically minded scholar still has to presuppose, whichever letter is under the microscope at the time, that there is *some* affinity of mind between, say, the Paul who wrote Galatians and the Paul who wrote Philippians. Some of us tried the experiment, over a decade ago, of discussing the theology of the individual letters one by one as

though there were no others. It was a useful and important experiment, but I do not think the results called into question the parallel task of synchronic hypotheses.⁵

The subject we are here investigating is of course immense. So is the body of scholarship that surrounds it. This is nothing new. Virgil, writing over two thousand years ago to the emperor Augustus, declared that his subject was so vast that he must have been almost out of his mind to have begun the work in the first place; and that was long before printing and the internet.⁶ Modern scholars in many fields express what I have found day after day in writing the present work:

The bibliography ... is enormous, and I could have increased the size of this book two- or threefold by debating divergent views. In every paragraph, if not in every sentence, I could have argued explicitly for or against the opinions of several scholars.⁷

I recall in this connection the dour Scot who was assigned the three-day task of packing up my books when we moved from Auckland Castle to the Fife coast in the summer of 2010. ‘What I cannae get my mind around,’ he declared, ‘is – all them books, all on the one subject!’ There is a serious point here. We are long past the time when one could read, or even skim-read, ‘everything’. As in many other fields, so with biblical scholarship, one has to choose certain conversation partners, and that is what I have done in this book. There are moments when, at particularly crucial turns in the road, I have tried to be a little more comprehensive, but for much of the time I have concentrated on expounding themes and passages with a fairly light touch on the footnotes. I apologize to friends, colleagues and indeed experts in the field whose work receives less attention than I would have liked. I had originally planned a chapter or two on the recent history of Pauline research, but this has grown into a separate book (*Paul and His Recent Interpreters*), and even there it has not been possible to discuss some recent writing – I think, for instance, of the massive work of Douglas Campbell – as fully as I would have liked. Almost every day a new monograph or article has come to my attention which could in principle have been

included, even if the world itself could not then have contained the extra volumes that would have been written.

Another problem with any thematic treatment of any writer is the necessary repetition. Either one must write a set of commentaries on all the texts from end to end, in which case one must repeat the necessary general statements on key topics every time they come up (or collect them into ‘excursuses’); or one must expound one’s chosen themes, in which case one must perforce repeat elements of the exegesis of this or that passage. I have chosen the latter route. A glance at the index (in which the key discussions of frequently referred-to passages are marked in **bold type**) will show where exegetical overlap has been inevitable.⁸ I regret the occasional overlap, but those who come to this book for a treatment of a particular topic may be glad to find the relevant material in one place.⁹

All kinds of linguistic challenges emerge in a project like this. We used to speak blithely of ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’, but people now warn that the first of these did not mean then what it means now, and that ‘Christian’ and ‘Christianity’ are anachronistic in the first century. That has not stopped the production of serious books with such words in their titles, but it is enough to give us pause, and I have tried to think historically about the first century and to avoid implying too much continuity with what came after. We have become aware, in particular, that the suffix ‘-ism’ has carried all kinds of nineteenth-century overtones which we would do well to avoid.¹⁰ A particular problem attaches to the way we speak about those of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries who did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s Messiah. They used to be called ‘non-Christian Jews’ or ‘unbelieving Jews’; some perceive the former as anachronistic, the latter as pejorative. I have attempted various circumlocutions, recognizing that we all face our own versions of these challenges.¹¹ So, too, the word ‘pagan’ is heard as pejorative by some, though as elsewhere I have continued (in company with many others from many backgrounds) to use it as a convenient shorthand. The same goes for the abbreviations AD and BC; for the phrase ‘Old Testament’; and for reflecting first-century Jewish and Christian usage by speaking of ‘he’ in relation to the one God.

But should that one God be so designated? In earlier volumes, determined not to beg the question as to ‘which god we were talking about’, I usually retained the lower-case initial letter for the word ‘god’. If we are trying to understand Paul’s own mind, however, this makes less sense. When Paul referred to the God of Israel, he believed that he was talking about the one and only being to whom the word ‘God’ might be properly applied. He knew, of course, about ‘other gods’; but I have taken the decision to attempt to reflect his own point of view by referring to them without the capital.¹²

I have referred to Paul himself, in his pre-Damascene years, as ‘Saul of Tarsus’. I hope he at least will not mind.¹³

Unless otherwise noted, I have used my own 2011 translation of the New Testament (*The New Testament for Everyone*, or in the USA *The Kingdom New Testament*, published in London by SPCK and in San Francisco by HarperOne). Where, however, I sometimes pushed the boat out in that work and translated *Christos* as ‘king’ (which I still think appropriate), I have here usually made it ‘Messiah’. I have also occasionally adapted that translation in other ways. For the Old Testament and Apocrypha I have normally followed the NRSV, except that I have written YHWH instead of ‘the LORD’.

It would take several pages to name everyone who has encouraged me in the writing of this book. Many people I have never met have emailed me to say they are waiting for it eagerly, and I hope they are not now disappointed. Many have told me they are praying for me (and perhaps also for my wife and family, the chief sufferers through this process). Many have read chapters, sections, or whole Parts, and in some cases almost the entire book, and have given me shrewd and helpful comments and advice from which I have tried to profit. They have helped to bear my burdens, even though now I must take full responsibility and carry my own load. Without specifying which of the following alphabetical list have done which of the tasks listed above, I simply name with great gratitude Andrew Angel, John Barclay, Michael Bird, Markus Bockmuehl, Richard Burridge, Martin de Boer, Michael Gorman, Scott Hafemann, Richard Hays, Simon Kingston,

Christopher Kirwan, Michael Lloyd, Bruce Longenecker, Grant Macaskill, Gordon McConville, Scot McKnight, Carey Newman (who wanted me to miss bits out, but also to add bits in), Oliver O'Donovan, William Pugh, John Richardson, Peter Rodgers (who nudged me into writing chapter 4), Kavin Rowe, Philip Seddon, David Seemuth, Elizabeth Shively, David Starling, Katie Thomas, Bill Tooman, Alan Torrance, Brian Walsh, Francis Watson, Sean Winter and Julian Wright (who suggested a new way of approaching chapter 16). It is extraordinary for a scholar in his sixties to include two of his undergraduate tutors in such a list, and I am especially grateful to Christopher Kirwan and John Richardson for picking up once more, for a brief moment, a tutorial relationship broken off in 1971. (That reminds me to pay homage to my two Pauline teachers, George Caird and Charlie Moule. George died long before the present series was even dreamed of. Charlie read the first three volumes with his customary sharp-eyed care, and his handwritten letters, stuffed into my working copies, are treasures. Alas, this volume will not be similarly graced.) I am particularly grateful to the graduate students at St Mary's College, St Andrews, who in early 2013 ploughed through large portions of Part III and emerged not only with a fistful of misprints but also with insightful comments and challenging questions. Special thanks to Ernest Clark, Andrew Cowan, John Dunne (who also gave important help at proof stage), John Frederick, Haley Goranson, Christoph Heilig, Keith Jagger, Janghoon Park and Norio Yamaguchi. Thanks are due, in a different category, to my friend Stuart Lyons CBE, who in addition to combining a stellar industrial career with innovatory scholarship on Horace (reflected fleetingly in chapter 5 below), has been one of the most profound and searching 'lay' readers of the previous books in this series and will, I hope, enjoy the present one as well.

I continue to be grateful to Kevin Bush, who has run 'my' website (www.ntwrightpage.com) for several years now and has thereby earned the appreciation of many whom I know neither by name nor by sight. During the many years of planning and writing this book I have been helped by a splendid string of research assistants whose tireless energy and cheerful support has been a real encouragement as well as a great practical boon. I

am delighted still to be in touch with them all and hope they enjoy the fruit of the labours in which they have all had some share. Nick Perrin was with me in Westminster; Archie Wright and Ben Blackwell in Durham; Chad Marshall in Princeton; and now, here in St Mary's, Jamie Davies has borne the burden and heat of the final years. Warm thanks to them all.

As with *Jesus and the Victory of God*, there is a sense in which I have been writing this book most of my life.¹⁴ There is a clear genealogical line both from my first article on Paul, published in the 1978 *Tyndale Bulletin*, and from my doctoral dissertation, completed in 1980, to several strands in the present book. However, there has of course been enormous change, growth, development and transformation as well. Had I written this book in the 1980s, as I dearly longed to do, it would have been very different. Most of what I now think most important I had scarcely begun to glimpse. I hope now that the long delay, and the preparatory work in other books and articles, will help to create a solid platform on which this work may stand. I am glad that, as a companion volume to this work, more or less all my Pauline articles (other than those in *The Climax of the Covenant* [Edinburgh and Minneapolis: T&T Clark and Fortress Press, 1991/1992]) are being made available under the title *Pauline Perspectives*, itself a nod of homage towards one of the greatest German scholars of the last generation, Ernst Käsemann.

Five more much-felt thanksgivings. First, to the publishers. Philip Law at SPCK commissioned this series nearly a quarter of a century ago. I do not think that either of us expected we would still be working on it so much later, but he has remained a source of cheerful encouragement and shrewd advice. Simon Kingston and Joanna Moriarty have been a great support and encouragement as always. Their editorial staff (especially Evangeline Deavall), proofreaders (Mollie Barker and Joanne Hill), publicists and sales team (especially Alan Mordue) have given me nothing but the best of help and enthusiasm. In the USA, I have been delighted to get to know Will Bergkamp and the new team at Fortress Press. They, too, cannot have anticipated this time-lag, but they have been cheerful and co-operative in working within the limits of the possible. Once again I am grateful to

Steven Siebert and his co-workers at *Nota Bene* for help and advice in using their remarkable software to generate the actual pages. Their software is second to none, as many have testified. But Steve himself has gone further. He has been generous to a fault with his time and expert help. His friendship and support have been an essential element in the production of this book.

Second, to colleagues. The serious writing of this book began when I was on sabbatical at Princeton in the autumn of 2009. I am more grateful than I can say to my dear friend and colleague the Right Reverend Mark Bryant, Bishop of Jarrow, who looked after the Diocese of Durham in my absence, with neither of us imagining that he would be doing it again a year later after I had left for St Andrews (in order to write this book!). Certainly neither of us supposed for a minute that he would have to do it yet again after my short-lived successor was scooped up to become Archbishop of Canterbury. My thanks to him, to the Archdeacons, to my staff and all who supported me through that time of extended leave. And my gratitude, too, to Dr William Storrar and his colleagues and the Trustees at the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, where I spent a happy and productive four months re-acquainting myself with the world of Pauline scholarship. It was a life-transforming time. The breathing space after years of intense work in church and state; the wonderful Library of Princeton Theological Seminary literally next door; the fellowship and companionship of the other residents during that time – all this made for a rich and memorable experience. Then, to my surprise and delight, I have been welcomed warmly at St Mary's College, St Andrews, where my shrivelled academic heart has recovered a measure of greenness, and where the support of colleagues, led from the front by the Dean, Professor Ivor Davidson, has created an atmosphere of happy and collaborative work. This has been a major and wholly unexpected move for me and my family, and as I write this looking out across the Firth of Forth I have nothing but gratitude.

Mention of family brings me to the third and greatest thanksgiving. My children and grandchildren have put up with my writing habits all their lives and have remained encouraging and supportive. Maggie has been her usual

magnificent self, never allowing me to think my work was more important than it actually was, but always nudging me to get on and get it done. She has carried the heavy end of several logs, and taken a good deal of the flak that comes with the strange vocation I have pursued. I am grateful to them, and particularly to her, more than I can say, for the balance of love, fun, challenge and delight which they provide.

Those who skim through this book may be surprised at one particular feature. Micheal O'Siadhail, whose poetry (and friendship) I have enjoyed for many years, emailed me early in my time in Princeton. I had been thinking that I needed something – a poem, or even a picture – to stand in the middle of the book, in the blank space between Parts II and III. On a whim, I asked Micheal for suggestions. Within minutes he sent me back not one poem, but three, from his then forthcoming collection *Tongues*.¹⁵ These extraordinary poems explore the inner meanings within Japanese characters, and the way the characters combine to produce further meaning. Micheal did not know that actually the book had four parts, and that the three poems he sent, individually and in sequence, would fit so exactly into the three inter-Part spaces. Nor did he know, sending me poems about three birds on a tree, now collected into one, that I had been thinking about ways in which to link Paul together with his three worlds, Jewish, Greek and Roman. Nor did he know, with that first poem about the bird and the chestnut tree, that moments before his email arrived the large red hawk that lived by the Princeton Seminary library had flown over to the chestnut tree outside my window and had stared in at me, eyeball to eyeball, for a full minute. There was no choice. I celebrate a great gift from a great artist, and am privileged to give his three birds fresh lodging in this unexpected tree.¹⁶

One of my greatest debts is reflected in the dedication. Richard Hays and I first met in November 1983 at the SBL conference in Dallas, where he presented a paper on Romans 4.1 and I offered one on Adam in Pauline theology.¹⁷ Within minutes of the conclusion of his paper we were sitting at a table with Greek Testaments open and Texas-sized gins and tonic to hand. Thus it has been, through the twists and turns of life and scholarship, with many times of family relaxation and many of gritty textual debate. We do

not, of course, always agree. But even when I have taken a very different line from his (I think, for instance, of his description of Paul's exegesis of Deuteronomy in Romans 10 as 'outrageous'¹⁸) I do not think I would have got there without his unlocking the rusty gate that was blocking the way. To change the picture, if I have sometimes explored dark paths which have led to places where he has not been, it is partly because he lent me his torch in the first place. We are very different in other ways. I have written lots of books, like someone trying to shoot rabbits in the dark, blasting away with a shotgun in the hope of the occasional hit. Richard has paused, pondered, and written masterpieces that have changed the whole discussion. I see this book as a kind of semi-colon after thirty years of Pauline conversation, and hope that the rest of the sentence will be as stimulating and fruitful.

I said that I had been working on this book most of my life. There was a hiatus: I did not think much about Paul between the ages of five and fifteen. But he was my point of entry. I have written elsewhere about my first experience of the Bible.¹⁹ It was 2 June 1953: my mother's birthday, and the Coronation Day of Queen Elizabeth II. My parents gave my sister and me each a Coronation Bible (King James, of course). Mine was, like me at the time, small and chunky. My sister and I retreated to our bedroom, sat on the floor, and leafed through this extraordinary object. I had after all only just learned to read, and was not quite ready for Romans. But we came upon the letter to Philemon: a single page, with something like a real story. We read it together. That is where I began. And that is one of the reasons, though not the only one, for beginning this book where I do. The Queen is still on the throne; my mother is celebrating another significant birthday; and Philemon is still a good place to start.

N. T. Wright
St Mary's College
St Andrews, Scotland

2 June 2013

¹ Lewis 1961, 121f. That Lewis did not always take his own advice – as, for instance, in his dismissing of historical-Jesus research and his preferring of a blatantly anachronistic reading (Lewis 1955, Letter 23) – does not of course undermine this point.

² See Malina and Neyrey 1996, ix–x, referring to this in terms of ‘abduction’ (as opposed either to induction or deduction). The term ‘abduction’ was introduced into philosophy by Peirce 1958, 89–164 to deal with what he called ‘the logic of discovery’ and the economics of research. Another familiar term for the same process is ‘inference to the best explanation’, seen to good advantage in detective stories such as those of Arthur Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie. On ‘critical realism’ (a phrase I borrowed from Meyer 1989, and use heuristically without intending a full evocation of the way it has been used as a technical term by philosophers like R. W. Sellars and A. O. Lovejoy) cf. *NTPG* 332–7.

³ Schnelle 2005 [2003].

⁴ cf. Hooker 1975.

⁵ See the series of volumes that emerged from the SBL Pauline Theology seminar in the 1990s: Bassler 1991; Hay 1993; Hay and Johnson 1995; Johnson and Hay 1997. On the whole problem of syntheses of Paul, and the extent to which his thought developed, see the interesting article of Sanders 2008b.

⁶ As quoted by Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.24.

⁷ Galinsky 1996, ix.

⁸ See the reflections of Fee 1994, 10f.

⁹ The major exception is Rom. 9.30—10.13, which cries out to be included under ‘justification’ in chapter 10, but which needed to be treated along with its whole section [in chapter 11](#).

¹⁰ See Meeks 2001; and e.g. Lang 2004.

¹¹ See, for instance, the elaborate paraphrases in Nanos 2010a.

¹² Barclay 1996, 15 n. 6 faces the same problem and makes the generous decision to use ‘God’ for all deities, ‘since it customarily conveys respect for the beliefs and practices of the relevant worshippers’. Longenecker 2010, 14f. goes the other way, referring to ‘Israel’s deity’ alongside other ancient deities.

¹³ The reasons he gave up that name have been interestingly explored by Leary 1992. It is possible that Paul echoes the distant memory of King Saul, like him from the tribe of Benjamin, in Rom. 11.1f. (see p. 1223).

¹⁴ cf. *JVG* xiv.

¹⁵ O’Siadhail 2010, 144–6.

¹⁶ I am grateful to my nephew the Revd Robert Crofton, ornithologist *extraordinaire*, for helping me to identify my unexpected visitor.

¹⁷ See Hays 1985 (now reprinted in Hays 2005, 61–84). My ‘Adam’ piece, originally published in the 1983 *SBL Seminar Papers* (ed. K. H. Richards), 359–89, was revised and expanded for Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 2.

¹⁸ Hays 1989a, 82.

¹⁹ See *Perspectives*, 407f.

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples th'upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support,
That to the highth of this great argument
I may assert eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1.17–26

θεός, ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ
καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις·
θεός πιστός, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία,
δίκαιος καὶ ὄσιος κύριος.

Deuteronomy 32.4 LXX

... St Paul is often criticized
By modern people, who're annoyed
At his conversion, saying Freud
Explains it all. But they omit
The really vital part of it:
Which isn't how it was achieved
But what it was that Paul believed ...

Betjeman 1982, 68 (italics added)

Our beloved brother Paul, writing in all his letters according to the wisdom given to him ... in
which are some things hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own
destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

2 Peter 3.15–16

PART I

PAUL AND HIS WORLD

Chapter One

RETURN OF THE RUNAWAY?

1. A World of Difference

(i) Pliny and Paul

Roughly seventy years after the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a Roman senator, mindful of his own importance and seniority, wrote to a friend about a third man, a social inferior who had got himself in trouble:

You told me you had been angry with a freedman of yours, and now he's come to see me! He threw himself at my feet and clung on to me as though I were you. He wept a lot, he asked for a lot, though he kept quiet about a lot too. To sum it up, he made me believe that he was genuinely sorry. I think he is a changed character, because he really does feel that he did wrong.

Yes, I know you are angry; and I know, too, that you have a right to be angry. But mercy earns most praise when anger is fully justified. Once you loved this fellow, and I hope you will love him again; for the moment, it's enough if you let yourself be placated. You can always be angry again if he deserves it, and you'll have all the more reason if you've been placated now. He's young, he's in tears, and you have a kind heart – make all that count. Don't torture him, and don't torture yourself either; anger is always torture for a soft heart like yours.

I am afraid it will look as though I'm putting pressure on you, not simply making a request, if I join my prayers to his. But I'm going to do it anyway, and all the more fully and thoroughly because I've given him a sharp and severe talking-to, and I've warned him clearly that I won't make such a request again. (This was because he needed a good fright, and I said it to him rather than to you, because it's just possible that I *shall* make another request, and receive it too – always supposing it's an appropriate thing for me to ask and for you to grant.)

Yours sincerely ...

The writer was Pliny: Pliny the Younger, nephew of the great naturalist whose death (at the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79) he memorably described in another letter.¹ This younger Pliny was a barrister, a senator, a public official who held a priesthood and other civil service appointments. He was elected to the Consulship for the autumn of AD 100; the office was, by then, nowhere near as important as it had been under the Republic, but it was still the highest civic honour available. After further work in the courts, the

Senate and the civil service, he was sent by the emperor Trajan as his personal representative to Bithynia and Pontus, in today's northern Turkey. There, it seems, he died; but not before writing a couple of puzzled letters back home to his master on what to do about those strange people called 'Christians'. That was where we met him in an earlier volume.²

The present letter is remarkable in several ways. We know nothing more about the friend in question, one Sabinianus, except that he granted the request and earned himself a further letter from the great man, congratulating him on 'accepting my authority – or, if you like, indulging my prayers', and urging him to be ready for further acts of mercy even if there is nobody to make the case.³ But we know enough to see what's going on. The freedman (in other words, a slave whom Sabinianus has freed but who is still clearly dependent on him) has got himself into trouble. Knowing Pliny to be a friend of his master, he has gone to him for help.

There then ensues a nice little comedy of manners, worthy almost of Jane Austen though without the dry humour. All three dancers retain their places in the implicit social hierarchy, with each making the moves appropriate to those places.

Pliny is at the top of the social pile, giving lordly instructions and emphasizing the fact by saying he's only making a request. Sabinianus is in the middle, obviously in command of the freedman but presumably a little in awe of the great Pliny, and eager to maintain friendship with such a man.⁴ The freedman, who remains unnamed, is no longer a slave, but is nevertheless socially near the bottom of the pile, at the mercy of those above him. Pliny does what a man in his position might be expected to do, dispensing the philosophical and even psychological wisdom of the day: 'Mercy looks even better when you've a right to be angry, but being angry is such torture for a gentle-hearted chap like you!' He makes it clear that the freedman deserves anger, and that he himself has given him a good, menacing talking-to. The appeal is based on the man's genuine repentance; but, despite the protestations that this appears genuine, Pliny's subsequent warning indicates that he suspects it may not last. In saying one thing to the unfortunate freedman and another to Sabinianus he shows himself again the

lofty master of the situation, playing the two others like a pair of (albeit very different) musical instruments.

Sabinianus, for his part, complies with Pliny's command/request, which involves no social change. He is subservient to Pliny, but his forgiveness, conditional as it is upon the man's present penitence and future good behaviour, leaves him even more obviously superior to the freedman than before. 'He has not demeaned himself by pardoning an inferior (his freedman), because his action represents his fitting submission to a superior (Pliny).'⁵

The freedman himself, tearful and apparently penitent, and now further frightened by Pliny's warnings, is, we may suppose, deeply grateful to them both. He is determined, at least until further notice or provocation, to know his place and to play the part of a well-behaved social inferior.

In terms of the customs of the time, the unnamed freedman was quite lucky. He was at least free, not a slave, even though the net result of that change may not have been very significant in real terms (he was presumably technically at liberty to leave Sabinianus and seek his fortune elsewhere, but many ex-slaves remained without the means to do such a thing).⁶ His master could have made life very unpleasant for him. He would not have faced the extreme danger of the runaway slave, but punishments and deprivations of many kinds might have awaited his projected return. All the more reason for him to go back with his tail between his legs and learn to lie low.

We move from Pliny's world of carefully calibrated social distinctions into a very different universe. Roughly half way in time between the resurrection of Jesus and Pliny's letter, we have another letter whose surface similarities mask a deep, disturbing dissimilarity. Here is its central core:

I have considerable boldness in the Messiah to command you to do the right thing, but I prefer to appeal on the basis of love, seeing as I am Paul, an elder and now also a prisoner of the Messiah, Jesus. I appeal to you about my child, whose father I have become in my imprisonment: Onesimus! Once he was useless to you, but now he is useful to you and to me. I'm sending him to you – sending the one who is my very heart. Actually, I would have liked to keep him here beside me, so that he could work for me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the royal announcement, but I didn't want to do anything without your approval, so that your good deed wouldn't be done, as it were, under compulsion, but willingly.

Perhaps this is why he was separated from you for a while, so that you could have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother – especially to me, but how much more to you, but in human terms and in the lord.

So: if you count me as your partner, receive him as you would me. If he has wronged you or owes you anything, put it down on my account. I, Paul, will repay: I'm writing this with my own hand! (Not to mention the fact that you owe me your own very self ...) Yes, brother, let me have some benefit from you in the lord! Refresh my heart in the Messiah.

I'm writing this fully confident of your obedience, and knowing that you will do more than I say. At the same time, get a guest room ready for me. I'm hoping, you see, that through your prayers I will be given to you as a gift ...

Paul's letter to Philemon, of which this extract forms verses 8–22, has some interesting similarities to that of Pliny to Sabinianus. The most obvious is the standard rhetorical ploy: Far be it from me to force your hand – I wouldn't tell you what to do, now would I? No, no, of course not, think Sabinianus and Philemon with a wry smile; you merely put me in an impossible position! The frequent references to friendship, at various levels, is a standard theme right across the world of ancient letter-writing.⁷ Then again Paul, like Pliny, speaks simply of 'obedience'. He is in fact (or so it seems) appealing, still more explicitly than Pliny, to his possession of a status which places him in a position to give orders, should he wish to do so (which of course, he insists, he doesn't!). Here, however, is the first rather shocking dissimilarity: Paul is in prison, a fact he mentions not as though it decreases his social standing (which it naturally did) but as though it gives him a higher status rather than a lower one.

But the main impression, once we study the two letters side by side, is that they breathe a different air. They are a world apart. Indeed – and this is part of the point of beginning the present book at this somewhat unlikely spot – this letter, the shortest of all Paul's writings that we possess, gives us a clear, sharp little window onto a phenomenon that demands a historical explanation, which in turn, as we shall see, demands a *theological* explication. It is stretching the point only a little to suggest that, if we had no other first-century evidence for the movement that came to be called Christianity, this letter ought to make us think: Something is going on here. Something is different. People don't say this sort of thing. That isn't how the world works. A new way of life is being attempted – by no means entirely

discontinuous with what was there already, but looking at things in a new way, trying out a new path. There is, after all, a world of difference between saying, ‘Now, my good fellow, let me tell you what to do with your stupid freedman and then we’ll all be safely back in our proper positions’ and ‘Now, my brother and partner, let me tell you about my newborn child, and let me ask you to think of him, and yourself, and me, as partners and brothers.’ This new way of life, and the new patterns of thinking which sustain it, are what the present book is about. I choose to begin here, with this sharp little vignette, one snapshot from Paul’s copious album. Sometimes it is better to get your hands dirty at once rather than approach a topic with lofty generalizations.

But – a new way of life? One can already hear in the background, at the very suggestion of such a difference between Pliny and Paul, a whirring of cogs in the postmodern imagination. Yes, yes, think many readers, this simply reveals Paul as a master of manipulation. The hermeneutic of suspicion casts its usual wet blanket over all possibilities other than the reinscribing of narratives of money, sex and particularly power, and it is power that people often see at work here.⁸ Sometimes this proposal is part of the contemporary drive to make Paul simply yet one more hellenistic thinker and writer. He can’t, people think, be as different as all that! It *must* ‘really’ be all about social manipulation ...

To this the only real answer is, How might we tell? and the answer is ‘through a more thorough study, not only of the history and theology, but of the entire worldview which here comes to the surface’. Such study must be both as broad as an entire worldview always is, and as deeply rooted as we can make it in an actual close reading of the text. And when we read this Pauline text closely, it compels us to focus on two features not sufficiently remarked upon: the actual request Paul makes, which is clear and sharp despite what people have often said, and the supporting argument he offers, which is likewise clear and sharp, and which opens up a window on the heart of Paul’s beliefs and aims, which are the central focus of this book.

[\(ii\) The Runaway Slave?](#)

Recent scholarship has gone round and round in circles in debating the question of what Paul was actually asking for. The letter to Philemon is sometimes hailed as a crystal-clear example of the ‘real Paul’, an out-and-out abolitionist, demanding of his convert Philemon that he give another convert, Onesimus, his freedom.⁹ But the implicit narrative of this letter is more complex than that. And implicit narratives – the ‘referential sequence’ which explains what was going on, as opposed to the ‘poetic sequence’ which consists of the flow of thought in the text itself – are vital if we are to understand any text, whether a poem of Catullus, a treatise of Plato, a novel of Jane Austen, or a letter of Paul.¹⁰ Once we come to grips with that, the real heart of the letter stands out – not simply the request itself, but also the way Paul makes it.¹¹

But this is already to run somewhat ahead of the argument. Was Onesimus even a runaway slave? That, to be sure, has been the majority opinion, at least since Chrysostom. According to this view, Philemon was a householder (probably in Colosse) who had been converted under Paul’s ministry, probably in Ephesus. Paul had not been to Colosse himself, but many from that town would find their way the eighty miles or so down the Lycus valley to Ephesus, the great metropolis and seaport of the region. Onesimus, one of Philemon’s slaves, had run away, as slaves often did, perhaps helping himself to some money, again as runaway slaves often did. In this hypothetical narrative, Onesimus made his way to Paul in prison, presumably deliberately and seeking help. This is not as problematic as some have suggested, and is considerably more likely than his happening to run into Paul by some extraordinary coincidence, let alone his finding himself imprisoned by chance alongside him. Granted, he was taking a big risk by going to Paul. Remember Pliny. But he had already risked everything in running away in the first place.

Before looking at the other options, I should stress that I side with the majority of contemporary scholars, who think that the place where Paul was imprisoned at that stage was Ephesus. The fact that such an Ephesian imprisonment is mentioned neither in Acts nor by Paul himself in his letters is no bar to this very likely hypothesis. The matter is clinched, for me, by

Paul's proposal of a visit to Philemon in the near future (verse 22). From Ephesus, that would be easy and natural. When he was in prison in Caesarea he was planning to go to Rome, and a visit to Colosse would not be part of such a journey. When under house arrest in Rome, he was still hoping to go on to Spain.¹² To place this letter in Ephesus, in the middle of Paul's ministry (before his final visit to Corinth), is easy and natural, and would date it in the early or middle 50s.¹³

This already undercuts some of the objections to the 'runaway slave' hypothesis. We do not have to imagine Onesimus undertaking the long and complicated journey to Rome and then, by a wonderful coincidence, meeting up with the apostle through whom his master had been converted. People went to and fro up and down the Lycus valley all the time. Philemon might have had a town house in Ephesus. Onesimus might have grown up in Ephesus in the first place. There was no such thing as private life in the ancient world, except for the very rich, and then only with deaf-mute slaves. There is nothing improbable about Onesimus knowing, or discovering, where he would find Paul.

But had he run away? The historical options have frequently been rehearsed. Some have suggested that Philemon had sent him on an errand to Paul, and that Paul was merely asking to be allowed to keep him as a fellow-worker.¹⁴ One writer has even suggested that Philemon and Onesimus were not master and slave, but actual brothers who had fallen out; but this, too, has not found support.¹⁵ A more likely alternative, favoured now by several, is that Onesimus had come to Paul, much as the unnamed freedman had come to Pliny, not because he had run away but because some trouble had occurred between him and his master, and he needed to appeal for help to someone he knew to be a friend of his master.¹⁶ This can be combined with the theory that he had been given to absconding in the past, and on this occasion found his way to Paul.¹⁷ This would make him a 'wandering slave', not exactly a runaway as such.

There are problems with this view. It is sometimes suggested that had Onesimus been a runaway, in serious trouble, we should have expected Paul to explain that he was now sorry. But that, on the analogy of Pliny's letter, is

precisely what we should expect, not in a letter about a runaway slave (an apology, however sincere, might well not be enough to allay a master's proper, and socially demanded, legal redress), but in a letter from an *amicus domini* intervening in a dispute. The absence of apology counts, not in favour of the *amicus domini* theory, but against. And – more importantly – for Paul to convey a profound apology from Onesimus *would merely serve to reinscribe the existing relationships*, as Pliny's letter did with Sabinianus; and Paul is attempting something radically different.¹⁸ That is why, when Paul does refer in verse 18 to Onesimus's wronging Philemon, or owing him something – a point Paul would hardly have raised had there been no such question – he does so having already set up the categories within which this potential time-bomb can be defused.

That is why, finally, he does not refer to Onesimus as a 'fugitive'. That is not the category in which he wants Philemon to see his former slave, even for a moment. No: he is *Paul's beloved son* and therefore *Philemon's beloved brother*. Those who have read this letter without seeing the profound, and profoundly revolutionary, theology it contains should ponder the social and cultural earthquake which Paul is attempting to precipitate – or rather, which he believes has already been precipitated by God's action in the Messiah. As he explains in the second letter to Corinth, written most likely a matter of weeks or months after this one, his own self-definition is focused on the claim that the one God, who 'was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah', has 'entrusted him with the message of reconciliation'.¹⁹ This letter brings that vocation itself into sharp and personal focus.

Nor will it do to suggest that verse 15 ('Maybe this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you could have him back for ever') might be a hint that Onesimus had come to Paul with the intention of sorting matters out and then returning to Philemon in perpetuity.²⁰ If Paul had been writing to say, of a slave who had come to ask him to intervene in a domestic dispute, that 'actually, he came to me in order to be able to go back to you for ever', he would certainly not have said 'maybe' (*tacha*). That would at once cast doubt on the sincerity of Onesimus's position (see below). That one word points securely to the more traditional understanding of the verse,

that it expresses Paul's hope that a providential purpose might be at work in the whole scenario. In any case, I shall shortly suggest a very different interpretation of the phrase 'for ever', which points to a quite different underlying narrative in Paul's mind at least.

One must in any case question whether the niceties of a legal distinction articulated by a jurist sitting in his study in Rome, as reported by a legal theorist half a millennium later, is sufficient to mark a distinction that would actually obtain in the back streets of Ephesus or the lanes of the Lycus valley. The only legal distinction between a runaway slave and one who had gone without permission to seek out an *amicus domini* was the private 'intention' of the slave in question.²¹ The outward circumstances would look the same either way. No doubt many actual runaways, if caught, might say, 'I was only going for help.' Who could tell? Who would believe them? As John Barclay remarks, 'it is a moot point how much Roman law has to do with the realities of social prejudice.'²² There is a sense, of course, in which Paul was indeed an *amicus domini* in this particular case, but the letter does not reflect that perspective – which, as I said, would leave the social categories firmly intact. Paul is after a bigger and more costly prize altogether.

[\(iii\) The Request](#)

So what is Paul asking for? Onesimus has come to him, has been converted, and is now being sent back to his master. What is Paul's request?

Despite those who have suggested that Paul is unclear at the crucial point, I see his central request as straightforward and unambiguous. It comes at verse 17, which should be seen as effectively the start of a new paragraph: 'So, anyway, if you reckon me a partner in your work, receive him as though he was me.'²³ The main thing Paul is asking for is that, when Onesimus returns home, Philemon will regard him as if he were Paul himself: 'if you regard me as a *koinōnos*, accept him (*proslabou auton*) as if he were me.' That will follow directly from Philemon's being prepared to see him as a brother in Christ (verse 16). It will have the effect, at the very least, in his

not condemning Onesimus to any of the punishments which might have been expected – up to and including death by crucifixion. But Paul wants more than that. He wants Philemon to see him as a beloved brother.

The two key words here are *koinōnos* and *proslabou* (‘receive’ or ‘welcome’). The whole letter is both an expression of, and an exhortation to, the central Pauline theme of *koinōnia*, ‘fellowship’ or ‘partnership’ – a word with multiple resonances both in the commercial world, where it might describe a business partnership, and in many personal or familial settings (and of course in Paul’s world many businesses would be family concerns). It also resonated powerfully with what we might call a ‘religious’ sense, where a worshipper shares *koinōnia* with the divinity. Paul can use it in all of these senses, drawing together the deeply personal and theological experience of ‘sharing’ the very life of the Messiah with the deeply practical project of ‘sharing’ resources, especially money, among the Messiah’s people.²⁴ Here in Philemon there is an umbilical link between the central opening statement of Paul’s prayer in verse 6, where the active force is the *koinōnia tēs pisteōs sou*, ‘the partnership of your faith’, and verse 17, where Paul appeals to the fact that Philemon regards him as a *koinōnos*, ‘partner’. This is the central thrust of the letter – as it is, indeed, of much of Paul’s understanding of what it meant to be the Messiah’s people. Here, as elsewhere, the short letter to Philemon provides an accurate signpost forwards to the wider Pauline concerns we shall explore throughout the present book.

Less well known than *koinōnia*, but no less significant, is the way Paul expresses the obligation which he understands to obtain between two or more members of the messianic family. They must ‘welcome’ (*proslambanesthai*) one another. This comes to particular expression in the lengthy section on mutual welcome in Romans 14 and 15: ‘Welcome someone who is weak in the faith, but not in order to have disputes ... because God has welcomed them’; ‘Welcome one another, therefore, as the Messiah has welcomed you, to God’s glory.’²⁵ Whatever precise reconstruction we offer of the situation Paul envisages in Rome, the point is clear: at the heart of his work is the yearning and striving for *messianic unity*

across traditional boundaries, whether it be the unity of Jew and Gentile in the Messiah (the main point of Galatians), the unity of the church under the lordship of the Messiah in a pagan and imperial context (part of the main point of Philippians, coming to memorable expression in 2.1–4), or, as here in Philemon, the unity of master and slave, expressing again what it means to be *en Christō*. ‘So, if you reckon me a *koinōnos*, a partner, *proslabou auton*, welcome him as you would welcome me.’²⁶ Or, as he puts it in Galatians, ‘There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no “male and female”; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus.’²⁷ That unity, as we shall argue in Part II of the present book, was for Paul the central symbol of the Christian worldview. And, as we shall argue in Part III, it could only be attained, and indeed maintained, through freshly worked theology, rooted in Jesus the Messiah and activated through the spirit.

Verse 17 thus constitutes not only Paul’s central request but the point at which we can see clearly how Philemon maps on to Paul’s wider (and perhaps better known) themes. That wider reference in turn explains, even if it does not excuse to all readers today, the fact that for Paul the *reconciliation* and *mutual welcome* of all those ‘in the Messiah’ took precedence over everything else. Including requesting Philemon to set Onesimus free. I take seriously the point advanced by John Barclay, that there were good reasons why Paul could not and would not simply say ‘Please set him free’ – however frustrating that may be to us post-Enlightenment moralists, for whom the issue of slavery has become something of a moral touchstone, not least due to the great abolitionist movements of the nineteenth century and the link of the slavery then abolished with colonialism and racism, neither of which had anything to do with slavery in Paul’s world.²⁸ For Paul, much as he valued freedom, the mutual reconciliation of those who belonged to the Messiah mattered more than anything else. For Philemon to have responded angrily to Paul’s letter by giving Onesimus his freedom but declaring that he never wanted to set eyes on him again would have meant defeat for Paul. Reconciliation was what mattered. That is why Paul wrote this letter.

The apostle was, after all, quite capable of being very, very clear and direct when he wanted to be. When he appears unclear to us it may well be both that he is saying something different from what we expect him to say, and that he is aware of sensitivities which generate a roundabout style in order to conform, not only to local rhetorical expectations, but also to the actual situation.²⁹ Most of those who either congratulate Paul on asking for Onesimus's freedom, or castigate him for not doing so, assume, shall we say, a black-and-white world in which the only thing a first-century moralist ought to say about slaves was 'Free them all!' The actual situation was somewhat different. As many have pointed out, freed slaves were by no means always better off. Those who deal daily with pastoral and political realities often find it irritating to be told by academics what they should do, or what pastors like Paul should obviously have done. As we shall now see, I do indeed think he is hinting at Onesimus's manumission – almost in a throwaway line at the end of verse 21 – but I do not think that that is the letter's main thrust.

Focusing attention on verse 17 as the clear, and thoroughly Pauline, central appeal of the letter allows the two other implicit requests to have their proper, if subordinate, place. It is at these, I think, that Paul is hinting in the cryptic language of verses 14 ('I didn't want to do anything without your permission'), 20 ('give me some benefit, refresh my heart') and particularly 21 ('I know you'll do more than I say'). What are these two concerns?

It is held by some to be quite obvious that Paul is requesting that Onesimus be sent back to him again, so that he can work for Paul in the ministry of the 'royal announcement' (verse 13).³⁰ That is clearly a possibility, though sometimes obscured by the second suggestion: Paul is asking, or at least hinting, that Philemon should give Onesimus his freedom. The two can of course be combined: verses 12 and 14 suggest that Onesimus be sent back, and verse 21 that he be sent back as a free man.

I think the majority are more or less correct: Paul did indeed want Onesimus back as a co-worker, and was hinting at emancipation.³¹ But I am inclined to think, in addition, that something else is going on which, like the

emphasis on mutual reconciliation, points beyond the small horizons of this letter to the larger worldview upon which Paul draws elsewhere.

The cryptic reference to Philemon ‘having him back for ever’ (verse 15) may be a deliberate allusion to the pentateuchal law which allowed a slave to decide to forego the manumission which was legally available in the seventh year, and to stay ‘for ever’ with the family.³² We remind ourselves that Israel’s scriptures were as familiar to Paul, and as readily available in his well-stocked mind, as Beethoven’s sonatas to a concert pianist. Paul, faced with a dilemma concerning a slave and a master, would naturally reach, not for our post-Enlightenment narratives of liberation, but for the material on this very subject within his own scriptures, which after all told their own large-scale narrative of the freeing of an entire nation of slaves. That was the way his mind most naturally worked – especially because he believed, and taught repeatedly, that the ultimate ‘exodus’ had now occurred in and through Jesus.³³

No doubt some will insist that to detect an allusion like this is out of order; that only those biblical echoes may be allowed which we can be sure Paul’s intended audience would certainly have recognized.³⁴ But that is (to be frank) not how most writers write, and we may be confident that it is not how Paul thought. Take that route, and there will be nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon. Take, though, the risk of assuming that the texts’ footfalls echo in the memory of one familiar with them from boyhood; assume that there are indeed times when one can find the mind’s construction in the phrase; and the reward may be not only an insight into the way Paul’s mind worked but also a sudden clarity about what he was really saying in this particular instance.³⁵ This, in verses 15 and 16, is the platform upon which Paul can then make his central appeal in verse 17. Before he gets to questions of sending Onesimus back, let alone giving him his freedom, he places the whole situation within the closest available scriptural background.

But does that not subvert the larger appeal before it is even made? Might it not (supposing Philemon picked up the biblical reference, or had it explained to him) simply reinforce the social situation, that Onesimus is

Philemon's slave and evermore shall be so? It might indeed, if that was where Paul left the matter. But he does not. He proceeds step by step. To see how this works we have to envisage the actual situation of Onesimus going back to Colosse (in the company of Tychicus, assuming this to be the same journey as that described in Colossians 4.7–9). To envisage this moment is to highlight the subtlety of what Paul is doing.

He is not sending Onesimus back with a glint in his eye and a swagger in his step which says cheerfully, or even cheekily, to Philemon, 'Paul is telling you to set me free.' Paul is sending him back into a dangerous and difficult situation, in which he will express a proper sorrow for anything he had done wrong, and a basic request: please allow me back without punishment, and I will serve you 'for ever'. Echoes of the law in Exodus 21.2–6 and Deuteronomy 15.12–18 indicate that the first thing to aim at is a willing and happy reconciliation. Other echoes may come to our minds, too: 'treat me as one of your hired servants.' Paul would be hoping that Onesimus would act, from his heart, the part of the penitent prodigal, and that Philemon would play the part of the forgiving father.³⁶

Paul would know that Philemon's decision would be quasi-judicial. This is already implied by the verb he uses in verse 12 (*anapempō*), which does not simply mean 'send back' but 'send "up" for trial'.³⁷ Paul is probably, though, hinting at the request which seems to be implied in verses 13 and 14, that once reconciliation has happened (the central point, as I have said), Onesimus might be sent back again to the apostle in order to resume working alongside him.

If that is so, then the further hint in verse 21 ('perhaps you'll do more than I say') would indeed refer most naturally to manumission. We note again that the larger narrative context of both Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15 is precisely that of God's freeing of his slave-people at the exodus, and that Deuteronomy refers back to that as the motivating principle: 'Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and YHWH your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today' (15.15). Paradoxically, then, the very passages which Paul is echoing to support his first and main request, that Onesimus be accepted back as a beloved family member (albeit

still a slave), point beyond, to what I suggest is Paul's third, and deeply cryptic, request: 'perhaps you will do more than I say ...'

The threefold request to Philemon then looks like this. First, accept Onesimus back, in principle, as a humble but reconciled brother in Christ (though still as a slave); do not punish him. Second, please send him back to me as an assistant. Third, perhaps, in doing so, you will also give him his freedom. The double-effect biblical allusion says, on the one hand, 'perhaps you will have him back for ever' (the first of the requests), but, on the other, 'perhaps you will do more than I say' (the third). If I am right, Paul is teaching Philemon, and indeed Onesimus (as according to Richard Hays Paul had to teach the Corinthian church), to *think within the biblical narrative*, to see themselves as actors within the ongoing scriptural drama: to allow their erstwhile pagan thought-forms to be transformed by a biblically based renewal of the mind.³⁸ Here we see one of the most fundamental differences between Pliny and Paul. Pliny's appeal, we remind ourselves, reinscribed the social dynamics already present. Paul's subverted them.

These further proposals, about the implied second and third requests, cannot be set in stone. Paul's studied reticence (reminding us of his unwillingness to use the word 'money' throughout 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, the two chapters about the 'collection') may not allow for such a thing. But it seems a plausible reading of the letter. And, if a young man called Onesimus were indeed to return to Ephesus to work alongside Paul in the mid-50s, it is not entirely impossible that he is the same person referred to sixty years later by Ignatius as the bishop of Ephesus, though since the name was common this, too, must remain quite uncertain.³⁹

(iv) The Central Argument

These discussions about the actual situation and the request Paul made have tended, as I said, to make exegetes overlook the point which is just as important in its way as the question of *what* Paul was asking for, namely the argument he uses to back up this central appeal. In order to make his triple (and increasingly cautious) request, Paul adopts a strategy so striking in its

social and cultural implications, so powerful in its rhetorical appeal, and so obviously theologically grounded, that despite the chorus of dismissive voices ancient and modern the letter can hold up its head, like Reepicheep the Mouse beside the talking bears and elephants, alongside its senior but not theologically superior cousins, Romans, Galatians and the rest.⁴⁰

Paul's strategy is the outflowing of the theme which he himself highlights in the dense but ultimately (I believe) clear statement of the letter's appeal in verse 6. As was his custom, the opening greeting and prayer contain the seed from which the letter will grow to full flower. The heart of it all, as already suggested, is *koinōnia*, a 'partnership' or 'fellowship' which is not static, but which enables the community of those who believe to grow together into a unity across the traditional divisions of the human race.⁴¹ This is a unity which is nothing other than the unity of Jesus Christ and his people – the unity, indeed, which Jesus Christ has won for his people precisely by his identifying with them and so, through his death and resurrection, effecting reconciliation between them and God. This is what Paul prays for in verse 6, and this is what he appeals for, dramatically and christologically, in verses 17–20, which form the letter's climax.

He works towards the prayer of verse 6 by thanking God (verses 4 and 5) for Philemon's 'love and faith towards the lord Jesus and to all his holy people'. This, it is normally assumed, is a careful chiasmic (ABBA) structure, 'love ... to the people' enclosing 'faith towards the lord Jesus'. The stylistic device is not merely decorative. Faith towards Jesus is the energizing heart of the community's life of love. This then leads directly into verse 6, the main subject of the prayer Paul has mentioned in verse 4. He is praying, he says,

that the partnership which goes with your faith may have its powerful effect, in realizing every good thing that is [at work] in us [to lead us] into the Messiah.⁴²

This, unfortunately, is so dense, and demands a familiarity with some less well known Pauline themes, that many, including translators as well as commentators, have pulled it out of shape in various directions. Once Paul's central point is grasped, the verse is not in fact unclear or imprecise, as is

often suggested.⁴³ For the moment we may simply summarize the key points.

First, ‘the partnership which goes with your faith’: literally, ‘the partnership of your faith’. This *koinōnia* denotes the fellowship or partnership which is generated and defined by the faith which Philemon holds (that is the point of the singular ‘your’) in company with all other Christians. And this *koinōnia* is not a static fact. It is an energizing principle. It is meant to produce the full reality of which it speaks.

Paul’s prayer is that it will become powerfully active ... *into Messiah (eis Christon)*. We should not flatten this out, as most translations do, into something about ‘our relationship to Christ’. As we shall see later, when Paul uses the word *Messiah* he evokes a world in which the Messiah, the king of Israel, sums up his people and their story in himself. Two thousand years of history, from the call of Abraham to the time of Jesus, are collected up like light in a prism and focused onto the royal representative in whom their meaning and purpose is fulfilled. ‘All God’s promises,’ wrote Paul in a letter penned shortly after this one, ‘find their Yes in him.’⁴⁴ Thus Paul can speak, here and in several other key passages (which are often misunderstood when this point is missed), of *Messiah* as a kind of collective noun: *Messiah-and-his-people*. The force of this, frequently, is that because of the Messiah, and particularly because of his death and resurrection and the ‘faith/faithfulness’ which that both enacted and evokes, people of all sorts (Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female) are brought into a single family. *Messiah-family*.⁴⁵

Paul’s prayer, then, is that the active *koinōnia* which goes with Philemon’s faith ‘may have its powerful effect’, will be energetic, in bringing about *Christos*, *Messiah-family*, in Colosse. In particular, of course, Paul wants to highlight the ‘slave-and-free’ element of this new single people. But his vision at this point is broader: this is what he would pray, in principle, for many churches and many situations.

The closest parallel to this remarkable use (which was for Paul, we suggest, neither vague nor generalized but very precise) is found in Ephesians 4. There, in a wide-ranging appeal for unity, he declares that the

wide variety of gifts given to different church members are designed to build up the Messiah's body, so that all may reach 'the stature of the mature Man', measured by the Messiah's fullness.⁴⁶ Thus, he says, 'we must speak the truth in love, and so grow up in everything into him – that is, into the Messiah, who is the head.'⁴⁷ Here the key phrase is *eis auton*, 'into him', with the 'him' further defined as 'the Messiah'. The whole train of thought reads, in fact, like a greatly enlarged and reapplied version of what Paul has written briefly and densely in Philemon verse 6. The Messiah, for Paul, is the one 'into whom' people are baptized, so that the whole company of his people may be spoken of, summed up in him, with the one word *Christos*.⁴⁸ Where there is division among the Messiah's people, their task, and Paul's longing, is that they may grow up 'into him' in terms of a powerful, loving unity. That is his prayer for Philemon and Onesimus.

The way this 'fellowship of faith' will have such a powerful effect, with this eventual goal, is 'through the knowledge of every good thing which is in us', or perhaps 'among us' (*en hēmin*). Perhaps the closest analogy to this way of putting it is Philippians 1.6, also in an opening greeting, thanksgiving and prayer to do with *koinōnia*: 'the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion unto the day of Messiah, Jesus.'⁴⁹ The 'good work' in Philippians, and the 'every good thing' in Philemon, are generalized references to the transformation of character brought about by the spirit. This always has a forward look, ultimately to the day of the Messiah, but also to intermediate goals, anticipations of that ultimate future. Paul does not want his communities to sit back, fold their arms, and wait for the final day, but to work in the present time at the *koinōnia* which will be complete in the future.⁵⁰ God has already accomplished a work of transforming grace, by his spirit, in the hearts and lives of his people. As Philemon comes to full practical knowledge of this,⁵¹ so the *koinōnia* will work powerfully towards the full unity in Christ which is the goal of that character-transforming work.

All this points us back to verse 17, which as we saw forms the rhetorical climax and main appeal of the letter. This is where verse 6 produces its own full effect. Here is the main request, neither vague nor unclear: 'accept him as you would accept me.' What we must now examine is how Paul arrives at

this climax and then supports it. Along with the echo of Exodus and Deuteronomy, this is what gives the letter the flavour of a different world, intersecting to be sure with that of Pliny but embodying a completely different worldview, and thus encapsulating Paul's own foundational sense both of the gospel and of his own vocation.

Paul sets up the climax by expressing in the strongest and most evocative terms his own personal unity both with Philemon and with Onesimus.⁵² Philemon is his beloved fellow worker (verse 1), the one whose faith, love and refreshing ministry have cheered Paul in prison (verses 5–7). Onesimus, meanwhile, is Paul's child, begotten in prison (verse 10), Paul's own very heart (verse 12), and a beloved brother (verse 16). Very well: the two of them are joined, *in Paul*, and this is how the *koinōnia tēs pisteōs*, the 'partnership of faith', is to be powerfully effective:⁵³

So: if you count me as your partner, receive him as you would me. If he has wronged you or owes you anything, put it down on my account. I, Paul, will repay: I'm writing this with my own hand! (Not to mention the fact that you owe me your own very self ...) Yes, brother, let me have some benefit from you in the lord! Refresh my heart in the Messiah.

When Philemon meets Onesimus, he will be meeting Paul himself, and must receive the slave as if he were the apostle in person.⁵⁴ That is already striking enough, but what follows is even more so: any wrongs Onesimus has done, and anything he owes Philemon (I think we can take it that there were such wrongs, and such debts, otherwise Paul would hardly have introduced them here), are to be charged to Paul's account. The word for 'charged' is *elloga*, 'reckoned', the same root from which Paul's more famous account of 'reckoning righteous' and 'reckoning yourself dead to sin' is derived.⁵⁵ We might muse that since one possible punishment for a badly behaved or runaway slave was crucifixion itself, Paul may even be alluding to that: if he deserves the cross, then I'll take it for him! Then, just in case Philemon might think to himself, 'Well, in that case, Paul, you owe me rather a lot', Paul adds the vital parenthesis, with the gentle rhetorical line 'of course I'm not going to mention it, but': 'By the way, Philemon, remember you already owe me your own very self.'⁵⁶ Paul, in other words,

has already invested in Philemon, and now wants a return on that investment: ‘let *me* have some benefit from *you*.’

Here is the heart of the letter’s argument, clear as a bell despite the deliberate unclarity of Paul’s further hints. This is what it means for *koinōnia* to become ‘active and energetic to bring us “into Messiah”’. Here, too, is the most outstanding contrast between Pliny’s worldview and Paul’s. Paul is not only urging and requesting but actually *embodying* what he elsewhere calls ‘the ministry of reconciliation’. God was in the Messiah, reconciling the world to himself, he says in 2 Corinthians 5.19; now, we dare to say, God was in Paul reconciling Onesimus and Philemon. Paul doubtless learned a great deal from the rhetorical schools and practices of his day. But the heart of his technique of persuasion was a theological belief learned from the Messiah himself, whose identification with his people meant that their sins were ‘reckoned’ to him, and his death and resurrection ‘reckoned’ to them.⁵⁷ Paul does not say, as Pliny does, ‘He seems genuinely penitent, so you’d better let him off.’ He says, ‘Put it down on my account.’

Here we have, in fact, the concrete outworking of Paul’s theology of the cross – reflecting the same theme in 2 Corinthians 5 itself, written probably not long after Philemon. There are other close parallels, too, not least Galatians 2.15–21, to which we shall return many times in the present book. But it is instructive to read through the final paragraph of 2 Corinthians 5 and imagine Paul writing it after having been released from prison in Ephesus and, we must suppose, paying his visit to Philemon in Colosse. ‘From this moment on,’ he writes in 5.16, ‘we don’t regard anybody from a merely human point of view’; that is what Pliny and Sabinianus were doing, but Paul has an entirely different perspective. ‘If anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation!’ (5.17). Yes, indeed: Philemon himself is part of that new creation, and so is Onesimus, so the question of their social status is radically outflanked. How has this happened? Through the Messiah’s cross: ‘God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah,’ (5.19) ‘not counting their trespasses against them’ (just as Paul was asking Philemon not to count Onesimus’s trespasses against him), ‘and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation.’ There we have it. That is the ministry Paul has

been exercising in the short letter. And, if I am right in my reading of 5.21, we have Paul's own statement, rich and theologically dense once more, of what it was that he was riskily attempting in writing using the argument he did. 'God made [the Messiah] to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might embody God's faithfulness to the covenant.' Paul's apostolic ministry reaches one of its high points as he stands there with arms outstretched, embracing Philemon with one and Onesimus with the other. That is what the ministry of reconciliation looks like. The cross itself, though not mentioned explicitly in Philemon, emerges here, embodied in the ministry of the imprisoned apostle, as the theological substructure of the pastoral appeal. This is what gives energy and colour to the personal aims and rhetorical strategy of the entire short composition.⁵⁸

This is what most clearly marks Paul's letter to Philemon as breathing a different air from Pliny's to Sabinianus. Paul's Jewish worldview, radically reshaped around the crucified Messiah, challenges the world of ancient paganism with the concrete signs of the faithfulness of God. That is a summary both of the letter to Philemon and of the entire present book.⁵⁹

Paul's rhetorical strategy includes an often-remarked set of puns, which make their subsidiary point. The apostle was adept at rhetorical tricks, but he never, I think, indulged in them for their own sake, using them rather to embody and highlight the larger point he was making. The name 'Onesimus' means, basically, 'useful'. (We note already a difference between Paul and Pliny: Paul names the subject of his letter, but Pliny never does.) Many slaves in the ancient world were given names that reflected their assumed functions or abilities. Philemon has clearly regarded this particular slave as badly named: he's supposed to be 'useful', but is actually 'useless'.⁶⁰ But the words Paul chooses in order to say 'once he was useless to you, but now he is useful to you and to me' are *achrēston* and *euchrēston*, alternative ways of saying the same thing, but also strongly echoing *Christos* (normally, it is assumed, pronounced with a long 'i').⁶¹ Onesimus was useless but now is useful; he was formerly non-Christian but now is fully Christian. This is not wordplay for the sake of it. This is rhetoric in service of the underlying theology: Onesimus is in Christ, Christ by his spirit is in Onesimus, and that

is foundational to the appeal Paul makes to Philemon.⁶² There is a further echo of Onesimus's name in verse 20: Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you as well, *egō sou onaimēn*: if he is now in fact 'useful', perhaps you had better be 'useful' to me as well.

All this brings us to the heart of the 'world of difference' we have observed between Pliny's letter and Paul's: the presence of a fourth party in the drama. Paul, Philemon and Onesimus are not the only players on the stage. The fourth is the figure designated as *Christos*, 'Messiah' or 'King'. The authority which Paul has is precisely because he is 'a prisoner of the Messiah, Jesus' (verses 1, 9), giving him 'boldness in the Messiah' (verse 8), and it is the Messiah's people, bringing together Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, that are designated corporately as *Christos*, as I shall argue more fully later on. The only way to explain and understand the rhetorical strategy Paul deploys is by thinking through what we find about this Messiah elsewhere in Paul, particularly his death and the meaning which Paul sees within it. The major difference between Pliny and Paul is that the heart of Paul's argument is both a gently implicit Jewish story, the story of the exodus which we know from elsewhere to have been central in his thinking, and, still more importantly, the story of the Messiah who came to reconcile humans and God, Jews and gentiles and now slaves and masters.⁶³ Paul's worldview, and his theology, have been rethought around this centre. Hence the world of difference.

To understand why *Christos* still means 'Messiah' and, equally important, what 'Messiah' itself meant for Paul, we will have to look further afield in due course. But for the moment we note an interesting theme emerging, like a cloud no bigger than a man's hand: at the heart of this difference between Pliny and Paul is a difference of *master*. Two roads have here diverged. Something has happened, at the heart of Rome's empire, that has made all the difference, not only to the social world but also to the world of power within which that society lived.⁶⁴ Paul the Jew, whose controlling story had always included the narrative whereby the living God overthrew the tyrant of Egypt and freed his slave-people, had come to believe that this great story had reached its God-ordained climax in the arrival of Israel's Messiah, who

according to multiple ancient traditions would be the true Lord of the entire world. In being faithful to his people, God had been faithful to the whole creation. Paul lived under the authority of this ‘lord’, this ‘Messiah’, and devoted himself to making that authority effective in the lives of the communities that had come to share that same faith. Because, however, this ‘Messiah’ and ‘lord’ was the crucified and risen Jesus, this ‘authority’ itself had been radically redefined. Because of Jesus, Paul understood everything differently – God, the world, God’s people, God’s future, and in and through it all God’s faithfulness. It is that world of difference, intersecting with the world of Pliny but radically transforming it, that the present book now aims to explore.

[2. Philemon and the Study of Paul](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

This brief study of the small masterpiece we call the letter to Philemon has introduced us, in an actual example, to most of the topics we face as we move towards a full-dress exposition of Paul, his worldview and his theology. One of the advantages of having a particular example in mind, and a small one at that, is that the many abstract issues we now have to lay out can be envisaged in more concrete terms by reference back to the discussion just concluded.

To begin with, though, the questions raised by the letter itself. If, as we imagined briefly at the start, Philemon was the only document we had from early Christianity, we would still know that something very different was happening, different from the way the rest of the world behaved. What, we might ask, had brought this about? Who is this *Christos* who seems so important to the writer, and whose presence works its way into the substance and even the rhetorical trickery of the letter? Is this letter just a random act of uncharacteristic kindness, or does it express and embody something deeper, a larger and more all-embracing view of persons, of the world, of the divine? What sort of a worldview is it bringing to expression? How can we

give a full and balanced account of that worldview? How might we locate it historically? How does it relate to the three standard topics in ancient philosophical reflection: physics ('what there is'), ethics ('how to behave') and epistemology ('how we know things')?⁶⁵ How does it relate to the main topics within first-century Jewish life, the orientation of life around the Temple in Jerusalem and the study and practice of Torah? Can the present scene be expressed in terms of these without remainder, or is there something more going on?

These are the sort of questions, in fact, which would be raised, *mutatis mutandis*, by a preliminary reading of any of Paul's letters. To address them, we need to be clear on the underlying disciplines and frameworks, as well as the particular debates into which the present study seeks to make its contribution. We need, that is, to say something about history and theology, and their relation to the very different tasks of exegesis on the one hand and 'application' or 'relevance' on the other. We need to say something about worldviews and mindsets. And we need to bring those two – history/theology and worldview/mindset – into appropriate relationship with one another, all within the context of a glance at the way the questions are currently being addressed.⁶⁶

I take these various topics in the order they will appear in the overall structure of the present book: first worldview/mindset (the 'mindset' being the individual's particular variation on the parent 'worldview' of the community to which he or she belongs), then theology, then history. This may seem counter-intuitive to those who are used to seeing 'history' as the kind of preliminary work, the bedrock for everything else, but all these elements are in any case involved in a continual hermeneutical spiral, and the particular argument I wish to advance in the book as a whole begins where a preliminary historical survey leaves off (our brief study of Philemon doing duty, synecdochically and representatively, for the larger picture) and moves forwards from there with the questions we have just raised.⁶⁷

So, then, to worldviews, building on the exposition in Part II of *The New Testament and the People of God*.

(ii) Philemon among the Worldviews

One of the great gains of the last few decades of scholarship has been the emergence, as a main topic, of what I continue to call ‘worldview’, though others label it and approach it differently. It doesn’t do at this point to be too fussy about labels, since they all function in any case heuristically, as signposts to a complex and yet vital phenomenon. I am not, for that reason, too worried about the danger of the word ‘worldview’ apparently privileging the sense of sight. Once we spell out what we mean, the ‘view’ element is reduced to a metaphor which, though not dead, is not dominant, and which can be useful without being intrusive. In any case, continuing with the label ‘worldview’ has the advantage of placing such discussions within a larger and longer chain of investigations.⁶⁸

The reason why it is important to study worldviews is that human life is complicated, confusingly multifaceted, and often puzzling – much like Paul’s letters, in fact. Study of Paul, as of the New Testament and much else besides, has for too long taken place in a (philosophically) idealist world, where thoughts and beliefs are passed to and fro as though between disembodied intelligences, leading of course to many perplexities, not least the then awkward transition from ‘theology’ to ‘ethics’, a transition with which Paul seems to have had no difficulty whatever but which for Reformational as well as Enlightenment-related reasons has given a good deal of grief to western interpreters. But once we move from the one-dimensional world of disembodied ideas to the three-dimensional world of ordinary, full human life, the initial confusion caused by all the new elements will be rewarded, one may hope, by clarity, nuance, perspective and even, perhaps, relevance.⁶⁹

A great deal of what humans do, say and think appears to spring from deep, buried sources. Psychoanalysis is one way of exploring what all great thinkers and writers have perceived at this point (give me Shakespeare rather than Freud any day); but the inward journey on the therapist’s couch needs to be matched by the outward journey into the wider world of real life, of love, sleep, shopping, sex, sickness, work, travel, politics, babies, death,

music and art, mountains and oceans, food and drink, birds and animals, sunlight and moonlight. It is better to recognize this, and to make continual attempts to map the resulting mystery, rather than to imagine that all of life can be understood in the flat, obvious surface events, statements and apparent meaning. The seemingly disparate elements of human life join up in ways which are easy to experience but hard to describe, but which are perceived to be very important; hence, for a start, the irreducibly and appropriately metaphorical nature of all human discourse, and the cultural importance of novels, plays and the cinema.⁷⁰ To abstract certain elements from this rich and perplexing world – the most basic historical questions, for instance, such as ‘What happened?’, or the most basic theological questions, such as ‘Is there a god?’ – and to treat these questions, and others like them, as the ‘real’ objects of study while screening out all the other things which in real life go with them is of temporary and at best limited value only. Part of the reason for welcoming the much wider socio-cultural investigations of the early Christian movement that have been taking place in recent decades is because they are helping to redress the balance, reminding us that history and theology, though important, do not stand alone.⁷¹

Worldview-models of various kinds have been tried out. What counts is not some abstract theoretical sophistication – that would be heavily ironic, here of all places! – but the heuristic effect, seen quite pragmatically and indeed always provisionally: as we map the landscape, are we able to explore and understand it more effectively? My own attempts are to be located within that broader social-science enterprise, whether we call it ‘social imaginary’, ‘habitus’, ‘worldview’ or whatever. There are, no doubt, distinctions to be drawn here, but the point is to get one’s hands dirty with the material, then stand back and see the effects, and then get stuck in once more. My concern is to seek for heuristic tools which clarify without simplifying, which give order without stereotypes, which shed light on what is normally buried. ‘Thick description’, in Clifford Geertz’s now famous phrase, is what is required: a laying out of as much of the picture as possible, so that one may make connections and avoid generalizations.⁷² This often has the effect of making earlier study of history and theology look somewhat

one-dimensional.⁷³ It cannot be, of course, that the refined and cloistered life of the modern western academy had fooled ‘academics’ into supposing that Paul and his companions lived a life of study, teaching and writing from which those other elements were excluded. It must have been just an accident that ‘theology’ came to be isolated from these other elements ... or perhaps not. In any case, it is time to relocate ‘theology’. Not to marginalize it, as though the study of everything else (especially sociology) is ‘real’ and theology is to be dismissed as irrelevant theory; as we shall see, that would be a disastrous mistake in relation to Paul in particular. In fact, one of the extraordinary achievements of Paul was to turn ‘theology’ into a different kind of thing from what it had been before in the world either of the Jews or of the pagans. *One of the central arguments of the present book is that this was the direct result and corollary of what had happened to Paul’s worldview. Paul effectively invented ‘Christian theology’ to meet a previously unknown need, to do a job which had not, until then, been necessary.*

If the reason for studying worldviews is the recognition that life is complex, multi-layered, and driven by often hidden energies, the method for such study must be appropriate to that quest. Those who engage in this work increasingly insist on the centrality of what may be called a ‘symbolic universe’, a world of artefacts (buildings, coins, clothes, ships) and habitual actions (what I have called ‘praxis’) in which people sense themselves at home and without which they would feel dangerously disorientated. Worldview-study has also insisted, with strong support from some recent work in linguistics and its sociological, cultural and political implications, on the importance of underlying narratives, the scripts by which people order their lives, the ‘plays’ in which they assume themselves to be actors.⁷⁴ Within this matrix of symbol, praxis and story, worldviews can be brought to expression using the elemental questions which Rudyard Kipling referred to as his ‘six honest serving men’ who ‘taught him all he knew’: What, Why, When, How, Where and Who.⁷⁵ The way I have asked those questions in this project up to now (and it will be as well to stick to this for the sake of continuity) is: Who are we? Where are we? What’s wrong? What’s the

solution (= ‘How?’), i.e. ‘How do we get out of this mess?’), and ‘What time is it?’ (= ‘When?’).⁷⁶

The one question that is missing from this list is ‘Why?’. When the question ‘Why?’ is asked, the answers can go back and back to more and more basic answers. When a child goes on asking, ‘Why?’ (in response, say, to a parental prohibition), the ultimate answer may sometimes be, ‘Because I say so.’ With grown-up questions, the ultimate answer may be something like, ‘That’s just the way things are.’ But it is at precisely that point that, in many different worldviews, a fuller answer may involve something we might call ‘theology’: some account or other of a god or gods, and particularly of their relation to the world and to humans. That is the point at which Paul found himself inventing and developing this new discipline we call, in retrospect, ‘Christian theology’. The radically new worldview in which he and his converts found themselves was bound to face the question ‘why’ at every corner, and in order to answer it, and to teach his churches to answer it for themselves, he had to speak of one particular God, and of the world, in a way nobody had done before.⁷⁷

This had an important result: the life of the *mind* was itself elevated by Paul from a secondary social activity, for those with the leisure to muse and ponder life’s tricky questions, to a primary socio-cultural activity for all the Messiah’s people. The interesting question of whether one thinks oneself into a new way of acting or acts oneself into a new way of thinking will, I suspect, continue to tease those who try to answer it (not least because it is of course reflexive: should you answer it by thinking or by acting?).⁷⁸ For Paul, there is no question that the praxis of the Messiah-following people created a context within which it made sense to think the revolutionary thoughts he urged his converts to think. But it is equally clear that he believed that the renewal of the mind through the work of the spirit would generate and sustain new patterns of behaviour.⁷⁹ In elevating (and simultaneously democratizing) the life of the mind, Paul was not buying into an idealist frame of reference, something which, as we have seen, his modern followers have found it all too easy to do. Worldview creates a context for theology, but theology is necessary to sustain the worldview.

Together they generate, and are either reinforced or modified by, ‘real life’ in all its rich variety.

The worldview-model I am using is the one I developed, with the help of Brian Walsh in particular, as an outgrowth from the work he had done with Richard Middleton. The new version was designed (a) to meet the objection that ‘worldview’ in some of its traditional uses had been too focused on ideas, and (b) to incorporate the many other foundational aspects of human life that Clifford Geertz and others had studied in terms of culture, symbols and so forth.⁸⁰

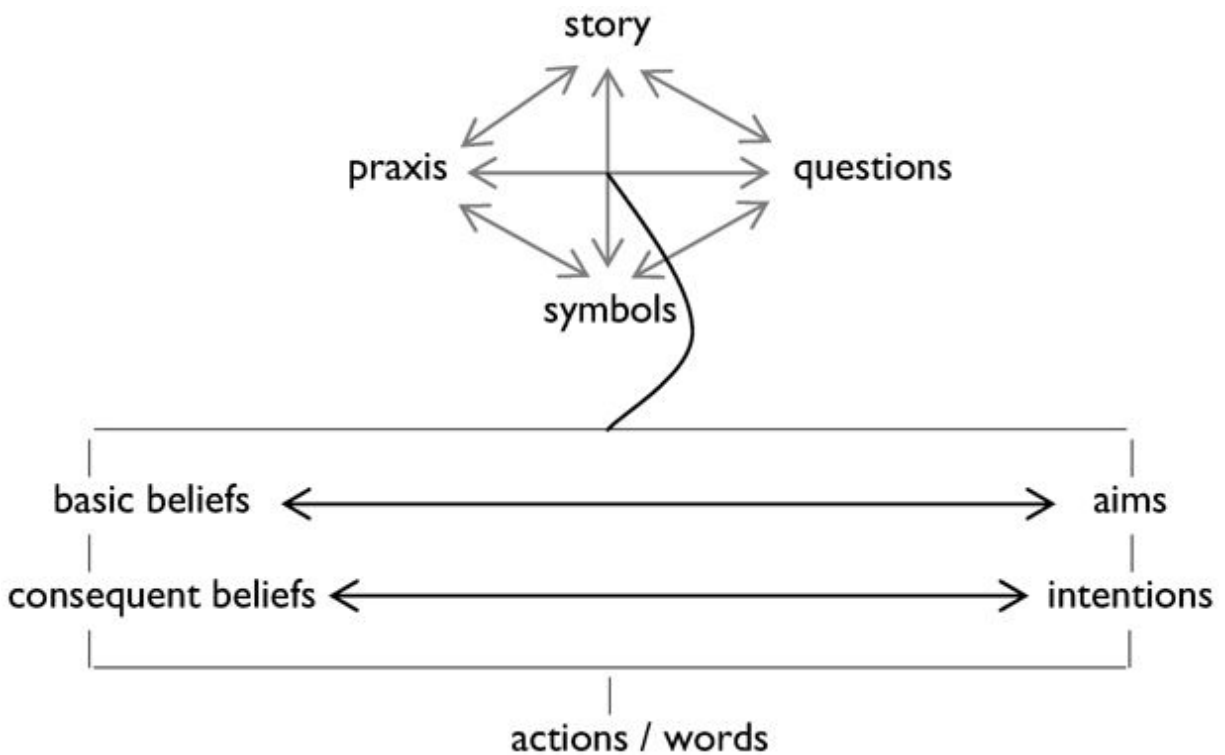
This, as I say, is my way of getting at those aspects of historiography which others have approached through what are called the ‘social sciences’. (I am reminded of the warning that if something has to call itself a ‘science’, it’s because it isn’t.) This has been an enormously important element in biblical studies over the last generation, and has not always made its proper way into exegesis and theology. Ultimately, ‘social science’ is simply a branch of history, a history which takes seriously the fact that its characters were fully human beings, and not simply brains on legs, or for that matter ambitions on legs. ‘Social science’ is a way, in particular, of avoiding anachronism; and that is part of what I am trying to do with worldview-analysis. To the extent that it supposes it can reach out beyond that, offering a reductive model which insinuates that ‘what was *really* going on’ was simply the play of ‘social’ forces, in relation to which the theology and spirituality that the characters seem to have thought they were dealing with were simply codes or even smokescreens, we must treat it like all reductionisms: it may sometimes have a point, but it cannot assume its shrunken world *a priori*.⁸¹

We may remind ourselves that a ‘worldview’ is not what you normally look *at*, but what you normally look *through*. (This is where the metaphor of ‘sight’ retains some use.) What we are now discussing is not the sort of thing humans habitually talk about or consciously engage in, but the sort of thing they habitually presuppose as they talk about, or consciously engage in, other subjects and activities. This is what some have called ‘prior commitments’: the basic set of beliefs which explain otherwise puzzling

patterns of action.⁸² Worldviews are like spectacles; normally you take them for granted, and you only think about them when they are broken, dirty or out of focus. What is more, though ‘view’ implies ‘looking and seeing’ (which is indeed both an important dimension and a useful and perfectly helpful metaphor), in this modification and development of the worldview-model one might equally well say ‘encounter’ or ‘experience’. This (to repeat) isn’t, then, purely about the arrangement of ideas in people’s minds. It is about the pattern and meaning of an entire life.

The model I have proposed has four main elements, each relating to each of the others. I have set this out in various places already but it may help to present it briefly again.⁸³ The hypothesis assumed by this model is that all human life, corporate and personal alike, includes each of these elements at (to repeat) a presuppositional level, all the more potent for being normally out of sight and out of the conscious, deliberating mind. Each element interacts in complex ways with the others, and the combination then generates and sustains what I have called ‘basic beliefs’ and ‘consequent beliefs’, on the one hand, and ‘aims’ and ‘intentions’ on the other. These are what give rise, in turn, to specific actions and words. The historian normally assumes that actions and words are not random, and the present model is a way of making more precise the normal historical task of attempting to discern beliefs and motivations, themselves rooted in worldview and mindset, underneath the deeds and words which come into the public domain.

Thus:



This is the model that will enable us to mount a ‘thick description’ of Paul in Part II of the present book, in the light of the analysis, in the remainder of Part I, of the three ‘worlds’ from which he came and in which he continued to move. What we are doing our best to track by this means is the nexus of worldview elements which will form an explanatory grid for why people did what they did in a world and culture in some ways like our own and in other ways so very different: in other words, to attempt to discern those things which people knew easily and without effort even if such ‘knowledge’ is remote for us and hard to reconstruct.⁸⁴ Part of the force of Part II will be to remark on the ways in which some elements in his original worldview appear to have been reinforced while others seem to have been abandoned. This was truly radical, which puzzled people in Paul’s own day and puzzles people still. Part of the question is whether this radicalism was random and merely quirky, or whether it corresponded, in Paul’s intention at least, to a thought-out transformation.

What happens, in a preliminary way, if we look at the letter to Philemon on the basis of this grid? The most important answer is that Paul’s overmastering aim in this letter is what elsewhere he calls *reconciliation*.

This is new. There is no sign that he is appealing to, or making use of, the symbols and praxis of his native Jewish world. Nor is he appealing to an implied world of social convention such as obtained in the world of Pliny. Nor is he drawing on any previously elaborated philosophical (in this case, ethical) schemes of thought. He has stepped out of the Jewish boat, but not onto any hidden stepping-stones offered from within the non-Jewish world. He appears to be walking on the water of a whole new worldview. Here, sharply focused within this tiny letter, we glimpse one of the large and central claims of this present book: that Paul's worldview was a radically redrawn version of the Jewish worldview he had formerly held, with some elements (the symbolic praxis) radically reduced in significance and others (the narratives) radically rethought. The new symbolic praxis which stood at the heart of his renewed worldview was *the unity of the Messiah's people*. In letter after letter he spells it out in more detail, but here in Philemon we see it up close: in this case, the unity of slave and free. Paul puts everything he has into making this unity a reality.

Why does he do this? Why would Philemon and Onesimus be motivated to go along with this costly and socially challenging plan? Answer: because of the implicit theology. Because of who God is. Because of the Messiah. Because of his death. Because of who 'we' are 'in him', or growing up together 'into him'. Because of the hope. *The study of Paul's worldview leads to a striking, dramatic conclusion: this worldview not only requires a particular 'theology' to sustain it, but also requires that 'theology' itself play a new role, integrated with the worldview itself.* Paradoxically in terms of the traditional division between social science and theology, it is by studying Paul within 'worldview' categories that we acquire a new way of seeing not only what was really important within his fully blown theology but also why theology as a whole became more important for him, and ever afterwards within the community of Jesus' followers, than it was (and still is to this day) within the worlds of either Jews or pagans. In studying Paul in a more holistic fashion, we discover the roots of the discipline known as 'Christian theology', and why – from Paul's perspective, at least! – it matters. This is the central subject of the present book.

The effect of this move is enormous. For far too long, in the western tradition at least, it has been assumed that the task and aim of ‘theology’ was to bring everything back in the end to a system of interlocking ideas and beliefs. The reaction against this from sociology, and materialistic viewpoints of various sorts, has been understandable, but it is important that neither side retreats from this engagement into prepared and polarized positions. Rather, what I am attempting to do in this book is to show how a historical and social analysis of Paul and his communities helps to explain why he needed to develop ‘theology’, and theology *of just this sort*, with its Messiah-and-spirit-driven emphasis on the one God and on the unity of the people of this one God. This theology cannot be reduced to a system of ideas, though it has plenty of ideas to offer and affirms that they do indeed interlock in a coherent, indeed elegant, whole – just as this worldview analysis cannot be reduced to the interplay of social and cultural systems, though there are plenty of such things in evidence in Paul’s letters, and they do make sense in their own terms. Nor is it the case that Paul *simply* developed ‘theology’ because the symbolic praxis which seemed appropriate demanded it (theology simply as the handmaid of sociology). The reason Paul’s symbolic praxis seemed appropriate in the first place was because of what he believed about Jesus.

In particular, this way of approaching the matter explains why the tendency since at least medieval times in the western church to organize Paul’s concepts around his vision of ‘salvation’ in particular has distorted the larger picture, has marginalized elements which were central and vital to him, and – because this ‘salvation’ has often been understood in a dualistic, even Platonic, fashion – has encouraged a mode of study in which Paul and his soteriology is seen in splendid isolation from his historical context. Paul experienced ‘salvation’ on the road to Damascus, people suppose; his whole system of thought grew from that point; so we do not need to consider how he relates to the worlds of Israel, Greece or Rome! How very convenient. And how very untrue. If we take that route, a supposed ‘Pauline soteriology’ will swell to a distended size and, like an oversized airline traveller, end up sitting not only in its own seat but in those on either side as well. In

particular, it will become dangerously self-referential: the way to be saved is by believing, but the main theological point Paul taught was soteriology, so the way to be saved is by believing in Pauline soteriology ('justification by faith'). For Paul, that would be a *reductio ad absurdum*. The way to be saved is not by believing that one is saved. In Paul's view, the way to be saved is by believing in Jesus as the crucified and risen lord.

This way of analyzing worldview and theology has all kinds of positive results in terms of current debates, which will emerge as we go along. Let me here just mention one. In Douglas Campbell's already famous recent book on Paul, the main target of his sustained polemic is what he calls 'justification theology', which he sees as an unwarranted western imposition on Paul, who was much more concerned with 'being in Christ'.⁸⁵ This extreme version of Albert Schweitzer's thesis (Campbell makes us all look moderate) is understandable but in my view unnecessary. Once we approach things the way I am proposing, 'justification' can settle down and take its proper place within the overall scheme, which is indeed far more complex and many-sided (but still coherently so) than most western theology has imagined. We shall come back to this presently.

So how does the worldview-model work out in practice? Continuing to use the letter to Philemon as our example, let us consider how the investigation might begin. Starting with the most obvious point, slavery was, for both Philemon and Paul, simply part of the worldview. It was how things got done. It was the electricity of the ancient world; try imagining your home or your town without the ability to plug things in and switch them on, and you will realize how unthinkable it was to them that there should be no slaves. The only ancient communities that managed to live without them, so far as we can tell, were self-chosen, quasi-monastic groups who lived far away from other habitations.⁸⁶ For most people, slavery was simply part of the *praxis* of their worldview; for some – not least for slaves themselves! – it could also feature largely in the *story*, especially if, as was true for many slaves, they had once been free and had become slaves through being on the wrong side in a war, or even a business deal. It might then feature as part of the back story constituting an answer to the question 'What's wrong?', and

might also feature, in the form of liberation, as part of the answer to the question ‘What’s the solution?’ Slavery would not so often be a symbol, except in the case of a wealthy person conscious that a large quantity of slaves was itself a sign of social and financial status.

But Philemon’s mindset, his own local variation on the worldview of the average well-to-do pagan in western Turkey, would not revolve around slavery. That would be, at most, a minor detail of ‘praxis’. Rather, it would revolve around business and family, the gods and the festivals, travel (the normal guess is that he had met Paul in Ephesus) and empire (he must have known, if only through the coins in his purse, who was running the world), the seasons and the harvests, the normal human hopes and fears. We shall look a little more at the typical worldview of people like Philemon in chapter 3. What matters in reading the letter is of course that Paul could assume that Philemon’s worldview had been turned inside out and upside down by the impact of the messianic announcement about Jesus.

Onesimus’s worldview, we may assume, had been similar except for the obvious difference that his praxis was that of a slave. In consequence, as we just suggested, there will have been a very different element not only to his symbolic world (slaves might well have some kind of badge or branding), but also to his worldview-story, his personal mindset. *Once I was free*, he may have thought, *and now I’m a slave* ... which then easily generates the further narrative, *Now I’m a slave, but one day I may be free.*⁸⁷ Then comes the question, the answer to ‘What’s the solution?’, or ‘How can we get out of the mess?’: I could save up money and buy my freedom; or I could just run away and chance my luck ... And so, assuming that the normal reading of the letter is correct, the point at which he meets Paul is the point not only of a gospel-generated worldview-crisis, but also of the particular transformation of narrative: *I have tried to seek my freedom, but now I have to go back and face the possibility of being a slave for life*. It is a heavy thing that Paul is asking of Onesimus, just as it is a heavy thing that he is asking of Philemon.

What of Paul himself? That, of course, is the subject of this entire book. But we can say this: although Paul lived in a world (including his Jewish

world) where slavery was a fact of life, he and his Jewish contemporaries told and celebrated a story in which their own ancestors had been slaves and their God had freed them. That, as we shall see, remained a vital controlling narrative in the mature worldview of Paul the apostle. But we may note just one other thing. What Paul elsewhere calls ‘the message of reconciliation’, which he saw as being rooted in the fact of Jesus’ messianic crucifixion, has become so much part of him, so ingrained into him at the level of worldview, that even though the word ‘reconciliation’ never occurs in the letter, and even though he never mentions the cross itself, both realities come to fresh and deeply personal expression in this short text. As Paul could say of Jesus, ‘he loved me and gave himself for me’, so Onesimus might well say, in days to come, ‘Paul loved me and gave himself for me.’ Paul nearly says as much, of course, in Colossians, which many of us still stubbornly suppose to be the companion piece to Philemon.⁸⁸

Story, praxis and symbol are joined by the characteristic worldview ‘questions’: Who are we, where are we, what’s wrong, what’s the solution, and what time is it? These are, to repeat, not likely to be topics of regular conversation, whether in a family or in a culture; they are the presuppositions which enable people to make sense of everything else. For the average pagan in western Turkey, the implicit answers to such questions would have to do, once more, with social status, with family and business, with the affairs of the local *polis*, possibly with a famine, plague or earthquake and its aftermath, certainly with the constant question of which gods to worship, in what way, and with what hoped-for effect. The worldview of Saul of Tarsus was different, formed as we shall see by the ancient traditions of Israel about which he was so passionate, and reformed around the Messiah. Why such a man would come to write such a letter, or why he would think that either Philemon or Onesimus would go along with his proposals and requests, is part of the larger historical question: why did Christianity begin, and why did it take the shape it did? That, too, is then part of the enquiry which occupies the whole of the present volume. The ‘question of “god”’ remains in constant and complex dialogue with the question of ‘Christian origins’.

This, then, is how ‘worldviews’ work. Story, praxis and symbol generate and sustain a set of implicit answers to the five questions. People normally do not talk about these four elements of their worldview (story, praxis, symbol, questions); they only come up for discussion when something has gone wrong, when an outsider issues a challenge or a new question to which the routine answer would have been, ‘That’s just how things are.’ You can’t get on with the rest of your life if you are forever taking your spectacles off and inspecting them; indeed, one of the problems with spectacles is that if you break them you may not be able to see properly in order to mend them yourself. So it is with worldviews: when you are questioned about some or all of your worldview, and you have (as it were) to take it off and look at it in order to see what’s going on, you may not be able to examine it very closely because it is itself the thing through which you normally examine everything else. The resulting sense of disorientation can be distressing. It can lead to radical change. It shakes the very foundation of persons and societies. Sometimes, it seems, it can turn persecutors into apostles ...

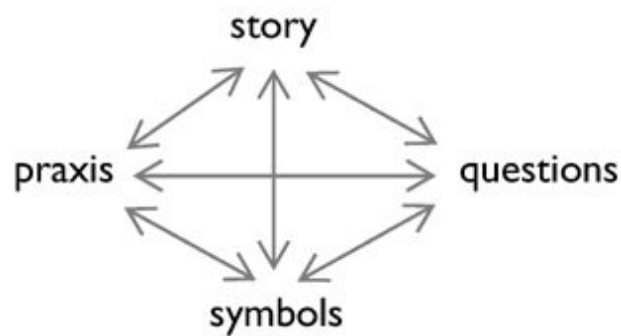
Because, of course, that is exactly what happened to St Paul on the road to Damascus. Whatever we say about the precise events reported three times in the book of Acts, and alluded to briefly by Paul himself, the blindness mentioned in the story may well have come upon him at several levels simultaneously.⁸⁹ He was forced (so to speak) to take off his worldview altogether and examine it at the deepest level. Part of the question of this book is whether he made radical adjustments to his old worldview or whether he exchanged it for a different one altogether. But the point at the moment is this: the study of worldviews, and of the ‘mindsets’ of individual persons (to repeat, I use ‘mindset’ as the personal version of the corporate ‘worldview’, suggesting that there may be local and individual variations within a parent worldview), is an excellent way of getting down underneath the to-and-fro of particular texts and historical evidence and offering hypotheses about the underlying coherence which enables us, as historians, to address the question, ‘Why?’ Why did he behave like this? Why did they want to do that? Why did this general attack that city? and so on. The ultimate answer to ‘Why?’ is usually, perhaps always – perhaps almost by

definition! – something to do with one or more aspects of a worldview. And, as I have suggested, when the question is pressed it is likely to generate an answer in the area we might want to call ‘theology’.

Within this worldview model, two other dimensions may be plotted in. The first is ‘culture’. I take this loose but important word to denote those aspects of shared human life which draw together narrative, praxis and symbol in particular patterns, often forming new stories which reflect parts of the underlying ones (as in many plays, novels, movies, soap operas and so on), often producing artefacts which themselves become symbols of a certain way of life (the fish-knife, the credit card, the iPhone), and often producing works of art and music which live in the spaces between story, praxis and symbol and which, as though from a different dimension, give people both a sense of the overall worldview and, quite often, a sense of its own deep internal problems and difficulties. That, perhaps, is one of the most important features of culture: to bring to expression beliefs and perceptions which are either reinforcements of the prevailing worldview or questions and challenges from within it, in a language which is precisely not that of articulate speech. Even when words are set to music, the music normally makes them ‘say’ and ‘mean’ something much more than they say and mean by themselves, whether these words are ‘There were shepherds abiding in the field’ or ‘Can’t take my eyes off of you’. ‘Culture’ thus nests within the worldview model in another dimension which draws together story, praxis and symbol in particular.

It is not easy to represent these in a diagram, but a rough attempt might look something like this. Ideally one would need three dimensions, and that indeed is the sort of thing which ‘culture’ itself sometimes produces; but for the moment I leave that refinement to the reader’s imagination:

W
O
R
S
H
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P



C
U
L
T
U
R
E

It would be good to know what might have corresponded to our loose word ‘culture’ in the world of Paul, Philemon and Onesimus. We do not know whether they went to the theatre to see the plays of Sophocles, or whether Philemon used to go to a rather different sort of theatre to see people fighting wild beasts. We do not know what musical instruments they played or listened to, what kind of pottery or jewellery was available in Colosse, how they decorated their houses, and so forth. (Perhaps one day we shall; there are rumours of a forthcoming excavation.⁹⁰) We do not know nearly as much as we would like to know about what sort of poetry they wrote, though it is possible that some passages of Paul may provide important clues. But for the sake of completeness we must note ‘culture’ as an important, if shadowy, receptacle, and generator, of the worldview-markers of story, praxis and symbol.

What is true of ‘culture’ is also true, in a different dimension again, of ‘worship’. Post-Enlightenment culture might have said ‘religion’ at this point, but part of my aim in this book is to put back together the worlds that the Enlightenment split apart, and the word ‘religion’, as we have already seen, is problematic precisely because it is bound to be heard, in most of today’s western world at least, as implying ‘not-ordinary-life’, ‘not-culture’, and particularly ‘not-politics’. By contrast, anything that might be called ‘religion’ in the first century was very firmly bound up with ordinary life, culture and politics, and one of the most obvious and massive anachronisms we might commit would be to ignore this and try to study Paul as though his ‘religion’ was ‘really’ something apart from the rest of his life and that of his communities. For Philemon, prior to his conversion, ‘worship’ would have been a feature of everyday life, bringing the gods, both local and national

and increasingly (as we shall see) transnational, into touch with all other elements of life, business, marriage, home and hearth, death and birth, travel and festival. 'Worship' is a specific activity in which the other elements of the worldview are caught up, colouring praxis, shaping and influencing narrative, generating symbols, and frequently offering answers to the key questions ('What's wrong?' 'We seem to have offended Apollo!' 'What's the solution?' 'Go to his temple and offer the appropriate sacrifice'). Humans are worshipping creatures, and even when they don't consciously or even unconsciously worship any kind of god they are all involved in the adoring pursuit of something greater than themselves. Worship transforms humans, all of us, all the time, since you become like what you worship: those who worship money, power or sex have their characters formed by those strange powers, so that little by little the money-worshipper sees and experiences the world in terms of financial opportunities or dangers, the power-hungry person sees and experiences the world and other humans in terms of chances to gain power or threats to existing power, and the sex-worshipper sees the world in terms of possible conquests (that word is interesting in itself) or rivals. Those who consciously and deliberately choose not to worship those gods still have a range of others to select from, each of which will be character-forming in various ways. And, somewhere in the middle of this range, we find the worship of a God who was believed, by some people in the middle of the first century, to have revealed himself uniquely and decisively in a man called Jesus. And, among those people, we find this man called Paul. If we are to understand his worldview we need to explore the symbolic praxis and narratives which characterized his worldview, together with the answers they generated to the worldview-questions. We should then explore the other dimensions too: the culture (insofar as we can) and the worship which went with this worldview, and which together contributed to the particular mindset of the apostle.

[\(iii\) From Worldview to Theology.](#)

The particular claim of the present book, then, embodied in the transition between Part II and Part III, is that when we understand the worldview of Paul the apostle we realize that a worldview such as his, granted what it does and doesn't contain, *needs* theology in a way that (some?) other worldviews do not. It can only be sustained by constantly, thoughtfully and prayerfully clarifying the question of who the one true God actually is, what this God has done and is doing, and what this all means for the lives of the community and the particular Messiah-follower. When Paul urges his Roman hearers to be 'transformed by the renewal of their minds', this was not simply a piece of good advice for those who wanted to practise their faith with a bit more understanding. It was vital if the entire worldview he was advocating and inculcating was to take root and flourish.

This point was made a quarter of a century ago by Wayne Meeks in his groundbreaking study *The First Urban Christians*.⁹¹ Meeks's undemonstrative style may have contributed to the fact that his highlighting of Jewish-style (but christologically rethought) monotheism in particular, as the key element which enabled Paul's worldview to be sustained, has gone undeveloped. I see the present work as picking up from that point and setting out a picture of Paul's worldview and theology which coheres with Meeks's insight but develops it in a detail and at a level that would have burst the boundaries of Meeks's own work. Meeks, however, was nevertheless emphatically bringing together Pauline sociology and theology in a way few seem to have picked up subsequently. Pauline 'theologians', I suspect, thought of his book as sociology rather than theology, while the eager sociologists who followed it up were less interested in the theology which was there all the time. I hope this present work may contribute to mutual enrichment across these fault lines.

One reason why those interested in 'Pauline theology' may have largely overlooked Meeks's proposal is that the particular theological topic he proposed as central, namely Jewish-style (but christologically redefined) monotheism, was simply not a topic of discussion at the time. It would shortly become so, not least through the controversial work of J. D. G. Dunn.⁹² But up to the early 1980s there were hardly any studies of Paul's

‘doctrine of God’, let alone monotheism itself.⁹³ How times have changed – and, I believe, for the better. In line with Meeks, then, I shall propose, as the basis for Part III of the present book, that monotheism is indeed at the heart of Paul’s theology, not simply as ‘what he believed about God’ in a sense that could be detached from what he believed about other topics (not least salvation), but rather as the integrating theme which explains and gives depth to all the others.

One could, indeed, characterize the major studies of Paul’s theology over the last two hundred or more years as ways of not talking about monotheism. I have written in the parallel volume about the long and complex story of ‘Pauline theology’, and the way it has arrived at the set of questions that confronts the scholar, and for that matter the preacher and teacher, today. Here I simply summarize.⁹⁴

Throughout much of western church history since the Reformation, it has been assumed that the main topic of Paul’s theology was soteriology: that is, his precise theory about how people are saved. This has included, in particular, the questions of justification, the law, the meaning of the death of Jesus, and final judgment – each of which, in itself and in combination with the others, has generated an enormous amount of discussion between rival schools. ‘Pauline theologies’, as Schweitzer pointed out a century ago, have generally been organized on the assumption that the categories of Reformation dogmatics could be assumed to be the most appropriate ones for analyzing the apostle to whom the Reformers appealed.⁹⁵ The questions which have arisen through such study have provided easily enough material for many generations to sustain lively debates, in which the ongoing struggle between Lutheran theology (with its ‘two kingdoms’ and its strong critique of the law) and Reformed theology (with its holistic worldview and its strong affirmation of the law) has been an important element, often ignored. Roman Catholic exegesis, particularly but not exclusively since Vatican II, has joined in these debates, often, predictably but helpfully, insisting on discussing Paul’s ecclesiology, which Protestants have usually marginalized. As with some of the historical questions, the letter to Philemon has played little part in these debates, though again my proposals in the first part of this

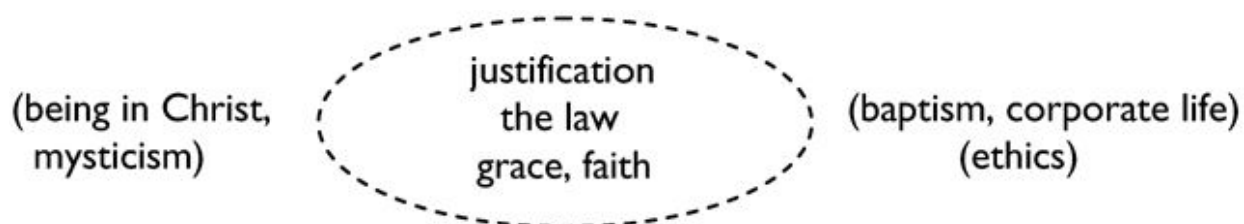
chapter would indicate that the central argument of the letter relates organically to Paul's view of Jesus' death and its meaning, as well as to Paul's ecclesiology, i.e. his vision of a community in which slaves and free are brothers and sisters.

But the traditional topics of Pauline theology as seen by the mainstream Reformation traditions, focused on 'justification' and sometimes labelled generically in terms of *juridical* thought, have not been the only focus of serious theological study. For Albert Schweitzer, and others both before him and more recently, these questions are still important, but not central. 'Being in Christ' (which Schweitzer, perhaps confusingly, referred to in terms of 'mysticism') was the centre of Paul's life and thought, and questions of justification and even 'salvation' were secondary. This has more recently been referred to in terms of *participation*, with humans 'participating' in that which is true of Jesus Christ. We should note – an important theme to which we shall return – that many classic protestant theologians, not least John Calvin, had already integrated 'being in Christ' fairly thoroughly with 'justification by faith', and had indeed located the latter within the larger circle of the former, as Schweitzer was to do (was Schweitzer, I wonder, aware of this?).⁹⁶ For neither the first nor the last time, one particular strand of scholarship, in this case the energetic and massively productive German Lutheran variety, had been able to set questions in a way which generated equal-and-opposite answers but which could have been better put in the first place, allowing for less polarized reactions. But already the basic shape of much of the debate of the last hundred years has been indicated: is Paul basically writing about justification or about being in Christ? Is his thought 'juridical' or 'participatory'? Do we therefore (this has been the most obvious exegetical spin-off) privilege Romans 1—4 or Romans 5—8? If we want to say 'both', what account must we give of the two to show how they integrate (as clearly they do in Paul's mind, since elsewhere in his thought, notably in Galatians 3 and 4, they are cheerfully jumbled up together)? And with this goes a meta-question of considerable importance: what, in Paul, is central, and what is peripheral? What is the 'heart' of Paul's thinking?⁹⁷

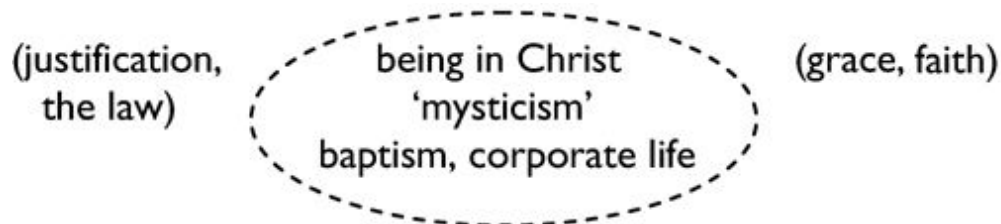
An initial diagram of these topics might, then, look like this:

justification	being in Christ
the law	'mysticism'
grace, faith	baptism, corporate life

which might be described from one point of view (the classic Lutheran position) thus:



and from another point of view (either a Reformed perspective, or the variants offered by Schweitzer, Sanders and others):



– with the question being: which is central, which is peripheral, how do we tell, why does it matter, and how does it all play out in terms of exegesis? This is, in fact, the older debate within which we may make some theological sense of the storms that have been raging between the so-called ‘old perspective’ on Paul and the so-called ‘new perspective’, about which I and others have written quite a lot already.⁹⁸

But at this point the picture becomes more complicated. Three other concepts have been introduced into the discussion, bringing with them enormous potential both for clarification and insight and for muddle and confusion.

First, if the ‘juridical’ and ‘participationist’ schools have highlighted Romans 1—4 and 5—8 respectively, Romans 9—11 has now made a welcome comeback. ‘*Salvation history*’ is a phrase with a chequered history of its own, urgently needing clarification before it can be useful as a tool of thought in interpreting Paul. But it can serve as a general marker for an element in Paul’s thought which ought never to have been absent, and which has now been reintroduced from several angles, raising several new questions of its own.⁹⁹ The previous marginalization of Romans 9—11 within much western theology, by no means only Lutheran, was an indication of what happens to exegesis when theology works with a truncated template.

Second, ‘*apocalyptic*’. Much work has been done on this complex and still difficult question.¹⁰⁰ People do from time to time throw up their hands and declare that the word means anything and nothing and should be abandoned as worse than useless. But it still denotes, at its heart, something which Paul really does seem to have made central. Some scholars have continued to press the case for seeing it (however interpreted) as the key to all his thought.¹⁰¹

The third term, ‘*covenant*’, has been used by myself and others as a convenient shorthand to draw attention to, and indeed to give a certain priority to, Paul’s belief that the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth were indeed the divine fulfilment of ancient covenant promises. This is sometimes criticized on the grounds that Paul seldom uses the word *diathēkē*, the regular Greek for ‘covenant’, to which the answer is (a) that he does here and there, and often in tell-tale contexts, (b) that, as Sanders pointed out about the Rabbis, sometimes when people do not repeat a word it is because it is everywhere presupposed, and (c) that Paul doesn’t say ‘juridical’ or ‘participatory’ either, or indeed ‘salvation history’, and only occasionally ‘apocalypse’ or its cognates. In other words, these are contemporary shorthands with which we are trying to discuss textual, historical and theological data which are in themselves sufficiently complex to warrant the use of summary labels. All disciplines generate shorthands, and provided we remind ourselves that that is what they are, and are prepared at a moment’s

notice to cash them out in terms of a fuller, and particularly text-based, account, there should be no problem in employing them.

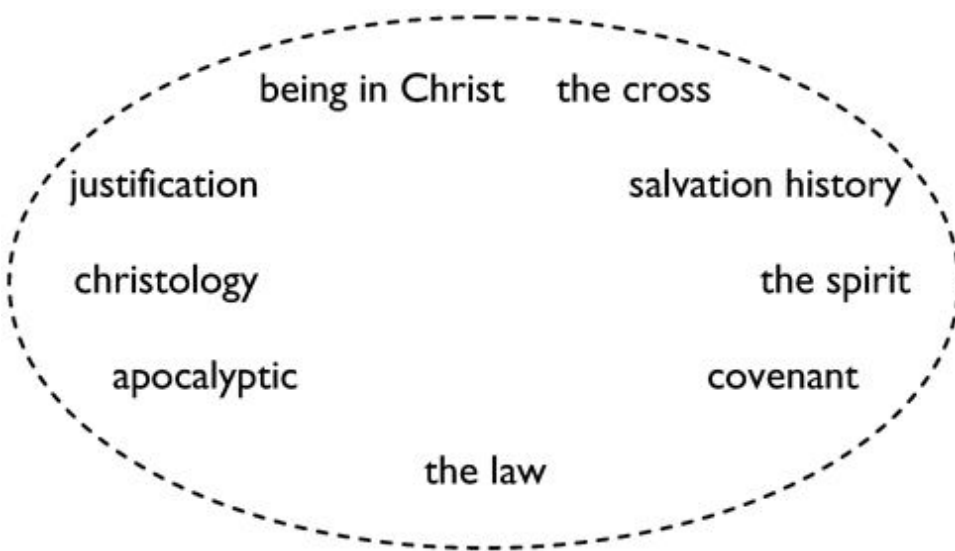
The relationship between the last three terms in themselves, and between them and the first two, are themselves inevitably complex, and one could plot the history of modern Pauline scholarship in terms of their often confused interaction. ‘Covenant’ and ‘salvation history’ are more obviously connected with one another than either is with ‘apocalyptic’, though ancient Jewish ‘apocalyptic’ literature was again and again both deeply covenantal and firmly salvation-historical. Debate has then sometimes collapsed back into a re-run of the primary post-Reformation discussion, with ‘apocalyptic’ joining forces with ‘justification’ on the one hand and doing collective battle with ‘participation’, ‘salvation history’, and ‘covenant’ on the other. Some, however, have joined up ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘participation’, or even ‘salvation history’, and played these off against ‘juristic’ thought.¹⁰² One of the central aims of the present project is in fact to offer an alternative account of the central matters which have been thus variously described. This may appear the more urgent in that even those who have insisted that ‘participation’ is central to Paul’s thought have expressed puzzlement as to what exactly Paul means by it.¹⁰³

As we round this corner, there comes into view another joining-up question: how do all these theological analyses and proposals link up with answers, actual or implicit, to the historical questions? The combination of justification and apocalyptic has sometimes, though not always, been aligned with the historical proposal to treat Paul as, if not actually a hellenizer, at least not a particularly Jewish thinker, either because his doctrine of justification engages in a polemic against the works of the Jewish law (the classic Lutheran view) or because his ‘apocalyptic’ theology involves a clean break with a Jewish sense of a continuous saving history (Martyn, de Boer, partially following Käsemann). The combination of covenant, ‘being in Christ’ and salvation history has sometimes, though not always, been associated with the historical proposal about treating Paul as basically a Jewish thinker, for more obvious reasons (Davies, Cullmann). Sometimes, indeed, this appears quite strikingly in the failure of those who opt for the

second route to articulate or even, it seems, to notice Paul's remaining critique of his Jewish contemporaries.¹⁰⁴

None of this positioning really begins, in my view, to do justice to any of Paul's letters or the concepts he is articulating in them. As a matter of history, not merely of theology, the data themselves must be allowed the right of reply, the right to call time on a slogan-based theological and historical debate, and the chance to generate and explore other ways of lining up the basic problems.

The question then now looks like this:



– with the key issue being: how do all *these* relate to one another? How do we describe (or perhaps rule out) such categories in relation to one another, to particular passages in Paul's letters, and to the larger historical questions we have hinted at? And – what about the things we have missed out? What about monotheism? What about the resurrection?

Part of the problem, of course, has been that much (though not all) study of Paul has been done within circles where Paul has been the hero, the great teacher of the faith. Hence, as with the historical debates, he has been assumed to teach what the tradition of that particular church has taught. Like Plato or Shakespeare, however, he is so many-sided that he can be appealed to this way or that on all kinds of issues, not only in theology and ethics but in culture and philosophy, as witness the recent upsurge of interest in Paul

among post-Derrida continental philosophers and at least one postmodern Jewish thinker.¹⁰⁵

Mention of theology and ethics, however, introduces a further split. This split has routinely been traced at least as far back as Paul himself (in the supposed division of some of his letters into ‘doctrinal’ and ‘ethical’ sections), but in its present form it owes far more to Immanuel Kant, and behind him to the sharp Reformational antithesis between ‘faith’ and ‘works’. (The distinction between ‘faith’ in the Reformers’ sense and ‘theology’ or ‘doctrine’ has by no means always been clear, producing as we saw the problem whereby ‘justification by faith’ has come to mean ‘justification by believing in the proper doctrine of justification’, a position which, in attempting to swallow its own tail, produces a certain type of theological and perhaps cultural indigestion.) Until comparatively recently, studies of Paul’s ‘ethics’ were mostly relegated to the latter stages of larger works on Paul’s theology, reflecting the perceived position of this topic, along with the doctrine of ‘the church’, within his own thought.¹⁰⁶ But more recently, in line with the turn to ethics in wider theological circles, the question not just of individual ‘ethical topics’ but of Paul’s whole stance in terms of the way of life of his communities, and how that is to be related to the ways of life in the various worlds of late antiquity, has become a major topic of discussion, sometimes in relation particularly to his Jewish context and sometimes in relation to his non-Jewish worlds.¹⁰⁷ This explains, at last, the recent flurry of interest in Philemon in particular, researching, as it were, for lost time; though, as I have indicated, I fear lest the motivation for the recent work – a desire either to place Paul in socio-political terms as some kind of a radical social thinker, or perhaps to pull back from such a positioning – has been allowed to screen out his more central theological concerns.

One particular topic within this turn to community ethics has been the question of Paul’s political stance and agenda. Over against the easy-going assumption until very recently that Paul was uninterested in ‘political’ questions, being content merely to say ‘obey the authorities and pay your taxes’ (Romans 13.1–7), it has now been widely argued that a good deal of

his writing was deliberately and explicitly subversive of the imperial ideology of his day. This too has now already generated its own backlash.¹⁰⁸ The debate, it is often pointed out, needs to be located within *both* ‘historical’ study (where does Paul belong in relation to Roman imperial ideology – and, indeed, in relation to the various political philosophies of the time, very different as they were from our post-Enlightenment assumptions?) *and* ‘theological’ study (when he says ‘Jesus is lord’, does this imply ‘therefore Caesar isn’t’? If not, why not? If so, how does this political emphasis integrate with the regular topics of Pauline theology in which the lordship of Jesus plays such an important part?). These movements of contemporary thought thus generate further sets of questions: must we stay forever within the split worlds of ‘indicative’ versus ‘imperative’, and of ‘politics’ versus ‘religion’, or does Paul himself provide ways towards a fresh integration of belief and life? It is precisely this kind of discussion which, we may hope, the placing of ‘theology’ within the larger model of ‘worldview’ might enable us to address in a more nuanced way. In particular, it might enable us to avoid, in a way that has not always been done, the projection of late-modern or postmodern political ideas back on to Paul, just at the moment when we are trying to repent of projecting late-medieval or Reformational soteriological categories back on to him.

We thus have a much more complex scene than before. The overtly theological debates (justification, ‘being in Christ’, salvation-history, apocalyptic, covenant, ‘old perspective’ and ‘new perspective’) must collectively be brought into dialogue with the ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ ones: how did Paul envisage his communities living and operating? What did he say about slavery? about sex? about anger? about family life? about empire? And what role did all this play within his thought? Was it really the driving force, with ‘theology’ as usually conceived playing a secondary, supporting role, or was it the other way round? Or is it *all* really ‘theological’, *all* really ‘political’, and *all* really ‘communitarian’? And all of these must meet up at last with the other enormous questions which have tended to have a life of their own rather than being integrated into any of the above discussions: what about christology? What account do we give of Paul’s view of the

identity, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, and how do we integrate that account with all these other topics? What, similarly, about the spirit? Is it possible to give a fair account of *any* one of these topics without at least indicating in principle how *all* the others relate to it? Is there any kind of framework within which they cohere, make sense and find their proper individual and mutually aligned emphases?

These questions are not usually all discussed at the same time. But since they all claim to relate quite closely to central themes in Paul's writings, what really needs to happen is for them all to be jumbled up together again, like pieces of the same jigsaw puzzle that had somehow found their way onto quite separate tables. Only when they have been brought together again in a single, initially confusing, mass can they be sorted out properly and fitted together into a more compelling, if inevitably more complex, single picture. That is, basically, what this book is about.

As part of that process, all these questions need to be brought into relation, much more explicitly than is usually done, not only to the questions of 'relevance' or 'application' (which, as we have seen, all too often drive both the historical and the theological agendas), but also to a deeper and richer form of the standard history-of-religions question. It isn't enough to say, 'Is Paul a Jewish or Greek, or (as it may be) a Roman thinker?' – and to hope that by answering that question this way or that we have solved a string of subsequent problems as well. I have written before about the importance of distinguishing the question of 'where an idea has come from' from the question of 'where it might be going to'. We must, in other words, separate out *derivation* from *confrontation*. My favourite example is Paul's use of the word *euaggelion*, usually translated 'gospel' or 'good news'. There is no doubt in my mind that when Paul uses it he is evoking the cognate verb in Isaiah 40.9 and 52.7: the 'good news' of Jesus the Messiah is the fulfilment of the 'good news' envisaged in that central prophetic passage. Paul has not 'derived' the idea from his surrounding culture. But equally there is no doubt in my mind (though there is in some others) that when Paul used it, not least in Galatians and Romans, he was conscious that for many of his hearers the 'gospel' of Caesar would be the primary resonance; and he was determined

to confront the grandiose imperial claims with the far superior claims of Jesus.

To broaden this either/or just a bit: we need to enquire not just about the derivation of Paul's ideas, as an older history-of-religions project tried to do, but more specifically about Paul's *engagement with* his various worlds. 'Engagement' here is a deliberately vague term, which I take to involve some or all of the following: borrowing (in either direction); parallel thought, indicating a 'cousinly' relationship where two strands can be traced to a common ancestor though with different parentage on either side; and the rich mixture of affirmation, denial, derivation, confrontation, subversion, transformation, and a whole range of possible 'yes-but' and 'no-but', or perhaps 'yes-and' and 'no-and', relations. Serious study of Paul must put away childish antitheses and embrace the deeper, more multiplex world to which his letters actually point.¹⁰⁹

We must, in other words, ask questions such as the following. How does Paul relate to the larger Jewish worldviews of his day, so far as we can reconstruct them, with their stories, symbols, praxis and implicit answers to worldview questions? In particular (since he seems deeply concerned with the Jewish scriptures), how did he read his Bible? Does his actual practice in *using* scripture tally with the claims he makes about Abraham, the law, and so forth? How does he relate to or engage with the hugely important Jewish markers of sacred space and time, the Temple on the one hand and the Sabbath on the other? Equally, how does he relate to the larger pagan worldviews of his day, with their own stories, symbols, praxis and answers? In particular (since he seems deeply concerned with the lifestyle of his communities, in a way which sends off all kinds of resonances into their non-Jewish culture), how did he understand the moral traditions and debates of his day? How well, for instance, did he know the Stoic traditions, and other similar contemporary philosophical movements? Was he engaging with them either explicitly or implicitly, and if so how and to what extent and effect? Where did his thought and theirs lie along the same lines, and at what points did they diverge?

It isn't a matter, in other words, of deciding between two straightforward alternatives, seeing Paul *either* as a Jewish thinker, exegeting his Bible and letting the chips fall where they would into the non-Jewish world, *or* as the apostle to the gentiles, engaging with the pagan culture of his day and grabbing, almost at random, ideas and texts from his previous life in order to do so.¹¹⁰ That old antithesis, which formed the template for so many earlier debates, is long past its sell-by date. It was always a serious misunderstanding (albeit with a distinguished pedigree) to suppose that if Paul was to make any headway in the gentile world he would have to 'translate' the early Jewish message into non-Jewish categories so his wider audience could relate to it. We must strive for a larger vision of his overall project, in which his subtle and careful use of the scriptures on the one hand, and his apparent engagement with the non-Jewish philosophical traditions on the other, can be integrated within a fresh account of his actual, Christ-and-spirit oriented, aims and objectives.

The main proposal of this book, then, which is advanced in Part III, is that there is indeed a way of analyzing and understanding Paul in which these several multi-layered dichotomies can be resolved, not indeed in a flat or simplistic way, but in that kind of harmony which often characterizes profound thinkers whose work not only touches on different topics but does so in different contexts and a variety of styles and tones of voice. This is not, then, a plea for a cheap coherence, a kind of conjurer's trick in which the audience is so bewitched by a clever piece of patter that it fails to notice the card up the sleeve or the rabbit in the hat. Nor is it simply to separate out, as J. C. Beker tried to do, the 'coherent' centre of Paul's thought as opposed to the 'contingent' expression it receives in the various letters.¹¹¹ It is the serious, scientific imperative to *get in all the data*, to do so *with appropriate simplicity*, and to *shed light on other areas* in addition to the primary topic.¹¹² Because the data are what they are – short but pithy documents which demand investigation from several angles all at once, many of which are still quite unfamiliar to western mindsets – the exposition cannot proceed smoothly, as it were topic by topic (God – humankind – sin – salvation – church – ethics!). Something more symphonic is called for, with due apology

to those who prefer their books to be more like a sequence of separate songs. We are looking, not so much for a ‘centre’ to Paul’s thought-world (and his worldview in the sense explained), as a vantage-point, a summit from which we can survey, and see the way to explore, the lesser hills and valleys, the pathways and streams, that form the complex landscape of the letters and their implicit worlds. Nor is an aerial photograph good enough. Contours are not easily visible from above. We need to find those points in the terrain from which we can walk down to inspect the lower slopes, returning to the summit ridge so that we can take fresh bearings and then investigate the next valley, climb the next rock face, and so on.

The hypothesis I offer in this book is that we can find just such a vantage-point when we begin by assuming that Paul remained a deeply Jewish theologian who had rethought and reworked every aspect of his native Jewish theology in the light of the Messiah and the spirit, resulting in his own vocational self-understanding as the apostle to the pagans. That last point is vital, but it cannot be the starting-place. Begin with Paul’s engagement with his pagan context, and (as the literature amply demonstrates!) it is impossible to do justice to the many actual arguments which depend on his deep loyalty to, and affirmation of, the ancient Jewish traditions and the God who stood behind them. That is clear from the lacunae which have appeared, for instance, when scholars have tried to read the letter to Philemon while screening out Paul’s biblical allusions and messianic focus. Start with his Jewish context, however – even though he knew that his gospel was scandalous to his fellow Jews! – and we shall find that, precisely because his Jewish theology was rooted in creational monotheism, it necessarily addressed, in a variety of ways of which the letter to Philemon is one, the wider worlds of philosophy and empire, of home and market-place, of human life in its many dimensions, of the real life of the whole cosmos. When, therefore, we allow Paul’s native Jewish world to set the theological agenda – in a way which, interestingly, has not been attempted even by those who have done their best to retrieve him as a ‘Jewish’ thinker! – we see the three major points of what might be called ‘Jewish theology’ (recognizing that Jews do not, for reasons I have already

given, have a ‘theology’ in the way that Paul and all subsequent Christianity needed to have) substantially reinterpreted, reworked, around the Messiah and the spirit.

The three categories are monotheism, election and eschatology: one God, one people of God, one future for God’s world. The ‘reinterpretation’ or ‘reworking’ in which Paul engaged was seen by him, not as a new, quirky or daring thing to do with ancient traditions, but as the true meaning of those ancient traditions, which had either gone unnoticed or been distorted by more recent readings of Israel’s scriptures and the movements of life and culture in which those readings played a key part. Paul’s reworking of these three basic theological categories provides the shape of Part III of this present book, in which my fundamental hypothesis about Paul’s theological thought is set out as fully as space permits. Like all hypotheses, this one must make its way by showing that it can include the material, do so with appropriate elegance, and shed light on other related areas. I shall try to show that it does these things successfully.

Part of the importance of seeing things this way round is to insist that Paul did not have to stop being a Jew, and thinking and speaking Jewishly, in order to have a message for the world. Quite the contrary. His message for the world was the message that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had done at last what he had promised, providing the world with its rightful Lord. When we put Jewish-style creational monotheism back at the centre of his thinking, a new possibility emerges, of a comprehensible and necessary overlap between his own specifically Christian thinking and the moral and cultural thinking of the wider world – which then enables us to address those issues of wider social ‘application’ in a way that is not easily available, or at least not securely grounded, when, as has usually been the case, creational monotheism is ignored. Conversely, Paul did not have to turn his back on engagement in the wider world in order to reaffirm his fundamental Jewishness. Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah and the Psalms, to look no further than some of Paul’s favourite books, already affirm that the whole world is claimed by Israel’s God and is addressed by him precisely *through* what he is doing in, through and for Israel. Now that this entire tradition had, for

Paul, been summed up in Israel's Messiah, hailed in advance by psalms and prophets as the lord of the whole world, it was not an odd step, not a piece of shoulder-shrugging pragmatism ('Well, the Jews won't listen, so maybe the pagans will'), but rather the natural outflowing of the deepest Jewish insights, that made Paul simultaneously loyal to Israel's traditions and committed to bringing this Jewish message into engagement with the wider world. The proper angle from which to approach Paul's engagement with his pagan context is precisely his deep-rooted Jewish understanding, just as the proper angle from which to examine those deep Jewish roots is his sense that now, in the messianic age, it was time to confront the world of the gentiles. Because of the Messiah and the spirit all these things came together – and, with them, the lesser dichotomies also, as scholarship has seen them, of justification and being-in-Christ, of apocalyptic and covenant, of old and new 'perspectives', of theology and ethics, of spirituality and politics. Once we glimpse the summit ridge on which Paul stands, with its three emerging theological peaks of monotheism, election and eschatology, freshly understood in the light of the Messiah and the spirit, it will be comparatively easy to see these false either-or distinctions for what they are: attempts to live only in *this* valley, only by *this* stream, without seeing the larger mountain which has shaped other interlocking valleys, and other contributory streams, which all belong without contradiction on the same map. Map, of course, is not territory, but territory is often puzzling without map. Those who seek to reinhabit the territory will find considerable help in a long, careful study of the map.

[\(iv\) Questions in Context: History, Exegesis, 'Application'](#)

The two questions we have now sketched – Paul's worldview and his theology – have an unequal pedigree in scholarship. Paul's theology has been discussed since the late first century; the attempt to plot his worldview is very recent. What about the other tasks normally undertaken when Paul is studied?

These other tasks consist of three closely related (but in principle separable) topics: history, exegesis, and ‘application’ or ‘relevance’. These each have their own inner dynamic, as well as joining up with one another, and with ‘theology’, in a variety of ways. With Philemon again as our example, they might look like this:

(1) History. The letter raises questions about the social world of the first century; about the institution of slavery; about relationships between people in prison and those outside; about the ‘social location’ of Paul. If this was the only letter of Paul we possessed, we might also puzzle over such questions as: how and why did he come to these ideas? What made him think he could appeal to someone in this way? What can we say about the spirituality we see in his reference to prayer and the apparently central concept of *koinōnia*? Does the letter help us to ‘locate’ Paul not only socially but also in terms of ‘religion’, i.e. (perhaps) in relation to the Jewish or pagan ‘religious’ world of his day? However important it is to study the ways in which people have read Paul in subsequent centuries (the notion of ‘reception history’ for which there has been a recent fashion), the historical task cannot thereby be displaced. We need to go on investigating why Paul wrote what he wrote and what he intended to convey by it – whether or not he was successful: as he knew in experience, it sometimes took more than one exposition and explanation to get a point across.¹¹³

(2) Exegesis. Exegesis is the point where history and theology come together and tackle one specific task. How does the letter hold together (the ‘poetic sequence’ of the text itself)? How do the individual sentences relate to the whole, and the individual words to the sentences? Can we tell the ‘back story’ (the ‘referential sequence’ as opposed to the ‘poetic sequence’) in such a way as to make satisfying sense of the letter itself?¹¹⁴ How do we hold history and theology together in this analysis? Exegesis is actually where everything starts (here are the letters; what shall we make of them?) and finishes (when all is said and done, have we made sense of the text?). But there is always a danger of reductionism (‘we have explained the text’ in a minimal way), and exegesis can never therefore be separated from its three

siblings, history, theology, and ‘application’ – which are themselves of course also closely related.

(3) ‘Application’ or ‘relevance’. Paul’s contemporaries took slavery for granted. In today’s western world we take its abolition for granted. Does Paul’s appeal therefore simply congratulate today’s world on having finally caught up? Or, if perhaps he does not appeal straightforwardly for Philemon to release Onesimus, does this mean we can or should criticize him for his failure to do so? At a deeper level, what can we learn for our own lives, personally, ecclesially, culturally, socially, from the reconciliation for which Paul is working and the fascinating way he goes about it? More broadly, when we read what Paul says about the Messiah, or about community formation, or about faith, hope and love, do we think (with most people in most churches) that we are under some kind of obligation to believe and do what he says? Or do we think (with Nietzsche and a string of distinguished nay-sayers) that we have now understood what it is that caused the corruption and decline of the western world? It is hard to be neutral in reading Paul. To pretend to a detached or disinterested stance, as one might with a minor philosopher of antiquity, might well be to declare that one had missed the point, had failed to grasp how influential Paul has been over the last two thousand years, and why.

It might appear that only the third of these questions moves beyond ‘description’ to some kind of ‘evaluation’, but to suppose that would be naive. Theology, history and exegesis are complicated. All theologians, all historians, and all exegetes come with their own agendas and presuppositions. As we shall see, this does not mean that no advances can be made. We are not bound simply to see ourselves reflected at the bottom of the well. That is the point of ‘critical realism’.¹¹⁵ But it shows that the process of ‘relevance’ or ‘application’ (whether we are inclined to say ‘Paul says this, so we must believe it’ or ‘Paul says this, which shows how wrong he was’) does not wait quietly in the wings while the other three actors speak their lines. It is already on stage, nudging them, whispering in their ears, perhaps even trying to stop their mouths. The varied tasks involved in studying Paul become blended together, and it is important that we learn to

listen for the different voices within the developing harmony, or, as it may be, cacophony. Some of the most exciting work done on Paul in the last two generations has brought together theology, history, exegesis and ‘relevance’ in an explosive mixture, as anyone who has worked through Käsemann’s commentary on Romans will know.

What then are the historical issues to which we must give attention? In terms of Philemon, we have already seen a microcosm of what the historical task might look like. The historian amasses as much evidence as possible, from whatever sources – books, coins, inscriptions, artefacts, archaeological discoveries about the layout and buildings of ancient cities, and so on – and tries to produce a picture, whether large or small, of how life was; a narrative, whether short or long, of what happened; and, particularly, some insight, whether deep or shallow, into the aims and motivations of the characters involved in the story. That is what we have had to do with Paul, Philemon and Onesimus as much as with Pliny, Sabinianus and the unnamed freedman.

For this task, of course, the historian needs to understand how people in that place and time normally thought, how they saw the world, how they understood themselves and those around them.¹¹⁶ This can never remain a mere intellectual construct. ‘History of ideas’ matters, just as what has been called ‘history of religions’ matters. But it is always part of a larger ‘history’ which includes pots and pans, marriage and war, gods and demons, public life and domestic life, and a host of other matters. The historian must therefore take account of as much information as possible: back to the anthropologists’ ‘thick description’.

This kind of exercise is vital if history is indeed to be history. The historian is always on guard against the double danger of anachronism and what we might call ‘analocism’ (the equivalent in relation to *place* of what anachronism is in relation to *time*). First-century Turkey was not only unlike twentieth-century Turkey but significantly unlike first-century Jerusalem on the one hand and Rome on the other.¹¹⁷ The reason history is fascinating is because people in other times and places are so like us. The reason history is difficult is because people in other times and places are so different from us.

History is, to that extent, like marriage, and subject to some of the same balanced dangers of over-detachment and over-possessiveness. One cannot do history at a clinical distance, but nor can one insist that it produce the results that were expected or desired.

But history is possible. We are not compelled to throw up our hands, capitulate to the current postmodern mood, and suppose that all we can do is listen to the echo of our own voices, bouncing off data which appear to give us access to other times and places but really only serve as a sounding-board for our own prejudices. Yes, of course, we all come to history with our own questions. We want to know: was Paul in favour of slavery, or was he against it? That has been such a worldview-shaping question for the western world, and particularly the American world, in the last two hundred years that we cannot believe (from our great Enlightened height) that Paul could have passed over such a question without giving it, to our mind, a definite answer! We should remind ourselves that we possess a seemingly random selection of Paul's writings, in which each letter contains some striking material not found in any of the others. Paul did not write the kind of systematic treatises in which he would have taken care to cover all possible 'topics'. There is always at least an implicit gap between the textually limited 'Paul' we know from the letters and the hypothetically wider 'Paul' who might well have had other things to say – if only some church had sent him a letter to ask him about them. But on some points our own inherited moral sensitivities make us want to press him further. We think, for instance (in addition to slavery) of what he says about his fellow Jews. Our moral sensitivities have been so battered by the events of the twentieth century that every time we come within a few paces of such questions we fear a further bruising, and can hardly bring ourselves to speak the truth about what Paul actually said in case he be accused, even at several removes and only by implication, of complicity in appalling crimes.

Such puzzles are inevitable. But it is shallow and one-dimensional to suppose that we can never advance beyond the state of bringing wrong assumptions to texts and receiving conundrums in return. We do not have to remain naive. Our reading of texts (and I mean 'texts' in the widest possible

sense, to include all data from other times and places) *ought* to puzzle us at some points. That is normal, to be expected and welcomed. The question is then, What do we do next? That is the point at which, if we are wise, we suspend our regular assumptions and look for other evidence, or unnoticed elements in the evidence we already have, which will enable us to say, ‘Ah! I couldn’t understand this text (or mosaic, or triumphal arch) because I thought they assumed *this*, whereas in fact they assumed *that*.’ And so we study the material again, sometimes with full comprehension, more often moving on to fresh puzzles, fresh further study, and, if we are fortunate, fresh insight.

This, more or less, is what I meant in *NTPG* by ‘critical realism’: a self-critical epistemology which, in rejecting the naive realism which simply imagines that we are looking at the material with a God’s-eye view, rejects also the narcissistic reductionism of imagining that all apparent perception is in fact projection, that everything is really going on inside our own heads. Critical realism engages determinedly in a many-sided conversation, both with the data itself and with others (including scholars) who are also engaging with it. This conversation aims, not of course at an unattainable ‘objectivity’, but at truth none the less, the truth in which the words we use and the stories we tell increasingly approximate to the reality of another world, in the historian’s case the world of the past. We *know* that Jerusalem fell in AD 70. We *know* Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross. And we *know* that someone called Paul wrote a sharp, wise little letter to a friend called Philemon, invoking their common loyalty to a figure he refers to as *Christos* as a means of persuading him to be reconciled to a slave. We must not, in our proper anxiety about projecting our own assumptions on to the past, compound the problem by imagining that we can actually know nothing much about the past because our reconstructions remain *our* reconstructions.

All this applies, in a specialized way, to what has been called ‘history of religions’, that highly influential branch of study which dramatically shaped the way the New Testament was read between, roughly, the middle of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth. Today’s discussions are

still to some extent influenced by the rhetoric at least, and sometimes also the substance, of these discussions, so it is important to be clear. The famous *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* was massively influenced by the prevailing Hegelian mood in German Protestantism, which was attempting to analyze and classify religious ideas and practices rather in the way that the scientific study of the natural world was proceeding with its data. But the ‘religions’ in question were not neutral objects lying around awaiting such classification. The central motif of the history-of-religions movement as it affected Pauline studies at least was the urgent importance of keeping Paul’s ideas well clear of two categories deemed, ahead of time, to be opposed to his all-important work: (a) Jewish beliefs, and ‘Jewish Christianity’ of the sort that (it was supposed) had flourished before Paul’s conversion and was opposing his views, as in the confrontation in Antioch; and (b) ‘early Catholicism’, that figment of F. C. Baur’s imagination which proved so convenient a way of labelling, and then pushing off the Pauline stage, any material which seemed to offer a more than merely functional view of the church, and a more than merely incidental view of God’s action in history. The implicit evaluative story of early Christianity thus ran like this: Jesus (good – not that we can know much about him, but his death and resurrection, whatever the latter means, are foundational); early Jewish Christianity (dangerous, and dogging the footsteps of Paul once he appeared); Paul (the real hero); early Catholicism (degenerate, a failure of nerve). About this whole scheme, the two most important things to say are that it has been massively influential and massively misleading. It was never the result of genuine open-ended historical enquiry. It was always an attempt – a successful attempt! – to force the evidence of the first generation of Jesus-followers into a straitjacket, to compel certain readings of key texts and to prohibit others. Even where neither its presuppositions nor its conclusions are officially held any longer, it continues to wield considerable influence in Pauline studies through the ‘consensus’ (in most cases now an unexamined prejudice) about which letters are genuine and which not (a point to which we shall return presently), and about the implicit interpretation of a great many passages and themes.

The more general legacy of the history-of-religions school is the larger question, which remains important and to which the present volume will give a precise and definite answer, as to whether Paul was basically a Jewish thinker or basically a gentile thinker – and whether, for instance, he changed from the one to the other. Paul, of course, will redefine the terms, but the question remains important not least because it is so intimately connected to the way we read his theology, and also to the way in which his ‘relevance’ or ‘applicability’ is assessed. But, above all, these questions matter because they affect the way we read every single verse of every single letter. They all come down, in other words, to exegesis.

Exegesis is a branch of history. (It is also a branch of literary study, since texts have their own internal life; but without historical anchorage our flights of literary fancy might lose their bearings, like migrating birds affected by global warming and thus landing in the wrong place.) This is so whether we are reading Aristotle or Jane Austen, Paul or Dostoevsky. No doubt we are affected, in our own selves, by what we read in writers ancient or modern. But it always makes sense to ask, What did the writer mean by this? Lexicography itself is a branch of history. The study not only of etymology, but of the way words were actually used in real sentences by real people, demands a wide historical knowledge. I sometimes have to make this point to puzzled romantics who suppose that any scholarly study of the Bible must somehow ‘come between the simple reader and the text’, or that bringing non-biblical texts to the table alongside scripture will somehow skew the ‘pure’ results of the Canon: without lexicography, there would be no translations, and without wider historical scholarship, there would be no lexicography! We cannot (or should not) read a letter like Philemon without being prepared to ask, for instance, What exactly would someone like Paul have meant when he used a word like *Christos*? What might someone in Ephesus or Colosse in the first century have thought he meant? The assumptions which have quietly crept over western readers of the Bible during the last few centuries may well have obscured the true answers to such questions. These assumptions must be challenged. Otherwise we will be like children playing Chinese whispers: supposing ourselves to be

listening to Paul's letters, we may instead be hearing the most recent in a series of increasingly distorted transcriptions.

This removal of distracting whispers, too, is in principle possible as well as desirable. We do not have to capitulate to the postmodern insistence on the death of the author. When we read words, whether they were written yesterday or two thousand years ago, the normal charitable assumption is that the words were written by writers who were doing their best to say, more or less, what they meant. The proper postmodern insistence that texts take on new lives in subsequent generations, 'meaning' different things to different people, is well (and often sadly) illustrated by the history of different readings of the biblical text itself, not least Paul. But (the critical realist move again) that doesn't mean we cannot or should not ask what the actual writer was getting at. In fact, despite the postmodern turn, most ordinary historians and most ordinary exegetes have not stopped asking such questions and working towards better answers. The postmodernist is welcome to go on insisting that the hare can never overtake the tortoise, but historians regularly watch the hare coming in first, and learn to smile at the sceptics who say it was impossible. Real advance in historical knowledge is possible. It happens all the time. An obvious example, despite the confusion and even chaos of contemporary Pauline studies, is that almost nobody now can write a serious book on Paul in ignorance of the massive work that has been done on the first century, particularly the Jewish world of that period. Look back at some of the monographs from fifty years ago; the contrast is shocking.

The criteria for 'better answers' and 'real advance' remain those I set out in detail in *NTPG*. A historical hypothesis, like a scientific hypothesis, must (a) get in the data, (b) do so with appropriate simplicity, and (c) shed light on areas outside the basic subject-matter of the inquiry.¹¹⁸ I suggest that the reading I have proposed of Philemon in general and of verses 6 and 17–20 in particular achieves these three things. That is of course debatable, but those are the standards to which I appeal (like all historians, at least by implication), and by which we expect our hypotheses to be judged. We assume that writers intended their texts to mean something (the extreme

cases of people writing nonsense actually proves the point, since the writers in question usually *intended* to write nonsense, rather like a composer deliberately producing outrageous discords) and we also assume that it is in principle possible to move towards the discovery of that intention.¹¹⁹

It will not do, in other words, for a particular interpretation of a particular text, whether of Aristotle, Paul, or anybody else, to be either affirmed or ruled out because that is what we want, or do not want, such a person to have said. Like most contemporary exegetes, I wish Paul could have said something much clearer about the dehumanizing practice of slavery and the need to work towards its abolition. But I cannot, as a historian, collude with the easy-going claim that that must have been what in fact he did say in this letter. Likewise, I wish that Aristotle, for whom I have a great regard, had not said what he did about women being an inferior form of humankind.¹²⁰ But he did, and I have to learn that life is more complicated than drawing up a list of good people, who said all the things I agree with, and bad people, who said the opposite. (It is just as easy to make Paul say something everybody will scoff at, as a way of distancing ourselves from him in other areas as well, as it is to force him to say things everybody will be pleased with, in order to gain him credit.) As Solzhenitsyn said, the line between good and evil runs through each one of us and every human community.¹²¹

One of the reasons we do history, in fact, is because it acts as a brake, a control, on our otherwise unbridled enthusiasm for our own ideas. This is a normal human failing, but one elevated to an art form within certain parts of post-Enlightenment western culture, where *our* discoveries, *our* political insights, *our* egalitarian view of marriage and the family, *our* architecture, or whatever, are assumed to be superior, and are made to form a canon, a yardstick, against which we can and must judge all other times and places. Wait a minute, says history, supported by exegesis: ancient Athenian public architecture knocks most of today's efforts off the stage altogether, ancient Roman houses (for those who could afford them) could still teach us a thing or two, and the ancient Israelites knew more about how to write poems of praise or lament than we will ever learn. And the early Christians? Well, that is the point at issue. What history demands, and exegesis facilitates, is

suspension of judgment in order to learn wisdom. ‘The impatient, who are concerned only about results or practical application, should leave their hands off exegesis. They are of no value for it, nor, when rightly done, is exegesis of any value for them.’ Thus the great Ernst Käsemann, writing the Preface to his commentary on Romans, nearly forty years ago.¹²² His words apply, I repeat, just as much to those who come to Paul in order to declare how wrong he is as to those who come in the hope that he will tell them they are right in what they already suppose. The historical task remains central and non-negotiable, and is never more needed than at those points where we are just a bit too eager for the one result or the other. Where the historical subject is known principally through his or her writings, exegesis remains history’s essential tool, just as history remains the handmaid of exegesis for those whose primary aim is to understand what was said, whether or not with a view to accepting it or acting upon it.

History, of course, is never ‘neutral’. The myth of neutrality, still clung to by some ‘departments of religion’ in the way a drowning mariner clings to a few battered spars, was itself an Enlightenment fiction, generating the spurious belief that one might approach the New Testament through a supposedly neutral ‘history’, and then, when the ‘facts’ or at least the ‘data’ have been cleaned up historically, venture upon the further task of a ‘theological’ reading. Things were never that simple. Many ‘historical’ verdicts reached by books of ‘New Testament Introduction’ have deeply theological or even ideological roots, not least those of the history-of-religions school discussed a moment ago. In any case, I propose in the present book that, having begun with one small and sharp historical incident, the letter to Philemon and its surrounding historical narrative and context, we then reserve the historical questions about Paul’s life and work for the final section of the volume. This is actually to take the heart of the historical task very seriously, as the study not just of what people do but of why they do it. Only when we have understood Paul’s worldview do we understand why his theology is what it is, and the role it plays precisely within that worldview. Only when we understand Paul’s theology do we understand why he believed himself called to do what he did, and why he went about his

tasks in the way that he did. Only then, in fact, do we really stand a chance of approaching the tasks of exegesis itself, of the sustained study of the individual letters, with any deep overall understanding – though of course, since the letters are the primary data for every stage of our investigation, it is not the case that we first draw conclusions about Paul’s worldview and theology from somewhere else and only at the end look back at the letters. Rather, my proposal is that, granted the basic starting-point we have already attained in the middle of the first century, we should work our way towards an understanding of why Paul did what he did (Part IV) by means of the two large studies of worldview (Part II) and theology (Part III).

I spoke before, briefly, about the way in which certain programmes of study, particularly the history-of-religions agenda, have conditioned the way scholars have come to regard the question of the authenticity or otherwise of the letters ascribed to Paul, and also the value to be placed on the other apparent source, the book of Acts. These questions remain important, and draw together many of the things we have been talking about. I shall therefore deal with them briefly now before concluding this opening chapter with some more Philemon-related questions of history and theology.

(v) Sources

The first question most historians ask has to do with sources. Here we face a problem as much of scholarly fashion as of historical substance. Since the present volume is designed to challenge and reshape in quite a radical way the ‘normal’ ways of understanding Paul historically and theologically, and since the judgments made about ‘authenticity’ grow directly out of, reflect and perpetuate the views I am challenging, it seems to me absurd simply to collude with the ruling hypothesis, to concede as it were some of the prosecution’s main points when in fact there is a good defence to be offered.

Hardly anybody today questions the authenticity of seven of the ‘Pauline’ letters: Romans, the two Corinthian letters, Galatians, Philippians, the first of the Thessalonian letters, and Philemon – though it is a salutary exercise to remember that all of them have been challenged at one stage or another, and

that F. C. Baur, who launched the nineteenth-century Tübingen school, regarded only the first four of those as genuine, spreading all the others out across a lengthy chronological framework. That position died a death over a century ago, but some of Baur's assumptions linger on in other forms, as we shall see.

It is high time, in my view, to reconsider the three obvious omissions in the list, namely Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians. Many scholars have in fact resisted the trend on one or more of these letters, more with Colossians than the other two.¹²³ Reasons of style are often cited (see below). But I have come to think that the main reason why Ephesians and Colossians have been regarded as non-Pauline (or, in the somewhat grandiose phrase, Deutero-Pauline) is because they fly in the face of the liberal protestant paradigm for reading Paul which dominated the scholarly landscape for several generations, but which has been undermined from more or less all sides over the course of recent decades. Quite simply, Ephesians in particular, and Colossians to a considerable extent, seem to have a much stronger and higher view of the church – and, indeed, of Jesus himself – than many scholars have been prepared to allow. The real Paul, such scholars assumed, taught 'justification by faith', and since this was held to be radically incompatible with what was seen as a high view of the church (sometimes, too, with a high view of Jesus), Paul could not have written those letters. Indeed, these letters did not appear to teach 'justification by faith', except in the single verse Ephesians 2.8, and that could be explained away in terms of 'Deutero-Paul' nodding politely to his great exemplar. But Procrustean beds will not do. It is time to challenge such dogma-driven prejudices head on.¹²⁴

But surely (someone might ask), isn't that liberal protestant paradigm exactly what has been challenged so strongly over the last generation by the 'new perspective'? And what about the new 'political' and 'sociological' readings of Paul? Now that they've highlighted Paul's vision of Christ as sovereign over the powers, and realized that Paul was interested in forming and shaping the early communities, might that not affect a decision about

sources? What, indeed, about the fashion for ‘apocalyptic’? Might that not have changed things as well?¹²⁵

Well, yes, all three of these movements might well have had that effect. The ‘new perspective’ might well have noticed that the main emphasis which has emerged from its own study of Romans and Galatians is exactly what we find in Ephesians 2.11–21, and that the stress on ‘participation in Christ’ which was so important already for Albert Schweitzer, and which has re-emerged as a central theme for writers like Ed Sanders and Douglas Campbell, is massively reaffirmed there as well. So, too, the ‘political Paul’ of Horsley and others might have been thought very likely to emphasize the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over all powers and authorities, and the victory of the cross in which those powers were led as a defeated rabble behind him. There we are again: Ephesians and Colossians. But no: that move has not been taken. Ephesians and Colossians are still on the ‘dubious’ list, and sometimes even cited, astonishingly, as indicating an ‘early catholic’ social conformism, settling down into comfortable bourgeois existence. (Anything less like comfortable bourgeois existence than Ephesians it would be hard to imagine, but there we are.¹²⁶) Likewise, one might have thought that an ‘apocalyptic’ reading of Paul would have done to 2 Thessalonians what Paul hoped Philemon would do to Onesimus, that is, welcomed it back into the family with open arms. The ‘apocalyptic’ enthusiasts might have noticed, as well, that the cosmic victory of the cross, and the consequent continuing cosmic warfare, brought Ephesians and Colossians, too, right in to the centre. The massive ingenuity and labour that has rehabilitated Galatians as an ‘apocalyptic’ text could, if applied to those two letters, have had much the same result with considerably less effort.¹²⁷

So why hasn’t it happened? One reason, I think, is that, at the very moment when the older reasons for rejecting Ephesians and Colossians had been kicked away, quite new ones came to the fore. Paul may not have been a nineteenth-century liberal Protestant, but people very much hoped he might turn out to be a postmodern egalitarian ... and there are those awkward *Haustafeln*, the instructions to husbands and wives, to children and slaves.¹²⁸ Even if we’ve given up making Paul the preacher of our favourite

theology, we still want him to back up our assumed ideology; and the thought of those differentiations within the household, with their threat of something we might even call ‘hierarchy’, is too much to bear. That emerges explicitly in some writers, but I suspect it is latent in many others. [129](#)

In addition – it is hard to say this, but perhaps it needs to be said – there is the matter of fashion and prejudice. Just as in Germany in the late nineteenth century you more or less *had* to be a follower of F. C. Baur, and in Oxford in the mid-twentieth century you more or less *had* to believe in the existence of Q, so in North America today you more or less *have* to say that you will regard Ephesians and Colossians as post-Pauline – unless, like Luke Timothy Johnson, you have so massively established your scholarly credibility on other grounds that your acceptance of the letters as fully Pauline can then be regarded, not as a serious scholarly fault, but as an allowable eccentricity. [130](#) This has come about partly because, again with a certain irony, the question has become bound up with a quite different debate, the ‘conservative’ versus ‘liberal’ question about the Bible itself. There are, of course, ‘conservatives’ who think Paul wrote everything the Bible says he wrote (though most balk at Hebrews, despite the heading in the King James Version), and a test of ‘liberal’ orthodoxy (which is of course just as fierce, and carefully policed, as any other sort) is not only how many sayings of Jesus you regard as inauthentic but how many letters of Paul you hold at bay. The irony emerges when those same ‘conservative’ readers allow Ephesians to be by Paul for reasons to do with their commitment to a particular view of scripture, but are careful not to let it affect their view of Paul lest they be forced to admit, not only a higher ecclesiology than they have usually wanted, but also the fact that Ephesians seems to offer rather a clear vindication of the ‘new perspective’ (these two points are not unrelated). The same irony in reverse emerges when the still-ruling ‘liberal’ orthodoxy embraces all kinds of political and sociologically ‘relevant’ readings of Paul, without noticing just how much help they would receive in such matters from Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians. [131](#)

The prejudice against Ephesians and Colossians has grown so strong in some circles that it has reached the point where young scholars are warned

against using them in the study of Paul lest they be thought unscholarly. This is one of those dogmas that have taken the place, within the western study of the New Testament, of the older doctrinal tests which used to characterize seminaries: instead of checking out students (or indeed would-be professors) on the Trinity or the Incarnation, interviewers now enquire cautiously whether they are sound on rejecting Pauline authorship of Ephesians! The multiple ironies of these positions should in themselves already suggest that it is time for a rethink. I am reminded of Clifford Geertz's ironic remark, that it is almost more of a problem to get exhausted ideas out of the scholarly literature than it is to get productive ones in.¹³² At least, as Robert Morgan suggested in a different context, let us put the chess pieces back on the board from time to time and restart the game.¹³³

Arguments from style are clearly important in principle. But they are hard to make in practice. We have such a tiny sample of Paul's writing, hardly an adequate database for a serious stylistic analysis such as would support definite conclusions about authorship. Those who have done computer analyses of Paul's style come up with more 'conservative' results than we might have expected.¹³⁴ In fact, if it's stylistic differences we want, the most striking are, in my opinion, the radical differences between 1 and 2 Corinthians. The second letter to Corinth is much jerkier; its sentences are dense and convoluted, bending back on themselves, twisting to and fro with language about God, Jesus Christ and Paul's ministry. The organization of material is much less crisp. There is a far greater difference between those two Corinthian letters than there is between Galatians and Romans on the one hand and Ephesians and Colossians on the other; yet nobody for that reason casts doubt on 2 Corinthians. As John A. T. Robinson pointed out from his personal experience a generation ago, a busy church leader may well write in very different styles for different occasions and audiences. The same person can be working simultaneously on a large academic project with careful, ponderous sentences and a short, snappy talk for the Sunday school. It has not been unknown for senior biblical scholars to write children's fiction.¹³⁵ More directly to the point, it has recently been argued strikingly that Ephesians and Colossians show evidence of a deliberate

‘Asiatic’ style which Paul could easily have adopted for readers in western Turkey.¹³⁶ I regard the possibility of significant variation in Paul’s own style as much higher than the possibility that someone else, a companion or co-worker, could achieve such a measure of similarity. Other historical examples of that genre do not encourage us to suppose they would have been so successful.¹³⁷

It is time, I believe, that we allow at least the possibility that Ephesians and Colossians, rather obviously companion pieces of one another and, in the case of Colossians, possessing an obvious link to Philemon, should be brought back into the fold. Since, to repeat, part of the point of this book is to rethink from the ground up all kinds of previously held views about Paul, his worldview, his theology and his aims, it would be foolish to push off the table, before we begin, material which has a *prima facie* claim to come from him, on the ground that it does not fit with those other views.

The question of 2 Thessalonians is different, though related. My suspicion is that the true reason for dismissing it was that Paul wasn’t supposed to be interested in the kind of ‘apocalyptic’ writing we find in chapter 2 in particular.¹³⁸ But again the prejudice has lingered on long after the scholarly mood has shifted. ‘Apocalyptic’ has made a come-back in New Testament studies in general and Paul in particular. What is more, ‘apocalyptic’ language such as we find in this letter, though no doubt difficult for us to interpret, was from at least Daniel onwards a standard way of referring to what today we would call ‘political’ events and personages and investing them with their supposed theological significance.¹³⁹ It would be ironic now, with interest running high in Paul as both an apocalypticist and a political thinker, if we continued to rule out of consideration, largely for reasons of scholarly tradition and fashion, a letter where both those themes play key roles.

The question of the Pastoral Letters is different again. My own opinion is that if the only ‘Pastoral’ letter we had was what we presently call 2 Timothy, the ‘problem of the Pastorals’ might not have occurred.¹⁴⁰ 2 Timothy is, it seems to me, much more like the ‘Paul’ of the other letters in style, mood and flavour than 1 Timothy. However, the variation is, again,

perhaps no greater than the variation between 1 and 2 Corinthians. Titus is in a slightly different category again.

For the purposes of this book I will assume three things. First, Colossians is certainly Pauline, and to be used without excuse or apology. Second, Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians are highly likely to be Pauline, even if (a concession to the weaker siblings; I do not myself find this plausible) they were written by someone close to Paul and doing their best to imitate him. They may be used in evidence though perhaps not made to bear an entire load by themselves. However, again as a concession to troubled consciences, I shall try, in mounting arguments, to allow the normal seven letters to bear most of the weight, and bring in Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians rather as Winston Churchill said he would bring ancient languages into a modern school curriculum: he would, he said, 'let the clever ones learn Latin as an honour and Greek as a treat.'

Third, as to the Pastorals, 2 Timothy may well be by Paul, writing in a different mood and context, and may be drawn on similarly, though again with due caution. 1 Timothy and Titus come in a different category, and will be used, in the opposite way to that in which a drunkard uses a lamppost, for illumination rather than support.

A further necessary question about sources concerns the use of Acts in the study of Paul. Here again we meet with prejudice – in both directions, one might add: 'conservative' scholars have tended to defend the 'historicity' of Acts, and 'radical' scholars to question it. No surprises so far. But underneath this is a rather different issue. It is precisely part of the implicit worldview of the older liberal protestant ruling paradigm in New Testament studies to suggest that the writing of the four gospels in general, and of Luke in particular, represented a 'failure of nerve' on the part of the early church: the 'parousia' has not arrived on schedule, so let's look back rather than forward!¹⁴¹ This extended to a highly negative judgment against Luke: at a time when 'salvation history' was seen as just about the most wicked theological mistake one could make, Luke was seen as its primary architect, pushing the early church down the fateful road to 'early Catholicism'.

I have argued strongly elsewhere that this entire way of looking at things rests on some fairly major mistakes.¹⁴² The prejudice against Acts as a historical source is based, in part, on this strange idea that early Christian historiography was a category mistake. The received ‘wisdom’ suggests a date for Acts in the 80s, 90s, or even later, but there are actually no solid arguments for this, and such dating largely depends on prior judgments already noted and queried.¹⁴³ There were, in other words, *theological* and ideological reasons why Acts was pushed further away from the events it purports to record. Now that we see so many things about early Christianity so very differently, it is time to revisit the reasons behind such judgments and submit them in their turn to critical questioning.¹⁴⁴

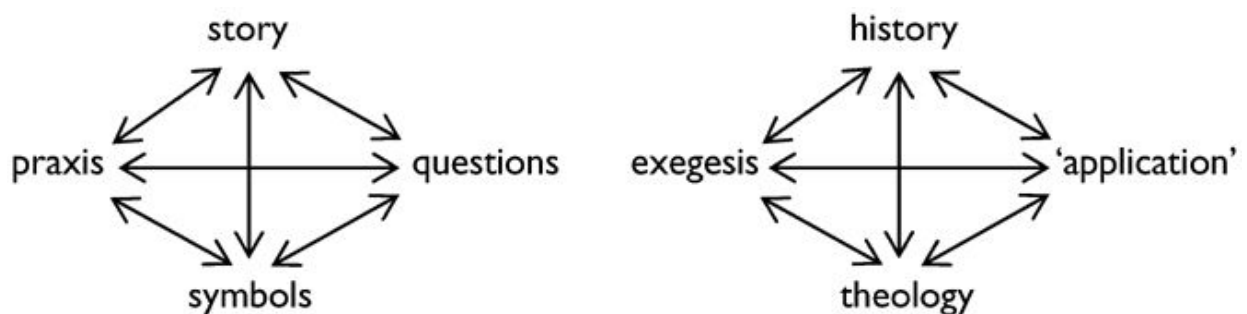
Similarly, the portrait of Paul in Acts is often held to be too different from that in the letters for them to be the same person. Well, it is of course likely that there will be significant differences between any book about any person and their own actual letters (or, today, emails). Compare Tacitus’s account of Augustus with the great man’s own *Res Gestae*, for a start. The letters include much that Acts doesn’t mention, and vice versa. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians of all sorts of escapades, including shipwrecks, which do not feature in Acts; nor does Acts even hint that Paul was a regular and passionate letter-writer. Nor does Acts mention Titus, who seems in the letters to have been one of Paul’s more important companions. Our friends Philemon and Onesimus do not appear. However, things are not so straightforward, to say the least. Some of the key points which used to be trotted out as evidence of the supposed Acts/Paul distinction are the very same points at which more recent study of Paul, not least the post-‘new perspective’ re-evaluations, might cause us to see things differently. We might, perhaps, enquire whether Acts has in fact highlighted some things which really are there in the letters but which certain parts of the ‘old perspective’ had screened out, for reasons once more of theology or ideology.¹⁴⁵ Finally, the chronological puzzles generated when we try to fit Acts and Paul together are the sort of thing one might expect, granted again the vagaries of first-century writing and the small amount of surviving evidence. Josephus’s different accounts of his own activities do not cohere

easily, but we do not for that reason assume that one version or the other is straightforwardly fictitious.¹⁴⁶ In particular, the correlation between Acts and Galatians should not be regarded as settled. Fashion has dictated that Galatians 2.1–10 refers to the same visit of Paul to Jerusalem as we find in Acts 15, but that is by no means the only way to cut the cake.¹⁴⁷ Like some other fashions in biblical scholarship, it may well be that this one serves a quite different agenda, in this case the desire, as part of the discredited ideological viewpoint mentioned above, to make every effort to make Luke look tendentious or just silly, or to return to F. C. Baur’s picture of an ‘early Christianity’ embodying a (Hegelian, of course) dialectic between ‘Jewish Christianity’ (Peter) and ‘gentile Christianity’ (Paul). Once we step back from these particular agendas, this ‘assured result’, along with many others, ought to be re-examined.

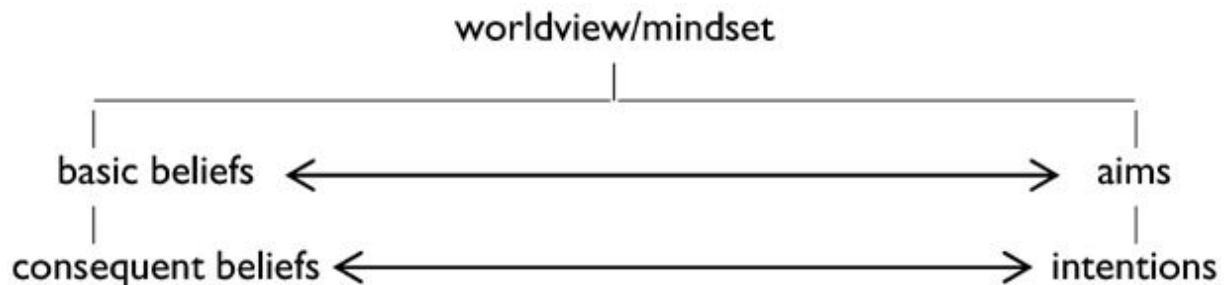
None of this means, of course, that Acts can be used naively as it stands as a historical source. But it means that we must hold off from dogmatic negativity and look at the actual evidence afresh. For our present purposes, we will take the line I have taken with Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians: nothing massive will rest on Acts, but it will be interesting from time to time to see what new possibilities emerge as we look at Paul from fresh angles.

[\(vi\) Worldview, Theology and History.](#)

We have, then, a set of questions about Paul (history, theology, exegesis and ‘application’, each with considerable subdivisions), and a set of worldview-enquiries with which to address them (story, praxis, symbol and questions, plus ‘culture’ and ‘worship’). How do these two line up and integrate?

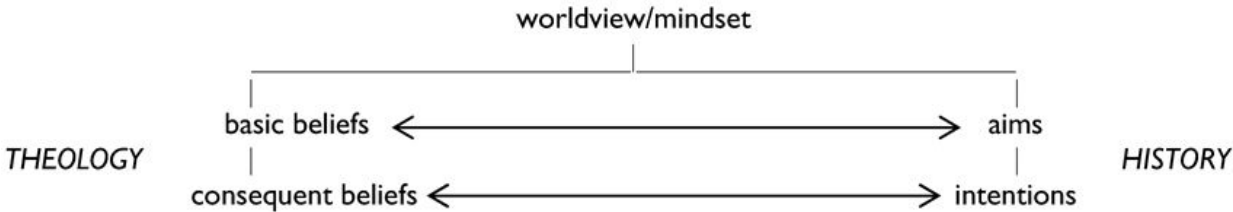


The worldview-model as I articulated it in *NTPG*, and applied it in the later parts of that volume and then, more particularly, in *JVG*, ended by proposing that worldviews relate, both in a community and in individual persons, to *beliefs* and *aims*, both of which (unlike the worldview itself) are things that the community (and the person) in question are conscious of, frequently refer to, discuss, modify and consciously work at.¹⁴⁸ I then identified a distinction on either hand. First, I proposed a distinction between *basic beliefs*, which are closer to the worldview and regarded as pretty much central and non-negotiable, and *consequent beliefs*, things which are believed to be entailed by the ‘basic beliefs’ and held as a result, though not themselves loadbearing in the same way. (It is because I believe that in the northern hemisphere the sun moves from left to right that I believe that it will shortly emerge from behind that cloud; the first belief is basic, and very important; the second is consequent and of only momentary significance, but not held with much less certainty.) Second, I proposed a distinction (not entirely unrelated to similar ones in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*) between *aims* and *intentions*, where ‘aims’, like ‘basic beliefs’, constituted a central core of goals and hopes for a society or a person, and ‘intentions’, like ‘consequent beliefs’, constituted the particular goals and aspirations which the society or the person believed contributed to those more fundamental aims. And I proposed that it was the task of the historian to work towards a description of all four of these things in relation to the society or individual one is studying.¹⁴⁹

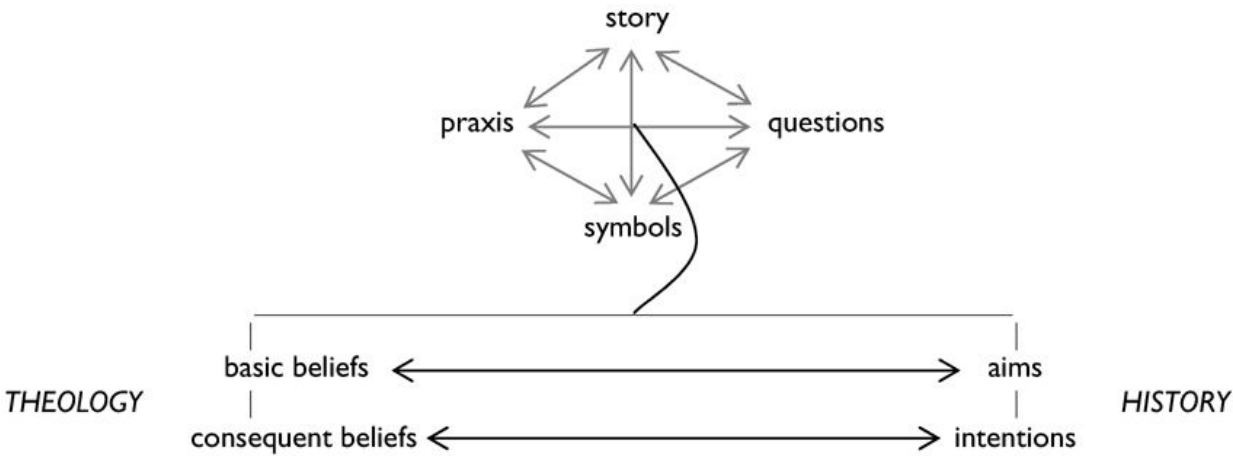


I now wish to propose, amplifying and developing the model just a little, that ‘history’ normally approaches this entire topic from the right-hand side as

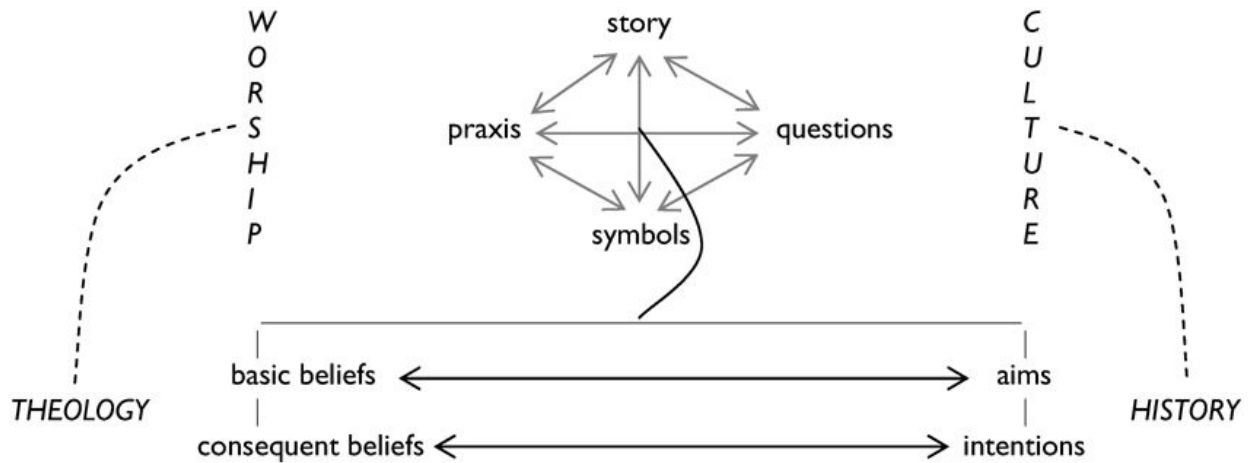
we look at it, and ‘theology’ from the left. Both will be aware that a full historical description will include an account of beliefs, and that a full theological description will include an account of aims and intentions. But the normal province of ‘theology’ is an account of beliefs and their mutual relationships, and the normal province of ‘history’ is an account of the often tangled motivations which generated particular historical events and movements. All this might usefully be displayed in something like the following diagram:



Or, to put it more completely:



We then need to factor in ‘culture’ and ‘worship’ at the worldview level, with their presence affecting the lower levels too. Both belong, of course, to the whole picture, but ‘culture’ may perhaps belong more closely with ‘history’, and ‘worship’ with ‘theology’:

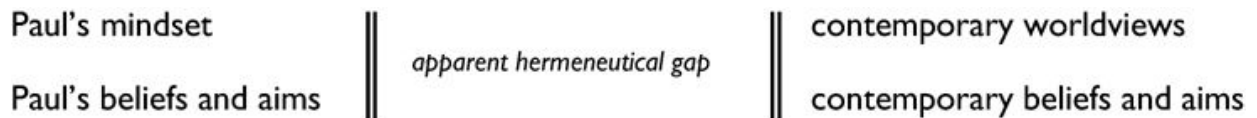


The aim, as always – the aim of *this* historian/theologian, at least! – is, once more, to *include the data* and to do so *with appropriate simplicity*, not forgetting the third task of a good hypothesis, to shed light on other cognate areas of research. The problem with so many studies of so many figures in history, not least figures in the history of Christianity, is that so much of this has been left unsaid, and so much data, in consequence, left unnoticed. The result has often been that the trio of ‘basic beliefs’, ‘consequent beliefs’ and ‘theology’ have not only assumed centre stage but have driven all the other actors into the wings, or off to the pub, or even to set up a rival theatre company in which ‘aims’, ‘intentions’ and ‘history’ have done their own thing, a kind of anti-theological ‘sociology’.¹⁵⁰ Part of the point of this book is to get them all back on stage together and let them work out how the play should really be performed.

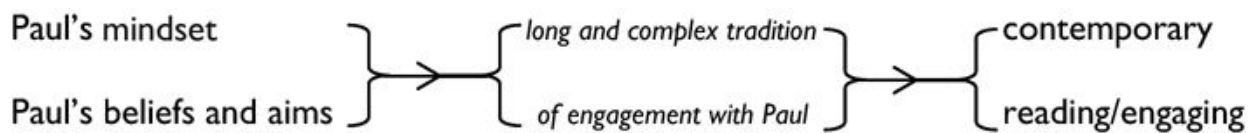
Just when one might think it couldn’t get any more complex, we must in all fairness point out that modern scholars, too, live within a world that can be similarly described. The vocation of hermeneutics, indeed, is always to be aware of our own worlds and worldviews, insofar as we can, and to be conscious of the points where our own sets of spectacles render us blind to what is going on in other times and places.¹⁵¹ This is of course where what I have called ‘application’ comes into play, and where our own contexts, whether it be our anxiety about social ethics (hence the weight that is borne by the question of slavery in our own day) or our concern for this or that element of Paul’s doctrinal, evangelistic and pastoral teaching (hence the

fighths over justification and ‘new perspectives’), lead us to highlight some parts of the overall Pauline picture and to undervalue or ignore other parts altogether.

What’s more, whether we live in the church or outside it, we cannot ignore the fact that Paul’s letters have been, and still are, enormously formative influences within western culture and, in a measure, global culture. The fact that some contemporary philosophers can discuss them along with other culturally significant texts indicates that well enough; it might be good if, from time to time, theologians and exegetes were to return the compliment. But the net result is that the two worldviews, those of Paul on the one hand and those of contemporary readers on the other, are not simply standing on either side of the hermeneutical divide looking uneasily at one another:



but are, rather, already intertwined in a thousand different ways which it would take a lifetime to unpick and analyze:



– resulting in our present hermeneutical situation, which we had better accept cheerfully (there being no alternative) and learn to live with. It is of course impossible for any one mind, perhaps any one community, to grow into full awareness of all the constituent elements of this picture. But it is as well to note that it exists and that, at many points, half-remembered bits of the tradition may be haunting us – bits of the tradition which themselves may have been engaged in complex multi-sided dialogues both with Paul, with other interpretative traditions, and with their own contemporaries, in ways that are now irretrievably lost to us. Such other traditions may whisper

that it would be safer or wiser to go one route rather than another, to avoid *this* topic and highlight *that* one, and so on. In particular, it has often happened that one tradition has so identified some elements of its own reconstruction with ‘what Paul was saying’ that those who come after cannot help reading Paul through the lenses of that reconstruction; and then the same thing happens again; and again ... To take the obvious example: there are plenty of serious-minded people in the world today who read Paul through a series of lenses bequeathed by Luther, Kant, Bultmann and others, and then interrogate Paul as to his perceived inconsistencies and aporiae as though these were there in his writings rather than in the cross-eyed effect produced by the lenses. At this point, once more, only the full worldview-model, and then the full study of beliefs and aims, will enable us to escape the trap.

This is where, of course, a robust critical realism would simply say: That’s fine, we take all that on board in principle, but fortunately we do have Paul’s text, we do have the means to make a good stab at saying what it meant in the first century, so let’s get on with it. Yes indeed, and that is what we shall shortly try to do; but this note of hermeneutical caution may be thought appropriate, and it, too, should haunt the following pages, should stand beside the historian even in the moment of historical triumph, whispering, ‘Remember that you too are hermeneutically conditioned.’

But this mention of the necessary work of the slave brings us back to the question of history and theology, and to the complex relationship between them. This book is part of a project in which I have tried to avoid collapsing either into the other, have tried to avoid history becoming a slave of theology or vice versa. The fact that I have been accused of failure *in both directions* indicates to me that I may be getting the balance somewhere near right, though presumably not completely. (It is not enough, of course, to make such accusations. Anyone can throw mud around the room. It is important, and helpful, to show how I, or anyone else, actually fail in the historical task because of theological interests, or vice versa.) Of course, to the materialist all theology is a dangerous distraction, just as to the Platonist all history is a dangerous distortion. Part of the point of the present series is precisely to

plot the way in which the New Testament, and Jesus, Paul and the gospels in particular, resist being collapsed into either the materialist or the Platonist worldview, or any of their would-be academic or ecclesial variations.

So: if theology has sometimes been the master and history the slave, and sometimes the roles have been reversed, what might happen if, instead of reading the letter to Philemon as an example of the tasks that await us, we now read it instead as an allegory?

[3. Philemon as Allegory: Theology, History and Reconciliation](#)

What follows now is a *jeu d'esprit*, a bit of Pauline foolishness for which the reader's indulgence and pardon is requested. It bears no weight of argument, serving more to mull over and flesh out the deeply serious questions we have been dealing with. It is more a matter of intuition than of reasoned scholarship to suppose that the massive antinomies of theology and history, frowning at each other across the table of biblical scholarship, might actually be yet another pair which seem within the modern western worldview to be irreconcilable, like heaven and earth themselves, and yet which might be open to some kind of *rapprochement*. Since the letter to Philemon is all about the reconciliation of people whose culture was trying to pull them apart, and since, as I have suggested, reconciliation and the resultant unity of God's people is pretty much central to Paul's whole project, it might make sense to ask whether the study of Paul might do, for this pair of glowering adversaries, what Paul himself was trying to do for his two friends. The fact that this poses our late-modern question to a text which was innocent of the problem is part of the foolishness.

This question is obviously cognate with the question which haunted *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Indeed, my making Philemon thematic for the present work is, as the sharp-eyed may already have spotted, a way of balancing the thematic role of the prodigal son within that earlier volume. There, too, I allowed that parable to say more than it did on the lips of Jesus (but who is to say how far a *sensus plenior* exegesis may be allowed to stretch?): I envisioned history as the prodigal, running off with half the

patrimony, and then coming home to find theology, as the older brother, looking down its nose and wondering what the cat had brought in.

It doesn't take much effort to transpose this same question, the underlying question for this whole series of books, into terms of Philemon and Onesimus. Here is Philemon, representing Theological Orthodoxy: we know what's right, we will order this household accordingly, and everyone must come into line. Here is Onesimus, representing the Enlightenment's project of historiography: we are cabined, cribbed and confined in this small and stifling theological world, and we must break out, do our own thing, ask our own questions, and run away, snatching bits and pieces of the family silver as we go. And the runaway slave, who in the case of Enlightenment historiography made a beeline for Jesus long before thinking of visiting Paul, eventually came to the apostle as well, hoping to redescribe him in historical terms and so to neutralize the scandalous gospel that the old slave-master, Theology, had used as a means of keeping History in its proper and servile place. But supposing the apostle, even in prison, has a trick or two left up his sleeve?

It will have to be a good trick. There are many Philemons out there, the self-appointed guardians of Pauline orthodoxy (of whichever sort), who will only be prepared to have the slave back in the house once he's been suitably chastised and given strict conditions of service. Do not give us this History, they say; do not tell us that in order to understand Paul we have to study his context, to learn about the Jewish world of the first century and the pre-Pauline meanings of Paul's favourite words! How will Theology be able to speak the good news if it is festooned with footnotes about Pharisees and spattered with speculation about sectarians? How can we sing the lord's song in such a strange land? Is this not an appeal away from the Text, and is not our calling (as devout scripture-believers – or perhaps simply as good, quasi-Barthian postliberals) to deal with the Text and nothing but the Text, and to keep away from everything else? Were not the years of AD 1–30 a special time, different from all others, so that all we need to know is that in that time God walked the earth, died for our sins and rose again? Or (another voice from a similar point of view) is it not the case that the great traditions of the

church, with their creeds and canons, have provided a wise and authoritative reading of all scriptures, so that we should pay attention to them rather than to historical reconstructions based on the wider world of the first century? Or (yet another voice from a different wing of the same house) how can we continue to celebrate the deeply *Jewish* theological message of Paul if we have to study the Stoics, the emperor-cult, all that pagan *Religionsgeschichte* which we threw out as so much *skybala*? What (ask all these contemporary Philemons) can this slave called History have to contribute to the household, especially after he's behaved so badly? The only thing we can think of using him for – and he's pretty useless even at that – is helping us look up words in the dictionary; and since we already know what they ought to mean, because Luther and Calvin (or Aquinas and Augustine, or even the great catholic creeds) told us, we aren't too bothered by his fistful of philology, either.

The Paul of History, in his prison cell, sighs as he reflects on the Apostle of Faith, and yearns for a reintegration of his whole self. Paul was nothing if not a historical figure, and the 'foolish' argument he mounted against the snooty Corinthians (one of his most spectacular pieces of rhetoric, and all the more so for being the climax of a letter declaring what a waste of time rhetoric was) applies here too:

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about (I'm talking nonsense, remember), I'll boast as well. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of the Messiah? – I'm talking like a raving madman – I'm a better one. I've worked harder, been in prison more often, been beaten more times than I can count, and I've often been close to death. Five times I've had the Jewish beating, forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; I was adrift in the sea for a night and a day. I've been constantly travelling, facing dangers from rivers, dangers from brigands, dangers from my own people, dangers from foreigners, dangers in the town, dangers in the countryside, dangers at sea, dangers from false believers. I've toiled and laboured, I've burnt the candle at both ends, I've been hungry and thirsty, I've often gone without food altogether, I've been cold and naked.

Quite apart from all that, I have this daily pressure on me, my care for all the churches. Who is weak and I'm not weak? Who is offended without me burning with shame?

If I must boast, I will boast of my weaknesses. The God and father of the lord Jesus, who is blessed for ever, knows that I'm not lying: in Damascus, King Aretas, the local ruler, was guarding the city of Damascus so that he could capture me, but I was let down in a basket through a window and over the wall, and I escaped his clutches.¹⁵²

That says it all, really: if you want to understand Paul, understand him as someone with his feet on the ground (or in the stocks) of messy reality, his shameful sufferings openly visible to the embarrassment of the high-minded, lofty Corinthians and perhaps also of their successors today. History is, after all, about *danger*: the danger of contingency, the possibility that things might have been otherwise, the prospect of being adrift night and day on a sea of unsorted data, the likelihood of being lashed, beaten and stoned by other evidence, other worldviews, determined to provide a harsh reality check by which to measure Theology and cut it down to size. How much safer Paul would have been had he founded a seminary in Tarsus or Antioch and required future church leaders to sit at his feet day by day! But how much less like the apostle whose calling was not just to speak of, but actually to embody, the covenant faithfulness of God.¹⁵³

So Paul knows that he has to send History, the former naughty slave, back to Theology, the master who, in terms of his own culture, might be thought highly likely to spurn him altogether. How is he going to make the case? How will the history of the apostle, one of the most central moments in the question of Christian Origins, relate to the overall question, the Question of God?¹⁵⁴

The argument of the present book is that when we use the worldview method I have set out above, and thus bring a larger ‘thick description’ of Paul and his mindset into play alongside and as a way in to a fresh analysis of his central theological concepts, we find a fresh coherence. More specifically, we find that we can understand the deep and organic links between the history of Paul, and of his letters and his churches, and the theology which he articulated in those letters. We will not need to collapse the one into the other, whether theology into history, as with some of the sociologists, allowing the slave to come back and dictate his own terms, reducing Philemon to a mere puppet in his own house, or history into theology, as with some of the preachers and guardians of orthodoxy, allowing the slave back as long as he’s bound hand and foot and told to mind his manners in future. And, just as Paul’s way to a reconciliation between master and servant was through a complete identification with them both,

reaching out either hand to embrace them so that they were to be united *in him*, with anything owing in either direction put down to his account, so the way of reconciliation between history and theology, between Christian Origins and the Question of God, comes to rest in this volume on Paul as the announcer and embodier of God as the faithful one, faithful to creation and faithful to covenant, the God whose faithfulness came to life and walked and talked in Palestine and died on a Roman cross to reconcile God and the world. The cross, indeed, will be central to our project here, both structurally and thematically, and part of the underlying and implicit proposal will be that Paul's understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death, while having of course other and better known highlights than that which we find in Philemon, may help us wrestle too with the question of reconciliation between the two elements of our split world.

For Paul, it mattered vitally that Jesus' death and resurrection took place in real space, time and matter. If these were not historical events, our faith was futile, he writes, and we would still be in our sins.¹⁵⁵ Paul is after all a *creational* theologian, as his deep structural and thematic reliance on Genesis at key points reminds us. For Paul, it was not enough for a theological meaning to float in the air over historical events, intersecting with them for a brief moment only (Bultmann's famous '*Dass*'!) and then leaving again in a hurry for fear of contamination. The slave belongs back in the house, back in the family, and only when that has been confirmed can he be set free to serve Paul in the cause of the gospel.

It is of course a risk. Onesimus must go home, like the prodigal, with real humility for the follies of the past as well as real hope for a new future. But it is a risk, too, for Philemon. Theology must be prepared to say that, for the sake of Paul, we will accept the challenge of history, even though, in a corner of our hearts, we remain wary because of what happened last time. The question is: how can that which was formerly 'useless' now be 'useful'? This book attempts to offer an answer.

But of course, in good postmodern fashion, we cannot assume that yesterday's victims are the same as today's. If for much of the pre-modern period, and still in many circles through to the present day, Theology has

been the slave-master, turning up its nose at the useless runaway slave called History, there is a sense in which those roles have now been well and truly reversed. There has been a massive shift in the geographical and also conceptual centre of gravity of biblical studies over the course of the last generation. Whereas once the world of western scholarship was led by Germany, with Britain, France, Italy, the United States and other countries all coming in alongside, the United States now appears to be producing more biblical scholarship than the rest of the world put together. This not only generates the real danger that the English-speaking world can decide, *de facto* as it were, to marginalize material in other languages, a danger which (alas) the present work will not altogether avoid. There is also the danger that the Lutheran theological worldview (albeit often in its neo-Kantian and other later developments) which in the past provided the implicit and sometimes explicit framework for so much biblical studies, especially Pauline studies, will be replaced by an implicit and sometimes explicit secular worldview, rooted in the culture whereby American ‘departments of religion’ are obliged to show that they are not corrupted by those dangerous theological and spiritual impulses which would so skew their historical endeavours.¹⁵⁶ The study of Paul will then be taken over by the sociologists, the rhetoricians and the secular historians. The theologians, meanwhile, will now be treated as the runaway slaves, fleeing to their denominational seminaries where, it is rumoured to the historians’ horror, they even *pray* before studying their texts – as if that were not a recipe for falsifying the evidence before you start! – and snatching as they go some of the historian’s household goods, and perhaps even household gods (lexica, classical texts, and so on), to lend the appearance of validity to their essentially faith-driven and prejudice-bound projects. It is now the turn, then, of Theology to come to Paul in prison, hoping perhaps to stay with him for ever, only to be told that before that could happen there is a difficult journey to be made, a journey which will be as difficult for the new Philemon (the arrogant secularist) to accept as it will be for the new Onesimus (the now perhaps useful theologian) to make in the first place. How will Paul effect reconciliation this way round?

For a start, Paul will reassure both sides that they are full partners in his work. As we shall see when we examine his worldview, the symbols, praxis and stories which contribute to it are none of them simply about ‘ideas’ and ‘beliefs’. They are about the creator God, his world and his people – and this world and these people are creatures of space, time and matter, open by definition to historical enquiry, living life in public without shame, modelling a way of life which is precisely in and for the world, affirming the goodness of the creator’s universe and of human beings within it. Yes, says Paul to the suspicious slave-master History: I am your partner! You and I belong together!

But then he goes on, still addressing Philemon the Historian, ‘Now: I appeal to you for my child, Theology, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment; in fact, the entire discipline of “theology” as you know it may fairly be said to have begun in my historically grounded work, my preaching, my communities, my letters. Theology is what makes my heart sing; I can (and sometimes do) go on about it all night. I know you have sometimes found Theology a thorough nuisance, always wanting answers to what seem to you the wrong questions, always insisting that the only history it will accept is such as will serve what it knows in advance must be its own proclamation. Well, blame me for that if you like; but if you want to be my partner, if you want to work fruitfully with me in the future, welcome this returning slave as if he were me. And perhaps you’ll do even more ...’

Of course, things are not quite that simple. Philemon the Historian has not, of late, been quite so ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’ as heretofore. When Theology flees out of the front door, other influential voices come in at the back, in the form of secular ‘ethics’, the postmodern questions of ‘solidarity and difference’, the challenges to make Paul ‘relevant’ not so much to the church and its preaching (thank goodness, thinks the secular historian, they’ve run away; they were always pretty useless for us, anyway) but to the supposed major concerns of the western world in its present social and cultural crisis.¹⁵⁷ History does not thrive in a vacuum, and the lingering puzzles of postmodernity with their sometimes shrill new moralisms create

fresh contexts within which to re-read (and perhaps misread) ancient texts and to reopen (and perhaps misunderstand) older investigations.

Pointing all this out to Philemon the Historian may not endear us to him, and certainly will not make him any the readier to have Onesimus the Theologian back in the house. But if Paul, the supposed partner in historical study, insists that to be friends with him you must be friends with Theology too, then perhaps a reconciliation needs to be effected. How might that happen?

The answer, again, is through the worldview-model, which attempts to bridge the gap (not exactly Lessing's ugly ditch, but not so far from it either) between history as it has been done and theology as it has been done.¹⁵⁸ The attempt must be made to offer a multi-dimensional study of Paul, insofar as that can be done; how we wish we had some artefacts, some hard evidence, even the spar of the ship that he clung to for a day and a night, rather than just that tantalizing tomb in St Paul's Without the Walls! Within that attempt, the more the probing question of history shines its searchlight to and fro, asking what precisely motivated this strange, energetic man to do what he did, the more it keeps hearing a voice which says, 'If you want to know why he did it, you'll have to understand Theology.' And the more the theologians struggle to understand how precisely 'juridical' and 'incorporative' themes belong together, how categories like 'apocalyptic', 'salvation history' and 'covenant' are all badly-formed signposts towards what is really the same thing seen from different angles, how 'religion' and 'politics' are bound up with one another, and, above all and in all, what all this has to do with Jesus the Messiah and him crucified and risen, the more they keep hearing a voice which says, 'If you want to know how it all makes sense, you'll have to understand the History.'

And so the study of Paul draws Philemon and Onesimus together once more, as the study of Christian Origins leads inexorably to the Question of God and vice versa. And if Paul were to visit, as he promised Philemon he would, he would want to talk not just about the reconciliation that has been effected, and the new freedoms that may result from that. He would want to talk about, and to make sure we went on talking about, the particular *shape*

of what has happened: the shape of a figure, in this case Paul himself, but consciously understanding himself as the Messiah's man, reaching out his arms to the two warring factions, reconciling them in himself, acting as a human signpost to the event which was, for him, the moment and the means of reconciliation, the sign and the content of the faithfulness of God.

¹ Pliny *Ep.* 9.21; his account of his uncle's death is at 6.16, 20.

² 10.96; cf. *NTPG* 348–50.

³ 9.24.

⁴ On the dynamics of 'friendship' in that world, cf. e.g. Aristotle *Nic. Eth.* 8; Cicero *Amic.*; and e.g. Herman 1987.

⁵ Barclay 2004 [1997], 106. The whole discussion is illuminating.

⁶ cp. Epict. *Disc.* 4.1.33–40 on the troubles faced by ex-slaves, and how they might wish to return to their former state – though Epictetus, admittedly, sees even membership of the Senate as a form of 'slavery', albeit of the most shiny (*liparōtatē*) sort. See e.g. Rapske 1991, 198 n. 63: 'the conditions of contract between freedmen and their former masters – and now patrons – often left them in a state scarcely better than slavery', citing *Digest* 38.1–5. Cf. too de Vos 2001.

⁷ See Herman 1987; Kumitz 2004; and most commentators.

⁸ cf. e.g. Polaski 1999, in a line which includes Shaw 1983 and goes back, at least, to Nietzsche (Polaski 1999, 21). See the recent discussions in e.g. Punt 2010; Botha 2010.

⁹ e.g. Borg and Crossan 2009, ch. 2. They then play off this crystal-clear abolitionist against the 'Paul' of some other letters; [see below](#).

¹⁰ On the distinction between 'poetic sequence' and 'referential sequence', see Petersen 1985, esp. ch. 1 (discussed recently by Wendland 2010). Petersen gives a full and thorough discussion of Philemon itself with which I am in broad agreement, though I think he, like most, ultimately misses the most important point.

¹¹ This combination, in case anyone should ask a question as old as Chrysostom and Jerome, explains why this letter is part of the Christian canon of scripture; on which see e.g. Lohse 1971, 188; Kumitz 2004, 214f. n. 953.

¹² Rom. 15.23f.

¹³ On all this see now Reinmuth 2006, 15–18. Reinmuth points out, with plenty of classical material to hand, that Ephesus was a well-known place of sanctuary, not least for fugitive slaves, because of the Temple of Artemis (so also Wilson 2005, 318): Onesimus, he says, had a choice of sanctuary, and he chose Paul. Barclay 1991, 163 speaks of a 'current consensus' in favour of Ephesus (similarly, Arzt-Grabner 2010, 134f.; Bird 2009b, 12–15; Müller 2012, 81; see too Fitzmyer 2000, 10; Osiek 2000, 126; Wilson 2005, 318f.; Ryan 2005, 179–81, with helpful detail; Wolter 2010, 174). Against: e.g. Nordling 2004, 7; Moo 2008, 363f.

¹⁴ For the variations on this theme, propounded by Knox 1935 in one way and Winter 1987 in another, see the summaries (and refutations) in e.g. Fitzmyer 2000, 17–19; Wilson 2005, 322–5.

¹⁵ Callahan 1993; see Fitzmyer 2000, 18f.; Moo 2008, 366.

¹⁶ See e.g. Lampe 1985 (favouring the idea that Onesimus was appealing to Paul as an *amicus domini*, 'friend of the master'); Rapske 1991; Fitzmyer 2000, 20–3, setting out the legal basis (a legal opinion of a first-century jurist, Proculus, cited by the sixth-century Justinian: *Digesta* 21.1.17.4–5 and 21.1.43.1); Bird 2009b, 27–9; Cousar 2009, 98; Harrill 1999; 2009a; 2009b. A response to Harrill is

provided by Nicklas 2008. Barclay 2004 [1997], 101f., has come round to this view. Perhaps the most helpful recent discussion of the background issues is that of Llewelyn 1998, 1–46.

¹⁷ So Arzt-Grabner 2001; 2003, 157–9; 2004; 2010.

¹⁸ I thus disagree with Llewelyn 1998, 42, who suggests that ‘it seems almost essential to the genre to include some overt expression of or allusion to remorse.’ If this is so, Paul is subverting the genre – not because remorse does not matter but because he has his eye on a bigger prize than merely restoring a *status quo*.

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 5.19.

²⁰ So e.g. Arzt-Grabner 2010, 124.

²¹ See Llewelyn 1998, 41–3.

²² Barclay 2004 [1997], 102.

²³ The Gk. of the opening phrase is *ei oun*. The only other occurrence of this phrase in Paul (Col. 3.1) is likewise the obvious beginning of a new section, summing up what has gone before and drawing practical conclusions. Cf. e.g. Arzt-Grabner 2003, 275, who describes v. 17 as ‘Das eigentliche Zentrum des Briefes’, the essential centre of the letter; Nordling 2004, 260.

²⁴ Most of the NT occurrences of the *koinōnia* root are in Paul, though cf. too Ac. 2.42 where it refers to the community of goods in the early church. Apart from our present letter, Paul can speak of *koinōnia* in or with the Messiah (1 Cor. 1.9; 10.16; Phil. 3.10) or the spirit (2 Cor. 13.13; Phil. 2.1; cf. 2 Cor. 6.14) or the gospel (Phil. 1.5; cf. Gal. 2.9), or, frequently, with regard to the collection of money (Rom. 15.16; 2 Cor. 8.4; 9.13, with the cognate verb being used in the same sense in Rom. 12.13; 15.27; Gal. 6.6; Phil. 4.15); and he uses the cognate noun *koinōnos*, ‘partner’, in a similar range of meaning (1 Cor. 10.18, 20; 2 Cor. 1.7; 8.23). For discussion see e.g. the summary by O’Brien 1993, with bibliography.

²⁵ Rom. 14.1, 3; 15.7.

²⁶ Philem. 17; some MSS have the word already in v. 12, anticipating the climactic appeal of v. 17; see Metzger 1994 [1971], 589; Wilson 2005, 351. For the idea of welcoming or receiving one person as if they were another, cf. e.g. Gal. 4.14 (and behind that Mt. 10.40, etc.).

²⁷ Gal. 3.28.

²⁸ See Barclay 1991, esp. 176f., 183, stressing the way in which slavery was woven into every aspect of the social fabric. Anyone, from any nation, race or social class, could become a slave in Paul’s world, and many slaves could and did attain freedom and independence. See too Byron 2003 and 2004. On American views of slavery see now esp. Atkins 2010; on the relevance of the American scene for interpreting the NT, see Meeks 1996. A recent collection of essays which reads Philemon mostly through the lens of contemporary American questions is that of Johnson, Noel and Williams 2012. These are important questions but, despite many interesting angles of vision, I am not persuaded that they shed very much historical light on the text.

²⁹ On the ‘Asiatic’ style of this letter, along with Ephesians and Colossians, see Witherington 2007.

³⁰ e.g. Marshall 1993, 188.

³¹ See e.g. Nordling 1991. Barclay 1991, 172 says it is ‘tolerably clear’ that the letter was requesting Onesimus’s return.

³² Ex. 21.6; Dt. 15.17 (granted, this law referred to a native Israelite slave in an Israelite family). Cf. too Lev. 25.39–41 for the ‘Jubilee’ legislation, with a different ‘exception’ clause (25.46) about foreign slaves who may be held *eis ton aiōna*. I referred to this possibility in my commentary (Wright 1986b, 192) but did not develop it at all there (similarly Wilson 2005, 355). Cp. e.g. Harris 1991, 266, following Sasse in *TDNT* 1.209, who points out that the ‘secular’ meaning of the Greek phrase was ‘for ever’ in a this-worldly sense. This both ‘biblical’ and ‘secular’ meaning (according to the division

of the *TDNT* article), together with parallels such as 1 Cor. 8.13, make it very unlikely that Paul means ‘for eternity’ in the sense of ‘after death’ (contra e.g. Fitzmyer 2000, 113 and many others; see the list in Moo 2008, 420 n. 89). The key phrase in Ex. and Dt. was well enough known for a direct echo in Job 40.28 LXX (= EVV 41.4), where God asks Job whether Leviathan will make a covenant with him, so that he can have him as *doulon aiōnion*, ‘a slave for ever’. We may doubt whether either Job or God thought of Job enslaving Leviathan in the world to come.

³³ See below, 1499–56, and the essay on Paul and scripture in *Perspectives*, ch. 32.

³⁴ See e.g. Stanley 2004, discussed in ch. 15 below.

³⁵ On the possibility that Paul might have written many things which his first audiences did not understand, see of course 2 Pet. 3.15f., and cf. Hays 2005, 30. On the absolute necessity of exuberant exegesis of exuberant writing (boring exegesis *must* be wrong when the texts are so obviously full of life) see Wright 2005 [*Fresh Perspectives*], 17f., 45f.; and Martyn 1997, 120 n. 100, speaking of ‘the temptation to be too modest, limiting ourselves to points which can be scientifically demonstrated beyond doubt’; Hays 2002 [1983], xxxiv.

³⁶ Lk. 15.19. To chase this down in terms of Paul’s implicit knowledge of stories like this would be fascinating, but lies beyond our present purpose. We note that, whereas Pliny tells Sabinianus how penitent his freedman is, Paul will not speak for Onesimus on this subject, but expects him to demonstrate it. Wall 1993, 210f. points out that Chrysostom observes a parallel between Onesimus and the Joseph of the Genesis stories.

³⁷ So, rightly, Moule 1957, 145; Derrett 1988, 87, a clear point in an article full of characteristic and confusing rhetorical fireworks. BDAG 70, offering ‘send back’ here and Lk. 23.11, 15, seems to ignore the clearly legal setting of the latter passage. LSJ cite this ref. under ‘remit, refer to higher authority’. This sense thus forms a nice, and no doubt deliberate, rhetorical tension with Paul’s own claim to authority in vv. 8, 14, 20f.

³⁸ See Hays 1997, *passim*; and Hays 2005, 1–24, esp 23.

³⁹ See Ign. *Eph.* 1.3; 2.1; 6.2. On the frequency of the name see e.g. Fitzmyer 2000, 107.

⁴⁰ Harrill 2009a, 499 is typical of many who miss what is going on here: ‘the letter contains no general theology, doctrine, or gospel message ...’. Barclay 1991, 175, 183, followed by e.g. Cousar 2009, 104 suggests that Paul didn’t know what to recommend, and could ‘do little more than offer a variety of different suggestions’; I think this, too, misses the heart of the matter. Contrast e.g. Wolter 2010. Those unfamiliar with Reepicheep the Mouse should consult the Narnia novels of C. S. Lewis, particularly *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (Lewis 1952).

⁴¹ See Nicklas 2008, 210 on the centrality of *koinōnia tēs pisteōs*.

⁴² ‘At work’ is my gloss, based on *energēs* seven words earlier, to bring out the force of ‘every good thing which is in us into Christ’; ‘to lead us’ slackens the force of Paul’s terse phrase but explains what ‘into Christ’ actually means: [see the discussion below](#). Several good MSS read ‘in you’ for ‘in us’; nothing vital hinges on this, but [see below n. 50](#).

⁴³ e.g. Weima 2010, 41 n. 37.

⁴⁴ 2 Cor. 1.20. The linkage of date obviously depends on an Ephesians locale for the writing of Philemon.

⁴⁵ The *eis Christon* here is a traditional puzzle for commentators; see e.g. Riesenfeld 1982, 257; Wilson 2005, 342 (quoting Moule 1957, 142 as suggesting ‘bringing us into (closer) relation to Christ’, and also offering the NRSV’s ‘all the good that we may do for Christ’ and the NEB footnote, ‘that bring us to Christ’). Moo 2008, 394 opts for ‘for the sake of Christ’; Bird 2009b, 135 is only marginally better (‘the values embodied by the Messiah are upheld and honored in the benevolence of Christians towards their brothers and sisters in the faith’). Still 2011, 169 suggests that the phrase is vague, referring possibly ‘both to what believers have received in Christ as well as to what they are to

do for Christ.’ See also recently, confessing puzzlement, Tilling 2012, 113. For the whole theme of ‘corporate Messiahship’ [see below, 825–35](#).

⁴⁶ Eph. 4.12f.

⁴⁷ Eph. 4.15.

⁴⁸ e.g. 1 Cor. 1.13; Gal. 3.16 (on which [see below, 868f.](#)).

⁴⁹ *ho enarxamenos en hymin ergon agathon epiteleseis achri hēmeras Christou Iēsou*. If Philippians was also written from Ephesus, as I think likely, then it too is close in date to Philemon, though I think the thought expressed in these two passages reflects a theme which was central to Paul throughout his work.

⁵⁰ The ‘in us’ in Philemon 6 is thus exactly parallel to the ‘in you’ in Philippians 1.6 (identical, if the variant is correct); see the discussions in e.g. Harris 1991, 252; Metzger 1994 [1971], 588; Nordling 2004, 214 n. 140; Kumitz 2004, 132f. n. 611. Kumitz and others are surely right to see ‘in us’ as *lectio difficilior*.

⁵¹ The English word ‘realization’ carries the double sense both of ‘coming to know’ and of ‘bringing into effect’. This may strain the Greek slightly too far, but it brings out Paul’s ultimate meaning.

⁵² Many commentators bring this out well: see e.g. Gorman 2004, 460f. On Paul and Onesimus see further Horrell 2005, 127. On the *topos* of *parrēsia* and *philia* see Malherbe 1989b, 47f.

⁵³ This adds further weight to Morna Hooker’s important insights on ‘interchange in Christ’; indeed, it is perhaps surprising that Philemon is not mentioned in Hooker 1990.

⁵⁴ There is of course an echo of this in Pliny’s account of the unfortunate freedman, who ‘clung on to me as though I were you’. But Paul’s request, based as it is on a different view of reality and personal identity, goes far deeper.

⁵⁵ Rom. 4.3–12; 6.11.

⁵⁶ Wall 1993, 216 suggests that Paul is hinting that Onesimus, by serving Paul in Philemon’s place (v. 13), has already paid off Philemon’s own debt. I do not find this convincing.

⁵⁷ The whole of 2 Cor. 5.11–21 is about the ‘ministry of reconciliation’, climaxing in the ‘reckoning’ of sins to the Messiah; on the ‘reckoning’ of his death and resurrection to those who are ‘in him’, cf. Rom. 6.6–11.

⁵⁸ So, rightly, Gorman 2004, 462, though Gorman does not explore the full range of what Paul has here accomplished.

⁵⁹ I want thus to press on beyond the helpful proposals of Wolter 2010 to see, not far behind the surface of this letter, a substantial and significant theological substructure: not simply ‘justification by faith’, important though that is, not least in its corollary of ‘*koinōnia* by faith’, but the larger revision of Jewish categories and their deployment in the service of the worldwide mission.

⁶⁰ On slaves’ names see e.g. Lightfoot 1876, 310f.; Fitzmyer 2000, 107.

⁶¹ *Chrēstus* is itself a slave’s name, and many suppose that this is reflected in the famous text of Suetonius where riots among the Roman Jews happened ‘at the instigation of Chrestus’, *impulsore Chresto*: Suet. *Claud.* 25.4. Cf. *NTPG* 355. The pun was noticed early: Lohse 1971, 200f. cites Justin (*Apol.* 1.4.1, 5) and Tertullian (*Apol.* 3.5). On the papyrological evidence see Arzt-Grabner 2003, 206–8. Fitzmyer 2000, 109 declares that the apparent pun is ‘far-fetched’ and says that the proper word for ‘non-Christian’ would have been *achristianos*. Here, not for the first time, I think Fitzmyer is putting the telescope to his blind eye. See too Wilson 2005, 323. On *Christos/Chrēstos* see BDAG 1091, and cf. the variant reading (the first hand in Ⲙ) in 1 Pet. 4.15. *Chrēstos* is used as an adjective for God himself in 2 Macc. 1.24.

⁶² Similarly, Gorman 2004, 457.

⁶³ This does *not* mean – to anticipate an obvious objection – that I am voting for a return to a simplistic ‘Jewish’ explanation of everything in Paul over against any reference to the wider hellenistic world. See chs. 2–5. All Judaism is already by Paul’s day a matter of varieties within ‘hellenistic Judaism’; but that does not mean there are no Jewish distinctives, and I suggest that is what we can see here.

⁶⁴ For this whole theme in relation to Acts, cf. Rowe 2009, esp. ch. 5. For Seneca’s views on slavery see e.g. *Ep.* 47.11; *Ben.* 3.18–24 (see Thorsteinsson 2006, 153). For Dio Chrysostom see *Or.* 14.

⁶⁵ ‘Physics’ in ancient philosophy includes what we call ‘theology’. Physics is, classically, an account of ‘nature’, *physis*, which for the Stoic included everything, including the divine. [See below, ch. 3.](#)

⁶⁶ The proper ‘introduction’ to these themes, for the present book, is found in *NTPG* Part II, which was designed to form the platform for the present work as much as for volumes II and III in the series. Sadly, the guild of New Testament scholarship has not shown much interest in these questions, resulting in a continuation of many of the problems I identified in the earlier volume. What follows, then, is both necessary recapitulation and development in the specific direction of Paul.

⁶⁷ See too my other studies on Paul: Wright 1991, 1997, 2005a [*Fresh Perspectives*], 2009 and, not least, the Romans commentary (2002).

⁶⁸ Among the basic texts are Berger and Luckman 1966; Geertz 2000 [1973]; Taylor 2007; Bourdieu 1977 [1972]; and see now also Sire 2004; J. K. A. Smith 2009 (discussed briefly below, 28 n. 80); Brown 1999; Naugle 2002; Christian Smith 2003 and 2010; Hiebert 2008. It is puzzling that Engberg-Pedersen, for all his sophistication in other respects, seems not really to engage with this discourse in his mentions of ‘world-view’: e.g. Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 9f., where he (a) confuses ‘world-view’ – which I, like most, understand as the lenses through which one looks, not as the collection of objects at which one looks – with particular beliefs and ideas and then (b) sweeps ‘theology’ off the table with a grand secularizing gesture, replacing it with ancient philosophical texts which will help ‘to give a more precise meaning to Paul’s statements’, and declaring that, instead, we should look for ‘as many precise particulars of a concrete world-view as possible’. See the discussion [in ch. 14 below.](#)

⁶⁹ See Watson 2007 [1986], 10, where he describes the impact of reading Berger and Luckman: ‘Previously,’ he writes, ‘I had known texts and ideas; now those texts and ideas all had to be re-thought in the light of their social dynamics.’

⁷⁰ See the basic work of Soskice 1985 on metaphor.

⁷¹ This is where the whole movement of Pauline social history associated with Meeks 1983 and his successors makes its essential contribution, not as an alternative to ‘theology’ (though some might mistreat it so) but as its necessary framework.

⁷² Geertz 2000 [1973] ch. 1: the whole chapter is well worth reading and re-reading for the sharp clarity of its vision about the task of describing cultures, a clarity often lacking in the study of Paul and his world. On the avoidance of generalizations, and the danger of atomization in scholarship if this is not done, see the shrewd remarks of Malherbe 1989b, 18. An excellent recent example of ‘thick description’ as applied to Paul’s world is provided by Oakes 2009.

⁷³ So, rightly, Meeks 1983, 5f.: there is a danger of theological reductionism, hence the need for ‘social description’. There is of course the danger of reverse reductionism, which not all have quite avoided.

⁷⁴ Meeks 1986a points out the relevance of Lindbeck’s ‘cultural-linguistic’ model for the history/theology divide.

⁷⁵ Kipling 1927, 585.

⁷⁶ I added ‘What time is it?’ in *JVG*. As we shall see, this is particularly important in the study of Paul. See particularly e.g. Martyn 1997, frequently, [and below, Part II](#).

⁷⁷ On worldview and theology see the remarks of Furnish 1990, 25f.

⁷⁸ See Scroggs 1989, 142.

⁷⁹ See e.g. Rom. 12.1–2, [discussed below, 1101; 1123f.](#)

⁸⁰ See Walsh and Middleton 1984; Geertz 2000 [1973], 5: ‘webs of significance’; and his distinction of ‘world-view’ and ‘ethos’. Recently J. K. A. Smith 2009 has argued strongly that ‘worldview’ privileges (not just the ‘sight’ metaphor, but) the cerebral element so much that it is better to replace it (following Taylor 2007, esp. 171–6) with ‘social imaginaries’. I take the point – and particularly Smith’s welcome emphasis on ‘desire’, ‘love’ and ‘worship’ as primary categories – but have preferred to expand the notion of ‘worldview’ to incorporate these and other elements rather than abandon it and launch out with a different term. Barclay 1996, 404 complains that my worldview-analysis is incomplete, but offers no suggestions as to how it might be filled out. Adams 2000, 1–3 seems to be doing two things at once, investigating the ‘world’ or ‘worldview’ which one might ‘construct’ for oneself and speaking at the same time of what Paul meant by *kosmos* or *ktisis*. But these are hardly the same thing. What Paul meant by *kosmos* was not the sort of thing one might construct for oneself.

⁸¹ See particularly Horrell 1999; and the various works by Malina (e.g. Malina 1993) and Neyrey (e.g. Neyrey and Stewart 2008). The use of social studies within serious historiography of the period has a long pedigree: see e.g. Judge 1960; 2008a.

⁸² See White 2003, 127.

⁸³ cf. esp. *NTPG*, 122–6; *JVG*, 137–44.

⁸⁴ See Judge 2008a, Part I re Augustus’s world; and see e.g. Champlin 2003. See also e.g. Williams 1997, 15–17 on the differences between Paul’s world and ours.

⁸⁵ Campbell 2009. See my discussion of Campbell in *Interpreters*.

⁸⁶ See Taylor 2010 on the ‘Therapeutae’ referred to in Philo *Vit. Cont.*

⁸⁷ Onesimus may very well of course have been born into slavery; I am only suggesting the possibility of his being born free to make the point about implicit narratives, which could of course be extended backwards to whenever his family had been enslaved.

⁸⁸ Col. 1.24f. On Col. [see below, 56–61.](#)

⁸⁹ See Gal. 1.11–17; 1 Cor. 9.1; 15.8–11; 2 Cor. 4.6; Ac. 9.3–9; 22.6–11; 26.12–19. See the discussion in *RSG* ch. 8.

⁹⁰ See, recently, Cadwallader and Trainor 2011, esp. ch. 1 (9–47, with full bibliography at 41–7).

⁹¹ Meeks 1983.

⁹² Dunn 1980 and 1982; and recently Dunn 2010.

⁹³ The main exception – and that a short article – was Dahl 1977, ch. 10.

⁹⁴ Engberg-Pedersen’s questions (2000, 5) are pertinent but hardly complete or indeed properly formed.

⁹⁵ Schweitzer 1912, 2, 33f.

⁹⁶ On ‘incorporation’ and ‘justification’ see now Vanhoozer 2011.

⁹⁷ Among recent works, this is obviously the continuing debate to which E. P. Sanders in his way, and Campbell in his very different way, have contributed, both firmly coming down on the ‘participationist’ side.

⁹⁸ See the discussion in *Interpreters*.

⁹⁹ Some interpreters have so screened ‘salvation history’, or indeed the idea of ‘meaning in history’, out of the picture that when they let it back in it appears as a strange, foreign body to be kept in a corner somewhere: e.g. Kee 1980 [1973], 100–14.

¹⁰⁰ cf. *NTPG* 280–99; *JVG* 95–7, 207–14, 311–6, 513–5.

¹⁰¹ On Beker, Martyn, de Boer, Campbell and others see the discussion in *Interpreters*.

[102](#) Campbell 2009.

[103](#) Sanders 1977, 549 discusses this in terms of ‘religious experience’, on which [see ch. 13 below](#).

[104](#) This was most obvious in Davies 1980 [1948]; it reappears in e.g. Harink 2003.

[105](#) For the secular philosophers (Agamben, Badiou, Taubes, Žižek) see the discussion in *Interpreters*; for Boyarin, a postmodern Talmudist, see the discussion in *Interpreters* and *Perspectives*, ch. 8.

[106](#) The obvious example is Dunn 1998.

[107](#) Paul’s ethics within a Jewish context: e.g. Tomson 1990; Bockmuehl 2000; and, from a different angle, Hays 1996b (see below, 1119f.). In the non-Jewish context: e.g. Meeks 1986b; Horrell 2005.

[108](#) See the discussion [in ch. 12 below](#).

[109](#) See the sensitive essays by Meeks 2001 and Martin 2001, even though the direction of the volume as a whole (Engberg-Pedersen 2001) seems to me still to lean in the direction of an implicit Hellenism and away from the rich world of second-Temple Judaism.

[110](#) See e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 111.

[111](#) This is one of the main themes of Beker 1980. He was writing at a time when any attempt at stating a ‘coherent’ centre or shape in Paul’s theology was widely frowned upon.

[112](#) See the account of method in *NTPG* II, esp. ch. 2.

[113](#) Obvious examples might be 1 Cor. 5 with 2 Cor. 2.1–11; and perhaps the relationship between 1 Thess. and 2 Thess.

[114](#) On ‘poetic sequence’ and ‘referential sequence’ see e.g. Petersen, [discussed above, 7](#).

[115](#) Again, see *NTPG* Part II and esp. ch. 2.

[116](#) I was intrigued, reading Briggs 2011, to discover (78) that historians were often chosen for the code-breaking team in Bletchley Park during the Second World War precisely because they were trained to think into the minds of people who thought very differently from themselves.

[117](#) Hence the importance of studies like Barclay 1996 and Trebilco 1991 and 2004. Koester’s *Introduction* (Koester 1982a and b), which attempts a geographical account of early Christianity, is commendable for that attempt but significantly flawed through several of the controlling assumptions.

[118](#) See Käsemann 1980 [1973], 406: ‘history is the field of reconstructions, and whether these are right or not depends on how far they overcome the problems posed.’ Quite so. Dodd offered a common-sense approach which still has depth and value in his sequence of observation, analysis, hypothesis and reflection (see Matlock 1996, 166, discussing Dodd 1946) – though Dodd believed, wrongly in my view, that one could by this means attain ‘objectivity’.

[119](#) A good example of deliberate nonsense-writing might be the correspondence between Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein: see Madeline 2008.

[120](#) cf. Aristotle *Pol.* 1.12f.

[121](#) See Wright 2006a [*Evil*], 18f. (UK edn.); 38f. (US edn.).

[122](#) Käsemann 1980 [1973], viii (Preface dated 15 December 1979, thirty years before the first draft of the present book; but the sentence, even sharper in the original, is in the Preface to the third German edn. (1974) as well: ‘... Er [exegesis] taugt nicht für sie, rechtshaffen betrieben sie nicht für ihn’). Käsemann, whose great work was complete before the so-called ‘new perspective’ burst on the scene, nevertheless pointed forward to many of today’s historical and theological emphases, not least because, head and shoulders above many others, he pointed back past Bultmann to Schweitzer. On all this, see the discussion in *Interpreters*, and *Perspectives*, chs. 1, 4.

¹²³ Among recent discussions see e.g. Lincoln 1990, lix–lxxiii (Eph.); Moo 2008, 28–41 (Col.); Malherbe 2000, 349–75 (2 Thess.).

¹²⁴ The tactic of pronouncing an undesirable work ‘inauthentic’ goes back a long way. The second-century BC Stoic Posidonius deemed Plato’s *Phaedo* inauthentic because it taught the immortality of the soul; the Stoics wanted to claim Plato himself as authoritative, but only on their own terms. See the discussion in Sedley 2003, 21.

¹²⁵ On all these movements, see the discussion in *Interpreters*.

¹²⁶ See too e.g. Dunn 1975a, 345–50, in a section entitled ‘The Vision Fades’, dealing first with Col. and Eph. – two letters one might have thought among the most visionary writings from the early church. Dunn’s ‘vision’, of a free-floating ‘charismatic’ community, embodies the standard Romantic idea of an early spontaneity followed by a kind of spiritual hardening of the arteries. I was delighted, thirty years after that book was published, to see James Dunn regularly attending worship in Durham Cathedral, with no apparent loss of vision.

¹²⁷ Martyn 1997; de Boer 2011.

¹²⁸ See Meeks 1996.

¹²⁹ See Borg and Crossan 2009. I recently came upon yet another spurious ‘reason’ for separating these letters out: all the undisputed Paulines mention ‘financial transactions on behalf of the Pauline mission’, but the disputed letters do not: so Downs 2006, 50 (repeated by Friesen 2009, 45; Downs cites Kiley 1986, 46f.). What does this mean? Galatians mentions neither the Collection nor Paul’s own payment (or lack thereof); 6.6–10 scarcely counts as a counter-example. Philemon does not mention money, except the possibility that Onesimus might have stolen some. Many of the really important themes in the letters occur only in one (obvious example: the eucharist in 1 Cor.). On the danger of arguments from silence see e.g. Hengel 1991, 27.

¹³⁰ See e.g. Johnson 1986; another example might be Gorman 2004. I well remember the shock when Dennis Nineham announced in a lecture in Oxford in the early 1970s that he still believed in the priority of Mark and the existence of Q ‘not because there were any good arguments in their favour but because he hadn’t yet seen good arguments for anything else’. I am happy to note that when I was teaching in Oxford in the late 1980s hardly any of the NT teachers believed strongly in ‘Q’, though I am informed that this has now changed once more. Fashions come and go.

¹³¹ Behind all this is the usual irony: supposedly ‘liberal’ views are assumed to be less influenced by ‘presuppositions’ (e.g. those arising from theological or ecclesial commitments) and hence more ‘objective’ and likely to be true. The two background assumptions for this position — the possibility of epistemological neutrality on the one hand, and an implicit Whig view of (modern intellectual) history on the other — need to be challenged, just as do the assumptions of naive ‘conservatives’.

¹³² Geertz 2000 [1973], 27 n. 5. Geertz goes on, in doubly ironic language that we can cheerfully transfer to our present context: ‘As the field advances one would hope that this sort of intellectual weed control would become a less prominent part of our activities. But, for the moment, it remains true that old theories tend less to die than to go into second editions.’ A recent example of a writer determined to say that Paul did not write Eph. but obviously stuck for proper arguments is Eisenbaum 2009, 16–22: eventually she gets to style and content, but her opening gambits, (a) that some MSS do not have ‘to those in Ephesus’, and that this is ‘one reason for the scholarly suspicion that Paul did not write Ephesians’ (17) and (b) that Ephesians ‘reads like a generic letter’, with no reference to a specific context, and that this is ‘another indicator that the letter was not written by Paul’, are puzzling indeed. Even if these were relevant considerations, many would say that they cancel one another out.

¹³³ Morgan 1973, 43f.: ‘after every game of theological interpretation all the pieces of tradition come back on to the board.’ One does not have to agree with Morgan’s account of *Sachkritik* to see the value of this point.

¹³⁴ cf. e.g. Kenny 1986; Neumann 1990.

¹³⁵ Robinson 1976, 70f., in what we may suppose to be a thinly veiled autobiographical remark: ‘Paul would not be the last church leader whose style (and indeed subject-matter) in an *ad clerum* differed markedly from his already highly diverse and adaptable manner of speaking and writing for wider audiences.’ Among NT scholars who have written children’s fiction we might mention C. H. Dodd and R. J. Bauckham.

¹³⁶ Witherington 2007, 1–6, 17–19.

¹³⁷ In Wright 1986b, 34 I cited Süssmaier’s completion of Mozart’s *Requiem*. This point about the style of one’s colleagues is not usually noted by those who, anxious to protect Paul from direct authorship of a particular letter but equally anxious to show that they recognize its similarity, have suggested that Timothy or some other colleague might have written on Paul’s behalf.

¹³⁸ cf. e.g. Koch etc. It would be interesting to track the way rejection of 2 Thess. has gone hand in hand with the inability to see what was going on in, for instance, Rom. 8.19–26.

¹³⁹ See *NTPG* 280–98; [and below, 175](#).

¹⁴⁰ On this possibility see Murphy-O’Connor 1991; Prior 1989.

¹⁴¹ See particularly Conzelmann 1960 [1953].

¹⁴² *NTPG* ch. 13 part 2, ch. 15 part 6. On the categories (‘early Catholicism’, etc.) [see below](#).

¹⁴³ See recently Pervo 2009, arguing for a date around 115.

¹⁴⁴ See esp. the work of Hengel, e.g. Hengel 1979.

¹⁴⁵ The classic article of Vielhauer 1966 needs now to be laid quietly to rest: see the multifaceted work of Rowe 2009, and now esp. Keener 2012, 221–57.

¹⁴⁶ The standard treatment is still that of Cohen 1979. See too Mason 2001, xxvii–xli. I am grateful to Andrew Cowan for this reference.

¹⁴⁷ See Longenecker 1990, lxxiii–lxxxiii.

¹⁴⁸ This seems to be closer to what Engberg-Pedersen means by ‘world-view’: a set of foundational, but quite consciously held, beliefs.

¹⁴⁹ See the original diagram in *NTPG*, 126.

¹⁵⁰ See the remarkably revealing comment by Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 245: ‘One may wonder, however, whether there is any likelihood of progress until one decides to place in parentheses to begin with the whole gamut of traditional theological concepts, soteriology, Christology, justification, grace, works, etc.’ See the discussion [in ch. 14 below](#).

¹⁵¹ See e.g. Thiselton 1980; 1992; 2007.

¹⁵² 2 Cor. 11.21b–33.

¹⁵³ 2 Cor. 5.21; [see below, 880–5](#).

¹⁵⁴ See the wise remarks of Watson 2007 [1986], 350.

¹⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 15.17. See *RSG* 332.

¹⁵⁶ This entire enterprise is, of course, localized to the post-Enlightenment western world. This is much to be regretted; to look no further, we are aware of real insight and wisdom coming from Africa, south-east Asia, and Japan. Who is sufficient for these things? For the strident insistence on ‘secular’ biblical studies see recently Boer 2010.

¹⁵⁷ One might draw a spectrum of writers here, from those like Horrell 2005 who are engaging deeply with the text, through the secular philosophers who are using it as it were at a distance

(Badiou, Taubes, etc.; see *Interpreters*), and on to those who seem to have abandoned history and merely bounce their own concerns off the text (e.g. Seesengood 2010; and some at least of the essays in Marchal 2012).

¹⁵⁸ In this connection, I am interested in the implications of the title of the recent *Festschrift* for Richard Hays: *The Word Leaps the Gap* (Wagner, Rowe and Grieb 2008). The editors speak (xxi) of the ‘gap’ as that between the first century and our own time, but the implied rhetoric of the title may hint at other gaps as well.

Chapter Two

LIKE BIRDS HOVERING OVERHEAD: THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE GOD OF ISRAEL

1. Introduction

A complex person in a complex time. Paul stands where three great roads converge; and he has made of them another, travelled less, and making all the difference. We ‘explain’ his life and work as nuclear by-products, the fallout as a consciousness explodes; or maybe as the predetermined course a brilliant mind would take in these conditions. But that speaks more of us, and our own frameworks, than history (or theology) demands. We must go slowly, standing where he stood, taking the route he would have taken, listening for other footfalls, echoing in the memory, for hints half guessed and gifts half understood.

Paul lived and worked, in fact, in at least three worlds at once, each of which subdivided. His life and work must sometimes have appeared just as bewildering to those who lived in those worlds as it does to us in our attempts to reconstruct them (and to understand him). In fact, much more so. We have two dangerous advantages: length of hindsight, shortage of material. We can ‘see’, or suppose we see, comparatively simple patterns and sequences. Those who lived in Jerusalem, Ephesus or Rome in the middle of the first century had no idea how things were going to turn out. They had far more information than we do: coins and inscriptions, poems and stories, a thousand rumours on the street and a thousand scribbled letters, travellers’ tales and court gossip, virtually all of it now lost for ever. Navigating one’s way through a day or a week, let alone a lifetime, will have demanded at least as much quick thinking and many-sided judgments as are required of us, citizens (and sometimes slaves) in a world of print and electronic gadgets.¹ As with an old photo album in which we see the character of different faces without being able to tell why that person looked

a bit cross, what had made those two laugh, or why there are three children in *this* picture but four in *that* one from the previous year, we have enough first-century data to be provoked, fascinated and frustrated, but never enough to give more than an outline. We can sketch Paul's world, but we cannot sail in it or sleep in it. We can tiptoe around among such tit-bits as remain, but we cannot talk to the soldiers in the guard-room or the customers waiting in line to see the tentmaker. Such is ancient history: necessary, but always insufficient.

But necessary it is; because the danger of anachronism, of imaginary constructions of Paul's mindset which are straightforwardly unthinkable as first-century options, is ever present, ready to toss the little historical craft to and fro with a thousand winds of doctrinal disputes from the late middle ages or ethical ones from more recent times. If we are not to suffer shipwreck before we even begin the voyage, our craft must have, as its ballast to keep it upright, such solid historical material as we can manage. And that means going back, as best we can, into those three first-century worlds, the worlds of Jews, Greeks and Romans. First, the Jews; that is where Paul began, and where we must as well. Then out into the larger, turbulent seas of ancient paganism, particularly the philosophy of Greece and the imperial might of Rome, but also the swirling religious and cultural currents that washed to and fro between them.

The three worlds overlapped and interlocked in all sorts of ways, and that is part of the point, part of what makes the world confusing and Paul such a complex character. Gone are the days when scholars could cheerfully assign this or that material or idea to 'Judaism' or 'Hellenism', as though they could ever be separated in a world which Alexander the Great had transformed three centuries earlier.² The encroachment of Rome had happened more slowly; its politicians and empire-builders, like its soldiers, came on slowly but relentlessly, step by step; and by the first Christian century Rome was even more omnipresent than Alexander and his successors had been. The middle east mattered to Rome, not least because by Paul's day Rome was heavily dependent on Egypt as the source of grain for the overcrowded and underemployed capital itself. Memories from the

previous century were important, too. People recalled that, for a while, Egypt had threatened to become a serious political rival to Rome, with the young Octavian facing the powerful alliance of Cleopatra, Egypt's queen, and Antony, her (latest) Roman consort. That couple, indeed, are as complex as Paul himself, with their mix of oriental mystery, hellenistic religion (they increasingly put themselves about in the guise of this or that god or goddess), hard-nosed Roman politics, and the evergreen combination of money, sex and power. Paul had a somewhat different take on all those three, to put it mildly, but to figure out how and why we must get inside those three worlds, separately but also in their often confused combination. It was, after all, the combination that tended to produce the riots. And riots seemed to follow Paul around: if we know anything about the historicity of Acts, we surely know that Luke did not invent the constant confrontations with angry crowds and puzzled magistrates. Paul is the hero of his story, and whether we think Acts was written in the 60s as a document for Paul's trial, or in the 90s or even later as a period piece about a previous generation, we do not suppose that Luke was trying to make Paul look even more unpopular and controversial than he actually was. I often mention, when lecturing, the bishop who complained that everywhere Paul went there was a riot, but everywhere he went they served tea. Luke might have preferred the tea, but he reported the riots.

This chapter needs to adjust, perhaps even to correct, the balance in Part III of *The New Testament and the People of God*, which was designed as the equivalent introduction for this book as well as for *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Because I had Jesus particularly in focus at that time, and because I was heavily concerned then with the Jewish context for understanding Paul, I concentrated almost all that section on the Jewish world of the first century, giving particular attention in chapter 7 to the Pharisees and the movements of revolt, which remain extremely important in the present volume, and then to the elements of Israel's worldview (story, symbol and praxis) in chapter 8, finishing with the two chapters, which remain foundational for the present volume, on Israel's beliefs and hopes (chapters 9 and 10). The point of writing those chapters there was to avoid having to do so here, so I shall not

repeat them, but refer the reader to them as part of the necessary preliminary work for the present book. This is perhaps especially true of *NTPG*'s section on the Pharisees (pages 181–203), where I set out the sources for our knowledge of that movement, to which Paul after all claims to have belonged, and discuss how we may use them carefully and critically. In my mind's eye I see the whole of *NTPG* Part III as though they were physically part of this book, perhaps as a kind of microdot within the running head for every page, and I encourage readers to do the same. Much of that work was done nearly twenty years ago, but reading what I have been able to read on the subject in the intervening period has not made me wish to change much. Of course, there has been an enormous amount written about particular texts and contexts, and it would now be possible to produce a similar section of two thousand pages rather than two hundred. What I am more concerned with here is certain emphases and angles of vision, rather than a major retelling of the story of the Jews in the first century or a major new sketch of their worldview, beliefs and hopes.

I hope in particular to bring out the way in which *the faithfulness of Israel's God* functions as a theme throughout so much of the period. This was particularly so, I suggest, for the Pharisees, generating and sustaining a complex but essentially single narrative, the long and often strange story of God's faithfulness which would – surely, they believed, it would! – work out finally in deliverance for Israel and justice and glory in the wider world. 'Like birds hovering overhead,' wrote Isaiah, 'so YHWH of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it, he will spare and rescue it.' The echoes of Deuteronomy 32, a vital chapter in this great story, are clear, and picked up too at various points in the Psalter.³ We should be prepared to hear, underneath echoes such as these, the soft, slow beat of hidden wings, brooding over the dark waters to bring creation itself to birth.⁴

What I did not do in the first volume was to say very much about the greco-roman world of late antiquity, and we shall have to redress that balance in the three chapters that follow this one. Here again two thousand pages would be too brief; such volumes are easy to imagine, not least because some of them sit smiling on my shelves, daring me to try to sum up

their massive learning in a few pages, to highlight what is going to be relevant without skewing it this way or that. But knowing ‘what is going to be relevant’ is precisely the problem. Again and again, reading a classical text as it were off piste, one comes across a paragraph or phrase which makes one think, ‘Well! Maybe *that’s* what Paul meant in Philipians ...’ or whatever. There are massive tomes available that have done a lot of that spadework for us, but there is always more that remains to be glimpsed, not least because those who did the earlier spadework came, as we all do, with their own expectations of what would be relevant, and those expectations themselves, like everything else, need to be re-evaluated in each generation.⁵

I propose, then, to look again in the present chapter at the Jewish world of Paul’s day, supplementing what I wrote in the early volume.⁶ That will clear the way for the following chapters, in which we shall look at the other two worlds in which Paul lived, the world of Greek philosophy on the one hand and of Roman imperial might on the other and, placed between them, the world of what we call greco-roman ‘religion’, set within that wider and more nebulous thing we call ‘culture’. These worlds themselves, of course, were completely intertwined, with as much Greek spoken in Rome as in Athens and as much Roman military presence in Syria as in Spain. Though we might, purely for the sake of giving the material some shape, think of Paul’s Greek world in terms of philosophy and his Roman world in terms of politics, those two were likewise inseparable, just as his Jewish world was much more than the ‘religious’ component in the triple mixture. Part of the question of this book, part of the reason why Paul is so challenging and fascinating, is the question of how those three elements, ‘philosophy’, ‘politics’ and ‘religion’, which appear significantly different to us but were completely intertwined for them, played their interlocking roles both within their own culture(s) and also within Paul’s own worldview and mindset, his beliefs and his aims. As we have already hinted in the opening chapter, it is only by looking at his complete worldview, his theology and his aims in the context (so far as we can) of a similar analysis of the worlds in which he lived that we can move beyond puzzling antinomies towards an integrated and comprehensible picture.

Intertwined those worlds might be, but for both Saul of Tarsus and Paul the apostle the world still divided into two, the world of the Jews and the world of the non-Jews. He called non-Jews ‘the nations’, *ta ethnē*, perhaps indicating ‘the *other* nations’, since Jews themselves could be spoken of as a ‘nation’;⁷ or else he calls them ‘the Greeks’, though of course the majority of non-Jews were not ethnically Greek, and many would no more have Greek as their first language than might a Palestinian Jew. Sometimes, in a remarkably explicit synecdoche, Paul referred to them as ‘the foreskin’, *hē akrobustia*, highlighting the fact that for the Jews circumcision was not simply obedience to a command but a badge of cultural and ethnic identity, and that they viewed the rest of the world in terms of its non-possession of this badge. It is rather as if, today, a Sikh were to regard all non-Sikhs as ‘the unturbaned’.

We today have more difficulty in finding the right terms to talk about non-Jews. Some have avoided ‘pagan’ because it sounds to them pejorative or derogatory.⁸ As I have said elsewhere, I use the word in a neutral sense, as do many in the secular world of classical studies; as, indeed, some ancient Romans themselves eventually came to do. But if we are to see the world the way Paul saw it the distinction remains, and a term which is strictly speaking anachronistic may be better than a cumbersome circumlocution. Even though Paul insisted that in the Messiah there was neither Jew nor Greek, he remained conscious that those who had come ‘into Messiah’ from a Jewish background had made a transition of one particular sort, while those who had come from a non-Jewish background had made a transition of a rather different (albeit related) sort. The end and goal was the same, but the different starting-point made the entry a different kind of thing.⁹ In any case, many of the real pressure points for Paul came along the fault line between Jews and non-Jews. That is the point. We must therefore look at the former, refreshing the memory of this series if not of its readers, before turning to the latter.

As we do this, we should be clear that our motive is primarily *historical*. That is, we are seeking to understand the complexities of Paul’s world so that we can get as clear a view as possible of what he meant, what he hoped

his hearers might understand, and what they might in fact have understood, when he wrote his famous but endlessly tantalizing letters. This means offering a *historical* account of how his mind, and the minds of his potential hearers, seem to have worked, much as one might with other great letter-writers of the period, such as Cicero or Seneca. A historical account, in other words, of his *theology*, what he actually thought and believed, not merely a ‘comparative’ account of his *religion*; that is a different, though of course related, exercise.¹⁰ These four chapters, then, aim to provide neither a list of sources from which we can trace the *derivation* of Paul’s thought and pattern of life (though they will help us to raise that question in appropriate ways), nor an account of other religions or cultures with which we can *compare* those of Paul (though comparisons will emerge as we go along). They aim to give as thick a description as is possible, within the confines of the present volume, of the world in which Paul lived and articulated his own particular worldview (Part II), including what we now, often confusedly, call ‘religion’, so that we can the better appreciate the contours and emphases of what can properly be called his ‘theology’ (Part III). This will enable us then to offer in Part IV an integrated historical account, including but not shaped by ‘comparison’, and including but not centring upon ‘religion’, of the ways in which Paul related to that wider world.

The obvious place to begin is where Paul himself tells us he began: in the politically charged, religiously zealous and intellectually demanding world of a first-century Pharisee.

[2. Who Were the Pharisees?](#)

Twenty years ago or so there took place a massive debate about who exactly the Pharisees were.¹¹ The debaters included heavyweights like Ed Sanders and Jacob Neusner, with the rest of us watching from the sidelines and intervening cautiously, much as a mouse might venture to interrupt a fight between a cat and a dog. That debate has settled down now, and I have not seen good reason to change my mind from the basic conclusions I drew at the time in *NTPG* chapter 7: that the Pharisees were far more than a small

pure-food club; that they were active not only in promoting their own holiness (trying to live at home as if they were actually in the Temple, though not necessarily as priests *per se*¹²) but also in persuading other Jews to do the same;¹³ that they were very popular and influential in the first half of the first century AD;¹⁴ and that – a crucial point, this – many of them were (what we would call) highly politically active.

Before we develop that point, however, we need a word about texts and sources.¹⁵ In what follows I shall use a fairly wide variety of second-Temple Jewish sources, and it may properly be objected that none of them comes with a label saying, ‘This is a Pharisaic document.’ The discussion of which texts can be used (*Psalms of Solomon?* *Pseudo-Philo?* *4 Ezra?*) can become dangerously circular: we judge *this* text Pharisaic because it conforms to our notion of what Pharisees thought, and then we use it to bolster that reconstruction.¹⁶ The question of back-reading a Pharisaic position in relation to the polemic of, say, documents from Qumran which refer to the ‘speakers of smooth things’ is likewise interesting but fraught.¹⁷ However, two factors mean that we should not therefore despair. First, as I shall show in a moment, we can reconstruct enough of the Pharisaic movement from the certain evidence to be able to recognize tell-tale signs of the movement – or of one very like it! – even when the label itself is not present. Second, the Pharisees themselves did not claim to be propagating anything other than central Jewish practices and beliefs, so that where we find those practices and beliefs in other documents we will not go far wrong in imagining the Pharisees taking a strict line on such things, both for themselves and for anyone they could influence by whatever means. Of course, different parties disagreed about what was central and how it should be observed, but nothing hinges for our purposes on the precise distinctions between, say, hypothetical Pharisees and hypothetical Essenes in the period between the Maccabees and Herod the Great.

Ironically perhaps, our earliest actual mention of ‘Pharisees’ comes in the New Testament, when Paul himself uses the word to describe his earlier self. Two of the speeches which Acts puts into his mouth do so as well.¹⁸ The plethora of references in the gospels then follows, but it is hard to use these

because of the multiple questions that have been raised about their historical value, especially in the light of the writers' obvious agendas. The other major first-century source is Josephus, who likewise must be handled with caution.¹⁹ Then, of course, there are the rabbis, who frequently refer back to the debates among the Pharisees, especially the disputes between Hillel and Shammai.²⁰ But the rabbinic texts come from the period after the two major revolts (AD 66–70 and 132–5), which means that they have screened out more or less entirely that which was vital and central (by his own admission) for Saul of Tarsus, namely the tradition of 'zeal for Torah' which, looking back to Phinehas and Elijah, was ready to use violence to enforce Torah-observance on wayward Jews or to defend it against non-Jews. That road came to an end with bar-Kochba in 135. Texts from after this period have lost two things which seem to have been vital up to that point: not only that commitment to 'zeal' in terms of violent 'political' or 'military' action, but also the sense of an ongoing *narrative* which would reach its glorious climax in (what we call) the first century or thereabouts (see below).²¹

Granted, the shift 'from politics to piety', as it is sometimes expressed, was already taking place in the 'moderate' stance of Hillel and his followers from the time of Herod the Great. But in the build-up to the war of 66–70, and in the support of the great Rabbi Akiba for bar-Kochba in the revolt of 132, we see that this shift seems to have remained the minority opinion until that revolt collapsed in disaster.²² After that the rabbis, not surprisingly, turned their attention well away from history, as indeed from any notion of the divine kingdom coming to birth on earth as in heaven. As Käsemann put it in explaining his generation's rejection of 'salvation history' after the horrors of the Third Reich, as burnt children they were unwilling to add fuel to the fire another time.²³ What had happened in the past was in the past, and was no longer applicable.²⁴ This represents such a massive break with the pre-70 world, as we shall see below, that though many scattered fragments of earlier views remain they are bound to be framed in a completely different way.

Despite the difficulty in using these sources, we can reconstruct a relatively clear picture of the Pharisees in the first half of the first century

AD, not least by building out from the certainties which these texts provide to others which speak of the same beliefs and practices but without using the word 'Pharisee' itself. This is what we do quite naturally, for instance, in combining Paul's own testimony in Philippians 3.5–6 (where, immediately after describing himself as a Pharisee according to the law, he speaks of persecuting the church as the evidence of his 'zeal') with that in Galatians 1.13–14, where he speaks first of his persecution of the church and then of his active 'Judaism' through his extreme 'zeal' for the ancestral traditions.²⁵ In other words, though the word 'Pharisee' does not occur in the latter passage, we can be absolutely sure that he is describing the affiliation and stance to which, elsewhere, he gives that label.

The same kind of move enables us to identify Pharisees in other texts where their activity is described but their label withheld (perhaps because it was felt to be a nickname, a kind of slogan?). Consider Philo's description of the danger that faces someone who transgresses the ancient laws:

There are thousands who have their eyes upon him full of zeal for the laws, strictest guardians of the ancestral institutions, merciless to those who do anything to subvert them.²⁶

We should be in no doubt that he is referring to Pharisees, and moreover to 'zealous' ones like Saul of Tarsus. Nor should we be in any doubt about the relevance of books like 1 Maccabees, whose programmatic statement of 'zeal' we shall discuss presently. It is often supposed, in my view correctly, that the *Psalms of Solomon* come from the same movement, since the Psalmist speaks of being 'full of righteousness', of the wickedness of Jews who have joined the pagans in defiling the sanctuary and overthrowing the commandments, and of the coming judgment when the former will be vindicated and the latter punished.²⁷ When therefore we find other texts which express similar concerns, we may cautiously use them, not necessarily to say, 'This is exactly what a strict Pharisee would have said' (there were after all, no doubt, varieties even within strict Pharisism, as there are in all strict political and religious movements), but at least to help us gain a picture of the hinterland of beliefs, aspirations, agendas and methods within which those of a Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus made the sense they did.

To put it briefly: the chances are that the Pharisees, broadly speaking, should be understood in terms of an overriding concern for *purity*. There were purity-conscious dining clubs known as the Haberim, and it may be that the Pharisees included people who joined such groups, but in any case such a concern marked them out sharply from the non-purity-conscious ‘people of the land’.²⁸ But purity was not, in the relevant period, their sole or even their primary concern – except insofar as ‘purity’ functioned as a code, both linguistically and in its symbolic meaning within a culture, for the Jews’ consciousness of their own distinctiveness, and the following through of that consciousness into social and political, and not merely cultic, stringency.

All the signs I have seen in recent work point, in fact, to a strengthening of my earlier conclusion that before the debacle of AD 70 the main issue at stake for a Pharisee was not simply ‘how to maintain one’s own personal purity’, but ‘how to be a loyal Jew faced with pagan oppression from outside and disloyal Jews from within’. Purity was a sign and seal of that concern. In our period it was the revolutionary wing of the Pharisees who were in the ascendancy, held back a bit by their more cautious colleagues but firmly in the driving seat until devastated by the fall of the city and the Temple. Even then, as I argued before, the revolutionary stream, though perhaps driven underground, did not go away. Represented by figures like Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, it was ready to emerge in the next generation, in the massive rebellion in which Akiba (a strong candidate for the title of greatest rabbinic teacher ever) hailed Simeon ben-Kosiba as ‘son of the star’ (i.e. ‘bar-Kochba), the Messiah promised in Numbers 24.17. Akiba perished, of course, along with his hero, his colleagues and the dreams of his people, in AD 135. But it was within this whole world, roughly half way between the Pharisees’ early heyday under the late Hasmoneans and their transformation with the events of 70 and 135, that Saul of Tarsus was trained in this most strict of Jewish worldviews.²⁹

This was above all a *kingdom-of-God* movement, with strong ideological links directly to the revolutionary Judaism in which Pharisees had taken part in the days of Herod and which came to a full flowering with the so-called

‘Zealot’ movement in the disastrous war against Rome (66–70).³⁰ At the heart of Pharisaic Judaism, as with their putative successors the rabbis, stood prayer; at the heart of daily prayer stood the *Shema* (‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One!’); and one subsequent way of referring to someone saying the *Shema*, as in the memorable and moving description of Akiba’s death, was to say that he was ‘accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven’, in other words, was declaring that Israel’s God alone was the true king of the world.³¹ That is what the rebels had shouted under Herod: ‘No king but God’. The many points of interconnection between the actual content of the daily prayers, the *Shema* and the Eighteen Benedictions in particular, and the dangerous and contested political circumstances of the time, make it virtually impossible to imagine that devout Jews, heirs to the traditions of the Maccabees, of Daniel, and behind them to those great models of ‘zeal’, Phinehas and Elijah, would be able to invoke the one God without thereby intentionally praying for that one God to do for them what he had done for their ancestors in Egypt, overthrowing pagan tyrants and setting his people free.³² ‘Zeal’, even when not turned into the proper name of a particular group, the ‘Zealots’ (for which there is evidence only in the period leading up to the war of 66–70), was an obvious code word for revolutionary aspiration. It denoted a ready willingness to take the law into one’s own hands, the law whose pure observance was so horribly challenged in the Maccabean period and thereafter. It meant being prepared to bring about God’s sovereign will on earth as in heaven by dealing fiercely and forcibly both with Jews who were flouting it and with pagans who were imposing their alien ways on the devout in order to break their national spirit. It meant being prepared to join in with the holy war, whenever it came, trusting that Israel’s God would be the enemy of Israel’s enemies.³³ That is what ‘zeal’ was all about. (That is why Josephus, describing the Pharisees in terms of philosophy, claimed that they held a balanced view of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility.³⁴) And ‘zeal’ is precisely the word that Paul uses of his former self, as we shall see.

The deep division among the Pharisees themselves, between the houses of Hillel and Shammai, almost certainly focused on this issue. Granted, life was

undoubtedly more complicated than a straightforward two-way split implies.³⁵ Anyone who observes the political landscape in their own country will soon enough discover the same thing. Two-party systems are too neat by half. Granted, too, the Hillel/Shammai division is represented much later as having to do mostly with issues of purity, with Shammai taking the stricter line and Hillel the softer. But the signs indicate that this is a re-reading of earlier debates which may have been about quite other things. I have cited elsewhere the example of the debate about the canonical status of Ecclesiastes, where Shammai took the supposedly ‘stricter’ line (by excluding the book from the canon of scripture), but thereby puzzled the later rabbis who, being mainly interested in purity, were concerned about whether one should wash one’s hands after touching this or that book, as one was obliged to with canonical texts, and were surprised to find Shammai coming down on the apparently ‘lenient’ side (ruling that one did not have to wash after touching Ecclesiastes, because it was not in the canon).³⁶ My point here is that the principal debate between Hillel and Shammai, who flourished in the time of Herod, is almost certain to have been not about purity (though that mattered too) but about how to be a loyal Jew under an alien regime, whether that of Rome (who had run the country, whether directly or through client rulers, since Pompey’s invasion in 63 BC) or compromised local regimes like Herod’s. Should one find a way to live and let live? Hillel thought so – as did his successor, and probably grandson, Gamaliel.³⁷ Shammai almost certainly thought not: one should strongly oppose the blasphemous imposition of paganism, after the example of the Maccabees and their distant biblical predecessors. And that meant violence – sacred violence, of course, but violence none the less. Hence the revolutionary movements under Herod; hence the build-up to war in the 50s and 60s; hence, fatefully, the massive support for Akiba and bar-Kochba in 132.³⁸

So strong was the division between the Hillelites and Shammaites, according to later tradition, that it was as though the Torah, the way of life for Israel, had split into two: there were ‘two Torahs in Israel’.³⁹ This is one of many suggestive themes to which we shall return much later. But we

should note here that Paul had almost certainly been on the Shammaite side (granted the caution about oversimplification expressed a moment ago), and it is against that background that we must imagine all his rethinking and reworking of prayer, thought and life to have taken place. It is, frankly, inconceivable that someone from the more conciliatory wing of the Pharisaic movement would have taken the trouble to persecute the emerging Christian movement in the way he did. Gamaliel, as we saw, thought that this strange new sect would fall by its own weight, but that one should beware lest one be found fighting against God.⁴⁰ Even if Saul of Tarsus had been Gamaliel's student, as Acts 22.3 has him say (I take Hengel's point that students like to study with the most exciting and learned teachers, not necessarily those with whom they will agree!⁴¹), he was certainly not acting in a Gamaliel-like, or Hillelite, fashion. Attempts to suggest that he had been a Hillelite on the grounds of some points in his later (Christian) writings miss the point. By Paul's own account his way of looking at a great many things had changed radically. We should not be surprised if his Christian rethinking made some opinions come out looking like cousins of Hillel rather than Shammai.⁴²

Paul himself, as we saw, uses the word 'zeal' twice in reference to his pre-Christian life, once in each of the short passages where he speaks of those days:

You heard, didn't you, the sort of person I was when I was still within 'Judaism'. I persecuted the church of God violently, and ravaged it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my fellow-Jewish contemporaries; I was extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions (*perissoterōs zēlōtēs hyparchōn tōn patrikōn mou nomōn*).⁴³

Mind you, I have good reason to trust in the flesh. If anyone else thinks they have reason to trust in the flesh, I have more: an eighth-day boy in circumcision, from the race of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, a Pharisee when it comes to Torah, a church-persecutor when it comes to zeal (*kata zēlos diōkōn tēn ekklēsian*), blameless when it comes to covenant membership defined by Torah (*kata dikaiosynēn tēn en tō nomō genomenos amemptos*).⁴⁴

To understand exactly what these claims meant, what sort of way of life and set of aspirations Paul was intending to convey by these words, it may help to take a closer look at one of the classic statements of 'zeal'. It is surprising, actually, that this passage in 1 Maccabees is not more referred to in

discussions of Paul's Pharisaic worldview, since one might think, reading it, that it was written deliberately to provide a frame for many of the themes of his mature writing. (We note in passing how totally different this setting is from that envisaged in so much western Christianity, both catholic and Protestant, evangelical and liberal. Call this a 'new perspective' if you like; though Sanders, and other 'new perspective' writers, have not usually emphasized the nakedly political setting, preferring to settle for the 'religious' or the socio-cultural context. Placing Paul in the framework of earlier statements of 'zeal' such as this looks to me like good history. And good theology is always rooted in good history.)

The date is 167 BC, the place is Jerusalem, and the situation could not be worse. The warning of Daniel 9 has come true: a 'desolating sacrilege' has been placed on the altar of burnt-offering in the Temple by the arrogant king Antiochus Epiphanes, who makes havoc of Judaea, putting people to death for daring to stick fast by the covenant and the law.⁴⁵ This evokes a lament from Mattathias, a priest with five sons, who sees what is going on and bewails the fact that the holy place, with all its beauty and glory, is laid waste, leaving Israel as a slave.⁴⁶ The king's officers then come to the town of Modein, where Mattathias and his sons live, and try to persuade people to offer a pagan sacrifice. Mattathias refuses:

Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to obey his commandments, everyone of them abandoning the religion of their ancestors, I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the covenant of our ancestors (*en diathēkē paterōn hēmōn*). Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances (*katalipein nomon kai dikaiōmata*). We will not obey the king's words ...⁴⁷

Thereupon a Jew came forward in full public gaze to offer pagan sacrifice in accordance with the royal command. Mattathias 'burned with zeal' (*ezēlōsen*), his innards were stirred, and he was angry in the cause of judgment (*kata to krima*). Running forward, he killed the man and the officer beside him, and tore down the altar. 'Thus he burned with zeal for the law' (*kai ezēlōsen tō nomō*), 'just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu'. The author thus carefully locates Mattathias at the heart of the classic picture of

‘zeal’: Phinehas’s action to spear the man who, in full public gaze, had taken a Midianite woman to his tent.⁴⁸

Mattathias then, not surprisingly, finds it expedient to leave town and flee to the hills, inviting everyone ‘who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant’ to come with him (2.27). The next sequence, through the rest of the long chapter, contains so many passages which sound familiar to a Pauline ear that we simply have to quote sections of it for the echoes to be aroused. This, I suggest, is at the heart of what it meant for Paul to be a loyal, ‘zealous’ Jew; his type of ‘Pharisee’, in fact. Many of these phrases and biblical allusions stayed, it seems, near the top of his mind:

At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice (*zētountes dikaiosynēn kai krima*) went down to the wilderness to live there ... [where they were pursued, and, because they would not fight on the sabbath, many were killed]. Then there united with them a company of Hasideans [*hasidim?* see below], mighty warriors of Israel, who offered themselves willingly for the law (*hekousiazomenos tō nomō*) ... [they enforced circumcision and hunted down the arrogant] and the work prospered in their hands. They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings (*antelabonto tou nomou ek cheiros tōn ethnōn kai tōn basileōn*), and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

[The time comes for Mattathias to die, and he gives his closing speech to his children:] ‘Now my children, show zeal for the law (*zēlōsate tō nomō*) and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors (*hyper diathēkēs paterōn hēmōn*). Remember the deeds (*erga*) of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great glory (*doxan megalēn*) and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?⁴⁹ (*Abraam ouchi en peirasmō heurethē pistos, kai elogisthē autō eis dikaiosynēn.*) Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood (*en tō zēlōsai zēlon elaben diathēkēn hierōsynēs aiōnias*).⁵⁰ [And so on through Joshua, Caleb, David; then] Elijah, because of great zeal for the law (*en tō zelōsai zēlon nomou*), was taken up into heaven.⁵¹ Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions.’

[Mattathias concludes with an appeal to courage, and then:] ‘My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law (*ischysate en tō nomō*), for by it you will gain glory (*hoti en autō doxasthēsethe*). [He commends his sons Simeon and Judas, and concludes,] Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law (*antapodote antapodoma tois ethnēsin kai prosechete eis prostagma tou nomou*).’⁵²

Zeal and the law, zeal and the law; the covenant, Abraham, Phinehas and Elijah; faith, courage, the reckoning of righteousness, the promise of glory;

pay back the pagans in their own coin,⁵³ *and hold fast to the commandments of the law!* How much clearer could it get? Are these not mostly ideas we know from Paul, even if exegetical and church tradition had taught us to read them very differently? And if we even venture the possibility that the ‘Hasideans’ of 2.42 might have something to do with the origin of the Pharisees (which is of course impossible to prove, but impossible to disprove either) we are on even more secure ground.⁵⁴ The important thing was: this was what being ‘zealous for Torah’ looked like. The long line of Israel’s history can be told in terms of Abraham being faithful, and it being reckoned to him as righteousness, and then of the others who showed their faith, their zeal, their courage. Keep the law, for that is the path to glory! It is not difficult to imagine a young Jew, faced with the sordid power of paganism in the early first century and the shabby compromises of many of his countrymen, being fired by this vision.⁵⁵ Cling on to God’s faithfulness, stir up your courage, and act. This is what being a Pharisee was all about. This, indeed – confusing for us in a world where the word ‘Judaism’ refers to a ‘religion’ in our modern sense – seems to have been what *Ioudaismos* meant: not simply the practice of a ‘religion’, but the active propagation of the ancestral way of life and its defence against attack whether from outside (as in the case of Mattathias) or inside (as in the case of Saul of Tarsus).⁵⁶

A much harder question concerns the mapping of this Jewish, and specifically Pharisaic, way of life in the Diaspora, as opposed to in the holy land itself. This is of more than passing interest for Paul, since of course his testimony in Acts is that he came from Tarsus in Cilicia (modern south-east Turkey), though being brought up or at least educated in Jerusalem.⁵⁷ Some, seeking to split Paul off from ‘genuine Judaism’, and supposing that with his Diaspora origins he only knew a low-grade form of the religion, have denigrated ‘Diaspora Judaism’ in order to dismiss Paul, but this would be a mistake on both counts. As has now been shown in great detail by John Barclay and others, Jewish life in the Diaspora cannot be so easily categorized. The Diaspora itself is so obviously varied: Alexandria, Ephesus and Rome are hardly likely to produce identical cultural formation, even in a strongly bonded group with allegiance to a parent country and religion. As

we saw in relation to Palestine, the Hillel/Shammai distinction was probably an over-schematization of a more complex state of affairs, and in any case it related only to one major party, the Pharisees, leaving out of the question the Sadducees and the Essenes, not to mention the great majority of Jews who were not aligned with any particular ‘party’.

In the same way, the evidence for the Diaspora is that there was a wide range of Jewish practice and even belief, allowing a tentative map to be drawn up of three different phenomena. Barclay refers to these as ‘assimilation, acculturation and accommodation’: the first refers to social integration into the wider society, the second to language and education, and the third to the use that was made of that language and education. It is possible, though tricky and necessarily tentative, to place different people, writings and social groupings at different points on these various scales in terms of their ‘cultural convergence’ and/or their ‘cultural antagonism’. This ‘thick description’ of Jewish life in the Diaspora (well, thicker than the older caricatures, at least) is enormously helpful in getting beyond stereotypes and enabling us to understand just how complicated, and sometimes dangerous, life was in Egypt, Asia, Greece or Italy. Putting Paul into this setting, whether as a young Jew growing up in Tarsus or as a mature apostle travelling through the Diaspora communities, is itself thus made more complicated, and all the better for that.⁵⁸

How then can we map the worldview and the theology of a Pharisee like Paul? What follows is as I have said both a supplement to, and a sharp focusing of, the fuller account in *NTPG*. From there, it will be no surprise that the main emphases within the worldview (praxis, story, symbol and questions) fall on the Temple and the Torah, with land and family situated in relation to both.⁵⁹ And within ‘Torah’ we shall include such matters as food, circumcision and sabbath.

[3. Praxis and Symbol: Torah and Temple](#)

In worldview terms, ancient Jewish praxis and symbol ran closely together, precisely because the symbols were what they were. I was going to write that

the Torah was hardly a symbol that you would hang on your wall (to make the point that Torah is something you *do*, not merely an ornament, like the fish-sign that a modern western Christian sticks on a car); but then I remembered that of course hanging things on the wall was precisely one of the things which devout Jews were commanded to do, and which they do to this day, so that *mezuzoth* greet you on your going out and coming in.⁶⁰ But the point remains: Torah is a *symbol* which by its very nature is about *praxis*. Torah, the greatest of all the divine gifts for a Jew, was not about grand religious abstractions but about precise patterns of behaviour.⁶¹

Even when Torah can be allegorized this way or that, with the allegorical meanings being regarded as the deep, 'real' thing, the prince of allegorists himself insisted that you should still do what it says in concrete, everyday terms.⁶² And the things Philo was worried about were precisely such matters as sabbath, circumcision and the keeping of festivals in the Temple in Jerusalem. Whatever their higher or deeper meaning, these were things that should be *done*. Most Jews, not only Pharisees, circumcised their male children as a matter of course, but the emphasis on circumcision as a boundary-marker between Jews and non-Jews, so powerfully evident in Galatians, was foreshadowed by those episodes two hundred years earlier where some Jews tried to remove the marks of circumcision so that, when exercising naked *à la Grècque* in the shiny new Gymnasium in Jerusalem, they would not be mocked for their piety or nationality.⁶³ The sabbath was such a solidly fixed institution that there are stories of Jews dying in large numbers rather than defend themselves on the sabbath day, and also of many pagans, observing the Jewish habit of taking a day off, picking up this strange custom as a curious but worthwhile social practice.⁶⁴ It may be that the sabbath had acquired a wider significance as well, in terms of the Jubilee, and the great Jubilee of Jubilees promised by the book of Daniel, but we shall return to that presently. The sense of identity among the Jewish people, whether we call them a (dispersed) nation, a family, or whatever, remained powerful, though of course contested in terms of what precisely it meant. A good deal of the stress and tension of Jewish life in the Diaspora, then as now, came from the questions Barclay and others have studied so

carefully, of how to tread the fine line in regard to assimilation, acculturation and accommodation. But the idea that the Jewish people was a single people, over against the multiplicity and confusion of the rest of the world, was deeply rooted and widely cherished.⁶⁵

It was of course taken for granted that the wider commands of Torah would be obeyed as well, and when they were disobeyed one can feel a wave of shock and horror sweeping through the community.⁶⁶ But the point of Torah as *symbol* is precisely the sense, widespread across ancient Jewish life and surely now uncontroversial among its contemporary interpreters, that Torah as a whole, and certain facets of it in particular, marked out the Jews from their non-Jewish neighbours. Particular emphases within wider morality did not so obviously have that function; adultery, for instance, though widely practised in the ancient non-Jewish world, was usually frowned upon by non-Jewish moralists, and the same went of course for theft and murder. But circumcision and sabbath, though the former was not absolutely unique to the Jews, were symbols which declared, not least in the Diaspora, ‘We are a different people, a people in covenant with the God who made heaven and earth.’⁶⁷ Mattathias’s strictures come to mind again, as the corruptions of Hellenism swept through the middle east in the early years of the second century BC: ‘show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of your ancestors.’⁶⁸ It would be hard to find a better motto for pious Jews in general, and Pharisaism in particular, throughout the following three hundred years.

In particular, Torah specified what you could and couldn’t eat, and (though this is harder to get right, but extremely important) who you could and couldn’t eat with. The food laws, and the restrictions on company at table, loom large in Paul’s letters, and it is one of the great gains of recent scholarship that we can plot such matters on the grid of social, cultural and political, as well as theological, analysis rather than trying to squash them into the box of either ‘doctrine’ or ‘ethics’, or indeed of ‘grace’ and ‘works’, conceived as essentially modern ‘religious’ abstractions. What would a Pharisee, and a strict one at that, believe about such matters?

Clearly, a Pharisee with any pretensions to genuine strictness would be concerned that his own food should be such as one might eat in a state of purity within the Temple itself. (I am assuming that Pharisees were normally male, though they will have done their best to ensure that the whole family kept to Pharisaic principles.) This does not necessarily mean that they regarded themselves as the equivalent of priests (though they may have done; the point is not vital for our present argument).⁶⁹ It is more a matter of translating the life of the Temple (on which see below) into everyday life, a matter of particular importance for those who lived some distance away from Jerusalem, not least in the further reaches of the Diaspora. The obvious kosher restrictions were to be observed strictly: there are awful tales in the Maccabean literature and elsewhere of devout Jews having pork stuffed into their mouths by pagan enforcers, and of their going to great lengths to refuse it.⁷⁰ Even in less troubled times, Jewish people living in non-Jewish countries, and otherwise enjoying good relations with their neighbours, regularly ran the risk of being regarded as socially disruptive or subversive because of their strict adherence to these ancestral codes.⁷¹ But the basic kosher regulations were just the start. While few Jews would have eaten pork or shellfish, the Pharisees went much further, as the Mishnah and a host of other writings make clear.

But it was not just the food that you ate that marked you out. It was also the company you kept at table. Obviously the two would often go together, but even if non-Jewish acquaintances would have been happy to share a kosher meal in a Jewish home, the stricter Jews – and that was precisely how the Pharisees defined themselves – would not have been happy to have them at the same table. The stark statement in Acts should be taken very seriously: ‘You must know,’ said Peter, ‘that it is forbidden for a Jewish man to mix with or visit a Gentile.’ He got into trouble, back in Jerusalem, for doing so: ‘Why did you do it?’ they asked. ‘Why did you go in to visit uncircumcised men and eat with them?’⁷² Peter’s rationale, and his subsequent explanation to his interlocutors, was that he had had a vision in which, being invited to eat all kinds of unclean food, he was told that he should not regard as ‘unclean’ something which God had made clean.⁷³ The unclean food was a

metaphor for the unclean company, that being how purity codes work; but it was the company that mattered. Peter's accusers in Jerusalem did not tell him off for eating unclean food (though that may have been implied as well) but for eating *with non-Jews*. This question would arise less in largely Jewish areas such as (some parts at least of) the holy land itself, which was why, according to Josephus, the Ptolemies in Egypt had granted the Jews a particular quarter of the city, 'so that they could maintain their way of life in greater purity, by mixing less with other peoples'.⁷⁴ This practice of *amixia*, 'non-mixing', is seen to stark effect in the attitude of Joseph to Aseneth in the novel that bears their names: Joseph will have nothing to do with this pagan woman until she has been very thoroughly purified, and Aseneth, remarkably, takes it in good part, which is just as well for the novel's happy ending.⁷⁵ We should not be surprised, then, that 'complaints [were] raised in different locations and across the centuries' at this widespread and common practice of 'Jewish separatism at meals'.⁷⁶ The *Letter of Aristeas* speaks of God laying down the dietary laws in order to establish 'unbreakable palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter'.⁷⁷ If this was true for Jews in general, how much more was it true for Pharisees; if for Pharisees, how much more for the zealous, strict sort, the out-and-out, the Shammaites; if for the zealous, how much more for one who was 'excessively zealous for the traditions of my fathers', outstripping all others of his own age and race. Even if eyebrows are raised at Paul's rather dramatic self-description, this is undoubtedly the point on the cultural and social map where he belonged prior to his conversion.

All this indicates a focus on what is still difficult to describe in neutral terms: race, ethnic identity, family.⁷⁸ There is nothing much new to add here; I simply endorse Barclay's conclusion, that 'Jewish identity in the Diaspora was not merely a matter of ancestry nor simply a question of cultural practice but was based on a combination of these two interlocking factors.'⁷⁹ I am not sure that a first-century Jew would have been happy with the gentle reductionism implied in speaking of Torah-zeal in terms of 'cultural practice', but the point is taken. Kinship, primarily genetic but also (in the case of proselytes) fictive, was the underlying bond, and was reinforced by

the numerous practices laid down in Torah, which was itself referred to in kinship terms ('the ancestral traditions', 'the traditions of the fathers', and so forth). We might note that, in Qumran, one of the primary symbols of the worldview was the *yahad* itself, the 'united community'.⁸⁰

We need to add to Barclay's combination of ancestry and cultural practice some kind of implicit relationship to sacred geography. Even if one never visited the land, the city or the Temple, Diaspora Jews still retained some kind of linkage to all three, however hard that may be to describe or factor in to one's understanding. It was not just a matter of sending money back to Jerusalem from time to time. That was itself a sign of something deeper, a memory and an aspiration perhaps, with a lingering sense of identity hovering in between the two. Apart from that, I have nothing new to add about the symbolic status of the land over and above what was said in *The New Testament and the People of God*.⁸¹ People plus land equals nation ... though 'nation' is itself tricky; today's 'nation-state' is a modern innovation, another of those words that we think are 'neutral' but may actually lead us in the wrong direction. In any case, whatever terms we settle on, the existence of the people, and the land as their possession, could never be taken for granted in the ancient world, as foreign overlords ruled and pagan institutions flourished. But the belief that the land of Israel belonged to the one true God, and had been given to his people in perpetuity, never wavered. That belief, unlike the political reality, was taken for granted, including by Diaspora Jews, who never presumed that their new residence could supplant the single land with its single Temple (with one celebrated exception, the surprising new sanctuary built at one point in Egypt).⁸²

When we come to the Jerusalem Temple, there is a certain amount to add to what was said in *NTPG*. There has recently been an explosion of interest in the Temple and what it stood for, and there are several ways in which what I said earlier should now be expanded as part of the context for understanding the mindset of a zealous first-century Pharisee.⁸³ The Temple in Jerusalem was the focus of the whole Jewish life and way of life. A good deal of Torah was about what to do in the Temple, and the practice of Torah in the Diaspora itself could be thought of in terms of gaining, at a distance,

the blessings you would gain if you were actually there – the blessing, in other words, of the sacred presence itself, the Shekinah, the glory which supposedly dwelt in the Temple but would also dwell ‘where two or three study Torah’.⁸⁴ An equivalent move was undertaken in Qumran: the sect was to be seen as ‘a human temple’ in which ‘works of law’ were to be offered.⁸⁵ Synagogues were often built so that they pointed towards the Temple, or otherwise indicated their relation to it.⁸⁶ Far-off Jews collected Temple-tax and transported it to Jerusalem so that they might take part in the sacrificial cult personally, albeit at a distance.⁸⁷ Long centuries after the Temple had been destroyed, some continued to regard the activity of studying the laws concerning Temple-worship as the functional equivalent of taking part in the long-defunct liturgy.⁸⁸ It would be a mistake to suppose that just because Pharisees developed strong Temple-substitutes (in part, no doubt, because of their frustration with the Sadducees who were actually running the Temple) they therefore disregarded the institution itself. Far from it. Like Philo, they could produce (as it were) symbolic or allegorical equivalents of the concrete reality, but the concrete reality still mattered. The wrong people might be in charge of it, but the Temple was still the Temple. It remained prior, even though Torah could be an effective substitute, just as the sacrificial cult in the Temple remained prior even while the keeping of Torah (particularly prayer, deeds of mercy and almsgiving) could serve instead, a tradition going back to the biblical Psalms.⁸⁹

The point of the Temple – this is where I want to develop considerably further what was said in the earlier volumes – is that it was where heaven and earth met. It was the place where Israel’s God, YHWH, had long ago promised to put his name, to make his glory present. The Temple, and before it the wilderness tabernacle, were thus heirs, within the biblical narrative, to moments like Jacob’s vision, the discovery that a particular spot on earth could intersect with, and be the gateway into, heaven itself.⁹⁰ In the later period, even synagogues could sometimes be thought of as meeting places between heaven and earth; how much more the actual Temple.⁹¹ The Temple was not simply a convenient place to meet for worship. It was not even just the ‘single sanctuary’, the one and only place where sacrifice was to be

offered in worship to the one God.⁹² It was the place above all where the twin halves of the good creation intersected. When you went up to the Temple, it was not *as though* you were ‘in heaven’. You were actually there. That was the point. Israel’s God did not have to leave heaven in order to come down and dwell in the wilderness tabernacle or the Jerusalem Temple. However surprising it may be for modern westerners to hear it, within the worldview formed by the ancient scriptures heaven and earth were always made to work together, to interlock and overlap. There might in principle be many places and ways in which this could happen, but the Jewish people had believed, throughout the millennium prior to Jesus, that the Jerusalem Temple was the place and the means *par excellence* for this strange and powerful mystery.⁹³

The roots of this Temple-belief go back to the heart of the great controlling narrative: passover, exodus, freedom, Sinai, covenant, homecoming (I shall discuss the whole implicit and sometimes explicit ‘story’ of Israel below).⁹⁴ Within the book of Exodus, no sooner had the children of Israel come out of Egypt and been given the law on Mount Sinai than Moses was given instructions on how to make the tabernacle. This, he was told, was the point of bringing them out in the first place:

And they shall know that I am YHWH their God, the one who brought them out from the land of Egypt so that I might dwell in their midst. I am YHWH their God.⁹⁵

‘That I might dwell in their midst’; the Hebrew for ‘dwell’ is *shkn*, from the same root as *mshkn*, ‘tabernacle’.⁹⁶ That was the aim of the whole thing: that the people rescued from slavery and formed by Torah might be the people in whose midst the living God would pitch his tabernacle, would ‘dwell’ (an apparently insignificant word which, in its early Christian reappropriation, needs to be heard within this particular echo-chamber). There was, of course, an unfortunate digression. Israel’s sin with the golden calf, a ghastly parody of the presence of the true God with his people, caused YHWH to threaten not to dwell in their midst after all, not to go with them into the promised land. This provoked the great crisis, and Moses’ great prayer, recorded in Exodus 32—4. But the tabernacle was eventually constructed according to

plan – even though it now had to be situated outside the camp. There is something of a sigh of relief as the book of Exodus then reaches its climax:

the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of YHWH was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.⁹⁷

The cloud and fire had been present before, of course, leading them out of Egypt, but now these strange symbols of YHWH's presence had found a permanent, if moveable, residence.

This in turn was basic to the understanding of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. At its dedication this Temple, like the tabernacle before it, was filled with the sign of YHWH's presence:

When the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of YHWH, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of YHWH filled the house of YHWH.⁹⁸

This is then repeated in the famous scene of Isaiah's vision:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and the hem of his robe filled the Temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him, each with six wings. With two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And they were crying to one another, 'Holy, holy, holy is YHWH Sebaoth; the whole earth is full of his glory.' The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said, 'Woe is me ...'⁹⁹

These are the scenes that provide a backdrop for all the language in the Psalms about YHWH choosing Zion, and the Temple, as the place to dwell, to 'place his name there', to 'let his glory dwell there', to have as 'his inheritance':

For YHWH has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:
'This is my resting-place for ever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.'¹⁰⁰

Again, stressing that the ‘name’ of YHWH will be in the Temple, we find Solomon’s speech, delivered immediately after that filling of the house with YHWH’s power and glory:

Blessed be YHWH, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David, saying, ‘Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there; but I chose David to be over my people Israel.’ My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of YHWH, the God of Israel. But YHWH said to my father David, ‘You did well to consider building a house for my name; nevertheless, you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.’ Now YHWH has upheld the promise that he made; for I have risen in the place of my father David; I sit on the throne of Israel, as YHWH promised, and have built the house for the name of YHWH, the God of Israel. There I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of YHWH that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.¹⁰¹

It would be hard to overestimate the lasting power of this combination of ideas – and not just ideas, either, but literally facts on the ground. (In what follows, the references to the Psalms in particular should make us think, all the time: this is the backbone of the prayer life of Israel, which by definition was the central, most character-forming element for a zealous Pharisee.) Here is David’s son Solomon, fulfilling the promises about the house that David would make for God and the house that God would make for David, a combined promise that echoed down through the second-Temple Jewish world and on into the New Testament.¹⁰² Here is the Temple itself, filled with the powerful glory, that is, the personal presence in power and glory, of YHWH himself.¹⁰³ This is the place which will now be the place of sacrifice, the place towards which prayer will be offered, even from far away,¹⁰⁴ the place of wisdom,¹⁰⁵ the place from which blessing or deliverance will come.¹⁰⁶ Here is the resting-place, after all the long journeyings, for the covenant made at the time of the exodus. Sometimes ancient writers speak of the *beauty* of YHWH present in this place; sometimes, too, of his constant love.¹⁰⁷ And here, not least, is the *name* of YHWH; this is one of the reasons why it helps us, despite the occasional objection, to quote that name itself rather than saying ‘LORD’ all the time, which in today’s English or American scarcely conveys the mystery and

power of the tetragrammaton itself. In fact, here and in many other places it looks as though ‘name’ and ‘glory’ are almost interchangeable.¹⁰⁸ It has been suggested that talk of the ‘name’ of YHWH dwelling in the Temple may have been a way of distancing Israel’s God himself from actual residence, corresponding to the reticence of Solomon’s prayer (‘heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house’); but one could equally say that the ‘name’ is about as powerful a sign of the divine presence as could be desired (or, indeed, feared).¹⁰⁹ Likewise, talk of the divine glory being present in the Temple could be a way of safeguarding the divine freedom (the ‘glory’ may be there, but YHWH himself is everywhere, transcendent over all), but equally it could function as a way of emphasizing the splendour of the divine presence itself, in the great paradox that lay at the heart of ancient Israel: the creator of heaven and earth has decided to come and live *right here*, on this little hill! This, declare the Psalmists, is therefore the most attractive, wonderful place on the face of the earth; and, of course, anyone who wants to be in or around this holy place must know their business, how to be holy, how to behave.¹¹⁰ But it is, above all else, the place of *praise*. The summons of the final psalm, ‘Praise God in his sanctuary’, draws together the entire message of the entire Psalter.¹¹¹

All the other symbols of ancient Israel and the second-Temple Jewish world gathered around this majestic, potent building, and from it they took their meaning and power. This was where the great narratives clustered, too, the stories upon which the Jewish people had already been living for centuries before Saul of Tarsus came along, narratives that had developed fresh resonances in the years immediately before his day and would, through his agency, develop significantly new ones as he told them around the world in a radically reworked form (and, he would say, as he worked on constructing the new ‘building’ around the world). These are stories about Israel’s God, about his name and his glory; stories about who this God is in himself and his actions, stories about his power and his faithfulness, about his powerful wings hovering over his people to keep them safe. They are Temple-stories because they are God-and-Israel stories, and vice versa.

There are three elements to this Temple-theology which we must now explore in more detail. These elements are (remarkably) not as well known as they should be – or at least, they do not seem to attract much attention. What is more, they are enormously important as part of the context for understanding the worldview and mindset of a first-century Pharisee.¹¹²

The first important theme is that the Temple was a microcosm of the whole creation. We do not have many artefacts from the second-Temple period with which to form an impression of the visual symbolic world of the day, but we have enough descriptions of the Temple to know that it was quite deliberately constructed so as to reflect the whole creation, the stars in the heavens on the one hand and the multiplicity of beautiful vegetation on the other. As one recent writer has summarized it:

The rest of the iconography that filled the Temple from its very beginning – the carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers in the inner shrine, the central hall, and on the doors leading into both rooms, the lily work, the lattice work, and the pomegranates on the bronze pillars, the bronze oxen under the molten sea, and the cherubim, lions, palm trees, oxen, and wreaths on the moveable basin frames, and at some point the pole-mounted seraphim – all had a symbolic significance ...¹¹³

Thus the throne of cherubs on which YHWH's presence was supposed to rest was designed to indicate his rule as divine king, Lord of the whole world, with cherubim and seraphim expressing the awesome power of his presence. Josephus describes the curtain in the second Temple which represented an image of the universe, covered with symbolic coloured embroidery and mystical figures. In the Holy Place, next in sanctity to the (empty) Holy of Holies itself, were three wonderful works of art: the lampstand whose seven branches represented the seven planets, the table on which the twelve loaves represented the circle of the Zodiac and the year, and the altar of incense on which were thirteen spices, from every part of land and sea. All this, according to Josephus, signified that 'all things are of God and for God.'¹¹⁴ Likewise, the Wisdom of Solomon describes the robe of Aaron, the first high priest, as depicting 'the whole world' (*holos ho kosmos*).¹¹⁵ Even if particular interpretations were local, or peculiar to this or that writer, the overall picture, of the Temple and its intimate details

designed as a way of drawing together the whole creation, was widely known precisely in those circles (intelligent and learned Jews in the Diaspora as well as in Jerusalem) where we know Saul of Tarsus to have been brought up.¹¹⁶

Amid a plethora of studies which make this overall point, and thus connect the whole created order symbolically to the Jerusalem Temple, two recent works approach the question from either end. The jury is still out on these interpretations, but they seem to me to point in the right direction.

Gregory Beale, in a thorough and careful work, asks why the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 and 22 is described as though the whole thing is a temple. His answer, on the basis of a wide survey of Temple-discourse throughout ancient Jewish history, is that the Temple was always supposed to represent creation, and that at last, according to Revelation, the purpose is accomplished: that which was represented by the Temple, namely the presence of the creator in his world, is completely achieved.¹¹⁷ There is thus no Temple in the New Jerusalem, because the whole new creation is itself the ultimate (and originally intended) Temple. That explains, too, why (for instance) Mount Zion is envisaged in the Psalms and elsewhere as a kind of New Eden, with the river flowing out as in the prototype.¹¹⁸

John Walton, a former colleague of Beale's though not in this work referring to him, has recently written a short work aimed at explicating aspects of Genesis 1 for an audience which finds it controversial. As part of that task, he builds on an earlier commentary on Genesis in which he has argued strongly, from evidence across the ancient near east, that the creation-account in Genesis 1 would have been understood in the world of its day as the construction not just of a garden but specifically of a temple, a place for the creator to live in. 'God created the heavens and the earth', creating them as a home for himself. Walton argues, suggestively, that the seventh day in Genesis 2.2–3 is not a 'rest' in the sense of a mere cessation of activity, but the equivalent of Psalm 132.14: this is God's 'resting-place'. He has finished the work of construction, which is to be seen as a prelude to all his intended work of developing it through the agency of his image-bearing human creatures. Now, with the construction complete, he can 'rest' in the sense of

‘taking up residence’. Temples, Walton argues, regularly had a sevenfold building-programme. We note that when Solomon dedicated his Temple the festival lasted for seven days.¹¹⁹

These are highly evocative, large-scale pictures which have not, to my knowledge, had much impact in the world of biblical scholarship. If thought through, they could do so. This applies particularly to the attempt to understand Paul, who as we shall see brought together Temple, glory, divine presence and new creation in a new overall pattern.¹²⁰

If the cosmic significance of the Temple is the first main point to be made about Israel’s central symbol, the second is much more sharply focused. The Temple was inextricably bound up, in Jewish thought from a thousand years before Paul, with the royal house of David. It was David who conceived the idea of the Temple, even though it was Solomon who built it; Chronicles in particular emphasizes that David had the entire scheme laid out for Solomon to implement, rather like God showing Moses the plan of the tabernacle on the mountain so that he could go down and get to work. There is here an echo, perhaps, of the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, being at the right hand of the creator and bringing his plans to birth: Moses, like Solomon, is the truly wise man, and indeed both Moses and Solomon enlist, for the construction of their respective buildings, the services of men who are said to be especially equipped with the divine spirit and wisdom.¹²¹ Solomon’s prayer for wisdom is indeed intimately connected to his building of the Temple. That project appears in the narrative as the primary, or at least the first, answer his prayer receives.¹²²

For the next thousand years the question of kingship and the question of Temple are tied closely together.¹²³ The split of the kingdom in the generation after Solomon created a major problem for the divided Israelite world, as the northern tribes had to create a replacement for the single sanctuary as part of their breaking away from David’s house. Threats to the Temple were threats to the king, and vice versa; conversely, the two kings seen as heroic by the Deuteronomic historian, Hezekiah and Josiah, are the ones who reform the Temple, its worship and its central place in the life of Judah.¹²⁴ The destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians goes hand in

hand with the overthrow of the monarchy, and the rebuilding after the partial return from Babylonian exile is entrusted to Zerubbabel – though the puzzle of the second Temple, to which we shall return presently, was part of the problem which meant that the Davidic house was not restored to its former glory.¹²⁵

There was then a hiatus until the second century BC, when Judas Maccabaeus cleansed and restored the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. This at one fell swoop legitimated his family as rulers, indeed priests as well as kings, for the next hundred years, despite the fact of their belonging neither to the royal tribe of Judah nor the priestly tribe of Levi. Arguably, one of the motives of Herod the Great in rebuilding the Temple to be the most stunning piece of architecture in the ancient world was the hope that, despite even less auspicious ancestry, he might legitimate at least his successors as the true kings of the Jews.¹²⁶ The question of kingship hung ominously over the first century along with the question of the Temple, which was scarcely completed in its new magnificence before the Romans finally burnt it down once and for all. But the memory of the royal vocation of temple-building continued. One of the coins minted by bar-Kochba in the great revolt has a picture of the Temple, indicating not only his aspiration to rebuild it but also his intention to demonstrate thereby that he was the true, final king.¹²⁷

All this is reflected in many texts of the relevant periods, and would have been well known – common coin, one might say – among Jews of the day, especially biblically literate ones. It has remained, however, relatively unknown and unreflected on by today's western world, including much of today's biblical scholarship. It is highly significant for our understanding of Paul, and his re-use of the Temple motif at various key points, that Temple and (Davidic) Messiahship go together. It is scarcely too much to suggest a link between the scholarly neglect of both the one and the other.

The two themes so far noted – Temple and cosmos, Temple and king – are both implicated in the third theme, of special importance for the study of the whole second-Temple period and, not least, the rise and self-understanding of the early Christian movement. What happens to the worldview, focused as

it was on the Temple, when the king was killed and the Temple destroyed? Answer: it threatens to fall apart. YHWH has abandoned the Temple to its fate, thereby removing his presence from Israel and leaving king and nation to their fate. The worldview can be put back together again only with the help of prophecies about the coming new Temple – which means, of course, the work of the true king and the restoration of the true cosmos. New Temple, new king, new creation: that is the combined promise of the exilic prophets. Israel's God will return to his Temple at last, the Temple which the coming king will build. Then, and only then, will the new Genesis come about.¹²⁸

That is the promise, too, of the so-called post-exilic prophets. Part of the puzzle of the second-Temple period, to which we shall come presently, is the fact that the rebuilt Temple was not all that had been hoped. The long book of Ezekiel closes with a great reprise of the climax of Exodus, the promise of a rebuilt Temple with YHWH coming to take up residence, so that 'the name of the city from that time on shall be, YHWH is There.'¹²⁹ But Haggai had to encourage Zerubbabel and his colleagues, working as they were on the new Temple, to believe that YHWH's spirit was present among them, as it had been before, and that there would be a new moment, a great convulsion, in which YHWH would shake both heavens and earth.¹³⁰ Then and only then would the divine presence return:

I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with [glory], says YHWH of hosts.¹³¹

Similarly, Zechariah, writing at the start of the second-Temple period, knows full well that the divine presence and glory has not yet returned. He promises that it will eventually do so:

Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and animals in it. For I will be a wall of fire all round it, says YHWH, and I will be the glory within it ... Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says YHWH. Many nations shall join themselves to YHWH on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that YHWH of hosts has sent me to you.¹³²

Perhaps most strikingly, Malachi castigates the priests in the second Temple for their lackadaisical approach to worship and sacrifice. He warns them that, though YHWH has not yet returned to the Temple, he will do so soon enough, and then he will execute judgment on those who have not taken him seriously:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says YHWH of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?¹³³

These promises of YHWH's return echo through the long years of the second-Temple period. But *at no point does anybody suggest that they have at last been fulfilled.*¹³⁴ There is a strange silence precisely where we might have expected a claim parallel to that of Exodus 40 or 1 Kings 8. Nobody attempts to tell of a sudden filling of the house with glory, with cloud and fire.

There is, indeed, one text which could be cited as an exception, but it is an exception which proves the rule. In Sirach 24, 'Wisdom' speaks in the first person, identifying herself even with the 'pillar of cloud' of the exodus narrative (24.4), and then with the Shekinah itself in the Temple (24.8–12).¹³⁵ The result of this is a kind of new creation, as the poem echoes features of the account in Genesis 2 (24.25–29). But the mode of Wisdom's presence is not the visible glory of the earlier texts. It consists of Torah: 'all this', says the writer,

is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob' (24.23).

Torah, taught of course by the priests, is the new 'presence'. We should not, then, be surprised that at the climax of the long story of Israel's heroes (Sirach 44–50) we find, not a Davidic Messiah, but the high priest in the Temple, glorious in himself and in his 'robe of glory', making both the sanctuary and the assisting priests 'glorious' in turn (50.5, 11, 13). This, it seems, is what sustains the claim that the Temple itself was 'destined for everlasting glory' (49.12).¹³⁶ The high priest's in the Temple, claims the

poem, so all's well with the world! For those with eyes to see, the divine glory has indeed returned at last – in the form of Torah, and of its supreme teacher and exemplar, the high priest (normally identified as Simon II, son of Onias).¹³⁷

The dream did not last. Sirach, it is normally supposed, was written around 200 BC or soon after.¹³⁸ Within a generation, all was swept away by the arrogant Syrian king, relentlessly enforcing pagan worship on the Jews and desecrating the Holy Place itself. That, too, was short-lived, as Judas Maccabaeus cleansed the Temple and restored the proper worship. But at no point then, either, did even the adulatory books of the Maccabees claim that the glorious presence of their God had actually returned. There is no mention of the house being filled with a cloud, of the priests being unable to stand before the glory, and so forth. The narrative is strangely incomplete. The boast of Sirach is not repeated. Nobody suggested that the Hasmonean high priests, or their successors in the time of Jesus and Paul, were vessels of divine glory. Nothing in the period inclines us to say that Isaiah, thinking of his promise that 'the glory of YHWH shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together', or Ezekiel, thinking of the whirling wheels and flashing fire returning at last to the rebuilt house, would say, 'There: that's what I was talking about.' Nor does the literature of the time give any hint that a new David has finally rebuilt a house in which YHWH has at last come to dwell for ever, to place his name there, to use it as the microcosm from which to renew the whole creation.¹³⁹

The point of all this, for our present purposes, is to say: all this would be common coin, second nature, to Jews of the period who were soaked in scripture and who were living as it were within the implicit narrative of the Temple and the divine presence (or absence). To those who pored over Torah night and day, looking for the consolation of Israel, this combination of motifs – Temple, presence, glory, kingship, wisdom, creation, exile, rebuilding, and unfulfilled promise – would be part of their mental and emotional furniture. Touch one and you would touch them all.

Torah itself intersected with everything else, being the true repository of wisdom.¹⁴⁰ The equation of Sirach 24 could be turned the other way round:

if the Temple was the place where Wisdom/Torah had made its home, any place in which Torah was studied might become an alternative Temple. Perhaps, mused the later rabbis after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and the failure of the last restoration-movement in AD 135, that might be how to seek and find the tabernacling divine presence in a new dispensation.¹⁴¹ The different attempts to solve this problem demonstrate well enough that the ultimate solution – the visible and effective divine presence as envisaged in Isaiah or Ezekiel – had not appeared.

Any self-respecting Pharisee would know all this, would live and breathe and hope and pray it. A Pharisee of the Pharisees, aware of the call to ‘zeal’ in defence both of the law and of the Holy Place, would have all this completely in his bloodstream. We have been looking, in other words, at some central components of the mindset of Saul of Tarsus.

As we have done so, we have found ourselves, as is normal within worldview-analysis, coming through the worlds of praxis and symbol and finding ourselves telling *stories*. It is those stories, and the questions to which they supply answers, that we must now examine.

[4. Stories and Questions in the Second-Temple Jewish World](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

I analyzed the basic Jewish stories of the second-Temple period in the first volume, and must now develop and amplify some of that material.¹⁴²

All generalizations about ‘what all Jews believed’ or ‘the stories all Jews knew’ are subject to the proper question: *all* of them? How do we know? Were not these hopes and dreams confined to a small, and perhaps scribal, elite who actually read the texts and knew these stories? In the ancient world, with far fewer books than today, most in any case not accessible to most people, the majestic biblical narrative would in fact stand out all the more. They were reinforced, for those who could not read, by the annual festivals: the story of the creator and the cosmos, of humans and their dignity and plight, and particularly of Israel – the patriarchs, the sojourn in Egypt,

the exodus, Sinai, the wanderings and homecoming, the monarchy, the prophets, the exile ... Other bits of scenery came and went, but as the large and small dramas of Israel's history unfolded over the centuries this backcloth was constant, unchanging, giving depth and body to everything that happened. Even for those whose every waking thought concerned family, food, water supplies, and eking out a daily existence, the great stories provided hope: *one day our God will act, and this will all be different*. As with an East German in the 1970s, or a black South African in the same period, the complex business of daily life would be shot through with a story, operating at a different level of consciousness, in which the injustice of the present would be linked to the future hope: *one day we shall be free*. You do not have to be a literate scribe to have that narrative in your head and your heart. For second-Temple Jews, of course, all this would be reinforced by the Psalms, retelling the ancient stories and posing exactly the questions many would raise of their own accord: has our God forgotten to be gracious? If we are people of Abraham, of Moses, of David, why has all this come upon us?¹⁴³

In short, despite the danger of generalization, we can and must say that most Jews of Paul's day perceived themselves, at a deep, worldview level, as living in *a story in search of an ending*. If Israel's God was indeed faithful, then the story could not simply collapse, implode, self-destruct. The narrative tension increased with every passing year, every false dawn, every would-be Messiah. Sometimes it looked as though the great event had happened, or was happening, and, like climbers reaching what they thought was the mountain-top, only to find another sheer rock face ahead, the devout Israelites suffered disappointments all the worse for having built up expectations. That, I take it, was how the slow disaffection after the Maccabean revolt affected pious Jews, precipitating (more or less) the formation of Pharisees and Essenes as movements determined not to lose the momentum, to find a way forward and tackle that rock face whatever it might cost. The story thus develops the quality of a musical sequence which the listeners expect to arrive at a resolution but which, instead, merely increases in intensity until our spines tingle and we realize that this is a truly

awful, truly awful, moment. I have in mind the hair-raising effect in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, in which what should be the penultimate chord of the 'Lachrymosa' from Mozart's *Requiem*, the first half of the concluding 'Amen', ought to resolve from its subdominant G minor back to D minor, but instead merely goes on, getting louder, precipitating us into unimagined worlds of unrequited grief, unresolved longing, encapsulating the inexpressible sorrow of Mozart's early death.¹⁴⁴ Thus it was for those who, through the last few centuries BC, prayed the Psalms, studied the Prophets, and heard year by year, festival by festival, the great stories of Genesis and Exodus, of Deuteronomy and Joshua.

And thus it was for Saul of Tarsus. Any narrative analysis of the letters he would write as Paul the apostle (chapter 7 below) has to begin with a proper understanding of the stories in which he had lived all his life. Israel was the one people of the creator God; how could this God not act at last to fulfil his promises?

Some find it helpful to set these narratives out in the form of diagrams.¹⁴⁵ For Saul of Tarsus, as for other Pharisees and for different movements like the Essenes, the shape of the controlling narrative went like this:

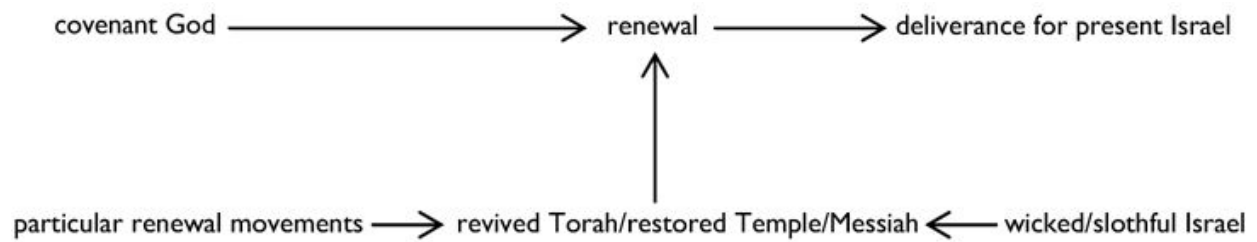


Israel's God has thus determined to make Israel his people, to rescue them from pagan overlordship as at the exodus, and to fulfil his purpose, as in the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He will enable the present Israel to stay loyal, will protect his people from the wicked pagan world, and will rescue them and give them what he had promised, the sovereignty over the world which had been theirs a thousand years before in the golden age of

David and Solomon.¹⁴⁶ What they need is what had been provided from early on: the Temple as the place of YHWH's presence; the Torah as the guiding way of life; the king as the leader and deliverer, the people's focal point and military leader. And all because YHWH is faithful.

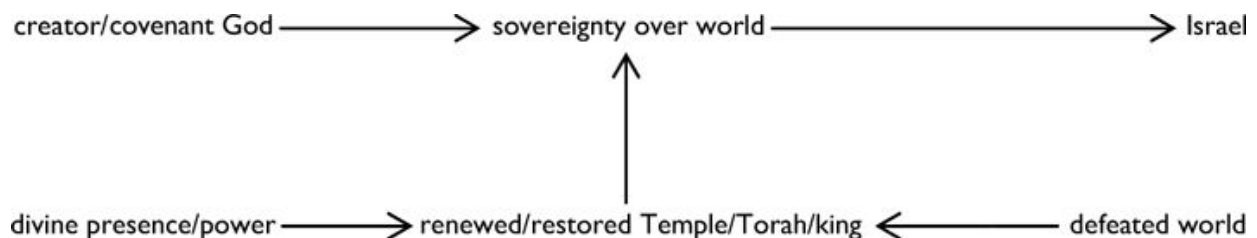
But things have gone horribly wrong. The Temple has been destroyed, and even though it has been rebuilt there is a widespread sense that all is not well, what with a corrupt priesthood and a sense that the liturgy is being performed according to wrong interpretations of Torah (so, particularly, the view from Qumran). What is now needed is a rescue operation, to enable the 'helpers' in the first diagram (Temple, Torah, king) to do their job:

2. Topical Sequence



– in other words, Israel's covenant God will raise up, or perhaps *has already* raised up, a renewal movement whose task is to outwit the wicked or slothful, the renegades within Israel who are no better than the wicked pagans outside, and so to revive Torah-keeping and restore the Temple and/or its liturgy. For some, this hope would move beyond that, to the future coming of a Messiah (or in the case of Qumran two Messiahs, a king and a priest) who would accomplish the badly needed renewal of Israel and the long-awaited judgment on the pagans.¹⁴⁷ Thus the great renewal will come, the prophecies will be fulfilled, and Israel will dwell secure:

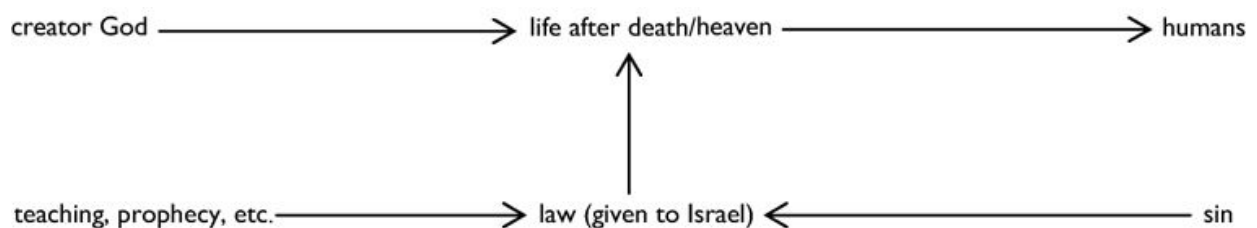
3. Final Sequence



There should be no mistaking the presence of this controlling narrative in the reform movements of the second-Temple period, not least the Pharisees. Nor should we mistake the power of such an implicit story. It drove (what we call) politics as much as piety. It had to; if it didn't, it would undermine its own narrative grammar. It is about the creator of the *world*, the *cosmos*. This is not simply about the 'history of ideas', even 'religious' ideas. It is about real people, real communities, real land, real buildings. Real violence.

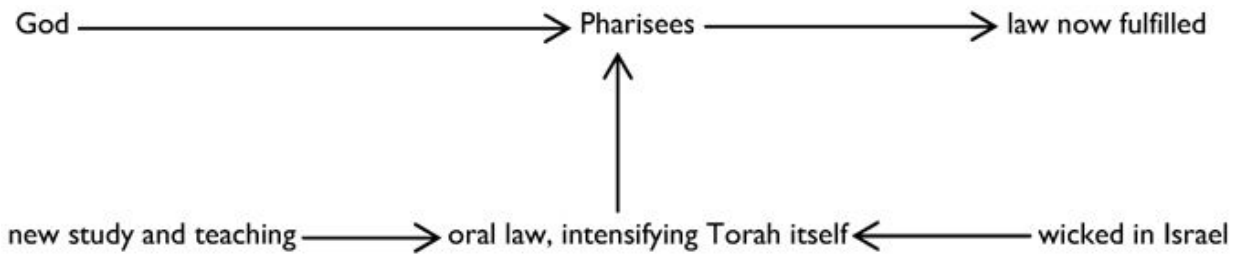
The basic Pharisaic story was not, then, about the sort of question that has exercised western theology over the last half-millennium. The reason a Pharisee studied and elucidated Torah, and tried both to keep it himself and to get more and more other people to do so, was not because of some moralistic scheme, designed to enable him to earn favour with a potentially angry deity and so to reach a 'solution' which was basically an otherworldly salvation. Here is the real problem at the heart of all the debates about the 'new perspective' on Paul. For centuries it has been assumed, by Catholics and Protestants alike, that the controlling narrative in which Saul of Tarsus and other first-century Jews had been living looked basically like this:

1. *Hypothetical initial sequence (Pharisaic)*



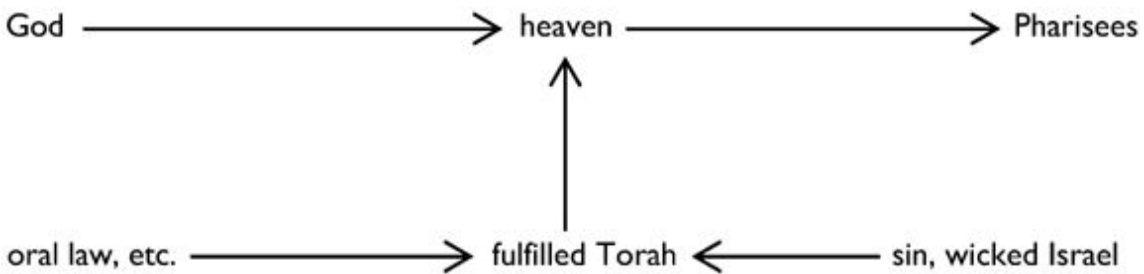
which would then fail, because 'sin' would defeat the teaching and prophecy and thus mean that the law (conceived as a system of moral good works, a kind of ancient encoded categorical imperative) would not enable Israel to attain the benefit. (Within some forms of Protestantism, the law itself is part of the 'opponent' category.) According to this scheme, the position of the Pharisee would look like this:

2. *Hypothetical topical sequence (Pharisaic)*



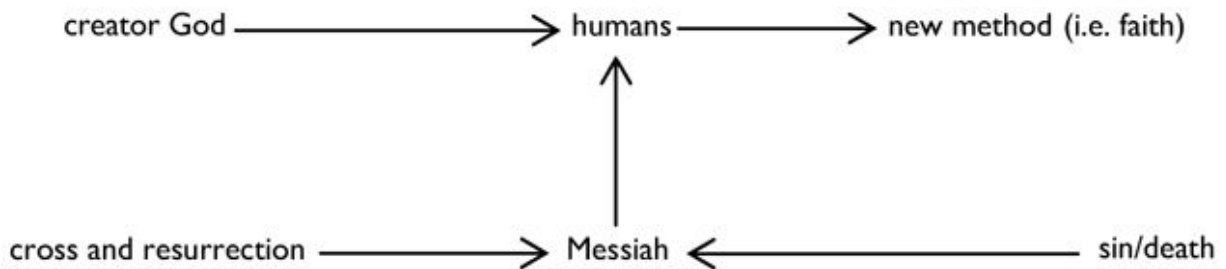
resulting in the supposed Pharisaic goal:

3. *Hypothetical final sequence (Pharisaic)*



This has then given rise to the proposal, endemic in western readings of Paul for many centuries, that God would instead undo the initial sequence altogether (very bad narrative grammar, that, reflecting very bad theology) and enable something else to take place: instead of the law as such, faith. This would then give rise to the possibility of a quite different move:

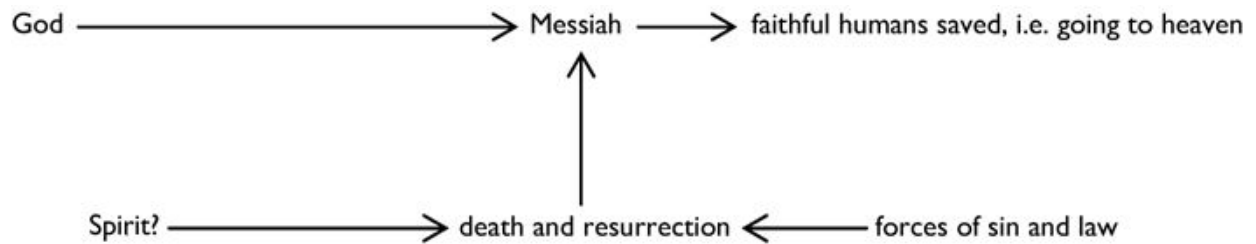
2. *Hypothetical topical sequence (Christian)*



which would arrive at a 'solution' which would in fact be far more congenial within Platonic thought than within a Jewish (or, indeed, early Christian) way of looking at God, the world and salvation. In such a 'solution' the ancient Jewish hope, of the creator God rescuing his entire creation, would

be set aside, and replaced with the rescue of certain human beings *from* the world of creation:

3. Hypothetical final sequence (Christian)



This scheme has been the ruling paradigm in Pauline studies, academic and popular, for many years. It has been assumed that this hypothetical Pharisaic story was how Saul the Pharisee saw the world. But this does not accord with the evidence. Reading through (say) Josephus, the Scrolls, and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and indeed the rabbis, this is simply not how they were thinking. They were not asking about ‘life after death’. Continuing life of some sort after death was assumed by most first-century Jews, except for the Sadducees. What mattered far more, as I argued in the previous volume, was ‘the age to come’; and this did not mean ‘life after death’ but ‘life *after* “life after death”’, in other words, a period of being ‘dead’, however that is described, followed by resurrection into God’s new creation.¹⁴⁸ And the reason first-century Jews, especially Pharisees, were interested in resurrection was because they believed in a God who was the creator of the whole world, and whose faithfulness demanded that he not abandon this creation to chaos. It was not enough to rescue Israel. This God would rescue the whole world.¹⁴⁹ That, indeed, in some brave visions, was the point of it all in the first place. Underneath the particular problems and puzzles that faced Pharisees in the first century we sometimes still see that concern coming through. God’s faithfulness to Israel (the birds hovering over Jerusalem) would be reflected in his faithfulness to all creation (the bird brooding over the waters).¹⁵⁰

This is the point at which a particular turning-point in the great narrative came to assume enormous importance – an importance which has been screened right out not least because people have concentrated on fine-tuning what I have suggested is basically the wrong narrative. There are three points which need to be insisted on as of first importance.

First, there is every indication that the kind of Jew who became a Pharisee was implicitly aware of living in *a continuous story going back to Abraham, perhaps even to Adam, and on to the great coming day*, and of being called to be an actor within that drama, to play a particular part in bringing the story forward into its final, decisive moment.

Second, there is every indication that Pharisees, like other Jews of the period, did not expect that decisive moment to involve the collapse or disappearance of the universe of space, time and matter. It would involve, rather, the transformation, redemption and renewal of that universe.

Third, there is every indication that Pharisees, like many other Jews of the period, saw their own time within this narrative as one of *continuing exile* awaiting the final promised rescue. The exile in Babylon had only been the first stage of a much longer process of God's people being enslaved to pagans. The real redemption, coupled with the long-awaited return of YHWH to Zion, still lay in the future.

Each of these proposals is controversial. Since previous attempts to explain them have not always been successful, it is sadly necessary to try one more time. [151](#)

[\(ii\) The Continuous Story](#)

[\(a\) Introduction](#)

First, the continuous story. Let me quote, to begin with, something I said in my last book on Paul:

Paying attention to the underlying narrative structure of Paul's thought, then, is not simply a matter of recognizing the implicit narratives in Paul and drawing out their implications for detailed exegesis. Something much deeper, more revolutionary, is going on when we start to unearth these implicit stories, and I suspect it is resistance to this element that is currently driving both the

resistance to recognizing narratives at all and, more particularly, the increasingly forceful resistance to the so-called 'new perspective'. The main point about narratives in the second-Temple Jewish world, and in that of Paul, is not simply that people liked telling stories as illustrations of, or scriptural proofs for, this or that experience or doctrine, but rather that second-Temple Jews believed themselves to be *actors within* a real-life narrative. To put it another way, they were not merely story-tellers who used their folklore (in their case, mostly the Bible) to illustrate the otherwise unrelated joys and sorrows, trials and triumphs, of everyday life. Their narratives could and did function typologically, that is, by providing a pattern which could be laid as a template across incidents and stories from another period without any historical continuity to link the two together. But the main function of their stories was to remind them of earlier and (they hoped) characteristic moments *within the single, larger story* which stretched from the creation of the world and the call of Abraham right forwards to their own day, and (they hoped) into the future.¹⁵²

This, in my regular experience, is very hard for modern persons, and perhaps even more so postmodern persons, to understand. I have speculated on why this is so, and three reasons come to mind.

(1) Much study of the ancient Jewish world has been undertaken, both before and after the 'Sanders revolution' of 1977, and indeed by Sanders himself, with substantially western and protestant questions in mind: how exactly do individuals get saved? It has been characteristic of western Protestantism precisely that *one does not think in terms of a continuous historical narrative with individuals finding their identity within it*. That idea of a continuous narrative is what western Protestantism thought it had left behind at the Reformation (we shall come back to this presently).

But (2) this has then colluded with what happened in the Jewish world of the second century AD. The disaster of the bar-Kochba revolt convinced most remaining Jews to give up the revolution and concentrate on privatized Torah-piety; in other words, *to give up the long story, and rest content with one's own story as a Torah-observant Jew*, sustained by dehistoricized examples culled from the ancient texts. No doubt the sense of a possible overarching story remained present within the Jewish imagination, far more than within western Protestantism. This is clear enough in the occasional outbreak of messianic movements within later Jewish communities, and particularly in the sudden revival of the ancient Jewish narrative after nearly two thousand years, with the 'return' of Jews to the middle east in the mid-twentieth century, celebrated with all the sense of prophecy fulfilled.¹⁵³ But

we search Mishnah and Talmud in vain for that sense of an overarching story which had been second nature to their ancestors.

The collusion of these first two streams of thought is ironic. The second-century Jews gave up the narrative because they had been defeated by Rome. The sixteenth-century Protestants gave up their narrative because they believed they had escaped from Rome. It would have been nice to report that Roman Catholic biblical scholarship, building on the creative work of Vatican II, had come through the middle to redress the balance of history, and refresh the meaning of the biblical narrative, but that does not seem to have been the case. No doubt there are noble exceptions to all these generalizations, but I suggest that there is deep truth there as well.

Meanwhile (3), the French postmodernists went in the other direction and declared that metanarrative had died of its own accord. This provides an often unspoken but all the more powerful extra motivation, should such be needed, for scholars today simply to overlook the idea of the retold story within which so many in Paul's day, not least the devout, were consciously living, praying and hoping.

In the face of all this, can this retold story be revived? It needs to be, at least if we are to understand history, which means understanding why people thought things and did things, especially when the things they thought are quite unlike the things we think. Overarching narrative mattered enormously in the world of Saul of Tarsus. He, and for that matter other Pharisees, Essenes, revolutionaries of various sorts, and no doubt plenty of other Jews too, were not wondering primarily how they could develop their own piety. They were not asking how they might find their way out of this world to 'heaven'. Nor were they simply saying, 'We are fed up with our present rulers; let's hope our God will do something to help', and then going back to a few ancient oracles to see if there were hints as to how such a deliverance might come about. They were more like people who find themselves hired to act in a play, only to find that they are cast in roles which come on stage in the fifth act, and that to grasp what's going on, and hence the particular nuances of the lines they have to speak, they must understand the full flow of the much longer drama which has already taken place, and particularly the

questions that are to be resolved. They have (to change the image) been thrust into the stadium to run a race, but it turns out to be a multi-leg relay race in which they are carrying the baton for one of the legs near the end of the sequence, where they will carry the weight of the previous efforts, mishaps, false starts and so on. They have pulled a book off the library shelf, called 'My Life', only to discover that it is Volume 99 in a hundred-volume narrative, and that to make sense of who they are supposed to be they have to recall the entire narrative of the first ninety-eight volumes, and read ahead into number 100 to find out how it's all supposed to end.

We can play about with these images a long time, as long as the point comes across. *The Bible was not merely a source of types, shadows, allusions, echoes, symbols, examples, role-models and other no doubt important things.* It was all those, but it was much, much more. It presented itself as a single, sprawling, complex but essentially coherent narrative, a narrative still in search of an ending. And one of the central features of the implicit story in the mind and heart of a first-century Pharisee, sectarian or revolutionary was the weight of that continuing narrative, the responsibility to take it forward, the possibility that all its threads might now come together, that the rich tapestry of Israel's history would disclose its full pattern at last, that the faithfulness of the one true God would be revealed to them but also through them.

How do we know all this? Not primarily, to be sure, by reading Philo. He never claimed to be a Pharisee (indeed, when he mentions them briefly we get the impression that he is thinking: *that lot*). His allegorizing method was precisely a way of reconnecting to the ancient scriptures *without* narrative sequence. (That, perhaps, may be why some studies of the first-century Jewish world never see the point; having begun with Philo, and coming with western denarrativized assumptions, they look for no other dimensions.) There are, to be sure, hints here and there that he held some form of the ultimate Jewish hope. We will come to those presently. But read Josephus, and it becomes clear: here are the revolutionaries, he says, who are doing what they are doing because of an oracle in their scriptures according to which *at that time* deliverance would come to Israel. As I argued before, the

only oracle which makes sense in this context, according to Josephus's strong hint elsewhere, is the book of Daniel.¹⁵⁴ And Daniel is precisely all about a story which goes on for many generations, as world powers rise and fall, climaxing in one superpower that will do its worst – whereupon the living God will set up a kingdom which cannot be shaken, will bring forth a 'stone' that will smash the great statue and bring it tumbling down, will raise up 'one like a son of man' and exalt him to dominion and glory over the nations, will bring about *the real return from exile* ...¹⁵⁵

We know (more or less) that this is how Pharisees (and no doubt many others) read Daniel in this period because of the evidence which, as we shall now see, points to their overall narrative world, sometimes with an explicit reference to Daniel's prophecy. Behind all this, of course, is the tradition of telling and retelling Israel's story, which continued unabated from early times into Paul's day and beyond.¹⁵⁶ This substantial and varied tradition is not usually factored into discussions of Paul. But there are key passages in his letters which will not make sense (or, worse, will be taken to make the wrong sense) unless we see them in relation to this tradition. As we shall now see, this habit of retelling Israel's story took many forms, but those who deployed it in one way or another were always fully aware of the story as a single story, with its several elements always in the right order (they were not, in other words, snatching items at random as miscellaneous examples or warnings). Many of these retellings, though not all, told the story in terms of Israel's constant failure, rebellion and sin, with only a dramatic rescue operation, in fulfilment of the original divine purpose and vocation, to save them from utter disaster. Many of them, though by no means all, told the story in terms of the key figures who would play their parts and lead the eye up to one figure in particular. While it is not always clear who this strange figure will be, we can be sure, from the texts which do make it clear, that many would have read the less clear texts in this way as well. For many, the story will reach its goal with a Messiah.

[\(b\) The Story Retold: Bible](#)

The long tradition of retelling the story of Israel, not only on the large scale (as in the Pentateuch itself, the books from Joshua through to 2 Kings, and the books of Chronicles) but also on the smaller, summary scale, starts of course in the scriptures themselves. In every case it would naturally be possible to investigate further the specific purposes for which the story, in whatever form, is being told; that would be a fascinating project, but would take us far too far afield in the present work. Actually, the fact that these retellings serve a wide variety of purposes, and yet retain the same narrative shape and overall intent, is one of the strengths of my case.¹⁵⁷

The book of Deuteronomy as a whole plays this sort of role, beginning with the rehearsal of, so to speak, ‘the story so far’, and ending with prophecies of the future. Of particular note is the narrative which Israelites are commanded to rehearse on coming to Jerusalem in festival: ‘A wandering Aramean was my father ...’ We note, as well, that the narratives, beginning with Deuteronomy itself, are anything but smooth accounts of an unbroken ‘salvation-history’. They are on the contrary accounts of Israel’s persistent rebellion and God’s judgment and mercy, a theme that continues into the surprisingly dark warnings of the great poem in chapter 32.¹⁵⁸ In particular, as we shall see below, the ‘covenant’ chapters of Deuteronomy 27—30 functioned in the second-Temple period as a prophecy of the bad times to come (specifically, the extended exile) and of the covenant renewal that would ultimately come about.

A similar narrative of ‘the story so far’, beginning with Abraham, comes towards the end of the book of Joshua. It leads, quite starkly, to the challenge: will Israel now serve YHWH or not?¹⁵⁹ By contrast, the fresh telling of Israel’s narrative in the books of Chronicles offers a quite different perspective, both as a whole and in the various smaller-scale rehearsals of the story.¹⁶⁰

The Psalms provide a major source of compact Israel-narratives. Psalm 78 speaks of the constant rebellion of Israel at the time of the exodus, the giving of Torah, the entry into the land, and the subsequent life in Israel. At last, however, God sends David, and causes the Temple to be built on Mount Zion; one can sense a sigh of relief, though of course this, too, does not

last.¹⁶¹ Psalms 105 and 106 balance one another.¹⁶² Psalm 105 celebrates the story from the covenant with Abraham through the promise of the land, the sojourn in Egypt, the exodus, and the settlement in Canaan, the purpose of it all being that Israel might keep God's statutes and observe his laws. Here, one might suppose, is the smooth, positive progression, so often posited as a caricature by those who scorn any sort of 'salvation-history'; but it does not last. Psalm 106 brings us back to earth, telling a story of constant rebellion – at the Red Sea, in the wilderness, through the making of the golden calf, the refusal to enter the land, the worship of the Baal of Peor, at the waters of Meribah, and not least in the practice of child sacrifice. It all leads eventually to exile. Israel's God, however, remembers his covenant and will rescue his people.

Other psalms celebrate the institution of the David monarchy as echoing the original promises to Abraham, with territory stretching from sea to sea, from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.¹⁶³ Others again retell the narrative from different angles. Psalm 132 tells the story of David bringing the ark to Jerusalem, and God promising to keep him a 'lamp' there.¹⁶⁴ Psalms 135 and 136 celebrate the story of the exodus, not least the victory of Israel over the pagans both in Egypt and later. Some of these psalms, all looking back to Psalm 2 which echoes 2 Samuel 7, imply a strong implicit link, both in narrative and prophecy, between the expectations of a Davidic monarch and the original Abrahamic promise.

The prophets evoke, and sometimes retell, the same story. Jeremiah speaks of the covenant made by God with David, whereby he will rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.¹⁶⁵ Ezekiel, much like Psalm 106, sees the story of Israel as mainly one of rebellion, from which God will rescue his people, despite their undeserving, only because of his own name.¹⁶⁶ The great single poem we know as Isaiah 40—55 looks back to Abraham in order to ground the promise that YHWH will again comfort Zion, sending the apparently messianic 'servant' and thereby making the Davidic promises available to 'all who are thirsty'.¹⁶⁷

The narrative of Israel is turned into prayer in three post-exilic chapters. Ezra 9 echoes Psalm 106: Israel has always rebelled, and is continuing to do

so even after exile and restoration.¹⁶⁸ Nehemiah 9 takes the story back to creation itself, and then to Abraham, again stressing Israel's repeated rebellion, and insisting that YHWH is 'in the right' in what he has done.¹⁶⁹ Daniel 9 confesses the sins of the people, acknowledges that YHWH is in the right and Israel in the wrong, but then appeals to that same 'righteousness' of God as the basis for mercy and restoration.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile chapter 9 as a whole takes its place, along with Daniel 2 and 7, in terms of a rather different narrative. Chapters 2 and 7 tell the story, not of Israel alone, but of a succession of world-empires. These empires will be called to account, and then superseded by the new kingdom which God will set up through the 'stone' in chapter 2, the 'one like a son of man' in chapter 7, and now the 'prince' – though his fate remains deeply mysterious – in chapter 9.¹⁷¹ In texts like this it is important to remember that what counts for our purposes is not so much any meanings that the text might have had 'originally' (whatever that means) but the ways in which it was being read in the first century. On Daniel we have a fair idea, since two extremely different sources, Josephus and *4 Ezra*, converge at this point, as we shall presently see.

Much of the story as we have told it so far is about expectations of rescue, of release from slavery and exile. But both in Daniel 2 and 7, and in the later retrievals of those passages such as we find in *4 Ezra*, there is something more. Back in the Deuteronomic covenant was the promise that if Israel obeyed they would be the most important and powerful nation on earth.¹⁷² All would see that they were called by YHWH's name, and blessed by him; they would be 'the head, and not the tail', at 'the top, and not at the bottom'.¹⁷³ This will of course be reversed if Israel disobeys;¹⁷⁴ but if and when Israel turns again, with a renewed heart, the promise will finally come true.¹⁷⁵ This relates closely to the various Pentateuchal promises concerning the coming king, who will receive the obedience of the peoples, and be lord over many nations.¹⁷⁶ The theme of a coming universal monarch is continued in the prophets, and found at Qumran.¹⁷⁷ These promises are linked in Deuteronomy 30 to the theme of the return from exile, the ingathering of the dispersed tribes.¹⁷⁸

These promises, Horbury points out, are picked up remarkably by Philo with his sense that the Diaspora of his day functioned, in effect, as a kind of Jewish colonial movement.¹⁷⁹ Philo envisages a coming day of ‘liberty’ when the Pentateuchal promises will come true, resulting in a kind of Jewish empire:

Forced back by a superior strength, [your enemies] will fly headlong ... some, without even any pursuer save fear, will turn their backs and present admirable targets to their enemies ... for ‘there shall come forth a man’, says the oracle [Num. 24.17 LXX], and leading his host to war he will subdue great and populous nations, because God has sent to his aid the reinforcement which befits the godly ... who will win not only a permanent and bloodless victory in the war but also a sovereignty which none can contest, bringing to its subjects the benefit which will accrue from the affection of fear or respect which they feel.¹⁸⁰

This is a good deal more than simply rescue from slavery. Horbury suggests that this sense of a larger Jewish ‘empire’ lies behind the behaviour of Herod the Great in acting as patron of the Jewish populations in Ionia.¹⁸¹ These ideas do not seem to have been developed very much in the period, but they represent one way at least in which the promises of worldwide sovereignty, whether for the nation or for its coming king, were being taken at the time.

(c) The Story Retold: Second-Temple Literature

Similar retellings of the story of Israel, from various angles depending on the particular interest, are found across different strands of second-Temple literature. In the book of Judith, the Ammonite leader Achior tells the pagan king Holofernes the long story of the patriarchs, of Israel’s slavery in Egypt, and of Israel’s repeated sin, defeat and exile but also restoration under God’s protection.¹⁸² Ben-Sirach lists the heroes of old, starting with Enoch and Noah and highlighting Abraham and the covenant promises of Genesis 12 and 15.¹⁸³ The list then moves on to Moses and Aaron, and to Phinehas, stressing the covenant made with the latter and its apparent parallel to the covenant with David (in other words, emphasizing the priestly strand in parallel to the kingly).¹⁸⁴ The Davidic covenant is re-emphasized when David himself comes up in the list of heroes, which continues through the

other good kings, noting that most kings were in fact bad and that because of them the city and sanctuary were destroyed. Zerubbabel and the post-exilic high priest Joshua are celebrated as the ones who rebuilt the Temple after the exile, but the climax of this particular narrative is of course the high priest of the day, Simon son of Onias. Israel's long story appears to have reached its appointed goal.¹⁸⁵

It was of course another false dawn. With the Syrian invasion, a new reality entered the Jewish world of the second century BC: the Maccabean rebellion and its aftermath. The call to arms issued by old Mattathias, father of Simeon and Judas Maccabaeus, consists as we saw of a long narrative which begins with Abraham: he, says the old man, was found *pistos* when tested, and 'it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'¹⁸⁶ Mattathias then continues through Joseph, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, David and Elijah, and concludes with Daniel and his companions in Babylon. Here the climax is clear: not the priests in the Temple, but the courageous young military leaders Simeon and Judah are the ones to carry this great narrative forward to its God-ordained conclusion, winning victory over the pagans.¹⁸⁷

The third book of Maccabees puts a parallel narrative into the mouth of the high priest Simon. It lists the times when wicked pagan nations had acted arrogantly and been overthrown by God's power, and then, acknowledging that Israel has sinned and been duly punished, claims God's promises of protection on his sanctuary against the present pagan invader, the Egyptian Ptolemy.¹⁸⁸ This prepares the way for the spectacular short prayer of Eleazar, an elderly priest, who reminds Israel's 'king of great power, almighty God most high, governing all creation with mercy' to 'look upon the descendants of Abraham'. He runs quickly through the story, highlighting key moments: Jacob, the exodus, the Assyrian crisis, the rescue of the three from the furnace and of Daniel from the lions, and finally (uniquely in such lists?) of Jonah from the sea-monster. This narrative then naturally gives birth to the prayer that Israel's God will once again rescue his people, undeserving though they be. The alternative is that the wicked pagans will triumph over them.¹⁸⁹

Also from the second century comes one of the most important of our narrative texts, the so-called ‘Animal Apocalypse’ of *1 Enoch* 85—90. After recounting the story of the Flood, the spotlight shines on Abraham and the other patriarchs, leading to an account of the exodus, the wilderness wanderings and the entry into the land. The whole story is told, often confusingly, in terms of cows, sheep and many other animals, with the key players being snow-white cows or bulls (Abraham, Isaac) or sheep (Jacob), contrasted with a wild ass (Ishmael) or a black wild boar (Esau).¹⁹⁰ Moses and Aaron are sheep, and the Egyptians are wolves.¹⁹¹ Then there follows the period of the judges; then David’s replacement of Saul and the building of the Temple (Saul is a ram, David a sheep who is promoted to be a ram). Then, in similar and often lurid terms, we see the decline of the later kings and the destruction of the Temple, the exile and return, the post-exilic struggles and particularly the Maccabean revolt. Finally the reader is promised, as the climax of this whole (and often dark) narrative, a snow-white bull with huge horns, to whom all the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky gave their respect. Is this the Messiah? Some have doubted it, but I find this unnecessarily cautious. The new white bull transforms all the other animals into snow-white bulls like himself, while he himself becomes a great beast with huge black horns.¹⁹² When will all this happen? Like Daniel 9, this apocalypse reinterprets Jeremiah’s prophecy of a seventy-year exile in terms of ‘seventy times seven’.¹⁹³

The ‘Animal Apocalypse’ was known at Qumran, and it is from there that we find another relevant text, most likely dated around the middle of the second century BC. The ‘Damascus Document’ retells some of the early narratives from Genesis (the ‘watchers’ and Noah), and then focuses on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are ‘members of the covenant for ever’.¹⁹⁴ This leads to the story of the sojourn in Egypt, the exodus, and the persistent rebellion of Israel which led to the exile.¹⁹⁵ The first members of the covenant, explains the text, sinned, ‘and were delivered up to the sword, because they forsook the Covenant of God and chose their own will.’¹⁹⁶ But then comes the secret re-establishment of the covenant, the beginning of the real ‘return from exile’: ‘with the remnant which held fast to the

commandments of God, He made His Covenant with Israel for ever, revealing to them the hidden things in which all Israel had gone astray'. In other words, the particular teachings of the sect are the key to it all, the secret for how the promises are at last to be fulfilled.¹⁹⁷ This is how this restored Israel will inherit the world sovereignty which had belonged to Adam himself: 'those who hold fast to it are destined to live for ever and all the glory of Adam shall be theirs.'¹⁹⁸ This framework then allows for fresh interpretation of prophetic passages whose previously hidden meanings are now revealed, turning out to refer to the various aspects of the setting up of the sect and its battles with rival movements.¹⁹⁹ As one recent commentator has summed it all up,

the very aim of Israel's history is the emergence and existence of the Qumran-Essene community. The community itself is only interested in the new beginning of Israel's history with the activity of the Teacher of Righteousness. There is continuity only with the patriarchs, the friends of God. By walking in the way of God's heart, the community is in decisive discontinuity with the rest of Israel's history ... Israel's history comes to its fulfilment in the history of the community.²⁰⁰

Lichtenberger also points out that the story is told in such a way as to stress that with this fulfilment 'it is mankind which comes to its destiny.' Human history has become focused on Israel, and Israel's history has been fulfilled at Qumran. That is a classic second-Temple retelling of the story: again, it is anything but a smooth unbroken progress up to the light, but a story of long and shocking rebellion followed by a dramatic reversal which brings about the fulfilment of the purpose for which Israel was called in the first place. Though of course the Essenes disagreed with the Pharisees on the specific details of how this fulfilment was being achieved, and on the specific post-biblical regulations which would achieve the required purity, the shape of the story resonates so clearly with so many other retellings that we should not hesitate to see it as the narrative shape with which Saul of Tarsus would have been familiar.

One other obviously relevant Qumran scroll, the 'Genesis Apocryphon', frustratingly peters out in its retelling of Genesis just at the moment when, from a Pauline standpoint, things are getting really interesting, that is, in Genesis 15.

The ‘priestly’ letter known as 4QMMT offers, at its conclusion, a brief and tantalizing narrative of Israel in terms of the covenant promises and warnings in Deuteronomy 27—30. The promised blessings took place, it says, in the days of David and Solomon, but the threatened curses then took over from the time of Jeroboam son of Nebat and up to the exile in the time of King Zedekiah. This is a bit more nuanced than the scheme of CD as expounded by Lichtenberger; there were at least some earlier times of ‘blessing’, even though with the two wicked kings the curses took over. But now, says the writer, we are to get the blessing of renewal, as in Deuteronomy 30, and this is therefore the time to remember David and the forgiveness he received.²⁰¹ It is the same shape once again, this time explicitly related to the Deuteronomic prediction of the long curse of exile and the eventual fresh blessing of covenant renewal.

The longest retelling of the story of Israel from the second century BC is that in *Jubilees*. The author, a close theological cousin of the Qumran sect (and parts of the book were found there), recounts the early history from the creation of the world and of Adam to Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, focusing especially on Passover, the exodus, and the giving of the Torah. Special attention is given throughout to the sabbath, both the weekly day of rest and (as the book’s title implies) the Jubilee, the greater ‘sabbath’ of weeks of years, and to the festivals which mark other periods of time. This is the larger story within which the writer implies that his readers are still living.²⁰² The book organizes the early history of Israel into ‘jubilees’, periods of forty-nine years, and ends by saying that, when all the jubilees are passed, Israel will finally be cleansed from all sin, and will dwell in confidence in a purified land for ever.²⁰³

The introduction to *Jubilees* tells the story of Moses writing Deuteronomy, and in particular the continuous narrative set out in the great covenantal chapters. The Israelites, God tells Moses, will go wandering astray from the covenant, from the sabbaths and the sanctuary. God will send them witnesses, but they will not listen and will even kill the witnesses. As a result,

I shall hide my face from them, and I shall give them over to the power of the nations to be captive, and for plunder, and to be devoured. And I shall remove them from the midst of the land, and I shall scatter them among the nations.²⁰⁴

Then, however, there will come a new day, a new promised moment. The writer of *Jubilees* sees this as a prophecy given by Moses himself which might just be fulfilled in his own day, even though originally spoken all those years ago; at last the continuous and sorry story is reaching its moment of triumph:

And afterward they will turn to me from among the nations with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their might. And I shall gather them from the midst of all the nations. And they will seek me so that I might be found by them. When they seek me with all their heart and with all their soul, I shall reveal to them an abundance of peace in righteousness ... And they will be a blessing and not a curse. And they will be the head and not the tail. And I shall build my sanctuary in their midst, and I shall dwell with them. And I shall be their God and they will be my people truly and rightly. And I shall not forsake them, and I shall not be alienated from them because I am the LORD their God.²⁰⁵

This passage has echoes of all kinds of prophecies of the end of exile and the renewal of the covenant, but the primary one is clear: Deuteronomy, especially chapter 30:

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you ...²⁰⁶

This, as we shall see presently, is the classic promise of ‘return from exile’, the covenant renewal which was still awaited in the first century. *Jubilees* does not, we assume (because of its popularity at Qumran) reflect directly the beliefs of the Pharisees, but again that is a matter of the specific details. The narrative shape, within which the details vary considerably, is widely held, and since it chimes exactly not only with the movements of ‘zeal’ in which Saul of Tarsus was prominent but also with the developed theology of Paul the apostle, we must assume that he had all along been aware of this larger narrative world, and had seen himself as an actor within it.

Our survey of fresh second-Temple retellings of the scriptural narrative then moves into the first century AD, where we find one retelling in terms of ‘wisdom’, another more substantial narrative, and one that is so much more substantial that it hardly bears comparison with these shorter ones. The book of Wisdom recounts the history of Israel from Adam to the exodus under the guise of the activity of ‘wisdom’ within history, giving special prominence to Abraham. The book then tells the story of the exodus, with particular reference to the punishment on recalcitrant Egypt.²⁰⁷

Another first-century writing, the *Biblical Antiquities* at one time ascribed to Philo, and hence now known as Pseudo-Philo, retells the scriptural narrative from Adam to the death of Saul.²⁰⁸ It is debated whether the text has been damaged at that point or whether, in fact, the point is that just as the story thus leads up to the arrival of the true king, David, so now the story of Israel is waiting on tiptoe for the arrival of the true Messiah at last, who will sweep away the false king (one of the Herods?) as David replaced Saul. We note in particular the way in which the work retells the story of Moses’ last days from Deuteronomy, reading the final chapters as a long-range prophecy of the days to come, with cryptic hints of a chronology of the last days.²⁰⁹

This mention of Moses points on to the so-called *Testament of Moses* (also known as the *Assumption of Moses*). Here Moses gives Joshua instructions not only about conquering and settling the holy land, but about the things to come, the generations far distant, and the problems they will face. These problems climax in the exile (3.3), where the people will be slaves ‘about seventy-seven years’ (3.14). Then after various further troubles, ‘the times will quickly come to an end’ (7.1) with great wrath for the wicked (8.1–5), and then, through the arrival of the mysterious figure Taxo (9.1–7), God’s kingdom will appear, transforming the whole creation and raising Israel up to the heights, above their enemies (10.1–10). Moses stresses to Joshua that the God who has established the covenant is also the creator, and that his faithfulness to creation is the guarantee of the covenant (12.4, 9, 13). Once again we have a continuous narrative in which first-century Jews were invited to understand themselves as new actors, taking forward the story towards its promised fulfilment.²¹⁰

This brings us to the *Psalms of Solomon*, which, as we saw, are as close as we are likely to come to a specifically Pharisaic text from the period. There, in the midst of all the grief over the wickedness of the nations and of many within Israel, we find the authentic narrative note, going back to Genesis in order to come forward again to the present day:

And now, you are God and we are the people whom you have loved; look and be compassionate, O God of Israel, for we are yours, and do not take away your mercy from us, lest they set upon us. For you chose the descendants of Abraham above all the nations, and you put your name upon us, Lord, and it will not cease forever. You made a covenant with our ancestors concerning us, and we hope in you when we turn our souls toward you. May the mercy of the Lord be upon the house of Israel forevermore.²¹¹

Then, in the first of the great messianic poems which conclude the collection, the writer looks back to the promises made to David and sees, stretching out in a continuous unbroken history, the puzzles of how those promises have not yet been fulfilled and yet the sure hope that now at last it will happen:

Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel, and swore to him about his descendants forever, that his kingdom should not fail before you ... With pomp they set up a monarchy because of their arrogance; they despoiled the throne of David with arrogant shouting ...

See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth ...

He will have gentile nations serving him under his yoke ... and he will purge Jerusalem, and make it holy as it was even from the beginning, for nations to come from the ends of the earth to see his glory ... and to see the glory of the Lord with which God has glorified her. And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God. There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.²¹²

So, too, the final 'psalm' indicates that the writer believes himself to be living in a long story which was at last approaching the great day, the longed-for day when God would put all things right:

Your compassionate judgments are over the whole world, and your love is for the descendants of Abraham, an Israelite. Your discipline for us is as for a firstborn son, an only child ...

May God cleanse Israel for the day of mercy in blessing, for the appointed day when his Messiah will reign. Blessed are those born in those days, to see the good things of the Lord which he will do for the coming generation; which will be under the rod of discipline of the Lord Messiah, in the fear of his God, in wisdom of spirit, and of righteousness and of strength ...[213](#)

The whole collection thus makes the point nicely: while the immediate pressures and political troubles loom very large, the underlying narrative peeps through at critical points, the story through whose invocation sense can be made, and hope can be generated, for the rest. The story functions precisely at the level of worldview, normally out of sight but occasionally summoned into view to undergird the more obvious surface concerns. The psalmist knows the story of and promises to Abraham, and sees his own generation as the time when all that will come to fulfilment. He knows the story of and promises to David, and sees his own generation as the time when the true King will emerge and do at last all that had been spoken. He was living within a larger narrative through which alone he could make sense of all the other narratives – gentile oppression, Jewish failure – that caused him so much grief. And that narrative pointed forwards to the coming worldwide victory of the Davidic king.

[\(d\) The Story Retold: After AD 70](#)

It might have appeared that with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 the great narrative had come to an end. Some of the most important retellings of the story, however, were written in the decades that followed. We focus here on the historian Josephus and on the two ‘apocalyptic’ works known as *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*.

The massive *Jewish Antiquities*, written by Flavius Josephus in Rome after the fall of Jerusalem, tells the entire story of Israel from first beginnings through to the writer’s own day. There, and also in his shorter account of the *Jewish War*, Josephus leads the eye up to an extraordinary conclusion: that Israel’s God has now gone over to the Romans because of the people’s persistent and flagrant sin. Scholars disagree as to whether Josephus is, as it were, reserving judgment on whether this state of affairs will be permanent.

The jury is still out, too, on the extent to which he is interpreting Israel's story for a Roman audience and the extent to which he may be encouraging Jews to hold on and await further fulfilment from the inscrutable operations of divine providence. Certainly he implies that both Daniel and Deuteronomy function as prophecies of a future restoration. For our present purposes the main thing is that he is interpreting his own time in the light of the huge, sprawling narrative of Israel's long and chequered career. That he sees the whole thing in terms of a long story reaching a paradoxical resolution (perhaps not yet a conclusion) there should be no doubt.²¹⁴

Josephus is well able to adapt Israel's history for his own purposes. In the fifth book of the *Jewish War*, he describes his own attempt to get his compatriots to surrender before the irresistible Roman power in the summer of AD 70, not long before the final destruction of the Temple and the city. In the dire situation of the Roman siege, one might have expected, as in 3 Maccabees, a historical account of past divine deliverances, leading up to a prayer that Israel's God will rescue his people yet again, and an exhortation to courage and patience in the meantime. Not at all: Josephus tells the story the other way round.²¹⁵ Yes: God rescued Sarah from Pharaoh, the Israelites from Egypt, the ark from the Philistines, Jerusalem from the Assyrians and the exiles from Babylon. But all this was done without the Jewish people taking up arms to defend themselves, and without them indulging in other wickedness. By contrast, when defence has been attempted it has been futile, as in the capture of the city by the Babylonians, by the Syrians, by Pompey the Roman and finally by Herod and Sossius. Josephus peppers this narrative with many accusations of wickedness and vice against his own contemporaries, insisting here as elsewhere that Israel's God has in fact gone over to the Romans.²¹⁶

Whatever else this is, it is not a 'salvation-history', though the note of 'salvation' is frequently sounded as Josephus exhorts his fellow countrymen to find 'rescue' by laying down their arms.²¹⁷ It is, if anything, a 'condemnation-history', with the 'salvation-historical' narrative overcome by its shadow side. *But it is still the great story of Israel coming at last to a long-delayed climax*, albeit a terrible and tragic one.

Within the *Antiquities* there are two passages in particular which offer a miniature encapsulation of the whole story and which thus anticipate more precisely the kind of fresh narrations of the story which we have in the New Testament. In the third book, Moses himself tells the story from Adam to Noah to Abraham and the other patriarchs, then to Joseph, and finally up to the crossing of the Red Sea and the provision of food and water in the desert, and all in order to say: the God who did all this is the God who is now speaking through me in giving you these commandments.²¹⁸ A similar brief account, focused now more on the exodus itself, is again put on the lips of Moses when confronted with the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, only this time in the form of a prayer, that the God who did all these things will now demonstrate that it is indeed by divine appointment, and not by human arrogance, that Aaron is called to be the high priest.²¹⁹

We should not fail to note, in addition, the passage we have described elsewhere in which Josephus explains that an oracle in the Jewish scriptures (which I have argued can only be Daniel) was whipping up excitement in the middle of the first century because it predicted that ‘at that time’ a world ruler would emerge from Judaea. Though Josephus deconstructs the prophecy by claiming (with what sincerity, who knows?) that it was a reference to Vespasian being hailed as emperor while besieging Judaea in AD 69, he certainly bears witness to the way in which one particular scriptural version of Israel’s narrative – that of successive waves of pagan domination followed by dramatic heaven-sent reversal – was being told at the time.²²⁰

There is another tell-tale little passage in Josephus which we should not ignore. Hidden away towards the end of his account of Moses in the *Antiquities*, we have a clear indication that Josephus knew of, and basically agreed with, a reading of the final chapters of Deuteronomy as a long-range prediction of the slowly unfolding destiny of Israel. In keeping with his well-known reticence about the similar (and, for him, dangerous) prophecies in Daniel 2 and 7,²²¹ he makes little of it, yet what he says is surely clear enough for us to recognize just how widespread was the first-century belief

in a continuing narrative, foretold in scripture, which was even now finding its fulfilment:

Then [Moses] recited to [the Israelites] a poem in hexameter verse, which he has moreover bequeathed in a book preserved in the temple, containing a prediction of future events, in accordance with which all has come and is coming to pass, the seer having in no whit strayed from the truth.²²²

I suspect that the opening clauses of this sentence – Moses reciting in hexameters, and a book preserved in the Temple in Josephus’s own day! – have so caught the attention of commentators that they have scarcely noticed the thrust of the central point: Deuteronomy 32 contains ‘a prediction of future events’, *prorrēsin tōn esomenōn*, ‘all of which both have come to pass and are coming to pass in the present’, *kath’ hēn kai gegone ta panta kai ginetai*.²²³ How easy it would have been for Josephus to skim more lightly over this, or just to say ‘which have all come true’. It is the *kai ginetai* which gives the game away: he believes himself, or is happy to give the appearance of believing himself, to be living in the long fulfilment of the Deuteronomic prophecies.²²⁴

This reading of Deuteronomy 32 is confirmed retrospectively by Paul’s own use, which we shall explore in its proper place. For the moment, we just need to note the way in which the chapter as it stands (without any Nelson-like covering of the historian’s eye in order to permit the distorted half-vision of the typologist) does indeed appear to speak, in a clear sequence, of God’s election of and care for Israel (32.6–14), Israel’s inexplicable rebellion (32.15–18, already noted in advance in verse 5), God’s judgment upon them (32.19–35), and, eventually and mysteriously, God’s final deliverance and vindication of his own people.²²⁵

Our two final examples come from the same period as Josephus, in the aftermath of the Roman war of 66–70 and the terrible destruction of Jerusalem. The writing we know as *4 Ezra* wrestles with the strange purposes of God, and like Paul himself concludes that the problem has been all along that Adam’s sin has infected Israel as well. This is set out in a historical narrative. After Adam’s sin, and Noah’s rescue, God called Abraham, and revealed to him by night how things would eventually turn

out (a reference to the covenant-making in Genesis 15.7–21). The ‘everlasting covenant’ which God made with Abraham was continued through Isaac and Jacob, and bore fruit in the exodus, and the giving of Torah on Sinai; but Israel still possessed an evil heart, traceable back to Adam. So, too, God called David, and through him established Jerusalem and the Temple; but again the curse of Adam was latent even in the royal house, and the story thus lurches into failure and exile.²²⁶

The book is complex in structure. One cannot simply draw a line from this initial analysis of the problem to the eventual solution. But the natural question which remains, as to when God will finally sort the whole thing out, is eventually answered within the book as it now stands by the vision of the eagle and the lion, in which the Davidic Messiah confronts and overthrows the imperial eagle.²²⁷ This, explains the angel who is conversing with ‘Ezra’, is the same vision that Daniel had, but is now being given a different interpretation; in other words, Daniel’s eschatological vision of God’s judgment over the pagan nations is being read in a specifically messianic fashion, and applied to a coming king who will finally defeat the evil empire – obviously, now, that of Rome. Substantially the same point is then made through the vision of the ‘man from the sea’, the Messiah who will establish the rule of God’s saving justice, and gather to himself those long exiled.²²⁸ To what extent these closing visions actually address the problem that was articulated in the early part of the book is beside our present purpose. Enough to notice that in this retelling of Israel’s ancient story, too, the writer explains the present time through a fresh account of Israel’s early and formative story, which enables him then to draw on earlier prophecies to project forwards to the ultimate end, the coming and victory of the Messiah.

The other apocalypse often associated with the post-destruction period is 2 *Baruch*. The book as a whole has been described as an ‘historical apocalypse’; there is no heavenly journey, no cosmological speculation,²²⁹ but rather a sustained interpretation of the history of the Jewish people and an attempt – the last one for which we have evidence, as it turns out – to bring together in this literary format some urgent reflections on how the

Jewish world could cope with the crisis it faced and draw on its varied traditions to move ahead, still awaiting the arrival of the Messiah who would come with mercy and judgment and fulfil the ancient promises of universal peace.²³⁰ The book, told in the first person by 'Baruch', places itself like 'Ezra' in the fictive setting of the sixth-century fall of Jerusalem in order to comment on the recent recapitulation of that disaster in AD 70. It falls into several divisions, of which two in particular form fresh narrations of the story of Israel.

In *2 Baruch* 21—34, we begin with a chapter (21) very similar to the great prayers of Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9. Baruch looks back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, 'those on whose account you have said you have created the world', in order to pray not only for understanding as to what sense can now be made out of the recent disaster, but also for the long-awaited vision of God's glory.²³¹ The answer echoes *4 Ezra*'s stress on the sin of Adam, and warns of great tribulations to come.²³² 'Weeks of seven weeks' will pass;²³³ eventually the Messiah will begin to be revealed; the earth will become abundantly fruitful; the righteous dead will be raised and the wicked punished.²³⁴ The implicit narrative is clear: Adam, Abraham, multiple devastations and terrors, and finally the Messiah.

The next section (35—46) is a further retelling of the story, but this time not as the story of Israel but, like Daniel 2 and 7, as a succession of global kingdoms with the last one being especially powerful and arrogant.²³⁵ The imagery this time is that of a great forest which is swept away by a fountain, over which will be a vine. The forest is the pagan kingdom that has overthrown Jerusalem, which will develop into a second, third and fourth kingdom.²³⁶ The fountain is the kingdom of the Messiah, which will sweep them all away except for one last cedar tree, representing the final wicked ruler of the world, whom the Messiah, now in the form of the vine, will confront, judge, condemn and kill.²³⁷ This will usher in the new world which will last for ever.²³⁸

After an interlude in which Baruch is shown the great coming tribulation, the glory of the resurrected and the horrors of the condemned (47—52), we come to the 'apocalypse of the cloud' (53—74). The cloud in Baruch's

vision contains both black water and bright, which descend by turns, twelve times, with the black always more than the bright until finally a deluge of black water brings about great devastation. Then there comes a flash of lightning which illuminates the whole earth and heals the devastation caused by the black waters. The lightning then occupies the whole world and takes charge of it, subjecting to itself the twelve rivers of the world.²³⁹

By now we ought to know more or less what this will mean. The interpretation begins with Adam and his sin.²⁴⁰ This was the source of all the black waters, the terrible things that have happened on earth, including the corruption of the 'watchers' in Genesis 6.²⁴¹ Then comes Abraham, the first of the 'bright waters', followed of course by Isaac and Jacob.²⁴² Then we have the wickedness of Egypt, followed by the coming of Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua and Caleb. Then there follows the wickedness of the Amorites, leading up to the glorious days of David and Solomon, with the establishment of the Temple and the universal rule of Zion.²⁴³ Then we have Jeroboam and his idolatrous calf, and the wickedness of Jezebel, resulting in the fall of the northern kingdom.²⁴⁴ Then, predictably enough, we have Hezekiah, followed by Manasseh, followed by Josiah: bright, black and then again bright water.²⁴⁵

Then comes the great disaster, the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, a time when 'the smoke of the incense of the righteousness of the Law has been extinguished everywhere in the region of Zion.'²⁴⁶ This will be followed by the return and rebuilding, though it will not be as glorious as before, and will give rise to yet blacker waters, a time of terrible tribulation and distress.²⁴⁷ Only after this will come the great moment towards which this entire history has been moving: 'my servant, the Messiah' will take charge of the whole world, calling all the nations before him to judgment, a judgment that will be based on the way the nations of the world have treated God's people Israel.²⁴⁸ He will then sit down in eternal peace on the throne of the kingdom, bringing healing and joy to the whole world and introducing that renewal of all creation which had been predicted in Isaiah 11.²⁴⁹ This final interpretation leads Baruch into a paean of praise which readers of Paul will associate with the end of Romans 11:

Who can equal your goodness, O Lord?
for it is incomprehensible.
Or who can fathom your grace
which is without end?
Or who can understand your intelligence?
Or who can narrate the thoughts of your spirit?
Or who of those born can hope to arrive at these things,
apart from those to whom you are merciful and gracious?²⁵⁰

The book closes with a letter written by Baruch to the ‘nine and a half tribes’, the lost tribes from the north, explaining the strange providences of God and promising that the wickedness and pride of the pagan nations will be called to account by God the creator. God’s people must therefore hold fast to the law, since God’s coming judgment will investigate the secrets of all hearts.²⁵¹

Even if 2 *Baruch* is a composite production, someone in the aftermath of AD 70 decided to bring these three apocalyptic narratives together, making them now mutually supportive and explanatory.²⁵² They draw together more or less all the elements we have observed in the other passages we have examined, not least the full story beginning with Adam and ending in the writer’s own day. It is specially notable that the normal format for telling Israel’s story, from Abraham through the kings and the exile to the present, is here told twice, while in between we have the Daniel-format in which the four kingdoms of the wider world are overthrown by the kingdom of God. Clearly somebody in the period regarded these two significantly different ways of narrating the great story as compatible. The point of convergence, of course, is at the end: each of the three culminates explicitly in the coming of the Messiah and his establishment of a worldwide kingdom.²⁵³ That, as we now realize, is how the narrative works.

(e) The Story Retold: Conclusions

This brief summary of multiple retellings of Israel’s story as a whole or in parts prompts several reflections. First, there are considerable and obvious differences between the examples we have studied. Had they been all more

or less alike (and had the New Testament writers simply picked up on such a common tradition) one might have regarded the whole thing simply as a *topos*, a kind of boilerplate, reach-me-down retelling which had been worn smooth and whose particularities made little difference. Anything but: the widely differing ways in which the story was told demonstrates that out of the hundreds of features that were in principle available every writer could pick and choose to press his own points. And, along with the differences of narrative selection and highlighting, there goes the obvious point, which I and others have frequently made: there is no single picture of ‘the Messiah’ which emerges even from these narrative texts, let alone from any wider consideration of the Jewish evidence.²⁵⁴ I shall return to this presently.

Second, however, despite the considerable differences there are also remarkable commonalities. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the exodus and the giving of the Torah, all feature again and again, often with expansion of critical points, such as the making of the covenant with Abraham.²⁵⁵ Creation and the pre-Abrahamic traditions are quite common. From the stories of wilderness wandering, Phinehas comes in for special mention more than once; he remains an example of godly ‘zeal’ through to the rabbis.²⁵⁶ David, and the establishment of Jerusalem and the Temple, are prominent, variously related to the rest of the narrative. Sometimes they echo the Abrahamic promises; once, the Davidic covenant is placed in parallel with the covenant of priesthood. Some retellings of the story take it as far forward as the exile and return; some bring that narrative itself more up to date, not least through the idea of an extended exile as in Daniel 9. None, I think, gets the events out of their biblical order.²⁵⁷ The overall story was obviously well enough known for the various elements in it to retain their place in relation to one another even if quite different lessons are being drawn from it. There is no sense of the ancient events being a mere ragbag of examples and warnings to be drawn on at random.²⁵⁸

Third, in consequence, in more or less all cases the story being told is a story in which the writer believes that he and his readers are still participants. Here we find again the major difference between this way of thinking and that of the rabbis, who were ‘indifferent to historiography’, and

had indeed ‘totally rejected the Hebrew Bible’s historical way of thinking and replaced it with a paradigmatic approach to time and events’.²⁵⁹ Examples and warnings abound in these retellings, but they are not free-floating moral lessons detached from the historical narrative. Sometimes, as in 1 Maccabees, things are brought right up to date: the story of Abraham, Phinehas and the rest now climaxes in Simon and Judah Maccabee themselves! At other times the continuity is conveyed in the clear resonance of ancient events with their contemporary analogues; we do not suppose that the Wisdom of Solomon was providing all that detail about the divine judgment on pagan Egypt out of antiquarian interest alone. Again and again the stories are looking for, praying for, hoping for some great divine deliverance, a time when Israel will finally be freed from all that has shackled and enslaved her, and that not simply to be free from outside interference but to fulfil the ancient promises that Israel itself would head up the new, righteous, world empire.²⁶⁰ Sometimes – not that often, but sometimes, and especially in the first century – the deliverance, and the coming world sovereignty, will take the form of a coming king in the line of David. Sometimes there will be other deliverers. The book of Judith, strikingly, casts its female heroine in this role. Sometimes, as in Ben-Sirach, there will be other climactic figures. That makes the same point from a different angle. These narratives are mostly going somewhere, and the somewhere in question is usually some kind of deliverance, sometimes followed by some kind of world sovereignty. That, indeed, is why the stories are being told.

Fourth, it is striking that most of these long and varied accounts of Israel’s history are the very opposite of success stories. Psalm 105 stands out as the exception, a smooth progression from Abraham to Moses and then to Israel inheriting the land and keeping the law. Mostly things do not work out like that. Frequently they are tales of disastrous infidelity and rebellion, of divine displeasure and national ruin. Sometimes, as in the cloud-apocalypse of 2 *Baruch*, the good and bad periods alternate, with the bad ones getting worse and worse until at last deliverance arrives. Frequently these stories turn to humble and abject prayer for forgiveness and restoration. Frequently that

appeal is made precisely on the basis of the covenant, recalled at last by Israel though never forgotten by God. In fact, almost whenever the covenant is being appealed to it is because Israel has broken it and horrible things have happened as a result. When that appeal is made, two of the most obvious focal points are Abraham and David. This appeal, then, is not to a narrative of smooth upward progress into the light. The closest we get to that, I think, is Ben-Sirach, and a moment's thought will show how foolish that was; or Psalm 105, which is quickly balanced by Psalm 106. No: the story is, again and again, a shocking and confused crashing down into the darkness. But that does not mean that the original covenants were invalid. It merely means that Israel must now determine to obey the law, and to cast itself upon the mercy of the God who might just find it in his heart to forgive. And to restore. And perhaps to send a deliverer. And perhaps, even, to exalt Israel over the nations. Thus, and only thus, can the original divine promises be fulfilled.

Perhaps, with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the Psalms, the coming deliverer will be a king from the line of David, whose rule from sea to sea will implement the original covenant promise to Abraham. That is what we find in Psalms 72 and 78, in *4 Ezra*, in *2 Baruch*, arguably in the 'Animal Apocalypse' of *1 Enoch*, and indeed in Psalm 89, though there again things have gone horribly wrong. In all these cases, a Davidic king seems clearly in mind. But even if the coming deliverer is otherwise unspecified, if he comes at the climax of a retelling of the story of Israel we should by now know who he is, even if he appears as a world ruler from Judaea, a mounted warrior, a lion out of the forest, a fountain and a vine, or even as a snow-white bull with huge horns. This is the Messiah.

It is true that these stories frequently pointed ahead into the future without any particular figure, whether human, angelic or divine, arriving to complete the narrative. But often such figures do emerge. Once or twice, as in Ben-Sirach, the climactic figure is a priest. But far more often the figure who brings the long story to its appointed *telos* is the Messiah: the warrior king in the *Psalms of Solomon*, the lion in *4 Ezra*, the fountain and vine in *2 Baruch*, and not least the world ruler who, in first-century readings of Daniel, would

arise from Judaea. One could, indeed, turn the point around. If it is true that when such stories reach a climax with a particular figure that figure is likely to be the Messiah, it is all the more true that one of the key things about a Messiah, however varied the portrait in other respects, is that the Messiah will precisely bring the story of Israel to its goal, fulfilling the ancient promises, especially those to Abraham, and rescuing the nation from the appalling mess into which its many rebellions have landed it. There are almost as many varieties of messianic expectation as there are relevant texts and movements. But they are variations on a theme; and the theme is the great and often tragic story of Israel, told and retold from biblical times through to Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*.

The overarching narrative, presented in dozens of different ways for different purposes, is there in the background ready to be called up when necessary. That is how worldviews, and the stories which express them most deeply, really function.

As a tailpiece to this account of Paul's Jewish narrative world, we may note that the writer of the *Psalms of Solomon*, too, was aware that even the story of Abraham was itself part of a larger narrative, and that he was living within that larger narrative as well as the more focused national one. Behind the story of Israel there stood the story of creator and cosmos, in which the heavens at least were faithful to God and his created order (except, in a cute afterthought, when God himself instructs them to behave differently, presumably alluding to Joshua's 'long day' and Isaiah's trick with the clock):

Our God is great and glorious, living in the highest heavens,
who arranges the stars into orbits, to mark time of the hours from day to day.
And they have not deviated from their course, which he appointed them.
Their course each day is in the fear of God, from the day God created them forever.
And they have not wandered from the day he created them, from ancient generations.
They have not veered off their course (except when God directed them by the command of his servants).²⁶¹

God is faithful; creation is faithful; and one day that faithfulness will be worked out through the fulfilment of the long history of Abraham's people, of David's descendants, and of those who in the present are faithful in

terrible times. That faithfulness will result, for the author of the *Psalms of Solomon*, in God sending a Messiah who would embody that faithfulness and fulfil at last the ancient dream of Psalm 2, bringing the nations of the world to see the glory of the lord and to live under his rule. This, I suggest, was at the heart of the worldview of many first-century Jews, and particularly of a first-century Pharisee. This is the story in which Saul of Tarsus believed himself to be living. Paul the apostle, as we shall see, believed that this story had been fulfilled, though certainly not in the way he or anyone else had expected.

[\(iii\) The Continuing Exile](#)

All this brings us back to another point which in my view ought by now to be non-controversial but which continues to be stubbornly resisted in certain quarters. I refer, of course, to the idea of the second-Temple period as a ‘continuing exile’.

The fundamental study for this remains that of O. H. Steck, and I suspect from some of the reactions to further presentations of the theme that his work has remained unread.²⁶² There is, however, more support for the overall hypothesis of a ‘continuing exile’, seen as a political and theological state rather than a geographical one, than I had realized in earlier publications.²⁶³ Thus, for instance, I had not noticed, until James Scott drew my attention to it, a remarkable passage by Robert Carroll in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*:

Much of the literature of the Second Temple period recognizes a category of exile after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/86, but it does not recognize any return in subsequent centuries. This literature ... represents Israel as being in exile for centuries; virtually in permanent exile ... Exile becomes a symbol in this literature; a symbol for the alienation of the group (or sect) from power in Jerusalem, or one related to messianic expectations which alone would restore the people to their land.²⁶⁴

This cuts clean across those who, reading what I and others have said, have spoken of this notion of ‘continuing exile’ as an ‘image’ or ‘metaphor’, an idea from the miscellaneous Jewish past picked up here to illuminate a different situation.²⁶⁵ It can of course be used that way, and obviously was and indeed still is, but that is not the basic point. Perhaps we can get at the heart of what I am saying like this: that, within the *continuing narrative* which virtually all Jews believed themselves to be living in, which we have studied at some length above, a great many second-Temple Jews interpreted *that part of the continuing narrative in which they were living* in terms of the so-called Deuteronomic scheme of sin–exile–restoration, with themselves still somewhere in the middle stage, that of ‘exile’ (which, granted, could itself become quite complicated).

There were, naturally, different perceptions of this at the time. But the sense of living within the middle term of the Deuteronomic scheme remains true whether, for those concerned, ‘exile’ was still in fact a geographical

reality, as it was for many in the Diaspora (though many Jews were quite comfortable away from the land, and did not see distance as deprivation), whether they were aware of the continuing theological and cultural oppression of foreign nations as indicating that Daniel 9 had not yet been fulfilled (which we shall see to be true for a great many), or whether they believed that in some sense they themselves were the advance guard of the ‘real return from exile’, indicating that it had been going on right up to their time and still was for everyone except themselves (as in Qumran). The point, whichever of these is true of this or that writer, is the *theological* awareness of being at a particular stage within the overall continuing narrative, coupled with the *exegetical* awareness of a large-scale Deuteronomic prophecy being worked out. While we can no doubt go on fine-tuning the details of what kind of ‘exile’ people thought they were living in, the greatest resistance to the overall construal I and others have put forward is not, I think, to do with those details, but rather with the sense of the overall narrative itself.

Here we touch a nerve which may be raw but as yet unrecognized, related to the larger anxieties I mentioned earlier. The idea of continuing exile is, I believe, part of the ‘Sanders revolution’ in Pauline studies (or second-Temple Jewish studies), but a part that neither Sanders himself, nor Dunn for that matter, ever worked out (though the texts were there to tell them they should). Sanders accused protestant exegesis of retrojecting a view of ‘catholic’ priestcraft, works-righteousness and so forth, onto the second-Temple period, in order that Protestantism could play the part of Luther to the faux-medieval soteriology of ‘Judaism’. That is where the debate (‘new perspective’ versus ‘revived old perspective’) still sits. [266](#) What is not noticed on either side, I think – but may in fact be driving some of the rather inchoate hostility towards the proposal about continuing exile – is that part of the protestant retrojection has been the idea of *a necessary break in the narrative*. Instead of the ‘great church’ rumbling along, gathering all kinds of accumulated baggage and heresy, and insisting that everyone simply go along with it, we have the Reformers (with all the energy, and breezy arrogance, of the Renaissance’s ‘new learning and new

ignorance'²⁶⁷) claiming to represent a new moment, a radical discontinuity, a clean break. That vision, of the previous dark narrative and the new bright intervention, is then played out in protestant visions of individual conversion; but, more particularly, in the corporate self-awareness of a protestant church history which disclaimed continuity with its immediate past and claimed, instead, a distant continuity with much earlier periods and their texts, namely the Bible and the Fathers. The appeal of Luther, Calvin, Cranmer and others to scripture and its first expositors is then worked through in a sense of Jesus, Paul and Peter (the parallels go on being provocative: does Erasmus play John the Baptist?) appealing *over the heads of second-Temple 'Judaism'* to 'Moses and the prophets', precisely not in the sense of the beginning point of a continuous story in whose climax they are themselves taking part (that would feel far too 'catholic'), but in the sense of long-distance visionaries, providers of types, patterns, symbols and above all long-range promises. History, within this frame of thought, is there only to be broken; as some earlier Germans put it, Christ is the end of history as he is the end of the law.²⁶⁸ The idea of a continuous narrative – albeit one whose climax is the shattering event of a crucified Messiah! – *constitutes the main problem* to which the answer is the clean break, the fresh start, the 'apocalyptic intervention' of a God who says a loud (Barthian?) 'No!' to all that has gone before, blinding Saul of Tarsus with a new light and reducing the idea of continuity to the status of an idol made with hands. The solution then is a non-narrative world, or rather *a narrative world where the only 'story' is 'my story with God'* on the one hand, or *a narrative world where the main 'story' is God's invasion of the cosmos*, without reference to the covenant, on the other.²⁶⁹ Hence the eagerness in older protestant exegesis to find parallels with, or derivations from, the pagan religions on the one hand or incipient gnosticism on the other, both worldviews that (like the rabbis, ironically) lacked a larger continuous narrative. And even when conservative expositors eschew that route, there is still as we shall see a worrying resemblance between the question 'How can I find a gracious God?' – let alone 'How can I go to heaven when I die?' – and the questions asked by Seneca or Epictetus.²⁷⁰

Anything rather than admit to a continuing historical narrative. That is not how the implicit eschatology of (in particular) North American Protestantism has functioned.²⁷¹ All this, I think, has been far more important underneath the debate than has been realized. It needs smoking out and examining in the light of rigorous exegesis.²⁷²

Whatever the underlying causes of resistance to the idea of continuing exile, it remains the case that previous attempts, by myself and several others, have not yet convinced the doubters. Let us then assemble the argument one more time, step by biblical step.²⁷³

The proper starting-point is Daniel 9. We know from Josephus that Daniel was a vital text for the mid-first century: that, he says, is what drove them to revolt.²⁷⁴ *At that time* a world ruler would emerge from Judaea! So how did they know it was to be *at that time*? Because of the chronological calculation that had been set in motion by the cryptic, coded message of the angel, in answer to Daniel's fervent prayer: the exile will not last for seventy years, but for *seventy times seven*.²⁷⁵ Within the fictive scenario of the book, the exiled Daniel has poured out his heart and soul in prayer, insisting that it must be time for the exile to end, because Jeremiah predicted that it would last for seventy years, and that time is now up.²⁷⁶ The prayer retells the sorry story in terms of the law of Moses, strongly echoing Deuteronomy 28 and 29:

All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you. He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven. Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us ...²⁷⁷

'Daniel' is thus positioning himself and his people within the continuous narrative promised by Moses, exactly as in the second-Temple passages we noted above. It is not that Deuteronomy promised, in general terms, that 'disobedience would bring exile', as though this were something that might just happen every so often in a miscellaneous fashion, unconnected with any larger narrative. Rather, Deuteronomy set out, briefly in chapter 4, fully

in chapters 27–30, and then again in the great poem of chapter 32 and its flanking chapters of 31 and 33, a *single historical sequence*, which – though it has taken hundreds of years! – has eventually come to pass.²⁷⁸ The prayer of Daniel 9 takes its stand within this single narrative at the point of transition from the end of Deuteronomy 29 to the start of Deuteronomy 30, one of the Old Testament equivalents to those great ‘but now’ moments in Paul’s writings. All these things have happened to us, says Daniel, because God was being faithful to his side of the covenant. We were unfaithful, and God did what he said he would do. But now we appeal to that same covenant faithfulness to bring us through and out the other side: if we return with all our heart and soul, calling the blessings and the curses to mind in the lands to which we have been driven, then Deuteronomy tells us what ought to happen next:

YHWH your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the people among whom YHWH your God has scattered you. Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there YHWH your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. YHWH your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it ...²⁷⁹

That is what ‘Daniel’ is now hoping for. Deuteronomy promised it; Jeremiah said it would come in seventy years; so please may it happen right now:

And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and made your name renowned even to this day – we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, in view of all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain; because of our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors, Jerusalem and your people have become a disgrace among all our neighbours. Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary. Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name!²⁸⁰

It is one of the greatest prayers in the biblical tradition. And, like another that would press such a claim, it doesn’t receive the hoped-for answer. The

cup does not pass from Jesus in Gethsemane; the time is not yet for Daniel and his friends to receive the full blessing of restoration promised in Deuteronomy 30. Yes, Jeremiah had said seventy years; but actually there is a greater time still in prospect, a Jubilee of Jubilees, seventy times seven:

[The man Gabriel] came and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved. So consider the word and understand the vision: Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.²⁸¹

This is not what ‘Daniel’ wants, nor when he wants it. Instead of seventy years, four hundred and ninety. Instead of the restoration he had imagined, a flurry of frightening events, with wars and devastations, and only a hint, at the close of the prophecy, that a ‘decreed end’ will finally put paid to those who have been oppressing God’s people.

Now it is of course understood that the actual setting for this book, and this prayer, is the time of the Maccabean revolt. The author of 1 Maccabees refers specifically to this passage when he speaks of Antiochus Epiphanes setting up an ‘abomination that desolates’ in the Holy Place.²⁸² Quite how the calculation then worked is not clear: 490 years before 167 BC is 657 BC, a full sixty years before Nebuchadnezzar took the city in 597, and seventy before he destroyed it in 587. But it was precisely that sort of calculation that Daniel 9 set in motion, teasing pious Jews for the next three hundred years with the challenge to work out a riddle that sounds as if it came from his namesake, the author of *The Da Vinci Code*. Somehow those 490 years must mean something ...

And calculate they did. As several scholars have shown, such calculations were a significant feature of the period.²⁸³ Roger Beckwith showed in a pair of articles many years ago that many of the debates between different schools of thought, including inner-Pharisaic debates, concerned precisely the question of chronology: have you done your sums right? Do you know when the 490 begins, and hence when it will end? One of the arguments against Akiba's hailing of bar-Kochba as Messiah was that *his calculations were wrong*. 'Grass will be growing from between your jaws, Akiba,' declared Yohanan ben Torta, 'before the Son of David comes.'²⁸⁴ But the point, however you calculated it, was this: *Jeremiah said that the exile would last seventy years, and Daniel was told that this had to be interpreted as 'seventy times seven'*. That's what the text said, and there is abundant evidence that after the time of Daniel – certainly from the mid-second century onwards, through at least to the second century of the Common Era – people were calculating exactly that. All this is evidence, of course, not only that many Jews of the time believed in a *continuing exile* but also that they were indeed thinking in terms of a *continuous history*. Thus, as Beckwith summarizes the situation (and it is remarkable how many people have written about the second-Temple Jewish world in recent years without showing any recognition of this vital element):

There is strong evidence to show that the Essenes, the Pharisees and the Zealots all thought that they could date, at least approximately, the time when the Son of David would come, and that in each case their calculations were based upon Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks (Dan. 9:24-27), understood as 70 weeks of years. The later attempts of the Christian Fathers to show that this prophecy was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus, and accords with the time at which he came, had therefore a considerable tradition behind them.²⁸⁵

The reason for these calculations can be stated simply and sharply. These different groups of Jews were anxiously trying to work out when Daniel's 'seventy weeks' would be over, not simply because that was when the Messiah would come, but because, as Daniel 9 indicates, that was when the long exile, seven times longer than Jeremiah had foretold, would finally be complete. In other words, *they knew that, despite the geographical 'return' in the late sixth century and on to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah in the*

*mid-fifth century BC, something they still regarded as ‘exile’ was not yet over. And they were reading their own situation, again and again, within the single flow of national narrative which they found in Deuteronomy 27—30.*²⁸⁶ This combination of Daniel’s revised prophecy about the 490 years and the Deuteronomic warning of the curse of exile followed by the blessing of covenant renewal is, I suggest, at the heart of the controlling story within the worldview not only of first-century Pharisees but of a great many other second-Temple Jews as well.

I take this implicit narrative, in fact, to be common knowledge both among first-century Jews and among the majority of contemporary scholars of the first-century Jewish world. I recall being in a seminar in Manchester some years ago, surrounded by some very serious Scrolls and Rabbinics scholars, and when the discussion of this point came up it was Professor Philip Alexander who put paid to objections and insisted that the great weight of evidence was on my side.²⁸⁷ This is confirmed time and again by those closest to the texts under discussion: so, for instance, James VanderKam of Notre Dame University:

A common portrait of exile in the apocalyptic literature envisages it as a state of affairs that began at some point near the end of the kingdom of Judah and continued to the author’s day and even beyond.²⁸⁸

The text we were discussing that day in Manchester is, indeed, one of the other key bits of evidence, since it is another second-Temple exegesis of Deuteronomy 30. We shall return to 4QMMT on at least one more occasion in this book, but this point stands out and we must pursue it here for just a moment.²⁸⁹

I take the author of this scroll to be a would-be priestly figure in the Qumran group, warding off the ‘seekers after smooth things’ (probably the Pharisees) on the one hand, but encouraging on the other hand the present Jerusalem regime to follow certain very specific codes of practice for the conduct of Temple worship. This, he says, will be the sign that you are really part of the people of whom Deuteronomy 30 was speaking. In case the point be missed, we note the historical sequence once again: a long,

single narrative, taking Moses' warnings and promises as its basis (like the *Testament of Moses*, already noted) and spelling out enough of the intervening history to make it clear that this is (a) a single great narrative, not a bunch of isolated incidents treated as types, analogies, examples, models or whatever; (b) a single great narrative which has resulted, as it always warned, in a state of continuing long-term exile; (c) a single great narrative, resulting in long-term exile, now reaching the point of the true 'return', the covenant renewal spoken of in Deuteronomy 30. Thus:

To you (singular) we have written that you must understand the book of Moses and the books of the prophets and of David ... the annals of each generation... . 'And it shall happen when all these things shall befall you at the end of days, the blessing and the curse, then you shall take it to your heart and will return to him with all your heart and with all your soul' [there is the quotation from Deuteronomy 30.1–2] at the end of days [quoting Deuteronomy 31.29; cf. 32.20²⁹⁰]. And it is written in the book of Moses and in the book of the prophets, that there will come ... the blessings ... in the days of Solomon the son of David; and also the curses which came from the days of Jeroboam son of Nebat and up to the exile of Jerusalem and of Zedekiah, king of Judah, that he should bring them to ... And we recognize that some of the blessings and curses have occurred that are written in the book of Moses. And this is at the end of days, when they in Israel will return to the Law ... and not turn back. And the wicked shall act wickedly ... ²⁹¹

The text is frustratingly fragmentary (what I have transcribed is a text compiled from several fragments, which even so does not yield one continuous flow), but the sense remains clear none the less. Deuteronomy 30 is basic, and from there it is possible to sketch out 'the annals of each generation', one long story. Within this, more specifically, Moses warned about 'all these things' that would come upon you, 'the blessings and the curses'. Very well, says the author: we had the blessings under Solomon, and then the curses followed soon after, all the way from Jeroboam son of Nebat to the exile under Zedekiah. (It is interesting that this overtly priestly writer highlights the kings as markers, perhaps because those two kings were of course classic sinners.) But Moses spoke of the time when, after the blessings and the curses, people in Israel would return to the law, turning to him with all their heart and soul. And the whole point of the text is to say: *this is happening at last; you can be part of it; and here is what you must do for that to happen.* MMT is an eschatological announcement, another 'but

now’, based foursquare on a reading of Deuteronomy 30: here is the prophecy; here is how it is now coming to pass. And whenever we date MMT – the best guess might be late second century BC? – the point is obvious: this fulfilment of Deuteronomy has obviously not yet happened. There is no point urging someone to get on board a bus that left three centuries ago. This is what I mean by ‘exile’, by its continuance long after the ‘return’ of the sixth and fifth centuries, and by the ‘real return’.

Similar points emerge from a consideration of column 5 in 1QS, where the community is to be constituted by those whose hearts are circumcised and who ‘revert to the Law of Moses, according to all that he commanded, with whole heart and whole soul.’²⁹² We might compare the Damascus Document, perhaps one of the best known of all the ‘continuing exile’ references in Qumran.²⁹³

The same point could be made, with reference this time to Daniel 9, from one of the Qumran Hymns, the *Hodayot*. Towards the end of the eleventh hymn, the poet declares

The war of the heavenly warriors shall scourge the earth;
and it shall not end before the appointed destruction
which shall be for ever and without compare.²⁹⁴

As Michael Wise has pointed out, the idea of this ‘appointed [or in Wise’s translation ‘poured out’] destruction’ constitutes an echo of Daniel 9.27. When we take this together with cryptic but ultimately convincing references to the author of the hymns, the ‘Teacher of Righteousness’, we arrive at the conclusion that ‘the Teacher thus found himself in the prophecy of Daniel.’ So, as Wise summarizes it,

what does seem clear is that the Teacher located himself at the tail-end of Daniel’s four hundred and ninety years. He believed that from start to finish his mission of calling the many to the new covenant was to occupy a seven-year span of time. Then Daniel’s *destruction, eternally decreed* would come to pass and God would use the Teacher to establish the Kingdom of God.²⁹⁵

Another Qumran passage which appears to develop the same sequence of thought, though this time it is complicated by the interweaving of the

‘messianic’ prophecy of 2 Samuel 7, is 11QTemple 59. The passage opens with a description of the curses that are to come upon Israel: they will find themselves crying and screaming for help ‘in the lands of their enemies’, but God will not come to their rescue, ‘for they broke my covenant and their soul loathed my law.’ But that will not be the last stage in the narrative. The promise of Deuteronomy is to be blended with biblical promises about the coming Davidic king:

Afterwards they shall come back to me with all their heart and with all their soul, in agreement with all the words of this law, and I will save them from the hand of their enemies and redeem them from the hand of those who hate them, and bring them into the land of their fathers, and I shall redeem them, and multiply them, and rejoice in them. And I shall be their God and they shall be my people. And the king who prostitutes his heart and his eyes (removing them) from my commandments, shall have no-one who will sit on the throne of his fathers, never, because I shall prevent for ever his descendants from governing again in Israel. But if he walks according to my precepts and keeps my commandments and does what is right and good before me, he shall not lack one of this sons to sit on the throne of the kingdom of Israel for ever. And I shall be with him and free him from the hand of those who hate him and from the hand of those who seek to destroy his life; and I shall give to him all his enemies and he shall rule them at his will but they shall not rule him. And I shall place him above and not below, at the head and not the tail, and he will extend his kingdom for many days, he and his sons after him.²⁹⁶

This interweaving of Deuteronomical historical sequence and royal promise, making the prophecy about being ‘the head and not the tail’ specific to the king, is, to my knowledge, unique in second-Temple literature, though as we have seen the various strands it brings together are woven separately into many other passages.

Before we proceed further, we should note that Deuteronomy 27—30 is not the only Pentateuchal passage to carry the promise of a historical sequence culminating in a continuing exile and an ultimate return.²⁹⁷ At the climax of the ordering of Israel’s festivals in Leviticus 23 and 24 we find Leviticus 25 with its detailed commandment about the sabbatical year, and along with that the year of Jubilee, the multiplication of seven by seven, so that the fiftieth year is the time to proclaim liberty throughout the land.²⁹⁸ That is then spelt out in terms of agriculture, property, and the release of slaves. Leviticus 26 picks up this theme with a sudden, and to many readers

quite unexpected, burst of what can only be called historical prophecy, in which we find ourselves in the world of the late chapters of Deuteronomy: if you follow my commandments, all will go well (26.1–13), but if you will not, you will be punished (26.14–33). The end of that punishment will be exile: ‘I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste’ (26.33).

What has this got to do with Israel’s appointed festivals, particularly the great Jubilee that forms the main subject of the previous chapter in Leviticus? Just this, says the writer: that, when you are languishing in exile, *the land will enjoy its sabbaths*, making up as it were for lost time.²⁹⁹ But – one of those great biblical ‘but’s! – ‘if they confess their iniquity ...’ then God will remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he will remember the covenant he made at the Exodus; and – this is not said, but it is surely implied – he will rescue them from their continuing exile.³⁰⁰ There we have a strong parallel with Deuteronomy 26—30, and this time it contains a new element: the land will enjoy its sabbaths. How many sabbaths? Well, a sabbath is seven days; a sabbatical year is seven years; a jubilee comes after seven times seven; for a jubilee of jubilees, the moment of ultimate freedom, suppose we say ... seventy times seven? And with that, we find ourselves back in Daniel 9. If the God who made the world in six days and rested on the seventh, commanding his people to follow suit, were to liberate his people at last, an ultimate jubilee might make the point exactly.³⁰¹

What then does ‘exile’ mean, in this continuing sense? Answer: the time of the curse spoken of in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, a curse that lasts as long as Israel is ‘the tail and not the head’, still subject to the rule, and often the abusive treatment, of foreign nations with their blasphemous and wicked idolatry and immorality, not yet in possession of the promised (even if laughably ambitious) global sovereignty. As long, in other words, as the condition of Israel is much like that in Egypt, they will be waiting for the new exodus. As long as Persia, Egypt, Greece, Syria or Rome are in charge, the ‘exile’ is not really over. And as long as that exile is not over, we are

still in Deuteronomy 29, hoping and praying that Daniel's 490 years will soon be complete, that the Messiah will come at last, and that – in Daniel's majestic language – Israel's God will act in accordance with his righteousness, his faithfulness to the covenant. That is the position not only of the author of MMT but of both the Essenes in their way and the Pharisees in theirs. And some, as we have seen, looked beyond even rescue, even freedom, to the possibility of worldwide dominion.

The question then is: how do you know when it's happening? What are the signs? And what if – as MMT strongly implies – the real 'return from exile' is happening at last, but secretly, and with a small group whose interpretation of key elements of Torah is the sign that at last Israel is being faithful? That is the claim made by the Dead Sea Scrolls, one after another. I and others have quoted and discussed these before and do not need to repeat that discussion here.³⁰²

Step back from Qumran for a moment and consider the so-called 'post-exilic' period. As is noted often enough, both Ezra and Nehemiah, in their great prayers, very similar to the prayer in Daniel 9, speak of a continuing state which is hardly the great liberation the prophets had promised. We are still guilty, confesses Ezra: yes, a remnant has returned, but this is so that God may 'brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery. For we are slaves; yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery.'³⁰³ But we are still sinful and guilty. This is hardly the language of forgiveness, of the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31, of the incredulous delight of Isaiah 54 or Psalm 126. We are back in the land, but we might as well still be with Daniel in Babylon (to put it anachronistically in terms of the probable date of the books in question). So too in the longer prayer of Ezra, in Nehemiah 9. As we saw above when looking at the biblical retellings of Israel's story, the whole history of Israel, indeed in a measure the history of creation, is rehearsed. The prayer moves from creation to Abraham, on to the exodus and, despite rebellion, into the promised land at last; then on to the continuing rebellion which produced the exile, just as had been warned; and now, at last, here we are, 'slaves to this day – slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts' (verse 36). Here is

the dilemma: the prophecies have let us down, and though we are back in our own land the promises about being blessed in that land have not come to pass. Instead, ‘its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us’ (this is a direct reference to Deuteronomy 28.33, 51; in other words, the prayer is locating ‘us’ still firmly in the ‘exilic’ time-frame in the key prophetic passage). These kings ‘have power also over our bodies and over our livestock and their pleasure, and we are in great distress’ (verse 37). This cannot be the time that Isaiah 40—55 had in mind, or the great renewal spoken of in the last twenty or so chapters of Ezekiel. ‘We are still slaves’; and slaves need an exodus, a fresh act of liberation, a new Moses, a victory over the pagan tyrants who still oppress them.³⁰⁴

Exactly the same perspective is found in the book of Baruch, which like Daniel has a fictive setting in the Babylonian exile but is commonly dated in the second century BC. Accepting the fact of exile, ‘Baruch’ declares that he and those around him will praise Israel’s God anyway:

You are the Lord our God, and it is you, O Lord, whom we will praise. For you have put the fear of you in our hearts so that we call upon your name; and we will praise you in our exile, for we have put away from our hearts all the iniquity of our ancestors who sinned against you. See, we are today in our exile where you have scattered us, to be reproached and cursed and punished for all the iniquities of our ancestors, who forsook the Lord our God.³⁰⁵

But then, in a fascinating and evocative twist to the story, ‘Baruch’ asks the question from a different angle: why are we still in exile? Why are we growing old in a foreign country, ‘defiled with the dead’ and ‘counted among those in Hades’? The answer comes back, loud and clear: ‘You have forsaken the fountain of *wisdom*.’ What is needed now is for Israel to rediscover that wonderful, mysterious wisdom:

Learn where there is wisdom, where there is strength, where there is understanding, so that you may at the same time discern where there is length of days, and life, where there is light for the eyes, and peace.³⁰⁶

There follows a short poem about ‘wisdom’, redolent of the praise of Wisdom in Proverbs, Job or indeed the Wisdom of Solomon. How and where can Wisdom be found? The answer is – guess where? – *in*

Deuteronomy 30. Baruch had already alluded to the promise of a restoration after exile for those who ‘come to themselves’ and whose hearts turn back to God; they will be those with whom the covenant is renewed.³⁰⁷ Now, following the brief poem about Wisdom, ‘Baruch’ takes up the promise of *Deuteronomy 30*, that the Torah is ‘not high up in heaven’ or ‘far away across the sea’, so that the exiles would find it impossible to perform it. Rather, ‘the word is near you, in your mouth, in your heart, and in your hands, so that you may do it.’³⁰⁸ This was originally spoken of Torah, of course, but now it is *wisdom* who is described in a rich meditation on *Deuteronomy 30* which is closely parallel not only to *Job 28* and several passages in *Proverbs* but also to *Wisdom 7—9* and *Sirach 24*:

Who has gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds?
Who has gone over the sea, and found her, and will buy her for pure gold?
No one knows the way to her, or is concerned about the path to her.
But the one who knows all things knows her, he found her by his understanding.
The one who prepared the earth for all time filled it with four-footed creatures;
the one who sends forth the light, and it goes; he called it, and it obeyed him, trembling;
the stars shone in their watches, and were glad; he called them, and they said, ‘Here we are!’
They shone with gladness for him who made them.
This is our God; no other can be compared to him.
He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to his servant Jacob,
and to Israel, whom he loved.
Afterwards she appeared on earth and lived with humankind.
She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures for ever.
All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die.
Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk towards the shining of her light.
Do not give your glory to another, or your advantages to an alien people.
Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God.³⁰⁹

This is the centrepiece of the book, one of the great short poems of the second-Temple period. It looks back, through the *Wisdom* tradition, to *Genesis*, and on to the exhortations that will follow, encouraging those still in exile to hope in God and take courage. Exile will end, your children will come back; Isaiah’s promise of the land being flattened out for YHWH’s glory to appear will happen for Israel, too.³¹⁰ And in the meantime the promise of *Deuteronomy 30* is going to come true, because, as in *Sirach 24*,

God has given his wisdom to his people in the form of Torah. ‘Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God’; so do not collude with the pagans around you, but take hold of Wisdom/Torah, *and you will become the people of whom Deuteronomy 30 spoke*. That is the insight that drives the prayer, the poem and the promise. Exile is continuing; but Deuteronomy 30 is starting to come true. Baruch is a very, very different book from 4QMMT, but the underlying theological and exegetical point is exactly the same.³¹¹

The other obvious book to examine, a neighbour of Baruch within the Apocrypha, is Tobit. Written most likely in the first half of the second century BC, Tobit draws particularly on the books of Genesis and Deuteronomy as the backdrop for its novelistic story, whose fictive setting is in the time of the Assyrian empire – a situation of exile, of course. Some have suggested that the book was written either in Egypt or in Mesopotamia, but both those proposals are problematic, and there is a good chance that it was in fact written in Judaea.³¹² Underneath the romance and adventure, however, its subject-matter is God’s purpose for his exiled people.

Tobit’s prayer, not unlike those of Daniel and Ezra, places himself and his people in the condition prophesied by Deuteronomy 28:

They sinned against you, and disobeyed your commandments. So you gave us over to plunder, exile, and death, to become the talk, the byword, and an object of reproach, among all the nations among whom you have dispersed us.³¹³

All Tobit can find it in his heart to pray for, at this point in the story, is death (3.6). But there is a happy ending in store, even though the plot has to twist and turn to get there. His lament then changes into a great outpouring of praise to the God whose kingdom lasts throughout all ages, the God who afflicts and shows mercy, who brings people down and raises them up.³¹⁴ Then comes the promise – and remember, this book was written to be read by devout Jews, probably in Judaea, not in the sixth or fifth centuries but in the second century BC – of a fresh ingathering, in fulfilment of

Deuteronomy 30, with the other eschatological blessings that will accompany such an event:

He will gather you from all the nations among whom you have been scattered. If you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will no longer hide his face from you ...

In the land of my exile I acknowledge him, and show his power and majesty to a nation of sinners ... O Jerusalem, the holy city, he afflicted you for the deeds of your hands, but will again have mercy on the children of the righteous...

A bright light will shine to all the ends of the earth; many nations will come to you from far away, the inhabitants of the remotest parts of the earth to your holy name, bearing gifts in their hands for the King of heaven ... The gates of Jerusalem will be built with sapphire and emerald, and all your walls with precious stones ...³¹⁵

Now at last, in other words, we shall have the real, Deuteronomic, ‘return from exile’! The other nations will come and do homage to Israel’s God in Israel’s capital city! This is then amplified further in Tobit’s final speech to his family, set of course in the fictive eighth century BC and ‘prophesying’ about events long distant:

All of our kindred, inhabitants of the land of Israel, will be scattered and taken as captives from the good land; and the whole land of Israel will be desolate, even Samaria and Jerusalem will be desolate. And the temple of God in it will be burned to the ground, and it will be desolate for a while.

But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfilment shall come (*hou an plērōthē ho chronos tōn kairōn*). After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendour; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth. They will all abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into their error; and in righteousness they will praise the eternal God. All the Israelites who are saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety for ever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them.³¹⁶

We should note in particular in this passage, in the long verse 5, a clear hint of what we can only call *a double return from exile*. To begin with there is a return, and a rebuilding of the Temple, but it will not be like the first one. That is because ‘the times of fulfilment’ are yet to come; and that will be the *real* ‘return from exile’, when Jerusalem will be rebuilt in splendour and all the nations will abandon their idols and come to worship the true God.

Tobit thus provides us with a more explicit clue as to the way in which many devout Jews told their own story in the second century, the time, of course, when the Pharisees and Essenes came into existence. Yes, there had been a ‘return from exile’ – of sorts; but it had not been the real thing. The promises of Isaiah and the others (about the nations being converted, and the wonderful splendour of Jerusalem) had obviously not yet happened. Tobit is clear: we are living as it were between the times, having experienced a kind of ‘return’, but still awaiting the *true* ‘return’, which will come about when ‘the time of times is fulfilled’.

We turn back once more to apocalyptic literature. Very different texts, same perspective. Take, for instance, *1 Enoch*. Here, as in Tobit, we have a sense of a double return: a first return which fails to accomplish all that it should, followed by another ‘return’ in which at last all shall be well. *1 Enoch* 89.73–77, noted above in another context, speaks of a return and rebuilding which is thwarted through the dim-sightedness of the people and the impurity of their offerings. This leads to a period of further suffering (90.1–5), referring apparently to the hellenistic period of the third century BC. Then, after an allegorical description of the Maccabaeian revolt, we come at last to the messianic kingdom (90.20–42), with the rebuilt Temple (90.29), and the ushering in of the reign of justice and peace, with the Israelites purified (90.31–36) and the pagans condemned and coming to bow down before God’s people (90.24–27, 30).³¹⁷ Not only rescue: world sovereignty. It is substantially the same story.

So too with *Jubilees*. We have already noted that this book indicates a sense of a single continuing history running from the earliest times, unbroken, through to the author’s day and beyond. We saw, too, that the book opens with a vision of what will happen at the end, informed, once more, by Deuteronomy 30.³¹⁸ VanderKam’s comment on the passage is to the point:

The return, the sanctuary, and the new conditions of perfect covenantal relations hardly appear to be a description of any known return from exile in the historical books. Rather, the ideal portrait of a future time looks much more like the new age that will arise at the end. If so, then *Jubilees* too is a witness to the idea that exile ends only at the eschaton.³¹⁹

The same perspective is visible in *4 Ezra*. Written after the devastation of AD 70, its fresh interpretation of Daniel's vision makes it clear that the continuing domination of Israel by the nations, ending with the eagle (presumably Rome), has not yet come to an end, nor will it do so until the time of the Messiah.³²⁰ So too the *Testament of Levi* looks back to Daniel 9's prophecy of the 'seventy weeks', and warns that during this period, from one jubilee to another, things will go from bad to worse, until at last a new priest arises through whom God will judge.³²¹ This then puts the reader in the position of Deuteronomy 30: they must choose whether to serve light or darkness.³²² The *Testament of Judah* envisages the continuance of Israel's misfortunes until the Messiah comes, the 'Star from Jacob'.³²³

A fascinating rabbinic footnote.³²⁴ The Mishnah reports a discussion between Rabban Gamaliel (Gamaliel II, the son of the Gamaliel of Acts 5) and Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah. (These belong in the period between the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the great revolt under bar-Kochba; even if the story, the setting or the ascription are all fictitious, the point is still telling.) The question under discussion is whether an Ammonite proselyte should be allowed in the House of Study. Rabban Gamaliel is against allowing him in, but Rabbi Joshua is in favour. The question turns on scripture. Deuteronomy 23.3, quoted by Gamaliel, says that no Ammonite may enter the Lord's assembly; Isaiah 10.13, quoted by Joshua, says that God has removed the bounds of the peoples; Jeremiah 49.6, quoted by Gamaliel, declares that God will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon – in other words, the Ammonites are still under the original prohibition, which cannot be overruled by Isaiah's prophecy. But Joshua, apparently to demonstrate that exiles have not returned, quotes Jeremiah 30.3, 'And I will turn again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord.' And, he says, 'They have not yet returned.' *It hasn't happened yet*. There we have it; quite apart from the question of Ammonites in the assembly (the majority of rabbis, as it happened, supported Gamaliel), Rabbi Joshua, speaking in the late first century AD, declares that the great, promised Return has not yet come about. Nobody contradicts him. The point is obvious. The Temple is in ruins. YHWH has

not come back to judge the pagans and rescue his people. The Son of David has not appeared. Israel has not assumed global sovereignty. We are still awaiting the fulfilment of the prophecies. Nobody could possibly imagine that Deuteronomy 30 had been fulfilled, that the times of Daniel's 'seventy weeks' had been fulfilled.³²⁵

What might count as exceptions to the rule? Ben-Sirach might be thought an obvious exception. The great scene in chapter 50, with Simon son of Onias appearing in the Temple, can as we suggested be read as a sort of fulfilment of the promise of divine splendour being once again displayed, and hence as a sign that the exile is well and truly over.³²⁶ This is then supported by the 'return' of the tabernacling presence, in the form of Wisdom/Torah, in chapter 24. All that, of course, is what we might expect from a priestly aristocrat writing in the early years of the second century BC, before the trouble with Syria really began. But even in Ben-Sirach there are signs of an expectation that reaches out towards a further fulfilment, a sign that there are prophecies yet to be realized:

Have mercy upon us, O God of all, and put all the nations in fear of you ... Give new signs, and work other wonders; make your hand and right arm glorious ... Hasten the day, and remember the appointed time, and let people recount your mighty deeds ... Gather all the tribes of Jacob, and give them their inheritance, as at the beginning. Have mercy, O Lord, on the people called by your name, on Israel, whom you have named your firstborn; have pity on the city of your sanctuary, Jerusalem, the place of your dwelling [so Hebrew: Greek has 'your rest']. Fill Zion with your majesty, and your temple with your glory. Bear witness to those whom you created in the beginning, and fulfil the prophecies spoken in your name. Reward those who wait for you and let your prophets be found trustworthy.³²⁷

What is especially striking about this passage is the repeated sense towards the end that there are indeed unfulfilled prophecies still outstanding. It is important to the writer that the prophets (presumably including Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) should be proved right in a way that has not yet happened. However splendid the high priest may be, therefore, and however much weight we give to the sense that Wisdom/Torah might supply the sense of divine tabernacling presence that had been lost at the destruction of the first Temple, we should not regard Ben-Sirach as offering anything like

a fully realized eschatology, a claim that all prophecy has now been fulfilled and the people no longer need to be ‘gathered’.³²⁸

The passage we glanced at before from the book of Judith can be cited as another counter-example to the ‘end of exile’ thesis. (Be it noted, my case is not that *all Jews throughout the period* understood themselves to be living in a state of ‘continuing exile’, only that such an understanding was widespread, and was particularly likely to be true of zealous Pharisees. One might say the same, interestingly, about belief in the bodily resurrection.) The book of Judith describes how Holofernes, the general of Nebuchadnezzar’s army, had struck terror into the hearts of the Judaeans, since they had only just returned from exile and reconsecrated the Temple and its vessels (4.3). When Holofernes makes enquiry about Jerusalem, the Ammonite leader tells him Israel’s story, culminating in the exile which was the result of Israel’s sin, and then says, echoing Deuteronomy (not bad for an Ammonite, though the words are of course put in his mouth by the pious author), ‘but now they have returned to their God, and have come back from the places where they were scattered, and have occupied Jerusalem, where their sanctuary is’ (5.19). Fair enough: though we note that the rhetorical force of the book, if indeed it was composed (as is normally thought) in the mid-second century BC, is to place Holofernes in parallel with the new persecutors such as Antiochus Epiphanes. We do not imagine that the book was simply a tale of a heroine from centuries before, without relevance to the continuing pagan threat. But Judith can happily be allowed as a clear apparent exception to the larger pattern.³²⁹

What about the books of the Maccabees? It is true that 1 Maccabees uses such exalted language about the results of Simon’s rule (–34 BC) that we might well suppose the promised last days to have arrived.³³⁰ But the book ends with Simon (and his sons) getting drunk and being murdered, with the remaining son John succeeding him. No sign of the glorious eschaton there. And in 2 Maccabees there is the same strong sense we have seen elsewhere that, despite the dazzling victories of Judas, and the establishment of the Hasmonean dynasty, more remains to be done. The ‘more’ in question is once again explicitly linked to Deuteronomy 30.3–5:

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.³³¹

God *has* rescued us, and purified the place; and he *will soon* gather us from everywhere and have mercy on us. This sounds very like the ‘double return’ we found in Tobit and *1 Enoch*.

Might Josephus be an exception? Was he not an aristocrat who might have been satisfied with how things had been, at least until those wretched revolutionaries went and ruined it all? By no means: the period of life under Rome was a time of *douleia*, ‘slavery’, and it was all Israel’s own fault.³³² But there may, as we saw above, be a further deliverance yet to come, precisely in line with the prophecies at the end of Deuteronomy.³³³

We may end this survey by picking up from James Scott and Jonathan Goldstein the discussion of the remarkable wall paintings in the synagogue at Dura-Europos, out on the eastern edge of Syria.³³⁴ These paintings, from the second and third centuries of the Common Era, include, it is claimed, a depiction of the defeat of the Roman empire and the rescue of Israel from exile. A second Moses (the Messiah) leads the people to victory over Rome. The paintings look as if they were carefully designed to avoid arousing suspicions. But, like African-American spirituals with a deep double meaning, what might have looked like paintings of biblical scenes from long ago should be read as a promise of final restoration after exile.

Where does all this leave us? What may we conclude about the prevalence of a belief in ‘continuing exile’ in the centuries before Saul of Tarsus, and in the Jewish world where he grew up?

The objections to this reading of a fairly substantial body of evidence are not strong. They stem in part from the usual problem, ‘We never saw it this way before’, underneath which is the more serious problem, ‘This might force us to re-read some favourite texts.’ (It will indeed.) We may take the dissertation of Steven M. Bryan as a good example of a careful scholar trying to understand what is being said but remaining puzzled.³³⁵

Bryan begins by agreeing that many texts speak of a continuing bondage, but without seeing that as ‘analogous to or an extension of’ the exile.³³⁶ The phrase ‘analogous to’ indicates already that the point has not been understood; this is not an analogy, but precisely an extension as indicated in Daniel 9, picking up the scheme prophesied in Deuteronomy. Second, he denies that there was a straight-line trajectory from exile to restoration; the story was more complex.³³⁷ Yes indeed; but the massive complexity (Hasmonean exhilaration then frustration, the rise of parties and sects, the Roman invasion, and so on) are explicitly held by the relevant texts within the larger narrative. Third, ‘it is difficult to imagine that in the heady days of Hasmonean success, people still widely perceived themselves to be in exile.’³³⁸ Well, imagination has to be educated by evidence; and the evidence points to a very brief time of exhilaration at the Hasmonean success, in which some may indeed have supposed that the promised time of full blessing had virtually arrived. People were eager for signs that the bad times of pagan oppression were over and the good times of freedom, promised so long ago, were here arrived at last. But we must ask: were the nations flocking in to worship YHWH? Were the exiles streaming home from the Diaspora? Were the people all discovering that their sins had been forgiven, that God had poured out his spirit upon them? Were the nations of the world coming to acknowledge the one God, and Israel as the one appointed by him to rule the world? It was precisely because the answer to all these was ‘No’ that the Qumran sect arose with their radical alternative, insisting that the real post-exilic restoration had at last begun, but secretly, in their movement. It was because of speedy dissatisfaction with the Hasmonean regime that books like Susannah were added to Daniel, turning the wise judgment of Daniel not now against wicked pagan rulers but precisely against wicked *Jewish* rulers.³³⁹ And it was because of this continuing sense that the exile was not yet over, despite a few false dawns, that the Pharisaic movement in particular, as evidenced not only by texts that may reflect their perspective but by what they actually did, pursued their objectives in the belief that their form of Torah-intensification would at last accomplish what Deuteronomy 30 had promised. And among the

clearest pieces of evidence for that last claim we find the writings of Paul the apostle.³⁴⁰

Bryan's fourth point is that some texts do speak of a time of respite within the ongoing basically dire situation.³⁴¹ Yes; and these (Tobit, 2 *Baruch*, *Testament of Naphtali*, and so on) are noted above. But the large-scale prophecies of Deuteronomy and Daniel are still held as the wider framework within which these moments of respite come and go without affecting the basic structure.³⁴² Fifth, he says that Ezra and Nehemiah saw their own time, not as part of ongoing exile, but as a partial restoration.³⁴³ Well, in a sense, yes; but this takes us back to Carroll's point quoted earlier, that (in effect) 'they would say that, wouldn't they?' But the confession of continuing *slavery* speaks, to my mind, of an ongoing appalling state, like the archetypal slavery in Egypt, continuous with the previous state in Babylon, and yet to be undone. Had one asked Ezra or Nehemiah whether the prophecies of Isaiah 40—55 had yet been fulfilled, there could only have been one answer. Sixth, Bryan reads some texts (e.g. the Animal Apocalypse in *1 Enoch*) as 'flattening the significance of the seventy-year exile and the subsequent return' so that 'the exile is in no way distinguished from Israel's subsequent history.'³⁴⁴ But this is exactly the point, only put the other way around. Bryan supposes that 'exile' is thereby made a sub-category for general captivity, rather than vice versa. This simply ignores the larger point about the continuous narrative, to which *1 Enoch* and similar texts continue to bear witness. Seventh, in *Jubilees* the curse of exile is a reference to Deuteronomy, where (Bryan claims) exile is merely one curse among many.³⁴⁵ Answer: this completely misses the point of the almost ubiquitous reference to Deuteronomy 30 (and also Leviticus 26), and the build-up to it, in book after book, even (as we saw) in Philo.³⁴⁶ It is very odd to speak, as Bryan does, of a 'downgrading of the exile' which was meant to deal with the fact that 'the expected restoration had not accompanied the sixth century return.' That is exactly the point: the restoration hasn't happened yet! 'Exile' is therefore in no way 'downgraded', certainly not in *Jubilees*, and certainly not in the other texts

we have studied. It is freshly understood, as we have seen, in a non-geographical though still concrete, political sense, interpreted theologically.

Eventually, Bryan reaches Daniel 9 and the Qumran Damascus Document, which might perhaps have been the right point at which to begin.³⁴⁷ He claims, remarkably, that these texts ‘reduce the significance of the exile’ by ‘subsuming it within a much longer period of divine punishment on Israel’. This is extraordinary. Daniel explicitly refers to Jeremiah’s prophecy, which is explicitly a prophecy about how long the exile will last; it is this period that is then extended. The whole point about the ‘age of wrath’, in Qumran and elsewhere, is that this is the period which began with the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians and is still ongoing.

Finally, Bryan suggests that many Jews of the period dealt with the problem of continuing non-fulfilment of the promises of restoration simply by saying that it was up to God to do things in his own time.³⁴⁸ Well, yes. Some may have drawn back from fevered chronological calculation and speculation for those reasons. But this is hardly incompatible with the perception of the same people that they were living within an ongoing story whose present character had been decisively shaped by its opening motif, that of Babylonian exile.

What we miss throughout this discussion is any reference to Deuteronomy 27—30, or any discussion of the ‘Deuteronomic view of history’ which drew from that passage and which remained, as we have seen, constitutive of the underlying narrative framework. Bryan never discusses the massive work of Steck and others whose researches are part of the foundation for the proposals I have advanced. He does at least see that there is *some* perception of an ongoing narrative in a good many of these second-Temple texts. But it is the combination of Deuteronomy and Daniel, and their regular retrieval in the key sources, that compels us to go on highlighting ‘exile’ as the best controlling metaphor to characterize this continuing moment in the single, though complex, perceived narrative of a great many Jews, including Pharisees, in the second-Temple period.

One question remains. What then were they waiting for? Or, to put it more clearly: what sort of fulfilment of the promises were they expecting?

(iv) A World Transformed, Not Abolished

What then was the hope of a first-century Pharisee? One obvious answer might be, 'salvation'. But what might 'salvation' actually mean?

A good deal of the secondary literature on the hope of second-Temple Jews has assumed that ultimate salvation is emphatically otherworldly. Often this is simply taken for granted. You don't look *at* your spectacles until looking *through* them becomes difficult. This assumed otherworldly salvation, 'going to heaven when you die', has then contextualized and conditioned the ways in which scholars and preachers alike have handled the questions which swirl around 'salvation': questions, not least, of justification, the law, 'works', 'grace', and so on. But the second-Temple texts themselves tell strongly against an 'otherworldly' salvation; against (that is) the notion that the ultimate aim of humans in general and Jews in particular was the escape of saved souls from their present embodiment and indeed from space, time and matter altogether. In the texts we have studied, and in particular in the continuous story we have been examining, the aim and goal does not have to do with the abolition of the universe of space, time and matter, or the escape of humans from such a wreckage, but with its consummation.³⁴⁹

We could in fact read widely in the Jewish literature of the time without gaining any sense, except through one or two short passages taken out of context, that the writers had in mind the souls of the righteous leaving this present world and going off for ever into a non-spatio-temporal eternity.³⁵⁰ That Platonic vision, as I have argued elsewhere, cuts clean across the robustly creational hope of the great majority of first-century Jews, Pharisees included. Granted, Daniel 12 speaks of the righteous shining like the sun; the *Testament of Moses* imagines Israel exalted up to heaven, far above their enemies; *2 Baruch*, echoing Daniel, can talk in terms of God's people sharing the world of the angels.³⁵¹ But – against the grain of an

entire swathe of scholarship over the last hundred years – I echo again words of Ed Sanders: ‘like other Jews the Essenes did not think that the world would end.’³⁵²

Two things follow from this. First, it is massively misleading to bring to the texts the question ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’ in the sense that almost all modern western persons would understand. In the gospels, of course, that question is asked by a second-Temple Jew, and as I and others have made clear it did *not* mean ‘How can I go to heaven when I die?’ but rather ‘How can I be part of the coming age, the age to come, *ha‘olam ha-ba?*’³⁵³ As all the texts we have mentioned make clear, this ‘age to come’ was not much like the ‘heaven’ of medieval and post-medieval western imagination, and much more like the liberated Israel, and perhaps the liberated world, of biblical and second-Temple hope.³⁵⁴ If instead we insist on projecting on to the texts the questions of individual salvation, in a classic western heaven-or-hell scheme, trying to discern where they fit in terms of the ‘qualifications’ people might have for the one or the other, and how (either through God’s grace or human merit or some combination of the two) some might attain such a salvation, we will simply miss the entire story within which the writers of those texts were living. And in doing this we will, almost certainly, distort quite radically the other terms that cluster around the larger notion of ‘salvation’.

This relatively modern approach to the texts, understanding them in terms of a non-spatio-temporal ‘salvation’, is basically *telling the wrong story*. It collapses ‘Israel’s story’, the main theme of book after book in the literature we have surveyed, into ‘my story’, the story of the individual soul on the way to heaven or hell. In the modern world, ‘my story’ is then contextualized, by implication, within a larger implicit narrative: either the modern dream of ‘personal fulfilment’, or the Platonic one of leaving this world and going to a disembodied one instead; or some combination of the two. But to tell the story like this is arguably to take a large step away from the basic Jewish worldview and towards an essentially pagan one. Such an approach is not the prerogative of any one school of thought in either

Jewish or Pauline studies, but I suggest that it vitiates fairly radically the projects of those who use it.³⁵⁵

Let us, of course, be clear: *this is not to say that personal ‘salvation’ is not at issue* or is deemed unimportant. That is a regular slur against fresh interpretations of Paul, but it misses the point entirely. Of course ‘salvation’ matters. What is being said, however, is (a) that salvation doesn’t mean what the western tradition has often taken it to mean (escaping to a disembodied ‘heaven’), (b) that it is in any case not the main topic of most of the texts, and (c) that it is not the main narrative which they are trying to explicate. In the New Testament the rescue of human beings from sin and death, which remains vital throughout, serves a much larger purpose, namely that of God’s restorative justice for the whole creation.³⁵⁶

This brings us to the question of what second-Temple Jews believed about ‘the end of the world’, which obviously impinges on New Testament discussions about the ‘parousia’ and related topics.³⁵⁷ At the risk of arousing thunderbolts of wrath and showers of angry meteorites, I venture to suggest that the scholarly construct of a ‘parousia’ in which the space-time universe would cease to exist, followed by the second-order construct of a ‘delay’ in this event which then precipitates a new sort of Christian self-consciousness, has been an enormous black hole in historical understanding into which legions of scholars have sucked one another through the gravitational forces of their unremitting zeal for ‘the traditions of the fathers’ – ‘the fathers’ in this case being Schweitzer, Bultmann and their various successors. Woe betide those who break the traditions! The wrath of the blessed guild of biblical scholars, who wear their fringes long and their phylacteries broad, will fall upon them! As Philo said about the thousands of Pharisees with sharp eyes, ready to spot any infringement and pounce on it, so in our world too there are those who have ways of making their traditions prevail.³⁵⁸

Now it is of course quite possible that some first-century Jews believed that the space-time universe would come to a stop, that the material world was a thing of shadows and irrelevance, and that one day soon some god or other (which one? not the God of Genesis 1, for sure) would create a new

sort of world without all that messy *stuff*. Philo, on a poor day at least, might have pondered that possibility. But I continue to regard this dehistoricized and depoliticized reading of ‘end-of-the-world’ language as basically unhistorical. It is not how people at the time were reading and understanding the key texts. When Isaiah 13, or the *Testament of Moses* 10, spoke of the sun being darkened and the moon not giving its light, the strong presumption should be that the intended concrete referent of this was some kind of major political turmoil – the fall of Babylon in the first case, of Rome in the second. If you had been a journalist in AD 69, what language would you have used to describe the Year of the Four Emperors? Probably the same kind of cosmic, apocalyptic language that was used after September 11, 2001. ‘The End of the World’? Well, naturally. But it wasn’t, of course. It was simply the end of a world order in which certain things had been assumed to be fixed and unalterable, and which were now discovered to be frail and vulnerable. Of course, highly charged metaphors about the sun, the moon and the stars *invest* such events with a particular significance, just as journalistic language does when it speaks of an election in terms of a ‘landslide’ or of a new campaigning politician as a ‘tornado’. Or, indeed, of a scholarly non-debate in terms of thunderbolts. Other people’s metaphors may be easy to misunderstand, but we have enough first-century information not to be fooled.

The case does not, of course, stand alone, just as the case for a Schweitzer-like (mis)reading of apocalyptic language does not stand alone. Both must be contextualized. First-century language belongs in the setting of the socio-political turmoil of the centuries either side of the time of Jesus. Schweitzer belongs in the setting of a Nietzschean vision of the end of one world and the beginning of another, Christianized as much as Schweitzer could but with the key mistakes left in.³⁵⁹ As I have argued elsewhere, the reception of Schweitzer was conditioned particularly by the fact that the liberal establishment that dominated scholarship had by his time largely ‘spiritualized’ the resurrection accounts, so that their proper historical sense that the Jews of Jesus’ day were expecting something to *happen* could not be fastened on to its proper object, the resurrection itself,

but had to be projected forwards. There could not really be any such thing as ‘inaugurated eschatology’. Nothing had actually changed in the way the world was. If the early Christians were talking about the coming kingdom of God (which itself by the twentieth century was regularly confused with ‘the kingdom of heaven’ in the sense of ‘heaven’ as a place utterly different from earth), they must, it was thought, have been thinking of a coming cataclysm in which everything would change, even the make-up of the universe of space, time and matter. This was then projected back on to the pre-Christian Jewish world: ah, it was suggested, the early Christians must have got this idea from that strange world called ‘apocalyptic’, that dark, dualistic place where heaven and earth were separated by a great gulf. It is indeed true that ‘apocalyptic’ language was sometimes used in the service of dualism – *1 Enoch* 42 comes to mind – but normally, as with Daniel, the language of dreams and visions is pressed into the service of a relentlessly this-worldly end. The word ‘dualism’, as I pointed out earlier without (it seems) much effect, has been almost as slippery as the word ‘apocalyptic’ itself.³⁶⁰ The *language* of ‘apocalyptic’ (dreams, visions, extended ‘cosmic’ metaphors, and so on) can be used to invoke or denote quite a variety of worldviews. One can no more assume that all users of this language-system shared a worldview than one can assume that Shakespeare and Milton shared a worldview just because both of them wrote blank verse in iambic pentameters.

And it is the worldview, rather than the language-system, which determines how the relevant metaphors *work*. If the worldview is fundamentally creational and new-creational, we will take a good deal of convincing that the metaphors were intended to convey the meaning that creation itself was to be permanently undone. For the moment we conclude as follows. There is no good reason to suppose that a hard-line Pharisee like Paul, standing in the tradition (however loose that tradition might be) that stretched back, via Shammai, to Judas Maccabaeus and, in the distance, to Phinehas and Elijah, and that stretched forwards to Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and the supporters of bar-Kochba – there is no good reason to suppose either that anybody in that tradition was expecting, wanting or hoping for

the end of the space-time universe, or that the dramatic language they sometimes employed was intended to denote such an ‘event’. If Paul the apostle believed in such a thing, this would be a Christian innovation.

I and others have been developing this line of argument for some years, and it has recently been subjected to head-on attack by two scholars in particular, Edward Adams and Dale Allison.³⁶¹ Their arguments relate more to the gospels, particularly to passages like Mark 13 and its parallels, than they do to Paul. I hope to present a full response on that front on another occasion. But some of the points they raise also relate to my account of the second-Temple Jewish world as a whole, and hence to the present chapter, and therefore also to Paul; so it is incumbent on me to say at least something here as well by way of at least a partial reply.³⁶²

The first problem is a genuine difficulty in describing the views held by influential twentieth-century scholars. It may well be, as some have argued, that later generations have been wrong to attribute to Albert Schweitzer the view that Jesus, and behind him *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, envisaged the actual end of the space-time world. Certainly Schweitzer’s Jesus, in line with Matthew 10.23, expected a massive world-changing event of some sort to occur while the disciples were going about their quick tour of Palestine. The post-Schweitzer scholarly tradition has normally taken that to be the combination of events we have come to refer to as the *parousia*, the ‘coming of the Son of Man’, and, more generally, the end of the world, regularly interpreting that ‘end’ in terms of the disappearance of the world of space, time and matter and the launching of a completely ‘spiritual’ realm, a heavenly eternity for Jesus and his people. This emerges clearly in a famous passage at the start of Bultmann’s *Theology of the New Testament*.³⁶³ Bultmann, of course, himself stood in the tradition documented caustically by Klaus Koch, where German theology did not really know what to do with ‘apocalyptic’, and so dismissed it to the margins.³⁶⁴ That was, after all, the heart of Bultmann’s demythologization programme: Jesus employed the mythical language of apocalyptic, but what he meant – as we can now decode it – was the existential language of personal decision.³⁶⁵ So the lines are set. For Schweitzer, Jesus and the

early church really did intend a reference to the actual end of the physical universe,³⁶⁶ but Jesus' death and Paul's theology was able to transform this into a new kind of worldwide faith. For Bultmann, Jesus used the language of that actual end but, despite misunderstandings in the early church, he didn't mean it like that; he himself was already transforming such language so that it became the bearer of the challenge to existentialist faith. In the present debates, Adams represents a much more nuanced version of Schweitzer's position: Jesus really did use this end-of-the-world language to refer to a great cosmic event yet to come (part of the trouble is the use of slippery words like 'cosmic' themselves), but in line with many biblical and post-biblical writings this didn't necessarily mean the actual physical end of the planet or the universe, since these writings often intended to speak instead either of a major transformation or of a destruction that would then be followed by a remaking. Unsurprisingly, at this point Adams suggests that some of the post-biblical writings are influenced by the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrōsis*. Equally unsurprisingly, Troels Engberg-Pedersen has joined the ranks of Adams's enthusiastic supporters.³⁶⁷

The second point is the proper exegesis of end-of-the-world language in the biblical texts themselves. Adams rightly refers to George Caird's famous book *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* as a major source for the kind of view I represent, but without, I think, getting the measure of Caird's actual argument. Caird at one point discusses Jeremiah's statement about the world going back to *tohu wabohu*, as in Genesis 1.2, the description of chaos as 'without form and void':

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no light.
I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.
I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled.
I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins,
before YHWH, before his fierce anger.
For thus says YHWH: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.
Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.³⁶⁸

Caird's comment is this:

The expected attack did not come, and for years Jeremiah had to live with the haunting doubt that he might be a false prophet ... He even accused God of having duped him (Jer. 20:7). But in 605 B.C. he reissued his early prophecies by dictating them to Baruch (Jer. 36:1–4). This time his prediction came true, for Jerusalem was captured in 598 B.C. and reduced to ruins in a further siege eleven years later. *But it never occurred to Jeremiah or anybody else that he might still be regarded as a false prophet because the world had not come to an end.*³⁶⁹

Caird goes on to make a similar point about Joel 3, a passage much quoted by Adams. 'Sun and moon are darkened', says the prophet, 'and the stars forbear to shine' (Joel 3.14). Yes, points out Caird, but this is not the end: it is the massive reversal of fortune for Judah and Jerusalem (3.1), so that thereafter 'Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations ... for YHWH dwells in Zion' (3.20–1). All will be well at last, not in some second cosmos created after the sun, moon and stars of the first one have collapsed, but in the Jerusalem that will have been renewed by a mighty divine act for which the only appropriate language is found to be the *cosmic metaphor*: the collapse of the old order and the creation of a new one.

This is the place, too, to quote a passage in Caird which Adams unaccountably truncates. Caird, he says, 'summarizes his position in two propositions', first that the biblical writers believed literally that the world had had a beginning in the past and would have an end in the future, and second that they regularly used end-of-the-world language metaphorically to refer to that which they well knew was not the end of the world.³⁷⁰ However, Caird in fact summarized his position not in two propositions but in three, and the third one is not unimportant both for ancient sources and for modern readers:

As with all other uses of metaphor, we have to allow for the likelihood of some literalist misinterpretation on the part of the hearer, and for the possibility of some blurring of the edges between vehicle and tenor on the part of the speaker.³⁷¹

Caird's warning seems not to have been heeded, especially as applied to Daniel 7 and its use in the first century.³⁷² This is clear when Adams

discusses Jeremiah 4.³⁷³ Jeremiah's description of the disaster is, he says, 'obviously poetic in both structure and style', and yet, he says, 'there can be little question that what is being depicted by means of the literary imagery is "the breakdown of the created order"'. But Adams then notes that in Jeremiah 4.27–8 God declares that he will not make a complete destruction, which 'seems to suggest that the undoing of creation depicted in verses 23–26 is neither total nor final.' Well, quite, we might think. But then Adams continues:

Yet, the catastrophe foreseen is inevitable: 'I have not relented nor will I turn back.' After God's pronouncement in vv. 27–28, the focus on the coming invasion by Babylon resumes in v. 29.³⁷⁴

The only thing wrong with that sentence is the word 'resumes'. Adams himself has said that the description is 'obviously poetic', and I agree. The whole passage has been about Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem. Caird again: Jeremiah would have been a false prophet if Babylon had not overthrown Jerusalem, but nobody was going to make that accusation on the grounds that creation had not after all reverted to *tohu wabohu*.³⁷⁵

Similar things can be said in relation to Daniel. The key question for our purposes (though it is not, curiously, a question Adams ever addresses) is, How is Daniel being read in the first century? We here build on what has been said earlier in this chapter to bring into sharp focus the present question of 'end-of-the-world' language. Josephus speaks of the oracle which was inciting the mid-century rebels to revolt, and which was taken to predict that at that time a world ruler would arise from Judaea. This, as we saw, must refer to Daniel 9, where the seventy years of exile have become seventy weeks of years. But Daniel 9 does not itself speak of a world ruler; that must be a reference to chapters 2 and 7, both of which Josephus neatly avoids rather than explain to his Roman audience exactly how they would be read at the time. Josephus, of course, 'officially' makes the 'oracle' refer to Vespasian, who went from the siege of Jerusalem to become world ruler. This was politically convenient, to say the least, but when Josephus writes about Daniel in *Antiquities* we get the sense that he still sees him as a true prophet, just as he does with Moses in Deuteronomy 32.³⁷⁶

Another key piece of first-century evidence about how Daniel was being read, as again we saw earlier, is *4 Ezra* 11—12, where the angel tells the seer that the vision of the eagle and the lion is the same vision that Daniel had, but that it is now to be explained differently (12.11–12). The point of the vision (however we explain its relation to the rest of *4 Ezra*) is clear: the Messiah will speak words of judgment against the Roman eagle, because ‘the Most High has looked at his times; now they have ended, and his ages have reached completion’ (11.44). The Messiah will destroy the evil empire, and set God’s faithful people free, making them joyful until the eventual end, the final day of judgment (12.32–4).³⁷⁷ In this passage, there is no mention of the lion riding on a cloud, whether upwards or downwards: in other words, the apocalyptic metaphor of Daniel 7 has been cashed out into that which, arguably, it denoted all along, namely the victory of God’s people, probably under the leadership of the Messiah, over the pagan empires of the world.³⁷⁸ The same is true of *2 Baruch* 35—40, which clearly follows the ‘four kingdoms’ of Daniel 2 and 7 and the arrival of the Messiah with his universal dominion.³⁷⁹ The authors of these two apocalypses are, on the one hand, clearly tracking Daniel 7. On the other hand, they are perfectly happy to drop his particular image (the heavenly court and the arrival and enthronement there of the ‘one like a son of man’) and to substitute their own: in Ezra’s case, the roaring lion, in Baruch’s case, the fountain and the vine.

Similar points emerge in relation to many other passages in second-Temple literature. Sometimes the combination of metaphorical colouring and actual concrete portents seems to work, as for instance in *4 Ezra* 5, where Adams rightly insists that the language of blood dripping from wood, and stones speaking, is ‘not meant to be read factually’ (perhaps wisely, he does not point out that the next line is ‘the peoples shall be troubled, and the stars shall fall’, lest the reader should suppose the latter of these at least to be metaphorical too, thus challenging his own book-title). And he is probably right to say that, in the larger passage, ‘it is also clear that actual fearful events in nature are anticipated’, though how one is supposed to judge which parts of passages like this are predicting actual concrete fearful

portents and which parts are metaphor he once more does not say, and the reader is bound to think the matter more than a little arbitrary.³⁸⁰

When we get to the *Sibylline Oracles* 3.669–701, however, Adams's guard seems to be down, and he allows himself to write a paragraph full of confusion:

This is certainly an oracle about national crisis and deliverance [well, yes, thinks the reader], *but* the scenario is indisputably eschatological [yes; but, as we pointed out, to use 'eschatological' in that way simply begs the question], and the scale of judgment and redemption universal and cosmic [what distinction does Adams intend between 'universal' and 'cosmic', we wonder?]. It is not a historical or singular enemy that attacks Israel, but the kings of the earth in general. [This too is in line with prophetic language and with e.g. Psalm 2.1–6, and we see in the New Testament – e.g. Acts 4 – how that can be applied.] The occasion is the eschatological world war, with God intervening finally and decisively on behalf of his people and establishing his uncontested dominion on earth. [Again, it is revealing to see how this language is already applied in early Christian writings to the situation with God's rule already established in the risen Jesus.] The *Sibylline Oracles* are predictive literature, so there is no doubt that actual catastrophic and transformative events in the natural realm are envisaged, *even though* the language is metaphorical and colourful.³⁸¹

That last sentence alone is remarkable. Why 'so'? Can one not write 'predictive literature' about all sorts of future events, from the collapse of the space-time universe right down to a fall in the price of grain? And if the language is – as we may readily agree – 'metaphorical and colourful', how can there be 'no doubt' that it is none the less literal? And why should there be any problem ('even though') about metaphorical language denoting catastrophic events? Similar questions arise in Adams's treatment of *Sibylline Oracles* 5.155–161, which Adams admits is focused on the fall of Babylon (i.e. Rome), but nevertheless includes reference to an actual comet which will 'destroy the whole earth'. The same point emerges in relation to 5.211–213, whose clear reference to 'Ethiopia' does not, says Adams, negate 'the cosmic scope' of the preceding lines.³⁸²

Another important related point is raised by Dale Allison: in many second-Temple apocalyptic texts, there is an allusion to the events at Mount Sinai, and we must assume (he says) that these references were meant literally. True, in his early work, Allison had viewed Pseudo-Philo's account

of Sinai as basically metaphorical.³⁸³ But now, in the light of the writings of Aristobulus, an Alexandrian Jew of the second century BC quoted by Eusebius, Allison says he has revised this judgment. Aristobulus describes the great fire at Sinai which burned but consumed nothing, and he took this quite literally, along with the trumpet-blasts that accompanied the fire. Well and good; but Aristobulus is clearly exaggerating for rhetorical effect, and is not trying to draw out any symbolic significance. More to the point, he does *not*, as Allison leads us to expect that he will, endorse *any* of the rather fantastic statements in Pseudo-Philo itself: Aristobulus is innocent of rolling mountains, boiling abysses, the folding up of the heavens, the gathering together of the stars, and so on. These too, of course, look like rhetorical exaggeration rather than carefully coded symbolic metaphor. Insofar as they anticipate the New Testament's use of apocalyptic language, as I suggested myself,³⁸⁴ they are simply a way of saying that this was a classic moment when the living God interacted directly with the world.

In the same way, Allison's question to me, as to whether Philo was taking Isaiah 11 and similar passages literally when speaking of wild beasts that become tame, can be answered with a happy affirmative.³⁸⁵ It has never been part of my case that all biblical and post-biblical eschatological language must be taken as metaphor. Daniel's four monsters were metaphors for world-empires; but Daniel and his readers assumed that there really were four of them, that they used real concrete violence, and that they would really and literally be overthrown.

All in all, we seem still to be faced with some confusion as to how metaphors work. When the metaphors in question come laden with earlier meanings in well-known texts, the question presses even more: what justification have we for ignoring those earlier meanings?

This leads to a further point of enormous importance. The literature we call 'apocalyptic' frequently refers to actual catastrophic events, such as earthquakes, famines and the like.³⁸⁶ The reader naturally and rightly takes such references as being to concrete events in the natural and human world. There is no sense that they are metaphorical, or a code for something else. These are frequently referred to as 'portents', events which function as

signs of great events soon to occur. Of course, right across the ancient world and sometimes the modern world too, what we normally call ‘natural phenomena’ – actual rainbows, actual shooting stars, actual eclipses of the sun or moon, and so on – were and are seen in this way, as ‘signs’. Adams, Allison and others have seized on this as though it formed a problem for the view of second-Temple literature (including early Christian literature) which I have expounded. There you are, they say: the writers *did* envisage actual cosmic collapse.³⁸⁷

On the contrary. When Josephus speaks of portents in *War* Book 6 – a star like a sword suspended over the city, a comet which continued for a year, a sudden brilliant light at midnight, a cow giving birth to a lamb, the massive gates of the Temple swinging open of their own accord, and so forth – he really does think that these were concrete events to which his words refer literally, not metaphorically.³⁸⁸ Of course. No good reader would think otherwise. But the point of these, and the other portents Josephus mentions, in line with the view of such portents right across the ancient world, was not that they functioned metonymically. They were not an advance foretaste of a larger version of the same thing. The climax of Josephus’s story was not a heaven full of sword-shaped stars all falling on Jerusalem, or an even bigger comet tumbling to earth. The meaning of the cow giving birth to a lamb was not that fairly soon all the farmers in Judaea were going to find their cows giving birth to lambs, or their sheep to goat-kids, or their horses to donkey-foals. The point of all these portents was that they functioned, not as metonyms, but as warning *metaphors*: they were signs of massive upheavals in the socio-political world, of the death of Julius Caesar, the fall of Cleopatra, or the demise of Troy. Sometimes, in the pagan world, such strange events were seen as giving advice: stop the expedition at once! At other times, especially in the Roman world, they were understood as signs of divine anger; the city or nation would then take advice from the augurs, propitiate the divine wrath by offering the appropriate sacrifices, and so escape the coming catastrophe.³⁸⁹ But, to say it once more, the fact that all these things, falling stars, monstrous births, the raining of blood, sudden thunderstorms, statues that started to behave

strangely, and so on, were all ‘taken literally’, i.e. believed to refer to actual concrete events, did not mean that they were understood as signs of *further* concrete events *of the same sort* – *all* the stars falling, *all* animals having monstrous births, *all* statues misbehaving, and so on. They were signs that great and frightening changes were taking place, or about to take place, in what, today, we refer to as the ‘socio-political’ world: in other words, they referred to equally concrete events (they were not ‘metaphors’ for ‘spiritual realities’) but *of a different sort*. It will not do to use the phrase ‘socio-political’ dismissively, as Adams does, as though these were ‘mere’, irrelevant political goings-on. We moderns should not forget that in the ancient world many rulers were regarded, quite genuinely, as divine, as were many cities (think of Athene and Roma, for a start). If Caesar dies, if Athens falls, we are not talking about ‘trivial’ socio-political events. We are talking about events in which the whole complex divine and human fabric is being ripped apart, with unforeseeable and terrifying consequences.³⁹⁰

If that was so in the pagan world, how much more was it the case in the Jewish world, where the Jerusalem Temple had for a thousand years been seen as the place where heaven and earth met. The portents recorded by Josephus are all interpreted by him as heaven-sent concrete events of one sort, actual bizarre ‘natural phenomena’, whose purpose was to point the way forward to a concrete event of another sort, namely the fall of Jerusalem itself. There was nothing ‘merely socio-political’ about *that*.

One of the crucial points which Adams and Allison both seem to miss is one that has emerged more and more clearly from recent scholarship on ancient Jewish ‘apocalyptic’ literature. ‘Apocalyptic’ is deeply *political*.³⁹¹ Now of course one could say that it is ‘political’ to declare that the space-time universe is coming to a shuddering halt; that does indeed reduce to irrelevance otherwise impressive displays of earthly power. But this does not seem to be how ‘political’ is being used in recent studies. ‘Apocalyptic’ literature, whether in the second-Temple Jewish world or early Christianity, seems to be designed to give its hearers and readers *an alternative frame of reference within which to live their lives*, an alternative narrative to that which the world’s power-brokers are putting out, an alternative symbolic

universe to reshape their imagination and structure their worldview. People whose worldviews are thus realigned may not instantly form political parties or take up arms to march against enemies, but they will live differently. The ruling powers of the world will find them, at least from time to time, inconvenient and unco-operative. There can be no doubt that this was the effect which was created by the early Christians, not least by Paul, and we have good reason to think that their use of ‘apocalyptic’ language, exactly in the tradition of the second-Temple Jews, was a significant part of how this effect was generated. They did not expect the stars to fall from the sky. They did expect the creator God to do extraordinary things for which comets, earthquakes and other portents might be powerful and appropriate metaphors.

(v) Story and Scripture

All that we have said so far leads back to a point of enormous importance for our reading of Paul the apostle. The primary way in which scripture itself was seen was not simply as a rag-bag, a miscellaneous collection of texts from which one might summon up a maxim, an example, a historical insight, a ‘type’ or whatever. All of those are of course there in profusion. But they are seen, even sometimes by an allegorist like Philo, and certainly by second-Temple Jews with a reforming agenda, such as Qumran and the Pharisees, in terms of the *overall narrative* within which the second-Temple reader was presumed to be living. Scripture functioned as the earlier acts in the play in which Essene covenanters, Pharisaic sages, revolutionary leaders and others all assumed themselves to be actors.

Some parts of the earlier story contained promises and warnings about times far ahead in the future. Deuteronomy 27—30, as we have seen, was regularly read in that way, with Leviticus 26 coming in alongside and adding the note of ‘sabbath’. Daniel – the whole book, not just the cryptic chronological clues in chapter 9 – was read as the script for a great social, cultural, political and of course theological drama which was even now rushing towards its denouement. When the Qumran scribes wrote ‘pesher’

exegesis on biblical prophecies, this was not an arbitrary or fanciful exercise, but flowed directly from their belief that they were indeed the people of the renewed covenant, for whom therefore all the ancient prophecies must now be finding their ‘yes’. To this extent, and in other ways as well, they were doing their best to take what scripture itself said very seriously, not simply to foist strange and unnatural interpretations upon it.³⁹² This is the most basic point to make about the way scripture was being read. The manifold complexities that flow out in all directions – we shall come to them in due course – must be held within this larger framework.

This was the framework, I take it, within which the self-imposed Pharisaic task of the development of oral Torah is to be understood. I completely take Michael Fishbane’s point, that the Pharisees saw themselves within a larger continuum, developing for their own day the laws which needed to be articulated to make clear, or relevant, what was not obviously clear or relevant in the biblical text, and thus doing for their own time what at least some of the biblical writers themselves had done.³⁹³ They were precisely living within a *narrative*: a worldview within which the primary legislation had been laid down but within which, in their own day, fresh work was needed. The fact that they conceived of that fresh work in terms of the interpretation and application of Torah grows naturally out of what we have already seen in this chapter, that Torah was already playing a role of community formation and definition, not simply one of moral guidance for the puzzled individual. In particular, we should be clear that this development and intensification contributes directly to the vision of Deuteronomy 30: this is how Israel must turn back to YHWH with heart and soul, and discover and obey the full meaning of Torah. The development of oral law, then, should also be seen within an implicit *eschatological* narrative, at least in the period before AD 135. This is part of how Israel must advance towards the divinely promised future.

Within that, too, we must make the point that, even when it often seems obscure to a present-day reader, the context of a scriptural allusion or echo is again and again very important. Whole passages, whole themes, can be called to mind with a single reference. This point, naturally, has to be tested

against individual passages, but when that is done the test regularly comes out positive. Those who studied scripture intensively, which of course includes Essenes and Pharisees in particular, knew the material inside out and could evoke a whole world of textual reference with a word or phrase. The rabbis continued this tradition.³⁹⁴

(vi) From Story to Question: the Implicit Pharisaic Worldview

Praxis, symbol and story lead the eye to the implicit questions which, we have argued, can be raised within any worldview. Who are we, where are we, what's wrong, what's the solution, and what time is it? In *NTPG* I gave brief answers intended to apply to the larger unit, the Jewish world as a whole.³⁹⁵ Here we confine ourselves to the Pharisees, and couch our questions and answers in the first person plural, doing our best to approximate to an emic analysis.

Who are we? We are a group of Jews who find ourselves dissatisfied with the way our country is being run and with our life as a people, at home and abroad. We are therefore devoting ourselves to the study and practice of Torah, as a kind of elite corps, intending to advance the time when Israel will finally be redeemed, when our God will reveal his faithfulness to our nation.

Where are we? Mostly, it seems, in the holy land, which is where we might prefer to be; but some of us live and work in the Diaspora. We are, however, mostly living under the rule of the Roman empire (some, perhaps, far out in the east, have other pagan overlords), and we have struck a deal that we will pray *for* the emperor, not *to* him as everyone else is forced to do.³⁹⁶

What's wrong? There are not nearly enough of us who take Torah with proper seriousness, and even among those who do there are schools developing which the tough-minded among us regard as dangerously compromised. What counts, after all, is absolute purity. We do not imagine that we never sin, or never incur impurity, but we deal with it at once according to the methods and means of atonement and purification given by

God and prescribed in the law. That is what it means to be ‘perfect in the law’. But we cannot compromise or collude with the wickedness we see in the nations all around us, and that goes especially for the rulers of the nations. Ever since the days in Egypt, and then again from the time in Babylon (where some of us still are) to the present, we have known what pagan rulers are like, and what it’s like to live under them. We will not be content until we no longer have to live as, in effect, slaves under these pagans, paying them taxes. Behind the problem of Israel’s large-scale failure to obey Torah properly is the much bigger problem: when will our God reveal his faithfulness to the covenant, by judging the pagans, liberating us from their wicked grasp, and setting up his ultimate kingdom? That’s what’s wrong: it hasn’t happened yet.

What’s the solution? To the smaller-scale problem: a campaign to persuade more Jews to take upon themselves the yoke of Torah. To the larger-scale problem: to pray (prayer is especially important; the Shema alone is the very foundation of our existence) and to wait in purity, to keep the feasts and the fasts, to study scripture ... and perhaps, so some of us think, to join up with those who are eager for armed resistance and revolution. We have as our great models of ‘zeal for Torah’ the heroes of old, Phinehas and Elijah especially. They were not afraid to use the sword in the service of God. Nor were our more recent heroes, the Maccabean freedom-fighters. We venerate, too, the martyrs who died cruel deaths rather than defile themselves with pagan food and practices. We are waiting for a new exodus, and perhaps a new Moses to lead it. Some of us want to hurry that process along.

What time is it? Well, there is a lot of discussion about that, because nobody is completely sure how to calculate the Great Jubilee of Daniel 9. But it has to be soon. The ‘present age’ will give way to the ‘age to come’;³⁹⁷ the present time is the time of continuing exile and slavery, despite various false dawns; some of us did make it back to our own land, but whether we did or didn’t we are still in the long, dark period Daniel 9 predicted, the ‘exile’ of Deuteronomy 28. The coming age, however, will be the time of freedom, and some of us have begun to think that maybe that

coming age is being secretly inaugurated as we develop and pass on the oral law and do our best to keep it. Maybe that's the way God's faithfulness is being revealed. Meanwhile, we are frustrated that the great biblical laws about jubilee have usually been honoured in the breach rather than the observance. We who keep the sabbath very carefully week by week are hoping and praying for the great Sabbath, the time when our God will have completed the work of rescuing Israel, and we can enjoy 'rest' like Joshua's people did once the land was settled. It is time for 'messianic time', for a new *kind* of time, for the same thing to happen to our time and history as happens in space and matter when we go to the Temple: an intersection of our world with God's world, of our time with God's time. That's what happens every week, every sabbath. We want all those times of rest to come rushing together as the true Jubilee, the real freedom-moment, not just because we want a new exodus but because we want to share God's ultimate rest, the joy of work complete. [398](#)

These provisional answers, I suggest, emerge from the worldview of a zealous first-century Pharisee. They fit together with the praxis, the symbols and the stories. And together they raise the question: how can we then understand the particular *theological* position of such a group? In other words: what are their core beliefs and consequent beliefs? And what, then, are their aims and intentions?

[5. The Theology of a Pharisee](#)

It is not difficult to draw out from what has already been said the main lines of Pharisaic theology, bringing into brief and I hope sharp focus the larger and longer treatment in *The New Testament and the People of God* chapters 9 and 10. Granted that Jewish thinkers do not characteristically write systematic theologies, the best categories available for understanding their thinking about God and the world are monotheism, election and eschatology. One God; one people of God; one future for God's world. All other theological categories and discussions will be discovered not only to

fit well within that framework, but to gain in clarity and coherence from being so placed.³⁹⁹

I have already stressed that ‘monotheism’ as applied to first-century Jewish belief in general and Pharisaic belief in particular is far from being an abstract concept, the recognition that there may be ‘one God’ as opposed to many.⁴⁰⁰ The fundamental Jewish confession, the Shema, is not a mere intellectual assent to a proposition about the inner being of the one God. It is a commitment, a moment of as it were saluting the flag, a personal statement of allegiance to *this God in particular*. To say, ‘Hear, O Israel, YHWH our God, YHWH is one’ is a way of saying, at the same time, ‘No other gods before this one!’ And that is a way of saying, ‘We are to keep ourselves from the idols of the nations, and to do our best to work for the overthrow of their blasphemies.’ Thus what might seem to us like abstract concepts about the one God are in fact to be seen as a means of stiffening resistance to persecution, summoning up courage for martyrdom. Here, famously, is the mother in 2 Maccabees, urging her youngest son to strengthen his resolve after his six older brothers have been tortured to death by the pagan tyrant:

My son, have pity on me. I carried you for nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed (*hoti ouk ex ontōn epoiēsen auta ho theos*). And in the same way the human race came into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.⁴⁰¹

Creatio ex nihilo in the service of political resistance! Backed up by bodily resurrection! That is what Pharisaic monotheism looked like. Granted, there may have been some, even among resistance fighters, whose commitment to Jewish-style monotheism was not as firm as it might have been. Hence the embarrassing surprise of finding pagan amulets on the bodies of fallen revolutionaries.⁴⁰² But we are safe in saying that no serious Pharisee would have gone in for such compromises, or indeed agreed with the principle that what really mattered was not necessarily what you believed but bringing up

your children as Jews.⁴⁰³ Monotheism mattered to a Pharisee. Praying the Shema was linked directly to loyalty to law and covenant, to God's kingdom. And thereby to everything else. Invoke the God who hovers over his people, hiding them under the shadow of his wings!⁴⁰⁴

Within this kind of monotheism, prayer leads directly to engagement with the challenges of the social and political world, and vice versa. This is part of what is meant by insisting that first-century Pharisaic monotheism was *creational* and *covenantal* monotheism: the one God was not a pantheist's god, 'the divine' within *to pan* ('everything'). Nor was he a Deist's or Epicurean god, a distant, faceless bureaucrat who might indeed be enjoying himself thoroughly because he was so far away from the muddle and mess of our world. That is why Jews in general, and Pharisees in particular, were averse to joining in other cults in the Diaspora, even cults of a supposed 'One God'.⁴⁰⁵ The Pharisee's one God was the God who *made* the world and was thoroughly engaged with it without being identified with it. The world was not just 'good', as though in a kind of concession ('Well, I suppose it's all right'), but *full of his glory*, charged with his grandeur, silently telling the story from day to day and night to night. The creator was not simply the sum total of the divine impulses and energies within the world. Rather, the Pharisees (like many other Jews) were happy to speak of the creator God graciously condescending to dwell in the Temple, and (as a substitute, but an important one for the majority who could not get to the Temple day by day) in and through Torah. This God was not far away. His presence and power could be known and felt, in and as Torah, Shekinah, Wisdom. His glory and his name were his gifts to his people as they worshipped, prayed, sacrificed, studied and obeyed.

It follows directly from creational monotheism that the one God wanted his good creation to be properly ordered. The fact that the Pharisees were bitterly opposed to the Sadducees, the aristocracy who ran the Temple and pretty much everything else, was not because they were modern left-wing revolutionaries, rejecting all structures of authority and hoping instead for a kind of holy anarchy. Far from it. The texts we normally rely on to get at Pharisaic belief indicate a sense of divine order, an order against which

actual rulers are to be measured. Again and again when the Pharisees emerge into the half-light of first-century history (half-light because, with most of the incidents, we have to factor in the bias of Josephus as he retells them) it is because they are protesting against what is being done by the authorities, rather than against order and authority per se.⁴⁰⁶ When Josephus describes the Pharisees as believing in ‘synergism’, over against the Sadducees who believed in ‘free will’ and the Essenes who believed in ‘determinism’, the strong probability, I believe, is that this is Josephus’s translation of political reality into apparently harmless philosophical categories. The powerful, aristocratic Sadducees believed they could do what they liked; the disempowered Essenes believed that they simply had to wait for God to act; the Pharisees believed that they were required to work towards bringing God’s kingdom, even though in the end it was up to God himself how and when he would do it. Those are the three-dimensional versions of the two-dimensional analysis Josephus presents for the benefit of his non-Jewish readers. But the created order was basically good, as was its ordering through human structures. The present human occupiers of those structures could be called to account, or replaced by other humans who would do a better job. All that seems basic to Pharisaic theology.

Monotheism of any kind always faces a challenge in dealing with the fact of evil; particularly human evil, but also the sense that the whole creation is somehow infected with a sickness that thwarts the creator’s purpose, which is that his glory and power should fill the whole world. Jewish monotheism offers, as its basic solution to the problem of evil, belief in election, in the creator’s choice of a people as his own, to serve his larger purposes. Abraham and his family are to become the means of restoring humanity, restoring the garden; hence the promise of the land.⁴⁰⁷ (This is not, it should be noted, an attempt to answer the question of why there is ‘evil’ in the creator’s good world in the first place, but rather an attempt to say what he is going to do about it. Like Marx, ancient Jews seem to have thought that the point was not to explain the world but to change it. Only when faced with the terrible events of AD 70 do writers like *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* invoke the idea that human evil, including the continuing guilt of Israel

itself, must be traced back to Adam.⁴⁰⁸) Philo has a remarkable statement of this doctrine of redemptive election: the Jewish people are to the world what the priest is to the state; in other words, they are on the one hand the people of prayer in the midst of the world, and on the other hand the people through whom the one God makes his will known to all people.⁴⁰⁹ This idea of Israel as the special people of the one God is woven into every strand of Jewish life; the Pharisees made it their business to embody it. The many-sided story we observed in the previous section of this chapter, a story woven deeply into texts we may take to be Pharisaic but also visible more broadly, is of the one God calling Israel to be the means of putting the world to rights at last. Israel is, as it were, the advance guard, the part of the human family that the creator is sorting out ahead of the rest.⁴¹⁰ ‘Election’ is a way of talking about Abraham, about the covenant, and not least about the Torah: Torah is God’s gift, not indeed to the nations⁴¹¹ but specifically to Israel, to enable his people to know him and to live that genuinely human life of which Torah offers the outline. Torah thus marks out Israel as the chosen people of the creator God, as witnessed by the specific ‘works of Torah’ which the surrounding nations noticed as creating a wall between Jews and everybody else.⁴¹² Hence the importance of the symbols we studied earlier.

But what happens when election seems itself to be called into question, as for instance by great national disasters up to and including exile and/or the destruction of Jerusalem? That is precisely the problem of Psalm 89 and elsewhere, the question with which the great exilic prophets particularly wrestled, the question addressed also by Deuteronomy 27—32. It was also, of course, the problem faced in one way or another throughout the second-Temple period and all the way on to AD 135.⁴¹³ Without wishing to be too explicit too soon, it may be worth stressing here and now: *this is the sharp edge of the question faced by second-Temple Jews, the primary question to which the earliest Christians perceived the achievement of Jesus to be the answer.* If Israel is the divine solution for the problems of the world, and if Israel itself is now suffering from a sharply focused version of those problems, how will Israel’s God deal with that very specific problem and

hence get the plan of election back on track? Once one grasps this way of putting the question, which has comparatively little to do with the questions much western theology has brought to Paul, all kinds of puzzles in his writings can be seen in a clear, fresh light.

We have thus approached, from the theological angle, the topic we discovered at the heart of our study of the narrative world of second-Temple Jews. If Israel is chosen to be the people through whom the creator will put the world to rights, what happens when Israel itself needs to be put to rights? The answer given by the Pharisees was reasonably clear: Israel needs to learn how to keep Torah, how to keep it properly this time. If Israel wants the covenant God to be faithful to his promises and bring the restoration they longed for, Israel has to be faithful to this God, to Torah, to the covenant. Plenty of evidence in scripture itself indicated that something like this was the right answer. Since Paul the apostle basically agrees with this answer, though providing a radical and shocking fresh analysis of what 'keeping Torah properly' and 'being faithful to God' now looks like, we may confidently conclude that this was what Saul of Tarsus, the zealous Pharisee, had believed as well.⁴¹⁴

All this comes to a head, for Pharisees in particular (and for Saul of Tarsus above all, granted his subsequent history), when we put monotheism and election together with eschatology.⁴¹⁵ There is one future for God's world, the future when God will do what he promised in the Prophets and the Psalms, and bring to completion the great story in which the world had been living, the story to which Israel had the clue in its scriptures. When that happens, when the 'age to come' arrives, God will judge the wicked and vindicate his people, bringing to birth his sovereign and healing rule in the renewed cosmos, raising the righteous dead to new bodily life so that they can share this new world – indeed, so that they may share in running it.⁴¹⁶ This is what the world, the entire cosmos, has been waiting for. This is the true 'apocalyptic' expectation of second-Temple Jews. It was not the dualistic expectation of a world destroyed and a people rescued into a non-spatio-temporal 'salvation'. Nor was it the 'invasion' of the cosmos from outside, without reference to any previous story. It was the creational-

monotheist expectation of creation rescued and healed and, within that, of Israel vindicated at last.⁴¹⁷ Granted the status of humans within creational monotheism, humans would have to be put right if creation was to be put right. Granted the status of Israel within election, itself the solution to the problem within creational monotheism, Israel would have to be put right if humans were to be put right. What is to be ‘revealed’ in the great coming apocalypse, seen from within the second-Temple Jewish world, would therefore be the way in which Israel, and thence humanity, and thence creation itself, were to be put right. The apparent complexities of Paul’s theology are the direct result of his wrestling simultaneously with these interlocking, Russian-doll like questions from his own new angle of vision, the angle given to him in the events concerning Jesus.

If second-Temple Jews believed that the creator God, the lord of the covenant, was going to do all this, the question then presses: how could one tell, in the present, who were ‘the righteous’, the ones who would be found to be on God’s side on the great coming day, the ones who would inherit ‘the coming age’? This is how the question which much later theology has rendered so abstract and timeless – the question of ‘justification’ and, beyond that, of ‘salvation’ itself as conceived within western theology – comes into focus in actual first-century discourse.

Having said that, we are bound to find it frustrating that we have almost no texts from this period that do what we would like, namely, speak from a clearly Pharisaic point of view about what Paul the apostle calls ‘justification by works of the law’. The closest we get, as is well known, is the Essene document 4QMMT. Though this document arguably criticizes the Pharisees, it appears to share, so far as we can tell, a sense of the shape of how eschatology works in relation to election and thus to present justification, enabling us to make the substitution of Pharisaic elements for Essene ones in the hope that we will thereby come closer to the answer.⁴¹⁸

The point can be summarized thus. First, God will soon bring the whole world into judgment, at which point some people will be ‘reckoned in the right’, as Abraham and Phinehas were. Second, there are particular things, even in the present time, which will function as signs of that coming

verdict. Third, those particular things are naturally enough the things that mark out loyal Israelites from disloyal ones; in other words (remember Mattathias!) strong, zealous adherence to Torah and covenant. Fourth, as a result, those who perform these things *in the present time* can thus be assured that the verdict to be issued *in the future*, when the age to come is finally launched, can already be known, can be anticipated, in the present. *This, I believe, is what a first-century Pharisee would have meant by ‘justification by the works of the law’.*

With MMT, as I said, the ‘works’ in question (‘a selection of works of Torah’, *miqsat ma‘asē hatorah*, hence the acronym MMT) are post-biblical.⁴¹⁹ That is, they are not the basic biblical Torah-works of sabbath, circumcision and food laws that would mark Jews off from their pagan neighbours. Further, these ‘works’ are very much Temple-specific – laws about sacrifices and various aspects of cultic purity. This means that they are designed to mark off one Temple-based group, with their particular purity-regulations, from another Temple-based group who would have done things differently. Just who these groups are is of course debated, but that is irrelevant for our present purposes. The point is this: we have here an *inner-Jewish* distinction, not a distinction between Jew and gentile.⁴²⁰ And this is the point where our present discussion joins up with the earlier one about the reappropriation of the great story of Deuteronomy 27—30, because the key passage about works and justification comes immediately after the retelling of that story in MMT C 9–16. That is why MMT is so important as part of the second-Temple backdrop for Romans 10, where again justification and Deuteronomy 30 are immediately juxtaposed.⁴²¹

There are two different fragmentary scrolls that supply the final lines of MMT. Reconciling their slight differences, we arrive at something like this:

We have written to you (singular) this selection of works of Torah, which we think are good for you and for your people, for we saw that you have intellect and knowledge of Torah. Reflect on all these matters, and seek from him that he may support your counsel and keep far from you the evil scheming and the counsel of Belial, so that at the end of time, you may rejoice in finding that these selected words of ours are true. And it shall be reckoned to you as righteousness, when you do what is upright and good before him, for your good and that of Israel.⁴²²

This is the eschatological scheme the writer has in mind:

- a. at the 'end of time' or the 'end of days', the new day spoken of in Deuteronomy 30, the day of renewal and 'return from exile', God will judge the whole world, 'reckoning righteousness to' (that is, vindicating as in a lawcourt) his true people as genuine covenant members;
- b. the people who will thus be vindicated at the end are the ones who will have been loyal to him, to Torah, to the covenant, in the present;
- c. loyalty now consists of following *this* 'selection of works of Torah';
- d. therefore you can tell *in the present* who will be 'vindicated' or 'justified' *in the future*, because they are the people who, here and now, are performing this 'selection of works of Torah'. Do these things, and 'it will be reckoned to you as righteousness'.

This, I suggest, has exactly the same *shape* as what we may take to be the Pharisaic doctrine, only with different *content*. The Pharisees, we judge from the apparently anti-Pharisaic polemic of MMT, would not have agreed with this particular 'selection of works of Torah'. But the eschatological shape of the doctrine is becoming more and more recognizable. How would this work out?

First, the Pharisee would see the great, ultimate division in humankind as being between Israel and the nations. Israel, the chosen people of the creator God, would be vindicated at the last day: 'All Israel has a share in the age to come.'⁴²³ But how is Israel marked out as 'age to come' people in advance of that day? Answer, obviously: through Torah, given to the whole people. How does Torah mark Israel out from the nations? Answer, again obviously: keeping the law in general, but particularly the distinctive laws of sabbath, food and circumcision. If you do these, you will be able to see already, in advance of the eschaton, who God's ultimate people really are, who will 'inherit the age to come'. The Jewish people did often regard themselves as morally superior to the nations, but in our period this was symbolized graphically by the 'works of Torah' in the sense of sabbath, circumcision and food-laws. These were the badges one would wear. 'Works of Torah', in a fairly straightforward biblical sense (these 'works' were not, in other words, Pharisaic inventions or developments, but were commands from the Pentateuch itself) were what marked out 'Israel' against the rest of humankind. Keep those, and you can tell in the present that you will be vindicated as God's people in the future.

Second, it is clear from the whole Pharisaic project that, like Qumran but on different grounds, the Pharisees made sharp distinctions between themselves and the large multitude of Jews whom they regarded as (in varying degrees) compromised, assimilated, or otherwise insufficiently serious in their Torah-practice. If we know anything about the early Pharisaic movement, and specially the movement as it exists in the time of Saul of Tarsus, we know that the Pharisees were busily developing their own oral Torah, making the biblical laws more precise, more specific and relevant to every conceivable situation. That is the project which reaches one climax with the Mishnah and then goes on to its successors, the Talmudim and their associated literatures. At this level the ‘works of Torah’ might include particular Pharisaic interpretations, and it would then be a question between different Pharisees as to whether this or that one would ultimately matter in terms of ‘inheriting the age to come’. After all, no sooner has the Mishnah declared that ‘all Israel has a share in the age to come’ than it provides a list of exceptions: not the resurrection-deniers (in other words, the Sadducees), not those who deny the divine origin of Torah, and not ‘an Epicurean’.⁴²⁴ There follows a further set of lists, of biblical characters and groups whose chance of inheriting the age to come is debated.⁴²⁵ Here, therefore, there is a line drawn not just between Jews and others but within the company of Jews themselves. A hard-line Pharisee might well say, ‘Now we really know who will inherit the age to come, and how we can be clear about that in the present time. It is not enough (though it is essential) to keep the biblical laws which separate us from the nations; we must also keep the oral laws which bring Torah into every detail of life, which enable us to be zealous and loyal in our own day, and which will separate us Pharisees from the compromised assimilators who think of themselves as Jews but are denying that status by their deeds.’ We Pharisees can, in other words, anticipate the final divine verdict, the judgment of *the last day*, by practising true, worked-out, Pharisaically developed oral Torah *in the present time*. Thus would the implicit *forensic setting* (the ultimate divine law-court) merge with the *covenantal significance* (the question at issue is, who the people of the one God really are) and find expression

within an *eschatological framework* (the last day anticipated in the present) to give the doctrine to which Paul refers when he speaks of having a righteousness of his own, based on Torah, or of justification by works of the law.

A further line could perhaps be drawn between the Pharisaic schools of Paul's day. It is well known that the debates between the Hillelites and Shammaites could become heated, yet they did not for the most part attempt to put one another out of the assembly or warn one another that to follow their line might result in not inheriting the age to come. But the tolerance of stricter and more lenient opinions among different Pharisaic groups was not extended to the groups just mentioned, Sadducees, sceptics and the immoral.

We may therefore suppose (supposition is all we have, in the absence of direct evidence, but this is where all the lines of evidence converge) that a first-century Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus would have seen the picture like this:

- a. In the 'age to come', the creator God will judge the wicked (pagans, and renegade Jews), and will vindicate (= declare 'righteous') his people (i.e. will declare that they are part of his 'all Israel').
- b. The present marks of this vindicated/justified people will be the things which show their loyalty to their God and their zeal for his covenant.
- c. These things are, more precisely, the true keeping of Torah: (a) keeping the 'works' which mark out Jews from their pagan neighbours, and (b) keeping the 'works' which mark out good, observant Jews from non-observant – in extreme cases, the sceptics and the wicked, though there might be other more fine-tuned categories as well.⁴²⁶
- d. You can therefore tell in the present who will be 'vindicated' in the future, because they are those who keep 'the works of Torah' in this way in the present time.

I have spelled this out at some length for rather obvious reasons to do with our preparation for understanding the mindset, and the particular thought-patterns, of one Pharisee in particular. As has become clear, I see what might be called 'the doctrine of justification' having its nest at the interface between election and eschatology. Both remain dependent on creational monotheism. It is the responsibility of the creator to put the world right at the last; a basically linear history moving towards that goal of 'judgment'

(in the sense, as in Psalms 96 and 98, of ‘putting everything right’) is itself part of that sort of monotheism. Within that linear history, the particular story which Israel told about itself (and, within that, the specific forms of that story which we have seen to characterize Pharisaism) had to do with Torah in particular, and with Israel’s obligation to keep Torah. It is fascinating to see how this is expressed in the very careful study of Roland Deines. Speaking of the ‘individual understanding of religion’ which was not restricted ‘to the world of men or priests’, he says:

That shows how powerfully personal praxis of religion has surged alongside the official form of religion, to some measure as the result of hellenization. It was therefore no longer sufficient to regulate the cult; rather, everybody, men and women, must contribute their part to make possible the deliverance of the country. They were to do this by knowing and doing the commandments, each in his own individual sphere.⁴²⁷

Yes, indeed: ‘the deliverance of the country’. Not ‘must contribute to their own post-mortem life of bliss in heaven’; Deines has read the texts right, and concluded that the Pharisees held a solidly this-worldly soteriology, to which their law-keeping was umbilically attached. This is why he is also right to speak later of ‘the nation’s standing with God and thus its future’, and of ‘the Law’s *soteriological relevance*’ as requiring ‘precise’ interpretation and observance.⁴²⁸ Deines makes these points, quite rightly, against Sanders, but does not seem to see (and Carson, summarizing his work, does not seem to see⁴²⁹) how strongly they tell in favour of a very different doctrine of ‘justification by works of Torah’ to that which protestant theology has traditionally ascribed to ‘Pharisaic Judaism’ (and that which Carson and his fellow editors had hoped to support). Keeping the law so that God would liberate Israel is no more and no less than Deuteronomy 30 had indicated as the means by which exile would be undone at last. The question is: what counts as ‘doing the Torah’? To that, Saul of Tarsus had a thorough set of answers, which Paul the apostle restated in a shockingly and radically revised form. Through the law, he said, I died to the law, so that I might live to God ...⁴³⁰

Finally in relation to eschatology, we must note the full import of the cosmic vision which is there even in Philo and which is rooted in those ancient biblical texts which we see emerging in the writings of Paul. This is where our earlier discussion of the symbols of a Pharisaic worldview comes into its own; for the ideology of the Temple, which as we saw remained central even in the post-Mishnaic world where nobody alive even had a grandparent who had seen the Temple itself, was all about YHWH's promise to fill the house with his glory, his glorious presence, the Shekinah. Some of the earliest texts which speak of this 'filling' speak of it as relating to a much larger promise, that one day YHWH would fill *the whole earth* with his glory. Indeed, one of the foundational texts declares that this has already happened: the Seraphim in Isaiah 6 sing that 'the whole earth is full of his glory.'⁴³¹

A classic formulation of this element of second-Temple Jewish hope may be found in Isaiah 40.5: 'the glory of YHWH shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of YHWH has spoken it.' To understand this passage we have to remind ourselves that a central part of the significance of the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians was precisely that the divine glory, which had dwelt in the wilderness tabernacle as in Exodus 40, and in the Temple ever since Solomon's consecration of it in 1 Kings 8, had disappeared, abandoning the Temple to its fate. This picture of the Shekinah glory leaving the Temple is presented classically in Ezekiel 10—11, a direct result of the idolatry of the priests within the Temple. But one of the fascinating features of the second-Temple Jewish world, the world that emerged following the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, is that nowhere are we told that YHWH and his glory have at last returned. Indeed, we are told the opposite. As we saw, Ezekiel says, at the end of his book, that when the Temple is finally and properly rebuilt, the Shekinah will return, but there is no sign in this period that it has yet done so. The priests are finding their Temple service wearisome because YHWH has *not* returned; so the prophet Malachi assures them that 'the Lord whom you seek *will* suddenly come to his temple' – while warning them as well that they may not be able to stand before him when he does return.⁴³² This

prophecy of the returning divine glory is quite widespread in later Jewish literature.⁴³³ It will have conjured up memories and echoes of those earlier moments such as Isaiah 6, when the prophet saw YHWH shrouded by smoke and hymned by the seraphim.

But it is not only the glory of YHWH himself that is to be restored in the coming new age when God brings his judgment and mercy to bear on the world afresh. It is also the glory of humankind. In a theme particularly noticeable in the Dead Sea Scrolls, we find promises that ‘all the glory of Adam’ shall belong to the penitent, and/or the righteous, within Israel.⁴³⁴ This belongs of course to the ancient Jewish notion of humankind made in the creator’s image, made to reflect this God not only back to God but also out into God’s world. ‘The glory of Adam’ seems to include the dominion, the stewardship, exercised by Adam over all God’s creation. This theme remains in parallel, almost in tension, with the theme of the final revelation of God’s own personal glory. I do not think that second-Temple Jews found a way to bring them together.

There is, however, a pointer towards an integration of these two themes in some of the reflections about the coming Messiah. In 2 Samuel 7 David proposes to build a house for YHWH, but he is told that instead YHWH will build him a ‘house’.⁴³⁵ Playing on the double meaning of the word ‘house’, the king’s intention to build a physical temple where the glory of YHWH can dwell for ever is trumped, superseded one might say, by the promise that God will give David a son to sit on his throne, a son who will turn out to be God’s own son. But how can this be an *answer* to David’s intention, that there will be a permanent place for God to dwell among his people? Only if, in some sense, the coming king will be the reality towards which the Temple will turn out to be a mere signpost. Somehow, the king will be the place where, and the means by which, the living God comes to dwell among his people.

This notion may be discerned, albeit cryptically, with the so-called Servant Songs in Isaiah 40—55, where the work of the Servant seems to answer, however paradoxically, to the prophecy, already cited, about the reappearance of the glory of YHWH. ‘Who would have thought’, muses the

prophet, ‘that he was the Arm of YHWH?’ (53.1). But then, like so much else, these prophecies seem to be in abeyance from the time of the geographical return of the Jews right through, past the Maccabean period which promised so much but produced so little, to the time when John the Baptist appeared announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God and promising, in line with Isaiah and Malachi, that YHWH himself was on the way and would shortly appear in judgment and mercy.

With that, we might have found ourselves in the opening pages of the gospels, but that is not, of course, our present purpose. More significant here is to note the fairly widespread biblical and post-biblical notion that what is supposed to be true of the Temple – that YHWH will put his glory and his name there – is then supposed to be true, somehow, of the whole creation. It is not enough that Israel’s God will return to Zion, important though that is.⁴³⁶ The symbol-world we explored earlier, particularly the nexus between Temple and cosmos, gives rise to a previously hidden eschatological theme. Now, at last, YHWH’s glory will fill the whole earth:

Blessed be YHWH, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be his glorious name for ever; *may his glory fill the whole earth.*

Amen and Amen.⁴³⁷

Then YHWH said, ‘I do forgive, just as you have asked; nevertheless – as I live, and *as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of YHWH* – none of the people who have seen my glory ... and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors ...’⁴³⁸

Is it not from YHWH of hosts that peoples labour only to feed the flames, and nations weary themselves for nothing? But *the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of YHWH*, as the waters cover the sea.⁴³⁹

With these belong other closely related passages:

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for *the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH* as the waters cover the sea.⁴⁴⁰

He loves righteousness and justice; *the earth is full of the steadfast love of YHWH.*⁴⁴¹

The earth, O YHWH, is *full of your steadfast love*; teach me your statutes.⁴⁴²

And particularly, linking these together and alluding to the two key passages in Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8:

These all look to you, to give them their food in due season;

when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit [Heb. *ruach*, 'breath' or 'wind'] they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of YHWH endure for ever; may YHWH rejoice in his works – who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.

I will sing to YHWH as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.⁴⁴³

How are these passages, or rather the underlying theme of YHWH's glory and other attributes spreading out from the Temple into the rest of the cosmos, understood or developed in the Jewish world of Paul's day – and perhaps particularly in Pharisaic circles?

For a start (a long way from the world of the Pharisees!), there is Philo. In line with the passage we saw a moment ago, he declares that the Jewish people in whose lives the 'angels and words' are active have the chance to be

a house of God, a holy temple, a highly beautiful dwelling-place; for, just possibly, the one who is the whole world's Householder, and yours as well, will watch over you as his special house, to keep you for ever under his protection, safe from harm.⁴⁴⁴

Once again Beale, following Walton, sees a regular theme here. The purpose of creation, with Adam and Eve told to work in the garden which was the place of the divine presence, was that they should extend that garden out into the rest of the world, taking the divine presence with them.⁴⁴⁵ This theme comes to expression in David's preparations for the building of the Temple, where he praises the God of Israel for being sovereign over the heavens and the earth.⁴⁴⁶ Ezekiel's promises of a new Temple explicitly evoke the Eden theme, indicating the creator's intention to make his name known throughout the world.⁴⁴⁷ The eschatological promises towards the end of Isaiah link the glorious new state of Jerusalem

with the promise of new heavens and new earth.⁴⁴⁸ Zechariah speaks of a coming huge Temple, without walls, because YHWH himself will be the wall, and ‘the glory in her midst’, whereupon Israel will spread out across the world. ‘Israel, as a corporate Adam, must spread out to subdue the earth and fill it with [God’s] glory.’⁴⁴⁹ The ‘stone’ in Daniel 2 can be read the same way, as the foundation stone of the new Temple which then becomes the mountain that fills the whole earth, displacing the blasphemous statue that was there before.⁴⁵⁰

It is no surprise to find similar themes in Qumran, as well as in the famous passage in Ben-Sirach 24 where Wisdom, also eventually identified as Torah, comes to live in the Temple in Jerusalem, which is conceived as a new garden of Eden.⁴⁵¹ So too in the *Sibylline Oracles* and in *1 Enoch* there is mention of a giant Temple spread out for all the inhabitants of the earth.⁴⁵² The evidence is clear if not massive; but it is enough to show that at least some second-Temple readers of scripture picked up the hints already there that the promise concerning the eventual new Temple would join up with the promise of YHWH’s returning glory, and that both together would fulfil the otherwise puzzling repeated scriptural promise that YHWH’s glory would then fill the whole earth.

For much of the second-Temple period this remains as almost a dream, something too good to be true. Pagans are ravaging the holy land; the Temple itself is managed by a corrupt aristocracy. But the links in scripture between Genesis 1, Isaiah 11, Ezekiel 37—48 and the other passages surveyed have not gone away, with the Psalms always there to remind the regular worshipper of the underlying theme. I propose, as a hypothesis to be tested by his mature writings, that Saul of Tarsus knew this theme, and tapped into it in some of his most remarkable rewritings of Jewish eschatology.

We have thus sketched the ‘basic beliefs’ of a first-century Pharisee: monotheism, election and eschatology. We have developed some sense at least of some of the ‘consequent beliefs’, the beliefs that were taken to be entailed by those ‘basic beliefs’ and which played an important role in

bringing those larger beliefs into expression. What, now, about the aims and intentions which those beliefs generated and sustained?

6. The Aims of a Zealous Pharisee

Part of the answer to this question is easy; part is more controversial.

The two outer limits are easy. First, personal purity. This has been sufficiently explored in many other places. Second, the ultimate goal of God's coming fulfilment of his promises. The two join up: keeping Torah in the present is one of the means by which that goal will be reached, one of the signs that one belongs already to the age to come. For many Pharisees, maintaining personal purity to the required standard, and working in whatever way possible for the coming of God's kingdom, will have been the main aims of one's life. If there were substantial Pharisaic communities in the Diaspora as well as in the holy land itself, which is disputed, then the Torah will have loomed even larger, making up for being away from the Temple.⁴⁵³ In such a case, as well, Torah-observance was likewise accentuated because this was what enabled the 'wall' to be maintained between God's people and the idolatrous pagan world.⁴⁵⁴

For some, however, there may have been two other aims as well. As we shall see towards the end of this book, it is characteristic of Jewish approaches to suppose that the world is to be put right and that for this to happen something needs to be *done*. First, Philo makes it quite clear that a strong part of the Pharisees' aim was not just to try to influence other, non-Pharisaic, Jews, but to put considerable pressure on them to shape up, to approximate to their own high levels of purity, as best they could. Discussing what divine vengeance would do to someone who swears falsely, Philo envisages the possibility that such a person might evade human punishments, but then says that actually even that is unlikely because there are thousands of zealots keeping watch and ready to take action.

This cuts sharply against the thesis of Sanders, following Morton Smith, that the Pharisees were a small group who kept themselves to themselves (and largely in Jerusalem); but that was always an extreme position, designed more to get the Pharisees off the hook of regular Christian polemic than to establish a secure historical basis.⁴⁵⁵ It is highly likely, in view of this and other evidence, that many Pharisees, and certainly those who saw themselves as especially 'zealous' for 'the teachings of the ancestors', will have occupied themselves in trying to bring less enthusiastic lawkeepers into line. Philo's statement can hardly only have applied in Jerusalem itself. We may perhaps infer from it that there were such people in Alexandria in his day, and if there then possibly elsewhere in the Diaspora too.

Somewhere in this general area we meet the question, to which we shall return, about the actual and at least quasi-legal persecution of those who were perceived to be blaspheming, those who were not only not following Torah properly but actually appearing to subvert it (and perhaps undermining the Temple too). Philo's fascinating window on zealous Pharisaic activity opens up more questions than it solves.

We know for certain, however, that Saul of Tarsus persecuted the early church and was himself persecuted. We can be sure that neither of these activities were random activities, unrelated to the structure of what Pharisees believed was required by 'zeal'. This violence was what they were called and authorized by God to do, in defence of Torah and covenant. That was, more or less, what Mattathias had said in commissioning his sons to carry on the zealous work.⁴⁵⁶

What about the other question, then? Did Pharisees try to convert gentiles, to make proselytes? The well-known passage in Matthew 23.15 strongly implies this: Jesus there takes Pharisees to task for crossing land and sea to make a single proselyte, and thereby making him twice as much a child of hell as themselves. The saying ascribed to Hillel in *Aboth* sounds similar: 'Love mankind and bring them nigh to the law.'⁴⁵⁷ For a long time these were held to be more or less decisive, and it was assumed that Saul of Tarsus had in his pre-Christian days not only persecuted Christians, presumably for the reasons just given, but also gone about, perhaps on long

travels, to persuade non-Jews to convert. Perhaps, people have speculated, this is what he means about ‘preaching circumcision’ in Galatians 5.11. (‘Am I still doing it?’ he asks. ‘Of course not.’)

There is no question that in the second-Temple period many gentiles were attracted to the Jewish way of life. Plenty of them were content to remain as ‘god-fearers’, attending the synagogue and trying to follow the basic Jewish codes, but not going all the way and accepting circumcision. Some at least did become full proselytes, with all that that involved. But did Jews, particularly Pharisees, go looking for such people? The debate has swung this way and that over the last couple of decades, and the most recent contributions, once all the appropriate checks and balances have been allowed for, conclude that by and large they did not. The Pharisees were ready to accept and even encourage people who wanted to join, but mostly they expected gentiles to come to them (this was, after all, what the prophets had indicated⁴⁵⁸) rather than for them to have to go out searching for them.⁴⁵⁹ It is possible that different Jewish communities in different parts of the Diaspora took different lines; some have suggested that the Jewish community in Rome was more active than others.⁴⁶⁰ One Jewish writer has even speculated that the origins of Paul’s missionary impulse must have lain in the pagan practices of going around to encourage people to worship Osiris, Hercules or whoever, on the grounds that there were no models within the Jewish world for what he seems to have done.⁴⁶¹ This, as we shall see, is an unnecessary if curiously interesting hypothesis. I accept what seems to be the majority view: most Jews, and most Pharisees, did not routinely mount missions to go looking for potential proselytes. All history is full of exceptions, and ancient history full of gaps; Matthew 23 may perhaps have a case in mind now lost to us. But we have no particular reason to suppose that the young Saul of Tarsus went off hunting for gentiles. His missionary impulse came from quite a different source.

7. Conclusion

The worldview of a first-century Pharisee has thus come into focus. Living somewhere on the spectrum between the extreme and possibly violent zeal of the ardent Shammaite and the extreme and possibly flexible caution of the ardent Hillelite, the Pharisee was passionately concerned about the ancestral traditions, particularly the law of Moses and the development of that into oral law, and about the importance of keeping this double Torah not simply because it was required, or in order to earn the divine favour, but because a renewed keeping of the law with all one's heart and soul was one of the biblically stated conditions (as in Deuteronomy 30) for the great renewal, the eschaton and all that it would mean. It was what constituted the appropriate and faithful response to the faithfulness of Israel's God, invoking the protection of the divine bird hovering over Jerusalem. Personal piety, and personal hope, were firmly held within the ongoing story of the life and hope of Israel as a whole. The controlling stories, fleshed out in symbol and praxis, gave the essential body to the theological soul of monotheism, election and eschatology.

None of this was merely about ideas, about figuring out a consistent way of speaking about God, about Israel, about the future. The Pharisaic worldview embraced the whole of reality. It was not simply about 'religion', whether in the ancient or the modern senses. It included a 'wisdom', an understanding of the world and of its creator, which belonged with what the ancients thought of as 'philosophy'. It included a community-oriented agenda which belonged with 'politics'. That is why, if we are to understand Paul the apostle, we must see him within this rich, many-sided world. To move through the different concentric circles: the Pharisaic worldview was about the whole business of being *human*; of being a *Jewish* human; of living in a Jewish *community*; of living in a *threatened* Jewish community; of living *with wisdom, integrity and hope* in a threatened Jewish community; of living *with zeal for Torah, the covenant and above all Israel's faithful God* within a threatened Jewish community.

The threats came in many guises. It was perhaps easier to spot the danger in a mob coming to burn down a synagogue than in a friendly non-Jew across the street with interestingly different ideas and cultural assumptions.

It is to those interestingly different ideas and assumptions, circulating around the eastern Mediterranean world in the first century and forming the wider cultural context for Saul of Tarsus, that we now turn.

¹ One might note Pliny's letter (*Ep.* 3.5) about his uncle, Pliny the Elder, who wrote hundreds of books of which only the *Natural History*, a substantial work in itself, survives. We trace but the outskirts of their ways.

² The point is now so frequently made that one hopes it will soon be taken for granted. See, e.g., following the massive work of Hengel 1974 and others, Skarsaune 2002, 75f., and, going even further, Meeks 2001 and Martin 2001 (who are basically amplifying what I said in *NTPG* 342). On the word 'Judaism', and its strikingly different meaning in Paul's day and our own, see Mason 2007 ([see above, xxi](#), and [below, 82, 89](#)).

³ Isa. 31.5; Dt. 32.10f.; Ps. 17.8; 36.7; 57.1; 61.4; 63.7; 91.4.

⁴ cf. Gen. 1.2.

⁵ See e.g. the massive *Neuer Wettstein*; at a more popular level, Keener 1993; Evans and Porter 2000. The dangers of 'parallelomania' are as present in this kind of enterprise as they were in the Jewish studies about which Sandmel issued his famous warning (Sandmel 1962), but one has to start somewhere. Standing on the shoulders of text-reading giants, even if the giants were sometimes looking the wrong way, is better than crawling around on the floor.

⁶ There is no need to rehearse again the historical narrative from the Maccabees to bar-Kochba, endlessly fascinating though it is; my previous account stands, and there are plenty of others out there as well: e.g. Grabbe 1992; Mendels 1992; Skarsaune 2002.

⁷ e.g. 2 Macc. 14.34.

⁸ e.g. Barclay 1996, 15.

⁹ See Rom. 3.30: God will justify the circumcision *on the basis of faith* and the ‘foreskin’ *through faith*; see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 483. The subtle difference is reflected, one might suggest, throughout Gal. 3; cf. too Eph. 2.11–21.

¹⁰ See my remarks on Sanders 1977 at 1321–4 below, and in *Interpreters*.

¹¹ I set out the basic argument in *NTPG* 181–203 and developed it in *JVG* 369–83.

¹² Neusner 1973, 83 cites Ex. 19.6, where Israel is called to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’; but see the nuanced proposal of Schwartz 1992 ch. 3.

¹³ See Philo *De Spec. Leg.* 2.253 (discussed in *JVG* 379f. and below, 82f., 165).

¹⁴ So, rightly, Deines 2001, 503.

¹⁵ cf. *NTPG* 181–4; and, recently, the summary in Deines 2010; though Deines seems to me to minimize the overlap between extreme (‘zealous’) Pharisaism and Josephus’s ‘fourth philosophy’.

¹⁶ See Charlesworth’s cautionary added paragraph in R. B. Wright 1985, 642.

¹⁷ See Deines 2001, 461–74; Flusser 1996, 400.

¹⁸ Phil. 3.5; Ac. 23.6; 26.5. Acts also refers to Pharisees at 5.34; 15.5 and more widely in the incident in 23.1–10.

¹⁹ see *NTPG* 182f., 186.

²⁰ For a while many drew back from using the rabbis (see, still, e.g. Schnabel 2009, 488) because it was so hard to be sure which material could be dated when. The work of Instone-Brewer 1992 advanced different claims; and in Instone-Brewer 2004 (see e.g. 28–40), the beginning of a massive project, he claims to provide more clarity and chronological discernment. Reviewers have not (to put it mildly) been convinced (see e.g. Hezser 2005). Segal 2003, 162 suggests that in the place of a project like Strack-Billerbeck, going through the NT and providing rabbinic ‘parallels’, one might better write a commentary on the Mishnah finding parallels in the NT and using them to date early traditions – not totally unlike Instone-Brewer’s project, and one suspects equally unwelcome to many. A recent very helpful survey, pulling back as does *NTPG* from Sanders’s stranger suggestions but still supporting strongly a position very like my own, is that of Deines 2001.

²¹ See now e.g. the careful distinction between the second-Temple period and that of the rabbis, in relation to one particular question (that of ‘proselyte conversion’), in Thiessen 2011, 108, 145f.

²² Details in *NTPG* 161–6.

²³ Käsemann 1971 [1969], 64; see the discussion in *Interpreters* and *Perspectives*, chs. 1, 4.

²⁴ So e.g. jKil. 1.4 (27a); bPesah. 108a; see the discussion in Reif 2006, 323.

²⁵ This is what, according to Mason 2007, constitutes the strict first-century sense of ‘Judaism’, i.e. an active movement to put pressure on other Jews to conform to high Torah-based standards and to defend the ancestral way of life against pagan attack.

²⁶ *De Spec. Leg.* 2.253.

²⁷ e.g. *Ps. Sol.* 1.2f.; 2.2–4; 4.14–25; 8.1–34.

²⁸ See Deines 2001, 498.

²⁹ See e.g. Gal. 1.14; Phil. 3.5f.; supported by Ac. 23.6; 26.5. The attempt to label this as a fiction, denying that Paul was ever a Pharisee (e.g. Maccoby 1986), is a desperate ploy that has not found favour.

³⁰ Thus, though Josephus in some passages distinguishes the Pharisees from the revolutionary ‘fourth philosophy’, elsewhere he admits that the two movements more or less shaded off into one another; see the discussions of e.g. Jos. *War* 2.118 and *Ant.* 4–10, 23 in *NTPG* 191; the whole discussion in *NTPG* 185–99 is important here.

³¹ See bBer. 61b; and the discussion [in ch. 9 below](#). The Shema also invoked the exodus (by quoting Num. 15.37–41); see mBer. 1.5. On the dating see Instone-Brewer 2004, 47f. In mBer. 2.5 Gamaliel II, challenged by his students for not availing himself of the legal permission not to say the Shema on his wedding night, responds that he will not cast off from himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, even for a moment.

³² On Phinehas, see Num. 25.7–13; Elijah, 1 Kgs. 18.20–40, with 19.10. On their use in later tradition see the full survey in Hengel 1989 [1961], 147–83; on Elijah cf. e.g. 1 Macc. 2.58 ([on which see immediately below](#)); Sir. 48.1–11; and see Paul’s references to his own ‘zeal’ in Gal. 1.14; Phil. 3.6.

³³ God as enemy of Israel’s enemies: cf. Ex. 23.22; 2 Macc. 10.26; cf. Gen. 12.3; Dt. 30.7; Jer. 30.20.

³⁴ *Ant.* 13.172.

³⁵ So Hengel 1991, 119, referring to Hübner’s caution on the point (Hübner 1984 [1978], 44 n. 16): ‘I assume that the familiar division into the two Schools of Hillel and Shammai merely pinpoints two main tendencies and conceals a picture which is really much more varied.’

³⁶ See *NTPG* 183. The texts are mYad. 3.5; mEduy. 5.3.

³⁷ Ac. 5.34–9; cf. [86 below](#).

³⁸ Mendels 1992, 201: the support for the revolt in 132 shows that what he calls ‘Jewish nationalism’ ‘must have been latent for many years among the Jews of Palestine’.

³⁹ tSot. 47b.

⁴⁰ Ac. 5.35–9. For the idea of ‘fighting against God’, *theomachoi*, cf. 2 Macc. 7.19: that is what pagans do. Perhaps Gamaliel (or Luke, in summarizing him) is thinking: beware, we might find ourselves to be acting in a pagan fashion.

⁴¹ Hengel 1991, 28, 67.

⁴² Against, esp., Jeremias 1969. On Saul as Shammaite see e.g. Haacker 1971–2 and 1975; Kim 1981, 41–4, with older literature; Niebuhr 1992, 56f.; Donaldson 1997, 275. See too, cautiously but in my view correctly, Hübner 1984 [1978], 44: ‘I am not absolutely concerned to show that Paul was a Shammaite, but rather that he was not a Hillelite, i.e., that he did not belong to the conciliatory wing of the Pharisees.’ So too Bruce 1977, 50–2; Segal 2003, 167, 170f., though most of these writers do not seem to grasp the *political* sense in which this argument works, and in which it is important for understanding Paul’s mature thought.

⁴³ Gal. 1.13f. On the meaning of ‘Judaism’ here see Mason 2007, [discussed above](#).

⁴⁴ Phil. 3.4–6. See the similar testimony in Ac. 22.3: ‘brought up according to the strictness of our ancestral law, being zealous for God’ (*pepaideumenos kata akribeian tou patrōou nomou, zēlōtēs hyparchōn tou theou*). At this point at least, the portrait of Paul in Acts coincides precisely with his own self-portrait in the letters.

⁴⁵ 1 Macc. 1.41–64.

[46](#) 2.11f.

[47](#) 2.19–22.

[48](#) 1 Macc. 2.23–6, referring to Num. 25.6–8. This is then described as his ‘zeal’, reflecting God’s own ‘zeal’ for Israel (25.11); Phinehas is given by God a covenant of perpetual priesthood, ‘because he was zealous for his God’ (*ezēlōsen tō theō autou*) ‘and made atonement for the Israelites’ (25.12f.). Cp. Ps. 106.30f.; Sir. 45.23–5. Mattathias’s act is described in such a way that those with biblical ears attuned will begin to think: here we see the beginning of a new covenant of priesthood, a new atonement. That, as the book will reveal, is exactly what the author has in mind. For the relation of Phinehas and the ‘zeal’ tradition to Paul’s remarks in Gal. 1.13f. see *Perspectives*, ch. 10.

[49](#) This quote from Gen. 15.6, in its present context, puts Abraham in the same bracket as Phinehas, of whom Ps. 106 (LXX 105).31 says exactly the same thing.

[50](#) Just in case the reader had not picked up the allusion two verses before. Cf. too Sir. 45.23f.

[51](#) See 1 Kgs. 19—20: nb. esp. 19.10, 14, where Elijah repeats ‘I have been very zealous (*zēlōn ezēlōka*) for YHWH of Hosts, referring back to his killing of the prophets of Baal; Sir. 48.1f. (also noting Elijah’s ‘zeal’).

[52](#) 2.29–68. I have slightly altered the NRSV tr. to stick close to the Gk. and let the NT echoes resound; e.g. I have rendered *doxa* as ‘glory’ (on which, see below, 686 n. 212, 754, 794); nb. the almost straightforwardly *political* meaning of *doxa*.

[53](#) On the echoes of Mk. 12.13–17, see *JVG* 502–7.

[54](#) On the complexities of ‘Hasidim’ in this period (cp. 1 Macc. 7.13; 2 Macc. 14.6; and various Qumranic and rabbinic refs.), cf. esp. Kampen 1988; 2007; Davies 1977. The oldest rabbinic ref. to people with that description is probably mBer. 5.1.

[55](#) See again *Perspectives*, ch. 10.

[56](#) See above, [xxi](#), [76](#), [82](#).

⁵⁷ Ac. 21.39; 22.3; 23.34.

⁵⁸ Barclay 1996. Barclay (xi) promises a second volume placing Paul's churches into this setting, but like some of my own projects it seems to be delayed by other concerns. In the meantime, however, we all profit from Barclay 2011.

⁵⁹ Torah and Temple-worship are, of course, the first two of the 'three things on which the world rests' in mAb. 1.2 (the other being deeds of mercy). The saying is ascribed to 'Simon the Just', variously identified but possibly the great 'Simon son of Onias' in Sir. 50.

⁶⁰ Dt. 6.9; 11.20; in rabbinic writings e.g. mBer. 3.3. A *mezuzah* is 'a small rolled-up piece of parchment on which is written [*sic*] the two passages Deut. 6.4–9; 11.13–21, and which is enclosed in a cylinder and fastened to the right-hand doorpost' (Danby 1933, 795). Like a double mirror, these miniature scrolls thus obey the commandment they themselves quote, creating an impression of an infinitely extending holy space within the tiny cylinder.

⁶¹ On Torah as the greatest divine gift cf. Kaminsky 2007, 87.

⁶² Philo *Migr.* 89–93. On Torah-observance in the Diaspora see above all Barclay 1996 (on this passage, 109f., 177f.); also e.g. Lightstone 2006 [1984], ch. 4, and *NTPG* 255.

⁶³ 1 Macc. 1.11–15; 2 Macc. 4.11–17; *Jos. Ant.* 12.241; *T. Mos.* 8.3; see *NTPG* 158, 237, with other refs. On circumcision, and the variety of Jewish positions on questions relating thereto, see now Blaschke 1998; Thiessen 2011. On the Greek Gymnasia as a major symbol of Greek culture, superimposed on conquered territories, see e.g. Price 2001 [1986, 1988], 316; Murray 2001 [1986, 1988], 220.

⁶⁴ On the refusal to defend, cf. e.g. 1 Macc. 2.32–8; 2 Macc. 6.11. Philo (*Leg.* 158) tells of Jews in Rome being allowed to collect the corn-dole a day later: see Barclay 1996, 293; and Barclay 1996, 317f. on the attraction of Jewish customs for non-Jews in Rome, despite the sneers of Juvenal, Tacitus and others. A strong case is made by Williams 2004 for the truth of the stories (known among pagan writers) of sabbath fasting among the Roman Jewish community as a sign of mourning following the conquest by Pompey in 63 BC and the recapture of Jerusalem from the Parthians in 37 BC.

⁶⁵ An obvious example: *Jos. Ap.* 2.66.

⁶⁶ e.g. 2 Macc. 6.1–11, with gentiles indulging in immorality in the Temple precincts and Jews being forced to take part in pagan ceremonies; 1 Macc. 2, [discussed above](#).

⁶⁷ On Jewish strategies for distinguishing between Jewish circumcision (and that at the regulation eight days) and the circumcision of others, see Thiessen 2011, e.g. ch. 3.

⁶⁸ 1 Macc. 2.28.

⁶⁹ See Schwartz 1992, ch. 3.

⁷⁰ e.g. 2 Macc. 6.18; 7.1; 4 Macc. 5.2; Philo *Flacc.* 96, on which see Barclay 1996, 53.

⁷¹ e.g. 3 Macc. 3.3–7; *Aristeas* 139 (see Barclay 1996, 147, 198f.).

⁷² Ac. 10.28; 11.3.

⁷³ Ac. 10.9–16; 11.4–10. Levine 2011, 504 states bluntly that 'the claim is false', but the counter-evidence she cites is hardly conclusive (e.g. the Court of the Gentiles is just as much proof of a dividing line as of an open welcome). Evidence of 'universalism' in ancient prophecy and rabbinic texts, also mentioned, do not decide the issue. Cp. Friedenreich 2011, 523: objecting to commensality, as in Gal. 2.11–14, 'conforms to norms found in numerous Jewish works from the second-Temple period: Jews ought not share meals with Gentiles or eat food prepared by them', citing Dan. 1.8–12; *Jdth.* 10–12; Tob. 1.10f.; Add. Esth. C.26 (=14.17); *Jub.* 22.16. See too esp. *NTPG* 238–40; and now Thiessen 2011, 136f., noting that the verbs used for sharing fellowship in

Ac. 10.28 (*kollaō* and *proserchomai*) can be used both for table-fellowship and for sexual congress, indicating that intermarriage and shared meals are seen in the same light.

⁷⁴ *War* 2.488, cp. *Ap.* 2.35; cf. 2 Macc. 14.38, referring to ‘the time of *ameixia*’; 3 Macc. 3.4; see Sanders 1990, trying to minimize the apparent harshness of much of the evidence (including that of the NT); Barclay 1996, 29f.

⁷⁵ See the discussion of *JosAs* in Barclay 1996, 204–16. On pagan complaints against Jews for not ‘worshipping our gods’, see Meeks 1983, 36, with e.g. *Ant.* 12.126; on the more general anti-Jewish gossip about worship and food, and about political disloyalty, cf. 3 Macc. 3.7. This turns nasty when Ptolemy complains about their ‘traditional arrogance’ which had refused him access to the Temple when he turned up in his royal splendour (*parousia*) (3.17–19).

⁷⁶ Barclay 1996, 437, citing Tac. *Hist.* 5.5.2; Diod. Sic. 34.1.2; Philostr. *Apoll.* 33; 3 Macc. 3.4, and others.

⁷⁷ *Arist.* 139 (tr. R. J. H. Shutt in Charlesworth 1985, 22, with the marginal reading ‘unbreakable’ for ‘unbroken’), cf. 142. On the whole topic see Sevenster 1975, 89–144.

⁷⁸ Barclay calls it ‘the ethnic bond’ (1996, 402–13). I was roundly told off by some colleagues for daring to refer, in *NTPG* ch. 8, to the first-century Jewish symbol of family identity as ‘racial identity’. We may accept that ‘racial’ now has inescapable modern overtones which should not be allowed to intrude on our discussion, though of course an almost greater danger comes from technical terms whose anachronistic overtones are less obvious, such as ‘nation and family’, which I used instead in *JVG* ch. 9. (‘Nationalism’, we are told, is now also under the ban – despite e.g. the title of Mendels 1992, which he justifies at ix – because of its modern meaning [Fredriksen 2007, 31f.].) The word ‘ethnic’ itself is acquiring various unhelpful overtones in the contemporary western world. If this goes on we will soon only be able to converse in the decent obscurity of learned languages. The worldview-model I am using in this project enables us to avoid the nineteenth-century overtones of ‘race’, because it shows that what matters is not genetics, but the fact of a community that lives by certain customs and narratives, in which kinship is important but is blended in with all the other factors, including a relationship with a particular territory. See now e.g. Mendels 1992; Grosby 2002. There is a charming but telling passage in *Gen. Rabb.* 40.6 (on Gen. 12.10–16), where the story of Abram is retold point by point and the story of Israel retold in parallel, with Israel as it were recapitulating Abram’s life. Neusner, commenting on this, says, ‘Any claim, therefore, that there were children of Abraham other than Israel (“after the flesh”) finds refutation in this statement’ (Neusner 1985, 2.85).

⁷⁹ 1996, 402f.

⁸⁰ cf. *NTPG* 205.

⁸¹ 226f.

⁸² On the temple at Leontopolis see Haran 1995 [1978], 46f.; Barclay 1996, 36; Fuller 2006, 44 n. 116; Porter 2009: cf. *Jos. War* 1.33; 7.422–32; *Ant.* 12.387f.; 13.62–73, 285; 20.236f. Josephus’s accounts are internally inconsistent. The Leontopolis temple stood from the mid-second century BC until closed on Vespasian’s orders in AD 73.

⁸³ See *NTPG* 224–6; *JVG* ch. 8, and frequently elsewhere (see index s.v. ‘Temple’). The work of Margaret Barker (e.g. Barker 2004), though idiosyncratic and unreliable, has at least highlighted a major gap in much western thinking at this point.

⁸⁴ *mAb.* 3.2, going on to say that this is true even if only one person is ‘occupying himself in the law’.

⁸⁵ e.g. 1QS 9.3–7; 4Q174 (=4QFlor.) 1.1–7, on which see e.g. Flusser 1988; 1996, 398f.; Gärtner 1965; Bockmuehl 2001, 401 n. 71, with other refs. ‘Works of law’ in 4Q174 1.7 presupposes a text of

ma'se torah, as e.g. Vermes 1997, 493, following *DJD* V, 53 (Allegro and Anderson), with Plate XIX, where the letter in question, though indistinct, does indeed look like a *resh* rather than a *daleth*; others (e.g. García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1998, 1.352) assume *todah* ('thanksgiving') for *torah* ('law'), perhaps as being the more natural thing to expect. In favour of *torah* we note that 1.11 speaks in the same way of the coming 'interpreter of the law', *doresh hatorah*. See the similar questions in relation to 1QS 5.21 and 6.18 ([below, 185 n. 419](#)).

⁸⁶ On synagogues see now Fine and Brolley 2009.

⁸⁷ See Skarsaune 2002, 83.

⁸⁸ Instone-Brewer 2004, 35.

⁸⁹ Prayer: e.g. Ps. 141.2 (prayer is an acceptable substitute for incense and sacrifice). Deeds of kindness: the famous saying of Johanan ben Zakkai (Avot de R Nathan 4; cf. Skarsaune 2002, 122; *NTPG* 162f. with refs. there). Non-cultic atonement: e.g. Num. 25.13; Isa. 27.9; Pss. 50.23; 51.7; 65.3; 78.38; 79.8f.; Prov. 16.6; Dan. 9.24; so Bockmuehl 2001, 401.

⁹⁰ Gen. 28.10–22.

⁹¹ Lightstone 2006 [1984], 99.

⁹² Dt. 12.5; 14.23; 16.2; 17.8; 18.6; 26.2; 1 Kgs. 11.13; 14.21; 1 Chr. 22.1; 2 Chr. 7.12; 12.13; Neh. 1.9; 1 Macc. 7.37. For the earlier 'single sanctuary' at Shiloh is found cf. Josh. 18.1; 19.51; 21.2; 22.9; Jdg. 18.31; 1 Sam. 1.3, 24; 3.21; 4.3; 1 Kgs. 14.2; Ps. 78.60 (explaining YHWH's change of residence); Jer. 7.12; 26.6.

⁹³ On the Temple in ancient Israel, and its continuing significance in biblical theology, see e.g. Clements 1965; Terrien 2000; Lundquist 2008.

⁹⁴ The 'covenant' motif is all over the place even when the word *berith* is not used, as Sanders argued in relation to the rabbis (see the discussion in *Interpreters*). See e.g. Kaminsky 2007, 137: Amos is 'covenantal' despite the absence of the word.

⁹⁵ Ex. 29.46 (italics, obviously, added). For 'dwell', the LXX has *epiklēthēnai*, 'to be invoked'; the word *epikaleō* has as a primary meaning the idea of summoning or invoking a god (LSJ s.v.).

⁹⁶ e.g. Ex. 26.1; the LXX tr. of *mshkn* is *skēnē*, 'tent'.

⁹⁷ Ex. 40.34–8.

⁹⁸ 1 Kgs. 8.10f. This picture remained potent in Israel's memory, to be invoked much later when the second temple was in distress: e.g. 3 Macc. 2.16.

⁹⁹ Isa. 6.1–5 (NRSV, alt.).

¹⁰⁰ Ps. 132.13f., drawing together the theme of the whole psalm, which itself draws together much of the Zion/Temple theology here described; cf. Dt. 12.5, 11; 14.23; 16.2; 17.8; 18.6; 26.2; 1 Kgs. 11.13; 14.21; Pss. 9.11; 26.8; 43.3; 46.4f.; 48.1–3; 68.16–18 (indicating as it were YHWH's moving house from Sinai to Zion); 74.2; 76.2; 78.68; 79.1; 84.1; 87.2; 122 *passim*; 135.21; Joel 3.21. For the continuance of this theme in the second-Temple period see Renwick 1991, 33–41, citing e.g. Sir. 50.5–7; *Jub.* 1.27f.; *1 En.* 14.13–24; 90.29–33; *Ps. Sol.* 7.1, 6; 1QS 8.5–10; 11QTemple (noting, as many do, that the Qumran community saw itself as a kind of new Temple; see above), and other literature ancient and modern.

¹⁰¹ 1 Kgs. 8.15–21. Many of the references to the 'single sanctuary' (above) specify that this is the place where YHWH will make 'his name' to dwell.

¹⁰² 2 Sam. 7.1–17, focused on vv. 12–14: 'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your seed after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son.' This is then reflected in Ps. 2.7,

immediately following the promise: ‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill’ (2.6). For Paul’s reappropriation of 2 Sam. 7 and Ps. 2 [see below, 818f.](#)

[103](#) cf. Pss. 24.7–10; 29.9; 63.2; 68.35 (the psalm brings together in a very striking manner the sovereignty of Israel’s God over all creation and his awesome presence in the Temple); 99.2.

[104](#) cf. Pss. 3.4; 18.6; 28.2; 63.2: ‘So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory’; 65.1f.; 116.4, 18f.; and, expressing that distant longing, Pss. 42—43 *passim*.

[105](#) Ps. 73.17; and cf. Sir. 24 ([below, 671f.](#)).

[106](#) Pss. 14.7; 20.2f.; 53.6; 97.8; 110.2; 134.3; Isa. 26.21; Mic. 1.2f. When the Psalmist says that God will send ‘from heaven’ to save him (e.g. Ps. 57.3), this should probably be seen as another way of saying the same thing (so Roberts 2009, 502, citing Ps. 18.7, 10 [Heb. 8, 11], sc. 18.6, 9 [Heb. 7, 10]).

[107](#) Beauty: Ps. 27.4; 50.2; 96.6; cf. Lam. 2.15; 1 Macc. 2.12 (it is a question to ponder, why Israel’s scriptures, so alive with the beauty of creation, so seldom mention ‘beauty’ explicitly); love: Ps. 48.9.

[108](#) For the ‘name’ residing in the Temple cf. e.g. 1 Kgs. 8.29; 9.3; 11.36; and, wider, Ex. 20.24; Dt. 12.11; 14.23; and, in the later period, e.g. Jdth. 9.8; 3 Macc. 2.14.

[109](#) See Roberts 2009, 502; and cp. 1 Kgs. 8.27 (‘heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!’), cp. 2 Chr. 2.6) and Isa. 66.1. When Israel’s God reveals his name to Moses at the bush (Ex. 3.1–6, 13–15) and then again after Israel’s transgression (Ex. 34.5–9), this was a token of his dangerous presence, not his discreet absence. Roberts’s claim that ‘the older language of God’s dwelling in the Temple never completely dies out’ is putting it mildly; they went on singing the Psalms, after all, which were as explicit as anything could be.

[110](#) Pss. 15; 24.3–6; 84.1–12; 93.5; 99.9; 100.4; 118.20; Isa. 6.5 again; and cf. e.g. 2 Chr. 26.16–21.

[111](#) Ps. 150.1.

[112](#) See e.g. Brown 1999, esp. chs. 2, 7; Beale 2004; Walton 2009, 100–19. Renwick 1991 is a brief but worthwhile study which, through setting an exegesis of 2 Cor. 3 within the setting of Jewish Temple-belief, and the quest for the divine ‘presence’ in particular, explores the possibility of connections which the present book is hoping to develop.

[113](#) Roberts 2009, 501.

[114](#) Jos. *War* 5.212–18, here at 218: the Greek, reminding us of e.g. Rom. 11.36, is *hoti tou theou panta kai tō theō*. The thirteen spices are further explained in Thackeray’s note in the Loeb, 266. For Josephus’s other interpretations of the cosmic meaning of the tabernacle etc. see *Ant.* 3.179–87; *War* 4.324; and for Philo, similarly, *Quis rer.* 197 (the four parts of the incense representing the four elements); *Vit. Mos.* 2.117 (the high priest’s robe representing the cosmos and its parts).

¹¹⁵ Wis. 18.24, describing Aaron's intervention during the plague in Num. 16.41–30. (Sir. 45.7–12; 50.11, we note, omits this, emphasizing only the robe's beauty and its representation of the people of Israel.) As Chesnutt 2003, 225f. points out, this constitutes a fascinating moment in which the strongly nationalist claim of Wis. 10–19 overlaps with a feature held in common with many pagan philosophers of the time, namely the Stoic and Cynic idea of the whole world as the divine temple: Heraclit. *Ep.* 4; Sen. *Ben.* 7.7.3; *Ep.* 90.29; Plut. *Tranq.* 20, etc.

¹¹⁶ See the repeated theme in *Gen. Rabb.* e.g. 3.9, where creation is set in parallel to the making of the tabernacle. Neusner 1985, commenting on this, says that the tabernacle 'stands for the cosmos'. In 4.4 the God who fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23.24) can speak with Moses at the ark.

¹¹⁷ Beale 2004.

¹¹⁸ Ps. 46.4; Isa. 33.21–4; Ezek. 47.1–12; Zech. 14.8.

¹¹⁹ Walton 2009; for the commentary, to which Beale declares himself indebted, Walton 2001. For Solomon's festival cf. 1 Kgs. 8.62–6.

¹²⁰ See further e.g. Roberts 1987 and 2009; Haran 1995 [1978].

¹²¹ Prov. 8.22–31; 1 Kgs. 3.9–12 (cp. 2 Chr. 1.7–13; Wis. 7.7–9.18); 2 Sam. 7.12f.; 1 Chr. 28.1–29.22; 2 Chr. 2–7; Ex. 31.1–11 with 2 Chr. 2.13–16 (12–15 MT/LXX). Translations sometimes obscure the primary quality of 'wisdom' here, by translating *sophia* as 'ability' etc. in Ex. 31.2; 2 Chr. 2.12. On 'wisdom' in relation to the present discussion [see below, 674–6](#).

¹²² Prayer for wisdom: 1 Kgs. 3.5–14. Solomon at once (v. 15) goes to Jerusalem and offers sacrifices before the ark of the covenant. There then follows the famous story of the two women disputing over a live and a dead child, with Solomon's wise judgment (3.16–28). Ch. 4 gives a general survey of Solomon's administration, magnificence, and fame, and then with ch. 5 we get down to work on the Temple itself.

¹²³ Even if a 'minimalist' position is taken on the question of the historicity of the pre-exilic history of Israel, the point for our purposes is that this was the narrative assumed by second-Temple Jews and early Christians.

¹²⁴ The Chronicler describes a largely unsuccessful attempt by Hezekiah to persuade the northern kingdom to come to the Passover in Jerusalem: 30.1–12.

¹²⁵ Zerubbabel is still hailed by Ben-Sirach as the rebuilder: Sir. 49.11f.

¹²⁶ For the combination of themes, cf. e.g. CD 7.15f., where 'the books of the Law are the Tabernacle of the King' (quoting Am. 5.26f.) but where 'the King' in the Amos text 'means "the congregation"' – not to the exclusion of a Messiah, but rather as his setting, because at once the text speaks of the coming 'sceptre' and 'star' in accordance with Num. 24.17. Clearly it was second nature for a Jew of this period to combine Temple, Torah, Community and Messiah.

¹²⁷ Schäfer 2003; esp. the essay by Y. Tsafir. On the coins see Mildenberg 1984.

¹²⁸ Jer. (e.g. 3.17); Ezek (8–11 etc.); Isa. (2.2f.; 11.1–11; 31.4f.; 60.13; 66.18–21) etc. See esp. *JVG* 615–24 with OT and post-biblical passages. See e.g. Newman 1992, 242: 'The prophets also employed the Glory tradition to proclaim a message of hope. The Lord will one day manifest himself, his *cabōd*, in order to reconfigure the existence of his people. Judgment and suffering will be replaced by a revelation of Glory, a manifestation which will effect a second exodus, a restoration and recreation.' Though Newman's concern goes wider than ours at this point, to include 'thronisations' like that of Ezekiel, much of his chs. 4 (on the OT) and 5 and 6 (on subsequent developments) fills in the picture I am sketching.

¹²⁹ Ezek. 48.35; cf. 35.10 (the remembrance of the divine presence in the first Temple).

¹³⁰ The spirit with them: Hag. 2.5, reflecting the previous situation of e.g. Num. 11.17; Neh. 9.20; Isa. 63.11. For a rabbinic view that the spirit had been present in the first Temple but not the second,

and would finally return, see Schäfer 1972, 112–5.

¹³¹ Hag. 2.7. Beale 2004, 117 n. 77, says (over-cautiously in my view), ‘it is quite possible that the divine presence never returned to the post-exilic temple.’

¹³² Zech. 2.4f., 10f.

¹³³ Mal. 3.1f.

¹³⁴ This proposal goes in the other direction from Davies 1991. He cites in particular Ps. 135.21 as declaring that Israel’s God ‘dwells in Jerusalem’, which could simply be a repeating of the tradition; 11QT 29.7–10, which seems to me clearly to point to a *future* dwelling; Mt. 23.21, which again may simply repeat the tradition; and Jos. *War* 6.299 (cf. Tac. *Hist.* 5.13) in which, as the Romans approach, angelic voices are heard announcing their own departure. Some of these may indeed show that some groups believed in the presence of Israel’s God in the second Temple; but the other passages I refer to here and in *JVG* seem to underscore the view of bYom. 21b, that among the things missing from the second Temple were the ark, the fire from heaven, the holy spirit, the Urim and the Thummim – and the Shekinah. See too the other rabbinic passages which speak of the second Temple as defective compared with the first, e.g. *Song R.* 8.9; *jTaan.* 2.1.65a; *Makkot* 2.7.32a; *Hor.* 3.2.47c, and *ARNa* 41 (cf. discussion in Hayward 1999, 38f.).

¹³⁵ cp. Philo *Quis rer.* 42.

¹³⁶ Some MSS have ‘people’ for ‘temple’. The Davidic promise is spoken of in 45.25, as it were in passing.

¹³⁷ I do not think, however, that this amounts to a ‘divinization’ of the high priest (against e.g. Fletcher-Louis 1999). On all this see Harrison 2011, 247–51, and e.g. Hayward 1999. The claim of Sir. was advanced, of course, in the teeth of the Samaritan alternative (cf. Sir. 50.26).

¹³⁸ See the recent discussion in Corley 2009, 287.

¹³⁹ This is not to deny that e.g. Josephus speaks in fairly glowing terms of the rule of John Hyrcanus I: cf. e.g. *War.* 1.67–9; *Ant.* 13.299f., where he says that John functioned as both chief ruler, high priest and prophet, never ignorant of the future because he was so closely in touch with ‘the Deity’ (*to daimonion* in *War*, *to theion* in *Ant.*). He left, says Josephus, ‘no ground for complaint against fortune as regards himself’; but Josephus’s ongoing story indicates that the long-awaited glorious restoration of Israel as a whole had still not been realized. When it comes to other second-Temple texts, as in *JVG* 621–4, it is of course important to distinguish between e.g. those that speak explicitly of YHWH’s return to Zion (e.g. *Jub.*, 11QT) and those with a worldwide reach (*T. Mos.* etc.). This may have had to do with different attitudes to the Temple as it then was (e.g. the Essenes regarded the present Temple as incomplete). All of them, however, look back more or less explicitly to the prophetic traditions, as above (e.g. Isa. 40.1–11; 52.7–12), in which these themes are woven tightly together.

¹⁴⁰ On lawkeeping in Sir. see further 19.20. We have no reason to think that post-Maccabean Jews of whatever variety would substantially disagree with this pre-Maccabean perspective.

¹⁴¹ See mAb. 3.2.

¹⁴² *NTPG* 215–23. One of the basic problems I have with the account of Barclay 1996, ch. 14 (he describes it as a ‘sketch’) is the almost complete absence of any sense that the people he is talking about were living within an implied larger narrative. Yes, as he says (402), ‘story, symbol and praxis’ is no doubt ‘inadequate and open to challenge’, but screening out ‘story’ altogether is far more so. What results in such a de-storied world is something that threatens to collapse into a cultural and moral narrative that looks a lot more like that of the surrounding pagan world, simply with different culture and (somewhat) different morals.

¹⁴³ e.g. Pss. 77; 79; 80; 89.

¹⁴⁴ Shaffer 1985 [1980], 99: as Mozart dies, ‘the great chord of the “Amen” does not resolve itself, but lingers on in intense reverberation.’

¹⁴⁵ For an account and explanation of the actantial model of Greimas, see Hays 2002 [1983], 82–95. It was of course Hays 1983 that alerted me to this whole way of thinking, which I explained in my own way in *Climax* ch. 10 and *NTPG* 69–77. For some reason (thinking in German rather than French, presumably), I there consistently misspelled Greimas as Griemas.

¹⁴⁶ See Ac. 1.6, where the disciples ask if this is the time when Jesus will restore the kingdom to Israel – a telling moment indeed: ‘This is the story we’ve been living in; these strange events must presumably fit into it somewhere?’

¹⁴⁷ On Qumran’s two Messiahs cf. *NTPG* 311.

¹⁴⁸ *RSG passim*, esp. (on first-century Jewish views) ch. 4.

¹⁴⁹ See exactly this point, almost in these words, in Isa. 49.6; cf. 60.3 etc.

¹⁵⁰ e.g. Isa 65–6, drawing out the implications of Isa. 55. Many texts draw together the themes of YHWH’s ‘righteousness’, ‘judgment’, ‘faithfulness’, ‘equity’, and so on: e.g. Pss. 9.8f.; 82.1–8; Ps. 107.43, in the context of the psalm as a whole.

¹⁵¹ For a brief popular-level version of this argument see *Justification* 55–63.

¹⁵² *Fresh Perspectives* (UK edn.) 11.

¹⁵³ On the ‘messianic’ movements in Judaism after the second century see e.g. Lenowitz 2001 [1998]. Any visitor to the Mount Scopus campus of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem is bound to be struck by the huge photographs of the twentieth-century ‘returning exiles’, accompanied by biblical prophecies.

¹⁵⁴ See *War* 6.312–15, and the hint about Daniel as having ‘fixed the time (*kairon hōrizen*) when these things would happen’ in *Ant.* 10.267. See also Josephus’s clear hint about the long-term prophetic meaning of Dt. 32 ([below](#)). To be sure, other texts read messianically in the period would form part of the background picture, but it is only Daniel that fulfils the primary requirements. See further the discussion in *NTPG* 312f.; and cp. Ac. 17.26. See too Mason 1994. It is true that Dan. 7 does not mention ‘Judea’ as the origin of his world ruler; but Dan. 7, as it presently stands, clearly refers to a coming ruler (whether corporate or individual) from the Jewish people, so Josephus could easily take it in that way.

¹⁵⁵ Dan. 2; 7; 9; see *NTPG* 312–17, [and below](#). It is interesting to observe that Munck 1959 [1954], 38 mentions this theme and its first-century importance, but does not allow it to shape his understanding of Paul except for his interpretation of ‘the restrainer’ of 2 Thess. 2.6.

¹⁵⁶ See recently the collection of essays in Calduch-Benages and Liesen 2006. Unfortunately (from my point of view) this in some ways fascinating work seems mostly to bracket out the point I am making about the single continuous story.

¹⁵⁷ cf. the brief summary in Wischmeyer 2006, 348–53, as the context for an understanding of Stephen’s speech in Ac. 7.

¹⁵⁸ Dt. 1.6—3.29; 6.10–25; 26.5–9; 32.7–43. On Josephus’s reading of the end of Dt. [see below](#).

¹⁵⁹ Josh. 24.2–15.

¹⁶⁰ cf. Wischmeyer 2006, 350f.

¹⁶¹ 78.70–2. See Witte 2006.

¹⁶² See Passaro 2006.

¹⁶³ cf. e.g. Pss. 72.8; 89.25; cf. Gen. 15.18; Ex. 23.31; Dt. 11.24; 1 Kgs. 4.21–4 (the full extent of territory under Solomon); Ps. 80.11; Zech. 9.10 (the territory of the coming king).

¹⁶⁴ Ps. 132.17; cf. 2 Sam. 21.17; 22.29; 1 Kgs. 11.36; 15.4; 2 Kgs. 8.19; 2 Chr. 21.7.

- [165](#) Jer. 33.23–6.
- [166](#) Ezek. 20.5–44. Cf. too the story of ‘Oholah and Oholibah’ in Ezek. 23.
- [167](#) Isa. 41.8; 51.2; 55.1–3. Comfort: 40.1; 49.13; 51.3, 12. On the messianic traits of the ‘servant’ see Walton 2003.
- [168](#) Ez. 9.6–15.
- [169](#) Neh. 9.6–38. See Vermeulen 2006.
- [170](#) Dan. 9.4–19.
- [171](#) Dan. 2.34f., 44f.; 7.13f., 18, 22, 27; 9.25–7.
- [172](#) For exploration of this theme I am much indebted to Horbury 2012.
- [173](#) Dt. 26.19; 28.1, 10–13; cf. 15.6.
- [174](#) Dt. 28.25, 43.
- [175](#) 30.1–5, 7, 16; the explicit promise about being ‘the head and not the tail’ etc. is not repeated, but may properly be understood.
- [176](#) Gen. 49.10 (Horbury 2012 speculates that Paul may have had this in mind at Rom. 15.18); Num. 24.7 LXX.
- [177](#) Isa. 9.6f.; 11.10 (quoted in Rom. 15.12); Mic. 5.1–8 [=2–9]. Cf. too Ps. 18.43–9.
- [178](#) He cites Neh. 1.8f.; Pss. 106.47; 147.2; Sir. 36.11; 2 Macc. 1.27; 2.18 and the Tenth Benediction of the *Amidah*.
- [179](#) *Flacc.* 45f.; *Leg.* 281–4. The latter passage has Herod Agrippa writing lavishly to Caligula about the ‘colonies’ sent out to lands far and wide.
- [180](#) Philo, *Praem.* 94–7.
- [181](#) cf. *Jos. Ant.* 16.27–65; cp. Agrippa I being hailed as ‘our lord’ in Alexandria itself (Philo *Flacc.* 30f., 38f.). See further Horbury 2003, ch. 3; he speaks of ‘an atmosphere of what can be called, with due reserve, Herodian messianism’ (122). Cf. too Riesner 2000, 250.
- [182](#) *Jdth.* 5.5–21; see Puerto 2006, and [below, 158](#).
- [183](#) See esp. Sir. 44.20f. with ref. to Gen. 12.3; 17.10f. (circumcision); 13.16; 15.5, 18.
- [184](#) 45.24f., echoing 2 Sam. 7.12–17 and the promise of an ‘inheritance’ as in Ps. 2.8 (also 111 [110].6). The Davidic covenant is said to be ‘from son to son’, i.e. one at a time, but that with Phinehas, ‘the heritage of Aaron’, is for the whole family, *kai tō spermati autou*.
- [185](#) It is remarkable that di Lella 2006, surveying the list of heroes, seems not to notice its quasi-eschatological presentation of Simon in ch. 50, implying that the short summary poem in ch. 49 is the actual conclusion. See too above on the function of Sir. 24 as a hint of the divine return to Zion in the form of Wisdom/Torah.
- [186](#) 1 Macc. 2.52.
- [187](#) 1 Macc. 2.49–68; see Egger-Wenzel 2006. Wischmeyer 2006, 352 seems to me wrong to suggest that here ‘the chain of *exempla* has taken the place of *historia*’ so that what matters is ‘not the history of God with Israel but the fulfilling of the Law.’ The great figures of old are, to be sure, exemplary, but the narrative in which they feature is designedly eschatological, not simply ‘paradigmatic-ethical’ or ‘ethical-religious’.
- [188](#) 3 Macc. 2.1–20.
- [189](#) 3 Macc. 6.1–15; see Corley 2006, suggesting (210f.) that a Deuteronomic covenant theology is implicit here. The prayer is answered as two angels arrive and transform imminent destruction into rescue and celebration. A further brief account of the history of the Jews, emphasizing divine providence and rescue, is put into the mouth of Ptolemy himself, after he has come to his senses, in 3 Macc. 7.2–9.

[190](#) 89.11f.

[191](#) 89.16–19.

[192](#) *1 En.* 90.37f. Charlesworth 1992, 17–19 questions whether this is a precise reference to a/the Messiah, or more open-ended. So too e.g. Collins 1987, 100f, against e.g. Goldstein 1987, 72f., who stresses that the figure has Davidic characteristics; cf. too Collins 2010 [1995], 41, suggesting that the real ‘agent of salvation’ in the text is Judas Maccabaeus, who appears as ‘that ram’ in 90.9–14. Goldstein posits a tension between *1 En.* 90 and *1 Macc.* 2; certainly it makes sense to assume various competing ways of telling, and living out, a potentially ‘royal’ theology in the period. The fact that the final animal resembles Adam tells, I think, neither for nor against a messianic identification.

[193](#) See Beckwith 1996, 235–8.

[194](#) CD 3.2.

[195](#) CD 3.4–12. On this passage see the brief but important essay of Lichtenberger 2006.

[196](#) CD 3.10f. (tr. Vermes).

[197](#) 3.12–14.

[198](#) CD 3.20.

[199](#) CD 3.21—6.11. This makes it clear that the opening account of the secret covenant renewal when the sect was founded (CD 1.1—2.1) envisages that as a one-off eschatological moment, not as an example of an ongoing ‘alternation between disloyalty to God and being led by God’ (Wischmeyer 2006, 353).

[200](#) Lichtenberger 2006, 237.

[201](#) MMT C 18–32. See the discussion in Wells 2010, 44–49. Seifrid 2007, 658 suggests that this text simply states a general truth about the pattern of curses and blessings which will then be recapitulated in the end time, in which ‘final blessing’ will be ‘contingent on obedience’. Seifrid fails, however, to see (a) the way in which the whole sequence of Dt. 27—30 is being invoked here as elsewhere, (b) the fact that this belongs within a much larger second-Temple pattern of understanding Israel’s history as a single narrative, not simply a miscellany of ‘patterns’, and (c) the fact that obedience to the specific ‘works of Torah’ which here define one Jew over against another (as opposed to ‘works’ which define a Jew over against a gentile) functions as an advance sign of the blessing which will come, à la Dt. 30, ‘at the end of time’. On this see *Perspectives*, ch. 21.

[202](#) In other words, the use of e.g. Abraham as an ‘example’ or ‘model’ (e.g. *Jub.* 16.28; 24.11) functions within the larger, essentially eschatological, purpose.

[203](#) *Jub.* 50.5. For discussion see e.g. Beckwith 1996, 238–41.

[204](#) *Jub.* 1.7–12 (note the ‘reverse echo’ of Mk. 12.1–12!); the direct quote is 1.13. This summary of Dt. 26—9 is echoed of course in 2 Kgs. 17.7–20. But 2 Kgs. does not offer there any equivalent of Dt. 30.

[205](#) *Jub.* 1.15–18, discussed further [below, 156](#).

[206](#) Dt. 30.1–3; cp. 28.13 (‘the head, and not the tail’: see above). The whole chapter is important, as we shall see later; an earlier, briefer statement of exactly the same sequence is found in Dt. 4.25–31. On the considerable extent to which *Jub.* draws on Dt. cf. Halpern-Amaru 1997, 140 n. 31. For the other refs. cf. e.g. Jer. 29.13f.; and in Qumran CD 1.7; 4QMMT C 9–16, on which [see below, 185f](#). On Dt. in second-Temple Jewish readings see Lim 2007; Lincicum 2010.

[207](#) Wis. 10—12; 13—19. On this see Gilbert 2006, with earlier refs.

[208](#) Murphy 2010 expresses reservations about the proposal of Jacobson 1996 to date the work in the early second century, listing scholars who have continued to dispute any direct reference to the

events of AD 70. The full discussion in Fisk 2001, 34–40 remains cautiously inconclusive, with a date a decade or so either side of AD 70 remaining the least unlikely.

²⁰⁹ Ps.-Phil. 19.1–16; cp. the prophecy of Kenaz at 28.6–9. See Steck 1967, 173–6; and on the use of scripture in Ps.-Phil. see above all Fisk 2001.

²¹⁰ The link of *T. Mos.* with the closing chapters in Dt. was made by Nickelsburg 1972, 29, 43–5. See Harrington 1973, suggesting (65) that *T. Mos.* offers a modification of the Dt. pattern into apostasy, punishment, partial vindication, apostasy, punishment, eschatological vindication. Beckwith 1996, 264f. argues on the basis of 7.1 that the work appears to expect the great turning-point to come around the end of the first century BC or the start of the Common Era; and that a ‘Pharisaic chronology’ of the sort which eventually turns up in *Seder Olam Rabbah* (mid-second century at least) and in bSanh. 97a was already in existence, known to the author, and formed the basis of these calculations.

²¹¹ Ps. Sol. 9.8–11 (tr. R. B. Wright in *OTP* 2.661).

²¹² Ps. Sol. 17.4, 21–4, 30–2. We should not miss the clear allusions to Ps. 2 and Isa. 11: the echoes of ‘smash ... like a potter’s jar; and ‘shatter ... with an iron rod’ and ‘destroy ... with the word of his mouth’ are intended to evoke the full picture of the Davidic king who will receive the nations as his inheritance (Ps. 2) and through whose just rule creation itself will be renewed in peace and prosperity (Isa. 11).

²¹³ Ps. Sol. 18.3–7. Here the echoes include those of the exodus (‘Israel is my son, my firstborn’, Ex. 4.22; cp. Jer. 31.9, 20; Hos. 11.1).

²¹⁴ See the Introduction in Mason and Feldman 1999.

²¹⁵ *War* 5.376–419. See Kaiser 2006. Josephus’s story is, as Kaiser dryly remarks (257), very selective.

²¹⁶ 5.412. This is of course consonant with his stated view that the ‘world ruler’ to arise from Judaea in fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy was in fact Vespasian ([see below](#)).

²¹⁷ ‘A way of salvation (*sōtērias hodos*) is still left open for you,’ he says, ‘if you will only confess and repent’ (5.415); he offers his own blood as the price of their salvation (*misthon tēs heautōn sōtērias*) as a proof that he is not speaking out of self-interest (5.419).

²¹⁸ 3.86–8.

²¹⁹ 4.43–50.

²²⁰ *Jos. War* 6.312–15, and cf. 3.399–408; cf. *NTPG* 312–4 and [above, 116f.](#)

²²¹ On which [see below, 1316f.](#)

²²² *Jos. Ant.* 4.303 (tr. Thackeray).

²²³ The v.l. which omits *kai* and *ta* does not alter the meaning. Mason and Feldman 1999, 465 n. 1043 suggests this refers to Dt. 33.6–25, while agreeing that the ‘poem’ referred to is Dt. 32. The point seems to be that Josephus is referring to the larger book in which the ‘poem’ of Dt. 32 is found, and that this larger book contains Dt. 33 where the prediction is found. Dt. 33, with its predictions of the future destiny of the twelve brothers, is referred to by Josephus later on as a separate thing (*Ant.* 4.320), and it is better to take the ‘poem’ of 4.303 (on whose ‘hexameters’ etc. see Thackeray’s note in the Loeb ad loc.) as referring to Dt. 32. Dt. 33 is, however, certainly intended by Philo *Vit. Mos.* 2.288 (see the next note). For rabbinic parallels see e.g. *Sifre Dt.* 307–33 (Ginzberg 1937, 6.155 n 920).

²²⁴ Josephus goes on, in *Ant.* 4.314, to say that the cities which were to be lost through enemy action would be restored, but would be lost again, ‘not once, but often’. Harrington 1973, 63 sees this as a sign of ‘even further expansion’ of the history outlined in Dt. 32. The question of whether Moses’ prophecies had all come to pass or whether some remained for the future is reflected in the

v.l. *genomena* for *genēsomena* in 4.320; in Philo's ref. to Dt. 33 (*Vit. Mos.* 2.288) he says that some of these prophecies have already come to pass (*ta men ēdē symbebēke*) and others are still looked for (*ta de prosdokatai*), since past fulfilment generates confidence for the future. We should also note that Josephus regards the Balaam oracle of Num. 24 as partly fulfilled and partly still for the future (*Ant.* 4.125). I am grateful to Andrew Cowan for pointing this out to me.

²²⁵ So Hays 1989a, 164; see below, ch. 15. Here, it seems to me, Hays has anticipated his own later 'turn' towards historical continuity from detached typology: Deuteronomy, he says, as read by Paul, 'renders an account of God's mysterious action through the word to bring the whole world, the Jew first and also the Greek, to acknowledge his unconditional lordship', with Dt. thus, like Isa., offering 'a prefiguration of a larger eschatological design', 'comprehend[ing] the ongoing life of the people of God in history.' The fact that Hays was not at all interested at that time in the kind of point I have been making indicates the force of what he has observed, going against the grain of his statement (163) that Dt. 'is the most surprising member of Paul's functional canon within the canon.' If I am right (in company with e.g. Scott 1993b), we should never have been surprised.

²²⁶ 4 Ez. 3.4–27; cp. the short and sorrowful summary of Israel's Adamic history in 4.26–32.

²²⁷ 4 Ez. 11–12, on which see *NTPG* 314–7.

²²⁸ 4 Ez. 13, including echoes of Dan. 2.

²²⁹ Though at one point we are told of Moses receiving such secret information: 59.4–11.

²³⁰ cf. Gurtner 2009; Henze 2010; Schürer 1973–87, 3.2, 750–6.

[231](#) 21.19–25.

[232](#) 23.4; 25.2–4.

[233](#) 28.1, perhaps echoing Dan. 9.24.

[234](#) 29.3–8; 30.1–5.

[235](#) On the persistence of the Danielic ‘four kingdoms’ cf. e.g. *Gen. Rabb.* 44.19. On the back history of such periodization see below, 299f.

[236](#) 39.3–5; the echoes of Dan. 2 and 7 are clear.

[237](#) 39.7—40.2.

[238](#) 40.3.

[239](#) 53.3–11.

[240](#) 56.5–8.

[241](#) 56.10–13. This calls into question any would-be division of ‘apocalyptic’ types which would set an Adam-based explanation of evil over against one based in the ‘watchers’.

[242](#) 57.1–3. As elsewhere in these narratives, Abraham may function in one sense as an example or model (here at 57.1f.), but this is held within the larger eschatological scheme.

[243](#) Amorites: 60.1–2. David, Solomon and Zion: 61.1–8.

[244](#) 62.1–8.

[245](#) 63—6.

[246](#) 67.6.

[247](#) 69—70.

[248](#) 70.9; 72.2–6.

[249](#) 73.1–6.

[250](#) 75.1–5; cp. Rom. 11.33–6.

[251](#) 78—86. Secrets of hearts: 83.3.

[252](#) On theories of composite origin see Schürer 1973–87, 3.2, 752.

[253](#) This is yet another indication of what Horbury (see above) has called ‘Jewish imperial thought’.

[254](#) See Neusner, Green and Frerichs 1987.

[255](#) It may be of interest to ponder the comment of *Gen. Rabb.* 44.5, in which Abram is worried that, just as he seems to have superseded Noah, so someone else may come after him and take his place on the basis of even better deeds. God reassures him; he does not need to worry: ‘When your children will fall into sin and evil deeds, I shall see a single righteous man among them who can say to the attribute of justice, “Enough”. Him I shall take and make into the atonement for them all.’ This is remarkable both in its (probable) fifth-century AD setting and as a fictive vision of an apparently atoning Messiah (a priest? a king?) as the long-term solution to the problems which Abraham’s family will face.

[256](#) See Hengel 1989 [1961].

[257](#) Though the *LAB* draws on a wide range of biblical reference to fill out its basic narrative; see Fisk 2001.

[258](#) Thus, though there are clear differences between the retellings of the narrative within the biblical books themselves and the fresh retellings in the second-Temple period, it is misleading to characterize the latter as having lost the ‘historical structures’ of the former in favour of ‘a new ethical interpretation’ or ‘a dualistic devaluation of history’ (Wischmeyer 2006, 353). One may perhaps observe a slackening of historical perspective in e.g. 4 Macc. 18.10–19, where after a quick reminder of Abel, Isaac, Joseph and Phinehas we jump to the three young men in the fire and to

Daniel with the lions before returning to Isaiah, then David and Solomon, then Ezekiel, and finally the song of Moses. But 4 Macc. is perhaps typical of a moment of transition when the Jewish traditions are being employed in the service of a philosophical agenda. (See too 4 Macc. 16.20f.: Abraham, Isaac, then the Danielic heroes.)

²⁵⁹ Reif 2006, 324f., citing Neusner 2004, 3. Reif suggests (328–35) that, following the rise of Islam, the later rabbis took up historical reference again, not least in liturgical prayers e.g. at Hanukkah. This merely accentuates the remarkable turn away from history that took place in the mid-second century and perhaps, in some thinkers (Johanan ben Zakkai?), right after 70 itself (see *NTPG* 162f.).

²⁶⁰ So e.g. Gilbert 2006, 182: ‘the re-reading of the Exodus events proposed by our author involves an eschatological perspective,’ citing his earlier treatment (Gilbert 1997, 55–60).

²⁶¹ *Ps. Sol.* 18.10–12 (the end of the last psalm in the collection); cf. Josh. 10.12–14; Isa. 38.7f.

²⁶² Steck 1967; Steck 1968. See the clear statement in e.g. 1968, 454: ‘All Israel is still in Exile just as before, whether she now finds herself in the Land, which others rule, or in the Diaspora.’ Cf. too e.g. Nickelsburg 1981, 18.

²⁶³ See Scott 1993a, 1993b. Scott suggests (1993a, 201) that the point is now ‘widely recognized’ and speaks (213) of a ‘growing consensus’, which is I fear over-optimistic; Scott 1997b, 189; the whole volume is important; e.g. Evans and Flint 1997, 305–12; see too e.g. Thielman 1994, 49–55 (55: ‘It seems safe to say that at the time when Paul wrote his letters, most Jews, whether common laborer or sophisticated priest, understood the scattering of their people throughout the world and the Roman domination of their land to be a result of Israel’s violation of the covenant that God had made with them at Sinai’); Thielman 2005, 369: ‘anyone who knew the biblical account of Israel’s history understood that Israel had not kept the law and received life but had violated the law and received the curse of exile and foreign domination ... for Paul, ... the period ... has ended.’ See too Thielman 1989, ch. 2; 1994, 48–68; 1995, 172–6; and, recently, Portier-Young 2011, 267–72. Among older writers not previously noted by me is Ackroyd 1968, 232–47, making it crystal clear that ‘exile’ quickly becomes not simply a geographical reality but ‘the symbol for the bondage from which release is to be found’ (247); Schmidt 1982, quoted by Scott 1997b, 188f. Deines 2001, 495 notes that ‘the Pharisaic movement stands for the tradition of the Deuteronomistic view of history’, referring to Steck, but apparently does not realize (nor does Carson, summarizing his article in Carson 2001b, 537–40) that the ‘Deuteronomistic view of history’ is precisely that according to which the ‘exile’ predicted in Dt. 28—9 was continuing and the ‘restoration’ promised in Dt. 30 was yet to appear. One cannot simply flatten out this scheme into a general truth such as the proposition that ‘obedience to the revealed will of God brings salvation and blessing; disobedience ... leads to exile and loss of the land’ (Deines 495). These are not things that happen, as it were, now and again at random; or at least, though that may be the case, that is not the point. They are the one-off events, in proper narrative sequence, around which Israel’s history takes its biblical shape and moves towards its eschatological fulfilment.

²⁶⁴ Carroll 1992, 575. Carroll in my judgment divides too sharply between the canonical perspectives of e.g. Ezra and Nehemiah and these ‘other voices’; the situation is more nuanced. However his emphasis, and his citation of *1–3 Enoch*, *Baruch*, *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, *CD* and *Test. XII Patr.*, can hardly in my view be gainsaid.

²⁶⁵ e.g. Bock 1999, 309 n. 15. Far worse is the apparently deliberate misunderstanding of the position by Casey 1998, 95–103, 99f., ridiculing the idea that Jews could be ‘in exile’ when they were living in Jerusalem. This shows merely that Casey has not heard the point being made. The same is true in a different way of Stein 2001, 207–18. Stein writes as if I have replaced ‘kingdom of

God' in Jesus' teaching with 'return from exile'. Of course not; I have simply interpreted 'kingdom' in terms of a widespread expectation of the time.

²⁶⁶ See the discussion in *Interpreters*.

²⁶⁷ The title of the introduction in Lewis 1954.

²⁶⁸ This is one of those 'floating logia' that get ascribed to great people: it is associated particularly with E. Fuchs and R. Bultmann. See e.g. Bultmann 1957, 45: 'History has reached its end, since Christ is the end of the law'; similarly Bultmann 1954, 404 (I owe this reference to Robert Morgan).

²⁶⁹ As for instance in Martyn 1997: [see below](#), and *Interpreters*.

²⁷⁰ [See below, chs. 3, 14.](#)

²⁷¹ Would it be going too far to speculate that American evangelicalism and/or fundamentalism might be afraid of any kind of eschatology which might challenge the 'rapture' theories on the one hand or the implicit Enlightenment eschatology of the USA itself, the *novus ordo seclorum* of the dollar bill? See Douthat 2012, ch. 8.

²⁷² This is not to say that e.g. Luther himself was guilty of abolishing the great narrative. Indeed, he of course kept the idea of continuous narrative precisely through the device of labelling the medieval period as 'the Babylonian Captivity of the Church' (Luther 1970 [1520]), with himself as the leader of the real 'return from exile'. Perhaps his successors ought not to be so worried about metaphorical uses of 'exile'. My question here is cognate with that raised by Steck 1968, 449: why did it take so long for scholarly interest to be aroused in the theology of the post-Babylonian period?

²⁷³ Against, e.g., Carson 2001a, 5; Carson 2001b, 546. Interestingly, in both cases Carson cites me without referring to any actual writings. My previous statements include *Climax* 140f.; *NTPG* 268–70; *JVG* xvii f., 126f., 203f; *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel* [Newman ed.] 252–61; *PPF* 138–40; *Justification* 57–62. I realize, in listing these discussions, that none of them is very long. I had thought the biblical passages noted there would have been sufficient. Clearly I was wrong (and clearly those lists oversimplify, by their necessary brevity in their larger contexts, the quite complex evidence).

²⁷⁴ *War* 6.312–15; see above, and *NTPG* 312–14.

²⁷⁵ Dan. 9.24f. Seifrid's remarkable suggestion (Seifrid 1994, 87), that Dan. 9 is only about the condition of Jerusalem, not the gathering of exiles, ignores the invocation of Jeremiah, the way that Dan. 9 functions within the book as a whole (in relation, for instance, to chs. 2 and 7), and particularly the way in which Dan. 9 was being heard, read and used in many different Jewish circles in the last two centuries BC and the first century AD.

²⁷⁶ Dan. 9.2, citing Jer. 25.11f.; cp. too Jer. 29.10; 2 Chr. 36.21f.; Zech. 1.12; 7.5; 1 Esdr. 1.57f.; Jos. *Ant.* 11.1f., citing also Isa. 44.28. Cp. too Isa. 23.15 (the fate of Tyre, forgotten for seventy years).

²⁷⁷ Dan. 9.11–13. Direct reference is made here to Dt. 28.15–68; 29.12, 14, 19 (the oath); 29.20–8 (the curse); (the two seem almost interchangeable; the LXX for 'oath' is *ara*, for 'curse' *katara*); in 29.20, 21 the MT and LXX (29.19, 20) speak of God bringing 'all the oaths' of 'this book' or 'of the covenant' upon them. In 29.27 (MT/LXX 29.26) the Heb. speaks of 'all the curses in this book' and a variant in the A version of LXX speaks of 'all the oaths of the covenant'. Dt. 30.7 speaks of God putting 'all the oaths' on Israel's enemies as part of the great reversal ([see further below](#)).

²⁷⁸ It is not a 'repeated pattern', either in chs. 27—30 or 31—3, as suggested by many writers (e.g. Kugler 2001, 194 n. 19). However, in later Jewish thought exile becomes just such a pattern, as seen rightly e.g. by Neusner in Neusner, Green and Frerichs 1987, 1–3. von Rad 1962 [1957], 346 suggests that Dt. 30 is offering 'what is at bottom a simple religious message'. Over against this, Sailhamer 1992, 473 is correct: Neh. 9 shows that the promise was hoped for in Nehemiah's day, and

Lk. 2.25 indicates that at the time of Jesus' birth 'devout Israelites were still awaiting its fulfilment.' We might also note that in the poem of *1 En.* 103 both the elite and the non-elite are claiming the narrative of Deut. 28—30 for themselves (I owe this point to Loren Stuckenbruck).

²⁷⁹ Dt. 30.3–5. Fishbane 1988 [1985], 541 suggests that Dt. 29.29 (MT 29.28), the last verse of the chapter, which speaks of 'the secret things' as belonging to YHWH but 'the revealed things' as belonging to 'us and our children', is meant to function as a warning to subsequent readers not to try to probe too exactly into the timings of when these prophecies will be fulfilled – a warning which Jeremiah and Daniel failed to heed. 'The revealed things' is then a reference to Torah: you know what you have to do; don't worry about when future events will happen!

²⁸⁰ Dan. 9.15–19. Scott 1993a, 199 n. 35 points out that this prayer 'is saturated with the Deuteronomic covenantal tradition', citing many other scholars on the point.

²⁸¹ Dan. 9.22–7.

²⁸² 1 Macc. 1.54.

²⁸³ See e.g. Wacholder 1975; Grabbe 1979; Scott 2005 (e.g. 94: 'calculating the end of the protracted exile – and especially its end – seems to have been one of the main impulses for the development of sabbatical chronologies expressed in terms of sabbatical and jubilee language', i.e. esp. in *Jub.* itself, and the Qumran literature); and particularly Beckwith 1996 [Beckwith 1980, Beckwith 1981]. See too Scott 1993a, 200 n. 39.

²⁸⁴ *jTann.* 68d; see Beckwith 1980; 1981, esp. 536–9 [now combined in Beckwith 1996, ch. 8], and the discussion in *NTPG* 198 n. 156. Even if the legend is much later, it shows what was at stake: Dan. 9 put a date on the coming of Messiah, but nobody could be sure what that date was.

²⁸⁵ Beckwith 1996, 217.

²⁸⁶ cf. too Dt. 4.25–31 as precursor of this theme.

²⁸⁷ The prime objector was F. G. Downing, whose position is set out in Downing 2000, ch. 8. Downing admits that Qumran held an 'extended exile' view, but denies that anybody else did. He offers no discussion of the widespread tradition of re-reading the closing chapters of Dt., and a minimized reading of Dan. 9. It became clear in discussion that his real concern was to ward off a perceived contemporary implication: 'so there was something "wrong" with Judaism, after all.' Others, equally concerned about how we speak about 'the Jews', do not seem to share his problem. Downing (149 n. 3) strangely accuses me of wrongly claiming A. E. Harvey in support of the thesis; but the passage he cites (*NTPG* 114) is on a completely different point. On Goldstein, my reading of whom he questions, [see below](#).

²⁸⁸ VanderKam 1997, 94.

²⁸⁹ My paper on that occasion was the one now reprinted in *Perspectives* ch. 21.

²⁹⁰ Obscured and blunted in e.g. NRSV, which tr. *beacherith hayamim* as 'in time to come'. See too Gen. 49.1; Num. 24.14 (Balaam's oracle); Dt. 4.30 (the 'mini'-version of Dt. 29—30 or 32); Isa. 2.2; 27.6; Mic. 4.1.

²⁹¹ 4QMMT C 10–17 (I have used a combination of the trs. of García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1998, 2.801–3 and Vermes 1997, 227).

²⁹² 1QS 5.5, 8f. (tr. García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997, 81), echoing Dt. 30.6 (also, for 'circumcision of heart', Dt. 10.16; Lev. 26.41; Jer. 4.4; 9.26; Ac. 7.51; Rom. 2.29; Col. 2.11).

²⁹³ Wells 2010, ch. 3, esp. 54–61 on the use of Dt. in CD; also 62–5 on the use of Dt. in liturgical materials.

²⁹⁴ 1QH 11.37f., tr. Vermes 1997, 262.

²⁹⁵ Wise 2003, 128. Wise notes that the Teacher's followers had to reinterpret this, stretching the seven years into a forty-year final period, and that this, too, proved false.

²⁹⁶ 11QT [11Q19] 59 (=4Q524.6–13), 5–9; 9–21 (tr. García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1998, 1281).

²⁹⁷ van Unnik 1993 presents an overall thesis about the Diaspora, arguing that Diaspora itself was seen by many within it as the fulfilment of the punishment promised in Lev. 26 and Dt. 28. See too Trebilco 1991, 60–9 on the curses inscribed on some Jewish tombstones in Asia Minor, referring to ‘the curses in Deuteronomy’ in a way which indicates that (a) these were well known, (b) they were interpreted in terms of the present ongoing situation of Jews in the Diaspora and (c) they were looking ahead to a future fulfilment of Dt. 30.7 when ‘the curses’ would be put instead on the heads of the persecutors.

²⁹⁸ Lev. 25.10. Philo *Praem*, in the remarkable passage which concludes the book (127–72), gives a lengthy combined exposition of Dt. and Lev., finishing with a prediction of a great Return yet to be accomplished (163–72). He includes a meditation ([see below](#)) on the sabbatical year, or rather the shame of its not being kept (153–61). On this see esp. Trebilco 1991, 214 n. 38 (Trebilco’s interpretation has been disputed (see Scott 1997b, 199), but it remains suggestive); van Unnik 1993, 127–37. On Philo’s reading of Dt. 30 see Barclay 2006, 145.

²⁹⁹ Lev. 26.34f.

³⁰⁰ Lev. 26.40–5. What is promised is that God ‘will not spurn them, or abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them ... but I will remember in their favour the covenant ...’ (vv. 44f.). Lev. seems to me here to adopt the principle we see so often in the rabbis: when you can see to the end of an argument, you do not need to spell it out further. The chess game stops three or four moves short, since both players recognize that the winning move is inevitable. So here: ‘God will remember the covenant ...’ and the reader, knowing that Israel was in exile up to that point, can draw the proper conclusion.

³⁰¹ See esp. Fishbane 1988 [1985], 482f.

³⁰² See *NTPG* 269f., quoting CD 1.3–11; cf. too e.g. CD 3.10–14, where the sect are the remnant with whom Israel’s God has secretly re-established the covenant; on CD see now e.g. Fuller 2006, 52–60. Evans 1997, 308f. suggests that almost the whole of 4Q504–6 could be cited to make the same point; so too Garnet 1977. It is worth quoting again Talmon 1987, 116f.: the writers of the Scrolls ‘intended to obliterate it [i.e. the “return from exile” as normally understood] entirely from their conception of Israel’s history, and to claim for themselves the distinction of being the first returnees after the destruction.’ One of the first to draw attention to this whole theme in Qumran was Michael Knibb (Knibb 1976; Knibb 1987). See too Moessner 1989, 88–91, citing e.g. 1QpHab. 2.5–10; also VanderKam 1997, e.g. 90.

³⁰³ Ezra 9.6–9. Evans 1997, 309 quotes Williamson 1985, 136 on the passage: ‘the final consummation is by no means yet reached.’ See Gowan 1977, 219, suggesting this situation as a reason for the rise of ‘apocalyptic’: the people were ‘without security, living in an alien world, even though it was their own country’.

³⁰⁴ See esp. e.g. Steck 1968, 454f. The ‘irony’ of which Bryan 2002, 12 accuses me (of using an idea which connotes removal from the land to describe the situation of Jews living in the land) is thus not mine, but Ezra’s.

³⁰⁵ Bar. 3.6–8. On the relation between Bar. and Dan. in connection with our present theme see esp. Watson 2004, 459f.

³⁰⁶ Bar. 3.14.

³⁰⁷ 2.24–35, alluding to Dt. 28.62 and 31.9, as well as Lev. 26 ([see below](#)).

³⁰⁸ Dt. 30.11–14 (‘and in your hands’ is added by LXX). On this passage see esp. Fishbane 1988 [1985], 540, linking the traditions in Ps. 139.6–9; Prov. 30.4; Job 38.4–39.30; 40.8–41.26; Am. 9.2f.; 4 Ez. 4.5–8; 1 En. 93.11–14.

[309](#) Bar. 3.29—4.4.

[310](#) 5.7, cf. Isa. 40.4, cp. 45.2.

[311](#) So e.g. Steck 1993, 267; Evans 1997, 306f. The point is completely missed by e.g. Seifrid 1994, 88f., who suggests that Baruch ‘may well regard the exile as having ended already’; Tobin 2004, 345, who flattens the strong underlying narrative out into a Jewish version of ordinary hellenistic wisdom: Baruch (and Philo), he suggests, emphasized ‘that the capacity to acquire central religious realities such as “the good” or “wisdom” was not an impossible task but was “near at hand” and within the reach of all.’ (For discussion of such an ‘atemporal’ reading see e.g. Asurmendi 2006, 195f.) That is indeed how Philo appears to use the Dt. passage in *Post.* 83–8; *Mut.* 236–8; *Somn.* 2.180; *Spec.* 1.301; and cf. *Fug.* 138–41, on the similar passage in Dt. 4.29; but in *Virt.* 183 he applies it to proselyte repentance, which though still at a distance from Dt. 30 has at least an echo of the context; and in *Praem.* 82–4 the passage gives rise to a lyrical celebration of the greatness of Israel for having such a law (echoing Dt. 4.7), meaning that Israel lives not far away from God. The fact that Philo returns quite frequently to the passage might indicate that it was well known as a prophecy of Israel’s coming redemption, even though he will of course normally turn that into something more abstract and dehistoricized, addressed simply to the individual in their personal ‘sin, exile and return’; see Wells 2010, ch. 5.

[312](#) So Nowell 2009, 614.

[313](#) Tob. 3.3f., echoing Dt. 28.37. On ‘the prevalence of Deuteronomistic theology in Tobit 12—14’ cf. Fuller 2006, 29 n. 61.

[314](#) Tob. 13.1f.

[315](#) Tob. 13.5f. (a direct echo of Dt. 30.2f.), 9, 11, 16. On this see e.g. Gowan 1977, 209.

[316](#) Tob. 14.4–7. The line in v. 7 about being ‘gathered together’ is a further echo of Dt. 30.3. The Gk. phrase in v. 5 is significant for much later discussions; *chronos* is normally linear time and *kairos* a special moment of time, so that *ho chronos tōn kairōn* means something like ‘the time of special times’. When that is fulfilled, the real ‘return’ will come about. Seifrid (1994, 88) flies in the face of the evidence when he says that discerning a continuing exile in this passage is ‘slightly gratuitous’.

[317](#) On this passage from the ‘Animal Apocalypse’ see now VanderKam 1997, 96–100, e.g. 100: ‘the language of dispersion is used and continues to be employed even after the end of the historical exile ... for the author, exile was an ongoing condition that would soon end with the final judgment.’ Cf. too *1 En.* 93.9f. (from the ‘Apocalypse of Weeks’), on which see VanderKam 96: ‘the clear implication is that for the author the situation of exile never ended from the fall of Jerusalem until his time in the early to mid-second century BCE. Moreover, that condition is not destined to end, it seems, until the last judgment.’ See further, as on this whole theme, Knibb 1976, 259; 1987, 21; Goldstein 1987, 70, 74. On *1 En.* 1—5, evoking Dt. 33—4 ‘as prophecy of the future history of Israel’, see Bauckham 2001, 142.

[318](#) [Above, 125.](#)

[319](#) VanderKam 1997, 104, citing also v. 23: ‘after this they will return to me in all uprightness and with all of their heart and soul. And I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever.’ Again, the echoes of Dt. 30 are loud and clear. See too Gowan 1977, 218: the authors of *Jub.* and *Apoc. Abr.* (e.g. 27–9) ‘considered themselves still to be living in the exile and to have found nothing in the historical restoration worth mentioning as having mitigated that condition’.

[320](#) *4 Ez.* 12.10–35. (On the supposed ‘different eschatologies’ in *4 Ez.* see Metzger in *OTP* 1.521.) Bauckham 2001, 171 points out that *4 Ez.* 7.129 quotes Dt. 30.19, and suggests that this and other

refs. (4 Ez. 13.45 with Dt. 29.28; 4 Ez. 14.6 with Dt. 29.29) show that the writer ‘found special eschatological significance in the final chapters of Deuteronomy’, as we see also in 1 En. 1.3–9 in relation to Dt. 33.2. (In Dt., we note, the ‘eagle’ is sometimes friendly (32.11) and sometimes not (28.49–52).) So too the whole premise of the book 2 Bar. is the fictive ‘exilic’ situation in which ‘Baruch’, ostensibly the friend of Jeremiah in the Babylonian exile, is addressing his actual contemporaries in the continuing ‘exilic’ situation after AD 70, and again drawing on the closing chs. of Dt. (Bauckham 2001, 178). I am not persuaded by Murphy 2005, 117–33, that 2 Bar. sees the fulfilment of Dt. 30 only ‘in heaven’ (see the next section of the present chapter). On 2 Bar. 68.5–7 see Evans 1997, 310, and below. On 3 Bar. 16.2, which alludes to Dt. 32.21, see Collins 2000, 257: ‘The use of the language of Deuteronomy 32 indicates that the scattering of the people and the destruction of Jerusalem are viewed as punishment for the people’s sins,’ referring also to Nickelsburg 1981, 302.

³²¹ T. Lev. 16.1–18.14.

³²² T. Lev. 19.1–3.

³²³ T. Jud. 23.1–24.6. On T. Naph. [see below](#). On T. Mos. 3.1–3; 9.2; 10.1, similarly, see Evans 1997, 311.

³²⁴ mYad. 4.4 (not 4.7 as NTPG 270 n. 108). On further (and much later) rabbinic material cf. Steck 1967, 86–97.

³²⁵ This puts into a larger context the cryptic remark attributed to Abtalion (first century BC), warning the Sages to guard their words lest they incur the penalty of exile (mAb. 1.11). Cf. too Tg. Isa. 6.9–13.

³²⁶ So e.g. Seifrid 1994, 86f. Steck 1967, 146f. appears to concede this.

³²⁷ Sir. 36.1, 6, 10, 13–21. Seifrid 1994, 88 discounts this passage and insists that Sir. is an exception to my rule. I might have been happy to grant the point (though being then still puzzled as to what that prayer is doing) had it not been for the remarkable treatment by Fuller 2006, 33–42, making it quite clear that Sir. (a) saw the ‘exile’ as having continued to the time of Simon II, who has at last properly restored the Temple, and (b) very much envisaged a further, more glorious restoration still to come. See too Gowan 1977, 207. In any case, Sir. may be beside the point for a book on Paul: I very much doubt that Saul of Tarsus would have regarded the probably Sadducean author as a reliable guide to what a good second-Temple Jew should think about chronology, or much else for that matter.

³²⁸ So Evans 1997, 305f.

³²⁹ Thielman 1994, 50f. notes that even though Judith is thus part of ‘the literature of the establishment’, the book demonstrates the same basically Deuteronomic pattern of sin/punishment (8.18f.). To this extent, the perspective of Jdth. is parallel to that of Qumran (exile was indeed prolonged, but it’s now over), with the difference that in Qumran the ‘real return’ was a secret, small-scale movement whereas for Jdth. it seems to be a public, political settlement (i.e. presumably the Hasmonean regime).

³³⁰ 1 Macc. 14.4–15; cf. NTPG 429.

³³¹ 2 Macc. 2.18. It has been suggested (Seifrid 1994, 88) that the end of the book, with Jerusalem rescued and ‘in the possession of the Hebrews’ (15.37), indicates that the ‘plight’ of 2.18 has been fully dealt with. Evans 1997, 307, however, follows Goldstein 1987, 81–5 in concluding that the author believed ‘that the Jewish people were still experiencing the Age of Wrath, with many Jews still in exile’. See too Fuller 2006, 44 n. 113, who sees the ending of the book as ‘signify[ing] once more God’s protection of Israel and Jerusalem’, not an ultimate restoration which he sees as yet to come.

³³² *War* 5.395, part of Josephus's own reported speech (as having already gone over to the attackers) to the implacable defenders on the ramparts of Jerusalem. Granted, he places the start of the present mode of 'slavery' at the time of the Roman conquest in 63 BC. But Josephus is careful not to cash out too clearly the longer narratives, with their anti-pagan denouement. This, I think, is the reason for his silence about 'covenant' (see Grabbe 2003, 257f., 266), cognate with his sudden silence about the meaning of the Stone in Dan. 2 and the devastating imagery of Dan. 7. See the discussion in *NTPG* 303–14, with full refs.; and [below, ch. 12](#).

³³³ [See above, 117 n. 154, 130f.](#)

³³⁴ Scott 1997b, 193f.; Goldstein 1995.

³³⁵ Bryan 2002; Carson 2001b, 546f. (speaking vaguely of a case made by me and 'several scholars' but without any references) uses Bryan's earlier dissertation as the basis of his own brief critique (see too e.g. Chester 2012, 158, who merely refers to Bryan as though that will settle the matter). I refer to Bryan's published work. Among other critics Seifrid 1994 has been notable; in addition to points dealt with elsewhere, he says four things: (a) there is variety among positions taken in the period (granted); (b) the narrative locations of the works in question varies widely (granted); (c) the books in question 'display a considerable measure of confidence in the Law as the guarantee of salvation' (well, they would, wouldn't they, since that's how Dt. 30 told them it would be); (d) the model doesn't fit Paul, who has a different view of exile entirely (to that we shall return).

³³⁶ Bryan 2002, 14. References to Bryan in what follows are to this work.

³³⁷ Bryan 14.

³³⁸ Bryan, 15. Seifrid 1994, 86f. suggests that there were many periods when the returned exiles were happy and content, e.g. at the rebuilding of the Temple (but what about Malachi's disaffected priests who needed to be reassured that YHWH would indeed come back one day soon?), the Maccabean victories (yes indeed, but the joy was short-lived), the Hasmonean rule (nice work for the new aristocrats, not so good for the rest, which is precisely why the Essenes and the Pharisees either start up or are freshly energized in that period), and those who enjoyed the *status quo* under Rome (again, nice work for Rome's appointed henchmen like Herod, and for tax-collectors and a few others; but the majority, if Josephus and the *Ps. Sol.* are to be believed, were far from content).

³³⁹ On Susannah cf. *NTPG* 220.

³⁴⁰ On Paul's use of Dt. 30 in Rom. 10.6–8 see below, 1165f., 1171–6, and *Romans* 658–64.

³⁴¹ Bryan 15f.

³⁴² Respite: e.g. *2 Bar.* 68.3–7 (Evans, as we saw, reads this within a 'continuing exile' framework, stressing that the temporary restoration is 'not as fully as before'); *T. Naph.* 4.3 – a very brief respite indeed!

³⁴³ Bryan 16, quoting e.g. McConville 1986.

³⁴⁴ Bryan 17.

³⁴⁵ Bryan 17f.

³⁴⁶ The same could be said of the comments by Fuller 2006, 9f., who suggests (in an otherwise appreciative note) that in my previous work I have ignored or downplayed evidence which 'suggests many Jews understood their context and lives in much more positive terms than exile' (cf. too Fuller 49, saying I have been guilty of a 'lack of precision', to which I hope the present chapter offers a response). There is of course great variety, as one would expect – and as one finds even in the literal, geographical Babylon, where many Jews were happy to stay. But it is telling that Fuller's index shows almost no attention given to Dt. 30 or 32, and only a few passing references to the end of Dan. 9. These are the tell-tale texts which indicate the larger narrative framework for a wide swathe of the material; to ignore them is to fail even to hear the point being made.

[347](#) Bryan 18f.

[348](#) Bryan 19.

[349](#) See esp. *NTPG* chs. 10, 15; *JVG* chs. 6, 8; *RSG* ch. 4; and *Surprised by Hope*. A good example of ‘salvation’ language in this period with emphatically this-worldly reference is in *Jos. War* 5, discussed [above, 129f.](#)

[350](#) One apparent exception, *Wis.* 3.1–3, in fact proves the rule: see *RSG* 162–75.

[351](#) *Dan.* 12.2f.; *T. Mos.* 10.8–10; *2 Bar.* 51.8–12 etc.; on these, see *RSG* 157, 160–2.

[352](#) Sanders 1992, 368. Sanders goes on to describe the normal features of Qumran eschatology: holy war, an ordered community, two messiahs with the priests in charge; occupying Jerusalem; purity strictly enforced. God would eventually descend and create his own sanctuary on the present earth; in the meantime ‘war and rigorous discipline’ was to be expected.

[353](#) *Mk.* 10.18; *Mt.* 19.16; *Lk.* 18.18; cf. *JVG* 301. On biblical visions of ‘salvation’ and ‘eternal life’ see *RSG* and *Surprised by Hope, passim*.

[354](#) Where we do find ‘repositories of souls’ and similar ideas, these are often places where the entities in question await the coming restoration or resurrection: see e.g. *1 En.* 22.3f.; *2 Bar.* 21.23; 30.2–5.

[355](#) An obvious recent example: VanLandingham 2006. His central chapter on ‘the last judgment according to deeds’ etc. opens by quoting *Mk.* 10.18, meaning it clearly in its usual late western sense, and insists that ‘the texts surveyed below respond to’ this question (66). This criticism applies only partially, in my view, to Yinger 1999, who emphasizes that what is at issue is the membership of the individual in the group which is being considered (94). He rightly, in my view, follows Reiser 1997, 161 in seeing that individual appearance at a last judgment is a tannaitic innovation (94 n. 142), more like what we find in paganism than in classic Judaism (139f.), and stresses that at Qumran at least (I think elsewhere too) what is in view is what he calls a ‘historical eschatology’ (135f.). There is of course considerable variety in second-Temple salvation-scenarios, some of which have generated an apparent *prima facie* case for a promised ‘immortality’ of an otherworldly kind; see the full discussions in *RSG* ch. 4.

[356](#) Outside Paul, obvious passages include *Rev.* 5.9f.; in Paul, one naturally thinks of e.g. *Rom.* 8.17–25.

[357](#) I draw attention to the entire discussion of the point in *NTPG* chapter 10.

[358](#) Philo *De Spec. Leg.* 2.253; cf. *JVG* 379.

[359](#) On Schweitzer see Gathercole 2000.

[360](#) cf. *NTPG* 252–6, where I distinguish no fewer than ten phenomena that are sometimes referred to as ‘dualism’.

[361](#) Adams 2007, responding to *NTPG* and *JVG* and e.g. France 1971; 2002; Hatina 1996; 2002. For Allison see 1994, 1998, 1999, 2005, 2009, 2010, with many ancillary articles and chapters in other books.

[362](#) Adams and Allison regularly use the word ‘apocalyptic’ as though, despite its slipperiness, it settled the matter (‘Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet! QED!’). But, as I and others have demonstrated elsewhere, this simply begs the question of what ‘apocalyptic’ is, and how such language was taken in the first century. See e.g. Adams 53; Allison 2009, 91, summarizing my view of *Mark* 13 (which I expressly discuss in terms of ‘apocalyptic’) and then saying that, nevertheless, ‘the historical Jesus was the apocalyptic Jesus,’ as though this constituted a denial, or even a refutation, of my point.

[363](#) Bultmann 1951–5, 1.4f.: Jesus is not with those Jews who hope for a national messianic kingdom on the earth, not with a salvation which comes from ‘a miraculous change in historical (i.e.

political and social) conditions’, but one which comes from ‘a cosmic catastrophe which will do away with all conditions of the present world as it is’. The presupposition of this hope, says Bultmann, is ‘the pessimistic-dualistic view of the Satanic corruption of the total world-complex’, leading to the ‘two aeons’ doctrine. The result is that ‘the salvation of the faithful will consist not in national prosperity and splendor, but in the glory of paradise.’ Bultmann here, like some others who have made this kind of comment about ‘apocalyptic’, seems not to notice that the idea of ‘the present age’ and ‘the age to come’ is just as much at home in the rabbis, without a trace of other ‘apocalyptic’ material, as it is among the ‘apocalyptists’ themselves.

³⁶⁴ Koch 1972 [1970]: on Bultmann’s point, 1951, 57–73.

³⁶⁵ For the retrieval of this in our own day by Engberg-Pedersen, see ch. 14 below.

³⁶⁶ Schweitzer 1925 [1901], 101f. speaks of ‘a cosmic catastrophe through which evil is to be completely overcome’; in Schweitzer 1954 [1906], 369, of ‘bringing all ordinary history to a close’.

³⁶⁷ Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 248 n. 5. I wonder if Adams is happy with this ringing endorsement from someone who clearly has little idea of what Judaism actually was or how it worked, and who uses the word ‘apocalyptic’ in a fairly unreconstructed, and certainly unhistorical, Bultmannian sense (see below, 1386–406, esp. 1402f.).

³⁶⁸ Jer. 4.23–8.

³⁶⁹ Caird 1980, 259 (my italics).

³⁷⁰ Adams 2007, 9. References to Adams in what follows are to this work.

³⁷¹ Caird 256.

³⁷² Caird 262–7.

³⁷³ Adams 39. On 38 n. 53 he quotes an article by A. Gardner as pointing out that the analogy of a scroll being rolled up in Isa. 34.4 ‘need not imply that the heavens are destroyed’. The distinction between analogy and concrete event warrants more careful attention.

³⁷⁴ Adams 2007, 39.

³⁷⁵ See too Adams 57 on 1 *En.* 1.3b–9, where, says Adams, the writer ‘utilizes prophetic language of global upheaval, drawing on specific prophetic texts’. ‘Obviously’, he continues, ‘the language should not be taken literally’ (well, yes, thinks the reader, but he goes on): ‘its function is to evoke a scene of utter global ruination.’ If Adams intends a distinction between ‘global upheaval’ (the metaphor) and ‘global ruination’ (the concrete referent), he does not explain what it is. He makes a near-identical move (73f.) in relation to *T. Mos.* 10, though he is more concerned there to deny a socio-political referent. See below. When discussing *LAB* 9.3, he seems to move to and fro (78).

³⁷⁶ See Allison 2010, 76–8; though Allison fails to realize the extent to which all this material plays directly against his ‘end-of-the-world’ position. For Josephus on Daniel as prophet (*Ant.* 10.266–8) see above, 116f., and below, 294 n. 40, 1316f. The ‘oracle’ is mentioned in *War* 6.312f. cf. 3.399–408 (Josephus prophesying to Vespasian); cp. Tac. *Hist.* 5.13; Suet. *Vesp.* 4, and the discussion in *NTPG* 289–95 and 312–7.

³⁷⁷ There is, interestingly, a time-delay between the lion’s victory over the eagle and the final judgment day.

³⁷⁸ As with original meanings behind Isa. 13, so with original meanings behind Dan. 7 (see e.g. Collins 1993, ad loc.): whatever the original author had in mind (‘saints of the most high’ = angels? ‘son of man’ as ‘second’ or ‘junior’ divinity?), by the time of Josephus and 4 *Ezra*, and also by the time of Mark, it was being read in terms of the Messiah, representing the faithful ones.

³⁷⁹ See esp. 2 *Bar.* 39.7; 40.3.

³⁸⁰ Adams 83.

³⁸¹ Adams 89 (italics of ‘but’, ‘so’ and ‘even though’ added).

[382](#) Adams 93f.

[383](#) Allison 1985; see 1999, 132f., citing *LAB* 11.5.

[384](#) *JVG* 321 n. 2.

[385](#) Allison 1999, 133, quoting *De Praem.* 85–8; similarly with Philo’s belief in the concrete return of the ten tribes (*De Praem.* 164–72). Indeed, it is that large-scale return from exile which I would expect second-Temple Jews to take as literal prediction, and for which – since it would be such an extraordinary, world-shaking event – one might want to use ‘apocalyptic’ or ‘cosmic’ language; which is exactly what Mark’s Jesus does, as I have argued, in 13.27.

[386](#) Mk. 13.5–8 being a case in point.

[387](#) e.g. Allison 1999, 131; Adams 158, 174. Pitre 2005, 336f. claims that actual concrete portents, e.g. those mentioned by Josephus in *War* 6 ([see below](#)), are ‘the Achilles heel’ of my arguments on apocalyptic language, but this suggestion merely shows that Pitre does not understand the logic of portents (he also seems to have missed my reference to the passage in *JVG* 362 n. 161). I recognized the point in *NTPG* 285 (not 311 as Pitre suggests); and Pitre’s suggestion that when I say ‘natural phenomena’ one should instead say ‘cosmic phenomena’ is another indication of the misuse of the slippery word ‘cosmic’. On portents see e.g. Bird 2008a, 57 n. 39 (though I do not share his affirmation of Pitre at this point).

[388](#) Jos. *War* 6.288–300. He goes on to describe a different sort of portent, namely the prophecy of a peasant called Jesus, son of Ananias, who went on declaring woe on Jerusalem until he was himself killed by a stone from a Roman catapult. Here, of course, the portent was explicitly, literally and actually looking ahead to the actual military conquest of the city. The death of this Jesus was a metonym, not simply a metaphor.

[389](#) [See below, ch. 4.](#)

[390](#) Adams 1997 discusses in this connection the pagan use of ‘cosmic collapse’ imagery in Lucan *Civil War*. Adams, however, draws the wrong point from this (123f.; so too Allison 1999, 131). Lucan is well capable of (a) using descriptions of violent and disturbing natural phenomena, as in 7.151–84, as a literal reference to actual concrete portents which then functioned metaphorically as warnings of the massive concrete military disaster ahead, while also (b) using similar language, as in 2.289–92 and 7.135–8, in a way which seems purely metaphorical and without concrete referent except precisely to the major socio-political events he is describing (cp. 2.266–9, where a life of peaceful solitude means that ‘the stars of heaven roll on for ever unshaken in their courses’), and (c) referring literally to the coming *concrete* events of the universal conflagration envisaged by the Stoics, and then *using this as a metaphor* for the way in which Rome was collapsing under the weight of its own overgrown power (so 1.72–82). The Stoics did indeed believe in the world dissolving into fire and then, after a period, starting up all over again, though Lucan’s use of this as an image for the disastrous collapse of Rome calls into question whether he really understood or believed the doctrine, since in Stoicism the conflagration was not a disaster, but rather the ultimate victory of ‘fire’ over all the lesser elements ([see below, 215f.](#)). It may well be that some Jewish writings borrowed this language, though it would be very difficult to prove that they intended thereby to refer literally to a future concrete event, and harder still to suggest that they shared the Stoic pantheistic cosmology within which such conflagration made sense (see below, ch. 14, for a related discussion of Paul and Stoicism).

[391](#) See esp. Horsley 2009; Portier-Young 2011.

[392](#) See the sensitive essay by Brooke 2000, stressing the interplay between all factors involved in scripture transcribing, reading, study and exegesis. See too the controversial proposal of Instone-

Brewer 1992, that the early (i.e. pre-70) scribes did not treat OT citations without regard to their context. See further now e.g. Norton 2011.

[393](#) Fishbane 1988 [1985], 276f.

[394](#) On this, see Instone-Brewer 1992; Kimelman 1988–9 on the scriptural allusions in the Eighteen Benedictions.

[395](#) *NTPG* 243.

[396](#) See e.g. *Jos. Ap.* 2.73–77, with e.g. Barclay 1996, 31f.; for local hostility to this, 38, 45f. On resistance to empire: an interesting case-study would be 4 Macc., which, while apparently ‘translating’ Judaism into a form of Platonism (cf. ‘beloved self-control’ in parallel with ‘O Law that trained me’ in 4.34), is simultaneously saying that if it’s Virtue one wants, Torah is the way to it, thereby subduing (not killing) the passions – and thereby resisting Empire, with the deaths of the martyrs as the place where it all comes together. Note particularly Antiochus’s argument for eating pork based on *physis* (5.8f.) and Eleazar’s response (5.25f.) that the creator, in giving Torah, has been truly acting in accordance with *physis*, allowing the Jews to eat that which is suitable. All this is perhaps more ‘orthodox’ than is sometimes supposed. At the least, it is finding a place to stand for Jewish traditions in a troubled time.

[397](#) cf. *NTPG* 299f., with refs. The idea of ‘two ages’, with a clear distinction between ‘the present age’ and ‘the age to come’, is a commonplace not only of so-called ‘apocalyptic’ thought, as in *4 Ez.* (e.g. 6.9; 7.12f., 50, 112f.; 8.1; *2 Bar.* 14.13; 15.8; 44.11–15; *1 En.* 71.15), but also right across rabbinic thought (e.g. *mSanh.* 10.1). See Allison 2010, 164–204 for a sustained and highly detailed exposition of this theme and the argument that ‘kingdom of God’ corresponds closely to the ‘age to come’; on the key background, esp. 188f.

[398](#) This analysis of ‘messianic time’ alludes to Scholem 1971; Agamben 2006, 59–78; and see now Scott 2005.

[399](#) See the description of classic Jewish theological thinking in Schechter 1961 [1909].

[400](#) On monotheism see further [ch. 9 below](#).

[401](#) *2 Macc.* 7.27–9.

[402](#) *2 Macc.* 12.39–45.

[403](#) See Barclay 1996, 122f., following Goodenough 1953–68, 2.290. They are not, of course, talking about Pharisees.

[404](#) See the remarkable prayer in *3 Macc.* 2.1–20.

[405](#) Barclay 1996, 429–34.

[406](#) For the incidents, see *NTPG* 190–93.

[407](#) This statement will seem to some both remarkable and arbitrary. It is neither. I refer again to *NTPG* 251f., 262–8; also *Climax* 21–6; and esp. [ch. 10 below](#). See too esp. Beale 2004.

[408](#) See further [below, ch. 9, 740–2](#).

[409](#) Philo *De Spec. Leg.* 1.97: the high priest intercedes for the whole cosmos; 2.163: the whole nation carries out rites of purification and restrains the bodily passions; 2.167: the whole nation both intercedes for the rest of the world and represents the rest of the world by offering the praise which others should, but do not, give to the one God.

[410](#) Hence Philo, in the passage just quoted, uses for the nation the analogy of the sheaf offered as first-fruits.

[411](#) *Dt.* 4.7f.; *Ps.* 147.20.

[412](#) As distinct, we note, from the ‘works of Torah’ in e.g. 4QMMT, which distinguished one group of Jews from another.

⁴¹³ cf. e.g. 2 Macc. 14.15 (praying to God as the one who always manifests himself to uphold his own heritage).

⁴¹⁴ See below, [ch. 10](#).

⁴¹⁵ I have little to add at this point to *NTPG* 307–20 concerning the variegated hope of a coming Messiah. See further [815–25 below](#), and *Perspectives* ch. 31. The recent monograph of Novenson 2012 is now a key text. I note however the interesting comment of Segal 2003, 169 about the paucity of expressions of messianic hope in the relevant sources, the virtual absence in the Mishnah (Segal speculates on possible political reasons for this, I think rightly), and the fact that Paul’s own messianic belief is one of our best and earliest evidences for Pharisaic views on the subject. This, of course, contrasts sharply with those who suppose that ‘Messiah’ was not a category in Paul’s repertoire; see below.

⁴¹⁶ Wis. 3.7f; 4.20—5.23, on which see *RSG* 162–75.

⁴¹⁷ cf. Humphrey 2007, 312: apocalypses tend to be centrifugal, ‘encyclopaedic and addressing multiple issues and mysteries’, rather than ‘centripetal’, seeking a centre of meaning.

⁴¹⁸ For what follows, see esp. my art. on 4QMMT (now in *Perspectives*, ch. 21), with reasonably full secondary literature there. I do not agree with Deines 2001, 474 that this enables us to reconstruct a full Pharisaic position; nor does he see (at 462) the *eschatological* point of the text. I do think that the shape of the eschatological doctrine of justification emerges here clearly in a way which is common to Essenes and Pharisees alike. 4QMMT enables us to extend and build on the earlier discussion in *NTPG* 334–8, where more refs. can be found. Gathercole’s strange insistence (Gathercole 2002, 95) that since the text is clearly eschatological the ‘works’ cannot be ‘boundary defining’ indicates that he has not grasped the point. The two go inextricably together, and to affirm ‘eschatology’, so far from undermining ‘boundary markers’, contextualizes it exactly. Granted, Gathercole is responding to Dunn 2008 [2005] ch. 14 [orig. pub. 1997], where the point is not so clear.

⁴¹⁹ See MMT C 27. It is often said that this is the only passage where ‘works of Torah’ as such are mentioned in Qumran. However, we should note the similar 1QS 5.21 and 6.18, where *ma’syw betorah*, ‘his deeds in Torah’, function as criteria for membership in the Community. This implies (as suggested by Bockmuehl 2001, 406 n. 91, the only place in that large anti-Sanders volume where ‘works of Torah’ in Qumran is discussed head on) that e.g. 5.23 also, ‘his deeds’, should be read in the same way. See too e.g. ‘doers of the Torah’, ‘*osey hatorah* in 1QpHab. 7.11; 8.1; 12.4f.; and 96 n. 85 on 4QFlor. 1.7. See too 4 *Ez.* 7.24, 77; 8.32f.

⁴²⁰ Against Dunn 2008 [2005], ch. 14.

⁴²¹ See below, 1165–76, and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 658–63.

⁴²² MMT C 27–32. I have translated *mqtsth dbrinu* not as ‘some of our words’, as GM/T 803f., or ‘some of our sayings’ (Vermees 1997, 228), but as ‘these selected words of ours’. The author does not believe that only *some* of his words will prove correct, while others perhaps might not, but rather that *this* selection, a selection perhaps from a longer list he might have given, will all prove true.

⁴²³ mSanh. 10.1.

⁴²⁴ According to Danby’s note ad loc. (Danby 1933, 397 n. 4), this does not mean members of the philosophical school of that name, but evokes a looser Hebrew word meaning ‘unrestrained’, hence licentious and sceptical. However, by a strange coincidence, this was also the popular perception (however mistaken) of actual philosophical Epicureans, on which see [ch. 3 below](#).

⁴²⁵ mSanh. 10.1–4.

⁴²⁶ cf. 1 Macc. 2.67 (‘rally round you all who observe the law’); 13.48; 4QFlor. [=4Q174] 1.3–7.

⁴²⁷ Deines 2001, 461.

[428](#) Deines 2001, 491 (his italics).

[429](#) Carson 2001b, 537–40.

[430](#) Gal. 2.19; [see below, 852–60](#).

[431](#) Isa. 6.3. See too the texts listed in *Perspectives*, ch. 23 (on Col. 1), including Ps. 119.64, where God's *hesed* fills the earth. One might suggest that, from a Jewish point of view, the pantheism of Stoicism appears as a kind of advance parody of this eschatological promise of 'filling', an attempted realized eschatology.

[432](#) Mal. 3.1–4.

[433](#) See the survey in *JVG* 616–24.

[434](#) e.g. 1QS 4.23; CD 3.20; 1QH 17.15; 1QLitPr. 2.3–6; cf. 4QpPs37 3.1f., on which see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 24 n. 30; despite Vermes 1997, 488 the text is *kol nhlth adm*, 'all the inheritance of Adam', not 'glory'. The core meaning, however, is much the same, which tells us something about the meaning of 'glory' (= 'sovereignty'?) in these expressions.

[435](#) The passage (2 Sam. 7.10–14) is expounded, along with others such as Am. 9.11 and Ps. 2.1, in 4QFlor. (= 4Q174).

[436](#) In addition to other passages noted, cf. e.g. Ps. 102.16; Isa. 60.1f. On related texts cf. Adams 2006.

[437](#) Ps. 72.18f.

[438](#) Num. 14.20–3.

[439](#) Hab. 2.13f.

[440](#) Isa. 11.8f.

[441](#) Ps. 33.5.

[442](#) Ps. 119.64.

[443](#) Ps. 104.27–33.

[444](#) Philo *De Somn.* 1.149 (my tr.).

[445](#) Beale 2004, 85; Walton 2001, 186.

[446](#) 1 Chr. 29.10–12 (Beale 2004, 108).

[447](#) Ezek. 36–7.

[448](#) Isa. 65.17f.

[449](#) Beale 2004, 143; see Zech. 2.5.

[450](#) Beale 2004, 125–52, supporting the suggestion of Lacocque 1979 [1976], 124 with ref. to Isa. 2, Mic. 4 and similar passages, and with copious ancient near eastern evidence.

[451](#) Qumran: e.g. 1QH 6.12–19. On Sir. 24, and the possibility that this should be read as an anticipation of, or even a different mode of, YHWH's return to Zion, [see above, 106f](#).

[452](#) *Sib. Or.* 5.414–32; *1 En.* 90.

[453](#) On the question of Pharisees in the Diaspora see e.g. Niebuhr 1992, 55f. (he says that, with so little evidence, it is hard to prove anything); earlier, Schoeps 1961 [1959], 24–7, who assumes a 'Pharisaism of the Diaspora' though warning that not much can be known about it. See esp. van Unnik 1993.

[454](#) The Mishnah tractate *Abodah Zarah* focuses on the question of how to avoid pagan idolatry.

[455](#) See *NTPG* 187–97; *JVG* ch. 9, esp. here at 380–2, both with other refs. Sanders seems to have drawn back from this position in his later works.

[456](#) 1 Macc. 2.51–68; see above, 88–90, particularly the discussion of *Ioudaismos* as an active programme, not a 'religion'.

⁴⁵⁷ mAb. 1.12.

⁴⁵⁸ e.g. Isa. 2.2–4 (gentiles coming in); Zech. 8.20–3 (gentiles hearing that God is with the Jews and wanting to go with them). Riesner 2000, 249 concludes that ‘our evidence does not allow us to speak of a pre-Christian Jewish mission in the sense of an intended activity,’ pointing out that *prosēlytos* is derived from *proselthein*, ‘to come towards’: a proselyte, almost by etymological definition, is one who voluntarily comes towards Judaism. See too Munck 1959 [1954] 265, referring to earlier discussions.

⁴⁵⁹ See, most recently, Bird 2010, with full bibliography of the debate, including his own important monograph Bird 2006. Goodman 1994 takes perhaps too fierce a line (proselytism only began in earnest in the second century); McKnight 1991 is more nuanced but still quite emphatic; see, recently, Ware 2011 [2005] (153: Jews were expecting an eschatological pilgrimage of the nations, and a few incoming proselytes now and then could be seen as a foretaste of that). On the other side e.g. Carleton Paget 1996; cautiously, Judge 2008a, 432 n. 3, citing Stern’s interpretation of the attacks on proselytization by Arrian, Tacitus and Juvenal (on Juvenal *Sat.* 14.96–106 [not 104 as Judge], see Stern 1974–84, vol. 2, no. 301 (pp. 102f.)). Donaldson 1997, 275–84, carefully proposes a middle way (following e.g. Kim 1981, 44 n. 1): Paul was not dashing around the world looking for converts, but if people wanted to join the Jewish family he was one of those who insisted that they be circumcised, as did Eleazar in the story of the conversion of King Izates of Adiabene: *Jos. Ant.* 20.17–53 (at 43–8). See now too the important monograph of Thiessen 2011.

⁴⁶⁰ Hengel 1991, 13; and see the inscriptional evidence cited by Barclay 1996, 317 n. 89, which Barclay sees as evidence of attraction, not missionary work. On the Jews in Rome, and their difficulties, see Barclay 1996, 298–306; Leon 1995 [1960]; Lampe 2003 [1987], chs. 2, 5. On the question of whether some Jews believed that genealogical membership in Israel was permanent and exclusive, so that gentiles could not join even if they were to be circumcised, see Thiessen 2011, 8f. and frequently.

⁴⁶¹ Mendels 1996.

Chapter Three

ATHENE AND HER OWL: THE WISDOM OF THE GREEKS

1. Introduction

Perhaps it was the questions Homer raised and never answered: why the vain Olympians should interfere in Agamemnon's war; or how air, water, earth and fire combine into a *kosmos*; how we can be 'free'; what makes a person 'good', a city 'just', a speech effective?

Questions demand time, and time is conquest's gift to moneyed scholars. To Athens, then, they came, searching, searching, for wisdom, virtue, truth; to see what others, stumbling in darkness, could not see. Athene welcomed them; and, as symbol for their quest, the master of night-vision, at her side, bestowed his owlish blessing on their labours.

Owls were to Athens what (in the proverb from my own world) coals were to Newcastle. The Little Owl, common throughout the region, likes to nest in buildings, and a natural spot could be found in the rafters of the Parthenon, the enormous Temple of Athene on the Acropolis, still there today to look down on traffic fumes and currency crises. The same bird, chosen as the city's symbol, glinted up at ancient Athenians from their silver coins, mined and minted just down the road. The owl, whether feathered or silvered, was so obviously a local product that bringing more from elsewhere would be pointless.¹

More to the point, the owl was linked, in etymology and ability, to the eponymous goddess. One of Athene's regular epithets was *glaukōpis*, 'bright-eyed', and the owl itself was *glaux*; the bird had bright eyes, too.² The ability in question, which translates into Athens's long-lasting reputation for philosophy, was that of seeing what others could not. Ordinary mortals peer into the darkness and see nothing; the philosopher discerns hidden truths. Athene was regularly (if perhaps misleadingly) identified with the Roman goddess Minerva, who borrowed the bird as well

as the role: ‘Minerva’s owl’ has remained proverbial as the symbol of philosophy in general. Hegel, no doubt with a twist of dialectic in mind, turned the owl’s positive significance (seeing in the dark) into a negative one, invoking the bird as a sign that philosophy can be wise only after the event. ‘The owl of Minerva’, he wrote, ‘begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.’³

The philosophers of ancient Athens would have disagreed. Reflection on the past naturally formed part of the philosophical task, but those who sought the owl’s blessing also looked to the future. Like Marx (was he answering Hegel?), they saw the task as being not only to understand the world but to change it. Or, at least, to change themselves, that small part of the world that lay closest to hand. And perhaps – on this point, as we shall see, the major philosophical schools divided – to change their *polis*, their local city.

To this end, they asked questions, and remained dissatisfied with ordinary answers. What is there? What ought we to do? And How do we know?⁴

The technical names for these topics serve as a warning to modern readers. Key words can subtly change their meanings.

‘What is there’ is *physics*, the study of *physis*, nature. Today’s ‘physics’ is much narrower, excluding biology, botany, chemistry and so forth and also, more especially, theology and metaphysics, things which, if they are in some sense ‘there’, seem to be of a different order entirely. For the ancient Greeks, however, ‘physics’ covered all of that and more: ‘everything that is’, in fact – a huge, sprawling category, including quite specifically what became known as ‘metaphysics’, which in turn included the study of the gods and their relation to the world.

‘What ought we to do’ is *ethics*, which looks at first sight like our use of the word but finds different shading in its ancient context, not least since for most ancient philosophers ‘ethics’ and ‘physics’ were closely related. How we are to behave was deemed to bear a close relationship to how we understand the world to be.

‘How do we know’ is *logic*, from the famous and evocative term *logos*, which means both ‘word’ and ‘reason’ and much else besides. As with

‘physics’, ‘logic’ today usually means something considerably narrower than it did for Athene’s questers. For us it quickly becomes a matter of mathematical formulae. For them it denoted the whole process of reasoning, dialectic, the way one organized one’s thought both in itself and for public presentation. ‘Logic’ was all about making sure that one was moving securely from one point to another, not being merely carried along by rhetoric, emotion, or faulty reasoning.

Athens had been the undisputed home of philosophy, the place above all where such questions were to be addressed, since at least the time of Socrates in the fifth century BC. At its political peak, Athens had emerged from the Persian wars of the early fifth century to become mistress of the Aegean. This military and economic supremacy provided the leisure, for some at least, to stop and think, and to encourage others to do so as well. This tradition continued through into the New Testament period and beyond. When, in 79 BC, the young lawyer Marcus Tullius Cicero wanted to study philosophy, it was to Athens (and also Rhodes) that he came. Ovid and Horace did the same. When, over a century later, Paul came as a wandering evangelist to the city, Luke records that he disputed with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers in the market-place.

A major disruption in this line of philosophical teaching and debate in Athens came in the two-year period 88–86 BC. Mithradates VI, king of Pontus in northern Asia Minor, was Rome’s most dangerous enemy at the time. Having overrun most of the lands around the Black Sea, he proceeded to gain control of Bithynia and Cappadocia as well. He then provoked war with Rome by massacring Romans and Italians living in the province of Asia, and followed this by seizing control of most of Greece. At this point the wise owls of Athens looked into the dark and made the wrong choice.⁵ Two philosophers held absolute power (by turns) in Athens at this juncture, but Plato’s ideal structure of ‘philosopher kings’, steering a city in the right direction, crumbled away in their hands. Athenion, from the Peripatetic (Aristotelian) school, and Aristion, an Epicurean, both decided to go with Mithradates and against Rome. Rome then did what Rome did best. Five legions arrived, with Sulla at their head. They defeated Mithradates, laid

siege to Athens, took the city and sacked it. We cannot be sure how much physical damage the philosophical schools sustained. What is clear is that most of the philosophers left and went elsewhere: some to Rome itself, some to Rhodes, some to Alexandria.

And some to Tarsus in Cilicia; which is where our story really starts, and a major reason why this chapter is important in a book on Saul of Tarsus, better known to us as the apostle Paul.

We discover the reputation of Tarsus particularly in the work of the geographer Strabo, a native of Mithradates's Pontus. He had studied in Rome and elsewhere, and was himself inclined to the Stoic philosophy. Writing in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius (i.e. roughly in the fifty-year period from 30 BC to AD 20, which includes the period of Saul's boyhood and adolescence), he describes the schools of Tarsus, including the philosophical establishments, as they were in his own day. These schools, he declares, are in better shape than those of Athens and Alexandria, despite the fact that their pupils are all drawn from the local area (they, in other words, unlike Athens, are not attracting people from far and wide).⁶ But if Tarsus did not import philosophers, it certainly exported them. Some notable Stoics had already come from Tarsus in earlier centuries, and Strabo comments that Rome in his day was full of Tarsian sages.⁷

Was Saul also among the philosophers?

A strong *prima facie* case for a negative answer might be made on the grounds of Saul's strict Pharisaic upbringing. Granted the wide spectrum of positions taken by Diaspora Jews in relation to the surrounding pagan culture, we might guess that one who was brought up in the strictest 'traditions of the ancestors' might have shunned all but the most essential contact with the surrounding non-Jewish ways of life and thought.⁸ But there are strong indications in the other direction as well.⁹

A further negative hint might come in the explicit warning of Colossians 2.8: 'Watch out that nobody uses philosophy and hollow trickery to take you captive!' This verse has often functioned as a blanket warning that Christians should keep away from 'philosophy' of any kind. Coupled with Paul's highly charged contrast, in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, between 'the

wisdom of the world’ and ‘the wisdom of God’, this has been enough to convince many that Paul’s only word to the philosophies of his day would have been the same as that of Karl Barth to the merest suggestion of ‘natural theology’: *Nein!* – or, in Paul’s case, *mē genoito!* But there are, again, strong reasons for taking a much more nuanced – dare one say, dialectical – view.

One of Paul’s key self-descriptions is ‘apostle of the nations’, *apostolos ethnōn*.¹⁰ Entire schools of New Testament interpretation have been built up on the assumption that, following his conversion, Saul of Tarsus developed a system of thought which was essentially designed to abandon Jewish categories (‘law’, ‘Messiah’, and so forth) and offer Jesus to the gentile world as a new *kyrios*, ‘lord’, on the analogy with the ‘lords’ of the cults of the day. We have described this briefly elsewhere and will discuss it further when the larger picture of Paul has been constructed.¹¹ But for the moment, taking our cue from what appears to be self-evidently Paul’s own summary of his gospel and theology, we may propose instead that what Paul thought he was doing was offering an essentially *Jewish* message to the *pagan* world:

The Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy.¹²

The following verses (Romans 15.9–13) explain the point. There is no sense that one would have to abandon Jewish and biblical categories in order to have something to say to the wider world. It is a central part of Israel’s scriptures that the God of Israel intends to summon the nations of the world to worship and serve him. As we shall see, a central feature of Paul’s gospel and theology is the claim that, with the resurrection of the Messiah, the moment for this fresh worldwide summons has arrived.¹³ About all this we shall have much more to say at the proper time.

But if Paul did not *derive* the central themes and categories of his proclamation from the themes and categories of pagan thought, that doesn’t mean that he refused to make any use of such things. Indeed, he revels in

the fact that he can pick up all kinds of things from his surrounding culture and make them serve his purposes – much as philosophers of his day could quote rival schools in order to upstage or refute them.¹⁴ There are, I suggest, two things going on here. First, there is direct *confrontation*; perhaps the most vivid examples are in the realm of Jewish-style monotheism as it confronts pagan polytheism, and Jewish-style sexual ethics in contrast to the practices of the pagans.¹⁵ But second, there is *adaptation*. Here again we have a programmatic Pauline statement: ‘we take every thought prisoner,’ he declares, ‘and make it obey the Messiah.’ This is not simply a cavalier attitude, grabbing anything that looks useful. It is based on Paul’s robust creational monotheism: all the wisdom of the world belongs to Jesus the Messiah in the first place, so any flickers or glimmers of light, anywhere in the world, are to be used and indeed celebrated within the exposition of the gospel.¹⁶

But when we come to a better knowledge, not only of Paul but also of his pagan context, we discover that the problem with the ‘History of Religions’ school goes deeper than its supposition that Paul’s confrontation with, and adaptation of, ‘pagan’ themes was evidence of ‘derivation’. (Strong arguments have in any case been mounted, over the last half century and more, for the ‘derivation’ of most of Paul’s key themes from the world of Israel’s scriptures and Jewish traditions.) The real problem lies in the word ‘religion’ itself. Here we are close to the heart of the Enlightenment’s long, distorting effect upon biblical scholarship. Whether we are reading F. C. Baur from the middle of the nineteenth century or E. P. Sanders from the last quarter of the twentieth, the controlling assumption has been that Paul was proclaiming and teaching something which we can fairly straightforwardly call ‘religion’. But when we look at Paul’s wider context we discover a serious problem with this. It has to do, once more, with the subtle shifts in the meaning of words between Paul’s day and ours. This question has affected the shaping of this section of the present book; whereas many books on Paul might have begun with a consideration of the ‘religious’ world of late antiquity, I have made the conscious decision to do it differently. Why?

We know quite a lot about pagan ‘religion’ in Paul’s day.¹⁷ It involved temples and sacrifices; auspices and oracles; a priesthood which overlapped considerably with the local aristocracy; a close integration with the life of the *polis*. It assumed the existence, and the moody unpredictability, of the traditional pantheon of deities, and particularly of the local or tribal deity peculiar to the city or region. It might include particular cults, ‘mysteries’ into which one might be ‘initiated’, thereby gaining a new (secret) religious status in the present and the promise of a blissful post-mortem existence. Such ‘religion’, both at the public and private level, was usually capable of accommodating other divinities. As groups and individuals migrated around the ancient near east, this resulted in complex, criss-crossing varieties of local ‘religions’ in any one place (in which, for instance, newly arrived gods and goddesses might take the names and attributes of existing local ones). We shall say more about ‘religion’ in the next chapter, but for the moment we must make one point clear: none of this looks at all like what Paul the apostle was teaching, or like what his communities got up to.¹⁸

Yes, their baptismal and eucharistic practice was, in first-century terms at least, evidence of *religio*. Yes, by the early second century they were reported to be ‘singing hymns to *Christus* as to a god’, and Pliny, in telling Trajan he has prevented them from holding their regular meetings, refers to the law banning *hetaeriai*, which could mean associations of a religious kind.¹⁹ Yes, by the second century the Christians were using the *language* of temple, sacrifice, oracle and priesthood. But the Christians offered no animal sacrifices; they had no sacred precincts or cult functionaries; they did not make pilgrimages to Delphi or anywhere else in search of divine advice. They assumed (as Jews did) the non-existence of the traditional pantheon, and of the local or tribal deities. (They also assumed, again as Jews did, the existence of non-divine but non-human *daimones*, malevolent beings who would use pagan worship to deceive and corrupt humans.) They trusted the utterly reliable one God who had made himself known in and as Jesus, Israel’s Messiah. Paul was to make, as we are now making, the faithfulness of this one God the major theme of his longest book.

What is more, from Paul onwards the Christians did three things which in the ancient world would have been associated, not with 'religion', but precisely with *philosophy*.²⁰ First, they presented a case for a different order of reality, a divine reality which cut across the normal assumptions. They told stories about a creator God and the world, stories which had points of intersection with things that the pagans said about god(s) and the world but which started and finished in different places and included necessary but unprecedented elements in the middle. Second, they argued for, and themselves modelled, a particular way of life, a way which would before long be a cause of remark, sometimes curious and sometimes hostile, among their neighbours.²¹ Third, they constructed and maintained communities which ignored the normal ties of kinship, local or geographical identity, or language – not to mention gender or class. As a result, again starting with Paul, they received rough treatment at the hands of civic authorities. We do not hear of people in the ancient world being thrown out of cities for practising mainstream 'religion'.²² On the contrary: 'religion' was what kept the wheels of the state (the city or country) turning in the right direction. We do hear, frequently, of civic authorities banishing philosophers, or even putting them to death: Socrates is the most obvious example.²³ That is why the more likely translation of *hetaeriai* in Pliny's letter is not 'religious associations' but (as in the Loeb translation) *political* associations.²⁴ From this vantage point, it begins to look as though the entire 'history of religions' enterprise of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was, at least in relation to Paul, a massive exercise in missing the point. To people of his day, he and his communities would have looked more like a new school of philosophy than a type of religion. A strange philosophy, of course, with unexpected and even disturbing features. But a philosophical school none the less.²⁵

What has happened, of course, is that in the western world for the last two hundred years the categories of 'politics' and 'religion' have been carefully separated, each being defined negatively in relation to the other. 'Politics', for the modern west, is about the running of countries and cities as though there were no god; 'religion' is about engaging in present piety

and seeking future salvation as though there were no *polis*, no civic reality. ‘Philosophy’, in the modern western world, has maintained an uncomfortable and complicated relationship with both ‘politics’ and ‘religion’. The discomfort and complexity have arisen not least because, like a marriage counsellor trying to help a couple who are not on speaking terms, the two conversations have had to proceed independently. So Paul has been studied in ‘departments of religion’, though neither in ancient nor in modern terms do his letters, or the communities which he founded, belong primarily in such a category. And since Paul’s followers gave allegiance to Jesus as *kyrios* in a world where, amid many other *kyrioi*, one *Kyrios* stood out, namely Caesar, they formed groups that might well have been suspected of political insubordination. We shall discuss all this in the next chapter but one.

Thus the three terms ‘philosophy’, ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ – a bit like ‘physics’, ‘ethics’ and ‘logic’, in fact – all meant something significantly different in the first century from what they mean today. Coming to terms with this constitutes a strong *prima facie* case for seeing Paul as, in some sense and no doubt with significant modifications, a ‘philosopher’. A Jewish philosopher, to be sure; already an oddity (though not unprecedented) in the wider greco-roman world. A Jewish philosopher announcing, like a herald, the enthronement of a new *Kyrios*; even odder. But a philosopher all right. Not for nothing are the early icons of Paul more than a little like the ancient statues of Socrates.²⁶

It makes sense, then, to ask, as one might of any first-century philosopher: where does Paul belong on the map? How does he position himself in relation to other philosophical schools and their leading themes and concepts? When he appears to borrow ideas or technical terms, is he endorsing, co-opting, subverting or controverting them? In the present chapter we shall content ourselves with surveying the terrain, so that as we are studying Paul’s worldview and theology in Parts II and III of the present book we can be aware of significant and relevant themes, before returning in chapter 14 to the challenge of locating Paul within this world.

Three more introductory points need to be made at this stage. For a start, one of the big differences between the ancient Greco-Roman world and our own is that today the word ‘philosophy’ is regularly used for a somewhat recondite academic discipline. In Paul’s day, however, ‘philosophy’ covered the sort of things that a reasonably well educated person might expect to discuss over a meal with friends, or in a letter. There were technical terms and various developed ideas, but ‘philosophy’ in general was a much more street-level activity than it would be for us. To think of Paul as in some sense a ‘philosopher’ is therefore not to suppose him appealing only to a highbrow or (in our unpleasant modern sense) elite audience. It meant that he was addressing the culture and thought-forms of his day on topics of importance and controversy.

This means, second, that ‘philosophy’ in the ancient world was much more obviously linked with other aspects of the wider culture. Playwrights, poets, historians and artists could and did join in.²⁷ So, from time to time, might emperors, with Marcus Aurelius as the obvious example. What is really required is a more comprehensive study of Paul within this still wider world, exploring ways in which the imagery of his letters, and the encoded imagery of the communities he founded and tried to maintain, would have resonated within the wider cultural encyclopaedia of his day. Such a task is way beyond the scope of the present volume, but it is important to register it in case we give the impression that Paul’s thought floated about in a world only of ‘ideas’.²⁸ Anything but. He was, and remained, a Jew. And Jewish ‘thought’ has almost always been umbilically related to the concrete world of people and places, actions and artefacts, practice and performance. The same was true of some ancient philosophies, notably Stoicism. Whatever Paul meant by ‘justification by faith’ (we shall come to that later), there is no reason to suppose, though many have supposed it, that he was thereby advocating a Christian variation on philosophical idealism, privileging the abstract (‘faith’) over the concrete (‘works’). Paul, we may safely say, was not a Platonist.

A third point addresses the relevance, or the possible irrelevance, of all this, to the formation of the mind of the young Saul of Tarsus. An earlier

generation debated the question of whether he had in fact grown up in Tarsus, the undisputed city of his birth, or whether, from an early age, he had moved to Jerusalem to ‘sit at the feet of Gamaliel’, as in the account which Luke puts into his mouth in Acts 22.3.²⁹ This question has been well and truly mixed up with the question of the major influences on Paul (hellenistic or Jewish?), which in turn has been linked strongly to the question of how best to characterize his theology (and indeed his ‘religion’, in our modern, and as I have suggested misleading, sense). But there are good reasons to park this question of ‘Tarsus or Jerusalem’, and not allow it to have any decisive effect on an analysis of Paul’s thought.

First, even if we take Acts 22.3 strictly, it is not clear at what age it implies that Paul moved from Tarsus to Jerusalem. ‘Brought up’ might mean ‘from babyhood’, but it could equally refer to Paul’s teenage years, leaving him plenty of time, as a bright young boy, to pick up questions and discussions that were all around in the bustling Greco-Roman city. There are many twelve-year-olds in university towns today who become cheerfully familiar with the topics of the time, whether or not they go on to take a degree.

Second, Acts also informs us that, following his conversion, Saul visited Jerusalem and, after causing disturbances through his debates with ‘the Hellenists’, was packed off back home to Tarsus, staying there for some years until Barnabas invited him to come and join in the work he was doing in Antioch in Syria.³⁰ Granted that Saul had gone back to his home town fired with the dangerous message that a recently crucified Jew was Israel’s Messiah and the world’s true Lord, and granted all we know of his character before and after, we are bound to assume that he engaged with thinkers and scholars in Tarsus at all kinds of levels.

Thus, even if he had been taken to Jerusalem in infancy, which is by no means necessarily implied by Acts 22.3, Saul’s early post-conversion stay in Tarsus allows plenty of time, not indeed to ‘translate’ his initial ‘Jewish’ understanding of the news about Jesus into a very different and ‘hellenistic’ mode of thought – as we shall see, there is no reason to suppose he ever did that – but certainly for him to bump up against the major philosophical

traditions of the time and to begin to work out not only possible points of convergence but also key points where confrontation or subversion would be appropriate. I regard it as highly probable that it was in this early time in Tarsus that he began to acquire the art of ‘tearing down clever arguments, and every proud notion that sets itself up against the knowledge of God’, resulting in his project of ‘taking every thought prisoner and making it obey the Messiah’.³¹

We can thus proceed without more ado into the turbulent world of first-century philosophy. What were the questions that a young man growing up in Tarsus might hear being discussed in the schoolroom or on the street? What themes and concepts might he have learned to handle? What might he, as a strict Jew, have made of it all? Having, in the previous chapter, studied the hypothetical worldview of a first-century Pharisee, we must now locate that same devout young man, whether as a child or a newly converted young adult, or both, within the city of his birth.

2. The Shape and Content of First-Century Philosophy

(i) Introduction

It is of course out of the question to propose even a short history of ancient philosophy at this point. This is in any case quite unnecessary, there being several first-rate ones readily available at different levels of complexity.³² But we must at least point to the key features, reminding ourselves what Saul might have picked up in school, or on the street, in Tarsus. And we remind ourselves, in particular, that in popular culture what one is most likely to encounter is not a carefully designed construction of whatever sort. If we think of the major schools of the day as being like the four suits in a pack of cards, what one meets on the street is not all four neatly laid out in a row, but the philosophical equivalent of a disorderly heap of cards on a table, some of which look very like others. The two of spades and the two

of clubs appear to have more in common than either might do with their respective kings or queens.

The four 'suits' might then stand for the four main philosophical schools of Paul's day: the Academy (a development from Plato's 'Academy', but with some fresh emphases); the Lyceum (a development from Aristotle's 'Peripatetic' school); the Stoics; and the Epicureans. If we stretch the metaphor just a little, we might suggest that the Cynics were the jokers in the pack, which is happily true in that, if one wants a smile out of ancient philosophy, it is to the Cynics that one might first turn. Equally, it is only partially true. The Cynics were, if anything, a kind of edgy and extreme variety of Stoicism, and indeed Zeno, the founder of the Stoics, was himself influenced by early Cynics such as Diogenes. Stretching and twisting the metaphor even further, one can imagine a group of people in the corner of the room, refusing to have anything to do with the game, declaring that one cannot be sure just what these 'suits' actually are, or whether or not aces are to be high or low. These were the 'Sceptics'.

One can, then, construct a historical picture of these 'schools', not least because for some centuries they had constituted literal 'schools', with their own premises, traditions, officials and so on. One could, of course, do it differently, and line up all the cards in the pack according not to suit but to denomination: all the kings, all the queens, and so on – studying all the schools in terms of their answers to the big questions about the world and the gods, the virtuous life and 'the good', the nature of knowledge itself, and perhaps the practical questions of how a city or country should be run. Or one might combine the two approaches. Ancient authors tried both methods. But the point of the illustration, once more, is to remind ourselves that, whatever patterns we construct, the ordinary mortal in Tarsus or anywhere else may have had some sense of at least some of the patterns – the schools did after all carry on a long tradition of rivalry, which helped to keep self-definition reasonably clear – but that for the most part the ideas and their proponents did not come in hermetically sealed packages. As with cultural and philosophical streams of thought in our own day, one is far more likely to be confronted with the disorderly heap.

(ii) The Real Beginning: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle

First, then, the four great schools. All western philosophy traces itself back to Plato, and thereby to Socrates. Plato, though himself a great and original thinker, wins initial attention from having played Boswell to Socrates's Johnson. Socrates, however, was far more than a Johnson (implying no disrespect to the latter), and Plato was much, much more than a Boswell (implying deliberate and cheerful disrespect to that industrious but shallow hedonist). Plato's early dialogues, it is generally agreed, are closer to 'the historical Socrates' than the later ones, and from the whole corpus we gain a lively impression of the great man as possessed not only of extraordinary mental skill but also personal courage and deep integrity. His teaching technique encapsulated his basic philosophical position, which was the need to probe beneath common assumptions about life, goodness, justice, wisdom and so forth and to subject everything to close enquiry, taking nothing for granted. One can see already how this might lead in at least two directions: to a deep, reinforced piety, and with it a loyalty to the city and its best interests (the route taken by Socrates himself), or to a scepticism which allowed the questions to press on until everything seemed uncertain (the position taken by the later 'Academy').

There are three particular reasons for Socrates's pre-eminent position in the philosophical canon. First, he drew together the debates that had occupied those we now call the pre-Socratics; that title itself, of course, pays its own homage.³³ Though later movements sometimes picked up ideas from Socrates's contemporaries or predecessors (think, for instance, of Epicurus's retrieval of the 'atomism' of Democritus), they did so conscious of Socrates's own methods and critiques.³⁴ Second, he cut a very different figure from the 'sophists' of the day, wandering teachers ready to instruct the young or ambitious in return for pay, and widely suspected, as indeed was Socrates himself, of subversive teaching. Plato may have overplayed the difference, in his eagerness to distance himself from the continuing bad reputation of these characters, but Socrates's own character still emerges in a very different light to everything we know (mostly,

admittedly, through Plato himself!) of Thrasymachus, Protagoras and the rest.³⁵ Third, Socrates established himself as a public figure in Athens at a time of great civil distress and uncertainty, eventually being caught in the political storms that followed the disastrous defeat by Sparta in the long-running war between the cities. His well-known trial and death had less to do with a rejection by Athens of his beliefs or methods than with a sense that, at a time of serious crisis, the city could not afford either his relentless questioning or the influence of his pupils, such as the notorious Alcibiades.³⁶ Thus, nearly two centuries after Thales had declared that the world was ‘full of gods’, and roughly a century after Pythagoras had invented the word ‘philosophy’ itself (*sophia*, ‘wisdom’, he said, is the property of the divine alone, but humans have the chance to be its ‘lovers’) – roughly a century, too, since Heraclitus had declared that the cosmos was a complete system whose *logos*, rational principle, was the balancing of apparent opposites (day and night, and so on) – then, as the fifth century BC gave way to the fourth, philosophy gained its first and still most famous martyr, and so came of age.³⁷

Throughout antiquity, Socrates remained the classic example of the philosophical goal: an examined and examining life, which embodied the wisdom one was teaching.³⁸ Though in some respects Socrates was quite unlike Jesus of Nazareth, he shares with him a strange distinction: he wrote nothing, and yet, through his death and the development of his tradition by his followers, he continues to have greater influence on the world than any mere scribblers have done.³⁹

The relation of Plato to Socrates is almost as complicated as that of the four evangelists to Jesus. Memories of Socrates himself were kept fresh, not least through the triple accounts of his final days and hours. But the systematic teaching through which he exercised a massive influence over the next thousand years of western thought, not least some key developments in early Christianity, came through Plato’s development of his thought, taking it (it is normally assumed) into areas where Socrates himself had not in fact penetrated. In particular – a belief which we can trace back to Parmenides, who flourished about fifty years before Socrates

– Plato taught that the world of space, time and matter was essentially a secondary thing, a world of illusion, by comparison with the ultimate reality, the world of the ‘Forms’ or ‘Ideas’, the invisible realities of which this-worldly things (whether trees and chairs, or instances of good behaviour) were mere space-time copies. True ‘knowledge’ was therefore knowledge of the Forms; what appeared to be ‘knowledge’ in relation to the world of space, time and matter was in fact simply ‘opinion’ or ‘belief’. This ‘knowledge’ was to be the main goal and occupation, not of the outward bodily senses, but of the soul, which, Plato believed, was immortal, coming into a human body and passing from it either to a final state of disembodied bliss or into a sequence of other bodies, through reincarnation.⁴⁰ As with Socrates, one can see already that though some might read Plato as the inspiration for a life of spirituality and mystical contemplation (as indeed happened with the neo-Platonists of the second century AD and thereafter), others might conclude that, since our senses inevitably deceive us, we cannot be certain of anything either in the physical or in the metaphysical worlds. Both of these strands of thought, the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘sceptical’, were alive and well in the world to which Paul the apostle found himself called to be a missionary.

Plato established, and became the first teacher in, the Academy, and his work was carried on there after he died (347 BC).⁴¹ His star pupil Aristotle, however, was not part of this continuing school.

Aristotle came from northern Greece, and returned there after Plato’s death to act as tutor to the young Alexander of Macedon (much as, in the first century AD, Seneca would be tutor to Nero). He returned to Athens in 335, but instead of throwing in his lot with the followers of his old teacher, he set up his own philosophical school in the Lyceum, outside Athens’s city wall. Twelve years later (323) the death of Alexander generated an anti-Macedonian reaction in Athens which forced Aristotle to leave the city in a hurry. He died the next year. After Aristotle’s death his followers, under the leadership of Theophrastus, became known as the ‘Peripatetic’ school, due to their habit of walking to and fro while discussing.

Whereas Plato seems to us constantly to be pushing towards greater and greater abstraction, Aristotle usually appears to be moving in the opposite direction, towards greater and greater fine-tuned distinction between different objects, different animals, different motivations, different beliefs. He collects, analyzes and categorizes, probing with sharp and questing intelligence areas as diverse as biology and aesthetics, music and metaphysics, showing, if not exceeding, Plato's concern with abstraction. He is particularly famous for his development of logic, notably the syllogism ('all sheep are animals; all animals feed and die; therefore all sheep feed and die'), which he developed in order to move securely and on strict rational principles from truths already established to conclusions otherwise unreachable. His work on ethics constitutes a major development, with lasting influence, in the idea of 'virtue', combining psychological insight on the development of character with moral reflection on the attributes which go to make up a fully flourishing (and in that sense 'happy') human being. This pointed Aristotle forward to his work on politics, in which he developed a kind of corporate version of his ethics, drawing on his own experience in, and knowledge of, Macedon as well as Athens. At the other end of the scale, so to speak, his developed metaphysical reflections reached all the way up to an account of one single divinity, the 'unmoved mover' of all, a view of the divine which became particularly influential in the middle ages through its development by Thomas Aquinas.

Aristotle opposed Plato's theory of 'Forms', believing that the 'universals' (whether a colour like 'blue', the 'universal' reality behind or beneath all actual blue objects, or a quality like 'goodness', the reality behind all good actions) only existed in their concrete manifestations. One may wonder to what extent this was partly a matter of bent: Plato seems the more intuitive thinker, always reaching for the big picture, and then for a bigger one again, whereas Aristotle seems to revel in getting his hands dirty with the analysis of this animal, this musical sequence, this facet of human character. We can imagine Plato doing most of his work through reflection and discussion, but Aristotle could not have produced a fraction of the work

he did unless, in addition to strolling around discussing things with his followers, he had spent long hours actually studying the natural world. It is hard, in fact, to think of a major topic he did not discuss. Though he did not present a complete and ultimately coherent system, his dense and detailed analyses and reflections have continued to stimulate fresh thought to this day. Other schools took issue with some of his key principles, but much of his work contributed significantly to the forming of alternative viewpoints. This is particular so, as we shall see, in Stoic ethics. It is arguable that here at least there were ideas about the development of human character which Paul was able to pick up and translate into a Christian mode.

Since the purpose of the present abbreviated survey is to sketch the philosophical context of the young Saul of Tarsus and the mature Paul the apostle, it is important to note that in the first century the writings of Plato and Aristotle were not merely a distant memory (as far from his time, more or less, as Copernicus and Calvin are from ours). The first century BC saw a remarkable revival of Aristotle's teaching; his treatises were arranged, edited and commented upon. 'Philosophy' thus began not merely to look for answers but to study 'canonical' texts. Nicolaus of Damascus, friend and advisor to Herod the Great, as well as friend and biographer to Augustus – as well as tutor to the children of Antony and Cleopatra! – wrote paraphrases of, and commentaries on, Aristotle's works. Plato, too, enjoyed a considerable revival at the same time, following the refounding of the Academy after the Roman destruction in 88 BC. One of the most notable exponents of Platonism in or shortly after the time of Paul was the philosopher and biographer Plutarch, who for many years combined remarkable literary activity with holding the office of priest at the important shrine of Apollo at Delphi.⁴² Nor were Plato and Aristotle the only older philosophers to find their way back into favour. Another would be Pythagoras.⁴³

Nor should we forget – or, if we do, a few pages of any of the writers of the period will remind us – that Homer on the one hand, and the great Athenian tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides on the other, were as well known in the general culture of the day as the Bible and

Shakespeare are today. They were not necessarily, that is to say, subjected to close and thoughtful study, but were known and available in bits and pieces, a quotation here, a Trojan Horse there, themes and topics, phrases and couplets, recalled from schooldays and still forming part of the mental landscape. Saul of Tarsus was born into a world where eight hundred years of Hellenic culture was alive and well, and where, in particular, the philosophies of four centuries earlier were making a considerable comeback.

(iii) Epicureans and Stoics

By then, however, two major new schools, and two related minor but still significant ones, had come in to join the Academy and the Peripatetics. Plato and Aristotle were joined on the philosophers' top table by Epicurus and Zeno, the Garden and the Stoa.

Epicurus, who gave his name to Epicureanism, and Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, put down markers which still function well today. Epicureanism, in one form or another, is regularly assumed within western civilization, while Stoicism is frequently invoked both as a kind of reaction and as a compelling worldview in its own right.⁴⁴

At its simplest, the Epicurean philosophy insists on what amounts to a metaphysical dualism, with the gods far removed from the world as we know it. The deities, detached and uninvolved, are supremely happy, and the best thing a human can do is to become similarly detached from the cares of this life so as to imitate, in a measure, that happy and tranquil state.⁴⁵ The world as we know it operates under its own steam, with its smallest elements ('atoms'⁴⁶) falling through the void, 'swerving' (for reasons unknown) and thereby colliding with one another, producing all kinds of developments, not least of species. This evolutionary model, dramatically revived by many scientists and social engineers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Charles Darwin but by no means confined to him, was a development, and a sharpening up, of the theories of the pre-Socratic Empedocles (c.495–435 BC).⁴⁷

One of Epicurus's great concerns was to eliminate the fear of death and of what might lie beyond it. His consistent atomism (going back as we saw to Democritus, an older contemporary of Plato) was a chief means to this end. The atoms which make up living organisms, including human beings, simply dissolve upon death without remainder. There is no surviving 'soul' to migrate either into an afterlife or into an alternative body. Good and evil are straightforwardly discerned: pleasure is good, pain bad. Epicurus does not, however, deserve the sneers of those who considered him and his followers mere hedonists. It was a lofty, quiet sort of pleasure he had in mind, since bodily passions notoriously bring all kinds of bad long-term consequences. The ideal state of mind was *ataraxia*, 'undisturbedness'. It was fitting that the school Epicurus founded in Athens met in, and was known by, a garden. Epicureanism has always appealed to those who, like its own distant divinities, can afford the recommended lifestyle of withdrawal from the public world.

Since the apostle Paul seems to have made his way mostly among people for whom this Epicurean lifestyle would have been beyond their wildest dreams, we should not be surprised that there is little sign in his writings that he either borrowed from this school, or adapted some of its thought, or controverted or subverted it. By Paul's day Epicureanism had received its most thorough exposition in the form of the great poem of Lucretius (c.94–55 BC), who clothed his master's thought in Latin poetry of powerful beauty. But there is no hint in Paul of any engagement with this or any related work.⁴⁸ The closest we come is the famous Areopagus speech in Acts 17, following (as Luke reports) conversations in the market-place at Athens with Epicureans as well as Stoics. About this we must speak later on.⁴⁹

With the Stoics, however, things are very different. By the time of Paul the teachings of Zeno and his followers, in particular Chrysippus of Soli (c.286–206 BC), the 'second founder of Stoicism', had spread in various forms right across the ancient Mediterranean world.⁵⁰ The name 'Stoic' comes from *stoa*, a 'porch' or cloister, since Zeno established his school in the *Stoa Poikilē*, the 'painted cloister' in Athens. But by Paul's day, though

Stoicism was certainly still taught there, it was equally well known in Rome, Alexandria, and many other centres including Tarsus itself. Here is perhaps the most important thing in this chapter for today's readers of Paul to take to heart. *Whereas the default mode of most modern westerners is some kind of Epicureanism, the default mode for many of Paul's hearers was some kind of Stoicism.* Observing the differences between the two, particularly at the level of assumptions, is therefore vital if we are to 'hear' Paul as many of his first hearers might have done. If, when someone says the word 'god', we think at once of a distant, detached divinity – as most modern westerners, being implicitly Epicureans or at least Deists,⁵¹ are likely to do – we are unlikely to be able imaginatively to inhabit the world of many in Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus and elsewhere for whom the word 'god' might reasonably be expected to denote the divinity which indwelt, through its fiery physical presence, all things, all people, the whole cosmos.

Stoicism, after all, was the classic form of pantheism, the doctrine that sees divinity in everything. Saying this to someone today might appear to suggest that 'everything' is therefore in its essence 'spiritual', pointing back to some kind of Platonic vision of a 'real' world beyond space, time and matter. Stoicism, however, went in the opposite direction: everything, including the divine force or presence indwelling all things and all people, was 'material' or 'corporeal', not far from what we would normally call 'physical' (though all these terms are slippery with age and varied usage). The *logos*, the 'creative reason', was the 'active principle' which acted upon ordinary matter, the 'passive principle' (*hylē*). But this *logos* was itself a 'corporeal' thing, likened by some to a kind of fire or aether, but in any case a powerful substance animating and directing the bodies of people and things.⁵²

So, too, the 'spirit', the *pneuma*, was a 'corporeal' substance, again like fiery breath, working within what we think of as solid bodies. Indeed, in much Stoic thought there is a fluidity between the *logos*, which pervades all things, and the *pneuma*, the inner vitality which made something what it really was. Furthermore, tellingly, either the *logos* or the *pneuma*, or both, can actually be spoken of as 'the divine', *to theion*, or even as Zeus himself,

ruler and lord of all that is.⁵³ Whereas in early Christian thinking, especially that of Paul, the *pneuma* was associated especially with the transformation of human life, for the Stoics the *pneuma* was a key concept in areas such as biology and physics, turning up in inanimate objects as the *hexis* ('state'), in plants as *physis* ('nature'), and in humans as *psychē* ('soul'). It was the *pneuma* that gave to a thing or a person its cohesion, its ultimate identity.

Since everything, including humans, was thus indwelt by the *logos* and/or the *pneuma*, the central imperative for human life was to live as much as possible in harmonious accord with this inner divine principle, whether it be thought of simply as living in accordance with the nature of the universe (with Cleanthes) or as living in accordance also with the true human nature (with Chrysippus).⁵⁴ This meant the resolute development of character, pursuing the Stoic version of Aristotle's virtues.⁵⁵ That was the only thing worth striving for, since the accidents of health and wealth were irrelevant to true happiness (though, unlike the Cynics who renounced all possessions except a bare minimum, the Stoics did not object to accumulating wealth, and indeed reputation, if occasion afforded).⁵⁶ The aim of the Stoic was to engage in a progress of continual moral enlightenment, with the goal of becoming a 'sage', a truly wise, well-formed character, able to live in accordance with 'nature' (*kata physin*) in this divine sense, becoming self-sufficient (*autarkēs*), impervious to the nasty tricks which life can play.⁵⁷ This is what constitutes true freedom; the truly wise are truly free, and are indeed 'kings'.⁵⁸ This ideal comes to particular flowering in the work of Seneca, perhaps the most famous Stoic of all time, through whose teaching the English word 'philosophical' has come to mean 'able to face life's troubles with equanimity'.⁵⁹

It is basic to Stoic belief that, though the senses can deceive, there are certain fundamental 'cognitive impressions' (*katalēptikai phantasiai*) which can be utterly trusted. From them – and this is the purpose of 'logic', of learning the virtue of proper reasoning – one can move to larger and wider conclusions. This is well expressed by Cicero: 'as our previous conclusions are undoubtedly true and well established', he has Cato say at one point,

‘and as these are the logical inferences from them, the truth of these inferences also cannot be called in question.’⁶⁰ The art of sifting these inferences, of working by ‘logic’ through the proper steps, was called ‘dialectic’, and Cicero at least regards this as a virtue

because it conveys a method that guards us from giving assent to any falsehood or ever being deceived by specious probability, and enables us to retain and to defend the truths that we have learned about good and evil; for without the art of Dialectic they [the Stoics] hold that any man may be seduced from truth into error. If therefore rashness and ignorance are in all matters fraught with mischief, the art which removes them is correctly entitled a virtue.⁶¹

Armed with this tool of reasoning, the Stoic system boldly maps out its basic view of the world. Since the world as a whole is, for the Stoic, the manifestation of the divine, it is out of the question to suppose that something can be seriously wrong with it. One cannot be both a pantheist and a dualist. (This contrasts sharply with classic Epicureanism, which points out the glaring faults in the world as evidence that it cannot have been made by the gods.⁶²) If, therefore, someone supposes that there is something importantly wrong with the way things are, the proper approach is either to rise above it or, failing that, to take up the option readily available, and commit suicide. Epictetus (see below) frequently recommends this to people who decide they can no longer stand the world, or life, as it is. All things are in any case moving in their pre-ordained direction. The Stoics expended considerable energy in explaining that this quasi-determinism did not in fact nullify human free will, because one still had the option to recognize what was happening and to work with the grain of the world, or to refuse and rail uselessly against it.⁶³

The Stoics then developed their famous belief in world history as a sequence of great cycles. At one level, this is a way of coping, within pantheism, with the fact of time, change and history: how can *to pan*, ‘the all’, be subject to such things? The answer is that the fiery *logos* or *pneuma* which inhabits and acts upon the passive matter of the world is slowly but surely expanding and developing to the point where it has its way with the whole universe, turning it all into an extension of its fiery self in a great

conflagration (*ekpyrōsis*) in which the deity ‘at stated periods of time absorbs into himself the whole of substance and again creates it from himself.’⁶⁴ In view of today’s interest, in some quarters, in a coming ‘Armageddon’ in which the world as we know it would be destroyed, it is important to stress that the ‘conflagration’ expected by the Stoics was not the ‘destruction’ of the cosmos, as though the world were a bad thing that the gods would want to get rid of. It was, rather, a kind of ‘apotheosis’, in which the cosmos would at last be turned into the fiery substance which was itself the full, powerful divinity. The conflagration would purify the world and enable its true self to enjoy a time of stillness.⁶⁵ But then, since the great cycle was by definition the perfect expression of the *logos*, it would all have to happen again, with everything exactly as it had been the previous time, and as it would be in all successive cycles.⁶⁶

Intriguingly, some Stoics also held that there would be, from time to time, a great deluge, as the water inherent in the passive matter of the world would rise and swell. Seneca held that the deluge would happen when the planets converged in Capricorn, while the conflagration would occur when they met in Cancer.⁶⁷ Water and fire, the two most basic parts of the world, would thus have their respective way at their proper times.

There was disagreement among Stoics, however, as to how precisely the conflagration would work out. Cleanthes thought that fire, air, water and earth were essentially different, so that the fire of the conflagration would consume the other elements. Chrysippus, however, regarded all four elements as composed of fire, only in a compressed form, so that the conflagration would simply transform them all into that element which had in any case always been their true identity.⁶⁸

Who or what, then, was ‘god’, or ‘the gods’, within this major and highly influential system? Stoic ‘theology’ forms part of ‘physics’, the description and analysis of that which is there.⁶⁹ It is integrated with the rest both of ‘physics’ and of ‘ethics’, since as in most philosophical systems the constant implication was that humans should be as like ‘god’ or ‘the gods’ as possible. An excellent summary is offered by Diogenes Laertius:

The deity, say they, is a living being (*zōon*), immortal, rational (*logikon*), perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape. He is, however, the artificer of the universe and, as it were, the father of all, both in general and in that particular part of him which is all-pervading, and which is called many names according to its various power. They give the name Dia because all things are due to (*dia*) him; Zeus (*Zēna*) in so far as he is the cause of life (*zēn*) or pervades all life; the name Athena is given, because the ruling part of the divinity extends to the aether; the name Hera marks its extension to the air (*aera*); he is called Hephaestus since it spreads to the creative fire; Poseidon, since it stretches to the sea; Demeter, since it reaches to the earth. Similarly men have given the deity his other titles, fastening, as best they can, on some one or other of his peculiar attributes.

The substance (*ousia*) of God is declared by Zeno to be the whole world and the heaven (*ton holon kosmon kai ton ouranon*), as well as by Chrysippus ... Now the term Nature (*physis*) is used by them to mean sometimes that which holds the world together, sometimes that which causes terrestrial things to spring up. Nature is defined as a force moving of itself (*hexis ex hautēs kinoumenē*), producing and preserving in being its offspring in accordance with seminal principles (*kata spermatikous logous*) within definite periods, and effecting results homogenous with their sources. Nature, they hold, aims both at utility and at pleasure, as is clear from the analogy of human craftsmanship.⁷⁰

This shows clearly enough what is going on: Stoic pantheism presents itself as a kind of grown-up and reflective version of ordinary paganism. That which earlier and unreflective people had seen as different divine forces were in fact among the multiple facets of the one God. Zeus and his associates in Greece, Jupiter and his colleagues in Rome, were all to be regarded as variegated manifestations of the one ‘divinity’ which permeated all things.⁷¹ As Michael White points out, even in the case of all the varied technical terms used to denote the divine – fire, spirit, god, mind, seed or whatever – ‘a difference in linguistic expressions does not correspond to a difference in the *referents* of those expressions.’⁷² In the passage quoted above, Diogenes Laertius provides fanciful etymological links between various divine beings and their sphere of responsibility (Athena and the aether, for example), and for others a more direct link in terms of the usual sphere of operations (as, for instance, with Poseidon and the sea). But these are clearly surface-level window-dressing. The point is that everything that can be imagined as ‘divine’, right up to the entire world itself, is all part of the one entity, *to pan*.

That is why, of course, Stoics are basically monotheists. If *to pan*, ‘the all’, is ‘divine’, there can only be one of it. But this did not stop many Stoics from referring to ‘the gods’, perhaps with the sense that the ‘gods’ of popular devotion were after all the kind of junior executives working under one chief deity, or alternatively that, like a sort of apotheosized Pooh-Bah, the one High God holds all the offices of state himself. There were, in fact, many thinkers in antiquity who articulated and embraced some form of ‘monotheism’, leading some later pagan apologists to grumble at the normal Christian line that the major difference between Christianity and paganism was that Christians believed in one divinity whereas pagans believed in many. This should not be pushed too far. A larger vision after which some philosophers might be feeling their way is not the same as what one finds on the street.⁷³ But at least for the Stoics themselves it was quite easy to subsume the traditional gods, and hence the traditional devotion due to them, within the single framework of a pantheism, cosmic in scale and fiery in energy.

At the same time, however, the Stoics could and did speak of praying to ‘god’ or ‘the gods’ in a way that seems to us inconsistent.⁷⁴ If ‘the divine’ is just as much inside the person praying as anywhere else, how is prayer anything other than introspection? Perhaps the two do in fact coincide, as in Seneca’s moving descriptions of his evening devotions.⁷⁵ He, like Epictetus and others, can write at one moment of ‘the divine’ in terms of the *logos* which inhabits all things, and at the next as though ‘the god’ is an external presence and power with which he can be in a relation not entirely unlike one’s relation with another human being.⁷⁶

So popular did Stoicism become, in the first centuries BC and AD, that its methods and technical terms became common coin even among those who disagreed with its basic tenets.⁷⁷ Whereas Cicero, a century before Paul, could assume a lively exchange between Epicureans and Academics as well as Stoics, by the time of Seneca the options seemed to have narrowed towards varieties of Stoicism and Cynicism (with Plato, to be sure, always somewhere in the background).⁷⁸ The importance of Stoicism for understanding Paul is so great that we must take a few more moments

and examine briefly four of its key exponents, one contemporary with Paul and three a little later (but reflecting traditions which were current in his day).⁷⁹ If we are to locate Paul within the philosophical climate of his time, a working knowledge of what Stoicism actually looked like in the hands of its master expositors is essential.

(iv) Four Leading Stoics

(a) Seneca

Seneca was born around the same time as Jesus of Nazareth. He wrote voluminously, employing a brilliant style which he could adapt into many different forms both of prose and verse. Enough of his work has survived (including particularly his remarkable ‘Moral Letters’) that he occupies ten volumes in the Loeb Classical Library, putting him in the same league as Philo or Josephus and not far behind Plato himself. He remains, in my judgment, one of the more attractive figures of an often murky period. Accusations of hypocrisy (only abandoning wealth and power when effectively forced to do so; self-confessed bouts of anger and grief) may equally be seen as the realistic moral struggles of one who refused the bright moral light of a Cynic-style asceticism, realizing that the human heart is more complicated than easy solutions allow. His lifelong hatred of cruelty makes him stand out in an age, and culture, not noted for such views.⁸⁰

After a comparatively obscure (but clearly intellectually hard-working) early life, at the age of fifty Seneca became tutor to the young Nero, who then, on becoming emperor, appointed him as a key advisor. (Seneca marked the transition by composing a lampoon on the deification of Nero’s predecessor Claudius, in which the late emperor is turned, not into a god, but into a pumpkin.⁸¹) After a decade in this role, however, Seneca eventually fell out of favour, as his master’s mental state and erratic behaviour grew more and more alarming. His writings from this period offer reflections both honest and searching, not least because, with Socrates

never far from his mind, and being well aware of what a mad emperor might do, he rightly judged that he himself would not be permitted to die of old age.⁸²

Legends of a possible meeting between Seneca and Paul himself, and even of a possible conversion, grew up in the early church, and were embraced on and off for many centuries (not least because, from as early as Tertullian at the end of the second century, Seneca's teaching was perceived to coincide on many points with that of Christianity). In particular, a collection of short letters, supposedly between the two men, was known at least by the time of Jerome. But such speculations are based on thin air, and the correspondence is now universally regarded as inauthentic.⁸³ What is more interesting, ultimately, is to probe the actual points of contact, as well as of significant difference, in terms of worldview, basic beliefs and basic aims. If there is convergence or overlap between Paul and the Stoics, Seneca is one of the important places to start.

Seneca spent his fifties in the highest social and political circles, where he did his best to bring philosophical wisdom to bear upon affairs of state and especially on the way in which his former pupil was to run the empire. This emerges particularly in his work 'On Mercy', addressed to Nero himself when he had been on the throne for about two years. To what extent his flattery (as it now seems to us) was a rhetorical ploy, hoping that by praising his master he might entice him to deserve such praise in fact, and to what extent it was sincerely meant on the basis of Nero's youthful promise ('this is what your character already shows; how lucky Rome is that you will go on in the same way'), it is hard to say. If it was the former, the technique didn't work; if the latter, it was a serious misjudgment from which Seneca himself would eventually suffer. The ideal is fine: absolute power must be kept in check by conscience. The outworking was disastrous: Nero became one of history's most notorious, capricious and megalomaniacal tyrants.

In later life, having retired from court (in AD 62) and no doubt pondering the failure of his protégé to live up to his expectations, Seneca appears in more reflective mood. Philosophy is, to him, a kind of moral and mental

anchor, enabling him, and any who will pay him attention, to remain calm and untroubled by the vicissitudes of life. Seneca was, after all, a well thought-out Stoic. He kept up a steady campaign against Epicureanism; his 'Natural Questions', examining phenomena such as earthquakes, comets, hail and snow, were designed to show that these things could not be the chance outworking of atomic movement, but were guided by the inner *logos*. But (in keeping with the middle period of Stoicism, over against its more dogmatic early period⁸⁴) he was not angry or dogmatic in promulgating his views. This, too, he sees as an outflow of a basic Stoic principle, that between friends all things are in common, so that the advantage of one is the advantage of the other (by contrast with the Epicureans, who, though putting a high value on friendship, insisted that what was advantageous for one could not be identical with what was advantageous for another).⁸⁵ Indeed, a striking feature of his 'Moral Letters' to his friend Lucilius is his regular quotation of sayings from Epicurus, borrowing the rival's ideas in order as it were to prove the rival wrong. After one such he anticipates Lucilius retorting, 'What are you doing with another's property?' No, he responds: '*quod verum est, meum est.*' If it's true, it's mine. The best ideas are common property. What does it matter who said it? He said it for everybody.⁸⁶

Seneca is above all practical. He knows the theory, but what interests him most is how it works out in the everyday challenges of the moral life. When faced with verbal trickery and philosophers' puzzles, he has a simple challenge: Which of these word-games, he asks, will get rid of lust?⁸⁷ His revealing hints about sensing the presence of the divine tells us a good deal about the sort of man he was:

If ever you have come upon a grove that is full of ancient trees which have grown to an unusual height, shutting out a view of the sky by a veil of pleached and intertwining branches, then the loftiness of the forest, the seclusion of the spot, and your marvel at the thick unbroken shade in the midst of the open spaces, will prove to you the presence of deity. If a cave, made by the deep crumbling of the rocks, holds up a mountain on its arch, a place not built with hands but hollowed out into such spaciousness by natural causes, your soul will be deeply moved by a certain intimation of the existence of God.⁸⁸

Some of the (to us) most striking statements about the Stoic divinity are found in Seneca. ‘God is near you, he is with you, he is within you,’ he declares, and goes on to explain that ‘a holy spirit [*sacer spiritus*] indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian.’⁸⁹ Philosophy promises him, he says, that it will make him equal to the deity (*ut parem deo faciat*).⁹⁰ How Seneca squares all this with the fact that, as he says at the end of the same letter, most humans seem to be mad, pushing one another into vice (41.9), he does not then say directly. But a later letter provides at least a partial explanation, with an interesting echo of someone else’s store of fertile illustrations:

The gods are not disdainful or envious; they open the door to you; they lend a hand as you climb. Do you marvel that man goes to the gods? God comes to men; nay, he comes nearer, – he comes into men. No mind that has not God, is good. Divine seeds (*semina divina*) are scattered throughout our mortal bodies; if a good husbandman receives them, they spring up in the likeness of their source and of a parity with those from which they came. If, however, the husbandman be bad, like a barren or marshy soil, he kills the seeds, and causes tares to grow up instead of wheat.⁹¹

It is perhaps in his tragedies that we see how Seneca might have addressed the question more fully. One of his villains, Medea, manifests in terrifying form what happens when emotion wins the battle with reason. The question is, of course, part of a larger problem: what account can a consistent Stoic give of evil in general, never mind the evil resident within, or acted out by, particular people? The mainstream Stoic answer (as, for instance, in Seneca himself, or Epictetus) is that evil arises from humans making irrational choices or giving their assent to untrue propositions. There are hints, though, that some Stoic thinkers were prepared to allow for the work of evil *daimones*, whose shadowy existence is almost as difficult to describe in relation to pagan thought as it is in relation to Jewish understandings.⁹²

Seneca adopted from time to time, not only in his actual ‘Dialogues’ (the ‘Moral Essays’), the writer’s trick of engaging imaginary opponents. This feature, the so-called ‘Diatribes’, goes back, with variations and developments, to Plato’s dialogues. It is best seen, not as a separate genre, but as a feature of style, designed to make the writing vivid and to recall actual debates, whether in the classroom or the discussion among friends.⁹³

Its point was to make sure that a speaker or writer was not allowed to get away with mere assertion. Ideas should be probed, and those who put them forward should be cross-examined. The fullest extant flowering of this technique is found in Epictetus, to whom we shall shortly turn.

(b) Musonius Rufus

The other two first-century figures who offer us a sight of what Stoicism looked like in Paul's day are Musonius Rufus (roughly AD 25–100) and his famous pupil, the ex-slave Epictetus, who flourished in the late first and early second centuries AD. In both cases we do indeed get a 'sight', not simply a set of ideas; both men understood their lives as exemplifying their teaching, since after all the teaching in question was precisely about what a genuinely human life was supposed to be like. They cover many topics with energy, enthusiasm and wit.

Musonius, hailed by some as 'the Roman Socrates', left no books as such, but a good many of his short sayings and essays are preserved.⁹⁴ He taught, among other things, the equality of women, and the high importance of marriage and of a sexual ethic which supported it. He rejected violence, and at one point attempted to intervene in an armed conflict, trying to persuade the army of Vespasian, approaching Rome at the climax of the 'Year of the Four Emperors', that peace would be the better option.

Musonius's intervention is reported by Tacitus in the tone of voice of a newspaper editorial sneering at a fundamentalist preacher for rushing out in front of a tank:

Mixing with the troops in their companies, [Musonius Rufus] now proceeded to lecture armed men on the blessings of peace and the dangers of war. Many of them laughed in his face, more still found him tedious, and a few were even ready to knock him down and stamp on him. But luckily the warnings of the best-behaved men and the threatening attitude of the rest induced him to abandon his untimely moralizing (*intempestivam sapientiam*).⁹⁵

Musonius was regarded as sufficiently subversive to be banished from Rome on at least three occasions.⁹⁶ He clearly made a great impression, for good or ill, on his contemporaries, continuing to teach cheerfully and to live

by what he preached, even under considerable hardship. It is not surprising that he attracted many pupils, some of whom became famous in their own right, such as Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom (c. AD 40–120) and the younger Pliny.⁹⁷

(c) Epictetus

Epictetus (c. AD 55–135) was another philosopher to suffer banishment, in his case in 89 under Domitian.⁹⁸ He was born the son of a slave woman in Hierapolis, near Laodicea and Colosse in the Lycus valley, inland from Ephesus, and like so many had ended up in Rome, where he belonged to Epaphroditus, a minister under Nero. While still a slave, he began to study under Musonius (whose teaching he echoes at many points). He continued his study after gaining his freedom, and he then began to teach on his own account. Thus he might have continued had not Domitian become increasingly suspicious of anything that smacked of conspiracy or even dissent, and started to execute people he suspected of plotting. Banishment, in fact, must have seemed mild; at least Epictetus got away with his life. In any case, he made his home from then on in Nicopolis, a coastal town in Epirus (north-western Greece), where he taught for the rest of his life. He wrote movingly about the Cynics, but did not himself embrace that severe way of life. On the contrary, he enjoyed the friendship of Hadrian, something one cannot readily imagine of a Diogenes.⁹⁹

His sayings, recorded by a distinguished pupil, the historian Arrian of Nicomedia, are lively, sharp and witty. They are cast more in the form of occasional discussions than systematic exposition, though the main lines of Stoic principles show through at every point. Epictetus seems to have held the normal Stoic views of logic and physics, but the teaching that has survived is mostly in the realm of practical ethics. In that sphere he took the normal Stoic line that one must accept the way the world is (or, if you don't like it, as he frequently says, 'the door stands open, and you are free to leave' – in other words, the only solution is suicide).¹⁰⁰ It is both possible and desirable to develop and make progress in the moral life, and in this

cause it is no good merely to have studied the works of eminent philosophers. One must demonstrate that one has truly learned, in practice, to make wise and good choices in behaviour.¹⁰¹ Freedom in general, and free speech in particular, are among his constant themes.

Epictetus, more than any other whose writings have come down to us, exemplifies the ‘diatribe’ style, which emerges most obviously in the New Testament in some passages in Paul’s letter to the Romans. There are times, indeed, when it sounds as if Epictetus and Paul had grown up in the same street:

What then? (*ti oun*) Do I say that man is an animal made for inactivity? Far be it from me! (*mē genoito*). But how can you say that we philosophers are not active in [public] affairs? For example, to take myself first: as soon as day breaks I call to mind briefly what author I must read over ...¹⁰²

What then? Is it we philosophers alone who take things easily and drowse? No, it is you young men far sooner. For, look you, we old men, when we see young men playing, are eager to join in the play ourselves. And much more, if I saw them wide-awake and eager to share in our studies, should I be eager to join, myself, in their serious pursuits.¹⁰³

The subject-matter is of course different; but nobody who has an ear for Paul’s cadences, especially in letters like Romans and 1 Corinthians, can doubt that he and Epictetus were, to this extent, employing a very similar method of argument, which traced its ancestry back to Socrates and was to be located, within the disciplines of ancient philosophy, as part of ‘logic’. This was a way of ensuring that one was working steadily towards the truth, and not being deceived by faulty impressions or rhetorical trickery.

One of the most striking things about Epictetus from the perspective of a potential comparison with Paul, however, is his remarkable sense of the presence and (what one is driven to call) personality of the god to whom he prayed. The gods (Epictetus seems happy to talk about them in the singular or the plural) are everywhere present, in us and with us, but there is also a sense in which humans are ‘children of Zeus’, since, though we share the physicality of our nature with the animals, we share reason and intelligence (*logos* and *gnōmē*) with the gods.¹⁰⁴ As one commentator has put it, he offers ‘an almost incredible mixture of Theism, Pantheism, and

Polytheism’, [105](#) at one moment addressing the divinity much as in Christian prayer, at another acknowledging the omnipresence of the divine, and at another accepting quite happily the assumed polytheism of ordinary pagan religion. We are all, he says, ‘primarily begotten of God’, and this god is father not only of gods but of humans. [106](#)

All this is seen to striking effect in the fourteenth and sixteenth sections of the first book of the *Discourses*. Everything is under the eye of the deity, he argues; from the plants in their behaviour, to the moon and the sun in theirs, and so to ourselves: everything is bound in a *sympatheia*, an intimate sharing. So

if our souls are so bound up with God and joined together with Him, as being parts and portions of His being, does not God perceive their every motion as being a motion of that which is His own and of one body with Himself? [107](#)

Equally, humans have the power to reflect on all of this, so that we are simultaneously part of the activity of the deity and under his supervision. Humans, unlike other animals, are beings of ‘primary importance’:

You are a fragment of God; you have within you a part of Him. Why, then, are you ignorant of your own kinship? Why do you not know the source from which you have sprung? Will you not bear in mind, whenever you eat, who you are that eat, and whom you are nourishing? Whenever you indulge in intercourse with women, who you are that do this? Whenever you mix in society, whenever you take physical exercise, whenever you converse, do you not know that you are nourishing God, exercising God? You are bearing God about with you, you poor wretch, and know it not! [108](#)

But this, says Epictetus, comes to a particular focus:

He has stationed by each man’s side as guardian (*epitropos*) his particular genius (*daimōn*), – and has committed the man to his care, – and that too a guardian who never sleeps and is not to be beguiled ... Wherefore, when you close your doors and make darkness within, remember never to say that you are alone, for you are not alone; nay, God is within, and your own genius is within ... Yes, and to this God you also ought to swear allegiance, as the soldiers do to Caesar ... Out there men swear never to prefer another in honour above Caesar; but here we swear to prefer ourselves in honour above everything else. [109](#)

The divinity, the *daimōn*, and one's own self; it is not clear that Epictetus (or any other Stoic) offers an analysis of how these are all related.¹¹⁰ (Indeed, sometimes he can speak of the ultimate goal as being to change from being a human into being a god.¹¹¹) The personal *daimōn*, of course, is an idea that goes back at least to Socrates, offering a loose analogy to the idea, in some later Christian discourse, of a personal 'guardian angel'. God can sometimes be like a personal trainer, matching us with a strong young opponent in the form of personal difficulties against which we must struggle and grow strong ourselves.¹¹² The fact of divine providence does not eliminate such struggle, or the challenge of moral choice; indeed, the deity has made me *eklektikos*, a choosing sort of creature.¹¹³ You can, of course, call upon the deity for help in a great moral struggle, but you have to engage in the struggle yourself.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere Epictetus can speak of 'another', one who stands over against us and watches and warns, gives gifts and takes them away.¹¹⁵

Or take the following discourse on Providence. Does Epictetus really distinguish between 'Zeus and the gods', 'providence' and 'nature'?

Yet, by Zeus and the gods, one single gift of nature would suffice to make a man who is reverent and grateful perceive the providence (*pronoia*) of God. Do not talk to me now of great matters: take the mere fact that milk is produced from grass, and cheese from milk, and that wool grows from skin – who is it that has created or devised these things? 'No one,' somebody says. Oh, the depth of man's stupidity and shamelessness!¹¹⁶

Instead, declares the sage, we should pass our time in praise and worship; and if others will not do it, he, a lame old man, will do it for them. God, after all, has made humans to be not merely spectators of his works, but also interpreters; he calls them to be his witnesses.¹¹⁷ This gives rise to one of the most remarkable and noble expressions of gratitude for divine favour to be found anywhere outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition:

Why, if we had sense, ought we to be doing anything else, publicly and privately, than hymning and praising the Deity (*to theion*), and rehearsing His benefits? Ought we not, as we dig and plough and eat, to sing the hymn of praise to God? 'Great is God, that He hath furnished us these instruments wherewith we shall till the earth. Great is God, that He hath given us hands, and power to swallow, and a belly, and power to grow unconsciously, and to breathe while asleep.' This is

what we ought to sing on every occasion, and above all to sing the greatest and divinest hymn, that God has given us the faculty to comprehend these things and to follow the path of reason. What then? Since most of you have become blind, ought there not to be someone to fulfil this office for you, and in behalf of all sing the hymn of praise to God? Why, what else can I, a lame old man, do but sing hymns to God? If, indeed, I were a nightingale, I should be singing as a nightingale; if a swan, as a swan. But as it is, I am a rational being, therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God (*nyn de logikos eimi, hymnein me dei ton theon*). This is my task; I do it, and will not desert this post, as long as it may be given me to fill it; and I exhort you to join me in this same song.¹¹⁸

The result of all this – flying in the face of some recent suggestions to the contrary – is that, for Epictetus, the primary task of the would-be philosopher is in fact *theology*:¹¹⁹

Now the philosophers say that the first thing we must learn is this: That there is a God, and that He provides for the universe, and that it is impossible for a man to conceal from Him, not merely his actions, but even his purposes and his thoughts. Next we must learn what the gods are like, for whatever their character is discovered to be, the man who is going to please and obey them must endeavour as best he can to resemble them. If the deity is faithful, he also must be faithful; if free, he also must be free; if beneficent, he also must be beneficent; if high-minded, he also must be high-minded, and so forth; therefore, in everything he says and does, he must act as an imitator (*zēlōtēs*) of God.¹²⁰

Here, for Epictetus, is the heart both of ‘physics’ and of ‘ethics’, and all to be argued out strenuously according to his own practice of ‘logic’. Once one has this knowledge, one is ready for the philosopher’s specific active vocation: to be dispatched like a scout or a spy in a time of war, to search out what is really going on, and then to come back and explain to people that they are mistaken in their perceptions of good and evil, and to point out the truth of the situation whether people want to hear it or not.¹²¹

Philosophers, to return to our opening image, are to be like owls who see in the dark – and then like heralds who announce the message with which they have been entrusted. Paul had a different message, but might well have agreed with the outline of the vocation as Epictetus articulated it.¹²²

(d) Marcus Aurelius

A century or so after Paul's time we find a leading Stoic who comes to occupy the imperial throne. Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–80; emperor from 161) was the last who might be thought of as a 'philosopher king', and was seen in his own day as a model of what an emperor should be.¹²³ Having as a young man been lent a copy of Epictetus's *Discourses*, he never looked back, and developed his own Stoic reflections throughout his life. Very much aware of both the philosophical and imperial traditions which he had inherited, he wrote 'To Himself', a set of notes or memoranda, including the remarkable warning against 'becoming a Caesar'.¹²⁴ This journal, though it reflects his own day rather than that of Paul, is nevertheless full of suggestive material for a complete picture of the thought-world of the time.

Marcus Aurelius follows the usual topics of logic, physics and ethics: in order to act rightly (ethics), one must think clearly, not trusting false impressions (logic), but must understand one's place within 'the All' (physics). This will lead to accepting what is inevitable, and behaving towards others with understanding and integrity. The world, after all, is in a constant state of flux (Marcus, like some earlier Stoics, was an admirer of Heraclitus); hence the need to beware of false impressions, including irrational emotions, and to seek the inner *logos* in both the world and oneself, guarding one's soul against wrong judgments. Death, after all, is coming soon (the 'Meditations' were written in the emperor's declining years). There are signs that his view of death leant towards Epicureanism, with the soul itself seen as a mere dream and mist.¹²⁵ But in and through it all he commends, to himself and thereby to others, philosophy itself as the only thing worth living for:

What then is it that can help us on our way? One thing and one alone – Philosophy; and this consists in keeping the divine 'genius' within (*ton endon daimona*) pure and unwronged, Lord of all pleasures and pains, doing nothing aimlessly or with deliberate falsehood and hypocrisy, independent of another's action or inaction; and furthermore welcoming what happens and is allotted, as issuing from the same source, whatever it be, from which the man himself has issued; and above all waiting for death with a good grace as being but a setting free of the elements (*ta stoicheia*) of which every thing living is made up. But if there be nothing terrible in each thing being continuously changed into another thing, why should a man look askance at the change and

dissolution of all things? For it is in the way of Nature (*kata physin gar*), and in the way of Nature there can be no evil (*ouden de kakon kata physin*).¹²⁶

Here we have the glory and the puzzle of ancient Stoicism – and, in a measure, of the best of ancient philosophy. A noble, temperate, sober vision, careful to avoid wrongdoing or injustice; by all accounts Marcus Aurelius was scrupulous in his public as well as his private life.¹²⁷ But there could hardly be a clearer statement of the problem: ‘nothing can be evil according to Nature’, so that everything in the world which appears evil cannot be so in fact. One must rise above it, ‘Lord of all pleasures and pains’, accepting the flux and dissolution of the world, and of oneself, ‘with a good grace’ (*hileō tē gnōmē*). The Universe (*kosmos*), Nature itself (*physis*), ‘Universal Nature’ (*koinē physis*) and ‘the Nature of the Universe’ (*hē tōn holōn physis*) are all the same thing, and this being is ‘the most venerable of Deities’.¹²⁸ This single being is the source, the means and the goal of all things:

All that is in tune with thee, O Universe, is in tune with me! ... All things come from thee, subsist in thee, go back to thee (*ek sou panta, en soi panta, eis se panta*).¹²⁹

This could not be further from Epicureanism. Instead of distant, detached divinities, ‘the divine’ is in us and around us, guiding and steering everything all the time. This is indeed the very heart of pantheism:

Cease not to think of the Universe (*kosmos*) as one living Being (*hen zōon*), possessed of a single Substance (*mian ousian*) and a single Soul (*psychēn mian*); and how all things trace back to its single sentience (*eis aisthēsin mian*); and how it does all things by a single impulse (*hormē mia*); and how all existing things are joint causes of all things that come into existence; and how intertwined in the fabric is the thread and how closely woven the web.¹³⁰

The apparent echoes of Paul only serve to show up the dramatic gulf that stands between the apostle and the emperor. For Paul, as for Judaism, the world is the good creation of the one God, who is both intimately involved with it and utterly different from it. That, in turn, begets a quite different approach to life, to death, and to the sense of what it means to be human. To this we shall return.

(v) Cynics and Sceptics

From Stoicism proper it is a short step to that disparate phenomenon – more of a mood than a movement – that was called Cynicism. The Cynics (again, our English meanings let us down here, though there is some overlap) prided themselves on pouring scorn on all human pretension. They barked and yapped, like dogs, at the rich, the respectable, and any who gave themselves airs.¹³¹ I have written about this movement elsewhere, and do not need to repeat that analysis,¹³² except to say that it is possible (and some scholars have developed this suggestion) to see Paul himself as in some ways like a wandering Cynic. Certainly his emphasis on *parrhēsia*, ‘freedom of speech’, in 2 Corinthians and elsewhere, coincides strikingly with the same theme in Cynic thought.¹³³ Though our sources for the Cynic movement are much thinner in Paul’s day than in earlier and later centuries, the portrait of the Cynics in Epictetus indicates that the tradition was alive and well in the first century. Epictetus seems to have regarded this movement as a kind of extreme version of Stoicism, though as with all extremes it led some of its members to positions that the larger body would not have held.¹³⁴ Certainly he warned that anyone wanting to be a Cynic should prepare himself to face flogging, and be prepared as well to love the people who were flogging him – a double message with interesting echoes in the New Testament.¹³⁵

The other movement which we must note as a serious option for many in Paul’s day is that of the Sceptics. The Athenian tradition always had the capacity to generate doubt, as anyone reading Plato will realize. I am reminded of a remark of the contemporary philosopher John Lucas to the effect that, in the arid climate of Oxford philosophy in his youth, ‘an ability not to be convinced was the most powerful part of a young philosopher’s armoury’, so that ‘a competent [philosophical] tutor could disbelieve any proposition, no matter how true it was, and the more sophisticated could not even understand the meaning of what was being asserted.’¹³⁶ So too with some ancients: once we admit that everything is in a state of flux, and that all our senses can and do deceive us, how can we be sure that, even if

something we might call a single *physis* exists, we could obtain true knowledge of it? Ironically perhaps, Plato's own school, which he might have supposed would lead to more and more people acquiring 'knowledge' of the ultimate Good, led many instead to puzzlement over knowledge itself, so that by the time Cicero wrote his famous book 'On the Nature of the Gods' in the middle of the first century BC, the word 'Academic', i.e. 'belonging to [Plato's] Academy', denoted a third live option for the serious thinker of his day. Some might choose to be Stoics, claiming that through the proper exercise of 'logic' they could indeed come both to know the truth about the *kosmos* and to embrace a life lived 'in accordance with nature'. Others might choose the way of Epicurus, claiming to know, again by logical reasoning, that the world and the gods were two totally different things, the former proceeding under its own steam by the chance movement of its atomic particles and the latter blissfully detached from the whole messy business. But some – and when Cicero wrote the book he numbered himself among them – were 'Academics', insisting that the evidence was insufficient, that 'knowledge' about all this was simply unavailable ... but that one should still continue to worship the gods as usual, just in case.

The history of the sceptical movement, from its beginnings in Pyrrho of Elis (360–271 BC) to Cicero's day, is of course more complicated than that (his work *Academica* is the best source for the whole story). It is customary, for a start, to distinguish between the strict Pyrrhonians and the more moderate 'Academy'. But the turns and twists of these debates do not concern us here.¹³⁷ Cicero was particularly indebted to Philo of Larissa (160/59–80 BC), who had disputed in particular the Stoic reliance on 'cognitive impressions' from which one might reason logically up to true knowledge, including of the divine.¹³⁸

Cicero has rightly been credited with translating the by then somewhat dusty debates of Greek philosophy into Latin and so giving them a new lease of life. His fresh Latin terminology would serve the subject well for the following millennium and more. But, like most of us, he was not completely consistent.¹³⁹ In many areas of his writing, not least his ethical and political thought, he leans decidedly in the direction of Stoicism, with

its insistence on the immortality of the soul (and the ‘divinity’ of human reason), and the divine care for and guidance of the whole world.¹⁴⁰

Cicero, in fact, provides us with evidence of two things which are worth bearing strongly in mind when contemplating the philosophical climate of the world in which Saul of Tarsus grew up and in which Paul the apostle travelled about announcing Jesus as Messiah and lord. First, philosophy was a topic of widespread discussion and debate right across the greco-roman world, particularly among the literary and cultured elite but also – as Epictetus reminds us a century or more later – very much at street level. This was already true before the first century BC, but the events of that highly disturbed period, particularly the terrible convulsions through which the Roman world passed in the middle decades of the century, contributed substantially to a fresh opening of ultimate questions:

These troubled times, which are reflected in the poems of Virgil and Horace, were a significant influence on the Roman turn to philosophy. As long as the main fabric of the Republic was intact, leading Romans had chiefly defined themselves by reference to family tradition and the renown that civic and military service could promote. With the state in complete disarray and no ethical or emotional support to be derived from official religion, we begin to find a more reflective and ascetic mentality, that would become still more prominent in the Empire.¹⁴¹

That was the world of Paul.

Second, Cicero’s mixture of the ‘Academic’ position with several significant elements of Stoicism is a reminder that, granted there was no creedal or dogmatic structure or policing of the different schools and opinions, the influence of Plato himself remained massive throughout the period. Much of his thought – for instance, on the immortality of the soul – had passed into Stoicism, just as much of the Socratic method which he made famous had opened the door for the questioning which led some to Scepticism. The explicit revival of the study of both Plato and Aristotle, which we noted earlier, combined with the teachings of both Stoic and Academic thinkers (the Epicureans alone maintaining, as they would, a dignified detachment), to form a general climate of opinion, at least as to the spectrum of possibilities. In particular, when we ask what Paul might have supposed his hearers would be thinking when he spoke or wrote about

a being he referred to as *theos*, about a powerful *pneuma* through which this ‘god’ might perform new deeds in his people, about the creation and recreation of the cosmos, and many other things besides, we must assume, and we must assume that he assumed, that the default mode for their thinking would be somewhere in the region of the Stoic development of Plato’s thought.

[\(vi\) The Philosophical Worldview](#)

What happens when we turn the spotlight of worldview-analysis on to the ancient philosophers, not least the Stoics who seem, *prima facie*, to be the most likely context for understanding Paul’s audience? A further whole book could easily be written at this point, and we must here boil it down to essentials.¹⁴²

The *praxis* of the first-century philosophers was, at its heart, the study, teaching, development and living out of the great traditions they inherited. We must never think of the ancient philosophers as working out schemes of ideas detached from everyday life. Philosophy, in the ancient world, was ‘everyday life’, lived, reflected upon and interpreted in this or that way. Each of the traditions inculcated a way of life, and what each meant by ‘reason’ or ‘wisdom’ was a meaning which nested within that totality. For some, therefore, embracing a philosophy came to involve a significant break with their previous life; everything was now different. This sense of a totality is part of what I have tried to indicate with the worldview-model which I and others have developed, recognizing that the word ‘worldview’ itself can, for some, point to a rather modern sense of ‘detached ideas’, but redefining it so as to bring into full and appropriately complex integration the life and tradition within which the ideas and theories mean what they mean and make the sense they make.

Behind all the divergence of the schools, the bright-eyed challenge remained: to see in the dark, to discern how the world really was, as opposed to how most people, misled by false impressions or the cunning of deceitful rhetoric, imagined it to be. Only then might one discern how to

live, to live in accordance with *physis*, with the way things really were. And for that task one needed logic, one needed to think clearly, to reason properly from one point to the next. Beyond that, the praxis diverged along with the teaching. Epicureans, believing that the world was divided radically into two, with the gods enjoying their detached bliss and the physical world developing in its own way, strongly recommended a similar detachment for its adherents: hence the Garden, both as a location for their school and as a hope to be realized in a country retreat for those who could afford it. The Stoics, by contrast, never seem to have abandoned the belief that the divinity that was active within all things, themselves included, was intent upon the proper and wise governance of all things. They therefore regularly sought influence in the highest circles: Seneca with Nero, Musonius with Titus, Dio and Pliny with Trajan, Epictetus with Hadrian, and finally Marcus Aurelius giving himself advice on how best to use the supreme position to which Fate had led him. Of course, by the same token, the Stoic praxis of seeking to bring wisdom into the political sphere had a severe corollary. When emperors and others disliked what they heard, banishment or worse might follow, and often did.¹⁴³ Here too we are reminded of Paul.

The *symbols* of the philosophers' worldview, the cultural artefacts which might catch the eye and sum up what they were about, would then include the texts they studied and, for Stoics at least, the simple clothes they wore, the plain food they ate, and the lack of luxury in their lives. They, seeing in the dark, had seen through all that kind of thing. To these the Cynics added the folded cloak, the begging-bag, the staff, and other signs of their extreme rejection of ordinary ways (long hair and beard, going without shoes, and so forth). Not all Cynics used all these symbols, but such accoutrements would probably have said 'Cynic' to a first-century onlooker.¹⁴⁴

The *stories* which the philosophers told, explicitly or implicitly, are most revealing. The new-style Platonists still harked back to the great myth of creation in the *Timaeus*, generally regarded at the time as the most important of Plato's works. Stories about the creation of the world, and the role of god or the gods in that task, loomed large. The Epicureans, of

course, told a complex but coherent narrative about how the material world had come into existence; Lucretius's version is the clearest, but we must assume that this was a regular theme of all teachers in the school.¹⁴⁵ The Stoics naturally taught the opposite narrative: all that exists is the result of the creative *logos* or *pneuma*, the active principle, working on the passive principle – fire and air working on earth and water – to produce the richly varied world we know. The end of the story varies similarly, with the Epicurean world dissolving into its component atoms and the Stoic one being eventually consumed by the fire which is its own primary element, only to be reborn and to repeat the process again and again.

Within this cosmic story, the more specific narrative told by all philosophers is, once more, the story of the bright-eyed owl. Ordinary mortals look at the world, draw wrong conclusions about it, and so behave inappropriately. Philosophers see what others cannot, they reason soundly on the basis of their true perceptions, and they thereby discern the follies of what the world counts valuable and the path to true happiness. This is a story, basically, about the *individual*, and indeed a case can be made for seeing the Greco-Roman philosophers as the real inventors of modern individualism. Though they then grouped together in schools, and though (despite their cosmopolitan ideals) most of them continued to live within the common life of their respective cities, the whole point of being a philosopher was that one was different.¹⁴⁶ As Epictetus insists, those who have glimpsed the truth are thereby commissioned to stand out from the herd and to show everyone else the error of their ways. The narrative then naturally develops into a story about what happens when philosophers do this, a story which as we saw can include, and often did include, suffering, banishment, and sometimes death.

Within Stoic and Cynic ethics, this individual narrative, aimed as with Aristotle at ultimate happiness, contained the regular note of *progress*.¹⁴⁷ One did not acquire fully fledged virtue all at one go; it took practice. This was the basis of all theories of virtue, one of the great lasting contributions of ancient philosophy, however much subsequent traditions have produced modifications.

Above all, the worldview-questions give us a sharp insight into the world of the philosophers – and into the possibility of a comparison, when we have studied him in his own right, with Paul. Take them first as addressed to more or less the entire ancient philosophical world. Who are we? We are humans, part of the world but trying to understand it and live wisely within it. Where are we? In the world of space, time and matter, but a world which some think teems with divine life as well. What's wrong? Most people, even most philosophers, do not see clearly enough in the darkness of the world, do not penetrate its secrets, and so do not live in the best possible way. In particular, they lack 'happiness' (*eudaimonia*), both in the normal sense that their circumstances trouble them and in the philosophical sense that, in seeking for normal happiness in outward circumstances, they are ignoring the real happiness that philosophy can help to produce. What's the solution? Why, study philosophy, of course, and then you will (gradually) accustom your eyes to the darkness of the world so that you can grasp the truth and live in accordance with it. Part of the result will be that you come at least to resemble the divine, and possibly to be transformed into a divine being yourself.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, whereas 'religion' in the ancient world meant submitting to someone (a god) other than oneself, philosophy meant that one was autonomous; either because, with the Epicureans, the gods are not concerned with what we do, so that we are only responsible to ourselves, or because, with the Stoics, the divinity is within us, so that responsibility to god and responsibility to self seem to be the same thing viewed from two different angles. Death itself will either be a return to absolute nothingness (Epicurus) or a transformation into a better life (Plato); as we have seen, some highly regarded Stoics kept this question open. What time is it? That's the sort of question, our philosophers might say, that a Jew might ask ... (The Stoics might have said that it was time for moral effort; the Academics, that it was time for more thought; the Peripatetics, that it was time for more research; the Epicureans, that it was time for a drink ...)

A Stoic would, of course, give sharper answers to the questions. Who are we? We are creatures composed, as is the whole world, of a mixture of the elements, with the physical element of fire indwelling us in the form of the

human *psychē*. We are therefore part of the divine, and the divine is part of us. Where are we? Within the Universe, the Cosmos, Nature, *to pan* – which is itself composed of the four elements, with fire and air acting upon earth and water to produce manifold forms of life. The same *logos* is at work in the world as within each of us. What’s wrong? Nothing is wrong with the world itself (the Epicureans would have disagreed strongly at this point). However, most people, deceived either by false impressions or by sloppy thinking or both, do not realize the truth of the matter, and so spend their time in futile pursuit of a mirage they think of as happiness. Even philosophers find it difficult to get it right all the time. What’s the solution? No surprises: study philosophy, start off on the path that might make you a sage, and continue to discipline yourself, to examine your own life and to take yourself in hand. All the virtues are within your grasp through the divine life within you, so co-operate with it and nerve yourself for the moral struggle. This will result in the appropriation (*oikeiōsis*) of what is in fact natural to ourselves. The end result (surprisingly similar, this, right across the philosophical board): a calm, untroubled life, free, self-sufficient, self-controlled. (The Stoics aimed to achieve this by refusing to regard pleasure and pain as important; the Epicureans, by regarding them as guides, but in a sophisticated fashion which looked for the real, calm, pleasure behind the mask of mere hedonism.) What time is it? For the Stoic, we are somewhere on the cycle between conflagrations; the fiery *pneuma*, which is the very breath of the divine, of Zeus himself, is at work in the world, and will one day transform everything into its own life of total fire before setting it all in motion yet again.

A glance at any textbook of philosophy, let alone any actual ancient texts, will show that this summary, though I trust accurate so far as it goes, is simply a pointer to deliberations of great subtlety, power and sometimes also beauty. I have thought it worth while to set some of this out within this present project not least because the questions that have surrounded ‘Paul and Philosophy’ have sometimes jumped straight for the natural parallels – between, for instance, elements of Paul’s pastoral and ethical language and that which we find in some Stoics. There is nothing wrong with that; but in

a book such as the present we have the chance to stand back and look at the larger picture. When we do, it is hard to suppose that Paul himself would not have had great respect for some of those we have studied. It is too easy to assume that, as a zealous Pharisaic Jew, he would simply sweep them all away as so much *skybala*, trash. Certainly that is not what he seems to be saying in some of the key passages:

These are the things you should think through: whatever is true, whatever is holy, whatever is upright, whatever is pure, whatever is attractive, whatever has a good reputation; anything virtuous, anything praiseworthy.¹⁴⁹

Whatever. Paul believed that he had been given insight into all things, all wisdom, through the divine *pneuma*, the spirit of the Messiah.¹⁵⁰ This kind of wisdom already made the ‘wisdom of the world’ look like foolishness to him.¹⁵¹ But precisely because this spirit was the spirit of the one God who had made the whole world – already we glimpse large areas of disagreement to be explored in due course – Paul expected that there might be points of overlap, of congruence. He would indeed regard it as his right and calling to ‘take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah’, but there were plenty of thoughts out there which, he might have judged, would be ready servants if only they were set within the right household. Not only thoughts; methods. How this plays out we must explore later on.

One final feature of Paul’s philosophical context must be named at this point. There is strong evidence that in his day, not only later in the century as used to be thought, a new movement was sweeping the Mediterranean world, a movement not wholly unlike that of the pre-Socratic ‘sophists’. This ‘Second Sophistic’ (the term was coined by Philostratus in his second-century AD ‘Lives of the Sophists’¹⁵²) highlighted rhetoric – the practice of public speaking – as the most prized intellectual activity. Techniques which could be traced back to the earlier movement of the Sophists were revived. Rhetoric became not merely a technique to be mastered by would-be lawyers or politicians, but a serious art form in its own right, with displays and contests being a common feature.¹⁵³ Though this movement reached perhaps its fullest flowering in the second century AD with characters like

Herodes Atticus (c.101–177) in Athens (Philostratus makes him the centre of his book), its beginnings can be clearly seen in the work of public speakers in Greek cities in the first century BC. The elder Seneca (writer, historian, and father of the famous philosopher of the same name) provides evidence of ‘declaimers’ who were active in Rome under Augustus and Tiberius.¹⁵⁴ In particular, a strong case has been made for the presence of teachers from the Second Sophistic both in Alexandria and Athens by at least the middle of the first century AD.¹⁵⁵ If there was a transition to a new mode within this movement later in the century, it may well have been a change not so much of the role played by such experts in declamation but of the wider and more open stage on which they could perform, giving them confidence and more political influence than before.¹⁵⁶ Faced with this new movement, what was Paul to do? His letters to Corinth offer a lively and many-sided answer.

(vii) The Philosophical Schools

Our brief survey has uncovered several features of considerable importance as we approach the task of placing Paul within the world into which he was called to go with the news of a different Lord. As we draw the threads together, we notice that, though the philosophical schools continued to operate in the first century, the outstanding figures we have mentioned seem to have been individuals, rather than professors within a particular establishment. It is possible that as actual communities the schools dwindled after the sack of Athens. But the evidence of continuing teaching, as we saw, in places like Alexandria, Rhodes and Tarsus, and epigraphic evidence of an Epicurean school continuing until at least the reign of Hadrian in the early second century AD, indicates that in all probability such communities did indeed maintain their common life and work.¹⁵⁷ The writers at whom we have glanced were original thinkers; but originality was not highly prized in the ancient world, and it may well be that there was, in many locations, steady exposition of what were already seen as the philosophical classics. Later in the second century, Marcus Aurelius, though

himself of course a devout Stoic, endowed chairs in Athens in each of the four major schools, Platonic, Peripatetic, Stoic and Epicurean. It seems unlikely that he had to refound the schools themselves in order to accomplish this.

The schools, as I have stressed, each shared a common life. Since the idea of a common life was itself an important element in the various philosophies (with the Stoics particularly emphasizing *koinōnia*), we should assume that such communities formed more or less coherent units, meeting to study the works of the founders and to encourage one another in living the appropriate life. As I hinted before, it would be saying too much to suggest that the churches which Paul founded were just like these philosophical schools.¹⁵⁸ But it would be saying too little to suggest that they had nothing in common. If Luke's description of those who met Paul in Athens is anything to go by, it would have been natural for members of such schools to try to put Paul into one or other of their regular pigeon-holes.¹⁵⁹ And even though, in that case, they concluded that he was a rag-bag teacher (*spermologos*, one who picks up words and gossip like a bird picking up seeds) preaching 'foreign divinities' (*xena daimonia*), anyone who looked at the communities Paul had founded might have responded that in fact he was more like the philosophers themselves. If the philosophers thought Paul was offering some odd kind of religion, I suspect that the religious would have thought he was offering some kind of philosophy. But to take this discussion any further we must take a deep breath and plunge into that other world, the world the philosophers so often criticized while claiming to teach the truth to which it pointed: the world of ancient Greco-Roman religion itself.

[3. Jewish Responses to Pagan Philosophy](#)

Before we do that, one final task remains. Granted that Paul grew up in the world of strict Pharisaic Judaism, what response might we expect him to have to the world of pagan philosophy? It would be easy to jump straight to

a purely negative conclusion: all this is so much foolishness, swept aside by the divine self-revelation in Torah. But there are signs that other avenues were there to be explored as well. Once more it is obviously out of the question to attempt any sort of full or comprehensive account. The interaction between Judaism and the wider world of culture, philosophy, politics and so on in the relevant period already fills many volumes on the library shelves. It would be possible to work through a dozen second-Temple Jewish books and authors and to analyze each in terms of their engagement with the wider philosophical and cultural tradition. Josephus, in particular, would be an attractive choice for such study. For our present purposes, however, as much illustrative as expository, I choose another obvious text: the Wisdom of Solomon.

Nobody knows exactly when Wisdom was written, or by whom, but the book must be roughly contemporary with Jesus and Paul or perhaps slightly earlier.¹⁶⁰ One of the most striking features of the book, in general but also in terms of our present discussion, is that it draws on Platonic and Stoic ideas in order to present the figure of ‘Wisdom’ as occupying the place in the divinely created and ordered cosmos which in the Stoics was taken by the *logos* or the *pneuma*:

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent (*pneuma noeron*), holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.

For she is a reflection of eternal light, and a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.

Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls, and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail. She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.¹⁶¹

In the light of our previous exploration of Stoic themes, there should be no difficulty in proposing that a first-century reader would understand the author to be claiming for ‘Wisdom’ personified what the philosophers had said of the *pneuma*, and to be developing this in familiar ways (making people ‘friends of God’ and so on). There appears to be, here, more of an attempt than is made in the ancient Hebrew scriptures themselves to give an account of the inner, perhaps even ‘metaphysical’, workings of the cosmos, including the typically Stoic notion that the deity created the world out of shapeless *hylē*, ‘matter’, the passive principle.¹⁶² And, exactly as in Stoicism, ‘ethics’ follows naturally: what humans need is precisely this ‘wisdom’, in order to know the secrets of how the world works (7.15–22a) and so to develop the consequent life of virtue (8.7, listing the four classical virtues of temperance, prudence, justice and courage). Another development which takes this book a lot further than anything in the earlier scriptural writings is Wisdom’s clear teaching of a ‘soul’ which is both ‘pre-existent’ (8.19–20), ‘weighed down’ by the present perishable body (*phtharton sōma*, 9.15), and able to survive physical death.¹⁶³ The righteous, like righteousness itself, are ‘immortal’.¹⁶⁴

At the same time, the polemic against the wicked who persecute the righteous (1.16—2.20) looks very like a description, and denunciation, of classic Epicurean theory:

Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end ... For we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been, for the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts; when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit (*pneuma*) will dissolve like empty air ... Our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and be scattered like mist that is chased by the rays of the sun and overcome by its heat ...

Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth.

Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass us by ... Let none of us fail to share in our revelry; everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, because this is our portion, and this our lot.¹⁶⁵

This is more or less exactly what Epicurus and his followers believed and taught. The corollary, though, might have startled them: ‘the wicked’ then

proceed, on this basis, to persecute ‘the righteous’, because such a person is inconvenient, reproaching sin and claiming to know a better way. I do not know that Stoics ever accused Epicureans of this kind of plot or persecution, though it has its own logic: if pleasure is the goal, and if the self-appointed ‘righteous’ are making life miserable by their criticisms, pleasure might be enhanced if they were out of the way. In any case, it is against that background that Wisdom then affirms that ‘the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God.’ They may have been persecuted and killed, but God is looking after them.

So far, so Stoic. Indeed, to this extent Wisdom might be hailed as one of the more eloquent expositions of a Stoic position. But the book is far more subtle, and intricately woven, than simply a Jewish attempt to expound a pagan philosophy. At every point in the book these apparently Stoic themes, subjects and technical terms are used *to undergird an essentially Jewish claim*. The book functions as a large-scale exposition of the second psalm: the nations are in uproar, but the one true God establishes his king, and calls the nations to tremble before him. It is Solomon, David’s son, who extols wisdom in chapters 7, 8 and 9, and prays that he may be given the wisdom he needs to govern God’s people. ‘I perceived,’ he says, ‘that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me’ (8.21); in other words, unlike the *logos* or *pneuma* in Stoicism, ‘wisdom’ is *not* automatically part of the make-up of all humans. Nor is immortality an automatic human possession; it will be the result of a righteous life, while the wicked, who have articulated the Epicurean doctrine, will find that doctrine to be true in their own case.¹⁶⁶ In any case, the ‘immortality’ promised to the righteous is not merely that of a disembodied life ‘in the hand of God’. The promise in 3.1–3 is only the first phase of a larger narrative, in which

In the time of their visitation they will shine forth and will run like sparks through the stubble.
They will govern nations and rule over people, and YHWH will reign over them for ever.¹⁶⁷

As I and others have demonstrated elsewhere, this is Wisdom’s prediction of a two-stage post-mortem reality for the righteous: first a time of resting ‘in the hand of God’, and then a time of return, restoration, and sharing

God's sovereign rule. It is, in fact, a coded (but quite clear) prediction of resurrection.¹⁶⁸ Such a notion would of course have been anathema not only to Epicureans, but also to Stoics, Platonists and more or less everyone else across the spectrum of paganism. At this point, the Wisdom of Solomon has taken the language of philosophy and has made it serve, decisively, an essentially Jewish vision of reality.

Nor is that all. As with Psalm 2, the book confidently predicts a great judgment in which the one God will sort things out properly (chapter 5), and then issues a warning to the kings of the earth that they should seek, while they have time, for the true wisdom, because the one God will hold them responsible for what they have done with their power and position (chapter 6). Thus, just as Psalm 2 predicts that Israel's God will set his anointed king over the whole world and call its rulers to account (expressed in Psalm 2.7–8 in the first person singular: 'I will tell of YHWH's decree; He said to me, "You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" '), so the warning of coming judgment gives way to the autobiographical section in which 'Solomon' tells of his prayer for the wisdom he will need if he is to fulfil the tasks allotted to David's son (9.7–12).

All this is deeply consonant with the book's implicit and sometimes explicit cosmology, which requires (as the early Fathers saw) an almost binitarian view of *theos* and *sophia*. The *theos* by whom the world was made is distinguished from the *sophia* that indwells the world. That distinction is then worked through in the distinction between those who seek, pray for, and receive this *sophia* – in other words, Solomon and any who copy him – and those who do not. This leads to the further distinction: the former will receive immortality (and ultimately, it seems, resurrection), and the latter will not.

Here, in other words, is a brilliant and radical Jewish reworking of key elements in Stoic philosophy. If we can for a moment imagine a meeting, not now between Seneca and Paul, but between Seneca and the pseudonymous 'Solomon', I think Seneca would have been impressed with

the power and poetic beauty of the book, but also disturbed and quite possibly offended at the presumption that this *sophia*, and the immortality it conveyed, would have been in any way restricted, particularly to the Jewish people and their royal traditions. And he would surely have scoffed, like the mockers in Athens, at even the hint of resurrection.

But there is more. The whole second half of the book of Wisdom is a retelling of the ancient story of Israel, arguing that Wisdom's activity in the world is focused, not on the general task of making humans virtuous, but on the life and story of Israel. The critique of pagan idolatry in chapters 13 and 14 has its roots in the Psalms and Isaiah 40—55, but it also has its counterparts in the philosophical critique of popular 'religion', from Plato and the Pyrrhonians onwards. But the critique itself is framed within a retold exodus narrative in which it becomes clear that the real thrust of the book is not merely philosophical, not merely an attempt to teach this special kind of 'wisdom', not merely a critique of one kind of 'religion' in favour of another, but *political*. 'Egypt' in the story stands not only, we may assume, for the pagan Egypt of the writer's own day, always capable of launching another pogrom against its Jewish inhabitants, but for any great power which oppresses and enslaves God's people. The philosophical tools of paganism are thus made, throughout the book, to serve a story the like of which was never imagined by anyone from Socrates to Seneca and beyond. This emerges clearly, for instance, in the author's reflection on the way in which the elements of the cosmos, here particularly snow, ice and fire, sometimes behaved in their normal manner and sometimes did not, in accordance with the creator's purposes. This theme, outlined in the description of the plagues in Egypt, returns at the close of the book, where 'the elements changed places with one another,' and 'fire even in water retained its normal power, and water forgot its fire-quenishing nature.'¹⁶⁹ The narrative of the book's second half thus not only issues a warning against the wickedness of the nations; it picks up the current philosophical reflections of the day on the very nature of the creation, and expounds the divine sovereignty over it all. This is the story of a world created and ordered by a divinity who remained both other than the world and deeply

involved with the world; of this divinity creating an ordered and stable world whose elements remain subject to his will; of this same divinity calling a specific people, then guiding and defending them and passing judgment on those who opposed them (though they might have to suffer terribly in the process); of this same divinity calling the whole world to account, as in Psalm 2, through those (or perhaps the one) who truly and uniquely possessed the promised 'wisdom'. If all this reminds us more than a little of Acts 17, perhaps we should not be surprised.

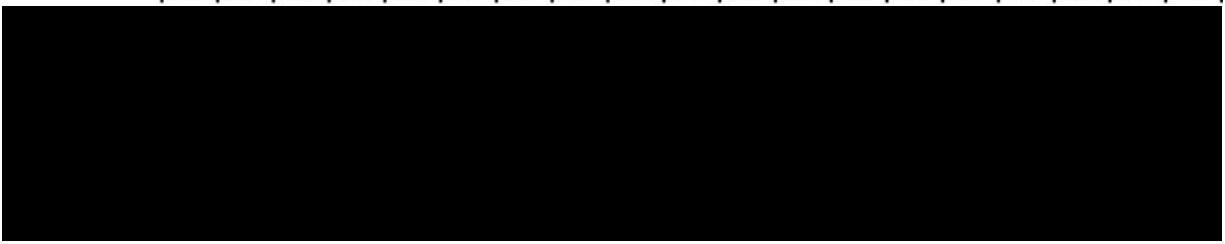
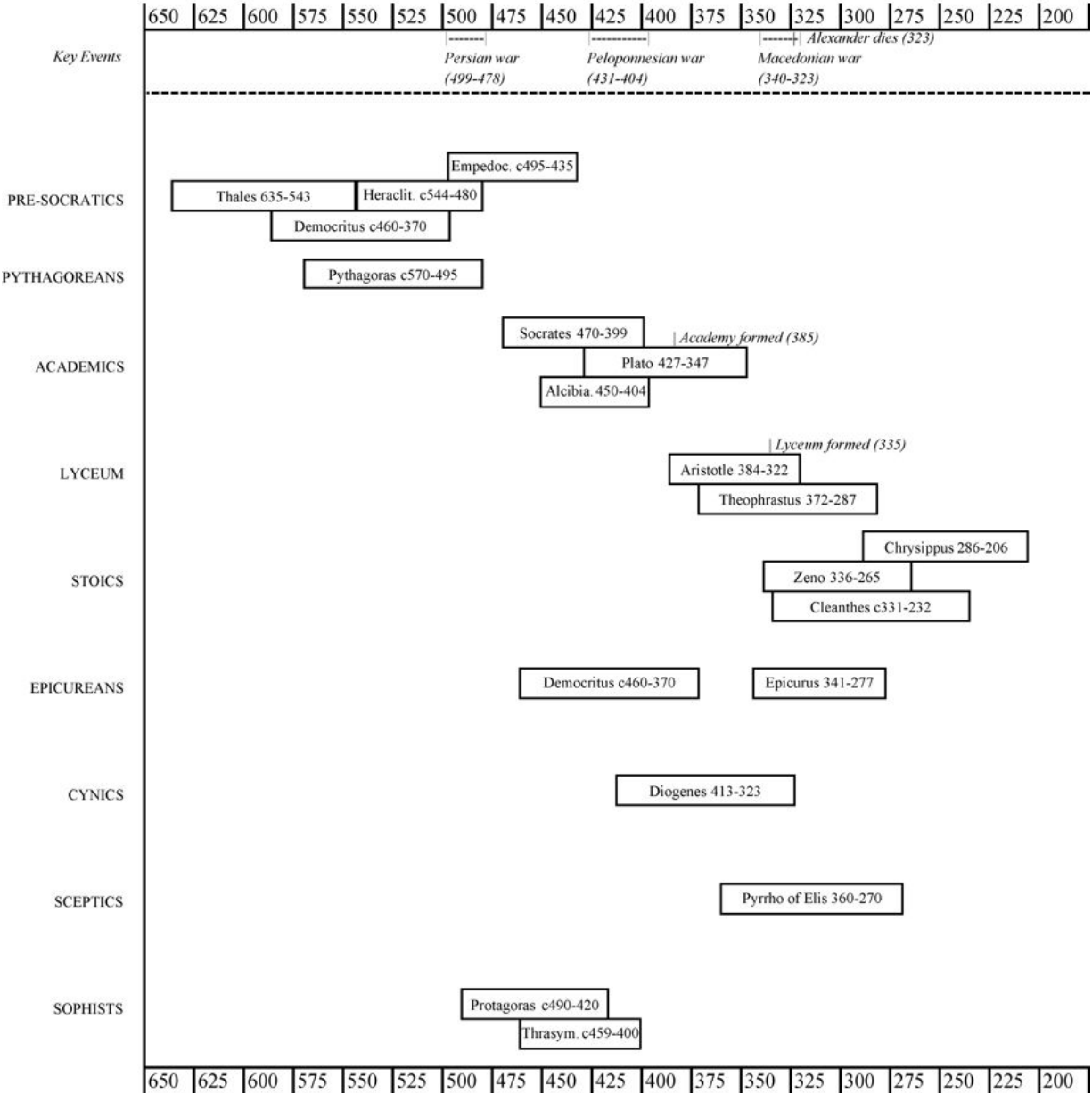
When we ask, therefore, what has happened in the Wisdom of Solomon to the traditional topics of logic, physics and ethics, the answer must be that they are all present, but in a strikingly transformed mode. The underlying 'logic', the means whereby the writer apparently claims to know what can be said, is not simply the combination of accurate sense-impressions and clear reasoning. It is the scriptures of Israel, and particularly the narratives of the exodus and the monarchy. The 'physics', the account of the world's creation and constitution, is a fresh reading of Genesis, with *sophia* filling in the picture. The 'ethics' is *both* a fresh statement of the Stoic development of Aristotle's system of virtues *and* a fresh reading of the biblical tradition of 'righteousness'. Athene's owl has peered into the darkness and come back to report what he has seen; but, at the same time, the birds which hovered overhead to protect the wandering Israelites have told their own story.

The fruit of this double vision comes in the answer given by the Wisdom of Solomon to the great, dark question on which even Seneca and Marcus Aurelius seem to have remained agnostic. Both options, it seems, are true. At death, those who have spurned the one God and his people will suffer the kind of annihilation promised by the Epicureans, while those who have embraced this special kind of 'wisdom' will enjoy immortality, perhaps even resurrection. The more we understand how Stoic thought worked, the more the Wisdom of Solomon stands out not just as a Jewish version of that same philosophy but as a striking attempt to express the still very Jewish belief in the one creator God, and in his as yet unfinished purposes for Israel, in the thought-forms of the day, not by capitulation (remember the

sharp critique both of idolatry and of Epicureanism) but by transformation. 'Wisdom' has borrowed several garments from Stoicism's wardrobe. But the body which they clothe, the narrative, belief and hope, remains recognizably Jewish. I shall argue later that something fairly similar, *mutatis mutandis*, has happened in the case of the apostle Paul.

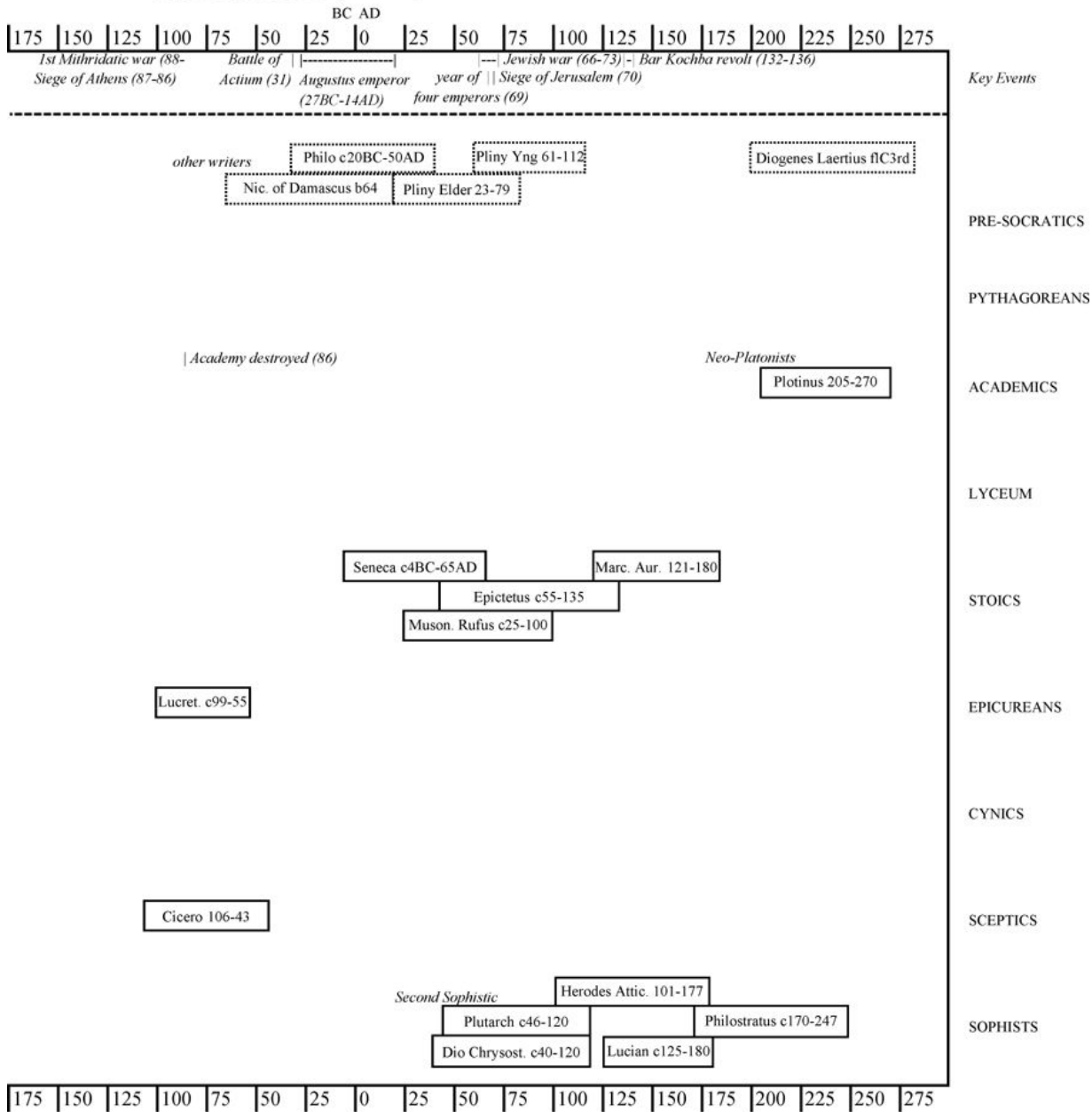
This brief discussion of one of the many relevant Jewish documents has brought us back to the question of religion. What was the 'religious' world of Paul's contemporaries?

[Appendix: Chronological Chart of Early Philosophers](#)





JESUS c4BC-c30AD |-----| PAUL c5-c67



¹ e.g. Aristophanes *Birds* 301. For the legend of Athene banishing crows from the Acropolis cf. Lucretius *De Re. Nat.* 6.749–55 (Lucretius, as he was bound to do, attributes this to natural causes).

² cp. the famous scene when ‘bright-eyed’ Athene checks the rage of Achilles: Homer, *Il.* 1.188–222 (esp. at 206).

³ Hegel 1991 [1821], 23.

⁴ On this threefold division see e.g. Diog. Laert. 7.40; Sextus Empiricus *Against Maths* 7.17.

⁵ As they would do again half a century later, supporting Antony rather than Octavian (i.e. Augustus), and being punished accordingly: see Richardson 2012, 107f.

⁶ Strabo 14.673.

⁷ 14.5.14–15. On earlier products of Tarsus, see Sedley 2003, 30. Chrysippus, one of the greatest Stoics of all time ([see below, 213–16](#)), was the son of a Tarsian.

⁸ See e.g. Gal. 1.13f.; Phil. 3.4–6. On the spectrum of Jewish views and practices see esp. Barclay 1996, and [above, ch. 2](#).

⁹ Which justifies (should that be needed) the presence of this chapter in this book. Malherbe 1989b laments the decline in the study of Paul within his philosophical context; also Malherbe 1989a, 3. This is part of the larger story of the turns and twists of (so-called) ‘history-of-religions’ research over the last century, on which see *Interpreters*.

¹⁰ Rom. 11.13; cf. 1.5; 15.16; Gal. 1.16; 2.7, 9; Eph. 3.1, 8. I use ‘nations’ and ‘pagans’ more or less interchangeably. Some scholars become twitchy over possible pejorative overtones of ‘pagans’ (e.g. Athanassiadi and Frede 1999, 4f.), but that should not stop us using it heuristically to denote non-Jews; in a study of Paul this distinction is necessary and inevitable, not for elitist reasons (Athanassiadi and Frede, 5) but in order to get as close as we can to seeing things the way Paul himself saw them. See now North 2011, 481f., 489f.

¹¹ See *Perspectives*, ch. 12, and [below, 1284–8, 1293f](#).

¹² Rom. 15.8f. For discussion of precise interpretation (and possible related alternative punctuation) see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 746–8.

¹³ Rom. 15.9b–12; cf. 1.3–5; 16.26.

¹⁴ See e.g. Seneca’s letters with persistent quotations from Epicurus.

¹⁵ Monotheism: 1 Cor. 8.4–6 ([see below, 661–70](#); the point is controversial; see Athanassiadi and Frede 1999); sexual ethics: Eph. 5.1–20; Col. 3.4–7 ([see below, 1101–8](#)).

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 10.5; cf. Col. 1.15–20; 2.2f.

¹⁷ [See esp. ch. 4 below](#).

¹⁸ For the wider problems about using the contemporary western category of ‘religion’ in discourse about ancient Jews and Christians see e.g. Thiessen 2011, 142–4; and see esp. [ch. 13 below](#).

¹⁹ Pliny 10.96.7; see the discussion in *NTPG* 348f.

²⁰ This is the point emphasized by (among others) Stowers 2001.

²¹ cf. e.g. 1 Pet. 2.11f.; 3.13–17; 4.3–6.

²² The introduction of new cults, especially ‘mystery’ cults, was a different matter; [see below, 264–8](#), and the question of early Christian persecution (see *NTPG* 346–55).

²³ On banishment: Dio Cassius *Hist.* 65.12 (Cynics and Stoics banished from Rome by Vespasian, probably in 71); see too Domitian 89. Musonius Rufus got himself banished regularly: *OCD* 1013. See below for more details. In 1656 Baruch Spinoza was expelled from the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish community, at the age of twenty-three, for his ‘abominable heresies and monstrous deeds’ (see e.g. Schwartz 2012, 17–19 etc.).

²⁴ Despite LS 850, who, citing only this correspondence, translate ‘a (religious) brotherhood, fraternity’. The Gk. original (see LSJ 700) is much wider, including particularly political clubs; the only mention of religion in the LSJ citations on the root is a Jewish inscription from Cilicia (*OGI* 573.1). See too Pliny’s correspondence with Trajan concerning the meetings of the local fire brigade, who by their close bonding were to be regarded as a political threat: Pliny *Ep.* 10.33f.

²⁵ So e.g. Judge 2008a, 415.

²⁶ The standard sculptures of Socrates, and the early depictions of Paul, share several characteristics, not least the domed and partly bald head, and the beard. I do not know if anyone has researched the possibility of an imitative relationship.

²⁷ On poetry and philosophy see *OCD* 1169; and e.g. Most 2003, 308 on Varro.

²⁸ The range of Koester 1982a and b remains impressive, even if the research of the last generation has not always upheld his judgments.

²⁹ See the discussions in e.g. Hengel 1991, chs. 1 and 2; Barrett 1998, 1034–6.

³⁰ Ac. 9.30; 11.25. This corresponds to Paul’s own account of spending time in ‘Syria and Cilicia’ (Gal. 1.21).

³¹ 2 Cor. 10.4f.

³² e.g. Kenny 2010. I have found considerable help in the recent dictionaries of philosophy, e.g. Honderich 1995; Audi 1999 [1995], and the recent series of ‘Cambridge Companions’. A timeline of ancient philosophers, compiled by my assistant Jamie Davies, is supplied at the end of the present chapter ([below, 244f.](#)).

³³ On the pre-Socratics, see the basic collection and discussion in Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983 [1957]; and the more recent discussion in Schofield 2003a.

³⁴ Democritus was a slightly younger contemporary of Socrates.

³⁵ On the sophists, cf. Broadie 2003.

³⁶ For a recent fascinating if tendentious discussion see Waterfield 2009. The basic texts are Plato’s *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro* and above all *Phaedo*.

³⁷ On Thales, Pythagoras and Heraclitus, see the works cited in [n. 33 above](#).

³⁸ One of Socrates’s most famous lines has regularly been translated ‘The unexamined life is not worth living’ (Plato *Apol.* 38A). The key word *anexetastos*, however, though it can have the passive meaning ‘unexamined’ (e.g. Demosth. 4.36; 21.218) is given the active meaning ‘without inquiry or investigation’ in LSJ 133: in other words, ‘The life that doesn’t go on asking questions is not worth living.’ LSJ give no other refs. for this meaning; perhaps we should allow both to resonate.

³⁹ See Steiner 1996, 361–89; Gooch 1997; Waterfield 2009.

⁴⁰ On Plato’s beliefs about the afterlife see *RSG* 47–53.

⁴¹ It may be that the Academy was actually co-founded by Eudoxus (cf. Diog. Laert. 8.86–91, including the suggestion of rivalry between him and Plato), and that Plato became dominant only after Eudoxus’s death. I owe this point to Christopher Kirwan.

⁴² On Plutarch see the wide-ranging treatments of e.g. Jones 1971; Russell 1973; and more recently Duff 1999.

⁴³ e.g. in the work of Apollonius of Tyana, more or less a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth (though he outlived him by at least fifty years). It would be interesting to trace the development of Pythagoreanism, but this would take us quite a long way from our present purpose.

⁴⁴ On the rise of modern Epicureanism, see e.g. Greenblatt 2011; Wilson 2008. Recent popular commendations of Stoicism include Vernezze 2005; Holowchak 2008.

⁴⁵ It was hard for anyone writing in the ancient world to hold this position with complete consistency. Lucretius opens his great Epicurean masterpiece (*De Re. Nat.* 1.1–49) by invoking the help of Venus. Smith’s note in the Loeb edn. points out that Venus is the Empedoclean principle of Love, and hence the creative forces in the world, as opposed to Mars who represents strife, and that she is also ‘the personification of the Epicurean *summum bonum*, pleasure (*voluptas*)’ (Loeb, 2f.). But the passage still reads remarkably like a prayer to a real goddess, invoking real and actual help from the one without whom nothing joyful or lovely is made (1.23), so that she, the goddess, may grant to the poet’s words ‘an ever-living charm’: ‘quo magis aeternum da dictis, diva, leporem’ (1.28). Some might argue that the prayer was answered, which would increase the sense of irony (the goddess enabling Lucretius to write a beautiful poem denying divine action in the world).

⁴⁶ Not what we today mean by the word, but with the same idea of ‘the smallest particle possible’: *atomos* means ‘uncuttable’, ‘indivisible’.

⁴⁷ It was Empedocles who proposed that all things were composed of the four elements: fire, earth, air and water. This was taken up by Aristotle and then by the Stoics; cf. too the discussion in *Lucretius* 1.565–9, 716–829.

⁴⁸ The only echo I have found is when Lucretius speaks of running the race to the goal and receiving the crown (6.92–5); cf. 1 Cor. 9.24; Phil. 3.14; 2 Tim. 4.8. But this, as Paul’s own varied usage indicates, is a common and flexible metaphor.

⁴⁹ [Below, ch. 14.](#)

⁵⁰ cf. *Diog. Laert.* 7.183: had there been no Chrysippus, there would have been no (continuing) Stoa.

⁵¹ The difference between Epicureans and Deists, in a nutshell, is that Deists are normally monotheists who allow that the divinity created the world, whereas classic Epicureanism allows for many divinities, who didn’t. But for present purposes the distant ‘god’ of Deism functions pretty much like the detached divinities of Epicureanism.

⁵² The idea of a fire goes back to Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. c.500), for whom the cosmos formed a complete system which, though in a continual state of flux, was held together by the *logos*. For ‘aether’ as another name for the fiery substance cf. *Diog. Laert.* 7.137.

⁵³ *Diog. Laert.* 7.88.

⁵⁴ *Diog. Laert.* 7.89. Cicero’s summary of this doctrine is found (on the lips of ‘Cato’) in *Ends* 3.9.31: ‘the Chief Good consists in applying to the conduct of life a knowledge of the working of natural causes, choosing what is in accordance with nature and rejecting what is contrary to it; in other words, the Chief Good is to live in agreement and in harmony with nature (*convenientur congruenterque naturae vivere*).’

⁵⁵ See the important discussion in *Diog. Laert.* 7.89–97; in 7.125f. he points out that in Stoic teaching to possess one of the virtues is to possess them all. For discussion cf. Schofield 2003b, 239–46. The classic presentation of Stoic virtue-theory is by Cicero (stating it, in the mouth of his conversation partner Cato, in order to refute it) in *Ends* Book 3.

⁵⁶ See Brunschwig and Sedley 2003, 174f.

⁵⁷ Brunschwig and Sedley 2003, 174.

⁵⁸ *Diog. Laert.* 7.122.

⁵⁹ See Long 2006, 205.

⁶⁰ *Ends* 3.15.48.

⁶¹ *Ends* 3.21.72. The Loeb translator has put ‘Logic’ in the margin beside Cicero’s *dialectica*, but it seems clearer to keep ‘dialectic’ here.

⁶² cf. *Lucretius De Re. Nat.* 2.180f.; 5.195–9.

⁶³ See Brunschwig and Sedley 2003, 172. Zeno was once beating a slave for stealing. The culprit pleaded that he had been fated to steal; Zeno replied that he was fated to be beaten, too (Diog. Laert. 7.23).

⁶⁴ Diog. Laert. 7.137. This is picked up by Plutarch in his critique of Stoic ideas: *Comm. Not.* 1065B; 1067A (= *SVF* 2.606); Plutarch is sniffing out a possible difficulty in the theory, in that if Zeus has absorbed everything into himself, there will be no evil and hence neither goodness nor prudence. Other discussions of the point in Plutarch are noted in Loeb (13.2) 705 (Cherniss).

⁶⁵ cf. Sen. *NQ* 3.29.5; 3.30.8. In *Ep. Mor.* 9.16 the conflagration provides Jupiter with some quiet space to think his own thoughts before starting the whole business up again (cf. too Epict. *Disc.* 3.13.4f.).

⁶⁶ See Long and Sedley 1987, 1.311. Some Stoics linked the conflagration with a putative ‘great year’ in which all the heavenly bodies would return simultaneously to their original position; see Jones 2003, 337.

⁶⁷ *NQ* 3.27.1—30.8; on the timing, 29.1.

⁶⁸ See esp. Salles 2009, with refs; esp. Chrysippus in *SVF* 2.604: the cosmos does not ‘die’, since the soul is not separated from the body, but rather the fiery substance of the soul consumes the body of the cosmos (see too Algra 2003, 172f.). For other debates about the conflagration see e.g. Sedley 2003, 23f.

⁶⁹ The word ‘theology’ was first used, in extant literature at least, by Plato in *Rep.* 2 (379A). Plato was writing about what ‘correct speech about the gods’ might involve, and debunking the myths of the poets. Aristotle is credited with the first use of *theologeō*, ‘to discourse on the gods and cosmology’ (*Metaph.* 983.b.29). See the discussion in Most 2003, 311f. ‘Theology’ was, however, used by Varro (C1 BC) in three senses: the mythical, as in the older poets; the analytical (according to *physis*, nature) as in the philosophers; and the ‘civil’, as in ordinary religion (see Aug. *Civ. De.* 6.5); in other words, what we might call myth, theology proper, and cult or religion. To these Dio Chrysostom added a fourth, that of the artists, particularly sculptors who fashion images of the gods (*Or.* 12.39–47). See e.g. Rüpke 2007 [2001], 119–34.

⁷⁰ Diog. Laert. 7.147f. (tr. Hicks [Loeb]).

⁷¹ For the idea of the divine ‘having many names’, including ‘reason’ (*nous*), ‘fate’ (*heimarmenē*) and ‘Zeus’ himself, see Diog. Laert. 7.135, 147. ‘God’ is in fact the ‘seminal reason’ (*spermatikos logos*) of the universe; in one sense, the cosmos itself is ‘god’ (7.138), since ‘the whole world is a living being, endowed with soul and reason, and having aether for its ruling principle’, though there are shades of opinion among Stoic teachers as to how this works out (7.139).

⁷² White 2003, 137 n. 55 (italics original).

⁷³ See Athanassiadi and Frede 1999; and, against, e.g. Price 2011, 266.

⁷⁴ e.g. Diog. Laert. 7.124.

⁷⁵ cf. *De Ira* 3.36.1–3: ‘[The mind] should be summoned to give an account of itself every day ... Can anything be more excellent than this practice of thoroughly sifting the whole day? ... I avail myself of this privilege, and every day I plead my cause before the bar of self. When the light has been removed from sight, and my wife, long aware of my habit, has become silent, I scan the whole of my day and retrace all my deeds and words. I conceal nothing from myself, I omit nothing ...’

⁷⁶ On the puzzle of Stoic prayer, cf. esp. Algra 2003, 174–7. Algra suggests (175) that Epictetus’s prayer at the end of the *Encheiridion* (*Ench.* 53.1) is actually a form of self-address, a kind of meditation (‘Lead thou me on, O Zeus, and Destiny/ To that goal long ago to me assigned ...’).

⁷⁷ Brunschwig and Sedley 2003, 165.

⁷⁸ cf. Long 2003, 204.

⁷⁹ I am not convinced by the suggestion of Engberg-Pedersen 2000, 46 that there is a sharp line to be drawn between the ‘middle Stoicism’ visible in Cicero and a supposed ‘late Stoicism’ in Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. This seems to me a muddled proposal, designed to privilege Cicero’s *Ends* which (so Engberg-Pedersen believes) supports his theoretical model. [See ch. 14 below](#).

⁸⁰ Long 2003, 205f.

⁸¹ On deification of emperors [see ch. 5 below](#). Seneca’s lampoon on Claudius is the *Apocolocyntōsis*.

⁸² His eventual suicide in 65 is graphically described by Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.62–4); it was clearly modelled on the death of Socrates.

⁸³ For the letters (probably the same ones as are mentioned in Jerome *De Vir. Ill.* 12, and Augustine *Ep.* 153.14), see Elliott 1993, 547–53; the earliest extant MS is from the ninth century. A substantial earlier discussion of Paul and Seneca, including the letters, is in Lightfoot 1868, 268–331. The classic monograph is Sevenster 1961. Tertullian’s famous remark that ‘Seneca is often on our side’ (*Seneca saepe noster*) is at *de Anim.* 20.

⁸⁴ cf. his polemic against quibbling and logic-chopping in *Ep.* 48. The middle period of Stoicism, with its emphasis more on practical moral living than on abstract theory, is normally traced to Panaetius (c.185–110 BC).

⁸⁵ cf. *Ep.* 48.1–2, with Gummere’s note in the Loeb. See too the discussion of the point in Cic. *Ends* 3.21.69.

⁸⁶ *Ep. Mor.* 12.11; 14.17; cf. 8.8

⁸⁷ *Ep.* 48.10.

⁸⁸ *Ep. Mor.* 41.3 (tr. Gummere [Loeb]: ‘to pleach’, cognate with ‘to ply’, means ‘to braid’).

⁸⁹ *Ep. Mor.* 41.1–2.

⁹⁰ *Ep.* 48.11.

⁹¹ *Ep. Mor.* 73.16 (tr. Gummere [Loeb]). In *Ep.* 102 Seneca warns Lucilius how difficult it is to reform a hardened sinner.

⁹² On this, see Algra 2003, 171–3, with notes; Most 2003, 313.

⁹³ The classic study within biblical scholarship was by Bultmann 1910; see too Stowers 1981; Watson 1993, with other refs.; and the helpful analysis, with warnings about misuse, in *OCD* 461f.

⁹⁴ ed. Hense (1905). On the ‘Socrates’ epithet see Lutz 1947.

⁹⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 3.81 (tr. Penguin Classics). The sneers remind me of the mocking at the end of Paul’s Areopagus speech (*Ac.* 17.32), and of what was probably said by the sea-captain and the centurion after Paul’s attempted intervention in their sailing plans (*Ac.* 27.10f.). Morgan 2006, 250 shares Tacitus’s perspective, describing Musonius as ‘a busybody’.

⁹⁶ Under Nero, first in 60–2, then again in 65–9 (*Tac. Ann.* 15.59, 71); then in the mid-70s (see Pliny *Ep.* 3.11), during which time he protested in public in Athens against gladiatorial games. These and other aspects of Musonius’s life and work are discussed by Dillon 2004.

⁹⁷ A study of Dio (real name Dio Cocceianus) would add somewhat to the present survey but for our purposes would take us too far afield. Having made an early career in rhetoric, as part of the ‘second sophistic’ (see below), he was persuaded by Musonius to take up philosophy instead. Like Musonius, he was banished from Rome, in his case by Domitian, but he returned under Nerva and became a friend of Trajan. The question of whether this constituted some kind of compromise strikes me as essentially modern; for the Stoics, as opposed at this point to the Cynics, the right to free speech (*parrhēsia*) was aimed at making the *polis* a better place from top to bottom, and if one could wield influence in high places there might be a responsibility at least to try.

⁹⁸ See Aulus Gellius *Noct. Att.* 15.11.5.

⁹⁹ So Oldfather in Loeb 1.xi.

¹⁰⁰ e.g. 1.9.20; 3.8.6. Cf. too e.g. Sen. *De Prov.* 6.7 (*patet exitus*, ‘the way out is open’).

¹⁰¹ 1.4.13–15.

¹⁰² 1.10.7–8.

¹⁰³ 1.10.12–13.

¹⁰⁴ 1.3.1–3. ‘The true nature (*ousia*) of God’ is ‘intelligence, knowledge, right reason’ (*nous, epistēmē, logos orthos*): 2.8.2.

¹⁰⁵ Oldfather in Loeb 1.xxiv.

¹⁰⁶ 1.3.1.

¹⁰⁷ 1.14.6.

¹⁰⁸ 2.8.11f.

¹⁰⁹ 1.14.12–17.

¹¹⁰ cf. 4.12.11: I must obey God first, and after him, myself.

¹¹¹ 2.19.26f.

¹¹² 1.24.1f.

¹¹³ 2.6.9, in a quote from Chrysippus.

¹¹⁴ 2.18.29; just as, says Epictetus, voyagers in a storm invoke the aid of the Dioscuri.

¹¹⁵ e.g. 1.25.13; 1.30.1; 2.5.22; 3.3.13, etc.

¹¹⁶ 1.16.7f.

¹¹⁷ 1.6.19; 1.29.47; cf. 2.23.6.

¹¹⁸ 1.16.15–21.

¹¹⁹ Against Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 245, who supposes that, in order properly to compare Paul and the Stoics in terms of their whole systems, one must begin by bracketing out theology: [see below, ch. 14](#).

¹²⁰ 2.14.11–13.

¹²¹ 1.24.3–10; 3.22.23f.

¹²² Epictetus is one of the few writers of his day to mention the Christians, whom he calls ‘the Galileans’ (4.7.6), though his only comment is an aside referring to their settled habit of being free from the cares and fears of the world. This state of freedom, he says, can be produced by madness, but also by ‘reason and demonstration’; in other words, he acknowledges that the Christians have in some way attained, by their own route, a goal not unlike that of philosophy.

¹²³ e.g. Dio Cassius 72.36.4 etc.

¹²⁴ 6.30, coining a word: ‘Don’t be “Caesarized”’, *mē apokaisarōthēs*; compare 5.16, where he muses that it is possible to live uprightly even at Court (*en aulē*). The work’s modern title *Meditations* was invented in the seventeenth century, when it finally became better known; the manuscript tradition gives the title *ta eis heauton*, ‘the things to himself’.

¹²⁵ 2.17. See too 5.33: will death bring ‘extinction or translation’ (*eite sbesin eite metastasin*)? See too 4.21; 6.24: at death Alexander the Great was reduced to the same condition as his muleteer; either they were taken back ‘into the same Seminal Reason of the Universe’ (*eis tous autous tou kosmou spermatikous logous*; see too e.g. 4.21) or they were ‘scattered alike into the atoms’; 8.25, 58: death will either bring no sensation at all, or a different sort of life; 9.3.

¹²⁶ 2.17 (tr. Haines [Loeb]).

¹²⁷ Rumours of his ill-treatment of Christians remain unproved; see Haines in Loeb 383–7. But 7.68 and 8.51 do seem to reflect times of persecutions, in which case Marcus’s advice to rise above it all and keep one’s mind ‘pure, sane, sober, just’ (8.51) may give us a hint of a darker side of his philosophy – though of course the Christians may well have been presented to him as themselves dark and disreputable. Even so, there would be a hint of inconsistency: if the Christians were able to ‘rise above it’, what use would it be to persecute them?

¹²⁸ 9.1.

¹²⁹ 4.23; cf. 9.1.

¹³⁰ 4.40.

¹³¹ For the ‘dog’ derivation of ‘Cynic’ (the Greek for ‘dog’ is *kyōn*), see esp. Diog. Laert. 6.60f., and also 6.46 where Diogenes responds to people throwing bones to him, as if to a dog, by doing what a dog might be expected to do in return. Diog. Laert. *Lives* 6 is full of anecdotes and pithy sayings attributed to Cynics from Antisthenes, an associate of Socrates often regarded both as a key influence on Stoicism and as the founder of Cynicism, and Diogenes, the first real Cynic, a contemporary of Aristotle, who lived in a barrel in Athens, to the third-century BC Menedemus.

¹³² On the Cynics see *JVG* 66–74.

¹³³ e.g. Diog. Laert. 6.69. On Paul and the Cynics see esp. Downing 1998.

¹³⁴ cf. Epict. 3.22. On the varieties of Cynicism – by its very nature a highly anarchic and hence fissiparous movement – see e.g. Moles in *OCD* 418.

¹³⁵ Epict. *Disc.* 3.22.53f.

¹³⁶ Lucas 1976, ix.

¹³⁷ See, recently, Bett 2010.

¹³⁸ For Cicero’s refutation of Stoic ethics see *Ends* Book 4.

¹³⁹ On the Latinizing of Greek philosophical concepts, cf. Cic. *Ends* 3.1.3–2.5; 3.4.15; 3.12.40 (though Cicero, in the dialogue format, gives the credit to Cato, his conversation partner).

¹⁴⁰ On the whole topic of Roman philosophy and Cicero’s place within it see esp. Long 2003.

¹⁴¹ Long 2003, 193.

¹⁴² On worldview-analysis see *NTPG* section, and above, ch. 1.

¹⁴³ In addition to the incidents already mentioned, we note older occurrences: in Athens around 433 BC, Diopieithes promulgated a decree, directed at Anaxagoras (and hence at Pericles, his pupil), that anyone who did not believe in the gods (*nomizein ta theia*) or taught theories about the ‘upper worlds’ (*ta metarsia*) should be publicly impeached (so Plut. *Peric.* 32.1). Similar distrust of philosophers comes through in Aristophanes’s *Clouds*, and in the jokes about Plato’s teaching reported in Diog. Laert. 3.27–9. An attempt in 307 BC to bring philosophical teaching under public control (the Peripatetics were particularly in mind) was soon reversed, enabling the philosophical schools thereafter to flourish unchecked.

¹⁴⁴ See discussion in Downing 1998, 33f.

¹⁴⁵ Lucr. *De Re. Nat.* 1.1021–51; 5.416–508.

¹⁴⁶ Engberg-Pedersen claims (2000, 37) that first- and second-century Stoics were very community-minded, but offers no evidence for this claim.

¹⁴⁷ See Brunschwig and Sedley 2003, 174. On Engberg-Pedersen’s proposal about a model of ‘conversion’ [see ch. 14 below](#).

¹⁴⁸ cf. Most 2003, 313: ‘For Aristotle, as for Plato, one of the fundamental purposes of engaging in philosophy is, by studying god, to become as godlike as possible.’ The same was certainly true also in the Stoa and the Garden.

[149](#) Phil. 4.8.

[150](#) 1 Cor. 2.15f.

[151](#) 1 Cor. 1.18—2.16.

[152](#) Philostratus VS 481.

[153](#) Details in *OCD* 1377f. The movement in its full flowering owed a great deal to Quintilian (AD 35–100). The interplay between the Second Sophistic and the visual arts is explored suggestively in Platt 2011, chs. 5, 6.

[154](#) See Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae*, 2 vols., Loeb.

[155](#) Winter 2002b [1997].

[156](#) So Bowie in *OCD* 1378, with other refs.

[157](#) cf. Natali, in *OEAGR* 5.252–5, with refs.; and e.g. Judge 2012.

[158](#) See Meeks 1983, 83f.; Stowers 2001. The suggestion goes back at least to Nock 1961 [1933]; but it is fairly obvious to anyone who knows the ancient world.

[159](#) Ac. 17.18.

[160](#) On Wisdom see esp. Barclay 1996, 181–91.

[161](#) Wis. 7.22b—8.1.

[162](#) 11.17. See too the *stoicheia* of fire and water and the way they behave differently in God's new creation (19.18–21; though the passage is obscure).

[163](#) 3.1–3, a famous passage: 'the souls of the righteous [dead] are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.'

[164](#) 1.15; 2.23; 15.3.

[165](#) 2.1–9.

[166](#) 5.1–23.

[167](#) 3.7f.

[168](#) See *RSG* 166–71.

[169](#) Wis. 16.22–9; 19.18–21.

Chapter Four

A COCK FOR ASCLEPIUS: 'RELIGION' AND 'CULTURE' IN PAUL'S WORLD

1. Introduction

'The world is full of gods,' Thales had said.¹ But gods, by definition, do not play according to our rules. They're inconsistent, pursuing private quarrels, moods and fancies, eager for bribe or sacrifice, prepared (like rich but grumpy aged relatives) to bless or blight, to hurt or heal, depending whether you keep them sweet. And so began a world of shrines and groves, of priests, processions, garlands and music, omens, oracles, inspecting entrails: rich solemnities, keeping the city safe, the home secure, healing the sick, calming the stormy seas. Olympus still retained its ancient power.

Philosophy, from very early on, raised questions about all this; but most philosophers, like most other people, continued to keep up the practices. 'Crito,' said Socrates to his friend as the deadly hemlock worked its way up his body, 'we owe a cock to Asclepius. Pay it; don't forget.'² They were his last words, Delphic in their multiple resonance. Asclepius was the god of healing, with shrines across the ancient world; Socrates had prayed, before drinking the poison, that his departure would be 'fortunate' (*eutuchē*), and he may have regarded the ease with which he was slipping away as an answer from the god, a strange sort of healing.³ Or perhaps, as has recently been argued, he meant something much greater: that in his death he would provide a kind of scapegoat whereby Athens might be healed from its bitter, self-destructive internal quarrels.⁴ Whatever he meant, and however much implicit irony there may have been both in his words and in Plato's mind in reporting them, he lived in a world where the sequence of (a) prayer, (b) libation (Socrates wanted to pour a small drink-offering from the poisoned cup, but was forbidden), and (c) thank-offering for healing received, was

natural and normal. The cock was sacred to Asclepius, and hence was the normal bird for a thanksgiving sacrifice.

One sharp vignette from a million; but it shows the interplay, at a personal and perhaps also conceptual level, between ‘philosophy’ and ‘religion’ in the ancient world.

Of those two terms, ‘religion’ is by far the more problematic.⁵ Matters have not been helped, over many generations of modern scholarship, by the loose assumptions made by some Christians that they could lump together all Greco-Roman religion as ‘paganism’, characterized by ‘ritual’ rather than genuine faith, and equally by mischaracterizations of Christianity both ancient and modern on the part of historians.⁶ Thus, for instance, many works on ancient religion still include an introductory note pointing out that the ancient Greeks and Romans had no equivalent of ‘holy scripture’, no priestly caste, no ‘articles of religion’, no dogmas to be enforced upon the faithful; such notes are a warning against not only anachronism but also false assumptions about what it is that is being discussed.⁷ Now, however, an equal and opposite warning may be needed. Older attempts to describe ancient religion in such a way as to lead the eye up naturally to Christianity (whether in sharp contrast or as the pinnacle of a progressive revelation) are matched, in their propensity to distort the subject-matter, by newer attempts to paint Christianity as the repressive, dogmatic, ideological force which squelched the fascinating, free-floating cultural phenomena of the ancient world into a monochrome, rigidly policed but hollow uniformity.⁸ Despite what is sometimes claimed, however, ancient religion – even if we ignore its darker sides – was scarcely an ‘open’ or ‘tolerant’ system. Such a suggestion seems to be itself be a further projection, this time of a modern pluralist protest against Christian (or other) dogmatism.⁹

Things were always more complicated than that, in all directions. The ancient pagans were not straightforwardly pluralist in matters of religion. They placed great importance upon accurate performance of time-honoured ritual and the precise wording of prayers. The ostensible reason Socrates was condemned to death included the charge of introducing foreign divinities into Athens. The reason the Romans banned the rites of Bacchus

were as much on the grounds of novelty, including social novelty, as of immorality.¹⁰ Failure to observe commonplace piety (attendance at great festivals¹¹) or certain specialized and focused rules (those for the Vestal Virgins, for instance¹²) could result in severe penalties whether *de jure* or *de facto*. Thus, just as Pauline scholars have been gradually learning that the categories of sixteenth-century polemic are likely to be unhelpful when discussing first-century texts, so scholars of ancient religion, from whatever perspective, may still need to learn that the categories of post-Enlightenment polemic between ‘dogma’ and ‘tolerance’ may not be an improvement, in the task of getting inside first-century dynamics, upon the older supposedly ‘Christianizing’ assumptions about what ‘religion’ really is, or should be.¹³ Equally, the study of ancient religion over the last two centuries has been subject to the large-scale agendas of several other movements, from the Romantics to the Marxists and Freudians, from those who studied ancient religion in order to stress its continuing importance to those who did so to show up its follies and dangers.¹⁴ Just as there have been ‘crypto-protestant’ projects trying to isolate a ‘pure’ centre of early Christianity from any corrupting influences of other ‘religions’, so there have been rationalist or reductionist projects (without much ‘crypto’ about them) trying to insist that Christianity was simply one oriental mystery cult among others.¹⁵

A crisp little article by the veteran ancient historian Edwin Judge sums up the problem from one particular angle. He quotes a contemporary dictionary which gives the current meaning of ‘religion’ as a ‘particular system in which the quest for the ideal life has been embodied’, as opposed to an obsolete sense of ‘the practice of sacred rites and observances’. But this means that any talk of Christianity in antiquity as one of a series of ‘religions’ is only possible through a historical muddle:

Either it converts the ancient ‘religions’ (in the obsolete sense) into modern-style questing phenomena like Christianity, or it converts ancient Christianity into a ritually observant practice as though it belonged to some established culture as its sacred anchor.¹⁶

Nor is this the only problem:

Talking of Christianity as an ancient ‘religion’ implies also a second historical muddle, a terminological rather than a chronological one. There was in Graeco-Roman antiquity no generic word for ‘religion’, whether in the ‘obsolete’ or the modern sense.¹⁷

The Latin word *religio*, Judge points out, meant ‘scruple’, and one might have scruples about many things, not only one’s duties to the gods.¹⁸ The New Testament has no exact word for ‘religion’, but uses terms like *eusebeia*, ‘piety’ or ‘godliness’; *thrēskeia*, ‘worship’, or the practices associated with it; or *latreia*, the ‘service’ that one might offer to the gods as to one’s social superiors.¹⁹ The word ‘religion’ only gradually came to be used, in the ancient world, in relation to Christianity, and the idea that there might then be different ‘religions’ was an innovation of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As Judge points out, this new idea of a plurality of ‘religions’ was then exported from the modern west to other parts of the world, causing surprise, for instance, among the sages of India who discovered, thanks to the colonizing British, that they had a ‘religion’ called ‘Hinduism’.²⁰ Among the many twists and turns of academic talk about ‘religion’, the present mood has ironically institutionalized what sees itself as a non-totalizing culture (‘the right to choose how to live’) which, says Judge, ‘may be deeply repugnant to other “religions”.’²¹

So was Christianity a religion? ‘Not at all,’ replies Judge, ‘in the sense we give to that term with regard to ancient cultic practice.’ But the present western understanding of ‘religion’, even when the concept has now been secularized, is inescapably bound up with aspects of the Christian heritage. Confusion, then, worse confounded. ‘It would be historically clearer,’ concludes Judge, ‘to analyze other cultural traditions first on their own terms.’²²

It might indeed; and, as I remarked in the previous chapter, any citizen of the ancient world, observing the communities founded by Paul, might well have thought them to be an odd kind of philosophical school, rather than some kind of ‘religion’ in the sense used today to describe ancient practices. However, three considerations have held me back from grasping this nettle

and eliminating (as I originally intended to do) any separate discussion of 'religion' in the present book.

First, though the ancient philosophers did regularly discuss 'the gods', or *to theion*, and the questions that they seemed to pose, not least by their very odd reported behaviour (in Homer, for instance), it was questions of that sort that regularly got philosophers into trouble. Philosophers got banished, or worse; but nobody would dream of banishing people for maintaining the cults of the gods, particularly the gods specific to the local community. On the contrary. However agnostic one might be as to whether the gods even existed, or, if they did, whether they ever actually intervened in human affairs, it would take a toxic mixture of folly and boldness to suggest that one might therefore leave off cultic observances. (It was, as we shall see, a different matter when it came to 'foreign divinities', particularly if they provoked people either to subversive moral or political behaviour.) There was thus a sphere of activity, right across the ancient world, which implied and symbolized a tangled network of beliefs, traditions, expectations and (not least) a sense of civic identity and security. We need a word, however loose its meaning and however heuristic its use, to denote this sphere of activity and the thought-patterns which it implied and embodied. 'Cult' is too narrowly specific, and again (see below) likely to mislead in today's world; it would, I think, fail to catch the virtually universal sense, throughout Mediterranean antiquity, of divine presences, purposes, warnings and encouragements. A world full of gods generated a human life full of ... well, let us go on calling it 'religion' for the moment. Did the lightning strike to the left or the right of the path? Did you remember to offer a sacrifice to Poseidon before you got on board the ship? Hope you enjoy the meal; this splendid beef was from a sacrifice in the temple down the street, so it comes with a special blessing. How were the planets aligned on the night you were born? Don't forget the festival tomorrow; everyone will be there, and the neighbours will notice if you don't show up. Have you heard that Augustus has now become *Pontifex Maximus*? I know I was due to arrive yesterday, but some god must have had it in for me, or perhaps someone put a curse on me; the roads were all blocked. Don't you like the

new temple in the city square? Isn't it good that they've reorganized the streets so you can see it from every angle! My nephew tells me he's been initiated into this new cult from the East; he says he's died and been reborn, though I can't see much difference. Oh, and don't forget; we owe a cock to Asclepius. This is not philosophy, though the philosophers regularly talk about it. Nor is it politics as such, though the fact that leading officers of state regularly doubled as the priests of local shrines demonstrates that the two were fully and firmly intertwined. We could call it 'superstition', but the sneer that the Latin *superstitio* already possessed in Paul's day has been so accentuated in modern usage that any kind of emic account would become impossible.²³ Call it 'religion'; and judge not, lest we be judged.

Second, whether we like it or not (clearly some do not) it remains the case that there are several elements of early Christian practice which at least overlap with this entire world of ancient 'religion'. Even if Paul and others wanted to give a significantly different account of what they were up to when they broke bread and drank wine for the *anamnēsis* of Jesus,²⁴ he and his friends spoke of Jesus as one might of a cultic divinity, a *kyrios*, and if they had wanted to avoid giving that impression they would have done so a lot more effectively. Would he have seen it as sailing close to the wind to describe the *koinōnia* (partnership, fellowship) one has with Jesus at this meal in parallel to the *koinōnia* that pagans have in their sacrificial meals with the *daimonia*, the dangerous little semi-divinities that lurk behind the Olympian fictions?²⁵ Or is the suggestion that this was a risky theological line to take simply the projection of a modern protestant perspective, suspicious of all 'religion' lest it turn into a 'human work' on the one hand or 'magic' on the other? By the same token, if Paul did not know that when he spoke of dying and rising with the Messiah he was echoing the sort of thing that some people said when they described initiation into a mystery religion, he was culpably ignorant, and, though we might accuse Paul of many things, that kind of cultural blindness seems not to be his problem.²⁶ What is more, Paul of course prayed constantly and encouraged his converts to do the same; he spoke both of divine leading and of satanic hindrance in relation to his life and work; he believed in divine healing, in

giving thanks for divine favours and blessing, in specific words of guidance and direction.²⁷ And, tellingly, the early Christians met in groups which would almost certainly be seen (as many modern scholars have seen them) as very similar to the *collegia*, the religious societies, such as those of the cult of Mithras and others.²⁸ Any ancient pagan, observing all this, would place Paul, at least for the time being, somewhere within the generalized world of ‘religion’ in the sense I have begun to describe. If we want – as I do want – to suggest that in the end there was a radical difference between Paul’s ‘pattern of religion’ and that of the world around him, cognate with his belief that Israel’s God was the only true God, we must at least acknowledge the *prima facie* case that can be made for locating Paul on this map in the first place. My concession to the linguistic slipperiness of the whole enterprise is reflected in the inverted commas in this chapter’s title: the ‘religion’ of Paul’s world. And I have written ‘religion’, not ‘religions’, mindful at least of Professor Judge’s proper warning about anachronism on that front as well.²⁹

That hint of ‘religions’, plural, sends us on to my third reason. One would not know it from most of the translations, but in fact Cicero himself speaks of ‘religions’, plural. But he does not mean that plural in our sense. He is not (that is to say) thinking of large-scale and perhaps ethnically oriented ‘religious systems’ such as ‘paganism’ and ‘Judaism’ or indeed ‘Hinduism’ or ‘Islam’. He is thinking of the different sorts of things one might do in discharging one’s obligation to the gods. As he does so, through a speech he puts into the mouth of the pontiff Cotta (a thinker who, like Cicero himself, belonged to the Academic persuasion), he gives us a clear and convenient summary of what ‘religion’ meant to a typical educated Roman of the day:

The religion of the Roman people comprises ritual, auspices, and the third additional division consisting of all such prophetic warnings as the interpreters of the Sybil or the soothsayers have derived from portents and prodigies. Well, I have always thought that none of *these departments of religion* [*harum religionum*] was to be despised, and I have held the conviction that Romulus by his auspices and Numa by his establishment of our ritual laid the foundations of our state, which assuredly could never have been as great as it is had not the fullest measure of divine favour been obtained for it.³⁰

The problem comes, as one recent writer points out, in modern translators refusing to render the key plural phrase *harum religionum* as ‘of these religions’; that would not fit with today’s sense.³¹ But that is what Cicero wrote. Clearly, for him, *religio* meant ‘religious observance’; one kind of ‘religion’ in this sense was traditional ritual, another kind of ‘religion’ was inspecting auspices, and yet another kind of ‘religion’ was interpreting prophetic oracles or special one-off signs. These were all ‘obligations’, *religiones*, things which ‘bound’ humans and gods together.

All of this could be summed up, for Cicero, as *cultus deorum*, the ‘cult’ of the gods.³² The word ‘cult’ starts another hare running. Even though most readers will assume that this does not, in Cicero’s world, carry the modern sense of ‘strange and perhaps dangerous religious sect’, they may assume that it either means ‘worship’ in some recognizably modern sense, or ‘ritual’, again in a modern sense, whereas for Cicero and his contemporaries it meant both of these but also much more besides. The Latin dictionary offers the basic meanings of *cultus* as ‘labouring at’, ‘labour’, ‘care’, ‘cultivation’ and (rarely) ‘culture’, with the derived meanings of ‘training, education’, and then, in particular, ‘an honouring, reverence, adoration, veneration’ (clearly the main emphasis for Cicero in the present passages); but it can also mean ‘care directed to the refinement of life’, or ‘style, manner of life, culture, cultivation, elegance, polish, civilisation, refinement’ with further meanings fanning out from there.³³ It is thus no accident that the word *cultus* points directly forward to our modern word ‘culture’ (though of course here as elsewhere we should assume significant slippage).³⁴ In the present chapter, though we cannot even begin to map the ‘culture’ of Paul’s world, it is important that we at least erect some signposts to show where one might look for help on that score, in particular in avoiding anachronisms.

For Cicero, what one did in relation to the gods, not just in worshipping them in some private way but in the proper public ordering of worship, sacrifice, prayer and so forth, was a central expression of the larger life of the community as a whole.³⁵ That was what *religiones*, the various forms of *religio*, were all about.

It was a matter of ascertaining the will of the gods, so far as one could, and performing such acts, especially sacrifices, as would be necessary to bring about their goodwill.³⁶ All was done, as far as Cicero was concerned in this passage and elsewhere, in relation to ‘a political community or body of citizens, one that included both humans and gods’.³⁷ The whole point was to maintain and enhance the *pax deorum*, the ‘peace of the gods’: the Roman people and their divinities had to maintain a harmonious relationship, and anything which went wrong in personal or civic life had to be analyzed, diagnosed, and treated with the appropriate ‘religious’ ceremony (sacrifice, prayer, the fulfilling of oaths, or whatever). Much better, though, to get the religious observances right in the first place and thus ensure that all would be well.

Ando offers two summary statements of what, in this broad sense, ‘Roman religion’ was all about. It was, he says, ‘a system of embedded symbols and social actions and their institutionalization’; or, approaching the same result from another angle, it was ‘a set of practices developed in response to the gods’ immanence and action in the world’.³⁸ What we can call, loosely and heuristically, the ‘religion’ of Paul’s world was not set apart from the rest of ancient culture. On the contrary: it was its beating heart, with every part of the body politic related to that heart by active and throbbing blood vessels. If the world was full of gods, the world was also therefore full of religion, full of cult; full of a god-soaked *culture*.

It was, not least, a world full of (what we might, perhaps incautiously, call) *myth*. The ancient stories, from Homer, from the great tragic playwrights, from numerous other sources, combined to produce a world in which myth, and with it all kinds of ‘religious’ overtones, were omnipresent:

Anyone with a passing knowledge of Roman life will appreciate the ubiquity of myth, in art and literature, in public places and private homes, on stage and in paintings and sculpture, on the earthenware pots in your house and in the graffiti on your wall and on the coins in your marketplace, in the names you gave to your children and in the tales told them by old wives. So common was the vocabulary of myth in daily life, high and low, that it was one of the hardest currencies in public debate: it provided simple, universal codes which everyone could comprehend.³⁹

It is fairly safe to say that this is a phenomenon today's western culture will find it hard to imagine. The main 'myths' by which many now live consist of a vague belief in 'progress', coupled with one or two moral 'no entry' signs from the middle of the twentieth century (Hitler, the holocaust) and the 1960s (segregation and Apartheid in America and South Africa, the Vietnam War). Even the Bible and Shakespeare are, literally, closed books to many. Our cultural equivalents of 'fast food' (the misnamed 'reality TV' shows and the tabloid press) provide the imaginary world. A major effort is needed to appreciate the readiness with which a first-century inhabitant of the Greco-Roman world would pick up allusions to Achilles, to Odysseus, to Hercules, to Orestes, to tales of the Trojan War and its aftermath. They knew these stories as well as today's western culture knows the present state of various soap operas, or indeed film franchises such as Batman or James Bond, or the present marital dilemmas of the leading film stars. This means that we cannot begin to understand how ordinary people in the first century thought, imagined, reasoned, believed, prayed and acted unless we try to get inside their myth-soaked culture.

Mention of fast food leads to a different analogy. One recent writer likens the place of religion in ancient Rome to the place of eating in our world; we all do it, most of us fairly unreflectively, some of us with more thought. Even so, 'religion was both taken for granted and at the same time central ... ancient religion is imbricated with other aspects of the culture.'⁴⁰ The centre of major cities, starting with Rome itself, was carefully constructed, with temples of the specific divinities that the rulers regarded as central, so that 'the whole space ... constituted a monumental visual lesson about the relationship between the city, the gods, and the emperor.'⁴¹ What the apostle Paul saw in Athens, a city 'full of idols', was typical of towns and cities everywhere in the ancient world, not just as an expression of multiple types of private piety but as the central embodiment and expression of civic, domestic and personal life. Pausanias, a writer of the Second Sophistic movement in the early second century AD, described what there was to see in the market-place at Corinth: three statues of Zeus, two of Hermes, and one each of Poseidon, Apollo, Aphrodite and Athene.⁴² Small-scale models

of gods were common (one could, and many did, pack them up and take them on journeys), and divine images featured on many domestic ornaments, items of jewellery, and coins. Any and every aspect of life could remind one of the gods, or actually evoke them. When Paul arrived in Ephesus, Philippi or anywhere else with his message about the one God and his crucified and risen son, he was not offering an alternative way of being 'religious' in the sense of a private hobby, something to do in a few hours at the weekend. He was offering a heart transplant for an entire community and its culture. If 'the centrality of Artemis was part of what it meant to be an Ephesian,'⁴³ it is not surprising that Paul's ministry there caused a riot.⁴⁴

This entire culture obviously stands in a close and complex relationship to the philosophical speculation about the gods that we studied in the previous chapter. The philosophers were exploring new possibilities of understanding the gods, but they too were rooted in the god-soaked culture as they did so: witness Socrates's dying words. Equally, those who officiated in the city's rituals (Cicero was himself a priest, specifically, an augur, and his friend Cotta a senior one) might well spend time pondering the philosophical questions of the day, including the 'theology' which formed, as we saw, part of 'physics', the attempted full account of 'what there is'. But the crucial difference lies just here, and is visible in the same texts. For Epicureans and Stoics alike, knowledge of divinities was rooted in sense-impressions (we might today want to call them quasi-sense impressions) left by the divinities on human minds and hearts. For Cicero, speaking as before through the character of Cotta, awareness of the gods was a by-product of the life of the community.⁴⁵

The strength of this feeling of a god-soaked community and culture is expressed in the speech of M. Furius Camillus at the end of Livy's fifth book, warning his fellow Romans against abandoning the city after the disastrous Gallic invasion in 391 BC and moving to the recently conquered Veii. When Livy told such stories, or invented such speeches, he seldom did so for antiquarian interest only (though his story of the invasion, and the rescue of the Capitol through the warning of the sacred geese of Juno, remains the stuff of schoolboy romance). He may well have been warning

his own contemporaries against any suggestion that Augustus's empire should move its capital city to Ilium (ancient Troy) or indeed Alexandria. Our local gods, he says, have already punished us for our folly and rewarded us for our good behaviour. We cannot leave them behind. They are here, all around us. Whether or not the world is full of gods, our city certainly is:

As you consider these manifest instances of the effect upon human destiny of obedience or disobedience to the divine, can you not understand the heinousness of the sin which, though we have barely as yet won to shore from the shipwreck brought on us by our former guilt, we are preparing to commit? We have a city founded with all due rites of auspice and augury; not a stone of her streets but is permeated by our sense of the divine [*nullus locus in ea non religionum deorumque est plenus*]; for our annual sacrifices not the days only are fixed, but the places too, where they may be performed; men of Rome, would you desert your gods – the tutelary spirits which guard your families, and those the nation prays to as its saviours? Would you leave them all?⁴⁶

Buildings, calendar, ancient stories, regular rituals: 'culture' is all of these and more (we should clearly include the arts, not least poetry and drama), and all permeated with that 'sense of the divine'. Though we have been speaking of Rome, and though, as we shall see, Rome was in some ways a special case, it was the special case that by Paul's day had come to dominate his world. This was how people, the people to whom Paul addressed his message, thought and felt. Or, if they thought otherwise, they might be careful how they expressed such alternative thoughts, lest their contemporaries regard them as dangerous subversives, pulling out the foundation-stones from under their long-standing culture.

The way in which Rome came to dominate the Mediterranean world, from Spain and north Africa in the west to the long eastern circle from Greece round to Egypt, is itself a highly complex story, not least when we consider its 'religious' and/or 'cultural' dimensions. Though the Romans applied the same method in every place (send in the legions, crush opposition, establish local elites as intermediary rulers, crucify rebels, levy taxes, proclaim 'peace and security'), they were pragmatists, and were for the most part prepared to work out local solutions, again not least in relation to 'religious' or 'cultural' life. We shall come to the so-called 'imperial

cult' in the next chapter. For the moment we need to look more broadly at the 'religious' and/or 'cultural' world of Greece, Asia Minor and the Levant as it had been before Rome arrived, and then at the rich and complex mixture that characterized the cities where Paul spent most of his public career. Rome added to, but did not normally displace, what had been there before.

2. Religion and Culture in the Eastern Mediterranean World of Paul's Day

(i) Introduction

As with everything else in this Part of the present book, no attempt or claim is made here for complete or exhaustive coverage of the highly complex field of ancient religion.⁴⁷ I highlight what seem to me the important features for understanding the world of those whom Paul addressed in cities themselves as diverse as Corinth, Ephesus and Antioch – and for understanding what, in these terms, might have been assumed, imagined or understood about the new movement by Christian converts themselves, not to mention their families and neighbours. And indeed what, behind all that, Paul himself might have had in mind in 'mothering' such communities and then trying to give shape and focus to their common life.⁴⁸ In one sense, everything about the classical world is grist to this mill, but all we can offer here is a quick survey of some salient points.

The same is true for the wider questions of 'culture'. No survey of art, music, theatre, poetry and public building is possible here, but no question of the worldview of Paul's contemporaries, and in particular the 'religious' angle on that worldview, would be complete without them.⁴⁹ The sources for a complete understanding of 'religion' in the ancient world include not only written texts but also, and particularly, the remains of material culture: excavated sites, inscriptions, vase and wall paintings, coins, and so forth. In a time before print or electronic media, these loomed even larger than their

equivalents do today. We must be content, once more, with some brief pointers in a few key directions.

We will follow a natural three-stage route by which to build up the required picture in the present chapter: ancient Greek religion, the cults of the Orient, and the religion of Rome. It must be understood from the start, however, that for almost all people in Paul's world these were now cheerfully and confusingly intertwined and overlaid. We are exhibiting these three pictures in the manner not of someone pinning three separate charts on a wall but rather of someone adding layers to a picture with the aid of Photoshop software, allowing the complete and interlocking picture to be seen all at once.

[\(ii\) The Religious World of Ancient Greece](#)

The word 'Greece' itself needs some definition – or rather, a warning about the comparative lack of it. By Paul's day the entire extended Middle East, from Greece proper all the way east to the Indus River and south through Egypt, had come under the influence of Greek language and culture through the extraordinary conquests of Alexander the Great. (Greek culture, for that matter, had extended westwards as well, to Sicily and southern Italy, though these did not form part of Alexander's empire.) But even before then the word 'Greek' needs qualification. Historically speaking, Greek culture can be traced back to the much earlier Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, and though the lines of derivation are blurred it is highly likely that some key features of what we now think of as classical Greek culture and religion (particularly that of the fifth and fourth centuries BC) can be traced back that far. Geographically, the Greeks saw themselves as a single, though differentiated, culture on either side of the Aegean Sea. Today's Greek mainland and the Aegean islands formed an important part of this wider 'Greece', but the Asia Minor seaboard, from the Black Sea in the north right down to the coastal area of the south-west, was also ethnically, culturally and religiously Greek. All of Paul's life and work, including his

arrival in Rome, took place within a world rooted in and still shaped by Greek culture.

This historical derivation and geographical distribution makes an important point for all subsequent study of 'Greek' religion and culture: it was irreducibly pluriform. Even when Athens acquired an empire at the height of its power in the fifth century BC, the islands and coastlands that came under its rule were diffuse. Their culture and religion could not have been standardized even if anyone had wanted to try. Greece, even (mostly) under Athenian rule, remained a collection of at least semi-autonomous cities and islands. Whereas Rome, a single city, was able to think in terms of tightly drawn cultural and religious lines, Greece had never done so.⁵⁰

The main lines of 'Greek religion', though, were already clear, owing their classic form to Homer and to a lesser extent Hesiod.⁵¹ The gods were presumed to live on Mount Olympus, roughly a hundred and fifty miles north of Athens, and everyone knew who they were: the 'senior twelve' of Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hermes, Demeter, Dionysos, Hephaistos and Ares, with attendant lesser gods and, out beyond them, nature deities such as tree-spirits or river-nymphs, and, not least, an uncountable host of *daimones*.⁵² Of particular note among the other divinities were Hestia, the hearth-goddess (the hearth was the centre or focus of each home, and each home was itself a place of religious worship); Prometheus, the great opponent of Zeus; the goat-god Pan, who later becomes associated with monotheistic speculation because his name, *pan*, means 'all'; the earth-goddess Gaia; the underworld-god, Hades; and, inevitably, Helios the sun-god and Selene the moon-goddess. Heracles (the Greek equivalent of the Latin Hercules) and Asclepius (Latin Aesculapius) are in a slightly different category, having human mothers but divine fathers (Zeus and Apollo respectively). They occupied a kind of middle space, along with the Dioscuroi (Castor and Polydeuces [Latin Pollux], invoked especially by seafarers): originally heroes but, by the classical period, divine at least *de facto*. Of these fascinating beings, and the many and varied accounts of their characters and doings, we do not now need to speak in detail.

What is more important for our purposes is the assumed relationship between these divinities and human beings – both individuals and, perhaps more significantly, cities and other wider communities. Most accounts of ancient religion give considerable emphasis to the divine aspect of fertility, of crops and animals, and though we associate the idea of corn-kings and similar dying and rising gods with Egypt in particular (see below) it is safe to presume that divinities across the board were invoked both for prosperity and for protection. This was reflected in the widespread religious practices of sacrifice, mostly but not always of animals, and including the drink-offering, a small ‘libation’ tipped out of a cup, such as Socrates had wanted to offer before he drank the hemlock. Prayer featured prominently, both as the spontaneous invocation of a god by an individual and also, more particularly, the set prayers of the cult which laid great stress on getting the name and official epithets of the god exactly right – or, in case of any uncertainty, inserting a ‘whatever’ clause, ‘by whatever name you like to be called’.⁵³ It was assumed that the gods were liable to take offence if addressed wrongly; indeed, it was assumed throughout classical culture that the gods were in any case unpredictable and needed to be treated, and entreated, with caution. They would undoubtedly have their own agendas, and might well be pursuing private quarrels, as frequently in Homer. It was all the more important, then, both to address them properly and to bring them appropriate and pleasing offerings.

The place for these and other ‘religious’ actions might well be within the home, at the ‘hearth’, where ‘household gods’, small statues or similar objects, would be placed. But for a city as a whole the focal point would be the temple, or rather the temples of the various gods to be invoked. We may assume that temples were built, often enough, on the sites of earlier shrines, though as divinities proliferated it is likely that many new temples would spring up on previously unhallowed ground. The important point of a temple was that it was a dwelling for the god or goddess, in the quite literal sense that the cult image was housed and venerated there. This image (an ‘idol’, though without the strong negative overtones of that word in Israel’s scriptures and Jewish and Christian tradition) would usually be a carved

statue of some sort, of stone or wood, though occasionally a lump of unhewn rock, perhaps a meteorite, would be regarded as a heaven-sent cult object.⁵⁴ Sacrifices would be offered in the temple, and the meat then distributed to worshippers or sold in the market. Greek cities did not have a priestly caste (though some families carried on a tradition); as long as the proper rites were followed and words spoken, anyone, even women and slaves, could offer sacrifice. Local officials, often civic leaders, would preside at major religious events, while things were kept in good order by a caretaker (*neokoros*) and other functionaries. In most cases even these were part-time positions.

Apart from individual sacrifices and prayers, a good deal of the 'religious' activity in an ancient Greek city centred upon the major festivals: 'as the sanctuary articulates space, so the festival articulates time.'⁵⁵ A sacred calendar was kept, and designated festivals gave opportunity for celebration and spectacle which set such moments dramatically aside from everyday concerns. Processions were the regular feature, winding their way through the city to whichever shrine was the centre for that particular occasion. Special clothes would be worn, and sometimes particular objects (tree branches, for instance, and in some cases the 'idol' itself) might be carried. Dancing and music would be the order of the day; for the music, there would be singers, and local poets would frequently compose new lyrics for special occasions. Greek choral lyrics, of which the poems of Pindar formed the early climax, were rooted in religious observances like this, and became in their turn part of the backbone for the tradition of drama, which itself became woven into the corporate religious life, not separated off as in today's world into a different sphere altogether. Though in many ceremonies one may detect echoes of fertility cults, acted out in overtly sexual displays such as those involving giant erect phalluses, by the classical period this had mostly turned into a release of social rather than sexual tension: 'the antagonism between the sexes is played up and finds release in lampoonery.'⁵⁶ Festivals were also an occasion for contests: beauty contests, music contests, sporting contests (the Olympic Games being merely the most famous of many), and dramatic

contests such as those in which the great fifth-century tragic poets Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides regularly competed. And above all, of course, the festival procession would end with a banquet, a great feast for everyone in which the gods themselves were understood to be sharing.⁵⁷

All that has just been described was understood explicitly to have to do with the health and well-being of the *polis*, the local city. Obviously in the case of Athens, where Athene was worshipped in the majestic Parthenon which still dominates the city's skyline, but equally so in less obvious contexts, the assumption was that this or that divine being looked after this or that aspect of the city's welfare, and should be invoked, placated, informed of special needs, and above all celebrated as occasion demanded.

How did the gods respond to this treatment?

By giving signs, portents, omens of one sort or another, most of which took specialized skill to interpret. In close connection with temple, sacrifice and festival, the behaviour of the sacrificial animal (how easily it died, and so forth) might reveal a lot about whether the divinity was receiving the offering favourably. Once the animal was dead, its innards would be inspected, with the condition of the liver being particularly important; this practice of haruspication was widespread across the ancient world. Generals took specialist seers with them into the field to offer sacrifice, inspect the entrails and thereby discern whether the moment was right for battle. One might enquire of such a seer (*mantis*) whether a particular business trip would be opportune, or concerning the right day (or the right partner) for a marriage.

But inspecting the entrails of a sacrificial animal was just the beginning. The gods could communicate good or bad news through all kinds of natural phenomena, from thunder and lightning to the flight of birds, particularly birds of prey. An eclipse would be of particular significance. Dreams, in particular, could and often (though not always) did reveal either the favour or guidance of a god, and they might also on occasion foretell the future.⁵⁸ If the world was full of gods, it was only to be expected that they would send out signals of their presence and of the many otherwise hidden meanings behind the surface of ordinary life.⁵⁹

The most dramatic means of divine disclosure came through oracles, of which the oracle at Delphi was easily the most famous. Set in glorious and evocative natural surroundings at the reputed centre of the world,⁶⁰ the shrine of Apollo was thought to embody the victory of that god over the dark forces in the world, and hence to be the place where he might give advice to individuals or cities as to how that victory might be accomplished in their case. The supplicant would offer a sacrifice and then, if the auspices were favourable, the question would be put, via ‘holy men’ and one or more ‘prophets’, to the Pythia, the local woman who, set apart for life, served as, and was venerated as, the mouthpiece of the god. She, having inhaled the smoke from the sacred fire in the cave, would make her pronouncement, which would be conveyed by the prophets to the worshipper. Delphic oracles became proverbial for their ambiguity, and answers might only gradually reveal their meaning. When Croesus, the last king of Lydia (c.560–546 BC), was contemplating war, the Delphic oracle told him that if he attacked the Persians he would destroy a mighty empire. Croesus was overjoyed; only in retrospect did it become clear that the mighty empire in question would be his own.⁶¹ Socrates’s friend Chaerephon once asked the Delphic oracle if anyone was wiser than Socrates, and the oracle replied that nobody was. When on trial for his life, Socrates explained to the court that he had tested this out over time, by going to all sorts of people and asking them questions. Eventually he had concluded that the oracle had been telling the truth, for this reason: he was the one person who was prepared to admit that he knew nothing.⁶² (It was still to Asclepius, rather than to the oracular Apollo, that Socrates made his dying promise.) The oracle remained in business well into the Roman period.⁶³

The phenomenon of oracles points to two further and final features of particular interest from the world of Greek religion. First, the trance-like state of the Pythia is one example of a much more widespread phenomenon, that of ecstasy or frenzy, either individual or in a group.⁶⁴ Plato distinguishes four types of ‘divine madness’: that associated with Apollo, through which the god inspires prophecy; that associated with Dionysos, the ‘mystic madness’ which, through alcohol, initiates the worshipper into a

different state of consciousness; the poetic ‘madness’ inspired by the Muses; and the madness of love, driven by Aphrodite or Eros.⁶⁵ This points to what we know as the ‘mysteries’, of which, in ancient Greece, those of Eleusis (a town ten miles or so north-west of Athens) were the most famous (see the next section of this chapter).

The second interesting phenomenon is the ancient practice of collecting oracular sayings. Many such books were ascribed to women prophets under the generic title of ‘Sibyl’. The collection of ‘Sibylline Oracles’ now regularly cited among the Christian or Jewish Pseudepigrapha is a comparatively late example of a much more widespread phenomenon.⁶⁶ Earlier books with the same title were brought to Rome, according to venerable legend, in the reign of Tarquinius Priscus in the fifth century BC. They consisted as much of ritual instruction as of prophetic oracles; they were regularly consulted and interpreted as another feature of the complex and difficult process of divination.⁶⁷ In the world of ancient paganism such books never played anything like the role of Israel’s scriptures in Judaism and Christianity. Indeed, the absence of ‘sacred texts’ in the latter sense within ancient paganism is one of many fascinating differences between the common life of the ancient world and the message and worldview which Paul the apostle was commending.

[\(iii\) Mysteries from the East](#)

Ancient Greece had its ‘mysteries’, in which the outward-facing public nature of the religious culture turned inwards, and the corporate nature of that public religion was translated into the private idiom.⁶⁸ From Crete in the south to the island of Samothrace in the north-eastern Aegean, and in many other locations, we find ancient evidence of secret cults and rites in which participants might experience agony, ecstasy or both, and emerge with a sense of having, in our modern idiom, been to hell and back again and been transformed in the process. In some cases this implied that the newly initiated would now be guaranteed a blissful life after death, but this was by no means always the aim. An outward protection against danger in

the present life was just as important, and in some cases it was implied that the initiate had acquired a new inward spiritual sense.

The mysteries of Eleusis, a short distance from Athens, were among those that offered ‘the guarantee of a better fate in the afterworld’.⁶⁹ The shrine was extremely popular; most though not all Athenians had been initiated, and the practice was open to all, including women, slaves and foreigners. Not everyone approved. Aristophanes made fun of such practices, and we may assume that some at least in his audience would have sympathized.⁷⁰ But mockery would only be allowed to go so far. It was a drunken parody of the Eleusinian mysteries that got Socrates’s friend Alcibiades into trouble, and led at least indirectly to Socrates’s own trial and death.⁷¹ The mysteries continued to be popular well into the Roman period; Cicero himself admits to being an initiate.⁷²

He might not so readily have admitted to having taken part in the festivals of Dionysos. Primarily the god of wine and drunkenness, Dionysos was known in the Greek cult (and then in Rome) as ‘Bacchus’, so that his initiates became ‘the ‘Bacchoi’. His festivals involved serious frenzy, orgiastic behaviour, and a sense of transformative union with the divine; they were popular throughout Greece, and in Athens alone there were seven such festivals each year. To quote Albert Henrichs in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*,

Festivals of Dionysus were often characterized by ritual licence and revelry, including reversal of social roles, cross-dressing by boys and men, drunken comasts in the streets, as well as widespread boisterousness and obscenity. In Athens as throughout Ionian territory, monumental phalli stood on public display, and phallophoric processions paraded through the streets ... The god’s dark side emerged in rituals and aetiological myths concerned with murder and bloodshed, madness and violence, flight and persecution, and gender hostility.⁷³

One can imagine the reaction of urbane Cicero to such goings-on. One can imagine, too, the reaction of Paul the apostle.

But there were other kinds of ‘mysteries’, too, in ancient Greece. Orpheus, the mythical singer who longed to bring his dead wife Euridice back from Hades, was associated with, among other things, the teaching of the transmigration of souls; his devotees were avid students of prophetic

books. This constituted a real departure in the ancient world, since it permitted anyone who could read to gain access to the kind of religious stimulus otherwise only available through the traditional words of a ritual. A different system again was taught by Pythagoras, who (in contrast to the mythical Orpheus) was a real-life sixth-century individual, originally from the Greek island of Samos but living most of his life in southern Italy. He was a mathematician and scientist who taught an ascetic lifestyle and the prospect of the soul's transformation in the present and transmigration in the future. Precise details of both Orpheism and Pythagoreanism are hard to come by. But the phenomenon they both represent is full of interest for the student of early Christianity. They can be seen, argues Burkert, 'as a protest movement against the established polis':

Instead of the pre-existing communities of family, city, and tribe there was now a self-chosen form of association, a community based on a common decision and a common disposition of mind.⁷⁴

There are some parallels between these movements and the one that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, with its own regulated community. Parallels, but probably not actual links. Parallel circumstances produce similar results without any borrowing necessarily taking place. Something similar could be said about the message of Paul, which generated a new form of association, claiming a transformed life in the present and a transformed hope for the future. The differences remain striking, though the similarities are not to be underestimated.

Thus far we have mentioned 'mysteries' that appear to have been more or less native to Greece (granted the fluid geography mentioned earlier). But with the opening up of the near east after Alexander's conquests, and the resultant sense that the whole known world was now a kind of extended *polis* (hence the word 'cosmopolitan'), the ancient Greek mysteries were joined, right across the regions under Roman rule or influence, by a much wider range of private religious options. When people in Paul's world thought of ways in which life might be radically transformed, they might well think of the cults of the Great Mother (*Magna Mater*) and her consort Attis, native to Phrygia in central western Asia Minor, or of Isis and Osiris

from Egypt.⁷⁵ Many other such cults flourished elsewhere in the region, as devotees of this or that divinity established their own religious micro-worlds here and there.⁷⁶ As with many such phenomena in the ancient Mediterranean world, it is often an open question whether the different names are simply different local variations on the same theme, or whether they represent initially independent cults; but for our purposes this does not matter. The point is that Attis, or Osiris, is the male god who symbolizes in his own death the end of the old year, awaiting rebirth the following spring. A fertility god, in fact. His rebirth was guaranteed by the power and providence of the Great Mother, sometimes at least partially identified with Isis. Their cults offered an initiation through which one might oneself experience that death and rebirth, through a variety of rituals, dramas and accompanying narratives, and the unveiling of secret pictures and objects which might be images of the god(dess) or some symbol of the fertility one was anticipating.⁷⁷

In particular, we find in this cult the famous ritual of the *taurobolium*, in which the person to be initiated or consecrated was placed in a pit under a wooden floor in which several holes had been bored, whereupon a bull would be sacrificed in the upper chamber and the person below drenched with its blood.⁷⁸ As in other religious expressions, the ritual would include some kind of food or drink, believed to be shared with the divinity. The aim of all such practices was not, as Aristotle pointed out, to learn things, but to experience things and so to come to a new state of mind.⁷⁹

The world of Paul was thus, already, a world full of ‘religious’ options. By his day Roman culture and religion had spread east, and Greek religion, including the cults of the east, had spread west. By the time Paul arrived in Rome in the late 50s of the first century, there was already a regular festival in honour of the *Magna Mater* and Attis, held in March every year. The Phrygian goddess had been admitted to the Roman pantheon as early as 204 BC; Claudius, emperor from AD 41 to 54, gave permission for increased attention to her cult. This is the more remarkable in that the attempted introduction of the cult of Isis by Egyptian migrants in the first century BC had met with considerable disfavour.⁸⁰

Already by this time there was another new mystery religion, spreading rapidly not least because of its popularity in the Roman army. Mithras seems to have begun further east again, in Persia or even India.⁸¹ Plutarch says that the cult was in evidence among the pirates in south-eastern Asia Minor during the first century BC,⁸² and there is evidence that the first Mithraic initiates were from – guess where? Tarsus, a city already noted in another connection.⁸³ What an interesting town the young Saul grew up in. By the second century AD the cult was in full swing right across the Roman world.

Mithraism was emphatically a male religion: only men were allowed to join, and Mithras himself was portrayed as a sun-god, a bull-killer, a heavenly soldier fighting for light, truth and justice. His initiates were ranked, as one might expect in a cult with military roots, in several stages of hierarchy, ascent through these orders being attained through harsh tests and initiation ceremonies. Initiates met in groups for worship, in chambers they called ‘caves’ which they regarded as ‘microcosms’, ‘little universes’, covered in zodiacal decoration and always featuring an elaborate picture of Mithras killing a bull and rescuing the world (or at least the worshippers) by means of its blood.⁸⁴ They would line up opposite one another on benches, the different ranks clad in different colours, to share a common meal. The aim of it all seems not merely to have been inner spiritual strengthening and the chance of a better life after death. Unlike the gnostics, whose religion encouraged them to ignore and escape the world, and unlike the Epicureans, who arrived at the same escapist result by a very different route, devotees of Mithras were strengthened in their resolve to be brave and resolute in fighting Rome’s battles and defending its empire:

The Mithraist, like the Stoic, was at home everywhere in the universe and in society, notably in imperial and cosmopolitan Roman society, where loyalty to the emperor and the consciousness of serving, each in his own position, were in fundamental accord with a religion of ‘Soldiers’ and the oath, *sacramentum*. In many respects, Mithraism rendered sacred certain constant values of Roman-ness.⁸⁵

Mithraism continued to flourish right across the Roman world until it was overthrown (and sometimes overbuilt) in the rise, and eventual legitimation, of Christianity. Though it was not, as used sometimes to be claimed, ever likely to prove a major world religion, it was undoubtedly a lively presence in the world from which Saul of Tarsus had come, and into which Paul the Apostle went with the news of one who had overcome a very different enemy by very different means.

(iv) Religion and Culture in the First-Century Roman World

Since Paul only arrived in Rome itself towards the end of his public career, one might be tempted to suppose that the specifics of Roman religion, oriented as it was to the city itself, would be less relevant to his earlier travels. This would be a mistake. Not only did Rome welcome into its own 'family' the gods of other cities, particularly those that had been 'persuaded' to leave their native cities so that Rome could then defeat the cities in battle.⁸⁶ That centripetal movement was matched by two centrifugal movements: colonies and armies. Both extended Roman culture and religion right across the entire area of Paul's life and work.

Colonies and armies were of course related. Many colonies, the ones in northern Greece being a case in point, had been founded because Rome did not relish the thought of veteran soldiers returning to Italy, eager for reward and careless of other people's lives and property. There were veteran soldiers in plenty in northern Greece after the civil wars of the 40s and 30s BC, and one of the ways of getting them to beat their swords into ploughshares was by the gift of land. By Paul's day there were thriving colonies in Philippi and Corinth (though Corinth was a civil, not an ex-military, foundation), and a string of others on both sides of the Aegean Sea. Others were placed further inland, in southern Asia Minor, for instance those at Antioch and Lystra, two of the cities which feature in Paul's first missionary journey.⁸⁷ Since a colony was basically a 'little Rome', it naturally reproduced the religion and culture of the capital as far as possible.⁸⁸

The spread of Roman religion and culture through the armies was far less formal, but no less effective. Troops and their officers might well be stationed in one area for several years, and their way of life would naturally have an impact on the world around them. There is evidence, for instance, of the Roman army living by the official religious calendar even in the far-flung recesses of the eastern empire.⁸⁹ Roman religion, therefore, though not originally diffuse in the manner of the geographically diverse Greek culture, had spread far and wide by Paul's day across the same world of the eastern Mediterranean which we have already been describing. And, once again, we must never forget the intimate and tight-woven link between 'religion' and everything else, not least the ordering of the whole society. 'Religion,' as Karl Galinsky put it, was 'the conduct of social policy by other means.'⁹⁰

The origins of Roman religion were, in any case, closely bound up with Greek roots. The story is complicated, because some of our primary sources, following their own rather different agendas, do not agree. Valerius Maximus, eager to maintain that Rome and its culture was Greek through and through, describes Roman religion as he has witnessed it and declares it to be identical to that of Greece. Virgil, however, eager to present the genealogy of Rome and its people in terms of Aeneas and ancient Troy, distances Roman practices from those of the ancient Greeks who had destroyed Troy, and offers Trojan ones instead.⁹¹ Neither is likely to be fully accurate, but in any case the point for our purposes is once again that a rich blending and overlay had already taken place by the first century. By the first century, too, we find subtle religious developments within Rome which signal her emergence from small city-state to world power:

By this period Romans were (and knew themselves to be) a world power; the small city-state on the Tiber was already well on the way to being the multicultural cosmopolis ... The ancient religious traditions of the city – Rome's relations with its divine citizens – explained Rome's rise to power, represented its success and ensured its continuance for the future. The constructive revival of old, half-forgotten rituals played a key role in the extension of Roman horizons. It was an assertion that the religious traditions of early Rome ordered the imperial universe.⁹²

Here, too, we observe the clearest of the signs of a highly complex phenomenon: the recognition that gods worshipped under one name in Greece were to be identified with gods worshipped under a different name in Rome. Zeus is Jupiter; Poseidon, Neptune; Hera, Juno; Athene, Minerva; Aphrodite, Venus. Ares becomes Mars; Artemis, Diana; Demeter, Ceres; Hephaistos, Vulcan; and Dionysos, Bacchus. Heracles changes a couple of letters to become Hercules; Asclepius adds a couple to become Aesculapius. Of the major divinities, only Apollo retains his name unchanged in both cultures. This is the most obvious setting of what has been called the *interpretatio Romana*, the ‘Roman interpretation’ of other people’s divinities, with some thinkers making light of the task and aligning differently named but similarly attributed divinities and others wondering whether they were in fact the same. It mattered; if you addressed a god by the wrong name you might not get the response you wanted.⁹³ The whole question is as slippery for scholars today as it must have been for first-century worshippers. Sometimes the list of ‘translations’ above would be affirmed as it stood. On other occasions people might suggest that a particular divinity had some attributes of three or four of the traditional Olympians.⁹⁴ Sometimes we detect real syncretism, the merging or at least grouping together of originally disparate cults and traditions. Sometimes this is resisted.⁹⁵ Sometimes, perhaps under philosophical influence, people might suggest that all these ‘divinities’ were simply different aspects of the same single divine force.⁹⁶ Sometimes this came to powerful expression as in, for instance, the cult of *theos hypsistos*, ‘god most high’.⁹⁷ The ‘Roman interpretation’, though, was intimately connected with another obvious phenomenon: the Roman triumphal expansion. Throughout the last three centuries BC, Rome (still then a republic, and proud of it) consistently enlarged the territory over which it had won sovereignty, starting with the bulk of Italy itself and spreading out in all directions. And with Rome – not least with her soldiers – went the Roman divinities. ‘Rome’s success was the gods’ success.’⁹⁸ As Hegel already suggested, some kind of syncretism might well be part of the imperial package: the Romans did their best to

‘assemble all gods and spirits in the pantheon of world domination in order to transform them into an abstract and shared entity.’⁹⁹

Of these Roman divinities, three were placed in a position of special prominence on the Capitol, becoming known as the ‘Capitoline Triad’: Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Jupiter, best and greatest), Juno Regina (the queen) and Minerva.¹⁰⁰ When Augustus built a new temple near his house on the Palatine, he dedicated it to another triad: Apollo, Latona and Diana.¹⁰¹

Not that the Romans had no new divinities. On the contrary. Fortuna, the goddess of luck, has ancient roots in the area around Rome; though later identified with the Greek goddess *Tychē*, she seems to be native to the area. Janus, the god of beginnings, had a temple whose doors, kept open in wartime, made a powerful symbolic statement when Augustus, shutting them, declared thereby that he had brought peace to the Roman world. Peace itself, *pax*, became a goddess, as did several other abstractions, including *fides*, ‘faith’, ‘faithfulness’ or ‘loyalty’.¹⁰² Others joined them: *Spes* (hope), *Victoria* and *Libertas* which hardly need translating, and, of considerable interest for our overall theme, *Iustitia*, corresponding broadly to the Greek *Dikē*. The temple for ‘Justice’ was consecrated on 8 January AD 13, just over a year before Augustus’s death.¹⁰³ This goddess, it was thought, was active in bringing wrongdoers to trial before the high god, and in punishing injustice. Sometimes, in inscriptions, she acquires the highly significant second name, *Augusta*. Augustus wanted it to be believed, as widely as possible, that he had brought not only peace to the Roman world (through military conquest, of course), but also a type and level of justice never before seen.¹⁰⁴ This is one of many important ingredients in the great innovation that came about as the new-minted empire of Augustus gathered religious and theological as well as political pace. We shall study it further in the next chapter.

But Roman religion never focused exclusively on the grand public statements and show. The private home was equally important, with the hearth and its ‘household gods’ as the focus, and the father of the family acting as priest. These ‘household gods’ comprise the *Lares*, small statues

of two young men, and the *Penates*, the small cult statues placed at the innermost point of the home, and clearly seen as symbolic of the ultimate identity of a particular family.¹⁰⁵ Harder to describe, but extremely important, was the *genius* of the father of the household.¹⁰⁶ The *genius* was the deified concept of the person in his true identity or self. It could be represented with a small statue, and was invoked on the occasion of marriage, or of oath-taking. Philosophically speaking, the *genius* was the true, spiritual inner core of a person, or indeed of a place; hence the *genius loci*, the ‘spirit of a place’, which could also be invoked as a divinity.

The ‘place’ above all which mattered in Roman religion was Rome itself. One feature of life, not only in Rome but in many other cities, which moderns may find surprising is the fixing of a boundary, the *pomerium*, around a city, constituting it as an official sacred space in accordance with augury.¹⁰⁷ ‘The importance of the *pomerium* as a ritually established boundary,’ says one recent writer, ‘would be impossible to overstate.’¹⁰⁸ It marked the distinction not only between ‘Roman’ and ‘foreign’ but between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’, and for that matter ‘civil’ and ‘military’. In the imperial period, massive stone blocks indicated its route; successive emperors claimed the right to extend the *pomerium* as they had extended the empire itself. Different types of activity, both political and religious (and as we have seen these overlapped anyway) were carried on outside and inside; the rigid separations, however (for instance between military life outside and non-military life inside), were strained to breaking point by the combination of civil and military power in the hands of one man, Augustus. It was after he had reigned for over two decades that, finally, a temple to the war-god Mars was built inside the sacred boundary. The Elder Pliny described it as among the most beautiful buildings in the world.¹⁰⁹ But the boundary continued to be symbolically important, not least as the so-called ‘imperial cult’ began to take off in the provinces; the rules that governed emperor-worship away from Rome were, at least to begin with, modelled precisely on Roman shrines that were *outside* the *pomerium*.¹¹⁰

It is within this complex and many-sided world of religion and culture that we must locate the various functionaries.¹¹¹ Their roles, the careful demarcation of their various duties, and not least the fact that again and again key figures in Roman social and political life turn up as one sort of priest or another, indicate that this topic is not merely of descriptive interest, but of considerable significance for understanding how the entire culture thought, felt and functioned. Priesthood in ancient Rome was, in today's terms, a lot more like holding office or chairing key bodies within a local city council than it was like being a member of the modern clergy. If Paul were to come to a city and find himself clashing with the religious authorities he might well find that the same people held considerable civic and political power.

Returning to Cicero's threefold division of types of *religio* (ritual, auspices, and the interpretation of sacred writings and omens), we find different 'colleges' or societies of priesthood.¹¹² The *pontifices* were broadly in charge of Roman religion of all sorts, especially through their control (and sometimes political manipulation) of the calendar which determined when festivals were to be held.¹¹³ Ancient laws governed sacred space, sacred time and sacred actions, and it was the task of the *pontifices* to make sure those laws were observed. (This is a long way from the 'tolerant' account of ancient paganism that has sometimes been given.) Their chief, the *Pontifex Maximus*, was 'judge and master of things divine and human', a powerful office indeed.¹¹⁴ A sign of its importance in the first century BC is that Julius Caesar acquired the office in the midst of all of his other concerns. After his assassination, Mark Antony rewarded one of his key supporters, Aemilius Lepidus, by having him appointed in Caesar's place. The fact that Augustus, in the early years of consolidating his sole power, did not oust Lepidus from that position shows the strength of Roman feeling in relation to the senior priesthood. Equally, the fact that after Lepidus's death in 13 BC Augustus took the post himself demonstrates that, even within what was by then clearly an autocracy, being *Pontifex Maximus* continued to carry enormous power. There had been earlier protests, in the second century BC, against the ruling classes automatically holding not

only the top civic offices but the top religious ones as well; these voices had by now been well and truly silenced.¹¹⁵

The second college of priests was that of the ‘augurs’: Cicero held office within that college.¹¹⁶ It was their job to advise the Senate on matters concerning the taking of auspices (anybody could in theory inspect auspices, but the augurs had to advise on how this was to be done and what it then meant) and the interpretation of omens. Auspices might be taken to mean that a planned action should or should not go ahead on a particular day; the augurs had to go further, and advise whether it should be done at all.

The third category mentioned by Cicero was the *quindecemviri*, the ‘fifteen men’ (though by the late republic there were actually sixteen of them). They guarded, and interpreted, the Sibylline books, their services being required not least when strange portents or omens had appeared: what did these things mean, and what religious actions should be taken in response? This important role was expanded to include the regulation and oversight of foreign cults, particularly those imported from Greece or elsewhere in the east. Their role in consulting the ancient books and advising on contemporary practice was well exploited by Augustus when, in the late 20s BC, he enquired about the ‘secular games’ (the word ‘secular’ having nothing to do with today’s meaning of ‘non-religious’, but rather with the *saeculum*, the ‘age’ of 100 years). Ancient Rome had sporadically kept such a celebration of theatrical games and sacrifices, commemorating the passing of another hundred years. Now, under Augustus and with the advice of the *quindecemviri*, they were celebrated in 17 BC with various new elements. As we shall see in the next chapter, Augustus was not so much commemorating the passing of another ‘old age’ as the launching of a new one, that of his own rule.¹¹⁷

Despite Cicero’s threefold classification, there was also a fourth order of priesthood: the *epulones* or ‘feast organizers’. It was their job, delegated by the *pontifices*, to organize the detail for public celebrations, especially in connection with the great November festival for Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the highest of the high gods and the most important of the Capitoline Triad.

Though Julius Caesar increased the number of *epulones* to ten, there were originally seven of them, and they continued to be known in consequence as the *septemviri*.¹¹⁸

This extremely brief summary of complex matters is, again, not merely of antiquarian interest. It is vital if we are to sense the flavour of life in a Roman environment; and much of Paul's most important work was carried out in a Roman environment, albeit overlaid on a Greek base and with plenty of other imported material coming in alongside.¹¹⁹ Though we must address such questions properly much later, a moment's thought will make it clear that Paul, in founding a 'church' in Corinth or Philippi or elsewhere, was not setting up a new 'religion' in any of the kind of senses we have been exploring. He seems to have had no interest in a sacred calendar, and indeed at one point has harsh words for those who do.¹²⁰ He never suggests that one should sacrifice animals, whether to eat them or to inspect their entrails.¹²¹ He never indicates that one ought to pay attention to thunderstorms, or to the flight of particular birds. The sacred texts he interprets are of a very different order to the Sibylline Books. He does not attempt to establish anything remotely corresponding to the priesthoods of either Greece or Rome.

By the same token, even the small beginnings of a 'thick description' of greco-roman culture such as we have made here indicate that when Paul arrived in a town and began to speak about the one true God, and about this God raising from the dead a man called Jesus who was now to be invoked, worshipped and hailed as *kyrios*, there was a whole network of assumptions, vested interests, long-cherished traditions, hopes and fears both personal and civic, which would be aroused. When the antagonists in Philippi declare that Paul and Silas are Jews, throwing the city into an uproar by 'teaching customs which it's illegal for us Romans to accept or practise',¹²² and when the crowd in Thessalonica yell out that Paul and Silas have been 'turning the world upside down' by 'acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus',¹²³ we can understand, in view of the evidence so far surveyed in this chapter, that these, though carrying an inescapably political dimension, were

fundamentally to do with a strong, deep-rooted culture, and within that culture with something we may as well call ‘religion’. ‘Religion’ may not be ultimately the best category for describing or analyzing what Paul was doing, or what he thought he was doing. But it is certainly a key and basic element in *what his contemporaries will have seen him doing and heard him saying*. And with ‘religion’, in all of these complex senses, we are dealing with what today we might call ‘the fabric of society’, the things which held people together and gave shape and meaning to their personal and corporate life.

All of this – the Greek background and the Roman foreground in particular – came together in one particular manifestation of greco-roman ‘religion’: the various practices which go under the loose heading of ‘imperial cult’. But for that to make the sense it makes we need to set it within the context of the enormous change that came over Rome and its world at the turn of the eras, namely the rise of the ‘empire’ itself, under the personal rule of the ‘emperor’. And for that we need a different chapter.

First, though, some concluding reflections on the world of greco-roman religion as it forms the context for Paul’s work.

[3. Reflections on the Religious World of Paul’s Day](#)

The main thing to emerge for our purposes from this short survey is that what Cicero and others referred to loosely with the word *religio* penetrated more or less every area of life. From the home, with its hearth and household gods, right up to great affairs of state, noble works of art and culture, and the most important public buildings and civic ceremonies, ‘religion’ was everywhere, because the gods were everywhere.¹²⁴ Paul, as ‘apostle to the gentiles’, believed himself to be sent by the one God of Israel into this world of many gods.¹²⁵

Furthermore, this religious world both was and wasn’t ordered and tidy. It was, to the extent that the great festivals mattered, the proper performance of regular religious rituals (particularly sacrifices) mattered,

and the appropriate investigation of omens and auguries mattered. To neglect those was to jeopardize the *polis* itself, and potentially to cast a blight on particular enterprises the *polis* might be conducting. ‘To refuse sacrifice was to refuse the gods.’¹²⁶ ‘Impiety’ like that might or might not be associated with the possibility of some kind of divine punishment in a future life, but that was a different matter; the more important charge would be that one was endangering the state by either ignoring or insulting one of the divinities involved in the civic life and in that particular project.¹²⁷

The religious world was ‘ordered and tidy’, too, in the sense that both in Athens in Socrates’s day and in Rome in Caesar’s day one of the things most likely to arouse hackles was religious innovation. New, foreign divinities might be brought on board (as with the *Magna Mater* and many other cults in Rome), but there was a proper process of naturalization, and it was to be expected that any such imports would, as it were, behave themselves and settle down as members of the family, not try to take over from any established practices. We must never forget that for the ancient world the power of tradition, of ways of life long established and handed down, was very strong. Exactly unlike much of today’s western culture, the word ‘old’ implied high praise, while ‘new’ carried both a moral and a social sneer.¹²⁸ Hence the ambiguity, even in Socrates himself: you might question everything, you might challenge every possible presupposition of social, cultural, moral and civic life, but when all is said and done you still owe a cock to Asclepius.

The philosophical critique, then, which we looked at briefly in the previous chapter, consisted more of intellectual questioning about the tradition rather than the attempt to overthrow the tradition altogether. The closest the philosophers came to that ambition was with Epicurus, but there is no sign that his views, despite Lucretius’s eloquent presentation of them, carried weight with many Romans through the period of the early empire. Perhaps the most interesting of the philosophical questions to be raised is one on which we have touched only briefly: granted (as most Romans did grant) that the gods of the Roman pantheon were basically the same as the gods of the Greek pantheon, albeit for the most part under other names, how

far might the same principle stretch? Could one straightforwardly assume that all peoples worshipped the same divinities, so that all one had to do, like Caesar in Gaul, was to find out which of the local gods performed which function?¹²⁹ Were the *Magna Mater* and Isis one and the same? And – more radical still – were the many ‘gods’ all simply manifestations of one single ‘divinity’, so that *to theion* would actually encompass the whole lot, perhaps even including the lesser *daimones*? A case can be made for thinking that by at least the time of Constantine plenty of educated Greeks and Romans, perhaps particularly under the influence of Stoic pantheism or neo-Platonic reverence for the Ultimate Good, had come to believe something like that. ‘Monotheism’ of various kinds may indeed have been the implicit belief held by many.¹³⁰ But it is important to stress at that very point that whereas indeed for Christians, starting with Paul, ‘belief’, and in particular belief about who ‘God’ really was, took centre stage, this had never been the case for the Greeks and the Romans. For them, *religio* was something you *did*: ‘even the idea of personal “*belief*” (to us, a self-evident part of religious experience) provides a strikingly *inappropriate* model for understanding the religious experience of early Rome.’¹³¹

What is more, saying that religion was a matter of action rather than belief does not mean that ‘religion’ in the Roman world had the function of teaching people how to behave. It could reinforce a morality already widely accepted (as, for example, in warning that a god might be less likely to hear the prayers of someone who behaved badly, or that wicked deeds might incur actual punishment here or hereafter).¹³² But Roman religion of itself had nothing to do with the *teaching* of morals. One would not expect a pagan priest, before or after a sacrifice or augury, to give a lecture on some aspect of personal or civic behaviour. If Cicero, his priestly duties done, went home and worked on a philosophical treatise about behaviour, that was a different matter, and had nothing to do with his activities as an augur. Indeed, in traditional religion and its accompanying mythologies, the behaviour of the gods themselves was hardly exemplary. Herein lay the invitation for the philosophers both to critique the assumptions of regular

religion and to teach, positively, both specific codes of behaviour and the theories of virtue whereby character might be developed in that direction.

What about the Jews? Here we need not pause for long. It is as well known today as it was in the ancient world that the Jews would have nothing, or next to nothing, to do with all this range of 'religion'. They denied the existence of the pagan divinities. They regarded pagan worship, offered to cult objects, as 'idolatry' in the full biblical sense. They believed that pagan life was a distorted version of the genuine humanness to which the one God had called Israel and would, in principle, want to call the whole world. They did their best to remain detached and separate from the whole thing.¹³³

One of the best known passages, roughly contemporary with Paul, in which this rejection is graphically expressed is from the Wisdom of Solomon, which we have already noted in connection with Jewish engagement with the philosophical world of the time. The writer picks up the scriptural denunciations of the making and the worship of idols, and applies them to the non-Jewish world of his day:

But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are those who give the name 'gods' to the works of human hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals, or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand ...

The idol made with hands is accursed, and so is the one who made it – he for having made it, and the perishable thing because it was named a god.

For equally hateful to God are the ungodly and their ungodliness; for what was done will be punished together with the one who did it.

Therefore there will be a visitation also upon the heathen idols, because, though part of what God created, they became an abomination, snares for human souls and a trap for the feet of the foolish.¹³⁴

The writer then goes on to denounce the worship of cult statues of monarchs, a point to which we shall return in the next chapter. He continues with a catalogue of the horrors which idolaters perpetrate: infanticide, frenzied revels and orgies, theft and deceit; sexual perversion and other disorders. For, he says,

the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil.

For their worshippers either rave in exultation, or prophesy lies, or live unrighteously, or readily commit perjury;

for because they trust in lifeless idols they swear wicked oaths and expect to suffer no harm ...¹³⁵

Of course, the Jews were mocked, misunderstood, and sometimes maltreated for their stance. They were in some places regarded as traitors. 'Rejecting collective worship meant rejecting group identity, and ... the refusal to take part in public cults was in effect a refusal to belong to the larger community.'¹³⁶

Their stubbornness did, however, find its reward. Successive Romans, in particular, discovered that they could not persuade Jews, even on pain of torture or death, to worship 'the gods', and being pragmatists the Romans decided to strike a deal (which Tertullian, at the end of the second century, referred to in terms of Judaism being a 'permitted religion'¹³⁷). The Jews would not pray *to* the gods of Rome, but they would pray (to their one God) *for* the health and well-being of Rome; that principle had been well established, as one of the ground rules for Jews in exile, as long ago as Jeremiah.¹³⁸ Under the empire, Jews would not pray *to* the emperor, as everyone else had to do, but they would pray *for* the emperor. Why not? According to their creational monotheism, with its remarkable role for humans as the imagebearers of the one God, this one God desired and intended that rulers should rule, and would hold them to account according to the wisdom and justice, or otherwise, with which they had exercised power. The Christians, from the start, behaved not as a new variety of pagan religion but as a new and strange variety of Judaism, though with the added puzzle (for the watching world) that while the Jews (like everybody else) offered animal sacrifices the Christians did not.¹³⁹

One of the most powerful and moving contemporary evocations of the world we have been studying ends by pointing forward to the world of Paul's day, with the deliberate and provocative ambiguity a work of art makes possible. William Golding's posthumously published novel *The Double Tongue* tells the first-person story of a first-century Pythia, priestess and mouthpiece of Apollo, at Delphi. Throughout her life, she has had vivid

and frightening experiences of ‘the divine’, but the Pythia remains uncertain as to who or what it is that has possessed her. There is something, but it is also nothing. Hard to explain. It is a ‘void’, an emptiness, and yet it has presence: a personality, a power.

This puzzle then forms a question-mark as the novel closes. Among the many oracles which the Pythia has uttered, some have been of considerable value to Athens. Near the end of her life, she receives a letter from the Archon of that city:¹⁴⁰

In view of my long service as Pythia of the Apolline Oracle the city wished to erect a stone image of me among the altars on the Field of Mars. I wrote back – remembering the void – and feeling strangely that there was a kind of tenderness in it that I could explain to nobody. I asked that rather than an image of me they should erect a simple altar and inscribe there:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

¹ KRS 91 = Ar. *de An.* A4, 411a7. Aristotle’s (demythologizing?) explanation for Thales’s comment is that ‘soul’ (*psychē*) is ‘mixed in’ (*memeichthai*) with the universe (*en tō holō*).

² Plato, *Phaedo*, 118A, my tr. The American for ‘cock’ is of course ‘rooster’.

³ *ib.* 117B–C.

⁴ Waterfield 2009, 204. Waterfield refers (226) to over twenty other interpretations of the saying, the most popular being that he was now being ‘cured’ from the sickness of life, or more specifically that his immortal soul was being ‘cured’ of having to stay within his body.

⁵ See the lively and many-sided discussion in Rüpke 2007 [2001], ch. 1; also Rives 2007, 4–7, 13–53; Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.x–xii; Gradel 2002, 4–6. The point is beginning to be noted among biblical scholars, too; cf. e.g. Thiessen 2011, 142–4. Among the many excellent surveys of ancient Greek religion we may mention Price 1999; Mikalson 2010 [2005]; and above all, still enormously valuable after nearly thirty years, Burkert 1985 [1977]. On Roman religion: Turcan 1996; Rives 2007, and especially Beard, North and Price 1998. On the etymology of the Latin *religio*, LS 1556 support Servius (ad Verg. *A.* 8, 349), Lactantius (4.28) and Augustine (*Retract.* 1.13) in deriving it from *religare*, ‘to bind’, cp. Lucr. *De Re. Nat.* 1.932 [not 931 as LS]; 4.7, as against Cic. *De Nat. De.* 2.28.72 who favours *relēgere*, to retrace or re-read (but cf. Rackham’s note in the Loeb ad loc., pointing out that elsewhere Cicero seems to go with *religare*). An excellent recent survey of meanings of ‘religion’ and its usefulness (or otherwise) in theology and biblical studies is that of Griffiths 2005, though his Barthian conclusion will be challenged in [ch. 13 below](#).

⁶ e.g. Ando 2008, xvii, contrasting the Roman ‘religion based on knowledge’, which ‘presupposes error’ and can therefore change, with the Christian faith which ‘admits no such challenge’. See too the repeated assertions of Price 1984, 10–16, which seem (not surprisingly) to be aimed at post-Enlightenment western versions of Christianity, with, for instance, a major split between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’; cp. Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.359f. On the word ‘pagan’, and the decision to go on using it despite its potential negative connotations, see e.g. Beard, North and Price 1988, 1.ix n. 2.

⁷ E.g. Burkert 1985 [1977], 4, 8. The Sibylline Oracles (see below) scarcely correspond to ‘scripture’ in a Jewish, Christian or Muslim sense; Cicero’s proposed ‘laws of religion’ (*De Leg.* Book 2) were a bold proposal from a philosopher/lawyer that were never likely to be translated into anyone’s legal system, let alone to be read aloud as part of an act of worship.

⁸ Compare the sardonic tone of Rüpke 2007, 17, dismissing the monotheistic claims of the Christians on the grounds that they continued to believe in *daemones*. ‘The ideological nature of the opposition “monotheism versus polytheism”,’ he suggests, ‘becomes clearer still if we think, say, of the theological concept of the Trinity ... , which is as fine an example as one could wish of having one’s cake and eating it’ – a charge from which he is eager to rescue Cicero (124). See, similarly, Athanassiadi and Frede 1999, 3: Christians claim to be monotheists while believing in ‘the deification of Man’, the Trinity and the veneration of saints; so ‘it becomes difficult to see why the same imaginative understanding should not be accorded to the pagan point of view.’

⁹ cf. e.g. Galinsky 1996, 330. It is true of course that all kinds of new deities could be, and were, added to the pantheon, and that Roman religion was richly variegated. But it was not only the cult of Isis that was banned (by Agrippa in 28 BC). Philosophers could be banished, or worse, for questioning time-honoured beliefs. The ‘Jewish exception’ that allowed these apparent ‘atheists’ to continue their traditional way of life (relatively) unmolested would not be extended to others who could not claim the same ethnic identity: [see below, 1304f.](#)

¹⁰ See Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.95f., arguing that what upset the authorities about the Bacchic rites (as opposed to those of the *Magna Mater*, which were accepted and legitimized) was (a) the hierarchic structure of the group, creating an alternative mini-society within Rome, and (b) the threat thus posed both to family life and to the authority of the ‘normal’ religious officials. See too Rüpke 2007, 205f.

¹¹ Burkert 1985 [1977], 276: ‘whoever refuses to take part incurs suspicions of *asebeia*,’ ‘impiety’ (and hence of failure to support the *polis* in its necessary invocation of the gods who guarantee its protection and prosperity).

¹² cf. e.g. Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.80–2.

¹³ cf. the strictures of Price 1984, 10 on the importation of false criteria which ‘apply the standards of one religion to the ritual of another society without consideration of their relevance to indigenous standards.’ So too *ib.*, 11 on the danger of elevating the (implicitly Christian) category of ‘belief’: ‘the question about the “real beliefs” of the Greeks is ... implicitly Christianizing.’ Of course, it is not only in matters of ‘religion’ that contemporary assumptions colour a reading of ancient history. Famously, Syme 1939 pictured Augustus as an early precursor of the European dictatorships of his day ([see ch. 5 below](#)).

¹⁴ Nicely summed up in Burkert 1985 [1977], 1–4.

¹⁵ On ‘crypto-protestant’ projects see Price 2011, 258. For an attempt (not without caveats) to place Christianity among the ‘mysteries’ see Meyer 1987, 225f.

¹⁶ Judge 2008a, 404, referring to the *Macquarie Dictionary*, 2nd edn., 1991.

¹⁷ Judge 2008a, 404. Subsequent references are to this work.

¹⁸ This, though true, needs to be tempered with reference to the ancient interpretations of the word to *relegere*, ‘to ponder in thought’ (Cic. *De Nat. De.* 2.72) or *relegare*, ‘to bind’ (Lucret. *De Re. Nat.* 1.931; Livy *Hist.* 5.23.10). Cicero defines *religio* as *iustitia erga deos*, ‘justice rendered to the gods’ (*Part. Or.* 78). See further Scheid in *OCD* 1307.

¹⁹ cf. 1 Tim. 3.16; Ac. 26.5; Col. 2.18; James 1.26f.; 3.7–10; Jn. 16.2; Rom. 9.4; 12.2; Phil. 3.3. When Paul comments on the extreme religiosity of the Athenians in Ac. 17.22, the word he uses is *deisidaimonesterous*, ‘extremely honouring of the *daimonia*’, perhaps broadly corresponding to the Latin *superstitio* (on which [see below, 252](#)).

²⁰ Judge 2008a 407, with several refs. to secondary discussions.

²¹ Judge 408.

²² Judge 409.

²³ Both Seneca and Plutarch wrote treatises ‘On Superstition’ (Plutarch *Peri Deisidaimonias* [Loeb vol. 2]; Seneca’s treatise is lost except for quotations in Augustine *Civ. Dei* 6.10). On the theme see Turcan 1996, 10: ‘In Rome, *religio* (national and authentic) was readily contrasted with *superstitio* (exotic and suspect);’ Rives 2007, 184–7. Turcan aligns this with today’s Roman Catholic ‘mistrust towards anything that evades the necessary mediation of the institutional Church’.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 11.24. The translation of *anamnēsis* is notoriously difficult: ‘as a memorial’ catches one side of it, but the meaning seems to be not merely that of mentally recording a past event or person but also that of celebrating a presence and a present reality. See e.g. Thiselton 2000, 878–82.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 10.16–22. On this theme [see ch. 9 below](#).

²⁶ Rom. 6.2–11; Col. 2.11–13.

²⁷ See e.g. Rom. 1.9f.; 1.13; 10.1; 15.22, 30, 31f.; 1 Cor. 16.7–9; 2 Cor. 1.3–11; 2.14; 8.16; Phil. 2.27; Eph. 3.7–12, 13, 14–19; 6.18–20.

²⁸ See e.g. Rüpke 2007, 208–14, citing also the (originally Syrian) cult of Jupiter Dolichenus; the Roman site of the latter, with its implications, is discussed by Price 2011, 262–4.

²⁹ Klauck 2000 [1995/6], 7–9 offers some interesting methodological observations; but he still seems to me to assume that early Christianity is in some sense a ‘religion’ to be compared with others.

³⁰ Cic. *De Nat. De.* 3.5 (italics, of course, added to the Loeb tr. [Rackham]). ‘Departments of religion’ means something different today, of course; we might translate instead ‘religious observances’. A similar breakdown of different aspects of Roman religion is found at the start of Valerius Maximus, *De Religione*, 1.1.1a–b, listing fixed and formal ceremonies; augury; interpretation of prophetic oracles; and (as a separate category, which Cicero’s Cotta lumps together with the third one) ‘the explication of portents’ (Ando 2008, 1 has ‘expiation’ for ‘explication’, but the Latin is *explicari*; see Cic. *Har. Resp.* 18 [Loeb vol. 11], Valerius Maximus’s probable source, which has ‘interpretation’ (Ando 2008, 2 n. 2)).

³¹ Ando 2008, 3, citing other translations. His whole opening discussion (1–18), though in some ways provocative, is helpful in drawing attention to verbal and conceptual nuances both ancient and modern.

³² Cic. *De Nat. De.* 1.117; 2.8.

³³ LS 488f.

³⁴ On ‘culture’, and its history as a concept in western thought from the Enlightenment to the present, see the shrewd summary of Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 28–32. As with ‘religion’, I here use ‘culture’ in a loose and heuristic fashion.

³⁵ On the complex relation of ‘religion’ to the different strata of communal life see e.g. Rives 2007, ch. 4.

³⁶ Ando 2008, 126: ‘placation, appeasement, was the chief aim of state cult, and perhaps the most one could hope for from figures whose power was so great and will so enigmatic that their exercise could not but seem arbitrary.’ On ‘placation’ Ando cites Livy 5.13.4–8; 7.2.2 and Arnobius 3.42.4–5.

³⁷ Ando 2008, 3.

³⁸ Ando 2008, 14f.

³⁹ Champlin 2003, 237; his ch. 4 (84–111) gives a full exposition of Nero’s use of myth and its resonances.

⁴⁰ Rüpke 2007, 10. He then provides his own understanding of ‘religion’: ‘a (loose) system of signs or symbols that help to interpret, even to construct, reality and provide orientation within this reality’. The fact that he does not link this system, or its purpose, with any divine or transcendent reality leaves the statement wide open, in a way that many secularists today might find alarming.

⁴¹ Rives 2007, 112, on the forum as constructed by Julius Caesar, with the temple of his putative ancestor Venus, and as developed by Augustus, with the temple of Mars Ultor, the god of warlike vengeance who had defeated Caesar's assassins and thus cleared the way for him, Caesar's adopted son, to attain supreme power (see below, 296f., with Ovid *Fast.* 5; Galinsky 1996, 211). On the longer story of Rome's sacred topography see e.g. Rüpke 2007, 176–85.

⁴² Paus. *Desc. Greece* 2.2.8—3.1.

⁴³ Rives 2007, 117.

⁴⁴ Ac. 19.23–40.

⁴⁵ So Ando 2008, 106, with several primary and secondary sources.

⁴⁶ Livy 5.52.1–3 (tr. de Sélincourt in Penguin Classics). The speech contains a good deal more in the same tone.

⁴⁷ Burkert 1985 [1977], 7 makes a similar point in relation to his book of nearly 500 pages.

⁴⁸ On 'mothering' see e.g. Gal. 4.19 (cp. 1 Cor. 4.14); see Gaventa 2007.

⁴⁹ Recent study is much indebted to the remarkable work of Paul Zanker: see Zanker 1988; see too Zanker 2010.

⁵⁰ See Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 34: 'There is a perpetual lopsidedness between the "Greek" and the "Roman" that flows from the fact that Rome is a citizen state, with a legally defined membership, and Greece a geographic area defined by its common language.'

⁵¹ See Hdt. *Hist.* 2.53.

⁵² For detailed descriptions of each of these, see esp. Burkert 1985 [1977] ch. 3, and any standard classical encyclopedia or dictionary. The words *daimon* and *daimonion* seem to be more or less interchangeable in the period, the latter being more frequent in the NT.

⁵³ e.g. Plato *Crat.* 400e; *Phdr.* 273.c; *Tim.* 28b; Aesch. *Ag.* 160.

⁵⁴ Detailed examples in Burkert 1985 [1977], 384 n. 84.

⁵⁵ Burkert 1985 [1977], 99. On festivals see e.g. Rives 2007, 112–4: 'these rituals functioned to define and reinforce the civic and religious identity of the populace' (114).

⁵⁶ Burkert 1985 [1977], 104f., speaking of the women-only Thesmophoria festival, but the point is more widely applicable. Burkert suggests (108f.) that the element of 'sacred marriage' was more a celebration of mysterious divine unions (sky-father and earth-mother providing the basic template) rather than an invitation to orgiastic human behaviour.

⁵⁷ see e.g. Livy 22.10.9–10.

⁵⁸ *OCD* 487 cites Xenophon's *Anabasis* as a classic statement of many types of divination, and Cic. *De Div.* as the classic philosophical discussion of the whole question.

⁵⁹ On the weekend I am editing this chapter, Her Majesty the Queen has been celebrating her Diamond Jubilee; the night after the celebrations ended, the planet Venus performed its once-in-a-lifetime 'transit' across the face of the sun. Few ancient Greeks or Romans would have regarded this as insignificant – even though few British people were able to see the astronomical event because of bad weather.

⁶⁰ According to legend, Zeus had released two eagles from the earth's far boundaries, and they met at Delphi: so Pind. *Fr.* 54.

⁶¹ Hdt. *Hist.* 1.53.

⁶² Plato *Apol.* 20 e—22 e.

⁶³ The tale that Nero temporarily shut it down, whether true or not, will have been a deliberate evocation of the similar action by Hercules: see Champlin 2003, 138 citing e.g. Apollodorus 2.6.2.

⁶⁴ Burkert 1985 [1977], 109–11. For the phenomenon of ecstatic speech cf. Burkert 391 n. 8 with refs.

⁶⁵ Plato *Phdr.* 265b; cf. 244a–245a.

⁶⁶ Readily available now in Charlesworth 1983, 1.317–472 (ed. J. J. Collins).

⁶⁷ Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.26 scoffs at such books: they are, he says, *annosa volumina vatium*, translated in the Loeb (Fairclough) as ‘the mouldy scrolls of seers’. Note, however, that Horace cites the Sibylline books at *Carm. Saec.* 5; he was more or less bound to do so, since he was there describing the enacting of Augustus’s own reading of the books.

⁶⁸ See Burkert 1987; 1985 [1977], ch. 6; Meyer 1987; and the recent survey of Gasparro 2011.

⁶⁹ Burkert 1985 [1977], 289.

⁷⁰ *Frogs* 353–71.

⁷¹ See Thuc. *Hist.* 6.27f., and cp. Plut. *Alc.* 34.3–6. For Socrates on mysteries see *Phaedo* 69b–c.

⁷² *De Leg.* 2.13.36.

⁷³ *OCD* 481.

⁷⁴ Burkert 1985 [1977], 303.

⁷⁵ One of the best sources for Isis and Osiris is Apuleius *Met.* Book 11.

⁷⁶ cf. Rives 2007, 122–8.

⁷⁷ Hippolytus (*Ref. Omn. Haer.* 5.8.39) mentions initiates being given a glimpse of a single head of grain, clearly as part of a crop-growing ritual.

⁷⁸ cf. Prudentius, *Peristephanon* x.1011–50 (cf. Barrett 1987 [1956], 126f.; Meyer 1987, 128–30). See esp. Beard, North and Price 1.280, 338.

⁷⁹ Arist. *Frag.*, in Synesius *Dio* 10. Beard, North and Price point out (1.384) that new interpretations of such rituals were possible, as in a fourth-century AD comment about the *taurobolium* which implies ‘a new intensity of personal relationship with the divine’, resulting in the initiate being ‘reborn for eternity’. How much, by then, pagan cult had begun to borrow language from Christianity it is impossible to say.

⁸⁰ On the *Magna Mater* in Rome see Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.98–98. On Isis: Koester 1982a [1980], 364; Beard, North and Price 1998, 160f.: the Senate had the temples and altars of Isis destroyed at various times in the 50s and 40s, almost certainly because, like that of Bacchus, the Isis-cult represented ‘a potentially dangerous alternative society, out of the control of the traditional political élite’. In AD 19 Tiberius had the Isis temple destroyed again and its cult statue thrown into the river Tiber, somewhat like Josiah throwing the rubble from idolatrous altars into the Wadi Kidron (2 Kgs. 23.12). Isis finally found official recognition under Claudius, though the temple was built on the Campus Martius, outside the official (and religiously significant) city limit, the *pomerium* ([see below](#)).

⁸¹ On Mithras cf. Turcan 1996, ch. 4; and esp. Gordon 2011.

⁸² Plut. *Pomp.* 24.

⁸³ Turcan 1996, 202. In Tarsus, too, an inscription provides evidence for a cell of ‘servants of Demeter’ (Rives 2007, 124, citing *IGR* 3.883).

⁸⁴ Porphyry *De Antr. Nymph.* 6. On the salvific effect see e.g. Turcan 1996, 226.

⁸⁵ Turcan 1996, 240.

⁸⁶ cf. Beard, North and Price 1998, 132–4 on the developing practice of *evocatio*, the ‘calling out’ of gods from other cities and inviting them to dwell in Rome instead; cf. too Ando 2008, 128–48.

⁸⁷ *Ac.* 13–14.

⁸⁸ See e.g. Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.157, citing Julius Caesar's colony of Urso in southern Spain.

⁸⁹ Rüpke 2007, 37.

⁹⁰ Galinsky 1996, 308.

⁹¹ On these, with full refs., see Cancik 1999. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 7.72.15–18) took the same line as Valerius Maximus: see Gradel 2002, 17f.

⁹² Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.113.

⁹³ On this whole question see Ando 2008, ch. 3; Rives 2007, ch. 5.

⁹⁴ e.g. Lucian *On the Syrian Goddess* 32.

⁹⁵ See the discussion of Price 2011, 262–7, pointing out that the cult of Mithras was normally exclusive.

⁹⁶ See Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.339–48; Rives 2007, 142–8, citing e.g. Dio *Or.* 31.11; Seneca *On Benevolent Deeds* 4.7f.

⁹⁷ See Mitchell 1993, 2.43–7, and further Mitchell 1999; Belayche 2011, not least the criticisms (164–6) of other positions, e.g. attempts to forge links with variant types of Judaism. Belayche insists (163) that the epithet *hypsistos*, while implying an absolute sovereignty, 'had the aim of highlighting the divinity so invoked within a plurality of gods'.

⁹⁸ Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.74.

⁹⁹ Hegel 1837/1928, xi.361f., cited in Rüpke 2011, 13.

¹⁰⁰ see Livy *Ab urbe condita* 1.55.1; the temple was built by the Etruscan king Tarquinius Superbus in the sixth century BC.

¹⁰¹ Latona is the Latin for *Lēto*, the mother of Apollo and Artemis.

¹⁰² Cic. *De Nat. De.* 2.61.

¹⁰³ Ovid *Pont.* 3.6.25. On the Roman deification of abstractions see e.g. Gradel 2002, 113–6, and esp. Clark 2007.

¹⁰⁴ cf. too the *clipeus virtutis* of 27 BC, on which see Galinsky 1996, 80–90.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Aeneas's taking of the *penates* of his family from Troy: Virg. *Aen.* 2.293; 3.148–50.

¹⁰⁶ See Gradel 2002, 36–8.

¹⁰⁷ see *OCD* 1213f.; and discussions of relevant issues in e.g. Beard, North and Price 1998, 177–81.

¹⁰⁸ Ando 2008, 115.

¹⁰⁹ Pliny *NH* 36.102; the temple was built in 2 BC. See Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.199f.

¹¹⁰ Thus e.g. the altar to Augustus at Gallia Narbonensis, erected in AD 12, which was to be under the regulations that obtained for the altar of Diana (a cosmopolitan shrine) on the Aventine hill, which at that stage was outside the *pomerium*: see Ando 2008, 115.

¹¹¹ See esp. Beard and North 1990, chs. 1–2.

¹¹² Cicero himself lists three, corresponding to the three *religiones*: *De Leg.* 2.12; *De Nat. De.* 3.2.5. See Beard and North 1990, 44 (Beard); for the back history of priesthood, Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.99–108; Rüpke 2007, ch. 11.

¹¹³ On the Roman sacred calendar see e.g. Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.1–8, 25; Rüpke 2007, ch. 9; on wider issues of calendar and time, Feeney 2007.

¹¹⁴ Festus 200 L. (Festus was a fourth-century AD historian.) A '*pontifex*' is literally a 'bridge-builder', but long before the main classical period any literal association with bridges and their construction had been lost.

¹¹⁵ On the protests, see e.g. Sulla *Jugurthine War* 31.10; and e.g. Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.135–7.

¹¹⁶ As did Pliny the Younger, who was glad of the association with Cicero across the interval of a century and a half (*Ep.* 4.8). Cicero was elected in 53/2. He seems genuinely to have believed in augury (against the Stoic objections): see *De Div.*, esp. 2.148; *De Leg.* 2.30.

¹¹⁷ The ‘secular games’ of 17 BC are recorded in an inscription; details in *OCD* 1378. See too Horace’s *Carmen Saeculare*, written for the occasion; and the discussion [below, 299f.](#)

¹¹⁸ One other order, the Arval Brotherhood, has recently received considerable attention: see Scheid 1990, and the use made of this work in Gradel 2002.

¹¹⁹ On the local religion around the Roman empire see e.g. Rives 2007, ch. 2.

¹²⁰ Gal. 4.10.

¹²¹ See Gordon 1990, 251f.: ‘It was only Christianity which refused sacrifice ... [this] was, in fact, the most uncompromising possible rejection of the civic model, and it marks off Christianity from all other organized sects of the empire.’

¹²² Ac. 16.20f.

¹²³ Ac. 17.6f.

¹²⁴ Rives 2007, 104, 116f. suggests that many people, then as now, went about their business with no thought for the gods. The evidence he offers is mAb Zar 1.4, in which the rabbis argue that at a time of pagan festival some shops will be ‘adorned’ and others will not; a Jew may then do business with the latter, presumably because they appear not to be participating in the festival. It would, however, be risky to argue from this context-specific ruling (the Mishnah in question mentions this happening in Beth Shean in central Palestine) to the wider pagan world. The fact that, as Rives he says, ‘religion’ at the time (and much of our evidence for it) was to do with society rather than individuals does not mean that it was less than all-pervasive. Cf. too Rüpke 2007, 7f., suggesting that participation in public rituals was voluntary.

¹²⁵ cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 8.4–6.

¹²⁶ Gradel 2002, 15.

¹²⁷ Rives 2007, 183: ‘people who steadfastly refused to perform sacrifices or even acknowledge them might well arouse the hostility of their neighbours.’

¹²⁸ So e.g. Galinsky 1996, 129, pointing out that a normal Latin expression for social upheaval was *res novae*, ‘new matters’; Gradel 2002, 23.

¹²⁹ Caesar, *Gallic War* 6.17; cf. Beard, North and Price 1998, 2.54f. with other bibliography.

¹³⁰ See Athanassiadi and Frede 1999; and Mitchell and van Nuffelen 2010. North 2011, 493 challenges the evolutionary assumption, still latent in e.g. West 1999, that all roads in ancient religion were in some sense steps on the way to a ‘grand universal convergence’ (493).

¹³¹ Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.x. See too the discussion in Rives 2007, 47–50. Another reflection from the 2012 Jubilee celebrations in the UK: journalists went about asking people in the enormous crowds why they were there, and why the monarchy was important to them. Though some interesting answers emerged, it was clear that this was the wrong question: a typical example, not so much of a ‘Christianizing’ assumption, but of a post-Enlightenment ‘rationalizing’, asking people to give a left-brain explanation of something that clearly moved them deeply in other ways.

¹³² cf. Rüpke 2007, 14f.

¹³³ The centrepiece of this resistance is found in mAb Zar, devoted to a careful analysis of how to avoid contamination with paganism. One section lists the pagan festivals, clearly with Roman rituals in mind: ‘the Calends, the Saturnalia, the commemoration of empire, the anniversaries of kings, and

the day of [their] birth and the day of [their] death' (mAb Zar 1.3). Similarly detailed instructions on avoiding pagan contamination, from within a Christian worldview, are found in Tertullian *On Idolatry*.

¹³⁴ Wis. 13.10; 14.8–11.

¹³⁵ 14.27–9. The 'wicked oaths' may refer simply to false swearing, or it may have in mind swearing by pagan divinities, including the emperor.

¹³⁶ Rives 2007, 129.

¹³⁷ Tertull. *Apol.* 21.1. For Julius Caesar's official position of friendship with the Jews, and similar decrees from around the Greek world, see Jos. *Ant.* 14.185–267; for the similar attitude of Antony, 14.301–23. See further *NTPG* 154 n. 19 with refs. there.

¹³⁸ Jer. 29.7; cf. Ezr. 6.9f.; Bar. 1.11; 1 Macc. 7.33; 1 Tim. 2.1f.; cp. Tertull. *Apol.* 30.1. [See below, 345.](#)

¹³⁹ See Rives 2007, 197–9 on perceptions of early Christianity; also e.g. Benko 1984; Wilcken 2003.

¹⁴⁰ Golding 1995, 165.

Chapter Five

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED: ROME AND THE CHALLENGE OF EMPIRE

1. Introduction

Last came the Eagle. They should all have known; should not have thought (like eager Hezekiah) to court the distant foe against the near. They should have counted. Daniel tried, but his four monsters came and went (it seemed) and still no sign of God's new reign. And even when proud Pompey pushed his way into the shrine (empty and dusty: 'Atheists!' he sneered) they did not see. Pragmatic Caesar shrugged; made citizens of some, and let them be.

Then the 'good news', chiselled around the world: 'Caesar's in charge!' The hungry bird swoops down on this land, now on this. And, on the coins (the hated tribute-penny): 'Son of God'.¹

The Roman empire was the great new Fact of the world which included the Palestine of Jesus' boyhood and the Cilicia of Saul's. It proclaimed itself as a bright new world: new roads with new soldiers to march along them, new taxes and new coins to pay them with, new administrations and lawcourts, local officials falling over themselves to erect splendid, prestigious new temples to the divine royal house. New crosses by the roadside, displaying the bird-pecked remains of rebels. Whole cities were redesigned to give honour to the emperor and his family, portrayed, often enough, in the guise of the ancient pagan divinities. Perhaps, after all, the gods had come down in human form. Rome took the eagle as its symbol; popular legend and iconography suggested a direct link to Jupiter, the highest god of all.² The Romans certainly seemed to be as powerful as gods ought to be. Tertullian, a leading teacher of the Latin church in the late second and early third centuries, famously asked what Athens had to do with Jerusalem. A cynic might answer that the most important thing those

two cities had in common is that both were sacked by Rome in punishment for rebellion: Athens two generations before the birth of Jesus, Jerusalem a generation after his death.

Up to the latter point, the Jewish people, with their long experience of living under pagan empire, muddled along with the new Fact as best they could. To begin with, Rome seemed a welcome, distant ally against nearer threats like Syria or Egypt.³ By the middle of the first century BC things had become clearer, as the internal power-struggles of the late Roman republic produced generals with reputations to make and glittering prizes to win. Pompey the Great (106–48 BC), having defeated Mithradates VI, king of Pontus in northern Turkey, swept down through the middle east, planting colonies, annexing Syria, and establishing the Roman presence in Judaea in 63 BC. This, famously, was the moment when, over the horrified protests of priests and people alike, he insisted on going in to the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem, presumably to confront the local god with the news that the upstart goddess Roma was now in charge. Finding no image of the local god, he concluded, logically enough, that the people didn't have one. They were obviously atheists.

Pompey's subsequent demise coincided with the ascent to supreme power of his great rival, Julius Caesar, in whose hands the ancient, proud republic found itself transformed into the personal fiefdom of its most successful general. Caesar discovered early on that the Jewish people were different: most subject peoples were content to adopt such Roman customs, including religious practices, as their new overlords imposed, but the Jews for some reason were implacably resistant to such things. Some of Caesar's later successors, finding this intolerable, tried to impose their will by force. Julius, though, realizing that this was an odd situation but containable, allowed them to practice their own religion in their own way. Some Jews served in his armies, and for this and other reasons he conferred on some of them the grant of Roman citizenship. That, we may assume, is the likely route by which the father or grandfather of Saul of Tarsus acquired that citizenship which, according to Acts at least, played such a significant role in Saul's later public career.⁴

The intervention in the middle east of Pompey and Caesar, and, not long after, of Antony, was not surprising within the wider world of Roman politics. Rome's far-flung conquests had made her rich, famous and fat: the population in the capital had long outgrown the capacity of the local hinterland to supply enough food, and supplementary grain had to be brought, in considerable quantity, from Egypt. Even at the height of Rome's imperial success a threat to the grain supply could produce riots on the streets in next to no time. It is striking that, at the very moment when Augustus was refusing the title 'dictator', he took the office of *curator annonae*, controlling the supply of food.⁵

Hence the need, which Pompey had addressed, to clear the Mediterranean of pirates. Hence too the need, which remained paramount for the next two hundred years at least, to keep the strange and awkward nations and races at the eastern end of the Mediterranean as quiet as reasonably possible. Then as now, the west depended on the east for basic resources, and the west was determined to safeguard the supply by political and, where necessary, military force. There were, of course, other serious problems in the middle east, of which the most obvious was the huge potential threat of Parthia (see below). Then as now, the lands to the north and east of Palestine were politically unstable, and the Jewish homeland found itself at the troubling centre of other people's fears and ambitions.

All this was going on at a time when native leadership among the Jewish people was itself in decline. The Hasmonean dynasty, founded after the glorious successes (with Roman help⁶) of the Maccabees a hundred and more years earlier, had gone to seed and become unpopular. Everybody knew, in any case, that they were neither from the royal family of David nor from the priestly house of Aaron, undermining their claim to be both priests and kings. Once the Romans came in, however, everything was in any case going to change. The Romans preferred to rule through local intermediaries. Their preferred method was to find the most obviously powerful local people, confer titles on them, and back them up where necessary. In this case the Hasmonians were in place, though often criticized by religious and populist pressure-groups, and Pompey reinstated the now elderly Hyrcanus

II as high priest. He had held the office already, from 76 to 67, but had then been out of power for four years after his defeat by Aristobulus II in a battle at Jericho. All the rulers of this period were related, within the complex Hasmonean dynasty. But in the period between 63 and 40 BC considerable power was wielded behind the official front by a wealthy Idumaean called Antipater, who dominated the political scene for a generation, and whose son, Herod, emerged as the most powerful figure around. Antipater was a good example of a strong local figure offering his services to the Romans and being rewarded with status and citizenship; he provided Jewish, Arab and Syrian troops to Caesar in his Egyptian campaign. He is also a good example of what often happened to such people, since he was assassinated for his pains (43 BC); but his influence and example lived on in his son.

Herod had learned the lesson well.⁷ When the Parthians swept through the middle east between 40 and 38 (the Parthians occupied, in the Roman imagination, the kind of mythical force of evil which some in the west today still envisage when they think of the countries to the east of Turkey and Syria), it was Herod who recaptured Jerusalem for the Romans. Equally shrewd was his marriage to a Hasmonean princess, Mariamne, the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II. Thus, though suspect in many local eyes because of only being half Jewish, Herod was doing his best to legitimate himself as ‘king of the Jews’, a project he was further advancing by his magnificent work on the Temple. A born manipulator – the sort of man for whom the twentieth century would adapt an older Jewish word into ‘schmoozer’ – he knew how to present himself to the pragmatic Romans as the obvious local person through whom to work. Having backed Antony in the Roman civil war, he then boldly switched tracks and offered his services to the victorious Octavian. Octavian, like his adoptive father Julius Caesar, knew a sensible solution when he saw one, and confirmed Herod in office. Thus the confusions of Jewish politics in the first century BC combined with the death-throes of the Roman republic to bring to power a clever warlord for thirty years in Palestine and Judaea and an even cleverer one for forty years in Rome. Octavian, taking the title Augustus, became the greatest emperor the world had ever known, ruling an area comparable with

Alexander's territories, and for much longer. Having deified his adoptive father, he took the obvious title 'Son of the Deified', *divi filius*.⁸ Strictly speaking, this is not the same as *dei filius*, 'son of god', but the rhetorical impact was much the same.⁹

The Jewish understanding of what was going on took time to catch up. This, as I say, was somewhat surprising, granted the long Jewish tradition of critique of empires, from Assyria and Babylon in the middle of the first millennium BC to Persia, Greece, Syria and Egypt more recently. Sometimes a vassal state, sometimes a buffer state, always in the middle of the military routes as well as the trade routes, riven with internal factions, flawed by weak leadership – it is truly remarkable that the Jewish people survived as a recognizable entity, not only in Galilee and Judaea but in a diaspora that stretched from Spain to Babylon, taking in lands both north and south of the Mediterranean. That they did so is testimony to the cultural and social boundary-markers we discussed in chapter 2, and in particular to the power of their own controlling narrative, contained in their extraordinary sacred books. And it was these books that might have given the first-century Jews a sense of how to read the signs of the times.

One of the latest books to be added to the collection had tried to do just that. The book of Daniel, whose origins may go back to the sixth century but which seems to have attained its present form around the time of the Maccabean revolt against Syria in the 160s BC, collected the narratives of the various world empires into a sequence of four. They are presented in Daniel 2.31–5 in the form of a dream of the pagan king, who sees a statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze, and the legs of iron but, in the feet, mixed with clay. This is said to represent four successive kingdoms, of which Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, is the first; and the final one will be brought crashing down by the establishment of God's kingdom in place of these pagan kingdoms. The pattern is repeated in chapter 7, where Daniel himself has a vision of four monsters emerging from the sea: a lion (with eagle's wings), a bear, a leopard, and a fourth beast of a different kind, with ten horns. This time the monsters are overthrown by the newly exalted 'one like a son of

man'. This, it seems, is to be interpreted as 'the holy ones of the Most High', who will receive the kingdom and possess it for ever.¹⁰

A sequence of kingdoms, then, with their varied grandeur and cruelty, but to be terminated by the arrival of God's kingdom, vindicating the people who had been oppressed by the four preceding ones. One might have thought that the Jews of Herod's time would have applied all this to their own day, and indeed maybe they did, in oral culture and even in books now lost to us. The first time we meet a serious development of this Jewish view of history, with Rome unambiguously taking the place of the fourth monster, it is a hundred years after Herod's day and over a generation after the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Here, in the book we now refer to as *4 Ezra*, we find Rome at last taking its place, the great and monstrous eagle with its many wings and heads swooping down on the world, to be overthrown in its turn by the lion who, rather obviously, represents Israel's messianic king. When, as we would expect in an apocalyptic vision, the seer requests an explanation, he is told that the eagle is indeed 'the fourth kingdom that appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel', even though it is now being explained in a different way.¹¹ In other words – at last, a hundred years too late – Rome is unmasked as Daniel's 'fourth beast'. And the seer, some time in the late first century AD, is looking for a coming Messiah to rebuke and destroy the eagle and all its works.

All this forms the setting for a brief account of the Roman empire in the middle of that same century, and the way it would be perceived by Jews in general, and Pharisees in particular. In order to understand why Rome did what it did, in the middle of the first century AD, in places as diverse as Antioch and Athens, as Jerusalem and Philippi, we have to have some grasp of the new reality that had come to birth in the capital itself half a century earlier, and the complex web of social, cultural, religious and political forces which had been operative in that revolution and which now sustained the new Roman vision of reality and exported it around its subject territories. This in turn, of course, provides the framework within which, as our larger argument proceeds, we can see how Paul perceived and

responded to the new world of the Caesars, and, in particular, the way in which his own vision of the lion of Judah enabled him to reconceive the confrontation between lion and eagle in a way that none of his contemporaries could have imagined.¹²

2. The Reality of Empire

(i) Introduction

By the time Paul was born, the empire of Augustus Caesar stretched from one sea to another – the Black Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean to the English Channel – and from the river Euphrates to the ends of the known world, the far western outposts of Spain and France. There, of course, lay the problem for the devout Jew: that was more or less the extent of empire which the Psalmist had promised to the Messiah.¹³ Whether many Romans knew or cared we may doubt. Rome's military adventures had not been undertaken in obedience to such ancient visions.¹⁴ It had acquired its foreign territories piecemeal. One conquest led to another and, with tax and treasure flowing in to the centre, it became advantageous to annex the next country, and then the next, first as allies, then as buffer zones, then as clients, and finally as a new piece of straightforwardly 'Roman' territory. Rome brought 'peace' to the world, at the usual price: submit or die.¹⁵

The story of how the great republic was transformed, almost overnight, into an empire with a single emperor, has been told and retold from many of the possible angles. The earliest tellings of that story – those commissioned by or under Augustus himself – are of particular interest for our purposes, since they introduce for the first time in the ancient world, so far as I am aware, the sense of a long historical narrative whose goal and climax, after centuries of quiet preparation, was the sudden emergence of a new sovereign under whose rule peace, justice, freedom and prosperity would spread across the world. To that we shall return. The continuing fascination

of scholars for the rise, rule and character of Augustus himself has resulted in a wealth of contemporary discussion into which we cannot possibly enter here. Enough to note the main lines and then, particularly, to contemplate the specifically 'religious' aspects of the new imperial reality. Only then will we be able to understand the challenge posed for Paul by the great new reality in his world.

(ii) Before and After Julius Caesar¹⁶

Ancient Rome had had a succession of kings, the last being Tarquinus Superbus in the late sixth century BC. Legend named Rome's first king, the founder of the city in 753 BC, as Romulus. Since, however, there is no contemporary evidence for such a figure, and since the name can be explained as a projection from 'Rome' rather than vice versa, and since a powerful alternative legend of foundation exists as well (see below), the historian may be content to leave the matter unresolved.¹⁷ Anyway, from the time they got rid of Tarquinus the Roman people prided themselves on not having absolute monarchs (such as had been, and continued in many parts to be, the norm in Greece). For half a millennium they organized their increasingly expanding territory as a 'public matter', a *res publica* or 'republic', led by two 'consuls', elected annually. As the system developed, other magistracies, again open to annual election, were added, but the consuls remained, a living attempt at checks and balances that might thwart any attempt at sole power. Since our question in this chapter concerns the way sole power came to be exercised, implemented and also conceptualized by Roman emperors in the first century AD, it is important to give some account, however brief, of the route by which that kind of power came to be wielded in the once proud republic.

Rome's territorial expansion was, initially, into the surrounding Italian districts; Rome was part of Latium, the 'Latin' territory, but from early on elements of Etruscan culture (to the north-west) and Sabine (to the north-east) were incorporated. (Being 'Roman', however, continued to be understood in a basic ethnic sense, coupled with a religious component and

expressed through citizenship.¹⁸) Conflict with near neighbours such as Veii, and far-off invaders such as the Gauls, led to a Roman determination to succeed as a military power, which became the backbone of all subsequent developments. One part of Italy after another, and then one part of the surrounding Mediterranean world after another, came under Roman rule. The greatest enemy to be overthrown was Carthage, soundly defeated in 201 BC and then totally flattened after insurgent behaviour in 146. A similar pattern obtained in Rome's relations with Greece over the same period, resulting in some devastating reprisals for insubordination, a notable example being the sack of Corinth in 146. Rome does not seem at this point to have followed a deliberate policy of imperial expansion, or a uniform policy in relation to territories at some distance. Rome's approach was pragmatic rather than the result of ideology or long-planned ambitions.

Power abroad led to problems at home. The land reforms pioneered by the Gracchus brothers in the 130s and 120s BC restored some measure of equity in the double struggle of rich and poor on the one hand and Romans and Italians on the other. But anger at continuing inequities erupted among Rome's Italian allies in 91, resulting in a two-year so-called 'Social War' (against allies, *socii*), the end of which saw Italy as a network partly of fully fledged Roman towns and partly of official allies. The Italians became Roman citizens, with their elites being incorporated within the Roman system and their peasants gaining equal treatment to those of Rome in terms of serving in the army and, on retirement, being granted land. But the tensions embodied in the Social War had not gone away, and over the next decade further civil war erupted between the rival factions of Marius and Sulla, ending in complete victory for Sulla, who was then, in 82, appointed 'dictator' with absolute power: the first dark shadow on the 'republican' horizon.¹⁹ Sulla ruled for three years, launching a major overhaul of everything from the Senate, to the judiciary, to the priesthoods. There was hope, when he retired in 79, that this would bring the republic back to a settled and peaceful mode.

The hope was not realized. Discontent broke out near to home in Etruria and further away in Spain to the west and Asia Minor to the east. Out of

many conflicts and political wranglings one man emerged: Pompey the Great, whom we met a few pages ago in the empty Holy of Holies in Jerusalem. Pompey was the next Roman after Sulla to attain all-powerful status. He both exemplified and solidified the apparent tendency within the now creaky republic to put its trust in a single obviously gifted and successful general over the heads of the long-established system of annually elected officers. Those who theorize about such things regularly have a field day figuring out whether the republic brought tyranny on itself or whether some particularly gifted individuals forced it to that conclusion. Or whether, as seems more likely, it was all in fact far more muddled, with the law of unintended consequences playing, as usual, a leading role.

Anyway, Pompey's great power did not go unchallenged. A conspiracy in his absence, led by Catiline, was nipped in the bud by Cicero in his year of consulship (63 BC).²⁰ But even so Pompey's return, and his proposals for land grants for his veterans, were by no means universally welcomed. He turned for help to two men: Marcus Licinius Crassus and Gaius Julius Caesar. The three formed a pact which, even though the republic was notionally subject to the consuls, gave them enormous power.²¹ The three managed affairs between them for most of the 50s BC, with Caesar fighting brilliant campaigns in Gaul, Pompey put in charge of Spain (which he ran through subordinates, while himself staying in Rome), and Crassus given responsibility for the east, where he died fighting the Parthians in 53. The republic was still intact; the Senate still ran life in Rome; but the three great men were there, with their friends at court campaigning on their behalf, and everybody knew it.

At the end of the decade, Caesar came back to a Rome that was already fearful of his power, wealth and prestige. He fulfilled some people's hopes and other people's nightmares in January 49 by bringing his troops across the river Rubicon, thereby breaking the law forbidding armies to approach that close to Rome. Civil war then broke out, across much of the Mediterranean world, between his supporters and Pompey's. Caesar's victory at Pharsalus in Thessaly (48) led to Pompey's flight to Egypt, where

he was assassinated, and then to eventual victory over the remaining Pompeians in Spain in 45.²²

It was like Sulla's victory a generation earlier, only more so, and the 'solution' to which Rome turned was the same. Nothing but the rule of one man, the already supremely powerful Caesar, could rescue the situation. Caesar was named 'dictator' for ten years in 46, but this was overtaken by his appointment in February 44 as dictator for life (as well as holding the consulship). While he held power, he instituted major social reforms. But the massive resentment of the senatorial class, not helped by Caesar's trampling on some venerable traditions and acquiring divine honours (see below), led to his assassination on 15 March 44 BC.

Those of us who have not known war first hand, let alone civil war, may be excused if our imagination fails us at this point, the point which provides one crucial explanation for Augustus's rise to sole power and hence for the state and mood of the Roman world in Paul's day nearly a century after Caesar's death. It was only a few years since Roman had fought Roman, and now it was going to happen again. It was as though Rome, having long since used military strength as a weapon of territorial expansion and economic gain, had discovered, first in the Social War, then in the civil wars of Sulla's day, and then in Caesar's war against Pompey, that all-out fighting was the way to settle things at home as well, though what this meant for families, neighbourhoods, towns and regions we can only guess. So they went at it one more time.

Initial battles between Antony, Caesar's friend, and Octavian, Caesar's adopted son and heir, gave way to a pragmatic alliance in which the two of them, together with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, formed a triumvirate, official this time, which, given power for five years, instituted a reign of terror, worse again than civil war. Many political scores were settled, and the consequent confiscations of land raised a good deal of money to pay the massive armies that were now in the field. The Caesar-party then defeated the conspirators Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in 42, continued the civil war in Italy, and defeated Sextus Pompeius, Pompey's younger son (36). Octavian thereupon stripped Lepidus of his triumviral status, and set about

the real war, against Antony. Antony, meanwhile, had taken up with the remarkable Egyptian queen Cleopatra, gaining for himself great power and influence in the eastern provinces which were so vital for Rome's security and food supply, but also incurring suspicion and unpopularity in Rome itself. Matters came to a head at the battle of Actium in 31. Antony, defeated, fled to Egypt with Cleopatra, and when Octavian's armies marched into Alexandria a year later the lovers both committed suicide.

Octavian returned to Rome, the undisputed and indisputable sole ruler. He took the honorific (neither strictly a name nor strictly a title) 'Augustus', 'the exalted one',²³ and the carefully chosen title *princeps*, which carried at least some overtones of republican precedent and was certainly a way of distinguishing his position from the hated and dangerous idea of 'dictator' or even 'lord', *dominus*.²⁴ He celebrated a massive triple triumph to commemorate Actium, Egypt and his earlier victories in the Balkans, and ordered the doors of the Temple of Janus to be shut as a sign that he had brought peace to the whole Roman world. A shattered, exhausted Rome was only too ready to ignore the irony and join in the celebration.²⁵ It would be over a century before a cynic would sneer that Octavian had enticed everyone with the sweet delights of peace. After sixty years, they were ready for it. Ready, too, to make it divine, and to associate it with the man who had brought it: *pax Augusta*.²⁶ It was this 'peace' that allowed the apostle Paul, under Augustus's successors, to travel the world announcing a different peace, and a different master.

(iii) Republic Restored, Empire Established:²⁷ Augustus

The many scholarly debates about Augustus have included the question: did he really claim to have restored the republic? If he did, what did he mean by that, and was it true? Was he, as the highly influential Ronald Syme argued half a century ago, a ruthless and relentless dictator such as Europe knew in parts of the twentieth century?²⁸ Or was he more genuinely concerned for the good of the Roman people and, finding himself at the sharp end of things at a time of enormous social upheaval, feeling his way forward with

a perfectly natural measure of self-interest but also with the interests of the people genuinely at heart? More obliquely, one might debate the extent to which ‘the empire’ itself only really came into being under Augustus. Rome had effectively ruled a fair amount of the Mediterranean world for many years before his day. There was, as we shall see, a cult of *Dea Roma*, the goddess ‘Rome’, and similar formulations in various places in the eastern empire as early as 195 BC.²⁹ There had been sole rulers before, as we have seen, though none of them lasted long – a point which will not have been lost on Octavian, still in his thirties and finding himself to be the last man standing in Rome’s half century of blood and fear. He was now *imperator*, a military title with which soldiers hailed a victorious general and with which, on some occasions, the Senate hailed such a returning victor. It now became clear to all that the title was to belong primarily to Augustus, and he took it as a sort of praenomen: *Imperator Caesar Augustus*, Emperor Caesar the Exalted. Rome had an empire for a long time; now she had an emperor as well. An occasional title had become an official position. And of course the empire itself changed, culturally and in other ways we shall shortly examine, to conform to the new reality.³⁰

Augustus used his new position to address some urgent concerns. What was he to do with the thousands upon thousands of military veterans left over from the long years of war? He swiftly did two things: established colonies around the Greek world, and had himself appointed as governor of several key provinces (with ordinary governors on the ground doing the actual work) so that he could master-mind fresh work for the remaining soldiery, directing its energies away from any danger of recurring factionalism and into the task of maintaining peace and security on the vast, far-flung borders. This had an added advantage: no single army consisted of more than four legions. Nobody would be tempted to bring so small a force back across the Rubicon, to use Caesar’s method to challenge Caesar’s successor.

In terms of his constitutional position Augustus played what in my part of the world we would call a canny game. There was no suggestion of his using the hated term ‘dictator’. He held the consulship – he kept officially

refusing it, and the Senate kept insisting – every year until 23 BC, and in that year he acquired the ancient office, and power, of the tribune (*tribunicia potestas*). This was ironic: tribunes were there to represent ordinary Romans who wanted to complain about the actions of the state, and were given all sorts of powers to help them in this important task (the right to summon popular assemblies, and indeed the Senate, and the right of veto). This power at home, and what used misleadingly to be called Augustus's *imperium maius*, 'greater authority', over the provinces, were the legal and constitutional basis of his ongoing work.³¹ He was also asked to become, officially, 'curator of laws and morals', with absolute power in these areas, but twice refused – though his own moral legislation (exercised through his tribunician power), attempting to outlaw adultery and to encourage marriage and childbearing which were in danger of falling out of fashion among the rich and noble, shows that he was aware that something needed to be done in this area. Such an office, he explains later, would be quite out of keeping with our ancestral customs.³² His official *imperium* was granted him by the Senate for ten-year periods in 27 and 8 BC (with two five-year terms in 18 and 13), and also in AD 3 and 13. Finally, as we saw in the previous chapter, when his old colleague Lepidus died in 13 BC Augustus assumed the senior priesthood as *Pontifex Maximus*. He now controlled the city, the provinces, the *pax deorum*. Was this a restoration of the republic? Yes and no. Enough of a 'yes', anyway, to placate potentially grumpy 'republicans'. Enough of a 'no' to get the job done.³³ As much evolution, albeit through violent times, as revolution.³⁴

Part of the job was establishing and consolidating the Roman system of justice right across the empire. It was under Augustus, as we saw in the previous chapter, that *Iustitia* became a goddess.³⁵

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, Augustus lived much longer than a Roman of the time might have expected to do, finally dying in his late seventies on 19 August AD 14. This gave him time to consolidate various social reforms, and the shaping of a civil service that would not only work well for the state as a whole (lasting, in more or less the same form, for several centuries) but also provide a proper career

structure, previously lacking, for those who had held elected office – the more important, perhaps, when under a sole ruler none of the magistracies possessed quite the status it had once had. But the long later years of his principate also provided the headache of succession planning, an obvious sign that, however much the older republican forms were still being employed, nobody was expecting to return to a non-imperial system after Augustus's death. Augustus followed up many possible lines before finally, in AD 6, adopting his stepson Tiberius (son of his wife Livia Drusilla by her first marriage) as his heir, and it was Tiberius who finally succeeded him.

Augustus's extraordinary story, and the seemingly endless scholarly speculations about his real motives and the character of his rule, are outside our concern here. What matters far more is the complex and intricate way in which his position as sole ruler of most of the known world was consolidated, expressed, communicated and put into effect. How (to turn it the other way round) would subject peoples in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor or Greece, the spheres of Paul's main work, have perceived and experienced the rule of this *imperator*? Before we can address this, however, we need to complete the Roman narrative up to Paul's own day and a little beyond. Sometimes the flavour of an event or period only emerges in a sequel.

[\(iv\) From Tiberius to Vespasian: AD 14–70](#)

The fifty years after Augustus's death saw the empire, in terms of the personal rule of the emperor, both consolidated and threatened. Consolidated, in that after a few years of Tiberius's rule the old republican ways of checks and balances and properly elected magistrates were all too obviously hollow (they may have been fairly hollow under Augustus, but appearances were better kept up), while real power lay precisely with the emperor and anyone with whom he chose to share it. Threatened, in that Tiberius's successor, Gaius Caligula, was quickly turned by illness from being an apparently sane man on whom high hopes had been placed to someone quite obviously mentally unfitted for the position. Since there was

no arranged succession at the time of his assassination in AD 41, the whole structure which Augustus had so carefully built up could have come crashing down. Several senators, in fact, suggested after Caligula's death that the state might no longer need a *princeps*.³⁶ This proposal did not go down well with the Roman people as a whole, who successfully supported Caligula's uncle Claudius (who may well have been involved in the assassins' plot).

Anyway, Claudius's reign (41–54) steadied the ship. He even extended the empire, though whether the acquisition of southern Britain and Mauretania (modern Morocco) were of sufficient benefit to justify the very considerable expense they incurred might be doubted.³⁷ He was not widely popular, it being reckoned that he was too much influenced by his successive wives and one or two very able freedmen, thus sidelining both the old aristocracy and the official civil servants. He was an odd character – if even half of what the scurrilous Suetonius says about him is true, he was a long way off from matching Augustus or even Tiberius in natural leadership quality – and was himself eventually poisoned by his young second wife Agrippina, to nobody's great regret. She had, of course, a vested interest: one of the two obvious successors was her own son by a previous marriage. He was bright, talented, altogether suited (it seemed) for the job. His name was Nero, the emperor to whom the apostle Paul would eventually appeal.

Nero was slightly older than the other candidate, Claudius's own son Britannicus, and he and his mother between them managed, first by pulling the right strings at court and then, a year later, by having Britannicus poisoned, to consolidate him in his position of sole power. He had every advantage, not least in having had the great philosopher Seneca (whom we met in chapter 3) as tutor, and now having him at court as an advisor. A flamboyant character, he was hugely popular in some circles, not least the army, and hugely unpopular in others. Juvenal, looking back with hindsight half a century later, explains that, while one might get away with murdering one's mother (which Nero did in 59), for a Roman emperor to write and perform plays, *to sing on stage*, for goodness' sake, strained Roman

patience too far.³⁸ Nero took his eye off the ball far too often, and by the time a huge conspiracy was uncovered it was too late. His own in-house bodyguard turned against him, and he committed suicide in 68.

If the idea of a sole emperor had once seemed like a way of protecting Rome against the horrors of civil war, the next fifteen months gave that notion the lie, as the chance to seize that absolute power led four men in succession to march on Rome and claim the prize.³⁹ Nero was succeeded by the elderly Galba, who early in 69 fell victim to a plot orchestrated from within the court by Otho, whose short reign was terminated by the advancing troops of Vitellius, commander of the legions in Germany. By then, with all restraint gone, the empire was there for anyone with sufficient military support to take it. Some of Otho's supporters in the Danube region joined forces with Vespasian, the general who had been commanding the legions besieging Jerusalem, and whose troops, hearing of the debacle in Rome, had hailed him as emperor then and there. It may only be the wisdom of hindsight, but all we know of Vespasian suggests that he was an altogether more capable man than any of the emperors since Tiberius. He advanced on Rome, overthrew the short-lived regime of Vitellius, and established himself and his family as the new ruling dynasty. By the time his son Titus, whom he had left in charge in Palestine, finished off the ruthless crushing of the rebellion in Judaea by destroying the Temple in AD 70 and returning to Rome for his famous *Iudaea Capta* triumph, Vespasian was established in power and the Roman world breathed again.

This, of course, is where this story joins up most obviously with the story, both explicit and implicit, that we were studying in chapter 2 above. Josephus, the Jewish aristocrat who became a general in the war against Rome, only to change sides and act as advisor to Titus, came to Rome not (like so many of his compatriots) as a prisoner to be killed or sold into slavery, but on an imperial pension. He devoted the rest of his life to literary work; and it is through a single comment that he makes on the Jewish zeal for war in the middle of the first century that we see how the prophetic narrative of the book of Daniel was being read at the time. What drove them to war, he said, was a biblical oracle which said that *at that time* a world

ruler would arise from Judaea. Though Josephus does not specify which oracle he has in mind, he can only be referring to the book of Daniel, which offers two things in particular: first (in chapters 2 and 7), a prophetic sequence of four coming kingdoms, the last of which will be overthrown by a new worldwide kingdom which the one God will set up; second (in chapter 9), a specific chronology for when this is to happen.⁴⁰ Ah, says Josephus, but this was not, as they supposed, a prophecy of a coming *Jewish* king. It was about Vespasian, who was in Judaea when he was hailed as *imperator*.

What might Paul have said to such an idea? Before we can address that question we will need to look more broadly and deeply at the two major strands of cultural life through which the message of Augustan empire was transmitted around the world: rhetoric (in the broad sense) and religion.

[3. The Rhetoric of Empire](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

It was not by military force alone that Augustus consolidated his power, or that his successors maintained it. It has been shown in great detail that from the beginning the empire used every available means in art, architecture, literature and culture in general – everything from tiny coins to the rebuilding of entire city centres – to communicate to the Roman people near and far the message that Augustus's rise to power was the great new moment for which Rome, and indeed the whole world, had been waiting. This is what I mean, in this broad sense and in the present context, by 'rhetoric'.

Here we are particularly fortunate. Ronald Syme, as part of his great if controversial work, devoted a chapter to 'the organization of opinion', focusing on literature that was composed under the auspices (literally, no doubt) of Augustus.⁴¹ But Paul Zanker has done the same with the visual arts, in a book that has, again literally, opened people's eyes to what was

going on. And Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has studied the ‘material culture’ of Augustan Rome from several quite new angles. Together they and others have now offered a multi-dimensional way of understanding what was going on in the crucial period of which Augustus’s rise to power forms the central hinge:

It is suggested that the wide-ranging transformations of Roman material and intellectual culture that ... reach a peak in the last two centuries BCE and the first century CE ... can be read as an integral expression and instrument of a realignment of ‘identities’ and construction of power within Roman society.⁴²

There is no way we can even summarize this richness of material, which ideally should be mastered if we are to contextualize the apostle Paul in the world of his day. As Richardson says, quoting Fergus Millar, in order to understand one idea of the time you really need to read the whole of Latin literature.⁴³ But there are some features to which we may draw particular attention since, in my judgment, they offer particular resonances with Paul’s thought, or particularly striking frameworks within which we may understand how his first audiences might have reacted to his letters.

(ii) Material Culture

Augustus claimed – it has since become a cliché – that he found Rome brick and left it marble. As Galinsky points out, this was more than simply a metaphor.⁴⁴ New shiny buildings dominated the centre of the city, with new temples in particular taking pride of place. The new temple of Apollo on the Palatine, close to Augustus’s own house, was an early showpiece and statement of intent, with all kinds of associations with ancient traditions. Augustus had promised Apollo a new temple in Rome (where to this point he had only had one) after his victory over Sextus Pompey in 36 BC, a turning-point in his own fortunes (it is important to remember that, granted the history of the previous fifty years, nobody could have dreamed that the young Octavian would survive that round of civil warfare, let alone attain such lengthy pre-eminence).⁴⁵ But the forum, not least the new temples

there, eventually formed the centrepiece of the new Rome; it was dedicated in 2 BC, the same year that the Senate voted him the title of *pater patriae*, father of the fatherland. It was closely related to the themes Virgil expounded in the *Aeneid* (see below), and constituted, quite deliberately, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.⁴⁶

One could spend a day walking, in one's mind's eye, around Augustus's forum and come nowhere near exhausting its range of powerful symbolic messages. Even its planning sent a message: Augustus deliberately built it on private ground purchased for the purpose, without using any right of compulsory purchase to oust existing buildings, since one of his many themes was the restoration of the right of private property. It was built of materials brought from far and wide, so that there, within the capital, one might walk on and gaze at symbols of the whole empire. The forum itself displayed, all around, statues and symbols which spoke eloquently of Rome's, and Augustus's, rule over the whole world, explicitly evoking the previous empire of Alexander the Great and pulling together allusions to older Greek as well as more recent Roman history, with honorific statues of everyone you can think of, from Aeneas and Romulus through to Pompey and Caesar, who had held power in Rome. The new forum, indeed, was set at right angles to the forum of Julius Caesar himself (much as the new Coventry Cathedral was built at right angles to the one destroyed by enemy action in the war of 1939–45). The temples that completed the two open-plan forums conveyed their own powerful message, with the forum of Julius Caesar leading the eye up to the Temple of Venus, the mother of Aeneas and hence the traditional ancestress of the Julian house, and the forum of Augustus himself climaxing in the Temple of Mars Ultor, the god of vengeance, the traditional god of the Latin peoples, invoked by Octavian in his victory over the assassins of his adopted father and then invoked again when the mighty Parthians were, if not trounced in battle, at least persuaded to hand over the Roman standards they had seized after defeating Crassus at Carrhae in 53 BC.⁴⁷ The whole forum declared, in its conception, construction (down to small architectural details) and iconography the message which Augustus was eager to convey: here the

most ancient traditions and virtues of the Roman people were summed up and given fresh expression for a new day in which the great themes of Roman life had become a reality across the known world.⁴⁸

Among other notable additions to the Roman landscape, the *Ara Pacis*, the ‘altar of peace’, stands out prominently. It is sited near the Mausoleum of Augustus, close to the Tiber in the ancient centre of Rome, and though today the Rome traffic sweeps by relentlessly it was originally designed as part of a larger architectural whole, including a sundial so placed that its shadow would bisect the altar on Augustus’s birthday.⁴⁹ To this day the huge altar, with its carved panels on every side, creates the strong impression of a solemn, devout, peaceful and (not least) prosperous society, in which the literal fruits of peace are displayed in a cornucopia, and a kind of rural idyll is invoked, as in Virgil’s *Georgics*, of a countryside enjoying the chance to get on with its quiet round of harvests and animal husbandry. The larger scheme, however, of which this celebration of peace forms a part, is unambiguously and unashamedly a celebration of the military victory which brings peace about. The goddess Roma sits triumphantly on top of a pile of arms; it is because the whole world now lives in fear of Rome that Rome herself can be at peace.⁵⁰ ‘Peace and security’, indeed, are regularly combined: military might guarantees imperial stability.⁵¹ But such thoughts, though present and relevant, seem miles away from the overall impression of the altar, which offers a serene combination of devout formality and familial informality, with (unusually) women and children portrayed attractively as part of the family party in sacrificial procession.⁵²

On a smaller scale, but no less notable, were some of the artefacts which became famous in their own right. The *clipeus virtutis*, the ‘shield of valour’, was presented to Augustus on 13 January 27 BC by the Senate, at the same time as the award of the honorific ‘Augustus’ itself, and the erection of a laurel wreath and a civic crown at his front door.⁵³ This golden shield was placed in the new senate house, named *Curia Julia* in honour of Julius Caesar; it bore the words *virtus*, *clementia*, *iustitia* and *pietas*: courage, mercy, justice and ... well, *pietas* has long been recognized as hard to translate, summing up as it does (not least in Virgil’s portrait of Aeneas)

the combination of devotion to the gods, and devotion to duty, expressed in a humane and kindly life. Our word 'piety' hardly covers all that, nor does 'duty' itself convey the warmth, and even (unlikely though it may seem in a Roman hero) a faint touch of humility, at least in the face of the gods and of one's elders (Aeneas carrying his father Anchises away from Troy is the standard image). As well as being thus displayed prominently in Rome itself, the *clipeus virtutis* was reproduced as a decoration on various household objects such as lamps, where it is held by a statue of Victoria: the same message again, of military conquest ushering in the new world.⁵⁴ Similar messages were given through other objects, such as the bronze breastplate displayed at the Prima Porta Augustus. Here again we find Venus, Apollo and Diana; here, too, we find the cornucopia, signalling a time of abundance and prosperity; and here, once more, we find the source of these god-given blessings: the Roman victory over foreign armies, here in particular the (apparently) subjugated Parthians.⁵⁵

The message carried by larger material objects was carried also, of course, by coins. Though it is hard to guess how many ordinary people, in Rome or in the empire, bothered too much about the symbols and slogans on coins, they were the only mass medium in the ancient world, and as such are bound to have attracted somewhat more attention than do our own symbol-laden but usually ignored modern western coins and banknotes.⁵⁶ And the coins of Augustus's reign make certain things very clear. First, the *princeps* is *divi filius*, 'son of the deified': that was the first, and remained one of the most important, of Augustus's political moves. A coin has, of course, two sides: in Roman times, one side displayed the official, legal statement, and the other attempted to reach out to the ideals held dear by the potential user.⁵⁷ Accustomed as we are to seeing human faces on coins, we might forget that it was only in the time of Julius Caesar that the Romans began to portray living human beings numismatically, and Augustus developed this strikingly, with his own portrait variously displayed, not least in the guise of a god (see below). In one striking image, on an *aureus* dated 12 BC, Augustus is depicted extending a helping hand to a figure who, kneeling, represents the *res publica*.⁵⁸ The coins from this period

display a subtle and complex variety of themes and messages. Though it is undoubtedly true that they could not by themselves carry the persuasive force required to convince people of things they did not before know or believe, they could certainly reinforce the messages people were getting by other means.⁵⁹

Those 'other means' included not only the material culture of Rome, striking though it was. They included particularly a striking phenomenon which is not, I think, sufficiently recognized. The reign of Augustus was celebrated in Rome and much further afield not only as a good thing in itself, but as the good thing for which a very long history had been preparing.

(iii) The Climax of the Narrative

Even if the Augustan age had built no temples, conquered no foreign nations, erected no statues and established no new dynasty, it would still rightly be world-famous for its astonishing output of literature. There were, naturally, great Latin writers before: Catullus of course; Sallust; Julius Caesar himself; and certainly Cicero, for all his sometimes tedious and self-conscious wordiness. Others, such as Tacitus and Pliny, would come after. But by common consent the 'golden age' of Latin prose and verse occurred under the patronage, and in the central cases the close personal friendship, of Augustus.

Perhaps the latent awareness of this cultural flowering helped to give currency to the idea of a 'golden age' in more general terms.⁶⁰ Many writers in antiquity reflected on the possibility of understanding history as a succession of different periods: gold, silver, bronze and iron being one regular sequence.⁶¹ Horace, especially in his *Odes*, is often called as a first witness to this; his poetic gifts came to fullest fruition more or less exactly at the same time as Augustus completed his initial rise to power. He celebrates Augustus's victory over Cleopatra, his various other military successes, and his splendid return to Rome.⁶² Nor is this merely a series of detached glories. Horace lists the heroes of long ago, leading up at last to

Augustus, who, he prays, will rule the world as Jupiter's viceroy. Augustus will do justice on earth while Jupiter does the same from heaven.⁶³ This is a narrative, with Augustus as its climax.

This is if anything even clearer in his *Carmen Saeculare*, 'Hymn for a New Age', written to be performed at the 'secular games' revived by Augustus in 17 BC, at a very specific moment in his programme of reform and renewal. The Parthians had come to terms; the Spanish Cantabrians had been subdued; Augustus's own severe programme of moral legislation had been laid down. This was the dawn of a new age all right, but not one of indolent luxury. Only if the ordinary Romans were prepared to live up to the ancient ideals, and to work hard, would it come about, so that the tradition of the *saeculum*, here seen as a hundred and ten years, would be maintained in the future.⁶⁴

... grant success to the Fathers' edicts on the yoking together of men and women and on the marriage law for raising a new crop of children, so that the unfailing cycle of ten times eleven years may bring round singing and games that are thronged with people three times by daylight and as often in the pleasant time of night.⁶⁵

The poet prays to the Fates, to Mother Earth, to Apollo and to the Moon, asking that Augustus, the supposed descendant and heir of Aeneas, may now establish Rome and its world in peace and prosperity:

If Rome is indeed your creation, if the squadrons that settled the Etruscan shore came from Troy – a remnant bidden to change their home and city in a voyage that brought salvation, for whom the righteous Aeneas, a Trojan survivor, built unscathed through the blazing city a road to freedom, destined, as he was, to give them more than they had left behind – then, o ye gods, give sound character to a young generation enabling them to learn; give rest to the old ensuring their contentment; and to the people of Romulus as a whole give wealth and children and every blessing. What the glorious descendant of Anchises and Venus [Augustus, in other words] asks of you with white oxen, may he obtain; may he be victorious in battle over his foes yet merciful once they are down.⁶⁶

The prosperity of this new age is built securely on conquest:

Now the Mede dreads our mighty hands and the axes of Alba [founded by Aeneas's son, a kind of pre-Roman Rome] that are powerful over land and sea; now the Scythians and the Indians, who were recently so arrogant, ask for our decisions. Now Good Faith [*Fides*], Peace [*Pax*], and

Honour [*Honos*], along with old-fashioned Modesty [*Pudor*] and Virtue [*Virtus*], who has been so long neglected, venture to return, and blessed Plenty [*Copia*] with her full horn is seen by all.⁶⁷

It is, more or less, the *Ara Pacis* set to music. Apollo will see to it all, looking down from his new temple on the Palatine, next to Augustus's house. He will 'prolong Rome's power and Latium's prosperity for another cycle and another ever improving age.'⁶⁸ Things can now only get better. With Caesar Augustus now in charge, and his new moral legislation in place, nothing can disturb the *pax Augusta*:

The Augustan age our rich crops reinstates
And to Rome's God our standards now restores,
Torn down from Parthia's haughty temple gates:
The age has closed Janus's warless doors.

The licence, which can strict rules override,
Has been curbed by restrictions and commands;
This age has pushed both guilt and crime aside,
And ancient arts and skills it now demands.

Through these the Latin name and Italy's strength
Have grown, her fame and empire's majesty,
Which to the eastern sun stretches its length
From the sun's couch beneath the western sea.

With Caesar as our institutions' guard,
No civil rage or force will drive out peace;
Nor yet the ire that hammers out the sword
And brings hostilities to sad cities.

No drinkers of the Danube's waters deep
Will break your Julian edicts, nor Chinese,
Getans or Persians who no trust can keep,
Nor men raised near the river Tanais.

Surrounded by the bounties Liber gives,
We, both on common and on holy day,
Together with our children and our wives,
After we first to heaven with due rites pray,

We'll sing our princes' glorious attributes
As in the past our forefathers have done, –

In song accompanied by Lydian flutes,
Of Troy, Anchises and kind Venus' son.⁶⁹

Aeneas was the prototype; Augustus is his natural successor. Under his rule, the most far-flung nations are rendered harmless.

It was, of course, a dream. In fact, Augustus's reign saw several military reverses, the most horrendous being the loss of three legions in Germany in AD 9. Similarly things could be noted about Augustus's much-trumpeted programme of moral reformation, which looked decidedly threadbare when he had to banish his own daughter and granddaughter (both called Julia) for flagrant sexual misbehaviour.

In any case, despite the impression we might get from these texts, Horace was not a fawning sycophant. He had fought on Brutus's side at Philippi against Antony and Octavian, and, having escaped with his life, might well have made it his business to accede to the great man's every whim. Not so. The *princeps* invited him to be his private secretary; Horace refused. Augustus then asked him instead to write a poem in praise of the victories of Agrippa, the emperor's closest associate and, at that stage, probable heir. Again Horace refused, this time in verse. Some poets, he says, might be able to write properly about battles and wars. He'd rather stick to young love, parties, and other trivia.⁷⁰ He even wrote a parody of Virgil's famous fourth Eclogue ([see below](#)); having written quite a lot about the dangers of actual gold, Horace was not about to be seduced into Virgil's apparently uncritical enthusiasm for an 'age' characterized metaphorically by that same metal.⁷¹ Augustus doesn't seem to have minded.⁷² Horace preferred his little farm, a gift from his patron Maecenas (another close associate of Augustus), to the delights, and the dangers, of Rome. But the message of the *Odes*, and especially of the *Carmen Saeculare*, remains: Rome's long story has arrived at its glorious climax with the victories, and the consequent peace, of Augustus. Whether he truly meant it or not, that was the message spread around the world as Horace gained, after his death, the fame he rightly predicted would come his way.⁷³

Another poet sometimes associated with a kind of Augustan historical apologetic is Ovid. His *Metamorphoses* sets off with the promise of a grand narrative, leading all the way from the creation of the world (the original ‘golden age’) to the poet’s own day.⁷⁴ But he wanders off this track so often that the framework of such an account seems to fall apart, with episodes following one another more because of thematic than historical links. Thus, ‘there is a real flirtation with the Augustan model of epic teleology established in the *Aeneid*’, but the stories the book tells, of strange transitions and transformations, make it hard for that larger narrative to come through in any strength.⁷⁵ He does, however, hint in the early books at the glories to come; and he does at last arrive at the story of Rome’s foundation, with echoes of course of its new foundation under Augustus, in Book 14.⁷⁶ At other times Ovid seems to regard his own days more with a cynical eye. For him, the ‘golden age’ still lay in the distant past.⁷⁷

A prose writer who, having lived through the Augustan age, harboured no such reserves about it is the historian Velleius Paterculus. As he reviews the state of the empire as Augustus passed it on to Tiberius, he can hardly praise it highly enough:

Caesar [i.e. Tiberius] deified his father, not by exercise of his imperial authority, but by his attitude of reverence; he did not call him a god, but made him one. Credit has been restored in the forum; strife has been banished from the forum, canvassing for office from the Campus Martius, discord from the senate-house; justice, equity, and industry, long buried in oblivion, have been restored to the state; the magistrates have regained their authority, the senate its majesty, the courts their dignity; rioting in the theatre has been suppressed; all citizens have either been impressed with the wish to do right, or have been forced to do so by necessity. Right is now honoured, evil is punished; the humble man respects the great but does not fear him, the great has precedence over the lowly but does not despise him. When was the price of grain more reasonable, of when were the blessings of peace greater? The *pax Augusta*, which has spread to the regions of the east and of the west and to the bounds of the north and of the south, preserves every corner of the world safe from the fear of brigandage. The munificence of the emperor claims for its province the losses inflicted by fortune not merely on private citizens, but on whole cities. The cities of Asia have been restored, the provinces have been freed from the oppression of their magistrates. Honour ever awaits the worthy; for the wicked punishment is slow but sure; fair play has not precedence over influence, and merit over ambition, for the best of emperors teaches his citizens to do right by doing it, and though he is greatest among us in authority, he is still greater in the example which he sets.⁷⁸

It is all a bit like 1 Maccabees 14: everyone is happy, sitting under their vines and fig trees, with nobody disturbing them. Doubtless to anyone who had lived through the civil wars, this must have been how it all seemed, provided one put the telescope to the proper eye. A golden age, indeed.

The far greater Augustan historian, however, tells a more complicated story, though it, too, lands up by the power of its narrative in much the same place. Livy, like Horace, was a contemporary and friend of Augustus, though he too managed to retain a measure of independence. His vast *History* (not all of which has survived, the climax in Augustus's reign being the saddest loss) covers the great sweep of Roman history from its earliest beginnings through to his own day.⁷⁹ His theme, spelled out in his preface, is the consideration of distant ancestors and their habits of life, which enables one to notice by contrast how morality had collapsed since their day, so that by the time of Augustus it urgently needed renewal. His aim was to tell the story of how Rome had come to dominate first Italy and then the whole Mediterranean world. Within that, his story is full of examples of great Romans of the past who have exemplified the virtues the state will need in his own day.

But he is not producing merely a series of moral examples. He is aware of beginnings, long and sometimes dark middles, and a glorious end. There must be development and evolution, new things will come to the fore. Eventually – his account closed in 9 BC, a time of solid achievement and triumph – the strengths that had made Rome great in the beginning will lead the city, not back to where it began, but on to a different, and we assume still finer, fruition. When the ancient virtues return, they will not merely repeat the distant past, but will fulfil its promise in a new way.⁸⁰

Livy is recognized now as being far more than a slavish flag-waver for Augustus. Tacitus reports a trial for treason that took place under Tiberius in AD 25: Cremutius Cordus had written a history 'eulogizing Brutus, and styling Cassius the last of the Romans'. One can well imagine Tiberius, grandson by adoption to Julius Caesar, not welcoming this praise for Caesar's assassins. But Cordus defends himself by saying that Livy, as a friend of Augustus, had nevertheless 'lavished such eulogies on Pompey',

Caesar's great enemy, 'that Augustus styled him "the Pompeian"' yet without prejudice to their friendship. Time and again, says Cordus, Livy describes Brutus and Cassius not, as one might expect, as 'brigand' or 'parricide', but 'in such terms as he might apply to any distinguished patriots'.⁸¹ If Livy then, why not me now? Tiberius's facial expression at the trial, says Tacitus, told the defendant that his case was hopeless; having finished his speech, Cordus went off and starved himself to death.⁸² Tacitus, no doubt, is wanting to point up the grumpiness of Tiberius, not one of his favourite people. But the point is so striking, and so consonant with what we know of Augustus's great-heartedness (as in the case of Horace, above), that it may well be true.

Nevertheless, there are other signs that Livy may have been prepared to bend the detail of his account here and there so as to provide historical precedent for Augustus's style of monarchy. When, in 437 BC, Aulus Cornelius Cossus killed Lars Tolumnius, king of Veii, he was awarded the *spolia opima*, given to a general who kills the opposing leader in single combat: the right to offer the spoils from his victim in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. Livy, recording this story, says that all previous accounts make Cossus only a military tribune, but that he has heard that Augustus, 'founder and restorer of all our temples', had visited the (restored) temple in question where the relevant inscription declared Cossus to have been consul. Livy reports, somewhat drily, that he has no idea how all the ancient documents had managed to get it wrong.⁸³ It has often been held that this was a political hot potato because Crassus claimed the *spolia opima* after killing Deldo, king of the Bastarnae, and Augustus wanted to refuse him, since he himself, as consul, was actually the official commander. Matters seem more complicated, however, and one recent writer has suggested that Crassus, realizing it might be inopportune to seem to be stealing limelight from the *princeps*, wisely refrained from making the claim. This does not, I think, undermine the point: whether or not Crassus attempted to gain the honour, Augustus may still have been eager to prove, for the avoidance of doubt, that Cossus had been not merely a tribune in 437, but actually consul.⁸⁴ One could not have junior officials claiming senior honours. For

our purposes, the incident shows that Livy, though telling his overall story in such a way as to lead the eye up to Augustus, was not prepared simply to suppress evidence which might have proved unwelcome in the house on the Palatine.

None of this, however, diminishes the basic point: Livy was indeed telling his story in such a way as to reach a great climax, after nearly a millennium of preparation.⁸⁵ Roman history was not just going round and round in circles. Nor was it a meaningless string of isolated moral and military examples. Nor again, indeed (the reader may detect here echoes of a different discussion, concerning so-called ‘apocalyptic’ in second-Temple Judaism⁸⁶) was it a smooth crescendo, from small beginnings to great conclusions, or from a wild and immoral civic past to a virtuous and sober present. It was a chequered and complex story, which had recently been through a very dark period in which all the old virtues had seemed to have disappeared, but it had now arrived at a new day. Even if Livy was not prepared to use the adulatory language of Velleius Paterculus, he was still going to tell the story as the arrival of the long-awaited new dawn for his beloved city.

The greatest writer of the Augustan age, another friend of the *princeps*, was of course Virgil.⁸⁷ He has held a famous place in Christian tradition, mostly because of his fourth Eclogue which, though written in 40 BC, was often seen by early Christians as a prophecy of the coming Messiah.⁸⁸ It does indeed hail the new age, the rebirth of the whole world:

Now is come the last age of Cumaean song; the great line of the centuries begins anew.⁸⁹ Now the Virgin returns [probably a reference to ‘Iustitia’], the reign of Saturn returns; now a new generation descends from heaven on high. Only do you, pure Lucina, smile on the birth of the child, under whom the iron brood shall at last cease and a golden race [*gens aurea*] spring up throughout the world! Your own Apollo now is king!

And in your consulship, Pollio, yes, yours, shall this glorious age begin, and the mighty months commence their march; under your sway any lingering traces of our guilt shall become void and release the earth from its continual dread. He shall have the gift of divine life, shall see heroes mingled with gods, and shall himself be seen by them, and shall rule the world to which his father’s prowess brought peace.⁹⁰

A golden race for a golden age! The poem goes on to celebrate the new world in which plants and animals will provide food in abundance and, though a further war will be fought, a veritable paradise will emerge, in which the earth will provide all its fruits without any human labour. All things rejoice in the age (*saeculum*) that is at hand.⁹¹ Virgil ends by praying that he may live to see the day.

The dating of the poem in Pollio's consulship (40 BC) is clear, but the recipient is in doubt. Various possibilities have been explored, the most probable being the expected child of Antony and Octavia (sister of Octavian).⁹² But this is not to our purpose. What matters is what we can only call Virgil's realized eschatology. A new day is dawning, a long-awaited time of peace and prosperity.

This theme is explored from various angles across much of Virgil's work. The *Georgics*, composed after the *Eclogues* at the time when Augustus defeated Antony and Cleopatra and thereby attained sole power, celebrate rural and farming life. The third poem, however, opens with a fantasy about building a temple in a rural idyll – where the god in the temple will be Caesar.⁹³ The dedication will be accompanied by games and sacrifices, and on the doors will be sculptured in solid gold the scenes of the three victories celebrated in August 29. There will also be marble statues, including – a grain of mustard-seed to turn into the enormous shrub of the *Aeneid* – one of 'Tros our ancestor', and 'Cynthian Apollo, architect of Troy'.⁹⁴

The other sign of current events in the *Georgics* comes right at the end. We hear of 'great Caesar' thundering away by the Euphrates, celebrating in the far east the victory won at Actium, imposing Rome's laws on willing subject nations, and treading the path to Olympus (*viamque adfectat Olympo*) – in other words, doing the things that would either make him become a god or reveal that he already was one.⁹⁵ According to one source, Virgil read the poem to Octavian in person after his return to Rome in 29 BC, around the time of the famous triple triumph itself. We may assume that the *princeps* liked what he heard.⁹⁶

But it is of course the *Aeneid*, one of the most famous poems in any language or time, that offers not only the celebration of Augustus and his

reign, but also, more specifically, the sense of a great narrative stretching back hundreds of years and now at last reaching the conclusion which the gods, or Fate, have purposed all along – a conclusion which involves the final fulfilment of a heaven-sent mission to recapture a long-lost vision of human society and to disseminate it throughout the world.⁹⁷ The *Aeneid* contains thousands of smaller-scale exemplary moments and characters, from its central hero down to the smaller but still finely drawn individuals, but we never lose the thread (as we often seem to do with Ovid) of a single story which will reach its goal in the end, despite all the temptations and trials, all the horror and loss, which will be encountered on the way. Though the components of this great narrative are so radically different from the great single story in which the apostle Paul believed himself to be living, the overall shape, and indeed the very *idea* of there being such an overall shape to a centuries-long story, would I think have been recognized at once.⁹⁸

I do not know if this sense of teleology, of a narrative ordered by its long-range designed conclusion and making its way through fire and blood to get there, has any real precedents in the ancient world. The analogy with Aristotle's teleological theory of virtue suggests itself, transposed now from a single human life to the thousand-year story of a people; but I am not aware of evidence that Virgil had thought of that parallel, or that he might have been consciously working it out. Virgil's great model, Homer, hardly counts as a precedent: the fall of Troy, though a defining moment in the 'back story' of classical Greece, remained a deeply ambiguous event, providing almost as much tragedy to the conquering Greeks as to the vanquished Trojans, and the eventual homecoming of Odysseus was more of a sigh of relief than a glorious climax to a long progression. There is no evidence that court poets in the time of Alexander the Great told this kind of long story to lead the eye up to the achievements of their monarch.⁹⁹ The only real parallels I know are, first, the ancient story of Abraham leaving his father's house to seek a promised homeland, with his descendants arriving at last after many trials and setbacks; and, second, the much longer story which begins with that Pentateuchal narrative but which continues, in

the mind and the writings of second-Temple Jews, in search of a further fulfilment which will involve a worldwide kingdom.¹⁰⁰ I know of no signs that Virgil knew, or was echoing, either the shorter, ancient Israelite narrative or the longer, contemporary Jewish one. But to those familiar with either, his poem would have considerable resonance – as well, of course, as the dissonance both of a rival claim to world domination and of a radically different method of bringing it about.

What we seem to have, with the *Aeneid*, is a remarkable confluence of factors, the beneficent equivalent of the proverbial ‘perfect storm’. Consider: the triumphant emergence of Augustus from the chaos of the 40s and 30s BC; the restoration of peace in Italy and far beyond; a sense both of something radically new and of the renewal of all that was best and greatest from Rome’s distant legendary past; and, at the same moment, Virgil’s coming under the patronage of Maecenas, a close friend of the *princeps*; the development and flowering of his poetic gifts through his earlier works; the awareness of Augustus’s pleasure both at his themes and at his handling of them; the leisure to write, though not the time to polish the work as he wanted (he died in 19 BC aware of more that he wanted to do to it); and, at that same time, a readiness on the part of the wider public to think in terms of a new age dawning, and to welcome a poet who could put it all into matchless verse. It is as when a farmer looks on his fields, and sees that the crop is ripening at last; and when, at the same moment, a voice from the house tells him that his son has returned safe from the wars; and, as he goes indoors, a thunderclap from a clear sky assures him that the gods are indeed smiling on him: even so, the confluence of circumstances, from political upheaval to mature poetic inspiration to popular readiness to listen, produces a work of surpassing beauty and power. Granted the newly peaceful empire and its networks as a natural way of disseminating a fresh vision, it is not surprising that, for aesthetic, social, cultural and political reasons, Virgil and his work became hugely famous. Parts of the *Aeneid* were adapted for the stage. Once, when in a different production an actor quoted a line from Virgil, the audience rose to their feet to pay homage to the poet, there in their midst, as if (says Tacitus) he were the emperor

himself.¹⁰¹ The great poem was soon as well known in Egypt as in Rome, and its famous lines were appearing as much in graffiti as in the schoolrooms.¹⁰² There is every reason to suppose that an intelligent boy growing up in Tarsus, or for that matter in Jerusalem, would know at least its main themes, if not its finer details.

And it is with main themes that we are concerned. The *Aeneid* tells the story of Aeneas, son-in-law to Priam, king of Troy, son of Anchises and the goddess Venus, making his way from the ruin of Troy to the place which has been appointed for him: Italy, more specifically Latium, more specifically the spot which will be Rome. So much we know from the very opening of the work.¹⁰³ Aeneas is to be the means by which a new race, the Romans, will arise from Trojan stock (though there are constant hints that the Trojans themselves came from Rome in the first place¹⁰⁴) and will come to dominate the whole world, knowing no bounds in space or time, producing an *imperium sine fine*, a kingdom without end. Romans, in short, will be *rerum domini*, masters of every kind of *res*, matter or business (as in *res publica*).¹⁰⁵ Aeneas's son Ascanius, also called Iulus, will found the original city, Alba Longa, that will be refounded by Romulus with the name Rome.¹⁰⁶ From Ascanius/Iulus will be descended a new 'Julius': Augustus himself, who will bring peace to the earth, shutting the gates of Janus, and will be welcomed into heaven, i.e. recognized as divine.¹⁰⁷ Aeneas is famous above all in this poem for his *pietas*, his devotion to the gods and to his father, his determination to do the right thing, however costly; and this is seen not least in the regular mention of his bringing the *penates*, the household gods, from his home in Troy, carrying them through all his adventures until eventually they are to be placed in the new city.¹⁰⁸

Though Aeneas is the hero, the action is directed by two – I was going to say *deae ex machinae*, but they are very much part of the plot and the action all through: Aeneas's mother Venus, and her rival Juno, wife of Jupiter. Venus, of course, supports her son; Juno is determined to thwart him, and this is the 'explanation' for all the trials and hazards that beset Aeneas and his company as they sail now here, now there. Famously, they land in

Carthage, where the hero is taken by the local widowed queen, Dido, as her lover. But the combination of Jupiter, Venus and 'Fate' are too strong, and the messenger-god Mercury is sent to remind Aeneas of his high calling. He must move on, because he must rule Italy, and bring the whole world under its laws.¹⁰⁹ He leaves. Dido, desolate, prophesies terrible hostility between his people and hers in days to come (a pointer to the Punic wars, the greatest test of Roman military might in the third and second centuries BC); she then commits suicide.¹¹⁰

Other prophecies come in, too. The Cumaean Sibyl gives warning of the early wars which Rome will have to fight. But the poem's greatest set piece, at least in terms of its eschatology, is the scene where Aeneas visits his late father Anchises in the underworld, and the dead man, now possessed of superhuman knowledge, tells him of the glory and the sorrow that will come in the last days. Rome, built by Romulus, son of the war-god Mars, will indeed extend its empire to the ends of the earth, raising her ambitions as high as Olympus, and build a city on seven hills where a race of heroes shall be born.¹¹¹ Then there will come the hero of heroes, Augustus, who will surpass even the labours of Hercules in his world-conquering exploits:

Turn hither now your two-eyed gaze, and behold this nation, the Romans that are yours. Here is Caesar and all the seed of Iulus destined to pass under heaven's spacious sphere. And this in truth is he whom you so often hear promised you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god [*divi genus*], who will again establish a golden age [*aurea saecula*] in Latium amid fields once ruled by Saturn; he will advance his empire beyond the Garamants and Indians to a land which lies beyond our stars, beyond the path of year and sun, where sky-bearing Atlas wheels on his shoulders the blazing star-studded sphere. Against his coming both Caspian realms and the Maeotic land even now shudder at the oracles of their gods, and the mouths of sevenfold Nile quiver in alarm. Not even Hercules traversed so much of earth's extent, though he pierced the stag of brazen foot, quieted the woods of Erymanthus, and made Lerna tremble at his bow ...¹¹²

Anchises then turns his mind back to the long story which has led up to that point. Numa, the second king of Rome, will give it its laws. Other kings will follow. The famous Brutus will be first to receive the *imperium* of a consul.¹¹³ But then we find ourselves in the first century again, with Julius Caesar and Pompey, before cutting back a century to those who conquered Greece in the second century BC, thus at last avenging Troy's destruction.

All this long story sets the agenda for what Rome must now do, building a noble empire to be embodied in works of art, human skill and scientific discovery:

Others, I doubt not, shall with softer mould beat out the breathing bronze, coax from the marble features to the life, plead cases with greater eloquence and with a pointer trace heaven's motions and predict the risings of the stars; you, Roman, be sure to rule the world (be these your arts), to crown peace with justice, to spare the vanquished and to crush the proud.¹¹⁴

Aeneas, receiving this vision in the underworld, will not, it seems, remember it when he returns to face the next challenges of his own day. But Virgil's reader has been granted a clear glimpse of the eschatological or teleological belief which lies at the heart of Augustus's programme: this is the golden age, the moment for which the fates and the gods called Aeneas long ago. All history has been moving forward, through dark and difficult times, to this sudden new day, and all Romans near and far must embrace the vision and live up to it. The long years of the republic have given birth, however surprisingly, to a world-conquering sole ruler, and this is in fact what the gods had intended all along. The narrative sweep is so breathtaking that we might almost forget the sharp political statement that is being made. Anyone like Brutus or Cassius who might suppose that a sole ruler was out of the question for proud, traditional Roman republicans must learn that the Julian family had all along been carrying the seeds of this moment of monarchical glory.

Nor is the theme exhausted with this climactic scene in Book 6. In the eighth book, Aeneas's mother Venus asks her divine husband, Vulcan the blacksmith, to make some special armour for the human son who now faces stern battle.¹¹⁵ This he does, and when it is given to Aeneas he looks from piece to piece, until his eyes rest on the shield. There 'the Lord of Fire' has carved the story of Italy and the triumphs of Rome, since he knows the prophecies and the coming age. The shield tells once more the old Roman stories of Romulus and Remus; of the rape of the Sabines; fresh wars and mighty deeds, generation after generation. Here is the goose that warned of the Gallic invasion.¹¹⁶ Here, from more recent times, are the wicked

Catiline and the lawgiving Cato. And here at last, standing on his warship, is Augustus, victor at Actium, bringing with him the great gods of the Penates, with his father's star on his head (the comet which announced the apotheosis of Julius Caesar). Here, fleeing from the final battle, are the last enemies he must defeat, Antony and his shameful Egyptian bride Cleopatra. And here is Caesar returning home:

But Caesar, entering the walls of Rome in triple triumph, was dedicating to Italy's gods his immortal votive gift – three hundred mighty fanes [shrines] throughout the city. The streets rang with gladness and games and shouting; in all the temples was a band of matrons, in all were altars, and before the altars slain steers strewed the ground. Himself, seated at the snowy threshold of shining Phoebus [the new temple of Apollo], reviews the gifts of nations and hangs them on the proud portals.¹¹⁷

This homecoming, this reappearing, this return to the city in triumph, are significant for the development of early Christian language about the return of a different king, as we shall see.¹¹⁸ Aeneas gazes at the shield, and picks it up for the coming battle, 'uplifting on his shoulder the fame and fortunes of his children's children'.¹¹⁹ That, in reverse, is what Virgil wants his readers to do: to take his narrative of their father's fathers as their own story, to relive the glorious memories not only of their great beginnings but also of the difficulties that have beset them down the centuries; to celebrate now the new day which has dawned, and the triumph of the single race of humans, and the single monarch from that race, which Jupiter himself intended to bring forth from this combination of Trojans and Latins, a fresh breed who would surpass not only all other humans but all gods as well in *pietas*.¹²⁰ The age of Augustus.

The means to it all was simple: war. This mixed race from Troy and Italy, this new breed called Romans, was to excel above all in the arts and practices of fighting and killing. Not for nothing is the final scene, long drawn out, the eventual single combat of Aeneas and Turnus, the traitor who stood in the way of the peaceful settlement of the Trojans in their land of promise. An enemy king, a rebel king, a rival to Aeneas then or Augustus now: such a person must be dealt with in the way Romans knew best. The thousand-year story is built on military success, with decisive help from the

gods, just as the new golden age was ushered in through the triple victory and triumph of the ‘son of god’.¹²¹ This was the story Rome had told about itself, in one way or another, for many generations; Virgil has tapped into one of the central arteries of the Roman worldview. What he has done with this story, however, is to give it historical depth and power, so that the long and difficult development over many centuries is held between two moments, the decisive and characteristic beginning and the equally decisive and characteristic climax.

However much we may want to raise questions about means and ends, the possibility of telling, celebrating, and living out such a massive and powerful narrative ought to excite admiration, not least as the breathtaking scope of the story is matched by the power and grace of the poetry. We ought not, in other words, to settle for the sneer of the deconstructionist. The political agenda is obvious, but that doesn’t mean that the conception and execution of the *Aeneid* was any less than brilliant. It always was, I think, a mistake to see Virgil as a kind of pre-Christian prophetic figure. His prophecies lead us more directly to Pontius Pilate than to his most famous victim. But his grand narrative stands to the grand narrative of Israel’s scriptures, together with their putative final chapter, at worst as a kind of parody, at best as another altar to an unknown god.

But it is with known gods that we are now to be concerned, as we come to the final section of this present chapter, and with it the conclusion of our introduction to Paul’s historical, cultural, civic and not least religious context. The story of Rome had long been seen as the story of a powerful goddess. By the time the apostle Paul was following in Augustus’s footsteps in places like Philippi and Corinth, Augustus himself and his successors were being hailed as gods. How this happened, and how it decisively shaped the world in which Paul went about speaking of Jesus, we must now investigate.

[4. The Religion of Empire](#)

(i) Introduction

Scholarship wobbles from one thing to another. The fortunes of ‘emperor-worship’ in recent study are typical of what happens in many areas. Faced with a rich density of material, scholars can easily lose sight of one entire segment of the field, only then to rediscover it with a whoop of delight, clutch it to their hearts, and make it the previously lost key which will at last open all their locked doors. This leads, however, to oversimplifications and generalizations, and the next and necessary wobble is into a thicker description of the new discovery, producing more distinctions and variations, less sense of unity. Thus, during my scholarly lifetime, we have witnessed all three stages (and I have fallen happily into the middle one) in relation to what has sometimes been called ‘the imperial cult’.¹²²

Nobody much in New Testament studies was talking about imperial cult in the generation after the war.¹²³ Then suddenly in the 1990s, not least because of the publications of Simon Price in 1984 and Paul Zanker in 1988, and because of the almost Virgilian confluence of (a) these works, (b) the rise of postcolonial theory and (c) the new American awareness of ‘empire’ as a problematic contemporary reality, ‘empire’ became flavour not of the month but of the decade.¹²⁴ Grand general theories of everything were proposed, as scholars who were used to looking for God in their texts began to look for Caesar instead. Some of us tried to look for both at the same time, unwilling to embrace merely the other pole of a false antithesis. But in that eager gold-rush, historical and textual land was staked out which now, in the cooler light of detailed research, needs to be mapped a lot more thoroughly. Put crudely, not all the streams have yielded as much as we hoped they would. Part of the point of the long build-up to this section of this chapter – through philosophy and religion, and now through the story of the rise of Augustus – is the necessary attempt to ground the possible interaction of Paul with the Roman empire more securely in the actual realities, so far as we can assess them, of Roman life and culture, including ‘cult’, in the areas where he went to work. Most of Paul’s work was in cities where the influence of Rome had been strong for at least half a century, in

some cases much longer. What happened in those cities was not identical to what happened in Rome; but what had happened in Rome, particularly under Augustus, was the crucial underlying factor for what happened everywhere else. When Rome lifted her little finger, many in the provinces sprang to attention; when Rome sneezed, faraway lands caught pneumonia.

But not at the same rate, or in the same way. This is why the late Simon Price, who in a measure started the present chain of scholarly events, wrote subsequently that ‘there was no such thing as the “imperial cult”.’ He offered a powerful and evocative explanation: what before had been a ‘religion of place’, the ‘place’ in question being Rome, had been adapted to accommodate the figure of the emperor:

The religion of place was now restructured round a person. But it is misleading to categorize this as “the imperial cult”. The term arbitrarily separates honours to the emperor from the full range of his religious activities, and it assumes that there was a single institution of his cult throughout the empire.¹²⁵

It might, then, be better to speak of ‘cults’, plural, both at and of Rome itself, and of cults, plural, related to the emperor and his family. It is certainly important to understand that, like the empire itself, they developed in bits and pieces, without (despite Virgil) any initial grand scheme. ‘There was a wide range of diverse strategies for integrating the emperor into religious life.’¹²⁶ Study of Paul, and for that matter of other early Christians, and their relation to newly focused religious institutions emanating from or relating to the capital and its chief citizen (will that do as a chastened paraphrase for ‘imperial cult’?) must therefore take account of diversity and pluriformity.¹²⁷ ‘If everything is “imperial cult”’, writes one of Simon Price’s pupils, ‘then nothing is.’¹²⁸

Still, as with the protests of the 1980s that there was ‘no such thing as first-century Judaism’, only Judaisms, plural, so we ought not to be too blown over by an Aristotelian critique of that Platonic abstraction, ‘imperial cult’. As long as we recognize that there was no single uniform reality that corresponded to that phrase, and as long as we remain alive to the multiple meanings which our diverse evidence throws up, we can, at least for present purposes, think in terms of a single complex phenomenon.¹²⁹ It would be a shame to know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Other sub-generalizations, however, must also be challenged. I have heard it said that the cult of Augustus grew in the eastern empire rather than the west; but one of our earliest pieces of evidence is an altar to Augustus in

Lyons in southern Gaul. People have often supposed that the east was more ready than anyone in Rome to see Augustus as a god; but we have already seen that Horace and Virgil were writing openly about the *princeps*, even in his early years, treading the path to Olympus. Those two poets have often themselves been cited as part of Augustus's propaganda machine, but we have observed subtle but important differences between their respective attitudes to the new reality. Life close up is always more complex than a distant vision suggests.

Critique is more complicated, too. The shallow social and political alternatives bequeathed to contemporary western society by the Enlightenment and its aftermath, in which every issue stands either to left or to right on some hypothetical spectrum, and every political question can be answered in terms of 'for' or 'against' – this trivialized world of thought cannot cope with the complexities of real life either in the first or the twenty-first century.¹³⁰ To repeat a warning from elsewhere: just as Pauline scholars have had to learn that one cannot expect the categories of sixteenth-century theology to catch all Paul's first-century nuances, so one cannot expect the political slogans of our own day to do justice to the challenges of his. The world of Augustus was a subtle, shaded, highly complex whole. Anyone wanting to say 'Yes' to it would almost certainly want to add a 'but', and so would anyone wanting to say 'No'.

No doubt, by the middle of the first century AD, and out in the provinces of Greece or Asia, some of the nice distinctions of the last decades BC will have been thoroughly blurred. Certainly this had happened by the end of the first Christian century, with the heavy-handed rule of Domitian, demanding to be called *dominus et deus*, lord and god, in his lifetime (unlike his father Vespasian, who famously remarked on his deathbed that he seemed to be turning into a god¹³¹). But when we are dealing with, say, Philippi or Pisidian Antioch, Corinth or Ephesus, in the middle of the century, we will do well to try, so far as is possible, to assess what was actually happening on the ground in those places, rather than generalize cheerfully about 'the imperial cult' and its 'imposition'.

The varied phenomenon of imperial cult was nested, from the first, within a larger image: that of the *princeps* as himself a man of religion, a priest (and eventually *Pontifex Maximus*) who would himself offer sacrifices, inspect auguries, intone prayers, lead processions and generally set an example of *pietas*, of what a noble and godly Roman ought to be doing.¹³² This does not stop when he, little by little, seems to be turning into a god in his own right; nor do writers of the time show any surprise at the combination. As with much else, the *Ara Pacis* forms a striking example.¹³³ By the same token, even when the emperor was being invoked as a divinity, it still made sense to offer prayers *for* him and his family, as indeed the Jewish people were eager to do as a demonstration of loyalty that did not involve compromise.¹³⁴ And, as with our earlier discussion of Roman religion, it ought by now to be abundantly clear that we must abandon any older views that try to drive a wedge between what we today call ‘religion’ and what we today call ‘culture’ or ‘politics’ or anything else. As we shall see in studying Paul, what we require for a proper understanding is a far more all-embracing vision, a worldview in which all of human life is woven together into a (potentially) coherent whole.¹³⁵ And we should note that even within a short period of Roman history the very meaning of the Latin word *religio* may have been itself undergoing change.¹³⁶ Caution is clearly required.

The background to our present topic is found right across the material we have studied in the previous chapters. Another Virgilian confluence: multiple factors came rushing together to make it virtually certain both that Augustus would be seen, whether officially or not, as a god in his own lifetime, and that cities across the empire, especially in the east, would not only have no difficulty in recognizing this claim but would be eager to endorse it and to celebrate it appropriately. And at that point all that we said in the previous chapter about pagan religious observance comes into play.

There are at least seven different though ultimately interrelated factors to be considered in the preparation of the ground for ‘imperial cult’. To begin with – and starting in the east where by common consent cults related to the emperor were the quickest off the mark – there was a long oriental tradition

of divine monarchy.¹³⁷ In Egypt this goes back to the pharaohs, in Greece to Alexander the Great and his successors in the various hellenistic kingdoms.¹³⁸ The two traditions were combined when Alexander himself became Pharaoh of Egypt in November 332 BC. Nor is this background relevant only to those who lived in Greece and further east. Alexander had been seen as a model by many leading figures in the late Roman republic; and Augustus himself evokes him as a kind of predecessor in his own account of his deeds.¹³⁹

Also in the eastern provinces, second, there was already a long tradition in some places of worship of the eponymous goddess Roma. *Dea Roma*, perhaps conceived on the analogy of the goddess Athene as the patron of Athens, was clearly designed to attract and hold the loyalty of the east long before anyone in Rome was thinking about one-man rule. It is this same goddess that we find on the *Ara Pacis* sitting at peace on a pile of other people's discarded weaponry. For our purposes the point is that Augustus did not need to invent provincial worship of Rome itself. It had been going on for at least a century and a half by his day. To slot him in beside the city's eponymous goddess was a significant move, but more of an evolution, a making explicit of a new but related reality, rather than a total break with the past.¹⁴⁰

Back home in Rome itself things were very far from the picture sometimes painted, of a traditional republic that would never have dreamed of a human being attaining divine status.¹⁴¹ The third preparatory factor includes the classic example of Hercules, a human who became some kind of quasi-divine being (the ancients felt under no obligation to be precise at this point), was prominent in the stories well known in that myth-soaked culture.¹⁴² Intellectual as well as civic heroes might be hailed as gods; Lucretius, for whom the gods were far off and did not involve themselves in our world, nevertheless hailed his master Epicurus as divine.¹⁴³ If a human leader, particularly a military leader, attained great success there was a natural tendency to see him in the same light, as seems to have happened with Sulla at least.¹⁴⁴ Out in the provinces it was not unknown for Roman

governors to be honoured with special festivities, civic games and even temples.¹⁴⁵ And of course a statue of Julius Caesar himself, Augustus's adopted father, had been erected in 45 BC in the Temple of Quirinus, with the inscription *Deo Invicto*, 'to the unconquered god'.¹⁴⁶ This was of course hugely controversial, and may well have helped to steel the nerve of the conspirators who assassinated him a few months later. But things moved fairly swiftly in the succeeding months. Antony, then holding effective power, had tried to put the brake on the process, but when Octavian returned to Rome and celebrated games in honour of Caesar's victories, in July 44, a comet appeared conveniently, and was naturally interpreted in terms of Caesar's soul ascending to join the gods in heaven. The comet quickly became the sign both of Caesar's divinity and, by implication, of Augustus's status as 'son of god', reappearing on coins, inscriptions, portraits and the like thereafter.¹⁴⁷ The Senate voted to deify Caesar and build him a temple; Antony was appointed as an initial priest of the cult.

The implication for Octavian was clear, but dangerous. As Galinsky comments, to be the son of a slain dictator is a mixed blessing, but to be the son of a god was an unmitigated one.¹⁴⁸ Octavian, though, remained wary. He quickly backtracked from his initial suggestion that he 'aspired to the honours of his father'.¹⁴⁹ Nor did he repeat the mistake (40 BC) of attending a banquet dressed as Apollo, though he did issue coins in the 20s with himself portrayed as Apollo, Jupiter or Neptune.¹⁵⁰ When Agrippa built the Pantheon, which still majestically bears his name, it was designed as a temple to Augustus, the Roman equivalent of the Caesar-shrines that were being built in the rest of the empire. But Augustus firmly refused this honour. The Pantheon, as its name implies, was a shrine for all the regular gods, plus Julius Caesar; a bust of Augustus (and also of Agrippa himself, regarded at the time as Augustus's heir apparent) was displayed prominently in the entrance lobby.¹⁵¹ There was no point being divine if it meant an early death. (Someone should have reminded Caligula of this, but a cautious Augustan balance was never his style.) Antony himself, as during the late 40s and early 30s he steadily gained more power in the east, could

in that culture scarcely avoid being seen as divine, and we have no evidence that he tried to avoid it. This, too, will have been a warning to Octavian: when Romans go to the east, they start behaving in unRoman fashion. But Octavian's reticence about his own metaphysical status was balanced by his emphatic insistence on the divinity of Julius Caesar. He took every opportunity – spoken, written and in public display – to remind everybody of it.¹⁵² The Senate officially ratified the deification of Caesar in 42 BC; cult statues of him, with comet attached, were placed everywhere in Italy, and work went ahead on his temple in the forum, which we have already noted.¹⁵³ Humans could, after all, become divine.¹⁵⁴

A further, fourth, preparatory factor within Rome itself was the reputed decline of traditional religion, and Augustus's much-heralded determination to restore it. This is somewhat controversial.¹⁵⁵ It is to be assumed that at a time of great social unrest, dispossession, reigns of terror, and ignorant armies clashing by night many would forsake the regular, solemn, careful religious routines that had been ingrained in the population over many generations. Following the war-god meant abandoning most of the others. Priesthoods that would normally have been filled remained vacant. Cicero, nothing if not the classic Academic philosopher, lamented the radical decline of traditional practices: whatever one thought about the gods, these practices should be observed!¹⁵⁶ Equally, widespread experience suggests that at a time of great social upheaval and anxiety people are often more overt in their religious practices, not less, clinging to such planks as come to hand in a wild sea of troubles. But that is not what the sources are referring to. It is the official, public *religiones* that are in decline in the period; and it is these official cults that Augustus, repeatedly, claims to have restored. He was known as a builder and restorer of temples; he also revived various orders of priesthood, such as the Arval brotherhood and the 'fellowship of Titius', which claimed a link with Romulus.¹⁵⁷ All this showed the average Roman just how close a link there was between their new leader and their old gods.¹⁵⁸

By itself, of course, this revival of traditional religion might well have undermined any chance of emperor-worship. So, in a measure and at the

local level, it did. If Augustus was restoring the ancient traditions, worship of a living ruler would not be found among them. That way, at least in Rome, lay danger.

But Augustus did something else, more subtle. The fifth preparatory factor for imperial cult grew out of the ancient practice in which, as we saw in the previous chapter, private and domestic religion had for centuries focused on the *Lares* and *Penates*, the former being two young men symbolizing, by this period obscurely, ancestors and ghosts to whom respect should be paid, and the latter being the more usual household gods such as Aeneas brought with him from Troy.¹⁵⁹ Together, by the hearth, they formed literally the focal point of the home, where also the *genius* of the *paterfamilias* would be invoked. This allowed for a particular, and significant, development. It was not only private houses that had *Lares*. Rome was divided into districts or wards (*compita*), each of which looked after its own *Lares compitales*, the gods of the district, and celebrated games and festivals in their honour. Augustus reorganized the districts, 265 of them, and rebuilt the main temple of the *Lares*.¹⁶⁰ But something else had happened in the first century: the *Lares compitales* had been referred to as the *Lares augusti*, the ‘sacred’ or ‘revered’ *Lares*. That happened a good twenty years before anyone thought of calling Octavian ‘Augustus’, but the happy coincidence produced a big win for the young *princeps*. These ‘household gods’ of each district became *Lares Augusti*, and the *genius* of the ‘father of the fatherland’ was to be invoked at each of them, with a statue of Augustus, or other symbols indicating his presence, accompanying the two figures already displayed. Though this did not of itself imply that Augustus was ‘divine’, any more than invoking the *genius* of the *paterfamilias* implied that the head of each household was divine, in the ill-defined and slippery usage and imagination of the time it was a big step in one particular direction, and was seen as such at the time.¹⁶¹ When the Senate eventually gave Augustus the official title of *pater patriae* in 2 BC, this merely confirmed, in terms of the implicit religion of each of the districts in Rome, what his presence with the *Lares* had indicated. Rome was one big home, and Augustus was its revered *paterfamilias*.

The sixth preparatory factor was the phenomenon, again noted in the previous chapter, of the reinterpretation of traditional divinities across cultures. This was not simply a matter of Greek deities being recognized under Roman names (or indeed Roman ones under Gallic names), so that the owl of Athene is transferred to Minerva and the eagle of Zeus to Jupiter. It also opened up the possibility that humans who were performing particularly powerful and remarkable deeds might be seen, and visibly portrayed, in the guise of some god or other. This was, indeed, one aspect of our first factor: from at least the time of Alexander, hellenistic rulers had had themselves portrayed in the likeness of gods. Part of Antony's campaign to establish an unassailable power base in the east involved his self-portrayal in the guise of Dionysos; Plutarch describes his grand entry into Ephesus in terms of the arrival of that god.¹⁶² Meanwhile Augustus had been allowing himself to be portrayed in the guise of Apollo (for instance, in a statue in the Palatine library), in contradistinction to the son of Pompey who still, claiming command of the sea, had himself displayed as Neptune.¹⁶³ Octavian would hint at that role himself once he had defeated the upstart.¹⁶⁴ But it was Apollo and Dionysos that Octavian and Antony invoked as the final drama in the civil war worked itself out. Antony, in addition, exploited the multiple possibilities of oriental cult, so that he and Cleopatra were displayed as Osiris and Isis (but without the implication that he would have to die and rise every year), while their children were named Alexander Helios (sun) and Cleopatra Selene (moon). But, whereas Antony did not hold back from public identification with Dionysos, Octavian did not, as we have seen, repeat the earlier blunder of displaying himself as Apollo. Instead, he allowed the close association of himself with that god – who was seen as the god of discipline, morality and moderation – to emerge from the fact of the newly built temple, next door to his own house, while Antony could be described as capitulating not only to the fantasies of the east but to the hedonistic and luxurious lifestyle that was associated with Dionysus.

Reticence in Rome, and for the moment, until Antony was out of the way; then the road lay open to further exploitation of the ancients' ability to

combine divinities. But now Augustus would not be content to look like Apollo or Neptune. He went to the top. In the east, at least, he was portrayed in the guise of Zeus/Jupiter; and Ovid, living in exile in northern Asia Minor, repeated the point, declaring that Jupiter (i.e. Caesar) had punished him with his thunderbolt.¹⁶⁵ Even if this was a vain attempt on the poet's part to gain rehabilitation, it shows what was possible, and what was actually happening, on the ground.

The seventh and final preparatory point has to do with the way the Romans governed their subject nations. They always much preferred to rule through local elites, rather than having to come in themselves with their own magistrates and officials.¹⁶⁶ The local elites could count on Roman support where necessary, but Rome saw the wisdom of allowing people who understood the region and its inhabitants to make the detailed decisions, or – to look at it the other way round – of getting someone else to do the dirty work. However one sees that question, the point remains that the local elites naturally had a strong vested interest in keeping Rome happy. (An obvious example would be Herod the Great in Judaea: see below.) Their own power, which might well have been shaky or even impossible without Roman support, depended on that goodwill. So expressions of gratitude to Rome and to Caesar for all the benefits they had brought to the city, the region or the country were routine, and routinely lavish. If and when the possibility of new honours for Rome and/or the emperor were to emerge, it would be only natural for such provincial rulers to be eager in developing and propagating them. It would, after all, be good (they would say) for everybody: for the people, to be at peace and enjoy Rome's famous justice; for Rome itself, to know the contentment of a grateful subject people; for themselves, to stay in power. That was the kind of local elite that John of Patmos appears to have portrayed as the Monster from the Land, doing the will of the Monster from the Sea.¹⁶⁷

(ii) The Divine Augustus

(a) In Rome: Informal but Clear

The caution which Augustus displayed over any claims to divinity in Rome was not matched either by his keenest followers at home or by his enthusiastic supporters in the provinces. Both are important as part of the larger context for the various Rome- and emperor-related cults which shaped the world where Paul announced Jesus as lord.¹⁶⁸

The studied reticence in relation to official cult has Augustus being portrayed in, almost literally, a liminal position. This is so, as we noticed, in the Pantheon; it is also so on the so-called Belvedere altar, dating to the last decade or so BC. None of the iconography says 'Augustus is now divine'; all of it says, 'He stands closer to divinity than the rest of us.'¹⁶⁹ Various moves in the direction of divinization were mooted in the capital, not least the Senate referring to the regular holiday that was established to celebrate Augustus's safe return, not as the *feria* of *Fortuna Redux*, the happy return, but as the *feria Augustalia*. Augustus forbade this naming of the day, as also the official recording of the public holiday assigned to his birthday.¹⁷⁰ He did however permit, towards the end of his life, an altar at which the four main priestly colleges sacrificed to the *numen* of Augustus. This could be taken to mean, granted the other evidence, that such a cult did not after all really count as an acknowledgment of divinity (though normally *numen* would point in that direction, as opposed to *genius* which an ordinary mortal would possess); or it could be seen as the thin end of a wedge that everybody could see was in due course to be driven further.¹⁷¹ But if we lift our eyes even for a moment from such small details to Augustus's larger works across the city as a whole, things were becoming clear: 'the superhuman nature of the *princeps* might be assumed, even if not explicitly displayed.'¹⁷²

The most interesting evidence for developments in Rome itself, some of which we have already glanced at, comes from the poets. Virgil pulls no punches: Augustus is striding along the road that will take him up to join the Olympians.¹⁷³ Apollo hails Iulus, Aeneas's son, as 'son of gods and sire of gods to be'.¹⁷⁴ Virgil cherishes a fantasy of building a temple for Caesar,

decorated with the story of his mighty deeds.¹⁷⁵ Clearly, for him, Augustus is divine, with the only question being whether he will be a god of sea or land.¹⁷⁶

Horace, meanwhile, ponders which god he should invoke to halt the collapse of the Roman world. Perhaps Apollo will come, he says, or maybe Venus, or even Mars, once he's become tired of all that fighting. Or maybe, he says, addressing Mercury, it will be you, daring

To fly down and change your own form to the frame
Of a young man on earth, and, braving the danger,
To suffer the people to give you the name
Of Caesar's avenger.¹⁷⁷

Augustus, in other words, coming to take vengeance on Brutus and Cassius, is to be seen as the embodiment of the god. Horace beseeches him not to return to heaven too soon, but rather stay to be hailed as father and prince (*pater atque princeps*) and to take revenge, too, on the Parthians. 'That will happen,' he says, 'under your leadership, Caesar': *te duce, Caesar*.¹⁷⁸ Caesar is Jupiter's vice-regent, sent to rule over the whole world, as far as India and China, and taking his place 'among the stars' and Jupiter's heavenly council.¹⁷⁹ He will join the divine company of Hercules and Pollux.¹⁸⁰ Once the furthest reaches of the world (Britain and Persia) have been brought under Roman rule, Augustus will be hailed as *praesens divus*, a god here on earth, just as we know Jove to be ruling in heaven because that is where we hear him thundering.¹⁸¹ When Caesar is away from Rome, everyone pines, but when he returns the whole world is put to rights; then worship will be offered to Caesar with prayers and libations, combining him with the *Lares* just as, in Greece, Castor and Hercules are invoked.¹⁸² In his poetic letter to the *princeps*, Horace likens him to Romulus, and to Castor, Pollux and Hercules. Normally, he says, people are famed and feted only after their death. But upon you, he says,

while still among us, we bestow honours betimes, set up altars to swear by in your name, and confess that nought like you will hereafter arise or has arisen ere now.¹⁸³

The claim to be already setting up altars for Augustus is interesting, because some have suggested that the earliest evidence for such an altar comes from Lugdunum (Lyons) in 10 BC, and from internal dating the *Epistle* in question must be a year or two older than that.¹⁸⁴ There were, however, three altars set up to Augustus in Spain some years before that, probably in 19 BC.¹⁸⁵

The evidence of Virgil and Horace is important for three reasons. First, it gives the lie to any suggestion that nobody in Rome itself would have dreamed of thinking of Augustus as divine, and that it was only the (degenerate?) provinces to the east that would go that route.¹⁸⁶ Second, these writers obviously enjoyed the continuing favour of Augustus himself; we have no indication of him trying to stop his fashionable poets, under the patronage of a close friend of his, from saying such things. Third, because they were highly popular in their own day and even more so in the generations that followed. What they said, many read. And they are not as it were making the case for Augustus to be seen as divine, as though this were a dangerous novelty to be advanced cautiously and with careful argument. They take it more or less for granted. They are therefore evidence, along with the *Lares Augusti*, for the emperor's being widely understood to be in some sense 'divine' (the Romans, of course, did not bother about the fine-tuning of such 'senses'). Along with Augustus's principled and persistent refusal of an actual public cult in Rome, therefore, we must take account of a widespread, unofficial but pervasive belief that he was in fact to be regarded not only as 'son of the deified Julius' but as actually divine, in his own lifetime. Already before his death that which was not permitted in Rome itself was becoming a reality across Italy, including the establishment of priestly colleges, the *Augustales*, to serve the newly built shrines.¹⁸⁷ And what happened in Italy was minor compared to what was going on in the rest of the Roman world.

Thus although, as we have seen, there were many factors which created the conditions for the developments that were now taking place, 'their combination was novel and resulted in a new and remarkably coherent system centred on the emperor.'¹⁸⁸ The system in question – not just

‘imperial cults’ in a narrow sense, but an entire symbolic universe, in which the varied cults played a key strategic and symptomatic role – constituted the world, including what we call philosophy, religion and politics, in which the apostle Paul lived, worked, preached and taught.

(b) In the Provinces: Enthusiastic and Diverse

The altar in Lyons, referred to above, is not the only one in the north-western empire in this period. The altar found at Cologne is dated to before AD 9. But let us begin, not in the west, but in the east.¹⁸⁹ And we begin with what might have seemed the most unlikely place to host a new pagan cult: the Jewish homeland, Palestine.

Herod the Great, more concerned about the newly acquired goodwill of Augustus than about the scruples of the people he governed, built a temple to Augustus at Banias, on the slopes of Mount Hermon, near the source of the Jordan. It was made of beautiful white marble.¹⁹⁰ He built another one at Samaria (Sebaste); and another one magnificent in its symbolic and strategic dominance of both city and port, in the new town of Caesarea Maritima, on an artificial mound facing the harbour so that no incoming vessels (and this meant more or less all serious shipping in the area) could miss the point.¹⁹¹ Inside it he set up a massive cult statue of the emperor, modelled on that of Zeus at Olympia, and also (since the temple had the double dedication of Caesar and Rome) a huge statue of *Roma*, beside that of the emperor, modelled on that of Hera at Argos. All this could scarcely have been a more explicit statement of a claim which the locals must have found horribly blasphemous; if Herod was, as has been suggested, working on the Roman principle that imperial cult should be able to coexist with local cults, so that a ‘partnership’ had been formed, we may doubt whether all his subjects would have seen it in that light.¹⁹² (When Caligula tried to have a similar statue of himself placed, not in Caesarea but in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, mass protests were organized and the people were ready to die rather than have such a thing.¹⁹³) Herod organized

quinquennial games, also named after Caesar, to celebrate the founding of Caesarea and this temple.¹⁹⁴

The process of developing a cult of Augustus in the provinces began, as this example shows, shortly after Actium. A combination of (a) gratitude to the victorious leader for ending the long period of civil strife and (b) recognition of the new reality of power and influence led to some swift developments. Two of the provinces in modern Turkey, Asia and Pontus/Bithynia, sent messages to Augustus to request permission to dedicate temples to him. This introduces us to a key distinction of Augustus's reign. Roman provinces needed permission, as did officially 'Roman' cities such as colonies. Non-Roman cities within the provinces, however, needed no permission, and a considerable variety of practice was the result. However, there was no apparent compulsion to organize such a cult. In the Greek east, five out of the seven provinces did not have a provincial cult as such, though civic ones existed in some of their cities.

Augustus's response to the request was a careful compromise. Roman citizens would be allowed to worship at a temple of *Divus Iulius*, Augustus's deified father, and *Roma*, one such temple to be in Nicaea in Bithynia and the other in Ephesus, on the Asia coast. For non-citizens, however, referred to by Augustus as 'Hellenes', it was permitted to have a cult and temple for *Roma* and for himself in two other cities, Pergamum in Asia, nearly a hundred miles north of Ephesus, and Nicomedia, about twenty miles north of its great rival Nicaea, in Bithynia.¹⁹⁵ This was the start of a long and disorganized movement. Sometimes applications were made, and cults authorized, by entire provinces; four such examples exist, counting both eastern and western provinces. Sometimes, as in the case of at least thirty-seven towns and cities (those are the ones for which we have solid evidence), things were organized on a more local basis.¹⁹⁶ Some eastern provinces, long used to divine rulers, were just as eager to regularize their own systems, by divinizing their new ruler, as Augustus was eager to regularize the Roman system by refusing such an honour. It speaks volumes for Augustus's wisdom and his shrewd political handling of major issues that he managed to steer a course between the Scylla of the

one and the Charybdis of the other. He had, after all, made political capital by pointing out Antony's excesses in having himself worshipped in the east; might people back home now think the same of him?¹⁹⁷

Gratitude to the emperor was expressed in a famous decree of the Province of Asia, dated to 9 BC. The calendar was to be changed so that the year would now begin (and magistrates would take office) on the birthday of Augustus. This was a radical move, and by no means all the cities involved adopted it.¹⁹⁸ But the decree itself, and the response of the provincial assembly to it, shows well the kind of mood, and in one or two cases the kind of language, that was becoming common. Several fragments of the decree, carved in stone, have survived, and from them a fairly full text can be reconstructed.¹⁹⁹ These excerpts give the flavour:

... from our ancestors we have received goodwill of the gods and ... whether more pleasant or more beneficial is the most divine Caesar's birthday, which we might justly consider equal to the beginning of all things. If not exact from the point of view of the natural order of things, at least from the point of view of the useful, if there is nothing which has fallen to pieces and to an unfortunate condition has been changed which he has not restored, he has given to the whole world a different appearance, a world which would have met its ruin with the greatest pleasure, if as the common good fortune of everyone Caesar had not been born. Therefore perhaps each person would justly consider that this event has been for himself the beginning of life and of living, which is the limit and end of regret at having been born. And since from no day both for public and for private advantage could each person receive luckier beginnings than from the one which has been lucky for everyone, and since, roughly speaking, it happens that the cities in Asia have the same time for the entrance of magistrates into public office, an arrangement clearly thus preordained according to some divine will, in order that it should be a beginning of honour for Augustus, and since it is difficult to return for his many great benefactions thanks in equal measure, unless for each of them we think of some manner of repayment, and more joyfully would men celebrate a birthday common to everyone if some particular pleasure through his magistracy should come to them, it seems good to me that one and the same New Year's day for all states should be the birthday of the most divine Caesar and that on that day all men should enter into their public office, the day which is the ninth day before the Kalends of October [23 September], in order that in an even more extraordinary manner the day may be honoured by acquiring in addition from without a certain religious observance and thus may become better known to everyone ...²⁰⁰

... since Providence, which has divinely disposed our lives, having employed zeal and ardor, has arranged the most perfect culmination for life by producing Augustus, whom for the benefit of mankind she has filled with excellence, as if she had sent him as a savior for us and our descendants, a savior who brought war to an end and set all things in order; and since with his appearance Caesar exceeded the hopes of all those who received glad tidings before us, but not

even leaving any hope of surpassing him for those who are to come in the future; and since the beginning of glad tidings on his account for the world was the birthday of the god, and since Asia decreed in Smyrna ... that the person who found the greatest honors for the god should have a crown, and Paulus Fabius Maximus the proconsul, as benefactor of the province having been sent from that god's right hand and mind together with the other men through whom he bestowed benefits on the province ... has found something unknown until now to the Greeks for the honor of Augustus, that from Augustus' birthday should begin the time for life – for this reason, with good luck and for our salvation, it has been decreed by the Greeks in Asia that the New Year's first month shall begin for all the cities on the ninth day before the Kalends of October, which is the birthday of Augustus ... [201](#)

Augustus has bestowed great benefits, including 'salvation'; Asia has held a competition to see who can propose the best way of honouring him, which has been won by the proconsul who suggested this reordering of the calendar. Augustus's rule has proved a new beginning for the world, and for individuals. He has been raised, as it were, to cosmogonic stature; the Roman imperial system has been equated with the cosmic structures of the world. [202](#) The events surrounding Augustus's coming to power are therefore 'good news', *euangelia*, a word virtually always in the plural in such contexts, though, interestingly, always in the singular in the New Testament. This 'good news' is not merely a nice piece of information to cheer you up on a bad day, but the public, dramatic announcement that something has happened through which the world has changed for ever and much for the better. [203](#)

None of this is 'cult' as such, since it does not mention the official organization of religious worship. The response of the province, however (the second text above), goes on to speak of the provincial decree being engraved on white marble and set up in the precinct (i.e. the temple) of *Roma* and Augustus. [204](#) That points clearly to some kind of official status, and once such a thing was launched it could only go one way.

There is uncertainty, too, over what precise terminology in both Latin and Greek was authorized by Augustus himself. He tried to forbid the use of the Greek word *theos*, 'god', but since there was no direct Greek equivalent for the Latin *divus*, 'divine' (which could be quite imprecise), the inscription above speaks of Augustus not only as *theos* but as *theotatos*, 'extremely

divine’, which spoils any sense of caution.²⁰⁵ The attempt to exploit a possible Latin distinction, using *divus* to mean ‘divinized’ or ‘deified’ (as of a human to whom divine honours had been voted) as opposed to *deus*, ‘god’ (as of a full-on, genuine divine being), had in any case been subverted both by the depiction, on statues and coins, of the emperor clothed or arrayed like one of the Olympian gods, and by the use, already, of language such as ‘Jupiter Julius’ for Julius Caesar in the last months of his life.²⁰⁶ When we find, during Augustus’s lifetime, an inscription dedicated to him as ‘to god, son of god’ (*theō theou huiō*), and then similar language used in turn for Tiberius during his lifetime, it is hard to suppose that the average Greek speaker, reading such an inscription, was saying to himself or herself, ‘Of course, this is a translation of the Latin *divus*, so it doesn’t really mean “son of god”, but only “son of the deified one”.’ Even if anybody did say that to themselves, it is not clear what practical difference such a conclusion might make.²⁰⁷ Especially when Caligula then came along and made everything worryingly clear.

In the absence of precision about such things in the time of Augustus, however, there remained a sense of uncertainty, of moving into new and previously uncharted territory. We can see this in the use of special sacrificial animals for imperial worship. Such animals had to be different both from the animals used for the regular gods and from those employed in the cult of previously honoured men. But however we categorize evidence like this, it is clear that right across the empire the world of space and time was being reorganized around the emperor. This is, in Galinsky’s words, ‘a palpable example of the cult of Augustus being *sui generis* and exploring the boundaries of existing norms’.²⁰⁸

At the time when Asia and Bithynia led the way in proposing imperial temples, the inland region of Anatolia had not itself attained provincial status.²⁰⁹ During Augustus’s reign, however, a large area of central Asia Minor was incorporated into the new province of Galatia. Colonies were planted in a whole string of cities across the region, including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, all cities involved in Paul’s first missionary journey.²¹⁰ Antioch in particular was built up in such a way as to draw

attention to its new Roman character and status; a scatter of coins has been found bearing Caesar's comet, the heavenly sign of the new age, and in one case a large eagle. Rome had arrived. These cities were linked by a new Roman road, allowing for movement of troops as the area was brought under control. And, as elsewhere, colonies and soldiers imitated Rome. Throughout the process, imperial cult in its various forms was a major part of the social and civic organization.²¹¹ As Stephen Mitchell, the acknowledged authority on the region, puts it, emperor worship 'was from the first an institution of great importance to the provincial communities, and one that had, quite literally, a central role to play in the development of the new cities'.²¹² Each of the three cities in the region to have been substantially excavated so far – Ancyra, Pessinus, and Pisidian Antioch – possessed as a central feature a temple dedicated to the imperial cult, dating to the time of Augustus or Tiberius.²¹³

Other cities we know to have been important for Paul were also being reorganized. In Ephesus, the Temple of Augustus was (probably) placed in the upper agora, and a new road system was constructed which would lead the eye towards it.²¹⁴ (In St Andrews, to this day, the three main streets lead the eye eastwards, converging on the now ruined cathedral.) This, too, was right in the area where all the main business of the city would be done. Ephesus, famously, was twice granted the status of *neōkoros*, guardian of the shrine.²¹⁵ In Miletus, the imperial shrine was placed by the council chamber, again offering a new integration within the civic structures.²¹⁶ The altar at Pergamum has of late become almost an academic cult object, such is the detail in which it has been studied and its interpretative possibilities analyzed.²¹⁷ Asia as a whole, in fact, quickly became replete with imperial cults of various sorts:

Sacrificial activity for the emperors took place in a myriad of contexts. Emperors were worshipped in their own temples, and temples of other gods, in theaters, in gymnasia, in stoas, in basilicas, in judicial settings, in private homes, and elsewhere. Imperial cults were everywhere.

Along with a myriad of contexts, there were also many types of imperial cults. The temple of Rome and Augustus at Pergamum was a dedication by the province. But cities could also dedicate temples for the emperors, as was the case with the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. In contrast to these

grand projects, imperial cults could be founded by individuals on a much smaller scale with modest altars.²¹⁸

From Asia we work anti-clockwise around the Aegean, and arrive, like Paul, at Philippi. Philippi boasted a prominent temple to the imperial family, and Claudius caused a large monument to be placed there in the forum as part of the cult of Livia, Augustus's wife, whom Claudius had deified.²¹⁹ Philippi had been, of course, the site of the decisive battle in which Augustus had avenged the assassination of Julius Caesar, and the military veterans who were settled in the new colony there could be expected to be among the more eager loyalists for the new regime. The likely unpopularity of this with the locals, who had supported Brutus and Cassius, meant that the new Roman rulers in Philippi would be all the more likely to insist on all possible links with the mother city.

The background at Thessalonica was different, that city being the only one in the region that supported Octavian, Antony and Lepidus against the conspirators. It was rewarded with a declaration of freedom, for which the city gave thanks on its official coins, including one which addressed Caesar as *THEOS*. Excavations at Thessalonica have not been sufficiently extensive to establish whether there was an imperial temple there and if so in what period. (As with parts of Athens itself, not to mention Jerusalem, let alone Rome, one's heart goes out to those frustrated archaeologists who find an annoying modern city sitting inconveniently on the spot they would most like to dig.) But the coins, and various inscriptions, make clear what we must solidly assume: some form of the imperial cult was established there very early on, most probably in the 20s BC. In addition, since Thessalonica was the capital city of the province of Macedonia, and (like Philippi) occupied an important way-station on the vital Via Egnatia, the main road connecting Rome itself with the east, it is highly likely that Thessalonica would keep in line with major centres of Roman power and influence by establishing and celebrating one local variation or other on the cult of Rome and its leading citizen.²²⁰ When Paul speaks of the Thessalonians turning away from idols to serve a living and true god and to

await the arrival of his son, it would be very strange if he had not meant to include *Roma* and the emperor among those false deities.²²¹ When he speaks of Jesus' *parousia*, there is good reason to suppose that many in Thessalonica would have had in their minds the picture of the emperor arriving for a state visit, or perhaps returning to Rome after his extensive travels.²²²

Continuing down the west side of the Aegean to Athens, the challenge of eagle and owl would be delicate: there was no way, short of major cultural destruction, that the new shrine of Caesar would overshadow that of Athene herself, the magnificent Parthenon. The small but strategic imperial temple was, however, placed on the Acropolis, close to the eponymous goddess herself.²²³ In Corinth, too, where the Acropolis was further away from the city centre, the new imperial shrine was not placed there, but at the western end of the forum, raised up on a plinth so as to be just a little higher than the previously highest temple, that of Apollo. Right across the eastern empire, in short, in different forms but with an overarching shape and focus, people began to

revere [Augustus] with temples and sacrifices over islands and continents, organized by cities and provinces, matching the greatness of his virtue and repaying his benefactions towards them.²²⁴

'Benefaction', indeed, was a major theme of the cult and its motivation; in a world where a great deal of social life consisted of 'benefactions' and the obligations they incurred, Augustus was the greatest 'benefactor' of all, and was to be repaid in the appropriate manner.²²⁵ And all this eager repaying amounted to a massive reordering of the public world, and also importantly the world of the imagination, for one community after another right across the world of the eastern Mediterranean. The buildings formed a kind of stage set on which ordinary people played out the dramas of their lives, with the Augustan metanarrative providing the basic script around which they, corporately and individually, would improvise their parts.

In all this, as with the empire itself, we are not looking at a single, thought-out policy, ruthlessly imposed, relentlessly implemented. The Romans were capable of doing that in other spheres – tax collection, for

example, and the rights and duties of magistrates – but they did not do it in matters of religion. In religion, for the most part, things worked as they did in culture at large: in this period, ‘Roman power and Greek culture engender radical transformations of society and economy; but there is no reason to see them as suppressing or substituting local identity.’²²⁶ The seven factors listed earlier operated according to local conditions and possibilities. Augustus and *Roma* took their place along with the many other deities of this place or that.

Not, however, that they were ‘optional extras’, a new type of religion for anyone that happened to fancy it. They did not, that is to say, operate on the analogy of the voluntary mystery cults, though there were indeed ‘mysteries of Augustus’, as well, which remained popular for many years.²²⁷ Diversity and tolerance are not the same thing.²²⁸ Nor is it the case, as has sometimes been suggested, that the varied forms of imperial cult tended to involve only the elite. The high probability is that the related festivals, games, theatrical performances and the like were designed to involve the whole community, though of course, granted the fairly chaotic state of many ancient cities, we must not assume that all streets, slums and suburbs were checked to see if anyone was hiding away. There would, at the very least, be a strong civic sense that these cults were important for everyone, and that it was a matter not just of civic pride but of clear likely benefit to the whole community to display corporate loyalty to Rome as clearly as possible.²²⁹

To be sure, in many places there was an easy coexistence. Obviously Athene still presided over Athens, and Artemis over Ephesus; even Augustus would not displace these great names, and since they were female goddesses there was no question of they and he being assimilated. The imperial family seem to have taken their place along with the shrine of Demeter in Ephesus, which may have meant that they were involved also in the ‘mysteries’ of that cult.²³⁰ There is evidence for a combination of imperial cult with the worship of Asclepius at Pergamon, with the epithet *Sōtēr*, ‘saviour’, being transferred from the god of healing to the new god of empire.²³¹ There is evidence that Aphrodisias celebrated the relationship

between the local goddess Aphrodite (Venus) and the family of Julius Caesar, establishing a special kind of attachment.²³²

But things did not always dovetail together so smoothly. The hint of a different approach was there, as for instance in the slightly higher plinth for the imperial temple in Corinth. The new cults meant the cessation of a widespread earlier practice of public divine cults for prominent and recently dead citizens.²³³ The imperial cult was never assimilated to non-Greek cults such as those of Mēn and Cybele.²³⁴ And sometimes the new gods did indeed disrupt and displace the older ones.²³⁵ On one occasion – though admittedly Nero was out of his mind by this time – the emperor punished the Delphic oracle (for what offence we do not know) by killing its priests and stuffing their corpses into the crack from which the sacred vapour arose.²³⁶ Caligula, also by then a few *denarii* short of an *aureus*, not only tried to put up the huge statue of himself in Jerusalem but also, according to Dio, appropriated for himself the wonderful temple in Miletus which was being built for Apollo (though Dio may be wrong on this point²³⁷). He then outdid this by constructing two temples for himself in Rome, consecrating himself (and his horse) among the priests. He had, says Dio, a lodging on the Capitoline hill, in order to dwell alongside Jupiter;

but, disdaining to take second place in this union of households, and blaming the god for occupying the Capitoline ahead of him, he hastened to erect another temple on the Palatine, and wished to transfer to it the statue of the Olympian Zeus after remodelling it to resemble himself. But he found this to be impossible, for the ship built to bring it was shattered by thunderbolts, and loud laughter was heard every time that anybody approached as if to take hold of the pedestal; accordingly, after uttering threats against the statue, he set up a new one of himself.²³⁸

Other schemes demonstrated a similar determination to place himself and his own cult ahead of all others.²³⁹ Thus, though for the most part it was true that imperial cults took their place alongside, and sometimes blended with, local and traditional customs, there was always at least the veiled threat: whatever else you do, this one matters. Just as Augustus was the *pater patriae* in Rome, and was to be honoured as such, so he played an equivalent role across the empire. For all the present mood among historians to be wary of generalizations, it remains true that for most people

who lived anywhere in the Roman empire, the emperor's authority was made present 'through a series of mechanisms which permeated their everyday existences and constructed their understanding of the world'.²⁴⁰ What is more, when it came to the way the emperor was presented on coins and in statutes, 'there is a remarkable level of standardization throughout the empire.' The emperor appears in the guise of a magistrate, a general, or a god, and 'the repetitive accumulation of the images and titles on a range of media would have reinforced their association with the emperor's power.'²⁴¹ In any case, the fact that imperial festivals and rituals frequently outnumbered and outweighed those of other gods, and were distributed more widely than any other cults, made its own point.²⁴² As the followers of Jesus soon discovered, the easiest way for Roman authorities to get them to renounce Christian faith and profess their attachment to standard paganism was to force them to sacrifice, or swear by, the emperor. One could not with impunity opt out of showing such allegiance, an allegiance which more or less everybody else (except the Jews) was cheerfully expressing in terms of participation in one form or another of imperial cult.

Thus far we have concentrated on the east of the empire. We have already mentioned the provincial cult of Augustus and *Roma* at Lugdunum and Cologne, both established in the closing years of the first century BC. In this case, quite unlike the east, it was a matter of the provincial cult being imposed by the Roman government rather than growing piecemeal by local initiative with multiple precedents from previous ruler-cults and the like. What seems to have happened is that, after several years of this eastern development, the decision was taken in Rome that it would be politically advantageous, in the potentially volatile west (a lot of trouble had been taken by Caesar pacifying Gaul and by Augustus and Agrippa bringing order to parts of Spain, and Germany was to prove the biggest disaster of Augustus's long reign), to take the eastern model and adapt it for western use. This involved, particularly, the use of the goddess Victoria, a key feature of Augustus's complex religious world. She appears on the altar at Lugdunum; or rather, she appears double, in two columns holding crowns. The main thing Rome wanted the west to know was that the victories

already won, subjugating the vast expanse of Europe, were divinely inspired.

As with the east, however, independent western cities did not wait for the provinces themselves to take the lead.²⁴³ Here too, however, there was influence from the east. Mytilene, north of Ephesus on the Asia coast, sent an embassy as far as Spain, in 27 BC, to announce to the wider empire what remarkable honours it had just voted the *princeps*,²⁴⁴ and this added to the personal appreciation for the emperor in the area arising from his spending some time at Tarraco, on the north-east coast of Spain, around the same period, while recovering from illness. Not long after, both Tarraco and Arelate in Gaul established a cult of Augustus and *Roma*, and many other cities, anxious no doubt not to appear disloyal and to express their implicit position within the Roman hierarchy, followed suit.²⁴⁵ In addition, the long-standing presence of Roman armies in the area, with their own traditions of strong loyalty to their supreme commanders, will have pushed many communities in the same direction. Thus we should not be surprised that it was the military commander in north-west Spain who dedicated three altars there to Augustus, and his counterpart in the north-east empire, on the Elbe, who did the same there in 2 BC.²⁴⁶ Evidence for the spread of what we can loosely call emperor-worship is found in military contexts in northern Germany and in Switzerland, with weapons, drinking-cups and the like bearing relevant images and symbols. Gymnasia were a popular site, granted the regular occurrence of athletic games in honour of the emperor.²⁴⁷

There was indeed, then, no single thing we can call ‘the emperor cult’ at any time during the reign of Augustus. However, from the hints in Horace and Virgil to the enthusiastic temple-building in Asia and Palestine, to the soldiers’ drinking-cups in Switzerland, Augustus was the name that was found, literally, on everybody’s lips. The cults worked their way into domestic and workshop shrines, and onto signet rings, oil lamps and numerous other small artefacts.²⁴⁸ Libations were offered to the emperor at every feast whether public or private, a ruling from as early as 30 BC in the

enthusiastic aftermath of Actium.²⁴⁹ However varied the cultic phenomena, however piecemeal the development, however ambiguous some of the phraseology, people were doing with Augustus what they had long done with the ancient pantheon: building temples to his honour, invoking him in prayer, offering sacrifice to him.

Nobody, we should note, was forcing anybody else to give a theological or philosophical explanation of what precisely was meant or implied by all this. As ever, religion (and, in Cicero's sense, religions, plural) was/were something you did, not primarily something you felt or intuited. The older suggestion that formal emperor-cults were 'political' only, and that people looked elsewhere, not least to the mystery cults, for what today we think of as 'religious' experiences in the sense of internal feeling, forces an unreal distinction on to the texts.²⁵⁰ And the cults were, of course, socially useful, not just for the ruling power to solidify its grip but for many among the ruled to better themselves. To be a priest in the new cults, whether a member of the elite in the official cult or a person of lower rank serving the provincial cult (developed from the Roman equivalent) of the *Lares Augusti*, meant an important step up the ladder of local significance.²⁵¹ Thus, to quote the leading recent compendious study on Roman religion:

What was at stake for emperors, governors and members of civic élites was the whole web of social, political and hierarchical assumptions that bound imperial society together. Sacrifices and other religious rituals were concerned with defining and establishing relationships of power. Not to place oneself within the set of relationships between emperor, gods, élite and people was effectively to place oneself outside the mainstream of the whole world and the shared Roman understanding of humanity's place within that world. Maintenance of the social order was seen by the Romans to be dependent on maintenance of this agreed set of symbolic structures, which assigned a role to people at all levels.²⁵²

It will be important, pondering this summary, to place the apostle Paul in cities like Philippi, Ephesus or Corinth, and to ask how this newly configured symbolic universe affected him and his little communities of Jesus-followers. To this we shall return.

The cults, in all their variety, and for all their blending of Augustus with other divinities and especially with *Roma* herself, came down to a focus on

Augustus himself as the lynch-pin to the whole symbolic universe. Thus all the lines, east and west and in Rome itself, pointed to one conclusion, which was confirmed shortly after the great man finally died on 19 August in AD 14. Numerius Atticus, a senator, declared on oath that he had seen Augustus ascending, like Romulus, into heaven. Livia, Augustus's widow, paid him a million sesterces for his trouble. Augustus thus received in death what he had refused to receive in his life. Suddenly, therefore, what was formerly forbidden now became urgent. A shrine for Augustus was at last built in Rome itself, priests were appointed, with Livia herself as priestess and a new college of priests, the *sodales Augustales*, consisting of leading senators. A golden image of the late emperor was placed in the temple of Mars, the architectural focus of Augustus's civic building programme. Other rites and ceremonies were voted.²⁵³ Whereas with Julius Caesar it had taken some time for deification to occur, with Augustus it happened very quickly. This was the final, public, dotting of the 'i's and crossing of the 't's in the message that the world had been able to read for some time.

The speed with which it all happened was not only a natural response to the death of the man who had ruled Rome for half a century. It was also politically important for his successor.

(iii) Imperial Cult from Tiberius to Nero

Tiberius was now 'son of god': son of the divine Augustus. I have on my desk, as I write this, a denarius of the kind they showed to Jesus not long before his death. It says, around Tiberius's portrait: TI CAESAR DIVI AUG F AUGUSTUS: Augustus Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus. And, on the back, PONTIF MAXIM: *Pontifex Maximus*, the senior priest. Augustus had had to wait for the senior priesthood, playing his cards carefully.²⁵⁴ Tiberius had it from the day he acceded to the principate. From here on, the empire-related cults that had developed piecemeal, with different motivations and various forms, would increasingly become a major tool of imperial consolidation. They gathered pace, in fact, throughout the Julio-Claudian period.²⁵⁵

Tiberius began with few of Augustus's advantages. Julius had freely and clearly chosen Augustus as his heir, but Augustus only adopted Tiberius when several of his other preferred options predeceased him, and rumours of reluctance persisted.²⁵⁶ Augustus had faced huge odds and come through victorious, restoring peace to the whole Roman world; Tiberius had fought successful campaigns, but they were more in the way of routine imperial maintenance rather than desperate, life-or-death struggles for the very soul of Rome. Augustus had been hailed as the bringer of a new golden age; Tiberius was sneered at by Suetonius for ushering in a new iron age.²⁵⁷ Augustus had charm and polish; Tiberius was dour and moody. A distant analogy with British prime ministers suggests itself. It would insult Augustus to liken him to Tony Blair, and it would insult Gordon Brown to liken him to Tiberius, but the sources reflect a similar sense of transitional disappointment.

This can be seen at once in the response to proposals to worship him as a god. Augustus had refused, and people were pleased. Tiberius refused, not even allowing oaths to be sworn by his *genius*, and people said he was being grumpy and hypocritical.²⁵⁸ (Of course, here and elsewhere, we are dependent on sources from the best part of a century later, which may be based on nothing more than second-hand court gossip. When we see what Tiberius, and for that matter Claudius, who likewise comes in for later scorn, actually achieved, we realize that these sources are, to say the least, not giving us the whole picture.)

After some years the magistrates in Asia asked permission to build a second provincial imperial temple. Tiberius had supported them in two lawsuits against Roman officials. They were not only grateful; they wanted to send a signal to future officials that they were themselves in direct touch with the divine man at the top.²⁵⁹ The new temple there, eventually constructed in Smyrna, dedicated to Tiberius and the Senate, precipitated a similar request from Spain; but Tiberius, wary of criticism in Rome, declined.²⁶⁰ Several cities in Asia, however, developed cults of Tiberius, one of them (Myra) using very high-flown language in calling the emperor 'the exalted god, son of exalted gods, lord of land and sea, the benefactor

and saviour of the entire world'.²⁶¹ It was easier for Tiberius, as for other emperors, if such cities did not ask for explicit permission, since then he would feel obliged to back off for the sake of appearances in Rome itself.

For the most part, as regards imperial cult, Tiberius was content to allow the various forms of worship already launched in relation to Augustus, as well as to *Roma*, to flourish and develop. His forte was the steady advance and consolidation of imperial borders. *Sub Tiberio quies*, said Tacitus of the eastern empire during his reign; all was quiet on the eastern front. Well, maybe, from the point of view of Rome. The residents of Jerusalem might have had a different story to tell. A large pot was seething on Rome's back burner; it might have boiled over under Tiberius's successor, but even though that disaster was postponed, when it came its origins could without difficulty be traced back the best part of a century.²⁶²

If Tiberius was moody, Gaius Caligula was (at least in the end) straightforwardly mad – as contemporary writers were only too ready to emphasize.²⁶³ Tiberius had not allowed people to swear by his *genius*; Caligula insisted that they should.²⁶⁴ He showed no reticence, no waiting for requests to come in and then carefully considering them. He went ahead and ordered that a temple to himself be built in Miletus, and its inscription shows that he had taken the step against which Augustus and Tiberius had so firmly set their faces: he was to be addressed as *theos*, god. And he was the sole dedicatee of the temple; no place for *Roma*, as with Augustus's shrines, nor for the Senate, as for Tiberius's. As we saw, some said that the real reason why Caligula chose Miletus was that he wanted to take over the massive temple being built for Apollo, though this now seems less likely.²⁶⁵ Certainly Suetonius reports his extraordinary, and basically blasphemous, act of theological supersession: he brought ancient and sacred statues of the gods from Greece to Rome specifically so that he could have their heads taken off and his own head placed there instead. In the temple he had built to himself was a great, lifelike statue, made of gold, with officials on hand to dress it in clothes corresponding to the ones he himself happened to be wearing that day.²⁶⁶ It was another huge statue of himself that he planned to place in the Temple in Jerusalem, a project only thwarted (though both

Roman and Jewish officials managed to delay it) by his assassination in AD 41. The great hopes that had been expressed when he had come to the throne²⁶⁷ were replaced by a mixture of horror that Augustus should so soon have such a travesty for a successor, and terror at not knowing where his wild and violent behaviour would lead next. *Oderint dum metuant*, ‘Let them hate, so long as they fear’, was his motto; they did, and they did.²⁶⁸

Under Claudius things proceeded more slowly and cautiously. Claudius had many faults, but radical innovation was not one of them.²⁶⁹ Nevertheless, proceed they did. A statue of Claudius in Rome makes him look like Jupiter, complete with a sceptre and, of course, an eagle.²⁷⁰ In the provinces he was, predictably, worshipped as divine during his lifetime, with temples to him as far apart as Colchester in Britain and the Aegean island of Cos.²⁷¹ He is depicted in the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias as ruler over land and sea.²⁷² He made sure his grandmother, Livia Drusilla, was deified, and immediately the south Galatian city of Pisidian Antioch appointed a priestess for the cult, selected from a leading local family.²⁷³ Coins from Ephesus indicate that the marriage of Claudius and Agrippina was celebrated by depicting the couple with the bride taking on the guise of Artemis.²⁷⁴ There is evidence in this period of a new imperial temple at Hierapolis, up the Lycus valley from Ephesus and in the neighbourhood of Laodicea and Colosse. (Laodicea acquired a similar temple under Domitian in the 90s.)²⁷⁵

Further inland, in the heart of Anatolia, Claudius gave special attention to the recently established province of Galatia.²⁷⁶ Galatia, indeed, had on its own initiative displayed copies of Augustus’s *Res Gestae*, one of which has been found in Pisidian Antioch, where the new imperial temple, modelled it seems on Augustus’s temple of Mars Ultor in Rome, was particularly prominent.²⁷⁷ One town after another was Romanized and given new names reflecting Claudius’s patronage.²⁷⁸ Alongside imperial worship, games and holidays were associated with the wider imperial ideology. Local towns were able to develop their own style, blending imperial allegiance with local custom and local deities. ‘At the municipal level a variegated,

decentralized (but not uncontrolled) series of buildings, officials, and rituals emerged that could be found in any community in Asia.’²⁷⁹ The leading contemporary specialist on Anatolia has concluded that, even in the incomplete state of present archaeological research, there is every reason to suppose that across the region local public life was dominated by one manifestation or another of imperial cult.²⁸⁰ Augustus and his family were the new, and powerful, gods to be faced in city after city. Including, of course, the ones to which Paul went, and to which he subsequently wrote.

Claudius was officially deified after his death in 54, but in the first flush of enthusiasm that greeted the gifted and flamboyant Nero nobody bothered much about organizing official worship, and the temple to Claudius in Rome was only completed under Vespasian in the 70s. The mood of the time was expressed by Seneca in what may well be the most scurrilous work from that wry and sober pen: the *Apocolocyntosis* or ‘Pumpkinification’ of Claudius.²⁸¹ He describes what by now was a stock joke, the ceremony whereby someone had to swear that they had seen the late emperor ascending into heaven; and he describes, more particularly, the reaction of the gods when the shambling, bumbling Claudius arrived. I have often wondered whether Seneca, in his older age, came to regret this flouting of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, though it must at the time have seemed hilarious, and very much in keeping with the euphoria of Nero’s first months in office.

Nero announced at the start of his reign that he intended to model himself on Augustus, and his public relations people claimed that his would be an even happier age.²⁸² He issued coins which depicted the *Ara Pacis*, evoking that world of solemn, archaizing religious practice, the very essence of *pietas*. Though in some ways, by the end, he seemed as mad as Caligula, he did not attempt to place himself ahead of the normal pantheon. As we saw earlier, he concentrated on his public performances, singing and acting. At the same time, he was celebrated in lavish terms, as lord of the whole world, and as the new sun that had now arisen.²⁸³ The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, in the Lycus valley not far from Ephesus (and hence on the way to Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis), was built in the 60s to honour

Nero by representing the Julio-Claudian emperors and their families as Olympian deities and as the personification of forces in the natural world.²⁸⁴ Coins broadcast the same message:

Such symbols, representing a renaissance of Jovian imagery in imperial media, urged imperial subjects to believe that Nero's reign was ordained by Jupiter and represented the earthly copy of a cosmic model, if not the en fleshed embodiment of the divine.²⁸⁵

So too did imperial iconography in the provinces. In Aphrodisias, again, Nero had himself depicted as spreading the rule of Rome as a civilizing force across the whole world, 'Romanizing' conquered peoples as a sign of Rome's own moral superiority and peace-bringing mission: the further application of Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*.²⁸⁶ In some ways the greatest contribution Nero made to the story of divine emperors is the strange rumour or legend that arose after his death in 68 (he was only thirty-one, having come to the throne at the tender age of seventeen). According to this rumour, he had not died after all, but was away out in the east somewhere and would one day return. The notion seems to be picked up in the book of Revelation, and it may bear some analogy to the early Christian expectation that Jesus himself would one day return.²⁸⁷ Various characters pretending to be Nero *redivivus* did indeed show up, but few people were deceived.²⁸⁸ It was Nero's utter incompetence at most of the things that mattered – most of the things Augustus had done so well – that precipitated the worst crisis in the Roman world since the wars of the 40s and 30s BC. His supporters and colleagues died ahead of him, including Seneca himself. Nero was unmourned, quite possibly unburied, and certainly undivinized.

(iv) Imperial Cult under the Julio-Claudians: Conclusion

For the purposes of a book on Paul, we need not take the story further. None of the three emperors who followed Nero in quick succession were divinized, nor did they have time to do much about organizing cult at home or abroad. The next one who restores the pattern is Vespasian, succeeded by his son Titus; both were divinized only after death. His other son, Domitian,

who came next, Titus having not produced an alternative heir, followed the style of Caligula and Nero in wanting to be addressed as divine: it is he who demands to be called *dominus et deus*, 'lord and god', a phrase familiar to readers of John's gospel.²⁸⁹ Attempts are made from time to time to explain that Domitian was not quite as bad an emperor as Tacitus and Suetonius make out, but such comparisons are relative. For our purposes, we note the construction of yet another imperial temple at Ephesus, where fragments of what must have been a positively enormous statue of Domitian have come to light.²⁹⁰ It is still possible to see the chisel-marks with which, after his death in 96 AD, the locals in Ephesus erased his name from the stone marking the temple's dedication, and substituted that of Vespasian. A case of reverse supersessionism.

Looking back across the first century in Asia, we see what Friesen has called 'an evolving imperial discourse'.²⁹¹ At Pergamum in the 20s BC, Augustus, based in Rome, was hailed as the conqueror, and coupled with *Roma* herself. Tiberius, half a century later, was seen as the successor who continued to dispense the Roman justice, and coupled with the Senate (and with Livia, by now a kind of 'queen mother' figure). The project of Caligula changed the rules. His own behaviour was wild and over the top; but it opened the way for possible subsequent developments which were previously unthinkable. By the end of the century, in the middle of which Paul came through the eastern empire preaching the message of Jesus, these developments had produced a new civic and religious reality. The highest honour a city could now hope for was to become *neōkoros*, temple-guardian for the *Sebastoi*, the Augustus-family. Worshipping the emperors was well on the way to becoming a central and vital aspect not only of life in general but of civic and municipal identity. Whatever we say about either the intentions or the effects of Roman rulers from Julius Caesar to Vespasian, the richly diverse phenomena we loosely call 'imperial cult' were a vital part of a complex system of power, communication and control, in other words, of all the things empires find they need to do.²⁹² The (highly variegated) imperial cult was an 'institutional metaphor' which supplied 'a brief formula for the fundamental structure of the social system, which

otherwise could not be put into words’, and which worked actively ‘to transmit this system to future generations’.²⁹³

That does not mean that these cults were any the less ‘religious’, and instead merely ‘social’ or ‘political’. It would be good to think that we can now leave behind these essentially modernist antitheses, from whichever side of the table we approach them. Reductive analyses will miss the point; no doubt imperial cult did assist in keeping the provinces loyal and the empire stable, but it also gave shape and body to ordinary life, especially urban life with its feasts and banquets, its public games and festivals. Indeed, it can be argued that imperial cult was a significant factor in the development of the cities themselves in the period, creating and sustaining new patterns of civic life in regions not previously urbanized.²⁹⁴

This larger integration also applies to the ways in which the figure of the emperor was actually perceived. The overall picture of him as a model of *pietas*, leading his people in traditional worship while also being himself identified, in flexible ways, as the recipient of worship, enables us to glimpse a far more integrated world than most westerners have imagined since at least the eighteenth century. Indeed, the combination of an integrated worldview and a flexibility of approach allowed the Romans to develop a remarkable system in which ‘the emperor may have been a god, but he was also the mediator between his empire and the Other World.’²⁹⁵ The Roman provincial temples, without ceasing to be places of worship, often heartfelt and sincere, thus

served as crucial symbols of the cosmology that supported imperial rule, that defined the evolving identity of the province, and that promoted provincial obedience at various levels of society.²⁹⁶

It was this cosmology, this identity, and this obedience which some perceived to be threatened by the message of Paul. And, though these issues of worldview (‘cosmology’ in Friesen’s language) continued to loom large in imperial cult, there was also plenty of room for ‘personal maturation and rites of passage’.²⁹⁷ That, too, when translated into more obviously Jewish language, was a vital and central part of Paul’s teaching. And, in particular, the developing discourse of imperial cult in Asia constantly stressed the fact

that the Roman empire, once launched, was going to continue, and to bring its great blessings to the world, for ever. 'The discourse of imperial cults was committed to preventing the imagination from imagining the end of the world.' No, declared Paul: God has fixed a day on which he will have the world brought to justice.²⁹⁸

That was, of course, an essentially Jewish view. The Jewish objection to the entire Roman view of the gods was not simply about monotheism (though that was of course the basis of the standard critique of idolatry), nor even about election (their belief that they, rather than the Romans or anybody else, were the chosen people of the one true God). It was about eschatology: about their belief that the one God had determined on a divine justice that would be done, and would be seen to be done, in a way that Roman imperial justice somehow never quite managed. Rome's claim to have brought the world into a new age of justice and peace flew, on eagle's wings, in the face of the ancient Jewish belief that these things would finally be brought to birth through the establishment of a new kingdom, the one spoken of in the Psalms, in Isaiah, in Daniel. Thus, though their resistance to empire drew on the ancient critique of idolatry, the sense that Israel's God would overthrow the pagan rule and establish his own proper kingdom in its place led the Jewish people to articulate their resistance in terms of eschatology. Sooner or later, the eagle would meet its match.

[5. Resistance to Empire: the Jews](#)

Resistance to Roman rule was natural and widespread, from western Spain to far-off Parthia.²⁹⁹ Some attempts at resistance were startlingly successful, like the German destruction of three legions in 9 AD. Julius Caesar did not stay so long in Gaul merely to practice his Gallic accent, and it was not without good cause that Augustus had his close colleague Agrippa away at the wars for such lengthy periods. *Oderint dum metuant*, 'Let them hate, so long as they fear', was not simply the motto which Suetonius ascribes to Caligula, but also, broadly speaking, the policy which Rome was bound to

follow across the board, granted its combination of proud history and deep ideology. Fighting and killing, crushing opposition by a combination of sheer force and strategic skill: that was what Rome, better than most, knew how to do.

Many subject peoples were, of course, grateful for the Roman benefits: good trade routes, overall peace, the absence of piracy on the seas, and moderately trustworthy systems of justice. There were many, not least those involved with the imperial cults, who saw the link with Rome as a chance for their own social and economic advancement. And it was not only from outside that criticism of the empire arose. We only have to think of the scathing work of Tacitus and Suetonius, the poetry of Martial and Juvenal, or Lucan's parody of Virgil. Greek writers, angry at the Roman claim that Latin literature had superseded them, fought back.³⁰⁰ There were also philosophical critiques, though once a philosopher had become emperor, a century or so after Nero, that tradition, too, turned into reflection rather than resistance.³⁰¹ Once things started to go badly wrong in the third century AD (barbarian invasions and the like), critique came home to roost, and as in the century before Augustus Rome once again saw a succession of bloody coups and violent grasping after power.

But it is with the Jews that we must finish this account of Rome in the time of Paul the apostle.³⁰² Here, of course, we are joining up, in a long loop, with chapter 2 above. There is no need to repeat either what was said there or the much fuller discussion of Jewish eschatology and resistance in Part III of *The New Testament and the People of God*. Our task is simply to remind ourselves of the Jewish context from within which Saul of Tarsus will have viewed, and reacted to, the Roman reality. For that, we highlight three points.

First, throughout the period there was a lively Jewish tradition, in the middle east itself, of resistance not only to external empire but to internal corrupt rulers. The rise of the Jewish parties, especially the Pharisees and Essenes, had begun in the second century BC when discontent set in with the Hasmonean house, after the glorious Maccabean revolution had failed to produce the new age it had seemed to promise. Hostility to that branch of

home-made aristocracy carried over to its successor, the house of Herod. When, in the middle of all this, the eagle landed in Jerusalem, supporting the rich elites and encouraging them to keep the populace in order, that only made matters worse. Attempts to construct some sort of mediating position, as for instance with Herod's double act, building a temple to Augustus on the one hand and rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple on the other, may have seemed to some like a sensible accommodation, but such things certainly seemed provocative to others. Looking back through the somewhat distorting (but nevertheless informative) prisms of Philo and Josephus, we can see that for many Jews it was not a matter of being 'pro-Roman' or 'anti-Roman', but of trying to find a *modus vivendi* that would keep the peace without burdening the conscience. Of particular importance was the promise made by the Jews, across the empire, that though they could not and would not pray *to* the emperor they would certainly pray *for* the emperor, and would offer sacrifice, in the one place where they were allowed to do so, not *to* him but on his behalf.³⁰³ Had all emperors, and for that matter provincial governors, been possessed of the same canny political skill as Augustus himself, the *modus vivendi* might have held, but that, to be frank, was never on the cards. The various movements of revolt could easily, in fact, have spilled over into outright rebellion of one sort or another at the time of Caligula's crazy plan to install his statue in the Temple, or at one of the lesser moments of tension such as the placing of a statue of the emperor in the synagogue at Dora (on the coast, near Mount Carmel).³⁰⁴ These, indeed, may have been deliberate acts of provocation, designed to show the Jewish people up as disloyal to Rome.³⁰⁵

Discontent in the Jewish homeland did not, then, go away. (Things were quite different out in the Diaspora, with a wide spectrum of Jewish life making its way, and its home, as best it could.)³⁰⁶ With hindsight (assisted not least by Josephus) we can see that the revolt of AD 66, and the terrible war and national devastation which it precipitated, was an accident waiting to happen. Even after Jerusalem's destruction in 70 and the subsequent massacre (or mass suicide) at Masada, hope refused to die. It would take another seventy years or so, another Jeremiah-like period of exile, before

the final great revolt. A star emerged from Jacob, but was quickly eclipsed. After 135 there would be no more Jewish protests against Roman rule.³⁰⁷

Second, the movements of thought which fuelled these protests were by no means merely the ordinary discontents of subject peoples. As we saw earlier, they were sustained through the symbolically encoded and constantly refreshed sense of living within a large and powerful narrative, as yet unfinished, stretching back even further than the great story with which the Augustan empire had narrated itself into legitimacy through Livy and Virgil. The Pentateuch, at least as read by some at the time, told the story from pre-historical beginnings to the ultimate future of God's people.³⁰⁸ The prophets pointed to a coming time of glorious redemption which, as everybody knew, had not yet arrived. Israel's God had not come back to dwell among his people and rescue them from their enemies. The Wisdom of Solomon, the text to which we went two chapters ago for an instance of Jewish engagement with pagan philosophy, and in the last chapter for a scathing denunciation of pagan religion, also has harsh words for emperor-worship:

When people could not honour monarchs in their presence, since they lived at a distance, they imagined their appearance far away, and made a visible image of the king whom they honoured,

so that by their zeal they might flatter the absent one as though present.

Then the ambition of the artisan impelled even those who did not know the king to intensify their worship.

For he, perhaps wishing to please his ruler, skilfully forced the likeness to take more beautiful form,

and the multitude, attracted by the charm of his work, now regarded as an object of worship the one whom shortly before they had honoured as a human being.

And this became a hidden trap for humankind, because people, in bondage to misfortune or to royal authority,

bestowed on objects of stone or wood the name that ought not to be shared.³⁰⁹

The book of Daniel became a particular catalyst for revolt, drawing together the earlier history of the world in lurid apocalyptic visions, and insisting that the new day was about to dawn through which the old ages of paganism, gold, silver, bronze and iron, would be collectively smashed by

something new, a 'stone'. The frightening sequence of imperial monsters would be overthrown by a great divine act of judgment through which 'the people of the holy ones of the Most High' would inherit their worldwide kingdom. What was more, all this would happen very soon, since the original exile had been extended to seventy times seven years, and that half-millennium was very nearly up (though nobody could quite agree when it would actually happen). Josephus tells us that this oracle fanned the revolutionary flames, and we can see it being reinterpreted and reapplied in the period between 70 and 135. The eagle would swoop down, all glorious with its wings and feathers, but the lion of Judah would emerge from the forest, confront it and defeat it.³¹⁰ Then, as in Daniel, the one true God would set up his own kingdom, which would fulfil at last the dream which was uncannily shared by biblical psalmists and prophets on the one hand and pagan imperialists on the other: a rule of justice that would stretch from one sea to another. In the wild world we loosely call 'apocalyptic', a literary and spiritual vehicle was found which could express and channel the long historical memory of the Jewish people and direct it, quite specifically, to one type of revolution or another.³¹¹ What sort of revolution it ought to be was one of the key questions on which Jews of the day were radically divided.

Third, there was one Jew, born under Augustus and executed under Tiberius, who modelled, articulated, and eventually gave his life for a different dream of divine empire. The point remains inevitably contentious, but I persist in seeing Jesus of Nazareth as, among many other things, the spokesman for what he himself saw as a new movement which would fulfil the ancient Israelite prophecies, which would bring Israel's strange, dark narrative to its climax, and would launch upon the world the new reality of which Augustus's 'golden age' would be seen as a parody. 'What is truth?' asked the imperial representative. Jesus claimed (and his first followers repeated this claim, since they believed he had been raised from the dead) that the ultimate truth lay in the new manifestation of the one God which had come about in and through him, his work and his death.

The birds that had hovered over Israel all those years had seen the story through. Instead of the wise owls of Athens, a descendant of Solomon had come who would see in the dark and bring hidden truth to light. Instead of the sacrificial cock offered to Asclepius, a sacrifice had occurred which, upstaging even the ancient cult and priesthood of the Jerusalem Temple, would bring healing at every level. Instead of the eagle with its talons and claws, Jesus summoned people to a different kind of empire: peacemaking, mercy, humility and a passion for genuine and restorative justice. Saul of Tarsus, born and bred a Pharisee in a world shaped by the wisdom of Greece, the religion of the east, and the empire of Rome, came to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's Messiah and the world's true Lord, and that this Jesus had called him, Saul, to take the 'good news' of his death, resurrection and universal lordship into the world of wisdom, religion and empire. That transformative vocation, articulated through the worldview which it provided and the theology which it produced, is the subject of the rest of this book. Earlier three birds on a tree; now only the one.

¹ On the difference between *dei filius* ('son of [a] god') and *divi filius* ('son of a deified one'), and the effective obliteration of this distinction in Greek, see below, 328f. On imperial coinage and some of its echoes in the NT, see Kreitzer 1996.

² In the only surviving free-standing ancient copy of the Capitoline Triad, Jupiter has his eagle and Minerva her owl. Juno, meanwhile, has a peacock. See the illustration in Rüpke 2007 [2001], 77; the piece, found in Tivoli, is dated to the late Antonine period (c. AD 160–80), and is now in the Museo Archeologica Nazionale di Palestrina.

³ cf. 1 Macc. 12.1–4.

⁴ The discussion of Sherwin-White 1969 [1963], 144–62, remains basic. There is, in my judgment, no good historical reason to doubt Paul's Roman citizenship. On the privileges and exemptions granted piecemeal to Jews under Rome in the period see esp. Smallwood 2001, esp. 168–72. The phrase *religio licita*, often used in this connection, is Tertullian's much later summary (*Apol.* 21.1) of more complicated and disparate phenomena, and is in any case made not to give a precise legal statement of all matters concerning Jews but to ground his further point that Christianity has grown out of a *religio* which was, in general terms, *licita* under Rome.

⁵ See Richardson 2012, 105. On the grain-supply see e.g. *Jos. War* 2.382, 386 (eight months' supply from Africa, four months' from Egypt); *War* 4.605f. (Vespasian securing Egypt in order, if necessary, to starve out Vitellius).

⁶ cf. 1 Macc. 8.17–32.

⁷ On Herod see e.g. Richardson 1996.

⁸ I use the honorific 'Augustus' to denote the man born Gaius Octavius and later adopted by Julius Caesar as his heir and so regularly referred to throughout the period as 'Caesar' (adoption for such purposes was a common Roman practice). He only acquired 'Augustus' in 27 BC, but just as we might say, 'The Queen was born in 1926,' even though she only became queen in 1952, it is

convenient to refer to him anachronistically in this way to distinguish him from e.g. Julius Caesar himself.

⁹ Again, [see below, 345](#).

¹⁰ 7.18.

¹¹ 4 Ez.12.10–12.

¹² On this whole chapter, see now Harrison 2011, which arrived too late for detailed engagement but which gives massive support, and extra detail, to much of the overall picture I am painting.

¹³ Ps. 72.8; cf. 89.25; Zech. 9.10; and, behind them, Ex. 23.31 (cp. 1 Kgs. 4.21).

¹⁴ Despite, of course, Virgil's anachronistic 'prophecies', e.g. *Aen.* 1.278f.; 4.229–31; 6.781–853; 12.839f., on which see below, 305–12. On Roman awareness of the Jewish scriptural 'oracle' about a forthcoming world ruler [see below, 346f.](#)

¹⁵ Tac. *Agric.* 30.6: 'they make a wilderness and call it "peace".' On the whole theme, and the panoply of imperial power which the claim of *pax Romana* summarized, see esp. Wengst 1987 [1986].

¹⁶ For this whole exceedingly complex story see now e.g. Richardson 2012, 1–46.

¹⁷ Virg. *Aen.* 1.276f. assumes the city is called after the man.

¹⁸ Woolf 2001, 316f.

¹⁹ I use the terms 'republic' and 'republican' in full awareness of the dangers of anachronism, not only with contemporary American politics but also with the contrast in Europe between the older 'monarchies' like the UK and the Netherlands and the newer 'republics' like France and Germany. The Romans *res publica* was much more than 'a state without a monarch'; it was the entire, ordered, stable network of society. [See below.](#)

²⁰ That, at least, is one possible interpretation of a highly complex set of events. Cicero, famously, spoke of Rome being lucky to be born in the year of his consulship. An accidental reverse prophecy: Cicero was thinking of the rescue and re-establishment of the republic, but it was in fact the year in which Octavian, later Caesar Augustus, was born (see Vell. Pat. *Hist.* 36.1).

²¹ One writer who was active in politics and the army at the time and then retired, under Augustus, to study and write, was Gaius Asinius Pollo (d. AD 4), who declared that this 'triumvirate' was the beginning of the end for the republic. This 'triumvirate' was later dubbed the 'first', as opposed to the 'second', formed in 43 of Antony, Lepidus and Octavian; but the first, here described, was strictly an unofficial arrangement.

²² Ps. *Sol.* 2.25–31 reflects grimly on Pompey's fate; he had not been forgiven for his violation of the Temple. See *NTPG* 159f. with other refs.

²³ On honorifics see Novenson 2012, 87–97. Dio (53.16.8) says that 'Augustus' implies that Octavian was 'more than human', and that this was why the word came through in Greek as *sebastos*, one who was revered (deification had long been the fashion for rulers in the east, which perhaps explains Dio's point of view). So too Livy *Praef.* 7; 1.7.9; 5.41.8; 8.6.9; 8.9.10; Ovid *Fast.* 1.589, 607–16; both contrast the adjective *augustus*, 'sacred', with *humanus*, '[merely] human'. Suet. *Aug.* 7.2 says that 'Augustus' was chosen as more suitable than 'Romulus' (i.e. seeing Octavian as Rome's second founder), because 'sanctuaries and all places consecrated by the augurs are known as "august"' (tr. Graves in the Penguin Classics edition).

²⁴ See *RG* 1.7; and *OCD* s.v. *Princeps*, not least on the vicissitudes of the title both in Greek translation and in subsequent imperial usage (when Augustus's fine-grained distinctions were steadily eroded), e.g. Domitian's use of *dominus*.

²⁵ *RG.* 2.13 (nb. esp. the phrase *parta victoriis pax*, 'peace secured by victories'); Suet. *Aug.* 22; Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.258f. Virgil refers repeatedly to the shutting of Janus's doors: *Aen.* 1.214–6; 7.609f.;

9.642f. The triple triumph (cf. Richardson 2012, 75f.) is referred to in Virg. *Georg.* 3.26–39; *Aen.* 8.714–6; for interesting details, cp. Beard 2007, 143–5, 303f. On the celebrations: e.g. Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.255f.; *Carm.* 4.15.4–9; Virg. *Aen.* 1.293–6; 7.607; 12.198.

²⁶ For the sneer: Tac. *Ann.* 1.2: Augustus enticed the army with gifts, the people with food, and everyone with the sweet delights of peace. The clipped Latin is even sharper: *militem donis, populum annona, cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit*. See the discussion in Galinsky 1996, 139, with reference to similar comments from e.g. Seneca and Pliny. On *pax Augusta*: Vell. *Pat. Hist.* 2.126.3. The goddess *pax* is hardly known before this time. Later, after further peace-bringing victories, Augustus would commission the remarkable *Ara Pacis*, now gloriously restored on the banks of the Tiber. Even the gruff Epictetus salutes Caesar’s ‘great peace’, as a result of which ‘there are no wars any longer, nor battles, no brigandage on a large scale, nor piracy, but at any hour we may travel by land, or sail from the rising of the sun to its setting’ (3.13.9, tr. Oldfather [Loeb]). The fact that he goes on to point out that Caesar cannot save us from fever, shipwreck, fire, earthquake and lightning (whereas philosophy, he says, can) should not blunt the force of the remarkable opening point.

²⁷ cp. the subtitle of Richardson 2012: ‘The Restoration of the Republic and the Establishment of the Empire’.

²⁸ For a recent discussion of Syme’s overall proposal of a ‘revolution’, see Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 441–54.

²⁹ See Mellor 1975; Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.158f.; and [below, 317](#).

³⁰ It is impossible, and for our purposes unnecessary, even to summarize the twists and turns by which *imperium* and *imperator* came to have the meaning they had by the time of the apostle Paul: see esp. Richardson 2008, summarized in Richardson 2012, 230–4 (by the end of Augustus’s reign *imperium*, formerly referring to a category of military authority, had come to denote the territory over which the *imperator* now ruled).

³¹ The official *imperium maius* could be granted to others as well as the emperor, as it was under Tiberius to Germanicus for his command in the east in AD 17 (Tac. *Ann.* 2.43). What Augustus had was a recognition that, when he was in a particular province, his power would override that of the particular local governor. Cf. Richardson 2012, 101, 105: Augustus’s aim was to secure power without office, but just as many were suspicious of his power so many did not want him to be without the status of office.

³² RG 6.

³³ The claim to have restored the republic is found at the start of the *RG*; cf. too Cic. *Phil.* 3.3–5; cf. Galinsky 1996, 45f. See now Richardson 2012, 233–40: once we realize that *res publica* is not exactly the same thing as ‘the republic’ in the sense of ‘the previous non-monarchical constitution’, but refers rather to the peaceful stabilizing and ordering of a highly complex society, the claim of restoration is not so outlandish. See too Judge 2008a, 221.

³⁴ So Galinsky 1996, 3–9.

³⁵ cf. Galinsky 1996, 85f., with 405 n. 22. On the ‘Augustan virtues’ (e.g. Victoria, Fortuna) as an extension of imperial cult see e.g. Clark 2007, *passim*, and Revell 2009, 96, with refs.

³⁶ Suet. *Calig.* 60 (tr. Graves in the Penguin Classics): ‘The conspirators had no particular candidate for Emperor in mind, and most senators were so bent on restoring the Republic that the Consuls summoned the first assembly not to the House, because it was named the Julian Building, but to the Capitol. Some wanted all memory of the Caesars obliterated, and their temples destroyed.’ Rebellion was mooted, too, after Augustus’s death, that time among the army in Germany (Vell. *Pat.* 2.125.1–3).

³⁷ Notwithstanding Horace's suggestion that if Augustus could add Britain and Persia to his empire he would be reckoned a *praesens divus*, a god on earth (on the analogy of Jupiter who, by thundering in the heavens, makes us believe that he is king): *Od.* 3.5.1–4.

³⁸ *Juv. Sat.* 8.211–30; cf. Dio 62.14 ('though, in his own words, possessing a world, he went on playing the lyre, making proclamations, and acting tragedies'). On Nero's attempt to deflect criticism by his choosing particular theatrical parts (*Suet. Ner.* 21.3; Dio 63.9.4) see Champlin 2003, 96–107. We should not forget that Augustus had introduced legislation to ban senators and their families appearing in theatrical performances (Dio 54.2.5; 16.2).

³⁹ On the so-called 'year of four emperors' (five in eighteen months, counting from Nero's suicide on 11 June 68 to Vespasian's arrival in Rome on 21 December 69, the day after Vitellius's death) see Morgan 2006.

⁴⁰ *War* 6.312–5; cf. 6.399–408 (where Josephus describes his own 'prophesying' of this to Vespasian in person); *Ant.* 10.267 (where Jos. hails Daniel as the only prophet who predicted chronology). Josephus's point is picked up by Suetonius (*Vesp.* 4.5, describing this as a *vetus et constans opinio*, an ancient and well-established view which led the Jews to revolt, including the capture of an eagle standard) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.13). Tacitus suggests that the prophecy referred to Titus as well as Vespasian. See the discussion in *NTPG* 312f.

⁴¹ Syme 1939, ch. 30.

⁴² Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 35f. Cp. the neat summary definition of 'imperial ideology' in Meggitt 2002, 162 n. 8: 'the cluster of interrelated, mutually suggestive ideas, practices, and their material forms, that articulated and legitimized the dominance of the Roman emperor in the Roman world.'

⁴³ Richardson 2008, vii. One would also, of course, need to examine every inscription, every coin, and every archaeological site ...

⁴⁴ *Suet. Aug.* 28; Dio 56.30.3; Galinsky 1996, 97f.

⁴⁵ See detailed discussion in Galinsky 1996, 213–24.

⁴⁶ So Pliny *NH* 36.101f., echoed of course in the various things Josephus said about Jerusalem and its Temple (e.g. *War* 5.161, 222–4; *Ant.* 15.380–425).

⁴⁷ The story is told by Ovid *Fast.* 5.569–78 (assassins); 579–80 (Parthia). Mars, says Ovid, has thus earned the title of 'avenger' twice over (5.595). Ovid also points up, with verbal allusion, the parallel with the climax of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas takes vengeance on Turnus for his oath-breaking and the death of Pallas (Galinsky 1996, 211, citing *Fast.* 5.575 in parallel with *Virg. Aen.* 12.949).

⁴⁸ See the detailed description in Galinsky 1996, 197–213.

⁴⁹ Zanker 1988, 144f.

⁵⁰ So *RG* 2.13; Ovid *Fast.* 1.717–18; Hor. *Carm. Saec. passim*; Virg. *Georg.* 2.136–72: the 'perpetual spring', and trees yielding fruit twice a year, and the other Italian delights of which he speaks, are directly related to the 'war horse' (145) and the vigorous military heroes (167–9), culminating in Caesar himself who has conquered the world of the east (170–2), referring thus obliquely to the victory over Antony and Cleopatra.

⁵¹ Richardson 2008, 3; and e.g. an inscription from Turkey in relation to Pompey, and various coins: see, for a start, Oakes 2005, 317f.

⁵² See Galinsky 1996, 141–55.

⁵³ *RG* 34.

⁵⁴ See Galinsky 1996, 80–90, with a detailed discussion of the four themes and their multiple resonances. The word *clipeus* was also sometimes spelled *clupeus* or *clypeus*.

⁵⁵ Galinsky 1996, 109, 155–64.

⁵⁶ A nice irony: the US one-dollar bill has displayed its proud allusion to Virgil (*Ec.* 4.5–8), *novus ordo seclorum* ('a new order of the ages'), since 1935; but I discover that few Americans are aware either of the phrase, or its derivation, or why it was chosen as the inscription for the Great Seal of 1782, matching the imperial claim of the Augustan age with a similar claim for the age of Thomas Jefferson.

⁵⁷ Wallace-Hadrill 1986, 73.

⁵⁸ Galinsky 1996, 33.

⁵⁹ Galinsky 1996, 28–41.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Günther and Müller 1988.

⁶¹ cf. *JVG* 451 n. 32; and cp. Galinsky 1996, 92f. and esp. Feeney 2007, ch. 4. The idea of an original 'golden age' from which the human race has subsequently declined goes back to Hesiod *Works* 109–26. Well-known expositions include Aratus *Phaen.* 100–14; Ovid *Met.* 1.89–112; Dan. 2.31–45. The golden age is associated with the rule of Saturn, or Chronos; and those who envisage a new 'golden age' in their own day often claim that Saturn is returning at last: [see below](#).

⁶² Cleopatra: 1.37; military success: 2.9, 12; return to Rome: 3.14; cf. 4.2, 5, 15. Part of Augustus's propaganda success at this point was owed to his emphasis on 'Italia' as the centre of his world, contrasting with what was seen as Antony's degenerate orientalism.

⁶³ *Od.* 1.12.

⁶⁴ Galinsky 1996, 100f.

⁶⁵ Hor. *Carm. Saec.* 17–24.

⁶⁶ *ib.* 37–52.

⁶⁷ *ib.* 53–60. *Virtus* would perhaps better be translated 'valour' (see above on the *clipeus virtutis*). Once again, the emphasis here is on Italy as the place where prosperity is to be found.

⁶⁸ *ib.* 62–8.

⁶⁹ Hor. *Od.* 4.15.4–32, tr. Lyons 2007, 200f. (lightly modifying Lyons 1996, 151f.) The son of Anchises and Venus was of course Aeneas.

⁷⁰ *Od.* 1.6.

⁷¹ Hor. *Epod.* 16: Jupiter, he says, has turned the golden *saeculum* to bronze, and then to iron (echoing the scheme in Ovid, on which see below), so it would be better to leave the country and sail to a fantasy land far away (16.63–6): see Feeney 2007, 132–4 and other refs. there.

⁷² The *princeps* was famous for not being disturbed by rude comments in the Senate or by lampoons directed against him, though he did pass a law, which in our electronic age we might understand, banning the use of false signatures for such things: Suet. *Aug.* 54f.

⁷³ *Od.* 3.30.

⁷⁴ 1.89–112.

⁷⁵ See S. E. Hinds in *OCD* 1085.

⁷⁶ See Feeney 2007, 103f.

⁷⁷ *Met.* 1.89–112; see Galinsky 1996, 99f.; 15.857–60 etc., on which see Feeney 2007, 135.

⁷⁸ Vell. Pat. 2.126.1–4.

⁷⁹ See the suggestive discussion in Feeney 2007, 100–4.

⁸⁰ On Livy see e.g. Galinsky 1996, 280–87.

⁸¹ *Ann.* 4.34.

⁸² 4.35.

⁸³ 4.19f. A. de Sélincourt, the Penguin Classics editor and translator, appends a note that the final paragraph of Livy's account of this incident appears to have been his own later addition to the book, since in 4.32 Cossus is again referred to as an 'army tribune'.

⁸⁴ As in a minority tradition: e.g. Val. Max. 3.2.4. For the discussion: Richardson 2012, 89f.

⁸⁵ On the reconfiguration of narrative in empires see Alcock 2001; Woolf 2001.

⁸⁶ See ch. 2 above.

⁸⁷ His name in Latin is normally spelled 'Vergilius', and some today prefer to use 'Vergil' as a ('slightly historicizing') form (*OCD* 1602) rather than the traditional English spelling, first found on a fourth-century inscription. On Virgil in the present context see e.g. Galinsky 1996, 246–53. Woolf 2001, 315 emphasizes that Virgil and Livy 'offered new formulations of Roman identity, of the Romans' shared past, of their destiny, and of their special relationship to the gods and the cosmic order'. He points out that the formation, under Augustus and his immediate successors, of an 'educational canon' of such works, and including Cicero, Sallust, Caesar and others, was a deliberate part of the 'development of a consciousness of empire'.

⁸⁸ cf. Coleiro 1979, 222–33; e.g. Constantine *Oratio* in *PL* 8.454–66. Discussion in Klauck 2000 [1995/6], 286–8.

⁸⁹ In Latin: *magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo*. This is the origin of *novus ordo saeculorum*.

⁹⁰ *Ec.* 4.4–17. The idea of Rome being born again in someone's consulship had already, of course, been claimed by Cicero in 63 BC.

⁹¹ 4.52.

⁹² If so, disappointment followed; the child died. See *OCD* 1604 (Fowler and Fowler) with other refs., suggesting that influence from Jewish messianism, though not necessary, is not in itself unlikely.

⁹³ 3.16.

⁹⁴ 3.26–36. On the triumphs see Richardson 2012, 75f.; Beard 2007, 143–5, 303f.

⁹⁵ *Georg.* 4.560–62.

⁹⁶ *Georg.* 3.26–39.

⁹⁷ See Woolf 2001, 319.

⁹⁸ Harrison (Harrison 1999; 2002; 2011) sees that there is an 'Augustan eschatology' of the 'golden age' etc., but not that it involves a long narrative build-up.

⁹⁹ According to Plutarch (*Alex.* 8.2) Alexander took with him on his campaigns a copy of Aristotle's recension of the *Iliad*, regarding it as a handbook in the art of war; and once, hearing in a dream a man quoting *Od.* 4.354f., followed the advice in relation to the founding of what became Alexandria in Egypt (Plutarch *Alex.* 26.2–5). *But there is no sign that he thought in terms of the ancient poems as providing a sustained narrative leading up to his own day.*

¹⁰⁰ See ch. 2 above.

¹⁰¹ Tac. *Dial.* 13: see Beacham 2005, 164 with other refs. Meggitt 2002, 145 takes this to refer to lines of Virgil, about Augustus's divinity, quoted during imperial games, but that is not what Tacitus says.

¹⁰² On the spread of Virgil's work see *OCD* 1603; and Galinsky 2005, 3, with other refs.

¹⁰³ 1.1–7, 33, 205f.

¹⁰⁴ e.g. 7.240f.

¹⁰⁵ 1.234, 278f., 282.

¹⁰⁶ 1.270–77.

¹⁰⁷ 1.267f., 286–90.

[108](#) 1.68; 2.293–5; 3.12; 8.11, 39. Scheid 2005, 177 defines *pietas* as ‘a correct social relation with the gods’.

[109](#) 4.274–6.

[110](#) 4.625–9 (cf. 10.11–15); 630–705.

[111](#) 6.781–4; Fairclough/Goold in the Loeb, translating *animos aequabit Olympo* as ‘[extend] her ambitions to the skies’, fail to bring out the force of this prophecy of divine emperors, on which cf. also e.g. 9.642.

[112](#) 6.780–803.

[113](#) 6.818–20.

[114](#) 6.847–53.

[115](#) 8.370–406.

[116](#) As Feeney points out (2007, 102), ‘the barely averted destruction of Rome by the Gauls (*Aen.* 8.652–62) comes midway in time between the foundation of the city (8.635) and the barely averted destruction of Rome by Antonius and Cleopatra (8.671–713).’ These were the only ‘historical’ events commemorated on the republican calendar, the *Fasti Antiates* (Feeney 103).

[117](#) 8.714–22.

[118](#) [Below, 1078–85, 1291–3.](#)

[119](#) 8.731.

[120](#) 12.829–42.

[121](#) This is the only sense, ironically, in which the rose-tinted view of Ogilvie 1986, 124 may be upheld: ‘the social and constitutional recovery which [Augustus] engineered could not have succeeded unless it had been based on a widely diffused religious confidence,’ a confidence which ‘springs from a spiritual awareness’.

[122](#) Among recent studies, those of Hardin 2008, esp. 23–5, Naylor 2010, and Harrison 2011, ch. 1 offer useful overviews of scholarship, particularly in relation to early Christianity. See too Friesen 1993; Brent 1999 (see the brief critique by Rowe 2005b, 285). Klauck 2000, 250–330 gives a full survey and multiple bibliographies. Rüpke 2011 offers provocative reflections on method. Issue 27.3 of *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (March 2005) is given over to the issue, with a helpful short introduction by David Horrell. For my own earlier essays see *Perspectives*, chs. 12, 16, 27; and e.g. Wright 2005a [*Fresh Perspectives*], ch. 4. [See further below, ch. 12.](#)

[123](#) Much excellent earlier work was done by Deissmann, e.g. Deissmann 1978 [1908], 346–9. As Horrell 2005, 251 points out, Deissmann insisted *both* that there were obvious and unmissable parallels between Paul’s language and that of the empire *and* that this did not necessarily represent borrowing, resulting though in what he calls a ‘polemical parallelism’. As Sanders suggests in another context (Sanders 2008a, 32f.), we are in a measure simply picking up earlier German historical scholarship (albeit, in Deissmann’s case, assuming that the overarching category under discussion was ‘religion’) at the point where it was broken off in favour of a dehistoricized existentialism – which nevertheless still thought of itself as ‘historical-critical’.

[124](#) A point that seems to be overlooked by Meggitt 2002, 143 in an otherwise important article. On the work of Horsley, Crossan and others see *Perspectives*, as in [note 122 above](#).

[125](#) Price 1996, 841, 846f. Similarly, Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.348. It is interesting to compare Price’s repeated strictures with his earlier sweeping statements in e.g. Price 1984, 247f., where ‘the imperial cult’ is emphatically singular and its effects described in strong, broad generalizations: ‘The imperial cult ... created a relationship of power between subject and ruler ... The imperial cult stabilized the religious order of the world ... The imperial cult ... constructed the

reality of the Roman empire.’ Perhaps a New Testament scholar may be forgiven for following an expert in the path from early generalization to subsequent multiple analysis.

¹²⁶ Rives 2007, 149.

¹²⁷ See too Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.318: instead of *the* ‘imperial cult’, there was ‘a series of different cults sharing a common focus in the worship of the emperor, his family or predecessors, but ... operating quite differently according to a variety of different local circumstances ... Besides, there was no sharp boundary between imperial cult and other religious forms ... Nor was imperial cult necessarily the most powerful marker of Romanization in religion: in specifically Roman communities abroad (*coloniae* and *municipia*), imitations of the transformed system of Augustan Rome were often a far more important aspect of religious Romanization than any direct worship of the emperor.’

¹²⁸ Gradel 2002, 108.

¹²⁹ Galinsky 1996, 427 n. 122, quotes D. Boschung to the effect that ‘the monuments of the cult are characterized by their variegated character rather than by uniform tendencies.’ The debate between generalization and multiple distinctions is pursued on a wider scale, in relation to ‘Romanization’ as a whole, by Revell 2009. Cf. the world-weary remarks of Scheid 2009 [2001], 275 n. 1: ‘I use the term “imperial cult” because all modern historians use it, even if it is a modern construct. It is a misleading term, since it assimilates various cultic acts that are sometimes very different one from another. If I use it, it is to make myself understandable to my readers, to identify crudely a Roman religious practice. Roman conceptual and cultic realities were different.’

¹³⁰ See Galinsky 1996, 5, speaking of ‘inane dichotomies’ such as ‘optimism’ and ‘pessimism’, or ‘pro-’ or ‘anti-Augustan’.

¹³¹ Domitian: cf. Dio 67.4.7; Suet. *Dom.* 13.1f.; cf. Rev. 4:11; Martial *Epig.* 8.2.5f., cf. 5.8.1; 10.72.3; see further Rowe 2005b, 292f.; Naylor 2010, 25f. On Vespasian: Suet. *Vesp.* 23, one of many examples of Vespasian’s quirky humour.

¹³² cf. Rüpke 2007, 248.

¹³³ On the *Ara Pacis* and its significance see e.g. Zanker 1988, 120–23; Elsner 1991; Kleiner 2005, esp. 212–25 on the Augustan narrative.

¹³⁴ cf. Philo *Leg.* 357, where Caligula is angry because of this restriction. Prayer to the (other) gods for the emperor could be effortlessly combined with prayer to the divine emperor concerning his own well-being, as we see e.g. in Aelius Aristides *Or.* 26.32 (see Klauck 2000, 314).

¹³⁵ See recently Friesen 2001, 5–22.

¹³⁶ So Rüpke 2011, 32.

¹³⁷ See esp. Price 1984.

¹³⁸ On Alexander see e.g. Klauck 2000, 266–74.

¹³⁹ Alexander as a model: Galinsky 1996, 48, citing coins, seals and paintings which represent Augustus assimilated to portraits of Alexander. In *RG* 1.1 and elsewhere Augustus stressed that he had taken the actions he did at the age of nineteen, which was a deliberate trumping of Alexander’s youthful start. On *RG* 1.1 Judge rightly comments (2008a, 187) that every element in the paragraph ‘is drawn from the Roman nobleman’s armoury of eulogistic cliché’; *RG* 31—3 indicates that he has actually surpassed Alexander, since the lands of the farther east sent embassies and petitions to him, so that (unlike Pompey, Caesar and Antony) he had had no need to attempt conquest (see Judge 2008a, 217).

¹⁴⁰ See Beard, North and Price 1998, 158f.; Galinsky 1996, 322f.; for *Roma* on the *Ara Pacis*, Galinsky 1996, 208.

¹⁴¹ cf. Gradel 2002, 26, who offers, in relation to Roman religion in the period, the model of ‘divinity as a relative rather than as an absolute category’; similarly Rüpke 2007, 83–5.

¹⁴² On Hercules see e.g. Rüpke 2007, 84; 106 with refs.

¹⁴³ *De Re. Nat.* 5.8–12.

¹⁴⁴ On Sulla: Galinsky 1996, 317, 321.

¹⁴⁵ Galinsky 1996, 323.

¹⁴⁶ Dio 43.45.3 (saying that the Senate erected it); Cic. *Att.* 12.45.3; 13.28.3. See Galinsky 1996, 312f.

¹⁴⁷ Virg. *Ec.* 9.47–9; Pliny *NH* 2.93f.; Suet. *Iul.* 88; Dio 45.7.1. On Caesar see Beard, North and Price 1998, 140–9; Galinsky 1996, 17f.; and esp. Weinstock 1971 *passim*.

¹⁴⁸ Galinsky 1996, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Cic. *Att.* 16.15.3. By 30 BC he was reacting strongly against any attempt to worship him as a god (Dio 51.19–20).

¹⁵⁰ Suet. *Aug.* 70. The other diners were also dressed as gods. For the coins, see Burnett 1983, and Price 1996, 840.

¹⁵¹ Dio 53.27.3.

¹⁵² Galinsky 1996, 319.

¹⁵³ cf. Dio 47.18f. On Caesar’s deification see Klauck 2000, 288–94.

¹⁵⁴ On the divinization of heroes, and similar questions, see RSG 76f. There were of course many subtly different meanings encapsulated in both Greek and Roman words for ‘god’ or ‘divine’, loosely correlated with various meanings of ‘worship’ or ‘reverence’. The main point for our purpose is the question of how all such ideas would be seen from the monotheistic (and mostly Greek-speaking) perspective of Jews and Christians.

¹⁵⁵ See Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 249f., warning against a naive reading of the rhetoric of the sources, who were eager to present Augustus as the great restorer, and suggesting that since Roman religion had always been able to innovate and renew itself we should see the allegations, as with Cicero *De Nat. De.* 2.9f., as a veiled attack on the nobility.

¹⁵⁶ Cic. *De Nat. De.* 1.82; cf. Livy 4.20.7; Hor. *Od.* 3.6.1–8. Cp. Galinsky 1996, 288–92 with other refs. and discussion.

¹⁵⁷ Galinsky 1996, 292f.; Scheid 2005, 181.

¹⁵⁸ So Richardson 2012, 208; and see Scheid 2009 [2001].

¹⁵⁹ On the *Lares*, their origin and meaning, cf. e.g. C. R. Phillips in *OCD* 815f.

¹⁶⁰ *RG* 19.2.

¹⁶¹ e.g. by Ovid *Fast.* 5.143–6. For the whole topic see Galinsky 1996, 300–10.

¹⁶² Plut. *Ant.* 24; see Beacham 2005, 155f.

¹⁶³ Galinsky 1996, 314; Beacham 2005, 153f.

¹⁶⁴ Galinsky 1996, 315.

¹⁶⁵ e.g. *Trist.* 1.5.77–84; 5.2.45–54; *Ep. ex Pont.* 1.7.43–6, 49–52.

¹⁶⁶ See Gordon 2011, 47f.

¹⁶⁷ *Rev.* 13.11–17.

¹⁶⁸ Millar 2002, 279f., insists that whereas for republican times the historian must start from Rome and work outwards, for the empire one must start in the provinces and work inwards. This is true on the broader front, but for looking specifically at the imperial cult it is still important first to investigate the centre. That is where we hear the theme upon which provincial cults play their

improvised variations. A recent account of the cities and regions of Paul's ministry is provided by Schnabel 2004, Part V.

¹⁶⁹ See Galinsky 1996, 319–21. There is, effectively, far more of a sliding scale with the divine/human divide in the ancient pagan world than there was in the ancient Jewish world or is in today's western modernism: see e.g. Rives 2007, 153f. This contextualizes the tricky discussion about the distinction between *deus* ('god') and *divus* ('divine'): [see below](#).

¹⁷⁰ See Scheid 2005, 190.

¹⁷¹ See Price 1996, 838, with refs.

¹⁷² Richardson 2012, 211.

¹⁷³ *Georg.* 4.562; *Aen.* 1.289.

¹⁷⁴ *Aen.* 9.642.

¹⁷⁵ *Georg.* 3.10–39.

¹⁷⁶ *Georg.* 1.24–42.

¹⁷⁷ *Od.* 1.2.25–44 (tr. Lyons 2007, 57).

¹⁷⁸ *Od.* 1.2.44–52.

¹⁷⁹ 1.12.49–60; 3.26.3–6.

¹⁸⁰ 1.3.9–12.

¹⁸¹ 1.5.1–4. On the importance of a 'present' god, rather than a distant one, see Galinsky 1996, 314–7. *Praesens*, he says, is the equivalent of the Greek *epiphanēs*, a title given to many hellenistic kings, such as the Syrian Antiochus IV. See too now Gordon 2011, 43.

¹⁸² *Od.* 4.5[not 4 as in Galinsky 1996, 424 n. 63].33–6.

¹⁸³ *Epistle* 2.1.15–17. This translation (Fairclough in Loeb) reads *nomen* at l.16 rather than *numen*, which is found in two manuscripts; but many scholars have seen *numen* as correct, even though our earliest other evidence for an altar to Augustus's *numen*, 'divinity' or 'divine power', is when Tiberius dedicated such an altar in the early first century AD (Galinsky 1996, 317).

¹⁸⁴ So Fairclough in Loeb 397, citing Suet. *Claud.* 2. On the date see Richardson 2012, 138 and the discussion of Crook 1996, 98, explaining the reasons for settling on 10 rather than 12 BC as used to be thought.

¹⁸⁵ See Richardson 2012, 209f., with refs.

¹⁸⁶ See esp. Gradel 2002 for helpful discussion of how the increasingly divine Augustus impacted popular life in Rome.

¹⁸⁷ Galinsky 1996, 322.

¹⁸⁸ Price 1996, 846.

¹⁸⁹ On loyalty to the empire in the provinces, see e.g. Ando 2000.

¹⁹⁰ *Jos. War* 1.404; *Ant.* 15.363f. Josephus immediately reports civil unrest, and the temple may have been partly the cause; it was after this, too, perhaps in compensation, that Herod announced his plans to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (15.380).

¹⁹¹ See *Jos. War* 1.403; *Ant.* 15.298 (Sebaste); *War* 1.414f.; *Ant.* 15.339f. (Caesarea Maritima); details and discussion in Richardson 1996, 184f.; McLaren 2005, 258–62. The reconstruction of the port took place between 22 and 9 BC. For a similar temple to Augustus, dominating the harbour at Alexandria, see Philo *Leg.* 151, part of the 'equal-to-Olympian' honours voted to the emperor (*Leg.* 150) by the whole world: *pasa hē oikoumenē tas isolympious autō timas epsēphisanto*. Cp. the temple to Augustus by the harbour at Eresus on the island of Lesbos, along with another to Livia and yet another to Augustus's sons Gaius and Lucius: Price 1984, 3; Zanker 1988, 298 with details.

¹⁹² Jos. *War.* 1.414; *Ant.* 15.339. The city is referred to as ‘Augusta’ in Philo *Leg.* 305, in referring to Pilate transferring thither the shields which had caused offence in Jerusalem (Philo *Leg.* 299–306; cf. *NTPG* 174). Suet. *Aug.* 52 insists that Augustus would only allow temples to himself in the provinces if he was coupled with *Roma*. Herod worked on a grand scale: the port town of Caesarea was equipped with underground sewers connected to the open sea, which flushed them out regularly (*Ant.* 15.340). For the suggestion of a ‘partnership’ of mutual tolerance cf. McLaren 2005, 276.

¹⁹³ *War* 2.184–203.

¹⁹⁴ *War* 1.415.

¹⁹⁵ Dio 51.20.6–9, an important passage for these basic distinctions.

¹⁹⁶ See Hardin 2008, 30 for development of this figure from Price 1984, including the now certainly imperial temple at Pisidian Antioch.

¹⁹⁷ See Friesen 2001, 27f., 32.

¹⁹⁸ Price 1984, 106.

¹⁹⁹ The inscription is sometimes called ‘the Priene inscription’, because the first, and still the largest fragment was found there (between Ephesus and Miletus). A good brief discussion is in Stanton 2004, 28–33, focusing particularly on the word *euangelion*, obviously important in Paul.

²⁰⁰ Sherk 1984, 124f. (document no. 101), lines 3–26. I have left the translation in American, and omitted most of the signs of the textual uncertainty characteristic of ancient fragmentary inscriptions. For the Greek text see details in Sherk 1969, 328–37.

²⁰¹ Sherk 1984, 125f., lines 32–52.

²⁰² Friesen 2001, 124.

²⁰³ See Stanton 2004, 31–3; and [below, ch. 12](#).

²⁰⁴ Sherk 1984, 101, line 64.

²⁰⁵ See Philo *Leg.* 154; and the discussion in Price 1984. On the *divus/deus* distinction, and the quite varied meanings given to it in antiquity, see recently Gradel 2002, 63–8 and 262–6. Originally it seems that *divus* was the ‘higher’ term, reserved for those who had always been divine as opposed to divinized mortals; but by later on in the empire *divus*, as applied to previous emperors, came to mean merely ‘dead’.

²⁰⁶ Dio 44.6.4; Weinstock 1971, 12, 287, 303; summarized, with other refs., in A. Y. Collins 1999, 249f.

²⁰⁷ On all this see A. Y. Collins 1999, 254; for the inscriptions in question, see Ehrenberg and Jones 1976 [1955], 91 (no. 108), 93 (no. 115).

²⁰⁸ Galinsky 1996, 325.

²⁰⁹ On everything to do with Anatolia, Mitchell 1993 still provides the gold standard.

²¹⁰ Ac. 13–14.

²¹¹ Details in Mitchell 1993, 102; Mitchell and Waelkins 1998 (on Pisidian Antioch); Gazda and Ng 2011; Hardin 2008, 50–63. On Paul’s work in the area: Ac. 13–14.

²¹² Mitchell 1993, 100.

²¹³ Mitchell 1993; see 101 for photographs of the temples in Ancyra and Antioch.

²¹⁴ Friesen 2001, 95–101.

²¹⁵ Friesen 1993.

²¹⁶ Price 1984, 138; Zanker 1988, 298. See the reconstruction in Friesen 2001, 70f.

²¹⁷ See esp. Kahl 2010, 75–127.

²¹⁸ Friesen 2005, 363, with refs.

[219](#) See Oakes 2005, 307, with refs.

[220](#) See Oakes 2005, 307–9, with other refs.

[221](#) 1 Thess. 1.9f.; see below, ch. 12. On the imperial cult at Thessalonica and its likely impact on the early church there, see esp. Harrison 2002, esp. 79–82; Judge 2008a, ch. 32.

[222](#) On *parousia* [see ch. 11 below](#).

[223](#) See Hoff 1996; cf. the picture in Alcock 2001, 344.

[224](#) Nicolaus of Damascus, in Jacoby *Fragmente* 90 F 125, as tr. by Meggitt 2002, 144.

[225](#) See Danker 1982.

[226](#) Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 143.

[227](#) See Pleket 1965; Klauck 2000, 314–6; Friesen 2001, 65, 113–6.

[228](#) Against Galinsky 1996, 330; Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.360: ‘The ancient cults of Rome were the context (if a modified one) within which the emperor fitted’: yes, but that modification was important.

[229](#) See e.g. Price 1984, 101–14; Oakes 2005, 311f., 314: ‘if you abandoned the cult of Isis, your family and other associates might be angry with you. If you were seen to dishonour the imperial cult, you were rebelling against Rome.’

[230](#) Friesen 2001, 63–5.

[231](#) Friesen 2001, 74f. ‘Saviour’ was quite commonly used for deified mortals, e.g. Demetrius ‘Polioretetes’ of Macedonia (336–283 BC).

[232](#) Friesen 2001, 81–95, including fascinating details about the use of visual imagery retelling the story of Aeneas and relating it to Augustus and his family.

[233](#) Price 1984, 49f.

[234](#) Price 1984, 96.

[235](#) Alcock 1989.

[236](#) Dio 62.14.2.

[237](#) [See below, 338](#).

[238](#) Dio 59.28.3f.; cf. Suet. *Gai.* 22; Jos. *Ant.* 19.4. See also below on his replacing the heads of ancient cult statues with his own.

[239](#) All this calls into question a further over-kindly verdict of Ogilvie 1986, 124, that the Romans had ‘a fine, yet tolerant, religion whose adherents committed very few crimes in its name and who were healthily free of neuroses’. Even in the last century of the republic the latter claims would be hard to sustain.

[240](#) Revell 2009, 80.

[241](#) Revell 2009, 82f.

[242](#) Mitchell 1993, 113. Cf. Woolf 2001, 321: ‘Empire was inscribed in the way time was measured and dates and years calculated. It was imprinted on the coinage of the empire; it structured the syllabus for those who went to school; it fixed the holidays for everyone and shaped the built environment of the cities of the empire in which celebrations took place. And through cult, empire was written in the stars. Empire, personalized – as in China – in the bodies, lives, and figures of individual emperors, was everywhere visible.’

[243](#) On imperial cult in the west see esp. Fishwick 1987.

[244](#) Price 1984, 126ff.

[245](#) Galinsky 1996, 327, pointing out that the western provinces had not been involved in the civil wars and so had no need to be especially grateful for Augustus’s gift of peace, also suggests that the western cities had no need to demonstrate their loyalty as did those eastern cities which had

previously supported Antony. This is no doubt true, but once two or three cities in a district or province establish cults, one can well imagine an implicit pressure from that alone for others to copy them. On Tarraco see further [below, 1500](#).

[246](#) Dio 55.10a.2.

[247](#) Friesen 2001, 74.

[248](#) Zanker 1988, 274f.; cf. Meggitt 2002, 150f.

[249](#) Dio 51.19.7.

[250](#) See Pleket 1965, 333f.

[251](#) See Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.357–9.

[252](#) Beard, North and Price 1998, 1.361.

[253](#) 56.46.1–4.

[254](#) See Scheid 2005, 187–92, on Augustus’s clever manoeuvring around the former Triumvir Lepidus, who held the office until his death in 13 BC.

[255](#) So, rightly, Hardin 2008, 47.

[256](#) Tac. *Ann.* 1.10.

[257](#) Suet. *Tib.* 59.1; cf. *Aug.* 100.3.

[258](#) Dio 57.8.3; 58.2.8. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 4.37.3; 4.38.1f.

[259](#) Details: Friesen 2001, 36f.

[260](#) Tac. *Ann.* 4.37; Suet. *Tib.* 26 (though ignoring the new shrine in Asia).

[261](#) IGRR III no. 721; see Klauck 2000, 302. On ‘saviour’ as an imperial title, and its resonances in the Christian world, see below, ch. 12.

[262](#) On all this see *NTPG* 159–61, 170–81. See Tac. *Ann.* 12.54, on which see Crossan 1991, 100–2: ‘How quiet was quiet? ... all [Tacitus] means is that under Tiberius there were no revolts in Palestine necessitating intervention from the Syrian legate backed by his legionary forces’ (italics original).

[263](#) Suet. *Calig.* 22, 50. As we noted above, his madness may well be due to serious illness early in his reign. The question is debated: for recent discussion, see Barrett 1989, esp. ch. 14.

[264](#) Suet. *Calig.* 27.3.

[265](#) Discussion in Friesen 2001, 40f.

[266](#) Suet. *Calig.* 22.2f.

[267](#) cf. e.g. Philo *Leg.* 22.

[268](#) Suet. *Calig.* 30; the line is, he says, a quote from a tragic poet, regularly identified as the C1 BC poet Accius. It is also found in Cic. *Phil.* 1.34; and Sen. *De Ira* 1.20.4.

[269](#) See Suet. *Claud.* 22, 25.5.

[270](#) See Rives 2007, 153, with picture on 154.

[271](#) Details in Hardin 2008, 38f.; though it now appears (Klauck 2000, 305) that the temple at Camulodunum was built only after his death.

[272](#) Friesen 2001, 92, 94.

[273](#) Hardin 2008, 39.

[274](#) Hardin 2008, 41.

[275](#) Friesen 2001, 61.

[276](#) On imperial cult in Galatia see now Gordon 2011, 47f. On the wider context cf. Schnabel 2004, 1084–124.

[277](#) Hardin 2008, 67f., 71–8. I am dubious, however, about Hardin’s proposal on this basis (74f.) to link the temple with the retired soldiers from the seventh legion who had fought for Augustus at

Philippi, where the *princeps* had made the vow ([above, 330](#)). Even if some of the soldiers at Philippi were only in their mid-teens, few would still be alive forty years later.

[278](#) Mitchell 1993, 1.96; Hardin 2008, 64f.

[279](#) Friesen 2001, 76.

[280](#) Mitchell 1993, 1.117.

[281](#) Dio 61.35.3 gives it this title, explaining that it is a pun on *apotheōsis*, ‘divinization’.

[282](#) Suet. *Nero* 10.1; Sen. *Clem.* 2.1.4. On the new ‘golden age’ of Nero cf. Calpurnius Siculus *Ecl.* 1.42–8, with the discussion in Harrison 2011, 103f., 126–8.

[283](#) See Smallwood 1967, 35–7 (no. 64).

[284](#) See Smith 1987 and 1990; discussion in Maier 2005, 336f.

[285](#) Maier 2005, 337, with copious references and discussion; he points out (338) that Nero copied Caligula in having coins portray him with a radiate crown, normally reserved for posthumous deification.

[286](#) See Maier 2005, 342–4, citing Lucan (contemporary with Nero) *Bell. Civ.* 1.367–72: Scythia, now conquered, stands for the kind of geographical and cultural remoteness which English speakers used to convey by expressions like ‘the back of beyond’ or even ‘outer Mongolia’.

[287](#) [See below, 1078–85](#). It would be bold to suggest that the rumour had begun because people were aware of the Christian story of a dying but returning Jesus. However, there is some other evidence that the Christian story was having an impact on popular culture: see RSG 75f. in relation to the sudden appearance of the *Scheintod* motif in novels of the period.

[288](#) cf. RSG 68, 82, 720.

[289](#) Jn. 20.28; Suet. *Dom.* 13.2.

[290](#) Friesen 2001, 41–52.

[291](#) Friesen 2001, 53.

[292](#) See now esp. Gordon 2011 for a discussion of the nature of imperial power in relation to the cult.

[293](#) Klauck 2000, 327.

[294](#) Mitchell 1993, 1.117.

[295](#) Gordon 2011, 60.

[296](#) Friesen 2001, 55.

[297](#) Friesen 2001, 121, cf. 127–9.

[298](#) Friesen 2001, 130; Ac. 17.31.

[299](#) These are quite different cases: the Romans never conquered Parthia until the time of Trajan, whereas western Spain, after resisting for a while, was subdued much earlier.

[300](#) On this see Woolf 2001, 322, with refs.

[301](#) cf. Scott 1929, 1932a and 1932b ; Bowersock 1973; see Naylor 2010. On Marcus Aurelius see [ch. 3 above](#).

[302](#) For an introduction at the level of ‘religion’, see e.g. Klauck 2000, 279–82.

[303](#) See Jos. *War* 2.197, 409f. (the latter passage highlighting the cessation of the practice, as a deliberate act of revolt, in the summer of 66); *Ap.* 2.77, explaining that this in an act of homage, not worship; Philo *Leg.* 157, 317 (claiming that Augustus paid for these sacrifices himself, though in *Ap.* loc. cit. Josephus says that the expense is borne by the whole Jewish community); *Leg.* 357 (Caligula objecting precisely that even if the Jewish sacrifices were ‘on his behalf’ [*hyper emou*] they were nevertheless offered ‘to somebody else’ [*heterō*]). For further discussion see e.g. McLaren 2005, 271–3.

[304](#) *Jos. Ant.* 19.300–11; see Barclay 1996, 252; McLaren 2005, 269–71.

[305](#) So McLaren 2005, 277.

[306](#) See Barclay 1996. In Egypt, for example, there was regular trouble between Jews and Egyptians, particularly in Alexandria, but this did not normally involve opposition to Rome itself.

[307](#) For details on all this, see *NTPG* ch. 6.

[308](#) On this reading of Dt. in particular [see above, 130f.](#)

[309](#) *Wis.* 14.17–21. The writer then anticipated Tacitus’s famous remark: referring to the ‘great strife due to ignorance’ in which such peoples live, he says ‘they call such great evils peace’ (14.22; cf. *Tac. Agric.* 30.6).

[310](#) *4 Ez.* 11–12.

[311](#) cf. e.g. Portier-Young 2011.

集 *Shū*

Collection

Earlier three birds on a tree
But now only the one.
Imagine swoops of homing rooks
As evening tumbles in
Cawing and wheeling to gather
In skeleton branches
With nodes of old nests blackening
Into the roosting night.

Treetop colony.
A rookery congregates.
Dusky assemblage.

Whatever instinct makes us hoard,
A desire to amass,
Toys, dolls, marbles, bird's-nests and eggs
We fondle and brood on
Or how we'd swoop like rooks to nab
Spiky windfalls, stamping
Open their milky husks to touch,
Smooth marvels of chestnut.

The collector's dream
To feel, to caress, to keep.
A bird in the hand.

Micheal O'Siadhail

PART II

THE MINDSET OF THE APOSTLE

Chapter Six

A BIRD IN THE HAND? THE SYMBOLIC PRAXIS OF PAUL'S WORLD

1. Introduction

So what happens when the owl, the cock and the eagle are met by the bird that hovers over Israel? What happens to all the myriad bits and pieces of Jewish story, Greek wisdom and Roman imperial majesty when Paul, like a great collector, brings them all together into his nest? How can we plot, describe, let alone understand, the dusky assemblage of ideas and influences that we not only assume in advance (as a matter of history) to have been present to his mind, but also discover (as a matter of exegesis) to have been part of his mental, emotional, imaginary furniture?

It was to answer that kind of question that sociologists and others developed the notion of 'worldview', and in the opening chapter I explained once more how this works. There are, no doubt, plenty of other ways of sorting things out and lining them up. This one has been developed not from some *a priori* scheme, but heuristically, building on seminal work done by several other writers, not least in the social sciences.

The model I have adopted proposes that we should ask about *praxis* and *symbol* and *story* and *question*, and should allow each of those microscopes to sweep and swoop around the territory, opening up the husks of history to discover the smooth marvels of worldview-ingredients within.¹ These, as we have already seen, inform, generate and give flavour to *culture* on the one hand and *worship* on the other; not that these two are at opposite ends of any particular scale, but rather that they need to be studied in interpenetration as well as in isolation. The whole rich mixture then emerges in one direction in the form of what I have called 'basic beliefs' and 'consequent beliefs', and in another direction in the form of 'aims' and 'intentions', all these again being linked in complex patterns and sustaining

the concrete choices and actions of a society and an individual. This, by the way, offers a completely different way in to those hoary old questions of ‘indicative’ and ‘imperative’, of ‘theology’ and ‘ethics’, that have been so characteristic of the study of the early Christian writings.

It is in the category of ‘beliefs’, of course, that we expect to find ‘theology’. I will be bracketing out ‘theology’ as such in this part of the book, saving it for Part III, because – this is one of the most important things to emerge from this worldview-analysis as applied to Paul – *theology itself plays a new symbolic role* in Paul’s worldview. It takes the place, within his revised worldview/symbolic universe/social imaginary (or whatever we want to call it), that had been occupied by more tangible things in the worlds from which he came. It precipitated a challenge to his successors which some generations have taken up and others not.

As we have seen in chapter 2, ‘theology’ as a *task* would be a new challenge for a zealous second-Temple Jew, for whom the basic ‘beliefs’ were assumed. In the world of Saul of Tarsus, ‘theology’ as a task, that is, fresh exploration of what ‘the divine’ might be or might mean, was something undertaken by pagan philosophers and manipulated by empires. ‘Theology’ as a *set of beliefs* was, at least by implication, already clear for someone like Saul: monotheism, election, eschatology, with their various sub-categories. Part of the genius of Paul was to bring together ‘theology as a task’ with this implicit Jewish ‘theology as a set of beliefs’, transforming (baptizing?) the task itself in the process while unpacking and explaining the beliefs in a radically new direction – though claiming, and trying to demonstrate, that this new direction was in fact a thoroughly Jewish, scripturally based exploration of the one God, his people and his plans. For Paul, the method and the means by which task and beliefs alike were transformed was Jesus himself, the crucified and risen Messiah, son of God and lord, and the ‘spirit of the son’ which the one God had poured out on his renewed people. Thus not only the subject-matter of theology but also the discipline itself, if we can call it that, was remoulded by Paul, at one level in terms of a creative fusion of the worlds we have studied in Part I

but at another level in terms of the fresh action, as he saw it, of the one God.

All that remains in the future, to be addressed in Part III. The present part of this book lays the foundation for it by exploring the mature worldview we discover in Paul.

Having spoken of four elements in the worldview-analysis, I propose in this opening chapter to deal with two together: symbol and praxis. This is not for want of material, to pad out two otherwise thin analyses. Rather, it is due to the frustrating fact that, when it comes to ‘symbols’, the earliest Christians have left us virtually nothing: almost no material culture for the archaeologists to dirty their hands with (well, all right: Peter’s house in Capernaum, turned by devout Franciscan diggers into a spaceship on the Galilean shore²), no coins, no solemn inscriptions, no first-century tombstones. We might count the letters themselves, and in a sense that is precisely what we are doing throughout, but of course we have no original manuscripts (though, by comparison with the great classical texts, we have a hundred times more fairly early ones). We do not have Paul’s own famous signature, or the place in Philippians where hot tears smudged the ink.³ It may be, indeed, that the bones in the great church of St Paul Without the Walls at the edge of ancient Rome are indeed those of the apostle, and it might even be that the fetters that keep them company really were the fetters in which he was chained up to the time of his death. If so (and nothing of course hinges on it either way) there would be a powerful and thoroughly Pauline message in such symbols – bones and chains! – that would speak eloquently enough of the apostolic vocation. But for the rest, silence: an aniconic system, it seems, at least in Paul’s day.⁴ The catacombs would follow, slowly amassing a new world of symbols, both in what they were and in what they contained. But in Paul’s day praxis was symbol, and symbol praxis. Hence the combining, at this point, of these two worldview elements.

The point about symbols, we remind ourselves, is that they are everyday things that carry more than everyday meanings. Worldview elements are things we take for granted, things we do or use or see or say unreflectively

because they are part of the furniture we only notice if someone has rearranged it, part of the wallpaper we only ‘see’ if somebody has replaced it or splashed paint on it. To change the metaphor, worldview elements, though usually out of sight, become loadbearing, like the deep, hidden foundations of a house. Shake them, and we experience a mental or emotional earthquake; remove them, and the house collapses: we don’t know who we are any more. It is almost as if we had died and woken up in a whole new world – which is, of course, what Paul said of himself, and reminded other early Messiah-people that they should expect to have to say of themselves. Wayne Meeks, whose powerful book *The First Urban Christians* sparked off a whole new wave of historical study of Paul thirty years ago, highlights the remarkably rapid growth of new combinations of symbol and belief among the early followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul was, of course, at the centre of it, with his own work doing as much as anybody else’s to stimulate that growth and to shape that new combination.⁵

It would, of course, have been good to be able to begin with more hard-edged, crunchy practical details. Ed Sanders, in a splendid recent passage, speaks energetically of the fact that, despite the bookishness of so much Pauline study, Paul himself

spent years of his life on the road, carrying (presumably on pack animals) his tent, clothing and tools – not many scrolls, if any. He carried the Bible safely tucked away in his head, where it belongs. As an apostle, he often supported himself by plying his trade. He was *busy*, traveling, working with his hands, winning people for Christ, shepherding or coping with his converts, responding to questions and problems. And he was very human; he knew not only fighting without but also fears within (2 Cor. 7:5). Paul the completely confident academic and systematic theologian – sitting at his desk, studying the Bible, working out a system, perfect and consistent in all its parts, unchanging over a period of thirty years, no matter how many new experiences he and his churches had – is an almost inhuman character, either a thinking machine or the fourth person of the Trinity. The real Paul knew anger, joy, depression, triumph, and anguish; he reacted, he overreacted, he repented, he apologized, he flattered and cajoled, he rebuked and threatened, he argued this way and that way: he did everything he could think of in order to win some.⁶

It almost makes one wish to leave the academic life and take to the road. (I am not sure about the pack animals; perhaps the reason Paul and his friends couldn’t get into Bithynia was that one of the donkeys, like Balaam’s ass,

saw an angel in the way.) But it reminds us, in particular, that Paul's ideas were not just ideas. They were part of a practical, down-to-earth world, and one way of being sure to misunderstand them is by forgetting or marginalizing that fact. However, since, to repeat, we have none of the basic 'material culture' to go on, we find ourselves having to ask, instead, what were the encoded symbols, the praxis which appears to have sustained his worldview.⁷

The obvious place to begin is with the symbols and praxis of the three worlds from which Paul had come. What did he do with them? What did he make of those universes of discourse, those highly charged and extremely effective worldviews?

2. Paul and the Symbolic Praxis of Three Worlds

(i) Judaism

The worldview elements of Judaism were, as we saw, tightly woven together. Temple, Torah, land, family, 'zeal', prayer, scripture – all fitted together in a multi-dimensional interlocking model, reinforcing one another at point after point. Think of a family going up to Jerusalem at Passover: singing psalms which told the story of God's goodness to Israel, travelling through the land to the great City, careful to keep Torah so that they could celebrate the feast in purity, praying that somehow, even this time, God would act to liberate his people from their long oppression. If we are to understand Saul of Tarsus we must imagine this entire, integrated worldview informing and undergirding him at every point, and we must then notice, with due historical caution but also, increasingly, with open-mouthed awe, the way in which every single element of this complex whole was reworked, rethought, re-expressed in Paul the apostle. Here, I suggest, is the fundamental answer to the puzzle John Barclay articulates in his brief account of Paul in the context of his brilliant study of Jews in the Diaspora: from one point of view Paul seems so radical in his rejection of Jewish

symbols, while from another point of view he seems so conservative in his insistence on tight boundaries and clear parameters.⁸

First, the Temple; and indeed the Holy City in which it stood. Paul seems in Galatians to be distancing himself not only from the apparent claims of the apostles based in Jerusalem but also from the city itself. This serves an obvious polemical purpose within the letter; but we should not infer from this that Paul has not thought through the implications of what he is saying.⁹ When it comes to the Temple itself, however – the epicentre of the Jewish world, even the Diaspora world, the one place where the living God had chosen to put his name and reveal his glory, the place to which the nations would flock to see that glory and learn that name – the magnitude of Paul’s transformed symbolic world becomes at once apparent. *You are the temple of the living God*, he says: not to the Philippians he loved so much, not to the Thessalonians in the midst of their suffering and danger, but precisely to the recalcitrant, muddled, problem-ridden Corinthians.¹⁰ This is not, in other words, a sober judgment based on the noticeable holiness, or gospel-inspired love or joy, of this or that *ekklēsia*. It is simply, for Paul, a fact: the living God, who had said he would put his name in the great House in Jerusalem, has put that name upon and within these little, surprised communities, dotted about the world of the north-eastern Mediterranean. Unless we are shocked by this, we have not seen the point.

This may already seem breathtaking to us; but Paul was not, it seems, entirely innovating. We saw in chapter 2 that other Jewish renewal movements thought of themselves, in some sense or other, as substitutes, even replacements, for the Temple.¹¹ Paul’s own reference to the Jerusalem apostles as ‘pillars’ is most plausibly explained by the proposal that the earliest *ekklēsia* understood itself as, in a sense, a counter-Temple movement.¹² This, too, was not new. From the time of John the Baptist, and from the kingdom-work of Jesus himself, the whole point of this new movement had been to declare that the living God of Israel was at work in a way that upstaged even the Temple itself. That, I have argued elsewhere, was at the heart of Jesus’ own self-understanding, and the point was well grasped by his first followers.¹³ (It is no counter-argument to point out that

they continued to worship at the Temple itself, as indeed, according to Acts, Paul himself did. Their point was not so much that the old Temple was corrupt or wicked, though those who were running it might be, but precisely that the one God was doing the new thing he had always promised. They were better at living in the overlap of the ages than some of their interpreters have been at understanding apparent anomalies.) This, I believe, is at the heart of the theology of Acts itself, in which Jesus himself has become the place where, and the means by which, heaven and earth are brought together, so that the Pentecost-scene in Acts 2 takes the long-awaited place of a second-Temple scene in which Israel's God comes back at last to live with and among his people.¹⁴ We should not be surprised, as a result, when the major clashes with authorities take place, first in the Jerusalem Temple, then in relation to cult and temples in the pagan world, and then in Jerusalem once more.¹⁵ Restatements of the same point, in very different modes, can be found in books as diverse as John's gospel on the one hand and 1 Peter on the other.¹⁶

First Peter reminds us that the image of the 'stone' played a significant role within the earliest *ekklēsia*'s understanding of Jesus, and of itself. The 'stone' which would become the cornerstone of the new Temple in Psalm 118 seems to be coupled with the 'stone' in Daniel 2 that was cut out of a mountain and that smashed the idolatrous statue on its feet, bringing it crashing to the ground, and then itself growing into a mountain to replace it and fill the whole world. This powerful combination of biblical imagery drew together texts from the Psalms, from Isaiah and from Daniel, and there are signs that Paul was as familiar with the theme as Peter and the Synoptists.¹⁷ The fact that so many lines of thought and expression converge on the idea of Temple-replacement shows that Paul is not out on a limb at this point, and that his drastic and shocking statements about the Corinthians were of a piece with what the whole early *ekklēsia* understood to be the case: that the central symbol of a thousand years of Judaism had been supplanted *by Jesus himself*, precisely as Israel's representative, and by the new community as somehow, through the spirit, sharing his status and role.

This forms the context for two of Paul's major and closely combined themes: the indwelling of the Spirit and the call to holiness. We can see this in a passage like 1 Thessalonians 4, which we should not dismiss as 'ethics' as opposed to 'doctrine', or indeed as 'imperative' to be played off against 'indicative'. It is, rather, part of the revised Jewish worldview, one of the chief effects of reframing the central worldview-symbol:

¹What remains, my dear family, is for me to ask you, and indeed to urge you in the lord Jesus, that you should continue more and more to behave in the manner that you received from us as the appropriate way of behaving and of pleasing God. ²You know, of course, what instructions we gave you through the lord Jesus. ³This is God's will, you see: he wants you to be holy, to keep well away from fornication. ⁴Each of you should know how to control your body in holiness and honour, ⁵not in the madness of lust like Gentiles who don't know God. ⁶Nobody should break this rule, or cheat a fellow-Christian in this area; the lord is the avenger in all such matters, just as we told you before and testified most solemnly. ⁷For God did not call us to a dirty life, but in holiness. Anyone who rejects this, then, is not rejecting a human command, but the God who gives his holy spirit to you.¹⁸

The content is the content of 'Christian behaviour in a pagan world', but the language, all through, is the language of the Temple-cult. As we shall see, the holiness of the *ekklēsia* comes to be, in itself, a central part of Paul's positive symbolic world, and here is the reason: this community is the transformed new reality to which Paul saw the Jerusalem Temple itself as the advance signpost.

One of the most striking redrawings of Temple-symbolism in Paul normally goes unnoticed, presumably because there is so much else going on in the same passage that commentators are, not surprisingly, dazzled:

⁵Look at it like this. People whose lives are determined by human flesh focus their minds on matters to do with the flesh, but people whose lives are determined by the spirit focus their minds on matters to do with the spirit. ⁶Focus on flesh, and you'll die; but focus on the spirit, and you'll have life, and peace. ⁷The mind focused on the flesh, you see, is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law; in fact, it can't. ⁸Those who are determined by the flesh can't please God.

⁹But you're not people of flesh; you're people of the spirit (if indeed God's spirit lives within you; note that anyone who doesn't have the spirit of the Messiah doesn't belong to him). ¹⁰But if

the Messiah is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of covenant faithfulness.¹¹ So, then, if the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you, the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, too, through his spirit who lives within you.¹⁹

The key here is the phrase ‘lives within you’. Verse 9: you are ‘in the spirit’, if God’s spirit *lives within you, oikei en hymin*; verse 10, remarkably: ‘if the Messiah is in you’; verse 11, climactically: if the spirit of him-who-raised-Jesus-from-the-dead dwells in you, *oikei en hymin*;²⁰ if all this is true, then the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, too, through his spirit that indwells you, *dia tou enoikountos autou pneumatos en hymin*.²¹ The echoes here are of Old Testament Temple-language: *katoikein* is the more usual Septuagintalism, and that too is picked up in Paul and elsewhere in early Christian writings. But the theme is the same, and as we shall see gives depth and substance to Paul’s pneumatology, not least (but by no means only) in Ephesians and Colossians.²²

The replacement of Temple with Jesus and, secondarily and derivatively, with his people remains one of Paul’s central worldview-revisions, unnoticed in an earlier generation that chose to forget the significance of the Temple within Paul’s ancestral symbolic universe. He developed it further: the Messiah’s people, and the tasks they perform ‘in the Messiah’, are described in terms which reflect the people at the centre of Jerusalem and the Temple and the tasks they performed there. They were priests, offering sacrifices, indeed offering *themselves* as sacrifices, or, in Paul’s case, bringing the gentiles themselves as a quasi-sacrificial offering, with a kind of heavy irony, to Jerusalem. And Jerusalem itself, the focus of the longed-for *centripetal* pilgrimage of the nations, has been replaced by Jerusalem as the *centrifugal* originating point of the world mission. The redeemer does not now come *to Zion* but *from Zion*, going out into all the world to ‘gather the nations’, not by their coming to the central symbol of ancient Judaism, but by their *becoming* the central symbol, as we shall see, of the transformed worldview.²³

If that is what happened, in Paul's mind and hands, to the symbol of the Temple, what about the second and in some ways equally important symbol (especially in the Diaspora), that of Torah? Obviously we shall have more to say about this when the subject comes up again both in considering Paul's controlling narratives and, particularly, when we explore the heart of his theology. But something must be said here at the level of worldview, of the symbolic praxis which mattered for the apostle as much as the Jewish symbolic praxis had mattered to Saul of Tarsus. As elsewhere, he was just as emphatic and insistent on these symbols, within the new worldview, as he had been with their predecessors within the old one.

The most important, and tricky, was the symbol of food: what you could and couldn't eat, and who you should and shouldn't eat it with. As we saw, these two interlocking questions loomed large in first-century Judaism, and the wide variety of practice among actual Jews, not least in the Diaspora, should not blind us to the strong probability that Saul of Tarsus had been among the sharpest of his day in his insistence both on the absolute purity of the food to be eaten and on the clearly defined restrictions on those with whom one could share it. Now, in a breathtaking move, we find Paul arguing, *on the basis of Jewish-style, Shema-shaped monotheism*, that 'all foods' are basically clean, God-given and to be enjoyed if received with thanksgiving, and that the matter of what one eats is therefore *indifferent*. This is a subtle argument. That fact, and the apparent remoteness of the topic from the concerns of the modern western church, have meant that the extraordinary symbolic significance of this move has often been missed. To say that something previously forbidden has now become something 'indifferent', so that it is up to the individual whether they go this way or that, is a move of earth-shattering importance.²⁴ As contemporary ecclesiologists know, or ought to know, the question of whether or not a particular practice is 'indifferent' cannot itself be 'indifferent'. In the light of this, and of Paul's own insistence that he took what he calls the 'strong' position, I find myself in agreement with those who have maintained that Paul did not himself continue to keep the kosher laws, and did not propose to, or require of, other 'Jewish Christians' that they should, either.²⁵

The question of who one might eat with, and under what conditions, was likewise radically redrawn. There was, to be sure, a good deal of variety on this question among Jews of Paul's day. What matters here, though, is (a) that there were implicit guidelines, even if they were flexible; (b) that Saul of Tarsus himself can be assumed to have been among the most inflexible; (c) that his new position represented a conscious transformation of that earlier inflexible stance; and, most importantly, (d) that he reached his new position not because he had come to regard the previous one as unsatisfactory or wrong-headed in itself but because, so he believed, God's new age had arrived through the crucified and risen Messiah and the gift of the spirit. The first time we meet Paul coming at us with full force, in an autobiographical account of a very early moment in the Christian story (the so-called 'Antioch incident' of Galatians 2.11–14), it is on precisely this matter. Previously, he says, a loyal Jew would not 'eat with gentiles' (again, whatever the varieties of actual practice, this is the point on which the whole argument depends). Now, however, Paul is not simply proposing that whether you share table-fellowship with gentiles (gentile Christians, of course, are in view) is a matter of indifference, so that some might and some mightn't and that people should not judge one another on such questions. No: *it is absolutely imperative that all those 'in the Messiah' belong at the same table.* Separation is not an option. Peter and the others must not withdraw and have separate tables or even separate rooms, one for Christian Jews and another for Christian gentiles. To do so is a denial of the gospel, of 'the freedom we have in the Messiah', of the loving and saving death of the Messiah (2.19–21). To rebuild the wall of partition is to declare that the old symbols are still valid, that the community can be and should be defined in terms of them; in other words, that the Messiah might as well not have died.²⁶ To put it positively, anticipating our later argument, *the unity of the Messiah's people has taken the place, within the community-defining symbol-system, of the socio-cultural identity of the strict Jew.*

So has Paul simply redrawn the old boundaries at a different point – instead of Torah, Messiah? In a sense, yes; in a sense, no. It is not just a matter, as some have suggested, of opting for 'unity' rather than 'purity'.

Paul is clear on the need for the latter as well as the former, but he comes at it by a different route. Here again 1 Corinthians is fascinating.

On the one hand, the new messianic law of who you can eat with is to be used to *exclude* those whose behaviour has effectively denied that they belong to the Messiah in the first place. You should ‘not even eat with such a person’, but expel them from the table-fellowship.²⁷ Such a person may bear the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’, but if they are practising sexual immorality, greed, extortion, idolatry, abusive speech or drunkenness they are a sibling in name only. Here Paul is guarding the new messianic fellowship just as strictly as ever he did the Pharisaic fellowship. The community is defined by the Messiah, and by faithfulness to him; and such behaviour flies in the face of the sacrificial death by which his own faithfulness was acted out.²⁸ Paul has every bit as much a concern for ‘purity’ of this sort as he had for the other sort in his Pharisaic days.

On the other hand, for ordinary meals (we already catch, perhaps, a sense of a distinction between the holy meals of messianic fellowship and the ‘ordinary’ eating and drinking that would go on at home), Messiah-people are encouraged to sit down and eat with unbelievers. Not to do so would imply that they would have to leave ‘the world’ altogether (5.10). If one of the unbelievers invites them out to dinner, they should feel free to go, operating a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy in respect of the food and where it came from. Only, if someone *does* say, ‘By the way, this meat was sacrificed to an idol’, then a different principle kicks in, that of respect for the conscience of the ‘weak’.²⁹ That principle is itself, of course, a sub-principle of the messianic fellowship: since the Messiah died for that person too, you must respect a tender conscience and not put such a person at risk of sliding back into sin.³⁰ Again, our shorthand slogans of ‘unity’ and ‘purity’ will not serve us well in relation to such carefully reasoned positions.

Those who have approached these delicate discussions in Paul in terms of ‘ethics’ have sometimes complained of inconsistency or muddle. Once we see them as part of his redrawing of the symbolic map of Judaism, however, they make perfect sense. The revised Jewish monotheism which he

employs, almost effortlessly, at key moments in his discourse shows where his roots are, and they give him the ‘strength’, as he puts it, to look out on the world, not only of cooked meat but also of pagans of all shapes, sorts and sizes, and to see them, not simply as dark and dangerous persons who should be shunned, but as human beings with whom the Messiah’s people should be free to associate in ordinary human friendship.

Paul’s revising of the Jewish symbol of Torah in terms of food and table-fellowship, then, was clear, if necessarily complex. First, all those who belong to the Messiah, and are defined by Messiah-faithfulness and baptism, *belong at the same table*: this, as we shall see, is a constitutive part of his most central new positive symbol.³¹ Second, Messiah-followers are free to eat whatever they wish, with that freedom curtailed only (but strongly) when someone else’s ‘weak’ conscience is endangered. Third, Messiah-followers are free to eat ordinary meals with anyone they like, but not with someone who professes to be one of the family but whose behaviour indicates otherwise. Fourth (an extra but important point), Messiah-followers are not free to go into a pagan temple and eat there. To do so would be to stage a contest with the lord himself.³² All this is not just ‘ethics’. It is a matter of a freshly crafted symbolic universe.

The second ‘badge’ of Torah-observance which all second-Temple Jews knew, and most of their pagan neighbours knew and scorned, was, of course, circumcision.³³ Here again Paul is adamant. ‘Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters; what matters is keeping God’s commandments!’ The obvious oxymoron (circumcision being itself a central ‘commandment’), rendering that statement almost Zen-like in its density of redefinition, shows not only that Paul had a sense of humour, but that his stance in Galatians had worked its way deep into his rethought symbolic universe.³⁴ Galatians itself is of course massively insistent, not only that gentile converts do not need to get circumcised in order to belong to Abraham’s true family, but moreover that if they do so they will actually put themselves *out of* that true family, and back with the ‘physical’ family whose identity has actually been transformed with the coming, and the death, of the Messiah.³⁵

As with food, there were apparent turns and twists in the outworking of this principle. If someone insists that a gentile convert *should* be circumcised in order to belong to God's people, Paul will resist tooth and nail – though whether this resistance succeeded in the case of Titus has been questioned.³⁶ Whether the reported circumcision of Timothy was historically true, and if so whether it represented a wobble of principle on Paul's part, is another question, though my judgment is that what counted for Paul was the pragmatic needs of his missionary strategy, and had nothing to do with whether Timothy was or was not a bona fide member of God's messianic people.³⁷

There are of course various other vital discussions of circumcision elsewhere in Paul's writings. We shall return to these in other contexts, but we may just note in particular Romans 2.25–29, Philippians 3.2–8, Colossians 2.11–12 and Romans 4.9–12.

In the first of these, Paul draws on the much older Jewish discussions about 'circumcision of the heart' to make the point that, if it is the heart that matters, the outward circumcision can be seen as itself indifferent. Lawbreaking makes circumcision count as uncircumcision (which can only mean that the person concerned is regarded as not a true member of God's people), and 'keeping the law's requirements' makes uncircumcision count as circumcision (which again can only mean that the person concerned is regarded as a member of God's people). Paul's redefinition of God's people is dense but breathtaking – though often ignored by those who have seen the passage as merely another move in the demonstration of universal sinfulness:³⁸

The 'Jew' isn't the person who appears to be one, you see. Nor is 'circumcision' what it appears to be, a matter of physical flesh. The 'Jew' is the one in secret; and 'circumcision' is a matter of the heart, in the spirit rather than the letter.³⁹

Paul could only write such things if he had long believed that the previously mandatory cultural symbol had become 'indifferent', because in the eschatological purposes of God the story of Israel had at last turned the great corner into Deuteronomy 30, the time of covenant renewal.⁴⁰ This is

not, then – the point had better be made here at once though we shall return to it – a matter of Paul contrasting two types of religion and deeming something called ‘Judaism’ to be inferior to something called ‘Christianity’. It is a matter of Paul believing, on the basis of the Messiah’s resurrection, that God’s covenant with Israel had been renewed, and that heart-circumcision was, as had always been promised, the proper mark of covenant membership to which physical circumcision had been a kind of advance signpost.

The same point is clear in the quite stark contrasts of Philippians 3.2–11. Watch out, Paul warns, for the ‘dogs’, the ‘bad works’ people, the ‘incision’ party – as contemptuous a line as anything he ever wrote, looking back on his own former self with disgust. The reason is clear:

We are the ‘circumcision’, you see – we who worship God by the spirit, and boast in King Jesus, and refuse to trust in the flesh.⁴¹

Paul had himself been ‘circumcised on the eighth day’, which he notes as the first in the list of privileges in the next verse. But all of that he had now written off as so much trash, ‘because of the Messiah’.⁴² Again, this has nothing to do with a contrast between types or patterns of religion, and everything to do with covenantal eschatology: in the Messiah God has unveiled his long-awaited purpose, all preparatory stages are rendered indifferent, and to insist on them is to deny the Messiah himself and his achievement.⁴³ The short mention of circumcision in Colossians 2 points in the same direction.⁴⁴

So it is with Romans 4. Within his discussion of Abraham as the father of all believers alike, irrespective of ethnic origin, Paul makes a historical and exegetical case for regarding circumcision as irrelevant for family membership. Abraham was uncircumcised at the time of the great covenant-making in Genesis 15; so, if anything, it is circumcised Jews who are incorporated into a family of uncircumcised covenant members which began with Abraham himself. Even then, their circumcision is an insufficient condition of that membership, just as it is not a necessary one: Abraham is ‘the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised

but who follow the steps of the faith which Abraham possessed while still uncircumcised'.⁴⁵ As elsewhere in Paul, especially Galatians 3, it is *pistis*, 'faith/faithfulness', which is the one and only both necessary and sufficient badge of membership in the Abrahamic family; and this *pistis* is defined in close relation to the Messiah.⁴⁶ Paul never says that physical circumcision was a bad thing, or that it represents a deficient type of religion. He sees it, as had Deuteronomy and Jeremiah and the writers of the Scrolls, as a signpost to the greater thing that would mark out God's people when the covenant was at last renewed.

The other signpost to what was to come was the third great marker of Torah, the keeping of the sabbath. Here we meet in Paul, not indeed a deafening silence, but a quite different sort of mood, which we shall have to explore more fully when looking at the worldview-questions in chapter 8. Paul is clear, to start with, that the keeping of holy days, like the eating of food, is a matter of 'indifference': someone who keeps the day, keeps it in honour of the lord, and someone who does not is equally intending thereby to honour the lord.⁴⁷ (The fact that Paul does not actually spell out the second half of that sentence is neither here nor there; it is clearly implied.) The placing of this discussion in among the discussion of eating and drinking indicates well enough that Paul knows he is here likewise dealing with the symbolic praxis of a worldview, and, as with questions of food, he is saying clearly that these things are *indifferent*. Once more, we should not miss the enormity of such a claim: anyone reading the zealous Maccabaeian literature would know perfectly well just how extraordinary it would be for an ex-Pharisee to say such a thing about food, and anyone reading *Jubilees* or the Scrolls would know perfectly well just how extraordinary it would be for a devout second-Temple Jew to say such a thing about the calendar. It may well be, too, that the scornful dismissal of 'keeping days, months, seasons and years' is likewise a way of scolding the Galatians for adopting customs which, from the apostle's point of view, were designed to separate Jews from gentiles, and had now become irrelevant in the messianic dispensation. That remains, certainly, the normal reading of that text.⁴⁸ Acts indicates that Paul himself was aware of the Jewish festivals, including the

regular sabbaths, but whether these have simply become markers within the year and its changing seasons is not clear. Paul may perhaps simply have wanted to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost because he wanted a quick turnaround to get off to Rome while the Mediterranean was still safe for sailing; in which case he was disappointed.⁴⁹

Food, circumcision and sabbath were, by common consent, the key markers which said, ‘We are loyal, Torah-observant Jews.’ There were, of course, other things as well, not least what we think of as ‘moral’ commandments. A circumcised male who kept strict kosher habits and observed the sabbath scrupulously but who was known to be a swindler or serial adulterer would have been ill regarded by Saul of Tarsus just as much as by Paul the apostle.⁵⁰ But food, circumcision and sabbath, as I have argued at length elsewhere, were the public and visible signs of Torah-observance, and functioned particularly as ways of marking off Jews from their pagan neighbours – as the pagan neighbours themselves recognized. Not for nothing did Antiochus try to force Jews to eat pork, or Hadrian try to ban circumcision, two moves in their own way more or less equivalent to Gaius Caligula trying to have his statue erected in the Jerusalem Temple.

In each case, Paul reworked, redefined, recategorized. Even if we knew nothing of the debates about ‘old perspective’ and ‘new perspective’, about the endless wrangling over what exactly ‘keeping the law’ or ‘works of the law’ might have meant to him as a Pharisee or as part of the Messiah’s people, we have seen enough to know that, to put it mildly, Torah as commonly understood within Pharisaic Judaism did not emerge unscathed within his newly framed worldview. On these other matters, and particularly the question of what he meant when he said, ‘By works of Torah shall nobody be justified,’ we shall have more to say at the proper time.

There was, of course, another apparently small (because less controversial) but actually enormously significant symbolic praxis which lay at the very heart of Judaism: prayer. As a Jew, one could, and should, pray anywhere. Solomon’s great prayer of dedication, at the building of the first Temple, indicated that, since Israel’s God had deigned to put his name

and presence in that building, wherever an Israelite might be in the whole world, all they had to do was to pray ‘towards this house’, and they would be heard. Daniel, famously, kept his window open towards Jerusalem, and prayed in that direction three times a day.⁵¹ Prayer thus belonged closely with the Temple: one would pray in the Temple itself, of course, but everywhere else as well *in the direction of the Temple*. Hence, as we saw, the geographical orientation of many synagogues. And the prayer, as we know, was formed around the *Shema* and the Eighteen Benedictions.

Paul has rethought, reworked and revised this central symbolic praxis as well. Pray constantly, he insists to his young churches. Whatever you do, do it with thanksgiving, praying all the time to God as father through Jesus the lord. Pray at all times in the spirit. He tells them, over and over, what he’s praying for when he thinks of them. He is modelling and exemplifying, if anything, an intensification of the Jewish practice. At no point does he specify set hours of prayer, and there is no geographical reference. If ‘you are the Temple of the living God’, if ‘the spirit of God dwells in you’, then prayer ‘in the spirit’ was the equivalent of turning towards the Temple.⁵² It was to be seen as the awesome privilege and responsibility of every faithful Messiah-person, and every gathering of Messiah-people. Prayer in the spirit, indeed, would lead to that strange and powerful sense of ‘groaning’ in which the groaning of the whole creation, and of God’s people within that, seemed to be taken up into the groaning of God.⁵³

As far as Paul was concerned, thanksgiving was closely bound up with creational monotheism. God was the creator, so the world was his good gift, and to give thanks constantly was the appropriate response of those who recognized this God.⁵⁴ But creational monotheism itself had been rethought, as we shall see. Paul had taken the *Shema* itself, the central prayer of Jewish piety, and had reworked it so that now, breathtakingly, Jesus was to be found at the middle of it: ‘Hear, O Israel, YHWH our God, YHWH is one’ had become ‘for us there is one God (the father, from whom are all things, and we towards him) and one lord (Jesus the Messiah, through whom are all things and we towards him).’ This is even clearer in the Greek Bible, where *kyrios*, of course, stands for YHWH; and 1

Corinthians 8.6, which we shall discuss fully in its proper place, is thus a monument not only to Paul's daring theological innovation but to his determination to remain rooted in the symbolic praxis of Jewish prayer, even though the radical rethinking of Temple and Torah meant an equally radical rethink of the very heart of that prayer itself.⁵⁵

The next most obvious Jewish symbol, which like the sabbath appears almost to have disappeared from Paul's horizon, was the land. We may detect, in the previously noted references to 'the present Jerusalem', a hint of revision at this point; but the hint is then massively magnified when we step back from Paul's writings and consider what has happened. The land was the central promise to Abraham: Saul of Tarsus will have taken that absolutely for granted. To what extent he would have agreed with some Jewish writers of the period who had already said that what this really meant was that the land was a sign of a far greater promise, that Abraham's family would inherit the whole world, the earth, the *kosmos*, it is hard to say. Certainly anyone who interpreted Abrahamic promises in terms of Davidic ones, as many Jews did and as Paul himself seems to have done, would have had no difficulty in making the transition: the first royal psalm picks up the notion of 'inheritance' and declares in no uncertain terms that this now consists, not of one small piece of territory in the middle east, but of 'the nations' and 'the uttermost parts of the earth'. That is reinforced by other psalms, as well as by the vivid picture of the messianic age spread across the whole book of Isaiah.⁵⁶

Paul picks up and insists upon exactly this developed and enlarged notion of 'inheritance'. The Messiah will 'inherit' the earth, as Psalm 2 proclaimed, *and the Messiah's people will share that inheritance*. Romans 4.13 thus looks ahead, within the complex argument of the letter, to the majestic prophecy of 8.17–30, in which 'the inheritance' will indeed be 'the world', but the world *renewed*, reborn through the coming convulsion of birth-pangs.⁵⁷ This clear statement in Romans should I believe be allowed, with caution, to act as the fuller explanation of the 'inheritance' in Galatians, which Paul does not explain there but which, left to itself, would be puzzling: he is expounding the Abrahamic promises in Galatians 3 and 4,

and when in that context he speaks of ‘inheritance’ and ‘inheritors’, the natural implication from his invocation of Genesis 12 and 15 would be that the Messiah’s people would inherit ‘the land’.⁵⁸ The only time in Galatians that he specifies the content of this *klēronomia*, it is ‘the kingdom of God’.⁵⁹ I suspect it is the subtly false reading of this in the whole western tradition (where ‘kingdom of God’ has been flattened out into a synonym for ‘heaven’, and ‘heaven’ has been thought of as ‘the ultimate destination of God’s people’) that has thrown readers off the scent.⁶⁰ For Paul, God’s kingdom – as we see clearly enough in 1 Corinthians 15.20–8 – is not a non-material, post-mortem destination, but is rather the sovereign rule of the creator over the entire created order, with death itself, that which corrupts and defaces the good creation, as the last enemy to be destroyed. In other words, the final ‘kingdom of God’ is *the whole world, rescued at last from corruption and decay*, and living under the sovereign rule of God, exercised through the Messiah’s people; which is precisely what Paul says when we combine, as we should, Romans 8.18–30 with 5.17, where those who receive God’s gift of righteousness ‘will reign’.

Once we grasp this larger picture – and, though quite clear in itself, it seems to have eluded many readers – it should also become clear that Paul’s entire mission to the pagan world was part of the enactment of the revised and reborn symbol of the land. If God’s original intention was to give Abraham the land as an advance sign, a foretaste, of an eventually intended justice-bringing rule over the whole creation (and that does seem to be what not only Paul but some other second-Temple Jews had in mind), then Paul clearly sees that ultimate aim as *fulfilled in the Messiah* on the one hand and *implemented through his own mission* on the other. The reason the symbol of land appears to be almost entirely missing in Paul is that it has been swallowed up in a much larger element of symbolic praxis. Paul’s mission was aimed precisely at declaring the Messiah, Jesus, as the world’s true lord, summoning people everywhere to believing allegiance to him.⁶¹ We note that here, as with the other Jewish symbols, Paul’s point was not that there was anything wrong with the original promise or symbol. Far from it. When you have arrived at your destination, you switch off the engine and

park the car, not because it has not done its proper job but because it has. It is eschatology, not religious superiority, that forms the key to Paul the apostle's radical revision of the symbolic world of Saul of Tarsus.

Along with Temple, Torah and land we find family. We shall look in more detail at this presently, because in company with most others who have written recently on the subject of Paul's symbolic world I am convinced that his rethinking of God's people lies pretty well at the heart of it.⁶² (This, again, is without prejudice to the fuss over 'old perspective' and 'new perspective', neither of which were designed to explore the question of symbols and worldviews.) As we have already seen in relation to the question of table-fellowship, Paul has (dare we say!) replaced the solidarity of Israel, and/or his group of 'the pure' within Israel, with the solidarity of the people of God who find their identity 'in the Messiah'. He is horribly, tragically aware of the enormous question that this raises about those of his kinsfolk who do not believe in Jesus as Messiah, but it is a tragedy, a matter for tears and earnest prayer (as in Romans 9.1–5 and 10.1), precisely because he believes that Israel's God, through Israel's Messiah and his death and resurrection, has himself redefined the family as he always warned that he would, and has done so thoroughly, explicitly, effectively. If Paul can speak of God's call to the patriarchs as 'irrevocable', he would certainly say the same about God's action in the Messiah, and some of his greatest (and most challenging) theological writing consists precisely of working out the relationship between those two.⁶³

We should note here, as we shall see in more detail in the proper place,⁶⁴ that this has nothing whatever to do with something called 'supersession' or with the strange notion of 'anti-Judaism'. On the contrary: it is based on, and coloured all through by, a massive reaffirmation of the goodness and God-giveness of Israel, Israel's call, Israel's scriptures, Israel's promises, Israel's destiny within the creator's overall purposes. Anti-Judaism, characteristically, rejects all this; Paul insists on it. (The real 'supersessionism' is of course the claim that the Christian movement, including Paul, looked back on 'Judaism' as part of a world of 'religion' which had now been swept away; which only goes to show once more that

the category of ‘religion’ is probably the wrong tool for understanding New Testament theology.) Indeed, Paul sees the danger of anti-Judaism coming up over the horizon, as a ghastly distortion of the truth, and he argues explicitly against it. Rather, Paul’s view has to do with *the fulfilment of the promises made by the creator God to Israel*, a fulfilment which is now, as the promises themselves had repeatedly indicated, not for Israel alone but for anyone at all who would heed the worldwide invitation.⁶⁵ And, just because Paul has so thoroughly and carefully revised the symbols of Temple, Torah and land, this revision, which refers to actual flesh-and-blood communities, now has to bear even more weight, within his symbolic universe, than its ancient Jewish original. The family solidarity of Israel was, after all, one of the loadbearing pillars, along with those others. But the kind of revision that has happened leaves this new family as the sole concrete, visible symbol of the new worldview.

Hence, once more, the importance of what can be called, with due awareness of anachronism, Paul’s ‘ecclesiology’. And hence, as we shall see, the enormous theological freight that is carried, not so much even by his revision of monotheism and eschatology, but by that of election. For Paul, phrases such as ‘in the Messiah’ and ‘the Messiah’s body’ were not merely vague ways of indicating that someone belonged to the Messiah, or ‘had a relationship with Jesus’; nor were they general, somewhat fuzzy metaphors to make pragmatic points (the relation of the individual to the whole, the differentiated gifts within the larger fellowship, or whatever). They grew out of, and expressed in sharp and accurate formulation, his sense that the family to which he had belonged had been utterly transformed – put to death and brought to new life, he would have said – through the Messiah and, in particular, through his death and resurrection. The community of baptized believers, rooted by that baptism and by that faith in the Messiah himself, became for Paul not only the central locus but also the key visible symbol of the transformed worldview. Hence the insistence on endogamy (‘marriage within the community’) in 2 Corinthians 6.14—7.1, though with due note, in the earlier letter, of the pastoral problem of one marriage partner being converted and the other not.⁶⁶

Two other aspects of Jewish symbolic praxis remain to be considered, both of vital importance. The first concerns the question of ‘zeal’, and not least the symbolic and actual holy war, or at least holy armed resistance and struggle, to which it gave rise. We saw in chapter 2 how this tradition of violent ‘zeal’ had its roots in the actions of Phinehas and Elijah, and its outworking in the Maccabaeen rebellion and then in the various traditions which, towards the right-wing edge of the Pharisaic movement, eventually gave rise to the violence directed against Rome (and, tragically, against those seen as Jewish renegades) in the 60s of the first century. Saul of Tarsus, by his own account, had been right in the midst of such a movement, the movement to which in fact he gives the name *Ioudaismos*;⁶⁷ and the form that his own ‘zeal’ had taken had been the persecution of the *ekklēsia*. This activity, and the worldview which it symbolized, indicate well enough that if the time had been thought right for armed resistance to Rome itself, Saul would not have hesitated to sign up. (Had Saul still been a zealous Pharisee, for instance, when Gaius Caligula ordered the giant statue of himself to be set up in the Temple, he would have been first in line to resist, saying his prayers and sharpening his sword.)

This time the worldview-redefinition takes a rather different form, indicative of other worldview elements to which we shall come later. Paul the apostle still believed most emphatically that there was a battle to be fought. He still refers to that battle with the kind of apocalyptic language which many Pharisees would have used to denote the ordinary kind of battle and to indicate its theological significance. Now the battle itself has been redefined. No longer is it Jews (or at least righteous Jews) against pagans (and renegade Jews); and no longer are the weapons to be used those you obtain by beating your ploughshares into swords and your pruning-hooks into spears. As he explains to the Corinthians,

Yes, we are mere humans, but we don’t fight the war in a merely human way. The weapons we use for the fight, you see, are not merely human; they carry a power from God that can tear down fortresses! We tear down clever arguments, and every proud notion that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah. We are holding ourselves in readiness to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.⁶⁸

And if he can speak thus of the ‘war’ in which he is presently so vividly involved (a war, again, on two fronts: foes without, disobedience within), it is because he believes himself to be a footsoldier in a much larger war, a battle not against the ordinary human and physical enemies, but against larger, more frightening, harder-to-define enemies, Sin and Death themselves:

The Messiah rises as the first fruits; then those who belong to the Messiah will rise at the time of his royal arrival. ²⁴Then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵He has to go on ruling, you see, until ‘he has put all his enemies under his feet’. ²⁶Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, ²⁷because ‘he has put all things in order under his feet’. But when it says that everything is put in order under him, it’s obvious that this doesn’t include the one who put everything in order under him. ²⁸No: when everything is put in order under him, then the son himself will be placed in proper order under the one who placed everything in order under him, so that God may be all in all. [69](#)

This, the central driving passage of the key chapter in his second longest letter, should be taken as an indication of Paul’s radical reappraisal of ‘the battle’, and hence ‘the zeal’ with which one should fight it. The death and resurrection of the Messiah have convinced him that what he had seen as the battle, and the zeal to conduct it, had to be transposed into a larger theatre of war altogether. On the cosmic scale, Israel’s God, the creator, had already installed Jesus the Messiah as king over the universe; but he was at present ruling in the way we might imagine a rightful prince to rule when, recapturing his own territory after long years in the hands of rebels, he re-establishes his dominion bit by bit, eventually subjugating all the powers that have usurped his place. This is one of many places where anything that Paul would recognize as ‘apocalyptic’ is part and parcel of what he might have seen as ‘covenantal’ theology.

The danger with even describing this part of the worldview-shift is that some contemporary readers will simply tune out. ‘So,’ they will think, ‘Paul believed in angels and demons! That’s where Dan Brown got it from!’ while others will say, ‘There! That’s “apocalyptic” for you! Paul really was

a dualist; he really did believe in God “invading” the world and doing something totally new!’ He was, people may think, just like the Qumran sectarians, anticipating the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness. Indeed, Jerome Neyrey devotes a whole chapter of his ‘cultural reading’ of Paul’s letters to describing his cosmology as ‘dualistic’. The word ‘dualism’ and its cognates appear over twenty times in the first few pages of the chapter.⁷⁰

Neyrey is absolutely right to draw attention to the phenomenon, but absolutely wrong, I suggest, to describe it as ‘dualistic’. Of course there are (what I and others have labelled) ‘dualities’ at the heart of this worldview, as there are in any except the blandest of monisms. But the word ‘dualism’ is far too tainted with the varieties of worldview which have set up God and the world as opposites, or God and the Devil, or even God and humans. Such dualisms exist, but Paul is not guilty of them. Indeed, in the first volume I plotted carefully ten types of worldview to which the label ‘dualism’ has been attached in scholarly writing about second-Temple Judaism.⁷¹ And I equally carefully distinguished them from the *dualities* – to choose a word which indicates something very different – that imply a separation *within* a robust overarching monotheism: dualities such as those between God and the world (where God is the good creator of a good world, but God and the world are not the same thing), between good and evil (where evil is an intruder into God’s good world, a destructive parasite rather than an equal and opposite force) and between the present age and the coming age (where the present age is not bad in itself, but only in what it has become through the power of evil). And it is hugely important, at this worldview-level, to stress that Paul’s sense of the ‘apocalyptic’ or ‘cosmic’ battle, so far from indicating a radical dualism at any of the ten levels where such a thing would count, is actually the strongest possible indicator of the *rejection* of all such ‘dualisms’. The whole point of the battle is that the creator God is rescuing the good creation from the destructive power of evil. To call that ‘dualism’ is to misunderstand the most important thing that is going on.

What is more, this radical redefinition of the battle is exactly cognate with two key moves in Paul's whole theology. First, if the problem has been redefined in terms, not of pagan oppression of righteous Jews, but of a cosmic-scale struggle between the creator God and the parasitic forces of evil, and ultimately death itself, it removes from the pagan world and its inhabitants the slur of being *automatically* 'wrong' or 'evil', and allows them to be human again. Yes, they are idolators; yes, they are sinful; yes, they are full of wicked thoughts and deeds; but they are human, called to reflect God's image, loved by their creator. That is why there can be a gentile mission in the first place. Second, if pagans are relieved of being automatically evil, Jews are relieved from the equal and opposite burden of being automatically good. In other words, if the battle is no longer 'the good Jews' against 'the wicked pagans', but a matter of God's victory in the Messiah over forces of evil that have enslaved the whole world, Paul can admit that even the best of good Jews (in other words, modesty permitting, his own former self) were actually, in the last analysis, in the same boat as the pagans they were intending to overcome.⁷² They, too, were 'in Adam', and needed to join the Messiah in his crucifixion, so that they too could come to share in his resurrection.⁷³ The shifting of the battle-symbol from an *ethnic* to a *cosmic* battle thus enabled Paul to open the way both for the gentile mission (not that the gentiles were therefore 'all right really', but that they were not 'automatically excluded') and for the full critique of the Jewish people, his own self included, such as we find not least in Romans.

This redefinition of the battle thus indicates, not that Paul was really a dualist, but that he really was not. The whole point of the battle as he now describes it is that it is rooted in the desire and firm intention of the creator God to re-establish his loving, saving sovereignty over the whole of his creation. Death (and its henchman, Sin) are rebels, intruders, destroyers of the good creation. This battle is a battle *within* creational monotheism. It is – even if it sounds paradoxical to put it this way! – precisely a battle *against dualism itself*. It is dualism that wants to pretend that the world must ultimately be divided, perhaps matter against spirit, perhaps Jews against gentiles, whatever. That is what Paul is fighting *against*. That is why, as we

shall see much later, resurrection matters. God's good creation is to be reaffirmed.

The redefined battle, then, rumbles on through much of his work, skipping cheerfully over the modern distinctions between the so-called 'principal letters' and the so-called 'deutero-Paulines'. God will finally bruise the satan under your feet, he says.⁷⁴ The powers of this world made a big mistake in crucifying the lord of glory, and they will perish as a result.⁷⁵ The satan may tempt you through a lack of self-control.⁷⁶ Idols may be non-existent, but there are demons who associate themselves with them, and you should not blunder into a trial of strength between them and the lord himself.⁷⁷ One of the reasons we must forgive one another is that not doing so hands a tactical advantage to the wily satan.⁷⁸ The satan, indeed, disguises himself as an angel of light, and those who are doing his work cloak themselves similarly.⁷⁹ The same satan was allowed to put a thorn in Paul's flesh, to keep him from being too elated.⁸⁰ The 'ruler of the power of the air' was in charge of all humans, Jew and gentile alike, but God's action in the Messiah has overthrown this rule, and now the *ekklēsia* itself, in all its polychrome glory, is a sign to 'the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places' of the wisdom of God, the wisdom made known in creation and new creation.⁸¹ The battle continues, and the weapons to be used include those worn by God himself, or the Messiah.⁸² All the powers in heaven and on earth were, after all, made in, through and for the Messiah, and have been reconciled similarly; when they rebelled, they were disarmed and defeated on the Messiah's cross, and he has celebrated his triumph over them.⁸³ The satan may block our way when we make our travel plans, but God is greater.⁸⁴ And as for 'the lawless one', to whom the satan gives his power: he will be condemned and overthrown.⁸⁵ It is a remarkably consistent picture, reflected directly in almost all the letters. Even those where it does not explicitly occur, such as Galatians, may be supposed nevertheless to reflect other elements of what Paul saw as the redrawn, revised but still deeply symbolic battle. Once we understand this ongoing struggle as *the reimagining of the zealous battles (or would-be battles) of a Pharisee*, we

not only locate it properly within the history of ideas. More important, we understand it theologically, and understand how it functioned *as a symbol*, as part of the worldview-definition of Paul and those who paid attention to his teaching.

The final Jewish symbol to be examined here, as an element which Paul reworked and revised, is scripture itself – which surrounds, and gives body and colour to, everything else. Scripture was central to the world of the Jews. As that world became more complex through the time in Babylon and all that followed, so, increasingly, scripture – not just Torah, the Five Books, providing the key symbolic elements of the worldview, but also the Prophets and the Writings, particularly the Psalms – shaped and formed the people both resident in the land, worshipping in the Temple itself and spread in dispersion across the world. I have already described how, though scripture was of course put to many different kinds of use by the many varieties of Jewish life in this period, one central strand of these uses was to see scripture as the great, controlling story through which Israel understood its own existence: to see it, indeed, as *a story in search of an ending*, an ending whose shape and content would not be in doubt (the fulfilment of the promises, the coming of the Messiah and so forth) but whose conditions, and hence whose timing, were open not just to doubt but to centuries of agonized searching and questioning. What was required – and the precise shaping and content of this requirement varied widely according to the different strands of Jewish life and the way they told the common story – was something new, something which would enable a new generation to become in truth the people through and for whom the story had reached its long-awaited destination.

There were various options as to what this new thing might be. Perhaps it would be the oral Torah, through which the written Torah would be applied more exactly to the day-to-day life of God's people, enabling them to keep it fully and from the heart. Perhaps it would be the search for, and discovery of, a deeper Wisdom, the wisdom through which the creator had made the world in the first place. Perhaps it would be a sudden vision. Perhaps it would be the unfolding of what had before been a mystery. One obvious

word for each of these is ‘revelation’, or ‘unveiling’; and one Greek word that captures some of that is *apokalypsis*. If we want to use the word ‘apocalyptic’ to designate a worldview or genre (very different things), it would help if the thing so designated bore some relation to this entire framework of thought.⁸⁶

At the heart of the apostle’s reworking of this central Jewish symbol of ‘apocalyptic’, of a new ‘revelation’ which would make sense of the puzzling as-yet-unfinished narrative, was his belief, stated again and again, that in Jesus the Messiah Israel’s God had ‘unveiled’ or ‘revealed’ or ‘manifested’ something which enabled Paul at last to read Israel’s scriptures with a sense of closure, a sense of an ending that made sense of the beginning (Abraham, and behind him Adam) and of everything in between as well. We can, if we wish, give this revision of Israel’s key symbol (scripture) the name ‘apocalyptic’, provided we realize that that term should then carry no more and no less than we have already put into it. It does not, that is, *explain* anything that is not otherwise explained by the sense of a story in search of a dramatic conclusion now at last ‘revealed’. It does not add anything to the argument; it merely enables us to sum it up in a single word instead of a complex set of phrases.

All such summaries carry their own difficulties, of course, and sometimes their own nemesis. Wayne Meeks rightly states both the way in which Paul and his followers believed that a fresh revelation had occurred and the way in which that belief served as a key marker. Speaking of ‘special beliefs that promoted a sense of distinctive identity’, he cites ‘the belief in revelation made uniquely to believers’:

That belief also was part of the Jewish heritage, and the form in which it appears in early Christianity is rooted especially in the forms of Jewish apocalyptic ... certainly a group that possesses information to which no one else has access is a group strongly conscious of the boundaries between itself and nonmembers. The content of the secret held by the Christians was malleable; it could be expanded to include the whole constellation of their special combinations of beliefs. For the Pauline Christians the heart of the secret was the significance of Jesus’ death as God’s messiah and his resurrection.⁸⁷

Paul's belief, in other words, that the one God of Israel had, through the resurrection, revealed the crucified Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel, was not simply an extraordinary notion to be trumpeted around as a miscellaneous religious attraction. It was, very specifically, 'the revelation' that had been required to make sense of, and hence generate a fresh reading of, scripture itself. The purpose, all along, had been beyond the end they had figured, and was altered in fulfilment.

This, as we shall see later, precipitated an implicit ongoing dialogue between Paul and those Jews who continued to read scripture both as he had himself done as a Pharisee and as others had done in different contexts. It also, more to the point in our present purpose, meant that scripture began to function for Paul in a quite new way, as a new *kind* of symbol. Cognate with all the other symbolic revision that we have noted, and indeed dovetailing into those revisions at every point, Paul now read scripture as pointing to one end, which was now always present. *But now!* That is the keynote of his gospel, the new answer to the question 'What time is it?' Part of that answer is: time to read scripture *knowing how it all ends*.

Temple, Torah, Prayer, Land, Family, Battle and Scripture: a formidable array of symbolic markers, and none left untouched, all transformed, by the Pauline gospel. These had all been things which said, at a worldview-level (i.e. at the level one does not normally talk about, but which informs everything else one thinks, says and does), 'This is who we are: we are the people of the creator God.' The Pauline transformations said, in effect, 'This is who we are: we are the *transformed, messianic* people of God.' And, because the cross and resurrection were the key things that now redefined the Messiah himself, these transformed symbols said, 'This is who we are: we are the *cross-and-resurrection-reshaped* people of God in the Messiah.' This already points us, in principle, towards the answer to several other questions to which we shall shortly turn. It also points further ahead, explaining in advance just why 'theology' of the sort that Paul wrote played a much more prominent role in his work than it had before, either for his Jewish contemporaries or for their pagan opposite numbers.

And it is, much more briefly, to the pagans that we now turn. How did Paul address the symbolic worlds outside Judaism?

(ii) The Symbols of the Pagan World

In line with what we have said in chapter 3 above, we turn to the question: what happened to the symbolic world of ancient paganism when seen from the perspective of Paul and his proclamation of the Jewish Messiah? The question has recently been raised in a fascinating way by Kavin Rowe: when the still very Jewish apostle gets going with his critique of idolatry, what, as it were, takes the place of all those gods? Once you desacralize a space, how do you refill it?⁸⁸

Because desacralize is what Paul did. As far as he was concerned, the gods and goddesses of the ancient world were man-made monstrosities, non-existent beings whose devotees were deceiving themselves and thereby colluding with their own dehumanization. Such, at least, is the import not only of the famous passage in Romans 1 but of other passages too:

¹⁸For the anger of God is unveiled from heaven against all the ungodliness and injustice performed by people who use injustice to suppress the truth. ¹⁹What can be known of God, you see, is plain to them, since God has revealed it to them. ²⁰Ever since the world was made, his [invisible] power and deity have been seen and known in the things he made. As a result, they have no excuse: ²¹they knew God, but didn't honour him as God or thank him. Instead, they learned to think in useless ways, and their unwise heart grew dark. ²²They declared themselves to be wise, but in fact they became foolish. ²³They swapped the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of the image of mortal humans – and of birds, animals and reptiles. ²⁴So God gave them up to uncleanness in the desires of their hearts, with the result that they dishonoured their bodies among themselves. ²⁵They swapped God's truth for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen.⁸⁹

¹Now when it comes to meat offered to idols, we know that 'We all have knowledge.' Knowledge puffs you up, but love builds you up! ²If anybody thinks they 'know' something, they don't yet 'know' in the way they ought to know. ³But if anybody loves God, they are 'known' – by him.

⁴So when it comes to food that has been offered to idols, we know that ‘idols are nothing in the world’, and that ‘there is no God but one.’ ⁵Yes, indeed: there may be many so-called ‘gods’, whether in heaven or on earth, just as there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’. ⁶But for us

There is one God, the father,
from whom are all things, and we belong to him;
and one lord, Jesus the Messiah,
through whom are all things, and we live through him.⁹⁰

⁸However, at that stage you didn’t know God, and so you were enslaved to beings that, in their proper nature, are not gods. ⁹But now that you’ve come to know God – or, better, to be known by God – how can you turn back again to that weak and poverty-stricken line-up of elements that you want to serve all over again? ¹⁰You are observing days, and months, and seasons, and years! ¹¹I am afraid for you; perhaps my hard work with you is all going to be wasted.⁹¹

⁸For the word of the lord has resonated out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaëa; your faith in God has gone out to people everywhere. This means that we haven’t had to say anything. ⁹They themselves tell the story of the kind of welcome we had from you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to await his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who delivers us from the coming fury.⁹²

In these passages, Paul has not ‘revised’ or ‘rethought’ the standard Jewish belief about pagan idolatry, a belief rooted in the sneers of the prophets and the scorn of the Psalms.⁹³ He has reaffirmed it. We are monotheists, he insists, not pagan polytheists! Those who scramble over themselves to declare that the Areopagus Address in Acts 17 could not have been given by Paul because it is so positive about pagan philosophy, quoting from pagan poets and so on, regularly fail to notice that the heart of the speech is a classic Jewish denunciation of idols, their shrines and their sacrifices. The speech is set, of course, on the rock of the Areopagus, in full view of the magnificent Parthenon and the smaller but still stunning Temple of Nike, two of the most beautiful constructions ever erected by human hands. And the Paul of Acts declares that they are a waste of space, a category mistake. The Paul of the letters shakes hands with his shadowy Lukan *Doppelgänger* across the void of critical fashion: that is exactly what they are. So much for the first, and most important, pagan symbol. There is one God, the creator

of all things, and it is a mistake of the first order to suppose that this God can be contained within, or identified with, anything in this present world. So far, this is precisely what we would expect from a strict first-century Jew; from a strict monotheistic Jew who believed that the one God had made, and owns, the whole world and all its ways and wisdom; from such a Jew who has been transformed from within so that he believes the Jewish story has reached its long-ordained climax. God is not, and cannot properly be manifested in, any kind of object within the world of space, time and matter.

With one exception. Written into the charter deeds of creational monotheism – i.e. the opening chapters of Genesis – Paul knew that there was one creature who was designed, not to contain the creator God (as if such a thing were possible) but, at least, to reflect him. Part of Paul’s radical and robust rejection of pagan idolatry was based on the clear belief that idolatry not only diminishes God; it diminishes, also, those who actually *do* bear God’s image. It steals their privilege and bestows it elsewhere; or rather, since it is these same humans who are doing it, pagan worship sells its own birthright for a mess of idolatrous pottage. It puts humans below the birds, animals and reptiles. Humans were supposed to be running God’s world as his vicegerents, his image-bearers, reflecting into the world the glory and wise ordering of its maker. Paul’s typically Jewish reaction against the dehumanization that results directly from idolatry was only heightened by his belief that there had come at last a truly human being, ‘the image of the invisible God’, whose aim was precisely to rehumanize other humans, to rescue them from the corruption brought on by idolatry and to re-establish them as what they were supposed to be.⁹⁴ Paul’s rejection of the central symbols of paganism was heightened by what he believed about Jesus.

As a result, also, Paul found himself analyzing pagan worship partly in terms of its nonsensical character and partly in terms of something much darker.⁹⁵ As we noticed a moment ago when discussing the redefined ‘battle’, Paul was anxious *both* to say that idols had no real existence *and* that idol-temples were the sort of place where *daimons* were effectively

invoked, creatures that could wield real, if limited, power. These two views should not be played off against one another, as though they were obviously inconsistent and Paul was oscillating between two conflicting positions.⁹⁶ He was clear about Zeus, Athene, Mars, Aphrodite and the rest: they didn't exist. But people who worshipped these 'gods many and lords many' were in fact, he claimed, summoning up spiritual forces, agents of the dark power he calls 'the satan'. These beings, though not themselves anything like the great and lofty Olympians imagined by mainstream paganism, were none the less potent and dangerous. This world of petty but dangerous *daimons* was an altogether murkier place than the outwardly noble vision of the classical divinities (not that Olympus itself was exactly straightforward or clean-living): the *daimons* were, so to speak, grubby backstreet swindlers hiding out in the grand, empty palaces vacated by their imaginary superiors, and reliant on humans to give them such power as they still possess against the day when their abolition, already announced in the gospel, would be made complete.⁹⁷ This, again, is a basically Jewish perception, heightened by Paul's always-astonished awareness that when he worshipped the God of Israel he now knew that this God had a human face, that he had lived a human life and died a human death. The resacralization of the world begins with Jesus.

But it doesn't stop there. When Paul thought of humans worshipping the regular gods of the ancient world, and being thereby dehumanized, he thought also of the breathtaking alternative: that, instead of invoking Bacchus or Aphrodite, and getting high on drink or sex, or instead of invoking Mars or Mammon, and concentrating on making war or money, it was possible to invoke the spirit of the living God and be remade in his likeness, to become a renewed, freshly image-bearing human being. We can perhaps detect here a hint not just of rejection but of revision: yes, worshipping the divine is a good thing to do (Paul would have scorned the sceptical Academy with its detached philosophy and its going-through-the-motions public religion), and yes, you really do become like what you worship.⁹⁸ But rather than having your character shaped by this or that pagan god or goddess, why not worship and invoke the creator God in

whose image you are made, and find your character, your life, transformed and reshaped by his spirit? If the main locus of Paul's pneumatology is, as we saw, to be found in his view of the Messiah's people as the new Temple, part of the energy for that invoking of the indwelling spirit is an awareness that theology and anthropology, like nature herself, abhor vacuums, and that to dismiss a *daimon* and to leave the house empty, as Jesus had said, is to court worse disaster.⁹⁹ This is the point at which, structurally speaking, there is a world of difference between Paul's 'ethic', so called, and that of the ancient Stoics and other teachers. We shall explore this in more detail later, but we may note at the level of worldview that, whereas the Stoic aimed at living 'in accordance with nature', what Paul envisaged was a radical transformation of 'nature' itself – human nature, and the entire cosmos – by the powerful indwelling of the divine spirit.¹⁰⁰

The main symbols of the pagan world (leaving aside political, and especially imperial, symbols for the time being) consisted in the regular social life, partly rural but mostly urban, in which street-level culture thrived on festivals, circuses, special events regularly held in honour of (or invoking) this or that divinity. A Roman 'triumph' would be one of the greatest of these, with all kinds of overtones of classic pagan religion.¹⁰¹ But every town, every city, every colony, would have its own social life, complete with festivals and other celebrations, in which most if not all inhabitants would take part. The normal routine would involve plenty to drink, and all the usual things that would follow from that in terms of licentious or bawdy behaviour. Paul's letters reflect this challenge in general terms: the Messiah's people should not take part, even if their neighbours were surprised or suspicious.¹⁰² But we may suppose that part of the reason why Christians were unpopular (they seemed to have, as Tacitus put it, *odium humani generis*, 'a hatred of the human race')¹⁰³ was that they dissociated themselves from so much that was taken for granted as bringing colour and fun into the normal drab, and sometimes dangerous, drudgery of life. This was bound to be difficult. As we saw, Paul was happy for Christians to accept invitations to dinner with non-Christians, though if social intercourse of this sort for a Jew was, as Barclay says, 'on the Jew's

terms', there was a sense in which the Christian equivalent was bound to be, so to speak, 'on Jesus' terms'.¹⁰⁴ One could go, and eat; but presumably not get drunk, or behave in the way that even comparatively respectable partygoers might behave (not to mention the crazy goings-on we find in Petronius and the like). The question of other people's consciences might well come up, and have to be dealt with sensitively. There were all sorts of areas where navigating an appropriate course might be difficult, with social honour and shame at stake, and working on a different scale of values to the Christian one, in various directions. Paul must have known all this, but was concerned to tread that fine line between compromise and withdrawal over which, *mutatis mutandis*, Christians have continued to puzzle to this day.

As for the more obvious symbols of civic life, such as magistracies and the like, we have little idea of how Paul regarded them. Some members of his churches, however, held public office;¹⁰⁵ some were members of the imperial household. When he occasionally considered the matter he believed, as a well thought out creational monotheist probably would, that the creator God intended there to be civic authorities to keep order and to prevent private vengeance. All this would indicate that he was not at all opposed to followers of the Messiah taking part in what we loosely today call 'public life'.¹⁰⁶

In particular, Paul seems to have believed that Christians could and should, in principle, contribute to the well-being of the wider world in which they found themselves. They were to 'do good to all, particularly those of the household of faith.'¹⁰⁷ Rather than repaying evil for evil, they should 'always try to do good to one another and to all.'¹⁰⁸ If, as I think, the last seven verses of Romans 12 are intended to outline Christian obligation to the world outside the *ekklēsia* (as the partial parallels with those passages just cited might indicate), they speak not only of the negative point, not giving offence or taking vengeance, but of the positive: rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Christians were not, like some of the ancient philosophers, to hold themselves aloof from the common joys and sorrows of ordinary people. They were not to give themselves airs, as though their faith made them a cut above everyone else. They were to 'take

thought for what is noble (*kala*: ‘fine, praiseworthy’) in the sight of all.’¹⁰⁹ It mattered that their public life be ‘worthy of the gospel of the Messiah’.¹¹⁰ Though I disagree with David Horrell about some of the ways in which this works out, I agree that we find, here in Paul, at least the beginnings of an outline sketch of a Christian responsibility in relation to the wider world, rather than an ethic which is concerned only for the ordering of the household of faith. And I am inclined to think that we should read the passages about ‘good works’ in this light as well: just because other civic benefactors are pagans, that doesn’t mean that Christians shouldn’t ‘do good works’ for their wider society if and when they have the opportunity.¹¹¹

Finally in the wider pagan world, and with the Owl of Athene in mind, we recall the massive effort expended on the search for Wisdom. This is an entire topic in itself, and must be dealt with in its place. For the moment we need say only this: Paul made it clear, again and again, that there is a ‘wisdom of this world’ which turns out to be foolishness before God. This did not, however, lead him to an anti-intellectualism (anything but!), or to a mere one-dimensional turning away from everything the world had to offer, or to the kind of sectarian dualism which retreated into its own private sphere. Once more, his creational monotheism meant that he could freely and gladly recognize the presence, in the wider non-Jewish and non-Christian world, of plenty that was true, holy, upright, pure, attractive, of good reputation, virtuous and praiseworthy.¹¹² The follower of Jesus did not have to pretend that none of the above existed. Rather, such things, wherever they might be found, were to be seen as signs of the handiwork of the good creator. That, indeed, is what undergirds the overall point: when Paul rejected so much of the symbolism of the pagan world, that was not because of any dualistic or world-rejecting tendency. Rather, it was precisely because he valued the world, and human life, so highly that he resisted strongly what he saw as destructive and dehumanizing worldviews and their resulting lifestyles. His engagement with the world of paganism was ultimately positive. He had in mind both the good original creation and the promise of creation renewed.

(iii) The Symbols of Empire

It would be highly controversial to say the same about Paul's implicit engagement with the world of the Eagle, of the drive towards global empire of which Rome was the current representative. The present scholarly mood, which I understand and in a measure share, is all for finding points of conflict, for reading between Paul's lines to see the way he implicitly and sometimes explicitly undermined the imperial rhetoric and religion that pervaded his world. Fair enough.¹¹³ Yet I believe that, in the last analysis, Paul did affirm the goodness, the God-givenness, of human structures of authority, even while at the same time undermining, through central aspects of his theology, the hubris, idolatry, blasphemy and other wickednesses which, as a Jew never mind as a follower of Jesus, he associated with the arrogance and swagger of Rome. To say that a particular police force is riddled with corruption, racism or collusion with organized crime is not to say, 'therefore we should not have a police force'. To say that the present imperial system encourages and sustains wickedness or folly of various sorts is not to say, 'therefore we should have no human authorities'. (The possibility of replacing an existing empire with some other system lies some way off the side of Paul's page. In any case, we should not forget that when Rome acquired its empire – a long time before it acquired its monarchical emperor – it was a proud republic whose office-holders, appointed by public votes, were accountable to public scrutiny.) The answer to corrupt authorities is not anarchy. Paul, once again as a good creational monotheist, would not suggest such a thing; that is what is underneath his strong affirmations, so shocking to some liberal democrats, never mind some Anabaptists, in Romans 13.1–7. That is why the poem of Colossians 1.15–20 is so important. Creational monotheism entails a strong statement about the God-givenness of human structures, even while at the same time also indicating that the one God will hold office-holders to account.

That is the context within which we look for signs of what Paul did about, or said in relation to, the symbols of pagan empire which we glanced at in the previous chapter. At the level of 'religion', he deigned briefly to

notice the ‘gods many and lords many’, upstaging them with the one God, one lord of his revised monotheism. He saw the gods of the nations, including the home-made or self-made ‘gods’ of recently deceased emperors, as among the *stoicheia*, the line-up of tutelary deities of the nations; as such, they were part of the enslaving systems that kept pagans in chains, awaiting the release which could only come through the gospel.¹¹⁴ He says nothing about the massive statues of emperors and their families with which outposts such as Corinth and Ephesus were adorned. Their newly built temples were on a par, for him, with all other pagan temples. The fact that some cities were being redesigned to highlight the imperial architecture produced, so far as we know, no written comment from him. Nor did he explicitly mention the coins, with their basically blasphemous inscriptions: Caesar as *Pontifex Maximus* and *Divi Filius*. Yet presumably Paul knew those coins well; the Christians did not at that stage mint their own (that was left to the Bishops of Durham, a custom now sadly in disuse). Paul used coins with Caesar’s picture and blasphemous claims on them: he received them in payment for his tentmaking work and spent them in the baker’s shop or when buying a flagon of wine for his young colleague Timothy. We have no evidence that he ever said anything about them.

Absence of evidence, of course, is not evidence of absence. We remind ourselves that, were it not for the trouble in Corinth, we would know nothing of Paul’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper. Colin Hickling once speculated delightfully on a world without First Corinthians, a world where protestant scholars would insist that the eucharist was obviously a late catholic invention of which Paul knew nothing.¹¹⁵ It is quite possible that, had someone raised the question about statues, or coins, or imperial architecture, Paul would have had something wry and subversive to say about them.¹¹⁶ But we happen not to possess that particular letter.

What we do have, arguably, is more powerful than any such small-scale comments, however sharp. As we shall see when discussing his theology, it turns out that some of the greatest, most central themes of Paul’s deepest teaching – those to do with Jesus the Messiah as the revelation of Israel’s God, as the place where God’s people were summed up and their story

brought to fruition, as the one before whom, now, every knee was summoned to bow – grew visibly out of Jewish traditions; they were not, in other words, invented to match, or to square off against, the imperial rhetoric. And yet they did in fact confront that imperial rhetoric at point after point. Jesus is ‘son of God’; he is ‘lord of the world’; he is ‘saviour’; the worldwide revelation of his rule is ‘good news’, because through it ‘justice’ and ‘peace’ are brought to birth at last. He is the one who ‘rises to rule the nations’. The announcement of all this is the key source, for Paul, of ‘power’, and in Ephesians, which is either Paul’s greatest summary of his own teaching or the work of a careful and close colleague and imitator, he speaks eloquently about the power of the one God at work in the Messiah, a power which has raised him above all rule, authority, power and dominion, and above every name that is named, both in the present age and in the age to come.¹¹⁷ Anyone who had seen the Eagle at work, and had heard its names and claims, would know what was being said. We must advance this case more fully later on.

This puts into context a more subtle question. As far as I can discover, one of the extraordinary innovations in the imperial claims of the Caesars was the production of a ‘salvation-history’, a thousand-year narrative designed, like the new streets in Ephesus, to lead the eye inexorably upward to the imperial glory. All those years of the republic were a preparation for ... this!¹¹⁸ For the first time, the great Jewish narrative which had lain at the heart of the worldview of Saul of Tarsus, and still lay at the heart of that of the apostle Paul, found a story which matched it, so it seemed, and backed up its claim with an impressive public record. Paul does not mention this story explicitly, any more than he speaks of the imperial claim made by coins, statues and other obvious imagery. Yet we should not ignore the subversive nature of the retold Jewish story which undergirds so much of his writing. If *this* – the story of Adam, Abraham and Israel, climaxing in the Messiah! – is the grand narrative of the creator’s design for his world, then the grand narrative of Virgil, Horace and Livy, and the visual symbolism which went with those writings, cannot be true, or the ultimate truth. That is the dilemma which Paul posed to his readers. The extent to

which they will have ‘heard’ that subversive note is a question to which we must return.

One thing, though, should be clear. As we shall see in a moment, what was central to Paul’s worldview was the fact of a new community, a community which transcended the boundaries of class, ethnic origin, location and (not least) gender, by all of which the pagan world in general, and the imperial world in particular, set so much store. It was this community, functioning as his central worldview-symbol, that Paul was establishing and supporting even in the little letter to Philemon, let alone in the larger letters which spell it all out more fully. These communities, whose only identifying badge was their loyalty to Jesus as Messiah and lord (articulated in spoken ‘faith’, embodied in baptism), tend now to be seen, by social historians at least, as more deeply important than their place in the usual structure of a ‘Pauline Theology’ might indicate.¹¹⁹ But, seen from the point of view of any sharp-eyed Roman official, such communities posed at least a question, possibly a threat. We recall that a primary reason for the suppression of certain foreign cults in Rome (giving the lie to the idea that ancient paganism was cheerfully and carelessly ‘inclusive’) was the suggestion of groups of people meeting together with their own social microcosmic structure, unrelated to the official structures of the state.¹²⁰ We should not be surprised that Pliny, fifty or so years after Paul, regarded the Christians as a dangerous nuisance. When we add to this the fact of Paul’s (to us) rather rigid insistence on the behavioural, symbolic boundaries of these communities, at once so similar to Diaspora Judaism and yet so dissimilar, we should not be surprised to discover that they were sometimes seen as subversive, sometimes riskily so. And when we add to this again the fact that Paul drew, for his mature theological expression, on the Psalms, and on books like Isaiah, with their sharp denunciation of pagan empire and their wild celebration at YHWH’s victory over it; when we note that parallels to some aspects of his thought are to be found in the very book, *4 Ezra*, which contains the most explicit denunciation of the ‘Eagle’ from the point of view of the messianic ‘Lion’; and when we reflect that he did appear sometimes to use expressions which must have had imperial

resonances for many of his hearers; then our suspicions ought to be very thoroughly aroused. When Paul said, 'Jesus is lord,' a good many of his hearers must have known at once that this meant, 'So Caesar isn't.' And *that* was the 'good news', the *euangelion* which Paul announced around the world. Was that a subversion of the symbolic world of the empire? How could it not be? How would that work out?

But before we can take this any further – it will be postponed to chapter 12, in the final part of the book – we must turn from our examination of what Paul did with the symbols of his triple world and look at the world which Paul himself constructed. What stands out as the symbolic structure of this strange thing, this new entity, for which he found himself using the language of 'new creation'?

3. Paul's Reconstruction of a World of Symbolic Praxis

(i) Introduction

The previous section has made it clear just how naked and exposed Paul's worldview must have seemed. Shorn of its most obvious Jewish symbolic universe, and refusing to embrace that of Greek wisdom or Roman imperialism, let alone the 'religion' which subsisted somewhere in between, it must often have seemed difficult to envisage what life was now all about. Approaching Paul in this way thrusts into the limelight questions which traditional approaches to his theology have screened out: in particular, the very existence, and meaning, of the community of the baptized faithful (call it 'the church', if you like; but the danger of anachronism is especially present right there, unless we force ourselves to think of seven or eight unlikely characters meeting in someone's front room in one part of town, and a dozen or two somewhere else, with news of three or four in an outlying village; that is why I have normally spoken of the *ekklēsia*). It is still common to find 'the church' and related topics tucked away towards the back of studies of Paul, the assumption being that what mattered was sin

and salvation and that questions about church life were essentially secondary, or even tertiary.¹²¹ This essentially western and protestant assumption, which has been responsible at a subliminal level for so much of the shape of how we read Paul, is not necessarily challenged by the present presentation. It might turn out, in the last analysis, that when we move from worldview to theology we find ‘ecclesiology’ settling back into its comfortable place. Nor, we hasten to add, does this present privileging of the topic mean that we are hereby capitulating either to ‘early Catholicism’ or to some more recent variety of that hypothetical movement. No: we are simply asking the question: what were the main symbols, and symbols-in-action, of Paul’s newly envisaged and constructed world? And we are about to find, large as life, on the basis not of a theological *a priori* but simply by asking this question, scratching our heads, and looking around, that the primary answer is *the ekklēsia: its unity, holiness and witness*.

This may, I suppose, make people suspicious, not now that I am capitulating to Catholicism but that I am caving in to sociology. Well, good sociology is in my view a way of keeping in sharp focus aspects of a subject that idealists might skip over in the quest for big ideas. To that extent it is to be welcomed, not as an end in itself but as a route to clarity of vision. If the discipline of history is like a telescope, the discipline of sociology is one of the lens-adjusters that makes sure the detail is clear. In this case, surprising though it may seem, the sociological question of Paul’s fresh worldview-construction opens a window, remarkably quickly, on to some of the largest theological topics of all. I beg my sceptical readers to be patient for a section, and see where this will lead.

A case has, indeed, recently been made out for seeing Paul’s primary aim as the social practice of his communities. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, one of the most original voices in contemporary Pauline studies, speaks glowingly of his discovery, through his time at Yale twenty years ago, of

the fundamental importance of social history, in particular the intricate and ultimately perhaps unfathomable ‘correlation’ of symbols, ideas and patterns of belief on the one hand and social facts on the other.

This has led him to postulate that the whole point of Paul's thought lies, not in self-understanding (as Bultmann had thought) but in practice. 'It is social practice,' he writes, 'that is his primary target.' 'Paul's ideas are all directed towards practice and indeed towards social practice.' His own aim is thus

to build up as comprehensive a picture as is possible of the form of life to which Paul's letters bear witness. The same aim will be found in various approaches of a cultural anthropological kind, only here focus will from the start be more on the symbolic content of terms and practices than on their strictly socio-political basis.¹²²

Quoting this particular scholar may seem, to those who guess where I may be going, a peculiar or even dangerous place to begin. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentis*, I hear someone murmur. It is true: I shall argue later on that Engberg-Pedersen's approach to the subject is unhelpfully reductionist, not only to Paul but to the Stoics with whom he is aligning him. He screens out both socio-political issues and theology, and we shall try to put them both back in. But his idea of social practice, of a correlation of symbols, ideas, patterns of belief and social facts, though not perhaps as tidily formulated as we have tried to do with the worldview-model I have employed, sets out a laudable aim. We shall not end here, but we shall at least begin here, even if the end of all our exploring will be to make our way back and know the place for the first time.

We are not concerned at this point with the question of mapping the socio-economic context of Paul and his converts. That debate has rumbled on over the years, with some insisting that they were most if not all extremely poor and others proposing a more variegated social background.¹²³ Paul does say, in one of the most obvious reference-points, that 'not many' of his Corinthian converts were wise, powerful or well-born in human terms. They were the foolish, the weak, the ill-bred, and God had chosen them to put the rest to shame. Some have suggested that the 'not many' was a euphemism: *none* of them were in the upper bracket. But that presents problems. Where did the *ekklēsia* meet? Whose home did they gather in? Who were the rich who had plenty to eat at the Lord's Supper, leaving the poor to go hungry? Certainly after a few years, as we saw

earlier, the city treasurer was among the Corinthian Messiah-people, and women of independent means were there not only to give hospitality but, in one case, to be entrusted with Paul's greatest letter.¹²⁴

These questions are important, but they are not the same as the one to which we now turn: with what symbols, and symbolic praxis, did Paul fill the void created by the abandonment of those rich and powerful Jewish symbols, and by the refusal to take up in their place the symbols proffered by the surrounding pagan culture?¹²⁵ In sharper terms, how did Paul resacralize the void? Did he, as some seem to suppose (reflecting, we may guess, the desacralized world of western modernism), offer only an internal personal religious experience and hope, leaving the rest of the cosmos as a flat, materialist landscape? Or were there ways he tried to recapture, by another route, the Jewish dream of YHWH revealing himself to bring justice to the world and filling it with his knowledge and glory, or indeed the pagan sense of a world somehow full of divinity?

(ii) The Symbols which Say: 'We Are the One People of the One God'

There is remarkable agreement, among those who have come to this and similar questions, that the *ekklēsia* and especially its unity stand at the centre of Paul's newly framed symbolic universe.¹²⁶ We might have guessed this anyway from the time and energy which Paul gave to the work of generating and sustaining that unity, struggling for it against, at times, apparently hopeless odds. We think, to look no further, of our old friends Philemon and Onesimus, and Paul's deeply theological strategy for reconciling them. But coming at the question the way we have done opens up the landscape in a particularly fruitful fashion.

It reminds us, before we go any further, that Paul's vision remained essentially Jewish. The philosophical sects and mystery cults of late antiquity were not concerned for unity. They developed this way and that. People could drop in and out of them at will, or develop new varieties of teaching and practice, which might of course be debated but which were not supposed to endanger or damage the thing itself. Paul at this point is much

more like, say, Qumran, with its *yahad*, its 'oneness'. However, the unity on which Paul insists went explicitly beyond that envisaged within Judaism, since it emphatically included women, children and slaves as well as adult males. In Mishnah Berakoth, when numbers are being sought to make up the requisite minimum of three to say the common grace at meals, women, slaves and children are expressly excluded. Paul expressly includes them.¹²⁷ That, too, is the import of the well-known synagogue prayer, included in the Jewish liturgy to this day, in which the worshipper thanks God for not making him 'a gentile, a slave or a woman' (at which point the women thank God that he has made them according to his will).¹²⁸ One of the best known of all Paul's 'unity' texts, Galatians 3.28, seems to be staring this tradition in the face, and thus outdoing even the Jewish stress on a united community with a different dimension of 'unity' altogether:

as many of you as were baptized into the Messiah put on the Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no 'male and female'; for you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus.¹²⁹

Galatians is, in fact, one of the prime 'unity' texts. Here we see Paul fighting hard precisely for the unity of the community at its (then) most vulnerable point, the astonishing and, to many, scandalous unity of Jew and Gentile. After recounting the early contacts he had had with the Jerusalem 'pillars', Paul famously recounts the moment in Antioch when Peter ('Cephas') arrived, and then when 'certain persons from James' came as well. Prior to James's people coming, Peter had eaten with the gentiles, but then 'drew back because he was afraid of the circumcision-people.' Paul regards this as hypocrisy; as a twisting of the truth of the gospel itself; as, ultimately, a denial of the status which all, Jew and gentile alike, have as members of the Messiah's people, characterized by Messiah-faithfulness. They all belong at the same table, no matter what their ethnic, cultural or moral background. That is the whole thrust of one of Paul's most famous paragraphs, the place where 'justification by faith' makes its first, and vital, appearance.¹³⁰

The theme continues throughout the main body of the letter, and indeed it is only when we see the drive towards unity that some of the trickiest

passages in Galatians 3 in particular come out cleanly.¹³¹ The end is the best place to start: ‘if you belong to the Messiah, *you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise*’ (3.29). In other words, *all* those who ‘belong to the Messiah’ are Abraham’s ‘seed’. ‘Belonging to the Messiah’ here is Paul’s way of summing up the several other ways he has spoken of that ‘belonging’ in the preceding verses (‘children of God in the Messiah’; ‘baptized into the Messiah, putting on the Messiah’; and especially ‘all are one in the Messiah’¹³²). They are ‘in’ the single ‘seed’, the Messiah whose incorporating life encompasses this new and expanding company from, in principle, every nation under heaven, and from all social classes. And, we note, from both genders – women being baptized just as men are, whereas circumcision had of course been another encoded sign of male superiority.¹³³

It is in Galatians 3 that we find one of Paul’s most notoriously dense references to the monotheism which, I am suggesting, formed the solid ground underneath the central symbol of the single family. The Mosaic law, he says, was ordained through angels, by the hand of a mediator (Galatians 3.19). Well and good: Jewish tradition was used to the idea of the angels having a part in the giving of the law, and the most natural way of reading ‘the mediator’ is to understand it as a reference to Moses.¹³⁴ Paul is arguing, remember, about God’s intention to produce a single family in fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. Well, he says, ‘the mediator is not of one, but God is one’ (3.20). The only way we can understand this – but this way works extremely well – is to gloss Paul’s dense, almost Aristotelian, terseness as follows. ‘Moses, however, is not the mediator through whom God has created or is creating the single family. Moses, after all, gave the law to ethnic Israel, which was only one part of the worldwide intention of the promises. God, however, is one, and therefore desires, and will produce in his good time, the single family which he always promised.’ Read like this, verse 20 stands as a signpost, looking back to 3.6–9 with the original promise, and on to 3.27–9 where Paul reaches his triumphant conclusion. And the point for our purpose is this: here once again is the central symbol, the single united family which Paul is struggling to maintain in this letter, as

in many others. And here, underneath this central symbol, is the appeal to monotheism: God is one, and therefore desires a single family.¹³⁵

Strong support for this reading of Galatians 3.20 is found in Romans 3.29–30:

Or does God only belong to Jews? Doesn't he belong to the nations as well? Yes, of course, to the nations as well, *since God is one*. He will make the declaration 'in the right' over the circumcised on the basis of their faith, and over the uncircumcised through faith.

Here again we have the united *ekklēsia* as the aim of the argument, standing firm on the *Shema* itself. The central symbolic praxis of the Jewish people, the prayerful invocation of the one God, indicates that the Jewish tradition points away from itself to the larger, worldwide family whose marker is not Torah but faith.

Another notable appeal for unity, this time without any very obvious target in terms of people pulling away from one another, is found in Philippians. Whether I come and see you or remain elsewhere, Paul writes, I want to get the news

that you are standing firm with a single spirit, struggling side by side with one united intent for the faith of the gospel, and not letting your opponents intimidate you in any way. This is a sign from God: one that signifies their destruction, but your salvation.¹³⁶

This then broadens out into one of the most remarkably searching and challenging appeals anywhere in his writing:

¹So if our shared life in the king brings you any comfort; if love still has the power to make you cheerful; if we really do have a partnership in the spirit; if your hearts are at all moved with affection and sympathy – then make my joy complete! Bring your thinking into line with one another.

Here's how to do it. Hold on to the same love; bring your innermost lives into harmony; fix your minds on the same object. ³Never act out of selfish ambition or vanity; instead, regard everybody else as your superior. ⁴Look after each other's interests, not your own.¹³⁷

This is not just the practical unity of sharing table-fellowship, as in Galatians (that was the best that Paul could hope for there!), but the deep, remarkable notion of a community, no doubt comprising very different

characters and quite possibly in danger of internal division from a variety of causes, coming to share a common mind, heart and soul, thinking the same way, careful to give way to one another, joined in a genuine love, partnership, affection and mercy.¹³⁸ In Galatians, the threat comes from inside the company of Messiah-people; in Philippi it may perhaps be coming at least partly from outside; but the answer is the same. The Messiah's people are a single family, and must strain every nerve to make that a reality that goes all the way down into their hearts and minds. The way they will do that is by allowing the Messiah's own 'mind' (2.5), as worked out in his own astonishing career-path of 'giving up' status and rights, to shape their own.¹³⁹

It is in this context that the more complex and developed arguments for unity in 1 Corinthians are to be understood. Again we are interested at this point in the *symbolic* value this unity has for Paul. It isn't just a practical matter (life will be easier if everyone gets along without factions and rivalry). It is rather that something essential to being Messiah-people is lost when the community is split. As David Horrell rightly argues, what appears at a modernist surface reading to be 'tolerance' of different opinions has a basis very different from that essentially eighteenth-century notion:

Paul's tolerance operates only within the framework of an intolerance that insists on Christ alone as the basis for community solidarity, a basis which also implies the proscription of actions deemed to threaten this union.¹⁴⁰

This is the principle that works its way through the letter. Seeing it, as I did for several years, from the perspective of a bishop concerned with the problematic unity of merely one 'denomination' (something itself utterly foreign to Paul's mind), one can only gasp both at the challenges he was facing and at the energy with which he turns from one potential split to another.

He comes at it right from the start in 1 Corinthians, with his sharp question to factionalism: *memeristai ho Christos?* is the Messiah divided? The right answer of course is 'no', but the Corinthians' behaviour has been giving the answer 'yes'. That key unlocks a good deal (not all) of the letter,

running through to the great picture of the Messiah's body in chapter 12, with its lyrical outworking in the poem about *agapē* in chapter 13 and then the practical instructions about ordered, united worship in chapter 14.¹⁴¹ Part of the point about the haunting and evocative suggestion of a deeper wisdom than the wisdom of the world (1.18—2.16) is that, while all that depth is on offer, you Corinthians are staying at the shallow end, squabbling about different leaders when you should be aware of your own identity as – the Temple of God.

Paul builds up to this particular point in a subtle piece of writing. He speaks first about the great building that is under construction, to which each minister of the gospel is contributing, work for which they will be judged by the coming fire. He then reveals, in all its glory, what the sharp-eyed had already picked up from the biblical echoes aroused by his description of 'gold, silver and precious stones'.¹⁴² This is not an ordinary structure, a house or a civic hall. Verses 16 and 17 of chapter 3 rise up from the surrounding verses like a great building emerging from the noise, smell and dust of the surrounding city:

¹⁶Don't you see? You are God's Temple! God's spirit lives in you! ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's Temple, God will destroy them. God's Temple is holy, you see, and that is precisely what you are.¹⁴³

As frequently, Paul leads slowly up to a main statement of a major theme, in order then to allow it to work out in detail – in this case, all the way from 3.18 to the end of chapter 4. We sense the utterly Jewish power of the claim: there is, of course, only one Temple, a point on which scripture had insisted. Ultimately, the shallow faction-fighting shows itself up not only as playing around with mere worldly wisdom when there is a much deeper wisdom on offer, but as an attempt to build little pseudo-temples, or perhaps (granted the one foundation that has already been laid) to stick on top of that foundation all kinds of unsuitable and incongruous materials. Paul issues two kinds of warnings: first, about the fact that the coming fire will reveal what sort of material people have been adding to the building; second, about the danger of destroying it once it is built. But the point is

this: there is one building, one Temple, one place where the living God has chosen to live. It consists, now, of all those who belong to the Messiah, all those who are indwelt by his spirit. God has planted that Temple in Corinth, as he has in city after city. The appeal for unity is based on nothing less than the Messiah himself, who in turn gains his being, his meaning, from the one God:

²¹So don't let anyone boast about mere human beings. For everything belongs to you, ²²whether it's Paul or Apollos or Cephas, whether it's the world or life or death, whether it's the present or the future – everything belongs to you! ²³And you belong to the Messiah; and the Messiah belongs to God. [144](#)

This 'unity', then, is not simply a matter of everyone smiling and behaving in a friendly fashion, though no doubt that would help. Paul is prepared, he says, to enforce his appeal, to come and sort things out, because part of the problem is human arrogance, and that needs to be confronted. A dangerous task, as he would later discover. But the aim is nothing less than God's sovereign rule. Temple and kingdom go together, and both demand that the Messiah's people are united. This kind of wisdom is what it means to have 'the mind of the Messiah'. [145](#)

The theme of unity then takes a back seat for three chapters, while Paul addresses questions of behaviour, not least in the area of sex and marriage. This is where he gives the very precise and interesting instructions we observed before, about being free to associate with non-Christians but not being free to eat with someone who claims to be part of the family but whose behaviour speaks otherwise (5.9–13). This time the 'unity' of which he speaks is the unity of the believer with the Messiah, and the necessary consequences in terms of behaviour; and this time the 'Temple' is the individual body, each one a place where the glory of God is to be manifested. [146](#)

Unity is then firmly back on the agenda all the way from chapter 8 to chapter 14, though in at least three different (though related) modes. First, the question of meat offered to idols. One of the great gains in recent scholarship is that the sociological investigation of exactly what was going

on here has resulted in this whole discussion being seen as much more than merely 'ethics' (and a rather odd corner of it at that). The question is: how to live as the people of the one God in the world of paganism? That is why Paul's evocation of the *Shema* in verses 3 and 4 ('anyone who loves God' and 'no God but one') builds to the extraordinary climax of the reworked *Shema* in verse 6: one God, one lord. As Wayne Meeks has rightly insisted, for Paul the symbolic power of the unity of the church is grounded on the equally symbolic power of the oneness of God, not as a mere dogma to be learned or affirmed, but as the sustaining and stabilizing force for the life of the community.¹⁴⁷

The christological reworking of monotheism, which we shall study in more detail later on, then becomes the ground plan for the careful appeal for unity when faced with conflicting consciences. As we have already seen, making the question of idol-meat a matter of conscience, rather than a matter of strict rules, is a major move away from a strict Jewish position, a move which is itself grounded on monotheism: because there is one God, all the beasts of the forest are his: 'the earth is YHWH's, and all its fullness.' Nothing is then to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.¹⁴⁸ But because the Messiah, who is now the lord at the heart of the reworked *Shema*, is the *crucified* Messiah, the community's practice when faced with issues of conscience must reflect the fact that all who belong to the Messiah's family are brothers and sisters for whom he died, and are called to put into practice the fact that their corporate existence involves a sharing in his death, and the renunciation of 'rights' which it entailed. A careful ordering of priorities, then: first, the absolute rejection of any step towards dualism, such as would declare this or that food 'off limits'; second, an equally absolute rejection of any behaviour that undoes the work of the cross. Here we see a further outworking of the 'wisdom' which comes from the cross, as opposed to that which comes from the world (1.17–31).

Paul's own example – as the apostle who gives up his rights for the sake of the gospel – is then the subject of chapter 9. Again we see the focus on unity highlighted in terms of Paul's sense of obligation to all people, as well

as the fragility of his own worldview since, by the way he speaks of himself at this point, he is himself neither Jew nor non-Jew, but must ‘become’ like these people in order to ‘win’ them:

I am indeed free from everyone; but I have enslaved myself to everyone, so that I can win all the more. ²⁰I became like a Jew to the Jews, to win Jews. I became like someone under the law to the people who are under the law, even though I’m not myself under the law, so that I could win those under the law. ²¹To the lawless I became like someone lawless (even though I’m not lawless before God, but under the Messiah’s law), so that I could win the lawless. ²²I became weak to the weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that in all ways I might save some. ²³I do it all because of the gospel, so that I can be a partner in its benefits. [149](#)

‘I became a Jew!’ Surely, Paul, we want to say, you *are* a Jew; you can’t *become* one. No indeed; and Paul will, on reflection, acknowledge the point and even use it within his arguments. [150](#) But his most fundamental identity – and this is what the present passage is concerned with, which is why it is so important and interesting when we are talking about worldview-construction – is no longer found in his ethnic identity, however significant that is in itself. As in Philippians, he has looked at all that and declared it to be *skybala*. What then are the symbols of Paul’s own deepest identity? In Philippians 3, as we shall see presently, it is the Messiah himself. Here it is ‘the gospel’: the gospel as vocation, the gospel as life-shaping, worldview-forming, for the apostle to whom it is entrusted. [151](#) And at the heart of ‘the gospel’ is of course the Messiah’s own ‘giving up of rights’. That is why Philippians 2.6–11 supports, so dramatically, the powerful appeal of 2.1–4, and why Paul can state again what he says in 1 Corinthians 9, in a quite different form but with the same theological *and worldview-forming* effect, in Philippians 3.2–11. [152](#)

The unity of God’s people, and the necessary holiness by which it will be characterized, is then at stake as Paul returns to the question of idols, food and temples in 1 Corinthians 10. Here he makes clear, too, how the ‘one God, one lord’ theology emerges into practical expression and symbolic value: ‘there is one loaf; well, then, there may be several of us, but we are one body, because we all share the one loaf.’ [153](#) Once again, monotheism is

what counts (10.26), but tempered by the christologically grounded respect for conscience. And, in a remarkable and worldview-revealing conclusion, those who understand themselves this way will form *a different, and differently symbolized, community*, neither Jew nor Greek, but rather the *ekklēsia tou theou*:

³¹So, then, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything to God's glory. ³²Be blameless before Jews and Greeks and the *ekklēsia* of God, ³³just as I try to please everybody in everything, not pursuing my own advantage, but that of the great majority, so that they may be saved. ^{11.1}Copy me, just as I'm copying the Messiah. ¹⁵⁴

'Before Jews, Greeks and the *ekklēsia* of God!' We should not, whether through inattention or theological resistance, miss the force of that phrase. ¹⁵⁵ Paul's main point, of course, is that the little Messiah-faith community in Corinth should not provoke unnecessary irritation among their neighbours; but the way he undergirds that is striking. This community is 'God's *ekklēsia*', the one people of the one God, the guidelines for whose common life are given in the Messiah and enacted in the example of the apostle. ¹⁵⁶

Chapter 11 forms a kind of transition to the great triptych of chapters 12—14. On the one hand, it picks up the theme of the Lord's Supper from chapter 10, the point at which Paul was describing what is really going on when someone actually goes inside a pagan temple and shares in the sacred meal. The central Christian meal, then, is not so completely different from those of the other traditions. It grows directly out of the Jewish passover-meal, bringing that long tradition to a climax, and thereby confronting, as passover-meals always did, the power of paganism, whether in Egypt a millennium and a half earlier or in the Corinth of Paul's own day. Again the point is *unity*: unity with the one and only lord, and unity 'in him' with all his people. In this case, the stress is on unity across the apparent social divisions that are threatening the community by allowing rich Messiah-people to stuff themselves while poor ones go hungry (11.21–2). Whether this rich/poor divide at the lord's table can be mapped on to the various other divisions that emerge elsewhere in the letter (the personality-cults of

chapters 1—4, the ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ in chapters 8—10, the squabbles about ‘spiritual gifts’ in chapters 12 and 14, and the debates over resurrection in chapter 15) seems to me a priori unlikely, though it may have formed one factor in how some of those difficulties expressed themselves. It is not even clear whether the rich/poor question of verses 21–2 constitutes the same problem as the ‘factions’ in verse 18; Paul may simply be highlighting the social divide as one example of divisions that range over wider issues.¹⁵⁷ But the overall point of what he is saying should be clear. The Lord’s Supper should be a moment of symbolic unity; and this requires, as does the delicate situation of chapters 8—10, that the Messiah’s people ‘wait for one another’ (11.33). Though the normal meaning of *ekdechomai* is simply temporal (‘waiting’ for something to happen or for someone to arrive) the sense here seems to be slightly more than that: waiting, perhaps, in the sense of having regard for one another, not just that ‘everyone has now arrived, so we can start the meal’, but that everyone should be aware of everyone else, with their social and cultural particularity, their needs, their vulnerabilities. We should not miss the significance of this within the tightly hierarchical world of a first-century Roman city, where everybody knew that the rich and powerful would *always* eat first and everybody else would wait, deferentially, for them.¹⁵⁸

All this leads the eye up to the great exposition of ‘the Messiah’s body’ in chapter 12. By now it should be clear that this is a long way from being a mere illustration, introduced as a handy way of speaking about an egalitarian or ‘every-member’ *ekklēsia* but without much wider significance. There are, perhaps, fewer ‘mere metaphors’ even in ordinary discourse, let alone in Paul, than we have realized. Just as the Temple-theme grew gradually in chapter 3, so the theme of a single human body has been growing gradually, with hints followed by guesses, throughout 1 Corinthians (think of chapter 6, with bodies as ‘members of the Messiah’; think of chapter 10, where the one bread signifies the ‘one body’). Now it emerges in all its glory, one of Paul’s two or three most potent symbolic (as well as merely hortatory or illustrative) statements of his entire worldview:

Just as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the Messiah. ¹³For we all were baptized into one body, by one spirit – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and we were all given one spirit to drink.

¹⁴For the body, indeed, is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, ‘Because I’m not a hand, I’m not part of the body’, that wouldn’t make it any less a part of the body, would it?

¹⁶And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I’m not an eye, I’m not part of the body’, that wouldn’t make it any less a part of the body, would it? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were the sense of hearing, what would happen to the sense of smell?

¹⁸But as it is, God has organized the members, placing each one individually in the body according to his wishes. ¹⁹If all the parts were one member, where would the body be?

²⁰So the result is this: there are many members, but one body. [159](#)

There are of course other places where the same imagery is used, and with the same or similar effect. (One of the extraordinary things about commentators is how puzzled they become if a writer should use an image in two different ways in two different letters; as though Paul or anyone else used an image as a carpenter uses a chisel, for one purpose and only one, so that if we find him doing something different with it we suspect a different hand at work.) But this passage stands out as the fullest exposition of ‘the Messiah’s body’. And again we remind ourselves: at the moment we are concerned, not with something called ‘the theology of the church’, but with the construction and maintenance of a worldview-symbol, indeed *the* central symbol of Paul’s newly formed world. The *ekklēsia*, the Messiah’s body, is nothing short of a new version of the human race.

That was already implied in 10.32, where the *ekklēsia* was distinguished from both Jews and Greeks. Now we see how it works: ‘the Messiah’ is a single body, and those who belong to him, who are ‘in him’ through baptism, are members of that single body. The unity of God’s people in the Messiah is the most obvious worldview-symbol Paul has. That is why, in the absence of others, it matters so enormously to him. It is loadbearing. If this gives way, everything comes crashing down.

The symbol of unity is precisely a unity ‘in the Messiah’, *en Christō*. It does not answer to a hypothetical ‘unity of all humans’. Paul may have been ‘born out of due time’, as he says, but he was certainly not an

eighteenth-century liberal. The softer but equally powerful argument for unity in Romans 14 and 15 is thus not to be seen as an appeal for a unity across the boundaries of Messiah-faith, as some have suggested. It, too, is a way of insisting that all who belong to the Messiah should learn to live together in mutual respect.¹⁶⁰ The scenario in Rome is almost certainly more complicated than that in Corinth, though perhaps not so immediately fraught. We cannot simply divide the hypothetical Roman church into ‘Jewish Christians’ and ‘gentile Christians’, as an older scholarship tried to do. Nor can we easily separate out four or five parties, though Minear’s attempt to do so, a generation ago, was at least a way of trying to think historically rather than ideologically.¹⁶¹ We should always remind ourselves that some ‘Jewish Christians’, like Paul himself, took the ‘strong’ line (monotheism meant that all food and drink was in principle available), and that some ‘gentile Christians’, like the Galatian converts, were eager to embrace Jewish customs, to ensure the proper validation for their new-found membership in Abraham’s family. These cross-overs are the stuff of real life; actual humans rather enjoy escaping from the cages where ideology would prefer to imprison them.¹⁶²

What is really interesting about Romans 14 is the fact that nowhere in the chapter does Paul mention ‘Jews’ or ‘gentiles’ at all. This may be partly because, as I have suggested, the actual or potential divisions in the Roman church do not correspond to ethnic backgrounds, but I think it is more likely to be because, exactly in line with the breathtaking realignment indicated by 1 Corinthians 10.32, *Paul does not want his addressees to see themselves as basically ‘Jews’ and ‘gentiles’ at all, but as Messiah-people.* He wants them to learn, on the basis of theology, rather than to discern, on the basis of their automatic self-perception, what their most fundamental ‘identity’ actually is. Why highlight the very markers you are doing your best to erase?

Granted, in the previous ‘movement’ of the symphony we know as the letter to the Romans, Paul has found it necessary to address head-on the questions of ethnic identity which are still bound to loom large. Here, suddenly, and almost uniquely in his letters, he presents himself as the

grieving Jew who believes in the crucified Messiah and who symbolizes the new ‘remnant’ (9.1–5; 11.1–6), and addresses ‘you gentiles’ specifically as such (11.13), warning them severely against any actual or potential anti-Jewish sentiment that would deny presently unbelieving Jews the chance of coming to believe in, and belong to, their own Messiah (11.23).¹⁶³

Those who are used to reading and pondering Romans 9—11 may forget how striking it is that here Paul suddenly speaks so explicitly of Jews and Gentiles, rather than addressing the *ekklēsia* as a whole in a way calculated to engender the new single identity in the Messiah. This sudden, dramatic dropping of the normal viewpoint reminds me of a solemn occasion at school when I was fifteen years old. One day our French teacher, who for six months had spoken no word of English in class, came in and told us, in English, that he thought we were the worst French set he had taught for twenty years. We shivered in our shoes. He wasn’t supposed to speak in English! When we were with him we lived in the fictive identity of being Francophone, of thinking in French! I didn’t know about worldviews then, but he had spent six months creating a worldview in that room, and had just stepped out of it, no doubt for effect. It worked. Paul, I suggest, is doing much the same in Romans 9—11, for the sake of the awesome story he has to tell at that point, a story exactly in line with the first eight chapters of the letter, and yet precisely unexpected, as a symphonic third movement ought to be.

But in the final movement, chapters 12—16, he addresses the *ekklēsia* as what it actually is, in the world of (what the sociologists call) fictive kinship which the gospel has generated and which he has expounded all through: the new humanity, among whom some prefer to eat only vegetables while others are happy to eat meat. Again, as with 1 Corinthians 8, the move to consider something previously forbidden as now *adiaphora* (‘things indifferent’) marks a major shift of worldview, which demands that a new loadbearing pillar should take the place of those that were there before. And, again as with the Corinthian exposition, the *ekklēsia* itself is the new loadbearing pillar, with its roots firmly in messianic monotheism. Observe

the almost kaleidoscopic to-and-fro between the lord and the one God, with God's people making up the complete consort dancing together:

³The one who eats should not despise the one who does not, and the one who does not should not condemn the one who does – because God has welcomed them. ⁴Who do you think you are to judge someone else's servants? They stand or fall before their own lord. And stand they will, because the lord can make them stand.

⁵One person reckons one day more important than another. Someone else regards all days as equally important. Each person must make up their own mind. ⁶The one who celebrates the day does so in honour of the lord, just as the one who eats does so in honour of the lord, since they give thanks to God. The one who does not eat, too, is abstaining in honour of the lord, and likewise gives thanks to God.

⁷None of us lives to ourselves; none of us dies to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the lord, and if we die, we die to the lord. So, then, whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the lord.

⁹That is why the Messiah died and came back to life, so that he might be lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰You, then: why do you condemn your fellow-Christian? Or you: why do you despise a fellow Christian? We must all appear before the judgment seat of God, ¹¹as the Bible says:

As I live, says the lord, to me every knee shall bow,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.

¹²So then, we must each give an account of ourselves to God. [164](#)

The passage continues with the now familiar story. Nothing is unclean in itself; but if eating it causes the ruin of one for whom the Messiah died, you must abstain. When something shifts from being loadbearing to being *adiaphora*, you must take care that nobody gets hurt in the falling masonry of the previous structure. Once again it is the work of the Messiah himself, giving up his rights and privileges, that must serve as the model and the energizing power (15.1–6). The aim is nothing less than united worship, of the messianic/monotheistic type: 'that together you may with one voice glorify the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ'. [165](#)

It is only then, once the point has been thoroughly made, that Paul can sum up the whole theology of the letter in an explicit appeal for a combined Jew/gentile worship. That has been the point all along: to bring all humanity together in a new song of united praise. Thus he sums up the entire narrative of God's saving purposes:

⁷Welcome one another, therefore, as the Messiah has welcomed you, to God's glory. ⁸Let me tell you why: the Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, ⁹and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy.

As the Bible says:

That is why I will praise you among the nations,
and will sing of your name.

¹⁰And again it says,

Rejoice, you nations, with his people. [166](#)

¹¹And again,

Praise the Lord, all nations,
And let all the peoples sing his praise.

¹²And Isaiah says once more:

There shall be the root of Jesse,
the one who rises up to rule the nations;
the nations shall hope in him.

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy spirit. [167](#)

In other words: this is the moment when we can stand back and see the full sweep of the prophetic and messianic narrative. It is no accident that Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 11 occur here, where Paul is drawing all his threads together. The scriptural story generates *a single worldwide people praising the God of Israel, the creator*. That is the point and purpose of it all. The theory, or theology, we call ‘ecclesiology’ will come later. For the moment we note that this is the single great cultural symbol, the single solid pillar of Paul’s newly minted worldview, the worldview in which the previous cultural symbols of ancient Israel, of Paul’s own ancestral way of life, cease to matter in the way they did.

The reason for this, we note once more, has nothing to do with their being stupid, crass, or ‘material’, still less because they are part of a ‘religion’ which is now shown to be inferior to the new one; still less because they encourage Pelagianism. Those old and unworthy slurs have come about when people have taken Paul’s conclusion and fitted it on to a different argument. The markers of Paul’s ancestral Judaism fall away, as far as the *ekklēsia* is concerned, because God has done at last the great thing which he had promised to the patriarchs, the thing for which Moses, the Psalms and the prophets had longed and prayed. The scaffolding which has protected both building and builders during its construction must now be taken down lest it spoil the view.

We cannot emphasize too strongly that, however paradoxical this may sound, Paul's viewpoint remained deeply and essentially Jewish – a point that Wayne Meeks rightly stresses.¹⁶⁸ Paul has not watered down in the slightest his basic commitment to the great story in which, as a Pharisee, he had believed himself to be living. He has simply (if 'simply' is the right word) discovered that God's fulfilment of his ancient purpose had been different from what he had imagined. Thus do 'covenant' and 'apocalyptic' (to use the shorthands) combine and mutually redefine. Some may regard this as deeply anomalous, and certainly plenty of people at the time saw it as that and worse.¹⁶⁹ But for Paul it was completely consistent. The roots of that consistency – the solid ground on which this central symbolic pillar of his worldview rested – we must examine in a moment. But we note, in concluding this discussion, the various forms in which this central symbol of ecclesial unity came to expression.

Perhaps the most important point is that Paul saw God's messianic people as a *family*. They were siblings, brothers and sisters. We are used to that latter phrase in a fairly generalized sense, said (for instance) by a preacher or even a politician who is happy to use the language but who would be alarmed if the audience took up the implicit offer and assumed a real commonality of home, business and livelihood. That would accurately reflect 'brothers and sisters' in a first-century context, but hardly in today's western world. As we mentioned a moment ago, sociologists speak of this sort of thing in terms of 'fictive kinship': we know we are not blood relations, but we are going to speak and act as if we were. (Actually, that was very common in the first-century Roman world: Caesar Augustus, who quite literally made his name by being the 'son' of the divine Julius Caesar, was adopted, and took care to make sure Caesar's actual sons did not long survive to challenge his claim.) This idea of a fictive family was itself a kind of adoption precisely into the historical people of Israel, as Paul's great expositions of Abraham and his family indicate, despite the host of unwilling readers.¹⁷⁰ And what the fictive family shares is *koinōnia*, one of those untranslatable words for which 'fellowship' provides one angle, 'business partnership' another, and 'family solidarity' a third, still leaving

us with a sense that more needs to be said for the whole to be grasped.¹⁷¹ That, once more, is what was going on in Paul's appeal to Philemon. Malina and Neyrey rightly draw attention to other types of fictive family in the ancient world: teachers and disciples, factions and coalitions, work groups, *collegia* and synagogues, patrons with their clients and, not least, the *polis* itself, the basic civic unit.¹⁷² These provide a network of near parallels, but it is still the case that the fictive family Paul seems to have in mind when he speaks of 'the household of faith' and so forth was the people of Israel itself.¹⁷³

Within this grouping, hospitality was expected to be offered and received readily, as would be the case within a geographically extended family.¹⁷⁴ It is thus absolutely true, as has recently been stressed, that Paul 'teaches the gospel using ethnic and kinship language to articulate God's plan for salvation *in terms* of these identities', but this does not at all mean that we are wrong to see his message as being for all, Jew as well as gentile.¹⁷⁵ And it is precisely within this context that there grows that powerful imperative, springing up right across the Pauline corpus, for *agapē*: not just a 'love' which is drawn instinctively or by emotion towards certain persons, but a practical and outgoing care and concern which displays itself in the concrete realities of money-sharing, project-sharing and life-sharing. One might even designate this as a separate, and significant, item of worldview-praxis.¹⁷⁶

If one were to summarize Paul's articulation of this central symbol, drawing together the threads of all that we have said so far, we might say six things. First, the gospel message of Jesus the Messiah created a new world with new inhabitants, no longer defined by the specifics of Jewish law, but not seeking as a replacement any of the standard symbols of pagan identity. Second, this new community could sometimes be thought of as the new Temple, sometimes as a human body, in both cases not simply drawing on obvious and available metaphors but making powerful symbolic statements. Third, this new community was to learn to live as a family, with all that this would entail. Fourth, we might suppose that this new community, being itself such a powerful symbol of a radically new

worldview, might be regarded as a considerable threat to existing power structures. Fifth, this new symbol was rooted in a monotheism which, while having the recognizable shape of Jewish rather than pagan styles of monotheism, had come to fresh expression precisely through Jesus the Messiah. Sixth, this new community was formed and characterized at every point by its conformity to the Messiah himself, specifically in his crucifixion and resurrection.¹⁷⁷

We might also then say a seventh thing. It will be noticed that in these six points, growing naturally out of the analysis of Paul's symbolic praxis in the letters so far studied, *we have just summarized Ephesians 2.11—3.21*. Perhaps symbolic or even sociological analysis may yet achieve the revolution in scholarly assumptions that neither the 'new perspective' nor the revived 'apocalyptic' school, nor even the 'political Paul', have so far managed to do, though all might have tumbled to it at any point in recent discussion: Ephesians, long sidelined in western protestant Pauline discussions, turns out to articulate rather precisely the very points which have emerged, on the basis of the 'main' letters, from a detailed worldview-study of Paul's central symbol.

This symbol says, as we have noticed several times already, 'we are the one people *of the one God*.' It is a measure of the attention Wayne Meeks paid to the texts that, despite the fact that hardly any New Testament scholars were writing about monotheism when he wrote *The First Urban Christians*, he recognized that the symbolic vacuum left by the departing symbols of Judaism needed to be filled by just that monotheism which, as we saw in chapter 2, characterized rather fiercely the very strand of Judaism with which Paul had been intimately connected. Paul did indeed so fill it. 'Christianity,' writes Meeks, 'took over the Jewish position completely': the position, that is, that unlike the varieties of synthetic and syncretistic pagan monotheism (the Stoics, for instance), they worshipped the one true God, and insisted on a correlated 'exclusive unity of the worshipers'.¹⁷⁸ We have seen how this worked out: the emphatic restatement of the (admittedly revised) *Shema* in 1 Corinthians 8, the invocation of Psalm 24.1 in 1 Corinthians 10, the insistence in Romans 14 that the one God would judge

all alike. Here is how this kind of monotheism *works in practice*: it is not an abstract dogma, to be appealed to as a kind of test of doctrinal orthodoxy, but is precisely a community-shaping and community-founding belief.¹⁷⁹

One reflection may be in order before we move on, a reflection I believe of considerable significance for the whole study of Paul and indeed of Christianity in general. I stated this briefly in the introductory chapter; it is now time to develop the point further.

If it is the case that Paul's worldview was constructed around the central symbol (with its attendant praxis) of the single 'family', the one 'people of God', the 'Temple of the living God', the 'Messiah's body', with none of the expected symbolic praxis either of second-Temple Judaism or ancient paganism to help this central pillar stand up, then we have stumbled upon a reason, perhaps the main reason, for the new place given to what we now call 'theology', Paul's theology in particular. We could put it like this: *it is precisely because of the major restructuring of Paul's symbolic world that 'theology' comes to have a different, much larger and more important place in his worldview, and thereafter in the Christian church, than ever it had in either Judaism or paganism.* In terms of the present book, it is because of Part II (Paul's symbolic world) that Part III (Paul's theology) is absolutely vital. Part III is not, in other words, simply a theologian's playing with the ideas thrown up by the 'real' sociology or history we are doing in Part II, just as (to ward off the opposite objection) the worldview-analysis in Part II is not simply a playing around with sociological categories before getting down to the 'real thing' in Part III. The two belong intimately together and support one another. Jewish writers have often commented that 'theology', as that word is now understood, is largely a Christian construct, and they are right, for just this reason: that a fresh, reflective understanding of God, the world, the human race, and so on grew and developed to fill the vacuum left by the departing symbols of Judaism. It had to if the new worldview was to have any staying power. It is no accident that we have seen, at the very moments when Paul is hammering out the nature of his new, symbolically freighted community, that he reaches for his reworked Jewish-style monotheism. It wasn't just that he needed some doctrinal stiffening,

and found that particular doctrine useful for the task. *Prayerful reflection on God, God's ways, God's work, God's purpose, and ultimately God's faithfulness* – that task we loosely call 'theology' – had, quite suddenly, to take on a new role.

Paul seems to have believed that this, too, was providential, and part of the meaning of the gospel. The Messiah's people, he often insisted, were to be 'transformed by the renewing of the mind'. Thinking clearly about God and his purposes was not just an intellectual luxury, an indulgence for long winter evenings. It was part of the solid ground upon which the single, central worldview-symbol would stand firm. The renewed people of God were to be renewed in their minds, learning to *think* in a way that was given, for the first time ever, the task of sustaining a worldview. To be clear: as we have seen, 'worldviews' are things you look through, not at. They are things you take for granted. My point here is that in order for the worldview to remain in place Paul believed it was necessary for the Messiah's people constantly to explore and think through the actual object of their faith, in other words, God himself, his purposes and his promises. Wisdom, prior to this a luxury for the leisured, was now offered to the slave, the shopkeeper, the housewife.

'Theology' was not of course invented by the early Christians. We see it in the Psalms, prophets and wisdom traditions of ancient Israel. We see it, sometimes agonizingly, in the writers of the second-Temple period. We see it, in their own mode, in Plato, the Stoics, some of the great classical poets. But the Christian mode is not only different in content (christology, pneumatology, justification by faith, a fresh vision of 'salvation', the reformulation of eschatology and so on). It is different in the job it has to do, in the shape within the worldview which it has to fill. It is as though an instrument (the clarinet, say) which has been content until that point to let the strings and trumpets play the main tunes, and to fill in the harmony half way back in the orchestra, is suddenly called out and given a new, spectacular part, which bids fair to become the central motif for the whole performance. Paul's radical reworking of the Jewish worldview for a global context was just such a moment, calling the sometimes shy, speculative,

mystical and not very practical instrument called ‘theology’ to its feet, transforming the music into a concerto. This is, of course, why any attempt to understand Paul that begins by bracketing out ‘theology’ is doomed to failure, however many important points it may bring to our attention on the way.¹⁸⁰ The reason we study Paul’s theology, I suggest, is that it has had to grow up quickly, to learn its new, complex, leading part within the music. Theology is the lifeblood of the *ekklēsia*, which is itself the central worldview-symbol. Without it – as any church will discover, to this day, if theology in general and Pauline theology in particular is ignored or marginalized! – the chance of the central worldview-symbol standing upright and supporting the rest of the building will be severely decreased.

(iii) The Symbols which Say: ‘We Are the People of the Messiah’

As soon as we begin to enquire about the central symbols around which the earliest Christian worldview was organized, and especially about the worldview of Paul himself, we come, of course, to Jesus himself. Even if we translate our questions into the language of the ‘myth’ by which a community comes to define itself and understand its existence, its goal and its intermediate purpose, there is no getting away from it: the story of Jesus himself, and indeed of Jesus *seen as the strange and unexpected fulfilment of the story of Israel*, is the non-negotiable centre of such a ‘myth’.¹⁸¹ We shall come back to this, of course, when considering the stories of Paul’s worldview in chapter 7.

Each of the main things we might wish to say about the role of Jesus in Paul at the level of theology also comes up for consideration at the level of worldview.¹⁸² This is not mere duplication. We shall shortly be examining some very specific elements of the symbolic praxis which Paul taught and practised in his churches, some of the rather few things he and his converts *did* which became, in their turn, loadbearing for the worldview. And the meaning of these elements of symbolic praxis is entirely dependent on the prior symbolic significance, as the character-shaping boundary-marker of the community, of the things Paul believed to be true about Jesus.

To begin with, he was Israel's representative Messiah, who summed up the life and story of the people in himself, brought Israel's history to its appointed if shocking and unexpected climax, and formed in himself the nucleus of the 'people' who, called now from all nations, were to inherit the promises and take forward the purposes of the one God. This summary of the meaning of Jesus' Messiahship in Paul should make it clear that we are not dealing here with an abstract idea, a theological 'concept' to be discussed as an intellectual exercise. This is part of the foundation of the community, the Messiah's 'body'. The Messiah himself becomes the focus, the sign and the means of unity, the unity in which Jew and gentile will come together as in Galatians, the unity in which slave and free will find a new fellowship as in Philemon. As Messiah, Jesus is the one in whom God's renewed people are incorporated. Many have seen this point who have never dreamed that it is actually contained, for Paul, within the meaning of Messiahship itself, which, following the fashion of the day, they have denied as a Pauline concept.¹⁸³

As Messiah, Jesus was the one in whom God's faithfulness had come to climactic expression, and who therefore called out faithfulness from his followers. Here is a point of great *symbolic* significance before it can be explored as a central point of *theology*: loyalty to Jesus as Messiah, 'the obedience of faith' as Paul puts it,¹⁸⁴ occupies the place within Paul's new worldview-construct formerly occupied by the 'loyalty to God', or to Torah, or to the holy land, within just that zealous Judaism that we know to have been Paul's own context. This loyalty, which in its former version would have been a key marker of the genuine, out-and-out committed Jew, was thereby transformed into the identity-anchor within Paul's renewed worldview. This loyalty (for which the Greek word was *pistis*) was the thing that demonstrated where God's true people were to be found within the new creation that had come to birth at Easter. Here, at a symbolic level, we see part of the meaning of 'justification by *pistis*': strange though it will seem to some, *pistis* is the badge that functions, within the Pauline worldview, as the sign of membership in God's people. (This is not, of course, *all* that

Paul means by *pistis*; such a rich term needs, and will receive, fuller explication later, particularly in chapter 10.)

In particular, Jesus the Messiah was for Paul the *eikōn tou theou*, the ‘image of God’.¹⁸⁵ It is not enough simply to explore this huge notion theologically, in terms of the ‘image’ in Genesis 1 and the reappropriation of that in Paul, or in terms of what this means for traditional ‘christology’, with its discussions of the coming together of ‘divine’ and ‘human’ in Jesus. No: at this point we are concerned with worldview-symbols, and here, as Kavin Rowe has pointed out, we have the beginnings of what we might even call a Christian iconography: the start, and the generative point, for a newly sacral world. The other icons – statues, temples, coins, mosaics – fall away, and for Paul one solitary icon stands in place of them all. Jesus *reflects the one God*: that is what *eikōn tou theou* indicates. The fact of Jesus himself, who he was and is, and not least his Messiahship,¹⁸⁶ is for Paul the place where, and the means by which, the community of his followers gazes at the one God and, through worship and thanksgiving, is itself transformed into the same likeness.¹⁸⁷ Thus the single, unique image gives birth to a freshly inscribed world of icons, as humans loyal to the Messiah come in their turn to reflect that image. All this, richly theological of course, must be understood at the level of *a newly symbolic world*.

In and through everything else, Jesus the Messiah, the one in whom the one God is reflected, the one in whom his people are summed up, is the one *who died on the cross and was raised on the third day*. David Horrell quotes Raymond Pickett who, coming at Christianity with the question of symbolic identity, emphasizes that ‘the central symbol of the cross’ is ‘not solely a theological or doctrinal topic’, but rather is ‘a symbol on which Paul draws to shape the praxis of the Corinthian community’.¹⁸⁸ It is hardly controversial to say this, but it needs to be said none the less. The cross itself worked its way into the symbolic imagination of Paul’s successors, and from quite early on there is evidence of its use as a visual symbol. But it could become this because it already possessed a symbolic power within the narrative itself, the symbolic power of being seen as the moment above

all when the rescuing purposes of Israel's God were finally enacted and fulfilled.¹⁸⁹ This is its first level of symbolic meaning.

This symbolic power possessed by the cross needs to be pondered further, into a second level. As Paul himself declared, it was 'foolishness to Greeks and a scandal to Jews'. More particularly, it flew in the face of all hellenistic wisdom: part of the point of crucifixion was that it completely degraded the sufferer. It denied him any chance of a noble death, a considerable preoccupation among pagans.¹⁹⁰ It also, in the normal run of things, denied him a proper burial as well, since the body would be eaten by birds, rats or other carrion and any final remains dumped in a common pit. The complete helplessness of crucifixion stood in sharp contrast to the Stoic, and indeed Socratic, ideal of the person who, perhaps through committing suicide, remained in control of their own fate. Any idea of personal dignity, virtue, worth or meaning was drained away by crucifixion, and designedly so; that is why, long before the Christians gave it a symbolic meaning, it already had one. It was designed to make a statement. It said, whether on the lips of an angry slave-master, a proud emperor or anyone in between, 'We are in charge here; and this is what happens to people who stand in our way.' The cross therefore offered a sharp symbolic paradox when the early followers of Jesus claimed that he was the world's true lord. It was Paul himself who explained this in terms of the revelation both of the faithfulness of Israel's God and of the new way of being human in which that faithfulness was to be reflected.¹⁹¹ But the second meaning of the cross, as a powerful counter-cultural and then counter-imperial symbol, should not be ignored.

Third, the cross was indeed a 'scandal to Jews'; or rather, the idea of a crucified *Messiah* was a scandal to them. Granted, crucifixion itself was a scandal, a pagan mode of execution that Jews themselves would not normally employ. Granted, too, there is that stray curse in Deuteronomy against one who is hanged on a tree.¹⁹² But many, many Jews were crucified, not least by the Romans, during the hundred years either side of the death of Jesus, and though this was no doubt in one sense a scandal, it was more a sorrow, a shame, a disaster. What turned this awfulness into a

symbolic as well as theological *skandalon* was the idea that a crucified man might turn out to be the Messiah. Here we see, in a flash, at a trumpet crash, right into the heart of Paul's symbolic world. It is as though a sudden bolt of lightning, right outside the window, shone a beacon into a previously dark room. Speaking of himself as a devout Jew, not a 'gentile sinner', but as one who has found his new, true identity in Messiah-faith, and speaking with the 'I', not of recollected autobiography, but of symbolic representation, he declares:

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. I am, however, alive – but it isn't me any longer, it's the Messiah who lives in me.¹⁹³

Here is the secret of the scandal. He was what I am, and now I am what he is. *A crucified Messiah means a crucified Israel.* Yes, and a resurrected Messiah means a completely renewed Israel. This is an even sharper 'invasion' into the first-century zealous Jewish worldview than has been imagined by the purveyors of a would-be 'apocalyptic' Paul. The cross, Paul believed, was not simply a strange, outlandish event, in which the one God did something completely new, utterly drastic, world-changing, world-shaking, world-remaking. The cross was actually the God-ordained, utterly shocking and paradoxical climax to the long story, the 'covenant' narrative which, as so many have pointed out, could not simply carry on like a broad river moving the divine purpose forward inch by inch, but which, as the same number have failed to see, carried at its heart the explosive charge which would radically transform that narrative even as it fulfilled it.

If the cross was central to Paul's newly generated symbolic world, so of course was the resurrection. He was quite clear (as not all his would-be followers have been) that the cross meant what it meant because Jesus was raised from the dead three days later, and for no other reason. 'If the Messiah is not raised,' he wrote to the muddled Corinthians, 'your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.' In other words, without the resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth goes down simply as another disastrous would-be hero. Another failed Messiah. A great martyr, perhaps; but not the bringer of the new age. If he is not raised, new creation has not begun.

With Jesus' resurrection, however, Paul, like all other early Christians actually known to us, believed that all this had now happened.¹⁹⁴ They all took the resurrection of Jesus to be a solid, concrete event, leaving an empty tomb behind it, with Jesus' body being thoroughly transformed so as to leave behind for ever the possibility of corruption and death. This event, this reality, had an obvious symbolic, worldview-constituting value.¹⁹⁵ It was, not least, a fresh marker of *time*: the new age has dawned, 'now is the time of salvation.'¹⁹⁶ It was, in other words, the sign of a freshly inaugurated eschatology: the end of Israel's time of desolation, the start of the time of 'return', of a new kind of law-fulfilment in line with Deuteronomy 30, the time for the nations to be brought in. Resurrection was much more than an event, though for Paul certainly not less. (How often, in recent years, have 'event' and 'interpretation' been played off against one another, as though it were somehow more mature or wise to have the interpretation without the event, the meaning, as it were, without the experience. On the contrary: approach to the meaning will indeed restore the experience.)

It was also, as we shall presently see in more detail, a worldview-marker with all kinds of immediate consequences for the life of the community that needed to be shaped and directed but which lacked other worldview-markers to help it on the way. For Paul, the impact of resurrection on behaviour is obvious: the Messiah is raised; if you are in him you are raised as well; so reckon that it's true and behave accordingly! This point is not new when we meet it in Ephesians and Colossians, as many have tried to insist: it is there, loud and clear, in Romans 6 as well.¹⁹⁷ Equally, the point can be put like this: the Messiah has been raised, you belong to him, therefore you *will* be raised in the future, therefore what you do with your body in the present time matters.¹⁹⁸ But it is not just in these matters, things we unhelpfully label as 'ethical', that the resurrection functions as a worldview-marker. It is also in the larger issues of the *ekklēsia* and Israel: 'what will their acceptance be if not life from the dead?'¹⁹⁹ And, out beyond that again, a 'world' view indeed: what God did for Jesus at Easter is, *mutatis mutandis*, what he will do for the whole creation at the end,

releasing it from its bondage to decay to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified.²⁰⁰ As I have argued elsewhere, this sharply delineated eschatology draws together and makes far more precise the expectation that some Jews already held. And that fresh, crisp delineation is the direct result of the resurrection of Jesus seen, not as a 'theological' statement, though it is that, nor yet as an isolated, detached, 'historical' event, though Paul certainly believed that it had happened in real space, time and matter. It is with the resurrection as *symbol* that we are here concerned, the resurrection as the marker of an entirely new worldview – and yet not entirely new, because it is born from the womb of the old, however unexpected and however painful the contractions. Resurrection as a symbol, if you like, doing at the level of worldview-marking what the resurrection of Jesus did in fact, turning the expectation of Israel upside down while raising a flag in the wider pagan world that said, The unthinkable has happened. The world is a different place. An old, rather unpleasant joke used to go the rounds, about someone who had been to see God and, on returning, declared, 'She's black!' Something of the same shock was felt around the pagan world of late antiquity by the declaration of 'good news' which went like this: we have a new lord of the world; and he's a crucified Jew, raised from the dead! Ridiculous, offensive, scandalous; just what we might expect from a new worldview.

The lordship of Jesus was itself, then, a further symbol, growing directly out of the belief that he was indeed Israel's Messiah, raised from the dead. It is hard to get the point across to people who have never seen it like this, but we must try none the less: central to some of the key messianic texts in Israel's scriptures was the affirmation that when Israel's true King finally arrived, he would be the lord of the whole world, the one who would bring justice to the nations, the one whose kingdom would stretch from one sea to the other, from the River to the ends of the earth.²⁰¹ The symbolic value of hailing Jesus as lord was much more, then, than the offering of allegiance, the taking on of a new way of life, the commitment to obedience. To the horror of many then and many now, it meant what it said: Jesus had already been installed as the true *kosmokrator*, world ruler.²⁰² In a world where

there was already a World Ruler (by whose subordinates, indeed, this new 'world ruler' had been crucified), the announcement of *kyrios Christos* was bound to have a powerful symbolic value, challenging all other 'lordships' of whatever sort, but challenging in particular, we must suppose as a preliminary working hypothesis, the 'lordship' of the one whose face leered up from the coins.²⁰³

Put all this together, and what do we have, as the central, shaping marker of the new worldview, taking the place and bearing the weight that the Jewish symbols had borne within the worldview of Saul of Tarsus? We have precisely *the gospel*, the *euangelion*, the 'good news', rooted in the 'good news' spoken of in the Great Prophet,²⁰⁴ confronting the 'good news' carved in stone around Caesar's empire. We have the symbol by which Paul declared that he was himself defined, the anchor of his own vocational mindset: Paul, an apostle, set apart for the *good news of God*; I am not ashamed of the good news, because it is *God's power for salvation to all who believe*; the Messiah did not send me to baptize, but *to preach the gospel*; woe to me *if I do not announce the good news*; I do it all *for the sake of the good news*; let me remind you of *the gospel which I announced to you*, which you received, in which you stand firm, through which you are saved; *the gospel of the glory of the Messiah*, who is the image of God; your confession of faith in the Messiah's gospel has brought you into proper order; let me remind you that *the gospel which was gossiped by me* was not something I received from other people; I did it so that *the truth of the gospel* might be preserved for you; my calling is *to gospel to the gentiles* the unsearchable riches of the Messiah; what has been happening to me has been *for the advancement of the gospel*; let your public life be *worthy of the gospel of the Messiah*; don't move away from *the hope of the gospel*; our *gospel was not in word only*, but in power, in the holy spirit, and in full conviction; I wanted to keep Onesimus with me, to serve me on your behalf *in the bonds of the gospel*.²⁰⁵ The gospel, the gospel, the gospel. It defined Paul. It defined his work. It defined his communities. It was the shorthand summary of the theology which, in turn, was the foundation for the central

pillar for the new worldview. It carried God's power. That was just as well: the worldview, and those who lived by it, were going to need it.

(iv) The Praxis of Messianic Monotheism

Creational monotheists routinely, in the habit of the heart, give thanks to the one God for the creation and their part in it. The Mishnaic tractate Berakoth concludes with a wonderful section insisting that wherever one goes and whatever one witnesses one should find the right point about it for which to give thanks: if someone sees shooting stars, earthquakes, lightnings, thunders and storms, 'he should say, "Blessed is he whose power and might fill the world"', and so on.²⁰⁶ The imperative to give thanks is organically linked to the *Shema*: because the latter declares 'thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might', this means that 'Man is bound to bless God for the evil even as he blesses God for the good', and to do so with both 'inclinations', with the soul even if it is taken away, with the 'might' in the sense of one's wealth.²⁰⁷ The prayer of Jewish monotheism thus issues in an imperative to thanksgiving, not just where something striking has happened, but quite deliberately and as a habit of life for the whole created order and for one's own place within it.

Messianic (and still of course creational) monotheists might be expected to do the same, only with Jesus and his specific achievements built in. This is not just a matter of (as it were) voluntary personal piety, but a key worldview-marker, an indication in the realm of praxis of what we have just been examining, the theological grounding of the central pillar of the emerging early Christian worldview.

No surprises, then: Paul fits into this pattern like a foot into a well-made shoe. Apart from Galatians (where he is in such a tearing hurry, and so appalled at what he has heard, that he either forgets to thank God for the Galatians or simply can't think of anything to thank God for in relation to them just at this moment) his letters always begin with thanks. Thanks for the faith of the Roman *ekklēsia*, known throughout the world; for the great enrichment that has been poured out in Corinth, so that the *ekklēsia* there

lacks nothing in terms of speech, knowledge and spiritual gifts (Paul might have been glad if they had a few less, to keep them humble, but that will come later); thanks, in the agonizing second letter, that God ‘consoles us in all our affliction’; thanks for the partnership of the Philippians, the faith, love and hope of the Colossians and the Thessalonians, the love and faith of Philemon.²⁰⁸ Once again, Ephesians outdoes them all with a majestic opening *Berakah*, a prayer of thanksgiving which tells the whole story of God’s plan from before the foundation of the world, through the great redeeming events of the gospel, and right up to the present time, with a sense, like a tourist map, of an arrow at the end which says, ‘You are here.’²⁰⁹

But it is not only the opening thanksgivings that speak of a habit of the heart, a characteristic praxis which reveals the underlying mindset of the creational monotheist whose thankfulness has been brought into new focus by the Messiah. Paul frequently urges his churches to display thanksgiving themselves. Give thanks in everything, he tells the Thessalonians. Thanksgiving is central to all his exhortations in Colossians, both in the smaller throwaway remarks and in the peroration of the main exhortatory section:

Let the Messiah’s peace be the deciding factor in your hearts; that’s what you were called to, within the one body. *And be thankful*. Let the Messiah’s word dwell richly among you, as you teach and exhort one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God with grateful hearts. And whatever you do, in word or action, do everything in the name of the lord Jesus, *giving thanks through him to God the father*.²¹⁰

And be thankful. The robust monotheism of this ought not to be missed. No doubt the Colossians had much to complain of (and would soon have more: an earthquake in the early 60s devastated much of the area, and it is assumed that Colosse suffered along with Laodicea and other local towns, resulting in the site’s abandonment; but, at least according to the Mishnah, one should be prepared to give thanks to God even for an earthquake).²¹¹ And, once again, Ephesians catches the messianically reshaped monotheistic thanksgiving exactly: ‘giving thanks to God the father at all

times and for everything in the name of our lord Jesus the Messiah.’²¹² Both with monotheism and the unveiling of the Messiah they had everything to be thankful for, not through some vague escapist piety but through the robust belief in the creator God who had finally implemented his plan for the creation. Thanksgiving demonstrates Jewish-style monotheism, which again and again for Paul means messianic monotheism; and monotheism of just this sort is the ground on which the worldview-pillar stands. Thanksgiving isn’t just a way of being a bit less grumpy and a bit more cheerful. It is a habit of the heart which indicates the nature and particular shape of the worldview. It is closely associated with joy, which for Paul is one of the primary signs of the spirit’s work.²¹³

So too with worship and prayer in general. As we saw when looking at prayer within the Jewish worldview, and at the ways in which Paul developed that traditional praxis, he has taken the great Jewish traditions of invoking the very name and oneness of Israel’s God and, in reaffirming them, has placed Jesus at their heart. First Corinthians 8.6 is the most striking example, but Ephesians 1.3–14, in more extended mode, makes the point just as well.²¹⁴ We can and must assume that in and with all of this Paul prayed the Psalms, indeed that he knew them by heart and would be able to invoke them, to combine them, to weave them in patterns which, like a great oriental mosaic, had an astonishing overall shape and symmetry but also endless fascinating specific detail.²¹⁵ And of course prayer and worship, though deeply personal, are also in their very nature to be shared: they are the property, the proper praxis, of the whole people of God, and we therefore assume, with 1 Corinthians to fill in some details, that in every place Paul expected the Messiah-people to pray together, to sing (how tantalizing it is not to know what they sang, and in particular not to know what their music sounded like), to share their sense of God’s presence and power as a community, and thereby, though this is not the main point of it, to reinforce one another’s faith and strengthen one another in times of trouble, of which there were plenty.

What about the praxis we vaguely call ‘mysticism’? Paul – we assume he is talking autobiographically, albeit obliquely – had on some occasion found

himself being taken, as we now say, ‘into a different space’; each generation, no doubt, develops metaphors for saying something for which we otherwise have no speech, waiting for the time when we shall be tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. Just as the Corinthians dragged out of him practical life-experiences of which otherwise we would know nothing (those other shipwrecks, for instance; what happened to Sanders’s pack-animals in those circumstances, and to the tools of Paul’s trade?), so they finally compel him to reveal one secret at least of what we call his own private ‘spiritual experience’: caught up into the third heaven (the only time he speaks of multiple heavens), hearing unrepeatable words and seeing indescribable sights. He quickly, of course, brings the whole thing back to earth with a bump, and with a thorn: he will not ‘boast’, as though such experiences set him apart, except of the things that reveal his weakness.²¹⁶ Such experiences are never made the basis of any argument: the only thing that was ever ‘revealed’ to him which functions in that way is the gospel itself, given ‘through the revelation of Jesus the Messiah’ (Galatians 1.12, 16). If someone, perhaps in the Jewish tradition, tries to make a claim about having seen visions and dreamed dreams and now insists that other people follow along, Paul is quick to dismiss it.²¹⁷

Markus Bockmuehl, Christopher Rowland and others have written at length on the Jewish context of Paul’s ‘mystical’ and revelatory experiences, and all we need to do here is to summarize and suggest a particular shape for understanding this element within Paul’s worldview.²¹⁸ It may be stretching the point to say, with Rowland, that ‘the mystical component in Paul’s life stands like a central pillar fundamental for his whole career’;²¹⁹ but when we take (as Rowland does) a maximal account of what we classify as ‘mysticism’ to include his conversion-experience, to which he refers in Galatians as a ‘revelation of Jesus the Messiah’, and the unveiling of secret wisdom which ‘the rulers of this age did not know’ in 1 Corinthians 2, and, not least, the revelation of a secret, new type of ‘glory’ in 2 Corinthians 3, then clearly we are on track for discovering something extremely important in Paul’s life, even if we do not have very good words to say what exactly it is. Once again, perhaps, we have the meaning but are

missing the experience. But for our present purposes, namely the tracing of the praxis-oriented worldview-markers of Paul's mindset, all we need say is this.

First, insofar as we can track Paul's experience and language, we can see that it belongs fairly and squarely in the centre of the Jewish religious world of his day. For him to speak of 'visions and revelations', of a particular 'revelation' (*apokalypsis*!) which had determined the course of his life and work, and the central core of his 'gospel', and of a hidden wisdom on the one hand and hidden glory on the other, was to deal in the (fairly) common coin of ancient Jewish devotion and the quest for a fresh pathway into God's future. It was one element of what the praxis of Jewish-style monotheism looked like at the time.²²⁰

Second, though, since Paul's central *apokalypsis* – both the 'revelation' to him and now the 'revelation' that took place every time he preached the gospel – was precisely of Jesus the Messiah, we should expect, and can in fact find, what we might call messianic modulations all through those 'mystical', 'revelatory' or 'wisdom' experiences and events we have just mentioned. This is of course exactly what we should expect from one who had spoken of seeing 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah' (2 Corinthians 4.4).

Third, therefore, we should expect, and do in fact find, that the two key areas of which the rabbis spoke when they described the classic streams of mysticism – penetration of the secrets of creation and cosmology on the one hand, and gazing on the vision of God enthroned on his chariot (as in Ezekiel 1) on the other – both find fresh and messianic expression in Paul. Colossians offers perhaps the best example, with its magnificent poem allotting Jesus the Messiah the place where we might have expected to find the Wisdom through whom the world was made, and also describing him as the one 'in whom all the fullness of deity dwells bodily'. This is Jewish mysticism, practised as a central part of his worldview-praxis, but it has been redefined and reshaped around Jesus the Messiah.²²¹ And that redefinition has not left the praxis of mystical prayer itself unaltered. The Jesus whom Paul saw on the road to Damascus, the Jesus who was now

‘unveiled’ in the gospel as the key to God’s faithfulness – this Jesus had, as it were, reversed the normal direction of ‘mystical’ travel. Instead of the mystic ‘ascending’ towards either the throne of God or the place where cosmic secrets might be revealed, Jesus had himself ‘descended’, had come down, come near, transforming the practice of mysticism itself into a life of prayer in the spirit in which all could partake.²²²

It may hardly need saying, but perhaps it needs a little amplifying: among the central praxis of Paul’s life was the reading and pondering of scripture. That this had been his lifelong habit we need not doubt; that he continued the habit when he discovered Jesus to be the Messiah we should not question. Even if, as Sanders suggests, Paul kept his scriptures in the best place, that is, in his heart and head,²²³ we should not imagine that he did not have access to, and regularly use, actual copies of scripture. What exactly that meant, with his travelling around and all those shipwrecks and so forth, we cannot easily imagine.²²⁴ But quite apart from his own use, insofar as he may have wanted to consult texts from time to time, he made converts in many places, and despite occasional suggestions to the contrary it is clear that most of them were gentiles. Even if some of them had been God-fearers, attending the synagogue regularly, few of them, we may suppose, would have possessed the scriptures themselves. And they needed to get to know them: to discover, like a newlywed, the family history into which they had suddenly been incorporated.²²⁵

Once again, however, the natural emphasis on scripture which marks Paul out as a second-Temple Jew (and a serious and devout one at that), within the wider world of late-antique paganism, has been transformed by the Messiah. For Paul, the narrative of scripture – the whole great sweep, from Genesis to 2 Chronicles if that is how he saw it, or from Genesis to Daniel if his Septuagint was anything like ours – had found its spectacular resolution. Like the book of Acts for a first-time reader today, the Jewish scriptures stopped just too soon. The reader wants to know what happened to the hero, in this case, to Israel, and (so to speak) to God as well. Does the hero triumph? Will adversity, so long drawn out, finally be overcome? Yes, answers Paul: we have had a fresh *apokalypsis*, the unveiling of long-

hidden mysteries, the discerning of age-old wisdom. *Paul saw himself, in some sense at least, as the prophet announcing the fulfilment of previous prophetic oracles.* That is why he so easily and naturally slips into Jeremiah 1 when referring to his ‘call’ from God. It is why, though at other times he sees the ‘servant’ passages in Isaiah as referring both to Jesus and to Jesus’ followers, he can also see himself as the *mebassēr*, the herald of good tidings, the prophet who has the privilege of declaring that the exile is over, that Babylon has been defeated, that YHWH himself is coming home in glory.²²⁶ As we know from his own retelling of the great narratives upon which he had himself previously lived in hope, not least that of the closing chapters of Deuteronomy, Paul was able now to tell the same story but, as we have seen with prayer and mysticism, now with the crucified and risen Jesus at its climax and as its radical redefinition: ‘the “Israel” into which Paul’s Corinthian converts were embraced was an Israel whose story had been hermeneutically reconfigured by the cross and resurrection.’²²⁷ As 4 *Ezra* agonized over the question of how God’s righteousness, his faithfulness to Israel and the world, was going to be revealed, granted all that had happened, so Paul, a generation earlier, saw himself within the ‘apocalyptic’ tradition, not weaving complex allegories about eagles and lions but unveiling something that *had already happened* as the answer to the age-old prayers and wrestlings of prophets, sages and seers. ‘The Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people,’ he wrote, ‘in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy.’²²⁸ He backs up this prophetic announcement with Psalms and prophets, with Samuel, Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Prophecy itself looks different now that the Messiah is here. Scripture still matters, and matters vitally, to this renewed-Jewish community and to Paul as its apostle; but it matters in a different way, with a new and different resonance. Paul’s worldview continued to be radically shaped by the praxis of scripture (reading, meditating, expounding, praying), but that praxis itself had been messianically transformed.²²⁹ Scripture thus functioned for Paul as a *symbol* at the heart of a multiplicity of *praxis*:

Paul calls his churches to live within the world-story told by Scripture. They are to find their identity there as God's covenant people, bearing the message of reconciliation to the world and manifesting the righteousness of God through loving, self-sacrificial conduct that fulfills the law ... Paul was convinced that the Spirit would lead his churches to become more discerning readers of Scripture, to hear themselves addressed directly by Scripture, and to shape their lives accordingly.²³⁰

All of which is to say, in worldview terms: this symbolic praxis was a vital element within the central worldview-symbol, that of the believing community rooted in messianic monotheism. But, though the older Jewish traditions of prayer and scripture had both been transformed through the coming, the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Messiah, there were two other elements of Pauline praxis which related more physically, more creationally, to Jesus himself. These were the symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

When I wrote *The New Testament and the People of God*, and cautiously anticipated the present section of this book, I spoke once or twice of baptism and eucharist as central to the early Christian symbol-system. One or two reviewers, I recall, commented wryly that this was just what one might expect from an Anglican. Fair comment, in a way: but I have been encouraged by the fact that plenty of writers from quite different traditions have seen what is surely obvious, that if we are asking the question, How did the worldview of the apostle Paul come into practical and physical expression in a way which would form a key part of worldview-praxis?, those two 'sacraments', as we now call them, ought to feature high on anybody's list. I have framed them, this time, within a short study of the symbolic praxis of prayer and scripture, but this only emphasizes all the more how much these two stand out.

Thus David Horrell, for instance, in his careful sociological study, insists that the narratives which carried the most important meanings for Paul 'are also enacted, performed, in ritual'. What he calls the central early 'mythology' is 'enacted in ritual performance and shapes the lives of its adherents'. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, he says, 'constitute the most significant forms of repeated performance through which early Christian

faith was enacted, made visible as well as audible'. Using Geertz's distinction, he proposes that these activities play a key role in terms of 'forming "world-view" and "ethos" '.²³¹ Just so: sociologists rush in where Protestants fear to tread. And in this case the sociologists are demonstrably correct. One can ask of the early Christians, as one does of any other body of people, what sort of things they did that marked their identity, self-understanding, controlling narratives and so on. Moderately sophisticated categories have been developed for this purpose, including a distinction between 'ritual' (one-off, irregular performances) and 'ceremony' (ordered, regular performances), the former serving to mark off someone either as a new member or an ex-member, the latter serving to reaffirm and strengthen the existing membership.²³² When we come to Paul with these questions, the answer is obvious. The evidence is not as full as we might like: most letters do not mention baptism; only one mentions the eucharist. But nobody doubts that these two outward and physical actions were taken for granted by Paul, and that, if we are looking for elements of praxis which indicate his underlying worldview, these ought to be high on the list.²³³

We would, of course, like to know more. In particular, we may wish (in those whimsical flights of fancy that come upon New Testament scholars after their own ritual libations) that, in the yet-undiscovered Second Letter to the Philippians or the Third to the Thessalonians, Paul would have reason to discuss with his congregation why they perform burials in one particular way rather than another. Though there is no shred of evidence about how Paul's communities buried their dead, nobody doubts that they did bury them, and we would like to know how.²³⁴ Did Paul, for example, teach them that, following the example of those among their Jewish cousins who believed so strongly in the resurrection of the body, they should institute the practice of a two-stage burial, ending up with the careful storage of the bones in an ossuary? Did he tell them that burial was to be preferred to cremation, but that ultimately it didn't matter because God could create resurrection bodies in a new way? By the third century, Minucius Felix is explaining that, though Christians are not averse to various funeral customs, they prefer burial in the earth. By the fifth century, we have evidence of

funerals being conducted as occasions of joy. But for the first century we know nothing.²³⁵ Nor, for that matter, do we know whether there was a specific Christian marriage-ritual. There, perhaps, is a happy topic for some creative PhD student to develop on the basis of Ephesians 5, which does after all (in the Vulgate) speak of marriage as a great *sacramentum*.²³⁶

Those two flights of fantasy are permitted here for this one reason: that they highlight, by contrast, the things we most certainly *do* know. They bring us back to earth, or rather, in the first instance, to water: the early Christians *did* baptize people, they *did* see baptism as an encoded narrative, and they *did* draw conclusions from it about what sort of people they were. And of course Paul (along with Acts) is our best evidence for all this.

A good deal has, of course, been written on Paul's view of baptism. Here we simply summarize, to make the main points about the way in which the rite or ritual seems to have functioned as part of the symbolic praxis at the heart of the worldview.

The contexts of Paul's references to baptism vary considerably, from Galatians to 1 Corinthians to Romans and on into Colossians. There are two ways of addressing these passages.

Some have tried to isolate supposedly 'pre-Pauline' traditions in these texts. While it is perfectly possible that Paul and his converts used phrases which were already traditional, all such investigation runs into the problem that first we have to guess what the early tradition may have been (with more or less no firm evidence, no 'world' within which to locate such a thing with any security), then we have to see whether Paul has added to that 'tradition', and then – not that all investigations reach this point – we have to see what sense the whole new unit might now make within the context of the letter where it occurs. This whole process is inevitably highly speculative.

I prefer to take the other route, in this matter as in the study of the great 'poems' or 'hymns' that we find here and there. First we should see what job this text is doing in its present context, and only then might we enquire as to whether it had a life of its own, perhaps with a subtly different meaning, somewhere else.²³⁷ By the same token, there are still some who

try to make out that baptism in Paul's communities would resonate primarily with the hellenistic mystery-cults (with Paul himself to be seen as a parallel kind of figure to the 'founders' of such cults), despite the very solid arguments to the contrary.²³⁸ Far better, in my judgment, and far more in line with the run of the letters at most of the points where baptism is discussed, is to see baptism within its Jewish context. This does not mean that one imagines it as a kind of analogous cousin to the various ritual washings and bathing-pools of which we know, or even to the one-off baptism of proselytes we find in contemporary Jewish sources, though they may remain as echoes in the minds of some.²³⁹ Rather, I suggest that baptism, as part of the community-defining symbolic system of early Christianity in general and Pauline praxis in particular, is to be seen as rooted in the community-defining symbols of Judaism: which means, in particular, the exodus on the one hand and circumcision on the other – both of them, of course, seen by Paul as pointing forward to the dying and rising of the Messiah.

Exodus! That, after all, is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians:

I don't want you to be ignorant, my brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all went through the sea. ²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴and drank the same spiritual drink ... ⁵But God wasn't pleased with most of them, as you can tell by the fact that he laid them low in the desert.²⁴⁰

Paul is addressing the question, which we have already discussed, of whether or not Messiah-people should eat meat that had been offered to idols. He has established the basic principles: we are Jewish-style monotheists, not a new form of pagan polytheists, but we are *redefined-by-the-Messiah* monotheists. We have the right to eat whatever we want, but there are likely to be times when for good reasons we do not make use of those rights. His own example (1 Corinthians 9) has made that point dramatically: what matters is not one's rights, but the gospel of Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah. Now and only now, having laid those very positive foundations, will he move into a more negative mode, warning against the real dangers which are 'out there' in the pagan world from

which most of the converted Corinthians had come. And the way he does it is to go back to the founding events of the family: ‘our fathers’ experienced the exodus! The *our* is positively breathtaking, unless one had fully grasped already the extent to which Paul sees the Messiah’s people as the heirs of Abraham. Here is the family story, he says, into which you have been incorporated. It began, precisely, with baptism: the cloud and the sea, the divine presence leading them safely through the water while the pursuing Egyptians were drowned. The fact that Paul can assume this connection so effortlessly makes its own point: baptism is a going-through-the-water initiation-into-the-community event: why look elsewhere than the exodus for its origins? Was that not, perhaps, something at least to do with John the Baptist’s motivation in choosing the river Jordan for his own baptist movement, calling Israel to repentance in the very place where Moses had delivered his final charge?²⁴¹

The point Paul is making here is remarkable in itself, and is as we have seen indicative of the way Paul is arguing throughout the letter, and hence of the problems he believes himself to be facing.²⁴² All the Israelites went through the water, with God’s cloud-shielded presence leading the way. *But God was not pleased*: their ‘baptism’ did not mean that they were then immune from entanglement in practices which denied their new status as God’s rescued people. Pagan idolatry, in the form of Moabite temptations, surrounded them; many succumbed.²⁴³ In other words, though baptism really does define the community of God’s people as the place of God’s presence, those who come in by that door must not risk the same fate as their ancestors. Baptism does not afford entry into a magically shielded space where one is automatically immune from danger. On the contrary. That is why, he says, though you are free to eat anything bought in the market, you really should not go into the idol temples themselves. That way danger lies: specifically, the danger of appearing to share fellowship (*koinōnia*) with ‘demons’, *daimonia*, at the same time as, in the eucharist, you are sharing *koinōnia* with the Messiah.²⁴⁴ That *koinōnia* is marked out by baptism. Those who enter it must continue to be marked by it. That is why, from the very beginning, baptism and eucharist are inseparable.

Already we see something enormously important in terms of many subsequent debates, which have (in my view) gone off in the wrong direction by focusing at once on the relation between the rite of baptism and the individual who is baptized. Baptism is a *community-marking symbol*, which the individual then receives, not first and foremost as a statement about him- or herself, but as a statement which says, ‘This is who *we are*.’ This does not exactly defuse all the anxieties of troubled Protestants when contemplating a physical event with supposed spiritual consequences, but it may suggest that the normal way of looking at ‘the problem’ is, at least, seeing things through the wrong end of the telescope. Baptism marks out *this community*, the messianic-monotheist, new-exodus, crucified-and-risen community, which like Israel of old then requires a commensurate way of life of its members.

This is strikingly confirmed (though you would never guess this from most studies of the chapter) by Romans 6. I have argued in detail elsewhere that the entire sequence of thought from Romans 4 through to Romans 8, for all the obvious change of gear around chapter 5, indicates that Paul has the complete exodus narrative in mind, from the initial promise to Abraham in Genesis 15 (where the ‘covenant’ specified the forthcoming exodus) through the crossing of the Red Sea which liberates the slaves, the arrival at Sinai and the giving of the law, the construction of the tabernacle, the wilderness wandering and the danger of going back to slavery, all the way to the final inheritance, the promised land.²⁴⁵ This is how it works in Romans itself: Romans 4 tells the story of Abraham; after the wider perspective of Romans 5, where Paul surveys the entire sweep of God’s purposes from the highest possible point, we resume the story in Romans 6 by coming through the water, by which the slaves are freed, arriving at Sinai in Romans 7 and grappling with the question of Torah, constructing the tabernacle in 8.9–11 (the ‘indwelling’ spirit),²⁴⁶ continuing the journey through the wilderness in 8.12–16 and glimpsing the promised ‘inheritance’ in 8.17–30. This sequence, I suggest, cannot be accidental. It is part of the conscious and deliberate structuring which Paul has given to this, one of his most obviously carefully composed passages. The deep meaning of telling

the story this way, within the letter as a whole, is to make the point as clearly as possible, the point which is stated in a nutshell at the end of chapter 4: the Messiah and his people are the people promised to Abraham, the true-exodus people on their way to inheriting the true 'promised land', i.e. the whole renewed creation. This, indeed, is what precipitates the outburst of grief at the start of chapter 9.

Within this setting (rather than within the multiple fictive settings proposed by clever scholars, abstracting phrases here and there, locating them within other hypothetical worlds and life-settings and then importing those meanings, or perhaps Paul's subversion of them, back into Romans) the meaning of baptism in Romans 6.2–11 is this: you are the new-exodus people, the people defined by the death and resurrection of the Messiah. If you have been baptized, you belong to the people thus defined, and you must therefore draw the proper conclusions: you, too, have died and been raised. 'You, too, must calculate yourselves as being dead to sin, and alive to God in the Messiah, Jesus' (6.11). You must work out the fact that you have been brought out of slavery, and stand now as free people on the way to your inheritance. We note, once again, against the run of much scholarship which has played off Romans 6 against Colossians and Ephesians, that though of course the bodily resurrection remains in the future (8.10–11), the whole point of 6.11 is that 'reckoning' oneself to be dead to sin *and alive to God* is not a fresh act on the part of the baptized by which they become something which before they were not. 'Reckoning' simply means 'calculating', working out *what is in fact the case*. And what is the case is that they are not in some strange intermediate state. They *have* died and they *are* 'alive to God'.²⁴⁷ Baptism marks out this community as the new-exodus people, the people who must therefore live in the appropriate way. As in 1 Corinthians 10, one might almost say that Paul appeals for a genuine, thought-out faith on the basis of baptism: now you are baptized, figure out what it means! The true statement that baptism makes is a statement about *the baptized community in Christ*, with the truth of the dying and rising of the particular individual who is baptized on this or that occasion being a function of that larger reality. The challenge to

particular individuals is always then to make real for themselves that which their membership in this community would indicate.

Similar things can be said about Galatians 3.27, though the passage here is so dense, like much of the chapter, that it may be harder to get a full handle on it. Once again, however, the context is an overall discussion of Abraham's family: the question Paul faced in Galatia was precisely, Who are the true children of Abraham? Does he now have one family, or two (a Jewish one and a gentile-Christian one), or what? As in Romans 4, Paul has set up the whole discussion in terms of an historical sequence, beginning with God's promises to Abraham and continuing with a puzzle about where Moses fits into this sequence – a puzzle that looms larger in Galatians than in Romans, arguably because of the very different circumstances.²⁴⁸

It is this sense of a sequence that dominates Galatians 3.23–9. There is a three-stage sequence, beginning with 'before faith came, we were under the law', continuing with 'the arrival of faith' and ending with 'no longer under the law'. This new state is then explained in a typically Pauline exposition: (i) an initial statement (verse 26), (ii) a further explanation for this initial statement (verse 27), (iii) a conclusion to be drawn from that explanation (verse 28) and (iv) the final QED of the argument in verse 29:

- (i) For you are all children of God, through faith, in the Messiah, Jesus (26).
- (ii) You see, every one of you who has been baptized into the Messiah has put on the Messiah (27).
- (iii) There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no 'male and female'; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus (28).
- (iv) And, if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham's family. You stand to inherit the promise (29).

The way to understand what Paul says about baptism in verse 27 is to understand the role that the verse plays within this sequence, not the

hypothetical role it plays in some other system of imaginary history-of-religions reconstruction.²⁴⁹

Here is how the sequence works. The initial statement, itself explaining the claim of verse 25 (no longer under the *paidagōgos*): ‘For you are all children of God, through faith, in the Messiah, Jesus.’ *All children of God*: that is the main thing, with Messiah-faithfulness the means by which this is accomplished and marked out. ‘Children of God’ echoes the exodus-promise: Israel is my son, my firstborn,²⁵⁰ so we ought not to be surprised at the reference to baptism which follows immediately, with the emphasis still falling on the implicit ‘all’: ‘You see, every one of you who has been baptised into the Messiah has put on the Messiah’ (27). This then leads to the two-stage conclusion, in 28–9: ‘There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no “male and female”; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus. And, if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham’s family. You stand to inherit the promise.’ All children of God; all one in the Messiah; all Abraham’s family; all Abraham’s heirs, awaiting your inheritance. The fulcrum around which the argument turns is that they all belong to the Messiah, with their baptism *into* the Messiah as the key.

Here again we see baptism as the *marker of the family and its identity*. It is the praxis which declares: here is the Messiah-family, the ones who are ‘in him’, who have ‘clothed themselves with the Messiah’. This is how baptism functions as one key element in the praxis which defines the worldview of the single, united family based on messianic monotheism.

All this brings us neatly to Colossians 2.12. Here again Paul is assuring young converts that if they belong to the Messiah there is nothing else they need. The emphasis in this passage on circumcision and the law as having nothing more to say to them is what convinced me twenty-five years ago, and convinces me still, that the subtle polemic of chapter 2 is aimed, primarily at least, at the possibility that the young church might be lured away into the synagogue, whether by people like the Galatian ‘agitators’ or others not totally dissimilar.²⁵¹ Whether or not that is so, Paul’s point is clear: *you have already been circumcised*, and you don’t need to have it done all over again.

What sort of ‘circumcision’ is this? One natural Pauline response might be, ‘the “circumcision of the heart” spoken of in Deuteronomy 30 and again in Jeremiah.’²⁵² That may be in Paul’s mind as well, but what he says here is

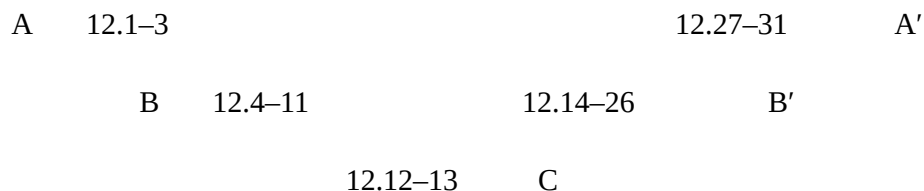
In him, indeed, you were circumcised with a special, new type of circumcision. It isn’t something that human hands can do. It is the Messiah’s version of circumcision, and it happens when you put off the ‘body of flesh’; when you’re buried with him in baptism, and indeed also raised with him, through faith in the power of the God who raised him from the dead.²⁵³

There are obvious, strong echoes of Romans 6 here, despite the wording being not totally identical (nobody thinks that such slight variation in, say, Plato, or Barth for that matter, means that we should at once detect a radical distinction, let alone a different author).²⁵⁴ The point once again is that baptism defines the community of the Messiah’s people in the way that circumcision defined the people of Israel according to the flesh. Identity ‘according to the flesh’ is set aside: you and your community are no longer defined by who your parents were. (That, perhaps, is why he has said ‘the body of flesh’ here, rather than ‘the body of sin’ in Romans 6.6, where the relationship of the baptized to ‘sin’ is precisely what is at issue.) The ‘Messiah’s version of circumcision’ is literally ‘the circumcision of the Messiah’, but this is not, of course, a reference to Jesus’ own circumcision.²⁵⁵ It is a way of saying, ‘This is the Messiah’s own new mode of circumcision.’ Once again, the primary point is about the definition of the community, only secondarily the effect on the individual. And Paul will yet again appeal for appropriate behaviour on the basis of the status which the community possesses, having died and been raised with the Messiah. The people who have come through the water must be given their way of life, and must become the appropriate place for the tabernacling presence of the one God.

We return, finally, to 1 Corinthians. The flurry of references to baptism in the first chapter has the same overall thrust that we have seen elsewhere. Paul’s main concern is to offer a preliminary challenge to the factionalism that has emerged in Corinth, and he does so by appealing, again merely

preliminarily, to baptism itself. The community to which you belong, he is saying, is defined by baptism, and baptism is defined as entry into the Messiah’s people. Being baptized ‘into the name of’ someone – not my name, he says twice, but by implication into the name of the Messiah – is to enter the community defined as the people who live in the presence of the one thus ‘named’.²⁵⁶ And the point of Paul’s final emphatic statement in verse 17 (‘the Messiah didn’t send me to baptize but to preach the gospel’) is not, despite the natural anti-sacramental reading in much Protestantism, a downgrading of baptism by comparison with ‘the gospel’, but a statement about Paul’s own vocation, and a distancing of himself in consequence from anything that might be taken as grounds for the creation of a ‘Paul party’.²⁵⁷

This reading of chapter 1, and our previous account of chapter 10, points naturally to the climactic statement at the start of the ‘Messiah’s body’ passage in chapter 12. The key passage, verses 12 and 13, is carefully positioned between the chapter’s opening statement (12.1–3) and its initial development (verses 4–11), on the one hand, and the full-dress picture of the ‘body’ in its functioning (verses 14–26) with the conclusion (verses 27–31), on the other. The chapter has something of an ABCB’A’ shape, with this statement in 12.12–13 as the central point around which everything else revolves:²⁵⁸



If ‘we’ were all ‘baptized into the name of the Messiah’, as by implication in chapter 1, we are likewise baptized into his ‘body’. Here is the theologically and rhetorically central statement of the whole discussion:

Just as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the Messiah.¹³ For we all were baptized into one body, by one spirit – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and we were all given one spirit to drink.²⁵⁹

The primary point of baptism, then, is not so much ‘that it does something to the individual’, though it does, but that it *defines the community of the baptized as the Messiah’s people*. Those who submit to baptism are thereby challenged to learn the family codes, the house rules, the way of life that this community is committed to precisely because it *is* the family of the Messiah, the crucified and risen one. Paul here echoes what has obviously become for him a regular ‘way of putting it’, seen already in Galatians 3.28 (the reference here in 1 Corinthians 12 to Jews and Greeks, slave and free, is not relevant to anything in the present passage, but merely reminds the Corinthians of the *united* nature of the family defined by baptism-into-Messiah).²⁶⁰ That is where the emphasis falls, taking us back to our primary point in this whole section: Paul’s world of symbolic praxis centred upon the single family, the one community, rooted in the messianic monotheism shaped around Jesus himself and – a particular contribution of the present passage – energized and activated by the spirit.²⁶¹

The strange passage in 1 Corinthians 15.29, about being ‘baptized on behalf of the dead’, need not detain us here. It has tantalized exegetes for many years and will no doubt continue so to do. It says nothing to alter our main point, but serves if anything to highlight it. What exactly the practice consisted of, and why it had been begun, is lost to us, but it must have had something to do with a sense that people who had died before being baptized needed to be brought, somehow, into the solidity of the Messiah’s people.²⁶²

We may simply note, in conclusion, that if we were attempting to sum up what we have said about baptism in relation to the wider united community, and its rootedness in the one God and the one lord, and the need which Paul articulates to make this unity a reality in the actual personal lives of the community’s members, we could do worse than quote again from Ephesians:

²Bear with one another in love; be humble, meek and patient in every way with one another.

³Make every effort to guard the unity that the spirit gives, with your lives bound together in peace.

⁴There is one body and one spirit; you were, after all, called to one hope which goes with your call. ⁵There is one lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and father of all, who is over all, through all and in all. [263](#)

So, to sum up: baptism in the worldview of Paul's communities, and within his own mindset, emerges not from pagan mystery religions but from the deep roots of Jewish covenantal story and covenantal symbolism. It is differentiated from the latter precisely because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Israel's Messiah and the effect that that has had in generating the Messiah's people as a worldwide family. The passage in Colossians appears to form something of a mid-point between Galatians and Romans. In Galatians, the emphasis is on the renewed multi-ethnic family; in Romans (as in 1 Corinthians 10, for that matter), it is on the fact that the family leaves behind the realm of sin; in Colossians, there is a bit of both, and in 1 Corinthians 1 and 12 a reaffirmation of unity when faced by a different kind of threat. But the point for our present purposes is that baptism is clearly a key ritual (in the sense noted above) which serves to mark out *this* people in *this* way as part of *this* single and *united* family, grounded in the messianic monotheism we have already described.

The same, more briefly, can and must be said about Paul's vision of the Lord's Supper. [264](#) Sadly, we do not possess two or three different angles of vision at this point, as we do with baptism. We have the point of view of Paul writing to the Corinthians, and that is all. But it is enough to be going on with. As with baptism, the partial parallels and slippery semi-analogies with pagan practices are interesting, but insufficient to explain the meal as Paul envisages it. With memories of 1 Corinthians 5.7 not far away ('our Passover lamb – the Messiah, I mean – has already been sacrificed'), it is pointless to deny what is already clear from the opening of chapter 10, namely that Paul is thinking of the exodus narrative. When, therefore, we agree that the Lord's Supper for Paul 'reenacts and derives its significance from the story of Christ's self-giving death and (implicitly) his resurrection', and that 'the central story of the Christian myth is encapsulated in this ritual practice,' [265](#) we want to add, quite strongly, that

we are talking about this central Christian story *seen as the culmination, climax and paradoxical meaning of the ancient Jewish story for which Passover and exodus were the prototype*. It is, of course, difficult to prove exact correlations between the traditions we find in 1 Corinthians 10.15–17 and 11.23–6 and those we find in the multiple and complex synoptic tradition.²⁶⁶ But there we run the risk, as often in the over-microscopic world of New Testament studies, of trying to track individual insects that inhabit the bark of this or that tree when we should be looking at the forest as a whole. Here are the gospels, all agreeing that Jesus of Nazareth went to Jerusalem at the time of Passover, that he celebrated with them either a Passover meal or a near equivalent, and that he went immediately to his death. Here is Paul, within fewer than thirty years, reminding the Corinthians (rather unusually) of the ‘tradition’ that he had already taught them, which speaks of Jesus breaking bread, sharing wine, speaking of his death ‘for them’ and of ‘the new covenant in my blood’. If it were not for the fact that nervous theological sensitivities had (quite understandably) wanted to scrutinize every jot and tittle of this, nobody would question the obvious reading of such evidence: that Paul’s interpretation of the meal carried strong Passover implications, and that conversely Jesus, however he may or may not have expressed it, intended to indicate that the death he was about to suffer, carrying those same Passover implications, would constitute the real rescue from slavery that he believed it was his vocation to accomplish.²⁶⁷

Paul does say, after all, ‘consider Israel according to the flesh’ (1 Corinthians 10.18, translating *kata sarka* literally). Why does he put it like this? The most obvious reason (again, sometimes held at bay for understandable but essentially non-historical reasons) is that he is implicitly contrasting ‘Israel *kata sarka*’ with the community that now regards the exodus generation as ‘our fathers’ (10.1). He sees a reasonably straightforward equation. ‘Israel according to the flesh’ reckons that partaking of a sacrifice in the Temple means sharing in the very life of Israel’s God (this, I take it, is what is meant by the apparent euphemism ‘partners in the altar’, *koinōnoi tou thysiastēriou*²⁶⁸). So, too, pagans reckon

that when they share in a sacrifice they are sharing the life of the divinity in whose temple they are eating. In more or less the same way – no doubt there are many *mutanda* at this point, but Paul is not here concerned with them – those who share in the bread and the wine at the Lord’s Supper really are sharing in the body and blood of the Messiah. Once again the *unity* of the people is part of the point: ‘we, though many, are one body, because we all share in the one loaf’ (10.17). That is what will concern him more in the next chapter, facing as we saw the unpleasant and demeaning emergence of social divisions at the meal itself. But here the point is simply that this meal marks out its participants as Messiah-people (and hence as crucified-and-risen people); as (true-)exodus people; as the people he will describe in 10.32 as ‘God’s *ekklēsia*’, contrasted both with Jews and with Greeks. And the more the story of the exodus resonates in the background, the more we are inclined to see, as well as in the implicit parallel with pagan meals, the great Pauline truth that sharing in this meal means participating in the very life of the one God, the God of Israel now freshly understood (with 1 Corinthians 8.6) as ‘one God, one lord’. The Lord’s Supper is the other great element of Pauline symbolic praxis, standing alongside baptism not as the retrojection of a later sacramental theology into the first century but as the object of socio-historical enquiry, together constituting the symbolic actions which designate this community as the Passover people, the single family rooted in Messiah-shaped monotheism.

The eucharist is, for Paul as indeed in the gospel tradition for Jesus himself, one of the moments which encapsulates that most central Christian praxis: love, *agapē*. This is well known and, I think, uncontroversial.²⁶⁹ There are, briefly, four main things to be said about this remarkable quality as Paul expounds it.

First, it is *practical*. When he tells the Thessalonians that they must love one another even more than they are already doing, this has nothing much to do with the stirring up of emotions. It is about what used to be called ‘charity’: the putting of one’s assets at the disposal of those, particularly within the Christian family, who at present need them more than one does oneself. ‘Love’ is thus very nearly the same thing as what Paul means by

‘grace’ in that tense and tightly argued little fund-raising section we call 2 Corinthians 8—9. ‘Love’ is what, according to Acts, the early Jerusalem church practised; it meant a sharing of goods such as one might expect within a family. And this was for the obvious reason that they *were* now a ‘family’ in quite a new way. Hence, too, the need to look after the vulnerable, particularly widows. Thus, if *agapē* approximates to some meanings of ‘grace’, it also comes close to, and partially overlaps with, that other great Pauline word *koinōnia*, ‘partnership’. Love, for Paul, is something you do; no doubt he hoped that feelings of mutual affection would follow, as they often do, but the practice must lead the way. Otherwise he would not need to remind his Roman audience to make sure that love should be genuine and sincere.²⁷⁰

Second, for Paul ‘love’ is about *unity*. Indeed, it is both the motive for that unity and the thing that will make it work. It is the sign of life in a community; when Epaphras returns to Paul with news of a new community of believers in Colossae, the key thing he announces to the imprisoned apostle is ‘their love in the spirit’.²⁷¹ We have already noted Paul’s breathtaking exhortation in Philippians 2.1–4, urging the little community to be in full accord and of one mind. This is costly and difficult, which is one reason why he follows the command with the equally breathtaking narrative of the Messiah’s own self-abnegation, suffering and death – and vindication. The same point is made at more length in Ephesians 4.1–16, where ‘love’ is noted as part of the quality of mind required in verse 2 and then again as the central characteristic of the whole united church in verse 16; ‘love’ is (surely not accidentally) the final word of the paragraph. This is the place to note, as well, not only the matchless beauty of the poem we know as 1 Corinthians 13, but also its rhetorical placing between chapters 12 and 14. The multi-faceted charismatic church, learning to live as a single body, forms the main topic of chapter 12; its worshipping life, always in danger of collapsing into chaotic disorder, is the theme of chapter 14. They are held together by love: a small, clear and evocative painting hanging between two vast, sprawling canvases, giving them a depth and balance they might otherwise lack. Without *agapē*, community life falls apart.²⁷²

Third, 'love' is for Paul a *virtue*. Like the other aspects of 'the fruit of the spirit' in Galatians 5 it would be easy to suppose that, being fruit, it would 'grow naturally'. But, as any gardener will know, just because the tree is alive and blossoming, it doesn't mean there is no work to do. The fact that the list of 'fruit of the spirit' ends with 'self-control' gives the game away: this is no romantic dream of a 'spontaneous' goodness. Love, joy, peace and the rest are all things which, though indeed growing from the work of the spirit within, require careful tending, protecting, weeding and feeding.²⁷³ One may indeed be 'taught by God' to love one's neighbours, but this does not obviate the need for exhortation and moral effort.²⁷⁴

The fourth and in some ways most obvious feature of Paul's vision of *agapē* is that it is rooted in, and sustained by, Jesus himself. 'The son of God loved me and gave himself for me': this is not an extraneous and merely pious remark, but goes to the heart of what, in much later theological parlance, would be called both the *extra nos* of salvation (what God does outside us and apart from us) and also the *intra nos* (what God does within the believer). About these we shall speak more in due course. 'The Messiah's love makes us press on,' Paul declares, writing of the trials and testings of the apostolic vocation, and spelling out that 'love' in terms both of the Messiah's self-giving to death and of the apostolic praxis, the 'ministry of reconciliation'.²⁷⁵ The Messiah is both the model and the means of love.²⁷⁶ It is at this point that we may glimpse what Paul means when he speaks of *agapē* as the fulfilling of the law;²⁷⁷ and also the significance of his aphorism that what counts as the badge of membership in God's people is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision but *pistis di'agapēs energoumenē*, 'faith working through love'.²⁷⁸

Yet once more Ephesians sums it all up. Paul prays that the Messiah will make his home, through faith, in the hearts of the believers:

that love may be your root, your firm foundation; and that you may be strong enough (with all God's holy ones) to grasp the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of the Messiah – though actually it's so deep that nobody can really know it! So may God fill you with all his fullness.²⁷⁹

It comes as no surprise, then, to see the praxis of *agapē* as one of the central features of Paul's worldview.

Granted that the self-giving love of the Messiah is the basis of this, we should not be surprised, either, that the final main category of praxis is *suffering*. This may sound paradoxical: praxis is something you do; suffering is what is done to you. But for Paul the fact of suffering became, from early on in his work as an apostle, not just a nuisance, not just something one would have to put up with, but actually a badge, a symbol. It was a sign, not just of being part of a special community, but of being part of a community which was itself, in effect, a sign to be spoken against.

And acted against: even without the swashbuckling tales of Acts, Paul's own list of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians, precisely to the people who didn't want to hear such a thing, would be quite enough for someone to construct an entire novel about his extraordinary hardships. But even in 1 Corinthians, where the mood is lighter and less ironic, we find him starting on the same theme:

⁹This is how I look at it, you see: God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like people sentenced to death. We have become a public show for the world, for angels and humans alike. ¹⁰We are fools because of the Messiah, but you are wise in the Messiah! We are weak, but you are strong! You are celebrated, we are nobodies! ¹¹Yes, right up to the present moment we go hungry and thirsty; we are badly clothed, roughly treated, with no home to call our own. ¹²What's more, we work hard, doing manual labour. When we are insulted, we give back blessings. When we are persecuted, we put up with it. ¹³When we are slandered, we speak gently in return. To this day we have become like the rubbish of the world, fit only to be scraped off the plate and thrown away with everything else. [280](#)

He means what he says, of course, but at the same time in 1 Corinthians we sense that he is able to say, 'And that's quite all right by me.' When he returns to the subject in the second letter, the mood has changed: he has been so crushed, devastated by events which he does not describe, that he 'gave up on life itself': [281](#) the classic symptoms of deep depression, or indeed of a wholesale nervous breakdown. He writes now as one who has looked into the pit and is still surprised that he has not fallen in:

⁷But we have this treasure in earthenware pots, so that the extraordinary quality of the power may belong to God, not to us. ⁸We are under all kinds of pressure, but we are not crushed completely; we are at a loss, but not at our wits' end; ⁹we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are cast down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry the deadness of Jesus about in the body, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body. ¹¹Although we are still alive, you see, we are always being given over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal humanity. ¹²So this is how it is: death is at work in us – but life in you! [282](#)

³We put no obstacles in anybody's way, so that nobody will say abusive things about our ministry. ⁴Instead, we recommend ourselves as God's servants: with much patience, with sufferings, difficulties, hardships, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, going without food, ⁶with purity, knowledge, great-heartedness, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, ⁷by speaking the truth, by God's power, with weapons for God's faithful work in left hand and right alike, ⁸through glory and shame, through slander and praise; as deceivers, and yet true; ⁹as unknown, yet very well known; as dying, and look—we are alive; as punished, yet not killed; ¹⁰as sad, yet always celebrating; as poor, yet bringing riches to many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. [283](#)

By the time he has reached chapter 11, however, the tone has changed again (whether because this is from a different letter or because his spirits have revived, as he says in 7.6–16, we need not here enquire). Now we see that the Corinthians' request that he supply 'letters of recommendation' (3.1) or, in today's term, an updated *curriculum vitae* listing all his achievements, has given him an opportunity to tease them mercilessly while still making the utterly serious point that 'weakness', suffering, shame and ultimately death itself are badges precisely of the newly redefined, messianic/monotheistic family. He offers an inverted *cursus honorum*, the mirror-image of the kind of 'boasting' which we associate with the Roman world, not least an achievement-list such as Augustus's *Res Gestae*:

²³Are they servants of the Messiah? – I'm talking like a raving madman – I'm a better one. I've worked harder, been in prison more often, been beaten more times than I can count, and I've often been close to death. ²⁴Five times I've had the Jewish beating, forty lashes less one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; I was adrift in the sea for a night and a day. ²⁶I've been constantly travelling, facing dangers from rivers, dangers from brigands, dangers from my own people, dangers from foreigners, dangers in the town, dangers in

the countryside, dangers at sea, dangers from false believers. ²⁷I've toiled and laboured, I've burnt the candle at both ends, I've been hungry and thirsty, I've often gone without food altogether, I've been cold and naked.

²⁸Quite apart from all that, I have this daily pressure on me, my care for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak and I'm not weak? Who is offended without me burning with shame?

³⁰If I must boast, I will boast of my weaknesses. ³¹The God and father of the lord Jesus, who is blessed for ever, knows that I'm not lying: ³²in Damascus, King Aretas, the local ruler, was guarding the city of Damascus so that he could capture me, ³³but I was let down in a basket through a window and over the wall, and I escaped his clutches. [284](#)

And then, one last time:

... so that I wouldn't become too exalted, a thorn was given to me in my flesh, a messenger from the satan, to keep stabbing away at me. I prayed to the lord three times about this, asking that it would be taken away from me, ⁹and this is what he said to me: 'My grace is enough for you; my power comes to perfection in weakness.' So I will be all the more pleased to boast of my weaknesses, so that the Messiah's power may rest upon me. ¹⁰So I'm delighted when I'm weak, insulted, in difficulties, persecuted and facing disasters, for the Messiah's sake. When I'm weak, you see, then I am strong. [285](#)

All of which goes to show, both that Paul was in fact a master of the rhetoric that the Corinthians so prized, and that, like a good philosopher, he could steal his opponents' clothes, using their rhetoric in order to say, 'Rhetoric? Who needs that?' 'I am no orator, as Brutus is.' And the underlying point, with this double-effect rhetoric rubbing it in, is this: in contrast to the Corinthians' apparent expectations that he present himself as a fine, upstanding, noble, heroic figure, Paul insists as a matter of symbolic praxis that that is entirely the wrong way round. Exactly in line with the redefinition of power and authority in Mark 10.25–45, Paul believes that apostolic life consists not only in *telling* people *about* the dying and rising of the Messiah, but also in going through the process oneself.

Whether he would have reached that conclusion from the start, without experiencing it, we may doubt. But of course he knew that followers of this crucified Messiah were likely to suffer, because he had himself, notoriously, been an ardent persecutor, and must have known from the moment when

scales fell from his eyes on the Damascus road, that he would suffer exactly what he had been inflicting. And he did.

When we try to locate this strong Pauline theme within its historical, cultural or theological contexts, we find that what Paul has just done to the Corinthians spells the death of any attempt to make him a Stoic just like the Stoics, or indeed any kind of ancient philosopher of any pretension. (Even Socrates, willingly drinking the hemlock, didn't go on about it in the way Paul does, or interpret it in the same way. Paul was aware of the strong emotions of friendship and loss, and would not, I think, have told his friends to stop grieving in the way that Socrates did.²⁸⁶) As various writers have observed, the popular philosophers aimed at a kind of self-sufficiency, either through getting rid of everything troublesome, or by explaining that the trouble wasn't real, that it couldn't affect one's real self. Paul would have none of that. Suffering was suffering and it mattered as such.²⁸⁷

No: the place to go for explanation is once again the Jewish tradition, heightened through the strange centuries of persecution since the Babylonian period. There was a battle on, and loyalty to God and Torah would probably mean suffering, at least for some and at least for some of the time. Evil powers were at work, after all, operating through pagans outside Israel and renegades inside, and loyalty would inevitably mean being caught in between. So the horrible sufferings of the Maccabean martyrs and many others were seen as symbols, symbols of the life of a people called to be God's people in the midst of a wicked world, living with a set of stories, contained within one long Story, all of which said that God's people would indeed pass through slavery, torment, subjugation, humiliation and much besides, but that they would be vindicated at the end. And, as we have seen elsewhere, some Jewish writers from quite early on, but more as we come towards the first century, told this story in terms of a crescendo of evil, an increase in hostility towards God's people, a climax of suffering, which would be like the labour pains from which a child would be born. Some have given this notion of a historical sequence, reaching such a high point of suffering, the label 'the messianic woes'. I argued in a previous volume, following Albert Schweitzer, that Jesus himself was

aware of this tradition and made it part of his own vocational understanding as he announced God's kingdom and discerned his own strange, dark role within it.²⁸⁸ And the point we need to make now is that Paul, too, seems to have understood his own suffering on the one hand, and the suffering of all Jesus' followers on the other hand (these are linked, of course, but they are not the same thing), within something like the same matrix. Suffering was a major worldview-symbol, whether we call it 'praxis' or invent another term, perhaps 'pathos'.

He could even speak of his own suffering in terms that imply, somehow, that he would take the heavy end of the load so that the young churches could escape with the light end. There is more than a hint of that in 2 Corinthians 4.12, quoted above. But it comes out especially strongly in a dense and surprising sentence in Colossians:

Right now I'm having a celebration – a celebration of my sufferings, which are for your benefit! And I'm steadily completing, in my own flesh, what remains of the Messiah's afflictions on behalf of his body, which is the church.²⁸⁹

The Messiah's afflictions: perhaps here we have just that notion of the 'messianic woes', a fixed amount of suffering to be undergone before the terror would be over. Certainly Paul has no thought here (as anxious interpreters have sometimes worried) that he was in some sense adding to the atoning significance of the Messiah's death. That is not where his mind is at all. Rather, he sees the young *ekklēsia* at great risk, watching anxiously like a parent seeing a child set off into the big wide world. If he can, so to speak, draw the enemy fire on to himself, he will be pleased, and indeed he is.

There may be quite a literal meaning to this. As long as the officials are concentrating on keeping Paul in prison and making life hard for him, they may not worry too much about a little group of his followers.²⁹⁰ Paul is taking the heat so that they will not need to. And somehow this suffering, too, is part of the Messiah's sufferings. Not at all that Jesus himself continues, in that sense, to suffer: the Messiah, being raised from the dead, will never die again, and death has no dominion over him.²⁹¹ But here we

find, as so often, ‘the Messiah’ as ‘the one who sums up his people in himself’, the one ‘in whom’ his people find their identity. And here we find too, just as in 2 Corinthians 4, the notion that suffering is, for Paul, a major worldview-marker, *precisely because the community thus demarcated is the community that belongs to this Messiah, the crucified one.* Their sufferings are his sufferings. That is part of the way they are to be known. And if, in that process, the Apostle is called to take more than his own share, he will interpret that as part of his special, and privileged, vocation. ‘I bear on my body,’ he says with heavy irony to the Galatians who were eager for bodily badges of status and membership, ‘the marks (*stigmata*) of the lord Jesus.’ And he wasn’t talking about circumcision.²⁹²

This then makes sense of the remaining passages in which suffering is part of the key worldview-praxis. We share the Messiah’s inheritance, as long as we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him, discovering in our groaning, as we wait for the redemption of our bodies, that on the one hand we are echoing the groaning of all creation and on the other we are being the place where the spirit of God is groaning at the heart of the pain of the world.²⁹³ What has happened to Paul when he writes to Philippi has been for the good of the gospel; he may be suffering, but the gospel is going ahead.²⁹⁴ This is to encourage the Philippians themselves as they face suffering in their turn, as they have done and will do.²⁹⁵ The Thessalonians have already been suffering, and he taught them in his brief time there that this would happen, not as a strange accident but as a necessary part of following the Messiah.²⁹⁶

The irony, of course, is that Paul was perhaps never more thoroughly Jewish than when he was saying this kind of thing, standing as he consciously did in the long tradition that included Jeremiah, Daniel and his friends, and the various martyrs of subsequent centuries. Even the Wisdom tradition picks up the same theme.²⁹⁷ And yet it was, as often as not, from zealous Jews that the persecution came. From pagans, as well, naturally. I see no reason to diverge sharply from the picture in Acts, and the present chapter explains why: someone who is going about establishing communities in which none of the expected symbols seem to function, and

a set of new ones is offered instead, is like someone who refuses to stand up for the National Anthem and who insists annoyingly on humming a different tune at a different time and standing up for that instead. Such a person may have an excellent reason for doing such a thing: that, Paul would have said, is why you need theology; but it is not the best way to win friends and influence people.

Unless, of course, there is something about your way of life which attracts them. Some would finish this section by considering, as a matter of worldview-praxis, the church's mission. There is a continuing debate about this. Some, not least within the mainline protestant traditions, have insisted that not only Paul himself but also his churches saw it as a central part of their worldview that they would go and tell others about Jesus, about his lordship over the world, about his death and resurrection as the means of the one true God rescuing the world from its plight, and individuals from theirs. Doubtless many of Paul's converts did that. He speaks from time to time of the fame of his converts' faith having spread either across a whole district or, in one case, right around the world.²⁹⁸ But the former case is, interestingly, almost the only time when he speaks explicitly of the *ekklēsia* members themselves going out and proclaiming the good news: 'the word of the lord has sounded forth from you.'²⁹⁹ Elsewhere he seems to be doing his best to build up the existing members of the *ekklēsia* in their faith, loyalty, love, hope and all the rest. There is a debate over the meaning of Philippians 2.16: does Paul say there that the *ekklēsia* must 'hold forth the word of life', must in other words proclaim it to the wider world, or does he say that they must hold it 'fast', must cling on to it? The word *epechō* can indeed mean 'hold out', as in 'offer to someone'; but it can also mean 'hold back', so that is not much help.³⁰⁰ When we look through his letters for evidence of active 'missionary' work, in the sense of finding opportunities to tell non-believers the good news about Jesus the Messiah, we find that it is almost always Paul himself (and perhaps his key co-workers; is this, we wonder, part of what being a co-worker involved?) who will be doing the telling. He has this as his particular vocation. Do they? It is surprisingly difficult to draw a firm conclusion. Perhaps he did, after all, simply want his

congregations to live in the way that he was teaching them to live, confident that this would have its own impact on the larger worlds all around them – as, according to the references in two of the letters, was actually happening.

It is impossible to draw definite conclusions on this slight evidence, and we must defer the substantive discussion of the point for later, when we may have more angles of vision from which to approach it. But one remark by way of conclusion. As we saw in looking at the central worldview-symbol, the *ekklēsia* itself, one of the ways in which Paul describes it is as the Temple. And this may indicate quite a different mode of ‘mission’. Paul seems to have believed that the individual churches, little groups of baptized believers coming together in communities of worship and love, dotted here and there around the north-east Mediterranean world, were each a living Temple in which the creator God, the God who had dwelt in the Temple in Jerusalem, was now dwelling. They were, in other words, the advance signs of that time when the whole world would be filled with the divine glory. Each lamp that was lit, in Colosse or Philippi or wherever, was a point of light, of divine presence, as a sign of the dawn that would come when the whole world would be so illuminated. That, I think, is part of what he means in Colossians 1.27: the Messiah in you, the hope of glory.³⁰¹ The indwelling Messiah, living in his Temple in Colosse, was the sign that ‘the hope of glory’ was starting to come true – the hope, that is, that YHWH would return in glory to his Temple, and that he would thereby fill the whole earth with his knowledge and glory, with his justice, peace and joy. Paul sees each *ekklēsia* as a sign of that future reality. To that extent, and in that sense, we can already say that ‘mission’ was indeed part of the symbolic reality (together with unity and holiness) by which Paul understood his communities to be defined.³⁰² The word ‘mission’ is used in many different ways today; we must be sure to understand it in the full sense which Paul would have understood. This will be part of the task of chapter 16 below.

[\(v\) The Praxis of a Renewed Humanity](#)

Like many Jewish thinkers of the period, Paul discerned in the large scriptural narrative he knew so well, and in many of its details, a particular focus within Israel's vocation as the people of the one God. They were called to be, in some sense or other, the renewed human race, the genuine humans, the people who would embody what the creator God had had in mind all along when he first made this strange creature in his own image.³⁰³ Since Paul believed that this purpose had been fulfilled in and through the Messiah and his people, he regarded the signs of renewed human life as among the key elements of symbolic praxis within his worldview. These signs are not just 'ethics' in the sense often supposed in western thought, to be placed low down on a scale of priority, way below 'theology'. Nor are they 'good works', to be regarded with suspicion on the basis of 'justification by faith alone'. They are part of the worldview which Paul believes must characterize the Messiah's people.³⁰⁴

Like some of his other key technical terms ('son of God', for instance), the actual word 'image' does not occur frequently in Paul's writings, but when it does it carries a lot of freight. One use in particular draws to our attention a passage from which alone we should deduce that Paul did indeed think of the Messiah's people as called to be, either now or eventually, the real article, the genuine humanity planned all along by the creator:

That's what it's like with the resurrection of the dead. It is sown decaying, and raised undecaying.⁴³ It is sown in shame, and raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, and raised in power.⁴⁴ It is sown as the embodiment of ordinary nature, and raised as the embodiment of the spirit. If ordinary nature has its embodiment, then the spirit too has its embodiment.⁴⁵ That's what it means when the Bible says, 'The first man, Adam, became a living natural being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ But you don't get the spirit-animated body first; you get the nature-animated one, and you get the spirit-animated one later.⁴⁷ The first man is from the ground, and is made of earth; the second man is from heaven.⁴⁸ Earthly people are like the man of earth; heavenly people are like the man from heaven.⁴⁹ We have borne the image of the man made of earth; we shall also bear the image of the man from heaven.³⁰⁵

I quote the whole passage, because the key verse for our present purposes, verse 49, is the climax of that sustained build-up, the ultimate point of the

entire argument. With that verse, Paul has finished the main thrust of the greatest chapter in this, arguably his second greatest letter (certainly his second longest). It is as though he has kept the word ‘image’ in reserve all the way through, but, as close study of the entire chapter indicates, Genesis 1, 2 and 3 have been in his mind all along, and part of the whole point has been the restoration of the original imagebearing vocation of Genesis 1.26–8. Now at last it comes, almost as a QED, referring right back to the original Adam/Messiah contrast in verses 21–2 (‘since it was through a human that death arrived, it is through a human that the resurrection from the dead has arrived; all die in Adam, you see, and all will be made alive in the Messiah’) and forming a carefully planned ‘circle’ with that opening.³⁰⁶

The point for our purposes is this: all humankind is marked with the ‘image’ of Adam, as in Genesis 5.3, where Adam becomes the father of Seth, ‘in his likeness, according to his image’, a deliberate echo of Genesis 1.28 but now impressing on the reader the fact that Adam is passing on *his* ‘likeness and image’.³⁰⁷ We have been Adam-image people; now we are to be Messiah-image people, reflecting the image of the one who is himself the reflection of the invisible God, as in 2 Corinthians 4.4.³⁰⁸ Though this obviously refers here to the final state of the resurrected body, part of the point of 1 Corinthians as a whole is to insist that followers of the Messiah should live already in the present in the light of what they will turn out to be in the future. That (for instance) is how the inaugurated eschatology of chapter 13 functions: faith, hope and particularly love will last into God’s future, so we must work on them here and now. That, too, is how the clear and sharp ethic of chapter 6 functions. God raised the lord and will raise us by his power, so we must glorify God in the body even in the present time.³⁰⁹ This principle is not simply a way of ‘doing ethics’ in the sense of working out a few rules to guide believers in the theologically secondary business of daily living. This is about the praxis in which the entire worldview comes to expression.

The same point emerges in the large, and even more carefully constructed, argument of Romans 5–8. Once again there is a long, slow circle involved, from the dense opening statements of the theme in chapter

5 through to the final triumphant statements towards the end of chapter 8. All we need for our present purpose is to note the links and the theological resonances they set up. In 5.2 Paul's opening statement of where his argument has now reached concludes by saying that 'we rejoice in the hope of God's glory', and the reader recalls that this 'glory' is what was lost, according to 3.23, through sin. A reference to Adam in 3.23 is now more or less universally assumed by commentators, many referring back also to the echoes of Genesis 3 in 1.18–25.³¹⁰ All this implicit material about the glory of humankind being lost and now being restored prepares us for the dense and cryptic, but central and vital, statement of the Adam/Messiah theme in 5.12–21, which turns out to be the ground plan (however quickly and allusively sketched) for the narrative, and its various themes, which Paul then offers in 6.1—8.30. It is often noticed that towards the end of chapter 8 Paul returns to the themes he stated at the start of chapter 5, and among those themes we should note particularly that of the 'image':

Those he foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family. And those he marked out in advance, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.³¹¹

'Shaped according to the model of the image': that is an attempt to catch Paul's phrase *symmorphous tēs eikonos*. Believers will share the *morphē* of the Messiah's *eikōn*, the 'pattern' or 'shape' of his 'image'. This is, as it were, a fuller statement of 1 Corinthians 15.49. For Paul, the Messiah himself, Jesus, is the true *eikōn* of God. Paul will not say that we are straightforwardly to become that *eikōn*; we will be conformed to *his* image-bearingness. But this derivative image-status does not lessen the force of 8.30 in its reaffirmation of 5.2: we rejoice in the hope of God's glory. For Paul this means a genuinely human existence at last; and a genuinely human existence means the resumption of that wise stewardship over creation which was lost by Adam (as in 3.23) and is now promised through the obedience of the Messiah.³¹² That is why the appeal of Romans 6, to live as resurrected people, and of Romans 8.12–16, to live under the leading

of the spirit, mean what they mean. There is to be a genuine anticipation, in the present, of the true humanity believers are promised in the future.

The idea of the Messiah-people as God's 'image' thus appears as a future hope which is to be anticipated, by the spirit, in the present. 'Being conformed to the image of the son', as in Romans 8.29, summarizes importantly *both* the present vocation of suffering, as in 8.17, and the promise of 'glory', the theme which binds together 8.17 with 8.18, 8.21 and 8.30. As we have seen in both 1 Corinthians and Romans, part of the whole point of Paul's message (and part of the reason for its complexity) is the urgent imperative to anticipate in the present, *through the presence, power and personality of the Spirit*, that which we are promised in the future. And this, in 2 Corinthians, includes also the vocation to be renewed and restored imagebearers:

All of us, without any veil on our faces, gaze at the glory of the lord as in a mirror, and so are being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as you would expect from the lord, the spirit ...

We don't proclaim ourselves, you see, but Jesus the Messiah as lord, and ourselves as your servants because of Jesus; because the God who said 'let light shine out of darkness' has shone in our hearts, to produce the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah.³¹³

Once again, Jesus the Messiah is himself the true 'image', and the glory of God is reflected through him 'in our hearts'. But what is thus true in the heart is true, by the spirit, on the unveiled face of believers: that is the extraordinary point Paul is emphasizing at the end of chapter 3. It may not look like it to the naked eye. That is why Paul goes on at once in 4.7 to speak of 'having the treasure in earthen vessels'. But this is part of the challenge of the gospel, that Messiah-people should learn to see the glory of the lord in one another.³¹⁴ This then forms the foundation of Paul's long argument in 2 Corinthians 4—6 about his own apostleship (which had been under serious attack from some in Corinth): the *ekklēsia* must learn to recognize what 'glory' looks like in the present age, and must discern it in the patient suffering of the apostle, modelling that of the Messiah himself,

rather than in the flashy or showy self-presentation which would model the wisdom of the world, or even the cunning of the satan.

The third example of the same to-and-fro between the Messiah as the true image and Messiah-people as the derivative imagebearers is in Colossians. Here it is relatively straightforward, and fits exactly into the pattern we have just observed. ‘He is the image of God, the invisible one’ (1.15) is picked up by 3.9–11:

Don’t tell lies to each other! You have stripped off the old human nature, complete with its patterns of behaviour,¹⁰ and you have put on the new one – which is being renewed in the image of the creator, bringing you into possession of new knowledge.¹¹ In this new humanity there is no question of ‘Greek and Jew’, or ‘circumcised and uncircumcised’, of ‘barbarian, Scythian’, or ‘slave and free’. The Messiah is everything and in everything!

The ‘patterns of behaviour’ are what count in this passage. Once again Paul stresses the unity of the new community, reflecting the concerns we have already explored in this chapter. Once again he stresses the Messiah as foundation and sum-total of it all, exactly as in the poem in chapter 1. But more particularly here he speaks of being ‘clothed’ with the new humanity, in other words, with the Messiah himself, just as in the baptismal passage in Galatians 3.27 and elsewhere.³¹⁵ This clothing, this being ‘renewed in the image of the creator’, is not something for which one must simply wait until the resurrection. Because, *in the Messiah*, one has already been ‘raised’ (3.1, corresponding exactly to Romans 6.4), one must already behave in accordance with this imagebearing vocation.

Bearing the image of God, through the agency of the Messiah, thus emerges as one of the foundation themes of Paul’s vision for what we may call ‘new humanity’. And this is what he tries to inculcate at the heart of the praxis of his communities. It is not just a neat trick of speech, a clever rhetorical way of working round to some ‘rules’ he wants to impose for other reasons. It is part of the worldview. We should not miss the powerful theological significance of this, which is also part of the worldview-symbolism: in a worldview where pagan images no longer have any meaning, Paul is not leaving the cosmos without images to mediate the

presence of the one true God. On the contrary. The world, the cosmos, is already presented with the one true Image, the Messiah himself; and the symbolic praxis of the Messiah's people is thus grounded, by the spirit, in the vocation to be imagebearers, to be the means of participating in and reflecting the true divine life into a world whose iconography had been giving off either a radically distorted vision or a downright lying one.³¹⁶ To put it in shorthand: in a world whose icons had been reflecting non-gods, the renewed iconography which informs and sustains the material symbolic universe of the Messiah-people begins with renewed human behaviour.³¹⁷ And this dovetails exactly with the 'new Temple' vision we have already explored. The spirit's indwelling enables the Messiah's people to be a dispersed Temple-people, the living presence of the one God launching the project of bringing the true divine life into the whole cosmos.

This sets the context for the main body of material in which Paul sees the symbolic praxis of the Messiah-people in terms of their actual behaviour – looking at this not in terms of 'ethics' seen through the lens of either deontology or indeed teleology, but rather in terms of worldview-praxis. These behaviour-patterns are to become the 'practical consciousness', the 'social autopilot', of the communities that belong to the one family of the one God.³¹⁸ As Clifford Geertz pointed out rather tartly a generation ago, (what he called) 'world view' and (what he called) 'ethos' – ontology and cosmology on the one hand, aesthetics and morality on the other, or even 'fact and value' – may be separable in thought but they never are in reality. And what he calls 'sacred symbols' are the means by which they are related. 'The number of such synthesizing symbols,' he goes on,

is limited in any culture, and though in theory we might think that a people could construct a wholly autonomous value system independent of any metaphysical referent, an ethics without ontology, we do not in fact seem to have found such a people. The tendency to synthesize world view and ethos at some level, if not logically necessary, is at least empirically coercive; if it is not philosophically justified, it is at least pragmatically universal.³¹⁹

We may start with one of Paul's most obvious, but still striking, ways of speaking about those to whom he is writing. He assumes that he can and

should address his communities as *hagioi*, ‘saints’ – even the muddled and misguided Corinthians.³²⁰ This, as Horrell rightly stresses, is a basically Jewish identity, marking a distinction between Messiah-people and the wider world.³²¹ That holds true at point after point elsewhere as well. The ‘holiness’ or ‘sanctity’ which is assumed as the norm for Messiah-people is basically a Jewish-style ‘holiness’, but *redefined* on the one hand and *intensified* on the other. (The same could be said of Jesus’ own teaching, but that topic is way outside our present limits.) Both of these points – redefinition and intensification – need a little more elaboration, because they reflect precisely the redefined worldview we are exploring. And, before we can even begin that elaboration, we may just note that the idea of Paul’s communities as Jewish-style *hagioi* does create an assumption about where to place Paul’s vision of the community within the wider history-of-religions (or indeed history-of-philosophies) paradigm. As Horrell observes, work on Paul’s worldview in relation to behaviour has tended to focus either on Jewish or on hellenistic parallels and possible source materials, despite the fact that all scholars now give lip service at least to the belief that all ‘Judaism’ in the period was in any case a form of ‘hellenistic Judaism’.³²² (We might comment that there are still two different ‘things’, the Jewish way of life and the Greek way of life, and that most first-century Jews not only knew this but lived with the tension; and that the scholarly problem has been precisely the failure to differentiate, in the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* itself, between religion (and between different *sorts* of religion), philosophy, culture, worldview and not least theology. *Of course* they are part of the same world, we should say; and *of course* they are in certain important respects radically different; and now can we please have the proper, differentiated and hermeneutically sensitive conversation?) As we shall see later on, Paul’s own view would be that it is because the followers of the Messiah are basically a strange new type of renewed Judaism that they are also, and for that very reason, renewed human beings (neither Jew nor Greek but ‘the *ekklēsia* of God’). They will, precisely for that reason, find themselves in tune with the best aspirations of the wider human family. This is a massive and important point, concerning

the ‘overlap’ between the Christian vision of genuine humanness and the human aspirations of other cultures, and we shall return to it later. For now, we proceed with the elaboration of Paul’s reworking of Jewish-style ‘holiness’.

First, then, Paul expects his communities to do what he himself has done, and accept a substantial and thorough *redefinition* of Jewish ‘holiness’. We have already seen this in dealing with the remarkable absence, in his reconstituted world, of the normal Jewish worldview-symbols which, for zealous Torah-observant Jews, were an integral part of being the special people of the one God. One only has to think, as before, of the Maccabean literature for the point to emerge clearly. If Antiochus’s torturers can persuade Eleazar to eat just a little pork, or even to *pretend* to, the game will be over; but he won’t, and so he goes to his horrible death.³²³ For Paul, though it may seem shocking to some and unbelievable to others, the one God made pigs and clams as well as cows, sheep and chickens, and pork and shellfish will be quite clean enough if you thank God for it.³²⁴ So too, as we have seen, with circumcision and the sabbath; so too, interestingly, with endogamous marriage. Someone who wishes to marry may do so ‘in the lord’; within prescribed boundaries, but not within prescribed *ethnic* boundaries.³²⁵ There is a clear restriction to ‘marrying within the family’, but the ‘family’ in question has nothing to do with parentage, tribe or *ethnos*. The reason is not far to seek: these symbols – food, circumcision, sabbath, family – had marked out the Jewish people as the special people of the one God, and Paul’s entire messianic worldview is based on the belief that that was a God-given status which has done its God-ordained job and is now transcended (though without leaving behind the problem of Romans 9.1–5) within the new world launched by the Messiah, the world in which believing Jews and believing gentiles belong, by baptism and faith, to the same single family of Abraham.

This redefinition therefore does not mean, as has so often been assumed, that Paul was simply a born-out-of-due-time modern liberal when it came to scriptural commandments.³²⁶ His redefinition had nothing whatever to do with a view that his Bible was less than fully inspired, or that it embodied a

worldview which, with the mere passage of time, had become outdated and needed to be corrected or supplemented in line with something more modern and relevant. This has been one of the main problems in discerning Paul's view of the law. Because, as we shall see, he argues in great detail that there *has* been a change, a new moment, a fulfilment of promise which makes the initial preparatory stages redundant, it has been all too easy for generations of readers for whom a Kantian view of 'ethics' is part of the assumed, unexamined worldview to guess that he is saying about the Old Testament what such readers wanted to say about the whole Bible: that it no doubt contains some important material but that it must be sifted in the light of the new *saeculum* that has dawned upon the world with the Enlightenment.³²⁷ It is this confusion that makes Paul appear 'anomalous' from the point of view of a second-Temple Diaspora Jew – or a modern interpreter putting himself into the mindset of such a person.³²⁸

Once we get past that problem, new clarity emerges. Paul not only *redefined* the Jewish praxis, leaving behind elements that were now irrelevant in his Messiah-based inaugurated eschatology and unified ecclesiology; he also *intensified* it. What have often been called the 'moral standards' or 'ethical imperatives' in his key texts show no sign of a slackening of demand, and in fact indicate on the contrary a standard of perfection at which one might well blanch. Violent, angry behaviour on the one hand and sexual misbehaviour on the other feature regularly on the list. The impulses towards such things must not just be tamed, as in some softer versions of popular philosophy (and, interestingly enough, in 4 Maccabees): they must be killed off. 'Those who belong to the Messiah crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'³²⁹ This is an all-out, no-holds-barred praxis, which Paul insists on not simply in terms of 'see if you can, perhaps, eventually ... manage to get somewhere reasonably near this', but in terms of the wholesale adoption of a worldview with its concomitant praxis. The aim is a personal mindset, nested within a community worldview, in which certain styles of behaviour will not even be named, not (of course) because they go on behind closed doors so that everyone lives in a state of denial and hypocrisy, as the cynic in the first or the twenty-first century will

always suppose, but because the community, the family and each person have discovered what it means to belong to the crucified and risen Messiah.³³⁰

Paul's so-called 'ethic' was rooted in questions about the actual community. This fact, coupled with his intensification of the Jewish standards, shows up clearly in complex discussions which, on any other account, look puzzling. Thus, for instance, divorce between Messiah-people is not allowed, and if it does happen the wife who has initiated the divorce must stay single thereafter or be reconciled to the original husband. Paul actually specifies that possibility (the wife divorcing the husband); it is not clear whether this is as an example of the larger category which would include the husband divorcing the wife, or whether he intends this permission to apply only in one direction. In other words, within the one family (i.e. of the *ekklēsia*), divorce and remarriage will count as adultery.³³¹ However, when the issue between spouses is that one partner is a 'believer' and the other is not, the believer is 'not bound' if the unbeliever wishes to separate. That, I take it, means that the abandoned believing spouse is free to remarry – 'only in the lord', as when one is widowed.³³² This is a remarkably careful distinction of cases. The underlying principle which makes sense of it is that the new community, the single family which is the central symbol of Paul's worldview, is the primary thing that matters. The behaviour of 'individuals' (which is, of course, the centre of everything for Kantian 'ethics' and indeed for the ancient Stoic ethics that some want to use as a Procrustean bed onto which to force Paul) is to be aligned with the vocation of that community. And the point Paul is making throughout 1 Corinthians, and indeed elsewhere, is that this community is to be the new, genuine humanity. In this humanity, the programme of Genesis 1 and 2 is at last to be realized: one man, one woman, for life. That vision of true humanity is what drives Paul's entire thinking on this and related subjects.³³³

This is why, more broadly, Paul's sexual ethic (to call it that for the moment) is not simply the application to such matters of a 'property' code as opposed to a 'purity' code.³³⁴ 'Paul's explicit concern ... is not with

what we might call “individual ethics”, but rather with the effect of such a misplaced person on the identity and purity of the group.’³³⁵ It is the community that matters first and foremost, and just as that community is greatly strengthened by the presence within it of persons who are giving themselves to the life of redefined and intensified holiness, so that community is endangered by the presence within it of persons whose whole personality, worldview and all, is heading in the other direction – not least when they are claiming a kind of Christian ‘liberty’ as their justification. As Horrell points out, in the list of unacceptable behaviours in 1 Corinthians 5.11 what Paul actually lists are not ‘vices’ but *persons*.³³⁶ Thus, in an opposite movement to that which has become taken for granted within contemporary post-Enlightenment western culture, Paul insists not only on seeing *persons* in the light of the whole *community* but on seeing *actions* in the light of the whole *person*. The act, in other words, cannot be split off from the whole person who is doing it, and who is thereby characterized; and the person cannot be split off from the community of which he or she is claiming to be a part, and which is thereby characterized. Conversely, the character of the community must be embodied in the persons of those who make it up, and the character of the persons must be embodied in the actions they perform. That is Paul’s vision of renewed humanity.

All this makes the traditional divisions between ‘indicative and imperative’, or, in would-be New Testament language, between ‘kerygma and didache’, look decidedly out of focus. The answer is, of course, that they *are* out of focus when seen from a first-century perspective, just as Paul’s worldview is out of focus when seen from a sixteenth- or nineteenth-century perspective (to say nothing for the moment of our own recently acquired twenty-first century and its ‘old’, ‘new’ and ‘fresh’ perspectives). It begins to look, as well, as though the difference which David Horrell makes thematic for his whole book, that between a ‘liberal’ ethic designed to be imposed (or at least assumed) for the whole human race and a ‘communitarian’ ethic designed for an ecclesial subset of the human race, is itself fundamentally mistaken.³³⁷ As far as Paul is concerned, his aim is to sustain the worldview whose central symbol is the one community of the

one God, whose whole *raison-d'être* is that, in claiming to be the fulfilment of Israel, it is at the same time and for the same reason the true humanity. The community is supposed to live in reality how all humanity is supposed to live in theory. Perhaps the entire division between the two viewpoints in our own day (and Horrell's theme of 'solidarity and difference' is nothing if not a contemporary perspective, and very interesting at that) is a symptom of a late-western cultural failure to grasp this essentially and shockingly *Jewish* perspective, complete with its inbuilt scandal of particularity. (There is, of course, the other obvious scandal, which Paul was much quicker to address than the modern western church has been, namely the abysmal failure of the *ekklesia* to live up to its calling. That, to my mind, is the really major objection to Paul's proposal, compared with which the home-made modernist 'objection' of the so-called 'delay of the parousia' pales into insignificance.)

If Paul's 'ethic' is thus both a redefined and intensified version of the Jewish way of life, we must also insist that, as with everything about his worldview, it is rooted specifically in the cross and resurrection of the Messiah. It is not, therefore, purely a matter of his getting some bits of his moral code from Judaism and some from non-Jewish sources.³³⁸ Nor is Paul's a worldview-praxis which then allows the newly formed people simply to behave as everyone out on the street would expect good people to behave. It is precisely a way of drawing a distinction: you are lights, he says, shining in a dark world! You are in a battle, and must put on the armour! You can see 'the works of the flesh' exhibited all around you, and you must be different.³³⁹

Paul thus arrives at the repeated statement of a worldview-praxis which is *both* what he wants the Messiah-people to have as their second nature, as a worldview-level assumption they do not even need to think about, *and*, however paradoxical this may be in terms of our own categories, something which will both overlap broadly with other human discourse on morality and send a signal to other communities that this particular family, though strange in some respects, is not behaving in the outlandish way they might suppose. We see here, in fact, the beginnings of that line of thought which

emerges in its full paradoxical glory in the Apologists of the second century: on the one hand they insist that they are good, law-abiding and indeed often exemplary citizens, and on the other hand they insist that they will not conform to some of the otherwise expected norms of the ruling pagan worldview, such as taking part in emperor-worship, the ultimate test of civic loyalty.³⁴⁰ This double-edged stance is not, in fact, an anomaly or an attempt to have one's moral cake and eat it, but flows once more straight from the underlying worldview and theology: the one community, rooted in the one God, is to be the true humanity. Unless Paul had held a very Manichaean theology of human evil, according to which there could be nothing whatever right about anyone who was not a member of the household of faith, he must have held, and did in fact hold, that there was a large degree of overlap in moral perception. All people know in their bones, he says in Romans 1, how they ought to behave; it's just that they choose (in one way or another) to go in other directions. But those overlaps remain: the Messiah's people should contemplate and mull over

whatever is true, whatever is holy, whatever is upright, whatever is pure, whatever is attractive, whatever has a good reputation; anything virtuous, anything praiseworthy,³⁴¹

wherever such qualities may be found. Paul is clear that they will be found – all over the place! – and that they are to be celebrated. By the same token (and in the same breath, almost) he indicates that the way of life which the Messiah's people follow should be something that commends itself to the wider world: 'let all people know your *epieikes*', your fairness, reasonableness, good-naturedness, your 'moderation' in the sense of mildness, kindness, willingness to see other people's points of view (even if you do not share them).³⁴² But, however much there is an obvious cross-over between the Christian vision of genuine humanness and that which is glimpsed in the pagan world, there is also, in the same passage, a clear statement on the need to follow a specific model of life, namely that of Paul himself: 'these are the things you should do,' he writes: 'what you learned, received, heard and saw in and through me.'³⁴³ Here is the strange double effect which results directly from the community's founding monotheism,

corresponding more or less exactly to the well-known distinction between (a) the Jewish monotheism which worshipped one God quite strictly and (b) the pagan varieties of monotheism in which many different divinities and religious systems could all be lumped together into a cheerful synthetic whole.³⁴⁴ The people of the one Jewish God, now made known (as far as Paul was concerned) in and through Jesus and the spirit, were to celebrate good examples of humanity wherever they saw them. They were to live in such a way that would commend itself to their pagan neighbours. But they were also to follow a strict way of life which would mark them out. Our contemporary categories of 'strictness' tend to lead into sectarianism; in avoiding that trap, and being 'open to the world', we lurch the other way, into compromise. That either/or simply shows how much we have failed to understand Paul's worldview, to think his thoughts after him.

This subtle position lies, also, underneath Paul's occasional but significant injunctions to 'do good' to people out beyond the limited circle of Messiah-people.³⁴⁵ His own communities are no doubt so small at the time he is writing – a few dozen at most, we may assume, even in Corinth? – that it makes no sense to think of him even dreaming of 'social programmes' whereby the *ekklēsia* might contribute to serious welfare reform, political transformation or whatever.³⁴⁶ We see here the beginnings of that question which no doubt haunted both the early Messiah-people and their neighbours: what sort of a group were they? Were they a cult, a club, a private association or what?³⁴⁷ As we suggested in a previous volume, Paul's early communities at least fell into none of these categories, and must for that very reason have raised suspicions: what exactly did they get up to behind closed doors? When they spoke of 'love', did that imply orgies? When they mentioned 'eating body' and 'drinking blood', did that imply cannibalism? We see these and similar questions emerging in the second century, but it is probable that they were there from very early on.³⁴⁸ In this context, too, the question naturally arose: if these people were celebrating some new divinity, some new 'son of God', hailing this person as *kyrios* or *sōtēr*, what did that imply about their wider political allegiance and their local civic reliability?

All these are questions we must explore further at the proper time. Enough for our present purposes to note the central point: the praxis of the single, united family cannot simply be analyzed in terms of an individual ‘ethic’ which stands at a subordinate place in the worldview or mindset of Paul. As Geertz stresses (in his terms of ‘world view’ and ‘ethos’), the praxis, symbol, questions and stories of a worldview all belong tightly together. In this case, Paul insisted on the praxis which was to become, not just a miscellaneous or from-time-to-time lifestyle choice, but part of the assumed mental furniture of the *ekklēsia*: the praxis of being ‘new humanity’, reflecting to the world, through its unity and holiness, the image of the one God which had been reflected fully and for ever ‘in the face of Jesus the Messiah’.

[4. Conclusion: the Praxis of Paul the Apostle](#)

Or: ‘what St Paul really did’, especially without thinking about it. Paul’s own individual mindset – his private and localized variation on the worldview we see him expounding so energetically in the letters – can be briefly elaborated. We shall return to it in more detail towards the end of the book, but we need just to log it here. These elements seem to present themselves in something of a hierarchy: that which forms his mindset at the deepest level, simply as a member of the Messiah’s family; that which is more specific to him in his own vocation; and that which he came to understand about some specific aspects of that vocation.

Paul’s account of himself is that he is ‘in the Messiah’. That frequent self-description goes back to the deeply personal, but also typical, account in Galatians 2.19–20: he died to the law so as to live to God, by being crucified with the Messiah and now being alive again but with the Messiah’s life rather than his own. He does not often say this so personally and obviously, but like a good worldview element we are aware of it, just below the surface, throughout the rest of his writing. And, being a Messiah-person, he effortlessly and naturally understands himself to be living in the

suddenly erupting new act of a much longer drama, the story of the one God, his people and the world. He assumes this scriptural narrative, its climax in Jesus as Messiah and his death and resurrection, and his own role in implementing what Jesus had achieved. If anything is worldview-stuff for Paul, this is it. It is the air he breathes. It works itself out in the elements we studied before: prayer, scripture, sacraments.

At that level, he would see himself on all fours with all other Messiah-people (though he wishes more of them would come to understand it in the way that he does). However, more specifically and personally, Paul understands himself as being defined by the gospel which has been entrusted to him by Jesus himself. He is an apostle, in the sense that he has seen the risen lord with his own eyes and has been commissioned by him. He is part of the 'servant'-vocation of the whole people of God.³⁴⁹ These two things are mutually defining; they are also basic for his particular mindset. 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' Without that, he literally would not know who he was, would not be able to live with himself.³⁵⁰

When we place the idea of 'belonging to the (crucified and risen) Messiah' alongside the specific apostolic call to preach (and live by) the gospel, three other things stand out. First, Paul is involved in a cosmic struggle. He mentions the satan often enough for us to understand that he sees all kinds of events, large and small, in terms of an implicit ongoing battle in which he is involved like a middle-ranking officer on a foggy day: remembering the orders he has received, able to see and hear some of what's going on, but often finding himself caught up, along with the people for whom he is responsible, in larger struggles whose overall shape he partially intuits without usually knowing the whole thing, or indeed any of it for sure. He knows that the battle is already won, but on his bit of the field it usually doesn't feel like that. (We note that some of his most glorious imagery about victory already accomplished, such as the passage about the powers and authorities being led in bedraggled captivity behind Jesus in his triumph, are found in letters written from prison.) If that is what we were to mean by 'apocalyptic', Paul would be, in this sense, an irreducibly 'apocalyptic' figure; though the full sweep of Jewish thought

from early times through to the middle ages at least suggests that this sense of spiritual warfare is by no means confined to so-called ‘apocalyptists’ and their writings.

Paul, in any case, believes in the reality of unseen powers that sometimes show themselves in real-time political events and sometimes in less obvious ways. He believes that these powers have been defeated by the Messiah in his death, and that the ongoing battle is the outworking of that victory. And he believes that the ‘revelation’ which took place in the Messiah himself, and which now takes place when Jesus is announced as lord, provides the revelatory clue, the ultimate *apokalypsis*, which makes sense, as a good ‘apocalypse’ should, of the two key areas which an ancient seer might want to investigate: (a) creation, cosmology and new creation and (b) past, present and future. What is more, the ‘revelation’ to which Paul referred not only made sense of these and drew them together. It also made clear, as we see from his own account in Galatians 1, his own role in both, subordinate to the central and defining role of the Messiah himself.

Second, and consequently, he suffered in all kinds of ways. We have already looked at this in terms of characteristic ‘praxis’. For Paul, this was basic and non-negotiable. It was part of ‘being in the Messiah’. There is none of the eager martyr about him in the way that there is with Ignatius of Antioch, but there is certainly nothing of the Stoic either, rising loftily above personal feelings and regarding bodily pain as irrelevant to happiness. He has learned how to be *autarchēs*, but his version of this Stoic quality is very different from that of Seneca or Epictetus.³⁵¹ He agonizes over communities, over individuals, over people who need discipline. He wears his heart on his sleeve, not least when writing to the Corinthians who wanted him to conform instead to their pattern of the good, upstanding philosophical or religious teacher. Paul remains, of course, deeply embedded in the scriptures, not least in the Psalms. It is considerably easier imagining him praising God exuberantly with Psalm 19, or lamenting before him with Psalm 88, than it is to imagine him as a serene Stoic, composing his soul in accordance with the *logos* of the *kosmos*.³⁵²

Third, Paul was a pastor. He tells the Thessalonians that he had been like a nurse with them; the Galatians, that he is like a mother going into labour once more. We can safely deduce from these, as we can from 1 Corinthians 13, that Paul really was that sort of person; and, as back-up evidence, we can see his personal concern writ large in the paragraphs about Timothy and Epaphroditus in Philippians, and above all in the letter to Philemon. He was a pastor, and a pastor's pastor. It shines through: an armchair theologian would have told the Corinthians that it was better to be strong than to be weak, and that the weak should get over it, or get used to it. They should come into line. Paul, the 'strong', held all the cards, all the theological high ground. But the pastor's insight, shaped and informed by the message of the cross, insists that human beings do not change their deep worldview-praxis (such as not eating certain foods) overnight. Conscience matters, and Paul will not squelch it. He might of course have learned that 'principle' from a book (which one?). Far more likely that he knew it in his bones, from years on the road, in the market-place, in the little room behind the tentmaker's shop, agonizing with this person and that about what it meant, in real, practical terms, to follow Jesus the Messiah, to be part of the new monotheistic community, to live within a newly redefined worldview after the disappearance of most of the previous symbols, which would have helped one get one's bearings.

There are two final things about Paul's personal praxis which, we may assume, did not come with the territory he had anticipated at his initial call, but which gradually worked their way from the status of conscious decisions to the status of worldview-characteristics. First, he was a writer. We have no means of knowing whether Galatians, or 1 Thessalonians, or possibly even one of the other letters we have, is the first letter he wrote. But writing is habit-forming. Once you have found you can do it, and that it has a certain effect, it is easy to assume that you should do it again. And once you do it again, you may reflect a bit about what you've just done. Paul may well have received elements of a formal classical education in rhetoric and so on. Maybe, as a bright young man, he just picked things up as he went along. But the fact remains that he wrote energetic and powerful

Greek, not particularly in line with the formalities of hellenistic education but not that far off either.³⁵³ He brought together the genres of ancient Hebrew poetry and prophecy with the street-level hellenistic world of the diatribe, and indeed of the personal letter; compare, again, Pliny writing to Sabinianus! He was capable of powerful and lyrical passages which show a poetic touch and an almost Beethoven-like ability to move from thunder and lightning to soft moonlight and back again. His style is his person, his tongue like a bell flinging out broad his name. Earlier three birds on a tree, but now only the one, and that one catching fire.

When you write like Paul seems to have done, at one level you think very hard about what you are doing, but at another level it just happens. Large-scale planning may be going on in your head or on scraps of parchment, but at that point there is an easy commerce of the old and the new, of conscious and subconscious. Finally, you glimpse it, you feel it, it emerges from somewhere, you write it (or dictate it), and it's done. By the time Paul wrote Romans, writing was part of the praxis of his mindset, a symphonist at the top of his game. The letters were part pastoral, part a substitute for his own presence; as theoreticians were already pointing out in his day, that's what a letter was and did.³⁵⁴ But they were also *writing*: quality writing to match the new thing which Paul must be credited with inventing, that specific, odd, craggy yet harmonious thing we call Christian theology, which demands new genres in which rhetoric, poetry, explanation, persuasion, scriptural exposition, warning and devotion rub shoulders and declare themselves members together of a new family. Whether we agree with him or not, his letters deserve their place (to put it with cheerful anachronism) not only in the *Church Times* or the *Christian Century* but also in the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Review of Books*. They break the several different moulds, from which they emerge, just as did Paul's theology itself. Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning. If Seneca didn't read Romans, which he almost certainly didn't, it is a pity: he would have been puzzled by much of the content, but he would have recognized that this man had something to say and knew how to say it. With style.

Finally, there is the Collection. We may imagine that when Paul set off for the first time on his travels, he had little idea what would happen, how things would work out, or how, if things went well, the folk back in Jerusalem would react to the news of all those pagans coming in to join Abraham's family. But at a certain point the idea had formed in his mind and his prayerful heart, and it soaked down so that it came to dominate his plans and hopes. Building on the little line about remembering the poor, from that early visit to Jerusalem,³⁵⁵ we find him mounting a large-scale strategy, with the disaster in Ephesus (whatever it was) intervening in the middle, and the rebellion in Corinth (whoever caused it) threatening to jeopardize the whole thing. He sticks at it, as we see him doing in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, because it has become part of his mental furniture, the will to plant a symbol not only in his own churches but also in Jerusalem itself, a symbol which would say what his whole worldview said, that Abraham has one family, not two, and that that family consists of all those who share Messiah-faith, and who live together by the rule of *agapē*. The Collection was thus umbilically linked to the most central elements in his worldview (and it collected other elements on the way, such as the masterful christological and then theological underpinning of the exhortation to generosity³⁵⁶). It was a fundamental expression of his central aims as an apostle, a direct outworking of the gospel he preached and lived. Though it was not, to begin with, part of his mindset either as a Messiah-follower or an apostle, by the time he arrived in Jerusalem on that last fateful trip he must have thought, 'What I do is me: for this I came.' The Collection spoke powerfully of Paul's vision of the *united* community; the problems that he faced in bringing the money to Jerusalem had to do with his redefined vision of the *holiness* of the community.

The symbols and the praxis link directly to the story and the questions. The single community, rooted in this strange, new messianic monotheism, has a narrative, tells a narrative, lives by a narrative; but it is a complex and integrated multiple narrative, and we must explore it step by step in the next chapter. This will help us as we then are interrogated by Kipling's 'six honest serving men': what, why, when, how, where and who, the questions

that probe down to the bedrock of the worldview and mindset. We shall take them in a different order. Who are we? We have already begun to see the answer to that, but must explore it further. Where are we? The obvious geographical answer (the lands of Greece and Asia Minor, within the Roman empire) is not at issue; here, too, we need to probe deeper. What's wrong? and How will it be put right ('What's the solution?') are both vital. Even more important is When?: *What time is it?*

Only when we have discerned Paul's answers to these five questions, to be examined in chapter 8, will we be able fully and properly to ask Why? and to hear the answer Paul will give, the answer which consists of his mature, coherent, integrated theology. Why this worldview, with its central symbol of the united, holy and witnessing *ekklēsia*? *Because of this theology*: the one God; the people of this one God; the future which this God has in store for his world and his people – all rethought and reworked in the light of the Messiah and the spirit. That is where all the bits and pieces, the sharp arguments and biblical allusions, the flights of fancy and the teasing parodies, the outbursts of praise and the hot tears of frustration, come together, hoarded, amassed, making sense at last. A bird in the hand.

¹ Geertz 2000 [1973]; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Walsh and Middleton 1984; Taylor 2007; see discussion in *NTPG* 122–37, and [ch. 1 above, 24–36](#).

² cf. Murphy-O'Connor 1998 [1980], 218–20.

³ Signature: 1 Cor. 16.21; Gal. 6.11; Col. 4.18; 2 Thess. 3.17; Philem. 19; tears: Phil. 3.18 (though of course Paul may, even in prison, have been dictating to a secretary whose own emotions were under more control).

⁴ See Rowe 2005a: a pregnant reflection which should spark further investigation.

⁵ Meeks 1983, 91.

⁶ Sanders 2008b, 347.

⁷ On the earliest Christian artefacts see now Hurtado 2006.

⁸ Barclay 1996, ch. 13. See Meeks 1983, 169: 'Although the Pauline Christians had abandoned the chief Jewish devices for distinguishing the covenanted people from the world of polytheism, that does not mean, as we have seen, that they themselves did not also maintain strong boundaries to define themselves over against that world.' Spot on. Meeks does not appear to regard this as 'anomalous' in the way Barclay does. Barclay has now produced a remarkable set of further detailed historical and cultural studies (Barclay 2011) on Paul, his churches and their world.

⁹ Gal. 1.17; 2.1–10; 4.25–7. The idea of 'Jerusalem above', though not articulated elsewhere, fits well with other elements of his developed ecclesiology. [See below, 1138.](#)

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 3.16f.; 2 Cor. 6.16 (my 'quote' combines the two); cf. 1 Cor. 6.19. [See below, 391f., 1041f.](#) On the OT background of 2 Cor. 6.16 cf. Lev. 26.11f.; Isa. 52.11, 14; Ezek. 37.27; and cp. 11QMelch. Concern for the Temple comes before concern for self in 3 Macc. 1. Important secondary studies include that of Renwick 1991.

¹¹ On Qumran and the Pharisees see above, 92, 95f. In the case of Qumran we seem to be dealing with a *temporary* replacement: one day, they believed, the Temple will be properly rebuilt, and properly run (by themselves, of course), and in the meantime they saw themselves as the Temple. Perhaps one could describe this view as 'Temple-in-waiting'.

¹² Gal. 2.9: 'those who seemed to be *styloi*'. See Bauckham 1995, 441–50.

¹³ See *JVG*, *passim*; and see now Perrin 2010.

¹⁴ See e.g. Gaventa 2003, 74: what happens at Pentecost 'has all the hallmarks of the divine presence', echoing earlier theophanies such as Ex. 3.2; 13.21f.; 19.18; 1 Kgs. 19.11f.; Isa. 66.15; 4 Ez. 13.1–3, 8–11. See too Beale 2004, ch. 6, esp. 201–16.

¹⁵ Ac. 1.9–11; 2.1–4; 6.8–7.53; 14.8–20; 17.16–34; 21.18–23.11.

¹⁶ John: see 1.14–18; 2.13–22; and the entire sequence of Temple-related actions and sayings, culminating in the 'farewell discourses' of chs. 13–17, often seen as the equivalent of entry into the holy place; 1 Pet. 2.4–10.

¹⁷ 1 Pet. 2.4–10; Rom. 9.32f.; Mt. 21.42–4 and par.; cf. Ps. 118.22f.; Dan. 2.35, 44f.

¹⁸ 1 Thess. 4.1–7.

¹⁹ Rom. 8.5–11.

²⁰ As in 1 Cor. 3.16. Had Paul been German, that hyphenated phrase might have ended up as a single word.

²¹ As in 2 Cor. 6.16.

²² *enoikeō*: 2 Cor. 6.16, where the Temple-reference is clear; 2 Tim. 1.14; cf. Col. 3.16; 2 Tim. 1.5. *katoikeō*: Eph. 3.17; Col. 1.19; 2.9; cf. 2 Pet. 3.13. Cp. *katoiketērion*, Eph. 2.22. In LXX: see e.g. 2 Sam. [2 Kgdms.] 7.2, 5, 6; Pss. 132 [131].14; 135 [134].21, etc.

²³ Priests and sacrifices: Rom. 12.1f.; 15.16; Phil. 2.17 (cp. 2 Tim. 4.6); pilgrimage in reverse: Rom. 15.19; redeemer coming from Zion: Rom. 11.26, changing Isa. 59.20f.; [see below, 1246–52](#), and e.g. Bird 2006, 134f., speaking of this as the translation into action of an older Jewish Temple-based universalism.

²⁴ Rom. 14.1–15.6, focused on 14.14, ‘nothing is unclean in itself’; for the christologically monotheistic foundation, cf. 14.6–9, 10–12, 17; 1 Cor. 8–10, focused on 8.8 (‘food will not commend us to God’), and given its foundation in 8.6; 10.26. For the revised monotheism and its outworking [see ch. 9 below](#). For the significance, see e.g. Meeks 1983, 103: ‘a whole second-order or symbolic system for mapping the sacred and the profane was thus discarded ... it was necessary, therefore, to define the purity of the community more directly in social terms.’ As Meeks goes on to explain, those ‘social terms’ were in fact firmly grounded in theology.

²⁵ With e.g. Horrell 2005, 17–19, 177f.; against e.g. Tomson 1990; Bockmuehl 2000; Nanos 1996, 2002a and 2011: [see below, 1435–41](#). I do not think Ac. 21, with Paul taking part in official practices relating to Temple-purity, offers a counter-example; ‘to the Jew, he became as a Jew’ (1 Cor. 9.20). The fact that his principled demoting of the Jewish symbolic universe looked to some of his contemporaries – and to some of ours! – like an illogical compromise is perhaps inevitable, but Paul at least believed he was acting on thought-out principles derived directly from the events concerning the Messiah.

²⁶ Gal. 2.15–21; [see below, 852–60](#).

²⁷ 1 Cor. 5.9–13.

²⁸ 1 Cor. 5.6–8; on the Messiah’s faithfulness, [see below, 836–51](#).

²⁹ 1 Cor. 10.27–30.

³⁰ cp. 1 Cor. 8.11; Rom. 14.23.

³¹ For a fuller exposition of what I have called ‘Messiah-faithfulness’ [see below, 910, 960f., 966–8, 1026, 1137](#).

³² 1 Cor. 8.10; 10.14–22.

³³ On this see recently Blaschke 1998; Thiessen 2011.

³⁴ 1 Cor. 7.19. The equivalent verses in Gal. would be 5.6 and 6.15.

³⁵ 5.2–6.

³⁶ Gal. 2.3–5. Hays 2000, 224 is clear that Titus did not undergo circumcision; cf. Dunn 1993, 96; de Boer 2011, 138.

³⁷ Ac. 16.1–3. Unlike Titus, Timothy had a Jewish mother, so was classifiable as ‘Jewish’. I doubt, though, if that was the reason Paul circumcised him. See e.g. the discussion in Witherington 1998, 473–77.

³⁸ On Rom. 2.17–29 see article in *Perspectives*, ch. 30.

³⁹ Rom. 2.28–9a.

⁴⁰ [See below, 1165–76](#).

⁴¹ Phil. 3.3.

⁴² 3.5, 7.

⁴³ As in Gal. 2.21.

⁴⁴ [See below, 992f.](#)

⁴⁵ Rom. 4.12.

⁴⁶ [See below, e.g. 836–51, 931f.](#)

⁴⁷ Rom. 14.5f.

⁴⁸ Gal. 4.10; [see below, 976.](#) For the primary discussion: Rom. 14.5f.

⁴⁹ Ac. 20.16; see too Lk.'s marking of 'the days of unleavened bread' in 20.6. See e.g. the discussion in Barrett 1998, 960. For the sabbaths in Ac. cf. e.g. Ac. 13.14, 42, 44; 15.21; 16.13; 17.2; 18.4.

⁵⁰ cf. Rom. 2.17–24.

⁵¹ Dan. 6.10; cf. 1 Kgs. 8.29f., 35, 38, 44, 48f.; 2 Chr. 6.20f.; Pss. 5.7 (cf. 11.4); 18.6; 28.2; 138.2; Jon. 2.4; 1 Esd. 4.58; and, by implication at least, Tob. 3.11f. See too e.g. Pss. 42.6; 43.3f.; Mic. 1.2; Hab. 2.20.

⁵² cf. 2 Cor. 3.16f.

⁵³ cf. e.g. Rom. 1.9; 12.12; Eph. 6.18f.; Phil. 4.6; Col. 4.2f.; 1 Thess. 5.17, 25; 1 Tim. 2.1; Rom. 8.26f.

⁵⁴ See [below, 676f.](#) On thanksgiving see esp. Col. 1.12; 2.7; 3.15, 17; 4.2.

⁵⁵ [See below, 662–7.](#)

⁵⁶ Abraham and the land: Gen. 12.1, 7; 13.15; 15.18; 17.8; 24.7; 26.4; 28.13; 35.12; the promise reiterated at the time of the exodus: Ex. 3.8; Dt. 6.3, etc.; the promise echoed: 1 Chr. 16.18; 2 Chr. 20.7; Neh. 9.8; Ps. 105.10f.; David and the wider promise: Pss. 2.8f.; 22.27; 72.8–11; 89.25; 105.44; 111.6; Isa. 9.7; 11.1–10 (echoing Ps. 2.9 at 11.4); 42.1–4, 6, 10–12; 49.6f.; 52.10, 15; 55.1–5; 60.1–16; 61.1–7; 66.18–21. See too Sir. 44.21 (combining Gen. 12.3 with Ps. 72.8); *1 En.* 5.7; and *Jub.* 19.21; 32.19 (speaking of Jacob's family in terms borrowed from Abraham's, and declaring that it will fill the whole earth). In *2 Bar.* 14.13; 51.3 the 'inheritance' is a whole new world. See further S-B 3.209; and see *Perspectives*, ch. 33.

⁵⁷ [See below, 1092f.](#)

⁵⁸ Gal. 3.18, 29; 4.1, 7, 30. For the relation between 'land' (the inheritance promised in Gen. 15 and elsewhere) and 'spirit' (highlighted as the promised gift in Gal. 3, as expounded by de Boer and others), [see below, e.g. 972, 1023.](#)

⁵⁹ Gal. 5.21; cf. 1 Cor. 6.9f.; Eph. 5.5.

⁶⁰ We might note here Col. 1.12–14, which combines several of these key Pauline motifs.

⁶¹ Rom. 1.5; 16.26; etc.

⁶² See e.g. Horrell 2005, 138–40.

⁶³ See Rom. 11.29; 15.8f.; [and below, ch. 10.](#)

⁶⁴ [ch. 10 below, on election.](#)

⁶⁵ e.g. Isa. 55.1.

⁶⁶ 2 Cor. 6.14–7.1 (on the question of whether this passage properly belongs with the rest of 2 Cor., or even the rest of Paul, see e.g. Thrall 1994, 2000, 25–36, against e.g. Betz 1973); 1 Cor. 7.39; and, for the Pastoral problem, 1 Cor. 7.12–16, with e.g. Hays 1997, 120–22; Thiselton 2000, 525–43.

⁶⁷ See Mason 2007; Novenson 2013 ([see above, 88–90](#)).

⁶⁸ 2 Cor. 10.3–6.

⁶⁹ 1 Cor. 15.23–8.

⁷⁰ Neyrey 1990, ch. 7. On Paul's 'world' see Adams 2000; and several of the essays in Pennington and McDonough 2008.

- [71](#) *NTPG* 252–6. Perhaps I should have published those pages as a separate article.
- [72](#) cf. Eph. 2.3.
- [73](#) cf. Gal. 2.19f.; Phil. 3.7–11.
- [74](#) Rom. 16.20.
- [75](#) 1 Cor. 2.6–8.
- [76](#) 1 Cor. 7.5.
- [77](#) 1 Cor. 10.14–22.
- [78](#) 2 Cor. 2.11.
- [79](#) 2 Cor. 11.14f.
- [80](#) 2 Cor. 12.7–9.
- [81](#) Eph. 2.2; 3.10.
- [82](#) Eph. 6.10–17; with 6.14, cp. Isa. 11.5; with 6.15, Isa. 52.7; with 6.17, Isa. 11.4; 59.17; 61.10.
- [83](#) Col. 1.15–20; 2.15.
- [84](#) 1 Thess. 2.18f.
- [85](#) 2 Thess. 2.8f.
- [86](#) See the discussion of new so-called ‘apocalyptic’ readings of Paul in *Interpreters*.
- [87](#) Meeks 1983, 92. For the whole theme of revelation and the role it played in different types of Judaism and in early Christianity, see not least Bockmuehl 1997 [1990].
- [88](#) Rowe 2005a, 308f.

⁸⁹ Rom. 1.18–25.

⁹⁰ 1 Cor. 8.1–6.

⁹¹ Gal. 4.8–11. There is, of course, considerable irony in this passage, in that the Galatians are wanting to become full Jews and Paul is accusing them of going back to paganism.

⁹² 1 Thess. 1.8–10.

⁹³ Among many examples cf. e.g. Pss. 115.4–8; 135.15–18; Isa. 37.18f.; 40.19f.; 44.9–20; Jer. 10.1–5.

⁹⁴ Col. 1.15. On the filling of the desacralized space see Gorman 2009, ch. 1, esp. 35–7, though I think we can go further still than he suggests.

⁹⁵ 1 Cor. 8—10, on which see now Phua 2005.

⁹⁶ See esp. Thiselton 2000, 775f., with ref. to earlier discussions.

⁹⁷ Thiselton 2000, 776: ‘Hence these former agencies have become reduced to *pockets of power* operating where human social “worlds” or value systems still offer them ground and sway’ (italics original).

⁹⁸ cf. e.g. Meadors 2006; Beale 2008. Beale goes further: we *become* what we worship.

⁹⁹ Mt. 12.43–5/Lk. 11.24–6.

¹⁰⁰ See ch. 14 below.

¹⁰¹ See Hafemann 2000, with good bibliography in relation to the NT; Beard 2007.

¹⁰² Perhaps Eph. 5.7, 11; more explicitly, 1 Pet. 4.4f.

¹⁰³ Tac. *Ann.* 15.44: cf. *NTPG* 352f. The charge is strongly rejected in *Ep. Diogn.* 5, echoing 2 Cor. 6, and going on (6) to claim for the Christians what Philo had claimed for the Jews, that they were in the world like the soul is in the body. The charge was also made against the Jews, as we see in Jos. *Ap.* 2.121–4.

¹⁰⁴ Barclay 1996, 147, expounding Aristeas 139.

¹⁰⁵ cf. e.g. the Erastus inscription at Corinth; details in e.g. Jewett 2007, 981–4. Erastus is mentioned, as Corinth’s city treasurer (i.e. aedile), in Rom. 16.23; 2 Tim. 4.20.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to Erastus (above), cp. Phil. 4.22; on public office and private vengeance: Rom. 13.1–7 with 12.19–21 (and cf. Col. 1.15–20). [See below, 1302–5.](#)

¹⁰⁷ Gal. 6.10. This may appropriately be read as a Christianizing of the command in Jer. 29[LXX 36].7 to ‘seek the welfare of the city’ where the exiles found themselves, though there is no obvious verbal echo. For this theme see, importantly, Winter 1994.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Thess. 5.15.

¹⁰⁹ 12.17.

¹¹⁰ Phil. 1.27.

¹¹¹ Thus e.g. 2 Cor. 9.8; Eph. 2.10; certainly at 1 Tim. 6.17f., and probably also 2.10; 5.10. See Horrell 2005, ch. 8. I do not agree that an ethic which includes ‘new creation’ as one of its principles will necessarily lead to an ‘ecclesial-community’ focus (270), though it is true that exponents of it have sometimes given that impression. Precisely because it is rooted in creational monotheism, one would expect, on the contrary, a reference to the wider community. For this to be properly nuanced, one would also need a robust Pauline account of evil; but Horrell does not factor that in at this point.

¹¹² Phil. 4.8.

¹¹³ On all this, [see ch. 12 below.](#)

¹¹⁴ On *stoicheia* [see below, 480, 878, 993.](#)

¹¹⁵ Hickling 1975.

¹¹⁶ How many British people could explain the cryptic abbreviations on UK currency? We should not, of course, imply a parallel with the ancient world. Coins were *the* mass media in that world, far more omnipresent than imposing statues or popular festivals. We today, receiving words and images from a million sources, easily ignore those on coins and banknotes.

¹¹⁷ Son of God: e.g. Rom. 1.3f.; 5.6–11; 8.3f.; Gal. 4.4; lord of the World: e.g. Rom. 1.5; 10.9–13; Phil. 2.9–11; Saviour: Eph. 5.23; Phil. 3.20 (in a context replete with ‘imperial’ overtones); 1 Tim. 1.1; 2.3; 4.10; 2 Tim. 1.10; Tit. 1.3, 4; 2.10, 13; 3.4, 6; ‘good news’: Rom. 1.1, 9, 16 and frequently; justice: Rom. 1.17 etc.; peace: Rom. 5.1 etc.; ruling the nations: Rom. 15.12. Power: Rom. 1.4, 16; 1 Cor. 1.18, 24; 2.4, 5; 4.19f.; 5.4; 2 Cor. 4.7; 12.9; 13.4; Eph. 1.19–23; 3.7–10; Phil. 3.10; Col. 1.11, 29; 1 Thess. 1.5; 2 Thess. 1.7; 2 Tim. 1.7.

¹¹⁸ cf. [above, 298–311](#).

¹¹⁹ [See below, n. 121](#).

¹²⁰ [See above, 249–51, 273](#).

¹²¹ e.g. Dunn 1998 (ch. 7 out of 9, with only ‘Ethics’ and an ‘Epilogue’ to come); Schreiner 2001, chs. 13, 14 (out of 16); Schnelle 2005 [2003], ch. 21 (out of 23); Wolter 2011, ch. 11 (out of 15) (though he saves his major topic, justification, for ch. 13, the longest in the book).

¹²² Engberg-Pedersen 2000, xi, 7, 12, 21.

¹²³ Hock 1980; Meeks 1983, ch. 2; Meggitt 1998; Longenecker 2009; Longenecker 2010.

¹²⁴ Rom. 16.23 (city treasurer); 16.1f. (the letter-bearer).

¹²⁵ Thiessen 2011, 148 and elsewhere, suggests that for early Christians to give up the markers of Jewish identity ‘would not indicate a movement from particularity to universality but from particularly Jewish identity markers to particularly Gentile ones’ – a move which, he says, Luke (the special subject of his study) did not advocate. My central thesis in this Part of the book is precisely that Paul did insist on a clean break with Jewish identity markers, and that he did not adopt gentile ones in their place, not because of a belief in ‘universality’ as opposed to ‘particularity’, but because he believed that the crucified and risen Messiah was now the identity marker of a renewed people, whose unity and holiness had to provide the symbolic strength to sustain the new worldview.

¹²⁶ Meeks 1983, chs. 3, 5, 6; Horrell 2005, ch. 4.

¹²⁷ mBer. 7.2. Instone-Brewer 2004, 78f. suggests that this tradition probably dates to before AD 70.

¹²⁸ See the helpful discussion in Cohen 2011, 339, pointing out the semi-parallel in a saying ascribed to Socrates, giving thanks that he was born a human and not a beast, a man and not a woman, a Greek and not a barbarian (Diog. Laert. 1.33), and tracking the rabbinic tradition through e.g. tBer. 6.18, bMen. 43b–44a. For the modern liturgy see *ADPB*, 6f. (the morning service).

¹²⁹ Gal. 3.28. It is not impossible that Paul is citing an earlier tradition at this point; but arguing for this (Horrell 2005, 104, following Betz) on the basis that only one of the three pairs appears relevant to the context, and that there is a change from ‘we’ to ‘you’ in the surrounding verses, misses the point (a) that Paul seems deliberately to be subverting this well-known specifically Jewish prayer and rule, implying that if the Galatians become, effectively, physically Jewish they will forfeit precisely this complex unity, and (b) that the change from ‘we’ to ‘you’ is actually demanded by the argument, on which [see below, 873–6, 974f](#).

¹³⁰ Gal. 2.15–21, on which see below, 852–60, 966–71. Horrell 2005, 119f. seems to me to make too much of a meal of this (so to speak): what is at stake is not ‘the place of the Jewish law in the Christian community’ (120), but the standing of all Messiah-faith people in that community irrespective of the Jewish law.

¹³¹ See the fuller treatment in *Perspectives*, ch. 31.

[132](#) 3.26, 27, 28.

[133](#) On Gal. 3 [see below, 860–76](#).

[134](#) I think this would have been ‘natural’ for a first-century Jew; but this has not prevented hundreds of alternative proposals. See *Climax* ch. 8, and e.g. Williams 1997, 98–100 (though Williams does not read the verse in quite the way that I do).

[135](#) See the discussion in [ch. 9 below, 641–3](#).

[136](#) Phil. 1.27f.

[137](#) Phil. 2.1–4.

[138](#) On the social composition of the Philippian church, and the strong likelihood of internal tensions, see e.g. Oakes 2001, ch. 2.

[139](#) 2.6–11, on which see 680–9. On having ‘the Messiah’s mind’, cf. 1 Cor. 2.16.

[140](#) Horrell 2005, 195.

[141](#) On the main theme of 1 Cor. as a sustained appeal for unity, see esp. Mitchell 1991/2.

[142](#) 1 Cor. 3.12; see e.g. Thiselton 2000, 311f., citing earlier studies, and bringing out well the vividness of a threat of a city fire in the dry, close-packed environment of a city like Corinth.

[143](#) 1 Cor. 3.16f. Paul uses the word *naos*, which is properly the actual shrine at the centre of the Temple, rather than *hieron*, the Temple area as a whole, perhaps in order to stress the holiness which the place possessed and which worshippers ought to share: see Thiselton 2000, 315.

[144](#) 3.21–3.

[145](#) 2.16, echoing Phil. 2.5.

[146](#) 6.15–20.

[147](#) Meeks 1983, 164–70. For some reason this line of thought remains opaque to Horrell 2005, 171–3, perhaps because he is following Murphy-O’Connor 1978, who in his determination to resist Paul’s astonishingly high christology here screens out the practical and symbolic power of monotheism along with it: see *Climax* ch. 6.

[148](#) 10.26 (quoting Ps. 24.1), 30; cf. Rom. 14.6; 1 Tim. 4.4.

[149](#) 9.19–23: see below, 1434–43. Horrell is right (2005, 260 n. 50) to stress that what might appear as a ‘chameleon-like flexibility’ is an indication, rather, that Paul’s ‘identity and practice are no longer defined by these categories, but rather by a “being in Christ” which Paul understands to demand precisely this adaptability’.

[150](#) Rom. 9.1–5; 11.1–6; and, we might say, the famous *ego* of 7.7–25 (and also Gal. 2.19–21).

[151](#) cf. too 1 Cor. 9.16f.

[152](#) See Gorman 2001, *passim*, and Gorman 2009, ch. 1, arguing that the story of Phil. 2.6–11 is foundational for Paul’s whole thinking and hence is being re-expressed in 1 Cor. and elsewhere.

[153](#) 10.17. [See below](#), on the symbolic praxis of the sacraments.

[154](#) 10.31—11.1. My translation here of 11.1 does not bring out the fact that Paul’s ‘imitation of the Messiah’ involves not as it were a detached copying but a profound sharing of life; but I am not sure that the Greek strictly conveys it either (see e.g. Thiselton 2000, 370f., on 1 Cor. 4.16, suggesting ‘emulate, follow, or use as a model’; also 795f., on the present passage).

[155](#) It points forward, of course, to the notion of a ‘third race’, as expounded by e.g. Aristides; cf. *Kerygma Petrou* frag. 2.

[156](#) On the apostle’s example, particularly in giving up rights, as marking a different pattern from that of the world cf. also 1 Cor. 4.16; and e.g. Phil. 3.17; 4.9; 1 Thess. 1.6; 2.14; 2 Thess. 3.7. People sometimes cite 4 Macc. 9.23; 13.9 as a parallel; these passages do indeed reflect the ‘imitation’ motif,

in a context of self-sacrifice, but they also highlight the difference. There, the cause is nationalist zeal, the very thing Paul declares that he has given up.

¹⁵⁷ See the discussions in e.g. Theissen 1982; Witherington 1995, 241–52 (248: ‘the divisions manifested among the Corinthians when they gather for worship are probably those that Paul has mentioned in ch. 1,’ citing Theissen; Thiselton 2000, 848–99; Fitzmyer 2008, 425–48 (433: the divisions of 11.18 were ‘of a different kind’ to those in 1.10).

¹⁵⁸ See Theissen 1982, 145–74; Slater 1991; Thiselton 2000, 861f.

¹⁵⁹ 12.12–20.

¹⁶⁰ Against e.g. Nanos 1996; Nanos 2011, 282f.

¹⁶¹ Minear 1971.

¹⁶² See Horrell 2005, 184 against e.g. Reasoner 1999, 128–58.

¹⁶³ The only other passage where he turns rhetorically to ‘the Jew’ is Rom. 2.17, on which see *Perspectives*, ch. 30.

¹⁶⁴ Rom. 14.3–12. Horrell 2005, 184f. does not seem to me to see the point, perhaps because he is structuring his reflections in terms of the rather generalized category of ‘other-regarding’ morality.

¹⁶⁵ On the very interesting symbolism of the praising ‘mouth’, which was a key element in the denunciation of 3.14, 19, see Gaventa 2008. I was surprised, though, that she says Paul never says that the stopped mouth has been opened by Christ (405 n. 41): that, I think, is the effect of 10.8, 9 and 10 (to which she refers briefly at 406), where *stoma* plays a key role precisely in the coming to articulate faith of the new-covenant people.

¹⁶⁶ MT has ‘nations’ (*goyim*); LXX, expanding the line, has *ethnē* in the second couplet.

¹⁶⁷ Rom. 15.7–13.

¹⁶⁸ e.g. Meeks 1983, 85–7, 108.

¹⁶⁹ See e.g. Barclay 1996, 388, speaking of the ‘anomaly’ of ‘a strongly antagonistic cultural stance, combined with a radical redefinition of traditional Jewish categories’, and saying that ‘*although* his life’s work consists of establishing communities made up of Jewish and non-Jewish believers, each of equal dignity, Paul *retains* the assumption that the non-Jewish world is a cess-pit of godlessness and vice’ (my italics). Barclay has done an admirable job of seeing things through the eyes of a puzzled first-century Diaspora Jew, but he shows no signs here of grasping the deep inner and structural logic of Paul’s practical and theological position. ‘His heritage’, says Barclay (389), ‘shapes his perceptions of the world, *even while* its categories are violently redefined by the social effects of his mission’ (my italics again). No, Paul would reply: it isn’t my ‘heritage’; it’s the God of Israel and the promises he made, and has kept; and the violent redefinition is *caused by* my belief in a crucified and risen Messiah, which is in turn the cause of the ‘social effects’ you rightly observe.

¹⁷⁰ Gal. 3; Rom. 4 (see *Perspectives*, ch. 33); contrast the treatment of e.g. Martyn 1997; Käsemann 1980 [1973]. Horrell 2005, 112 rightly sees the point.

¹⁷¹ Horrell 2005, 107, drawing out the meaning in relation to the Lord’s Supper: [see below, 417f., 427–9.](#)

¹⁷² Malina and Neyrey 1996, 160–4.

¹⁷³ Gal. 6.10, 16; see e.g. Meeks 1983, 85–7.

¹⁷⁴ Meeks 1983, 109f.

¹⁷⁵ Johnson Hodge 2007, 9 (her italics). She follows Gaston, Gager and others into the now surely discredited position of saying that Paul’s gospel was *only* for gentiles, not at all for Jews. Rom. 15.1–13, quoted above, is a fairly complete answer to this, as will be our later exposition of ‘election redefined’.

¹⁷⁶ e.g. 1 Thess. 4.9–12, where Paul’s urging that they ‘love one another more and more’ does not seem to indicate a stirring up of yet more powerful emotions but a raising of consciousness to more mutual meeting of needs.

¹⁷⁷ This is, more or less, what Gorman means when he speaks of ‘communities of cruciformity’ (Gorman 2001, 349–67).

¹⁷⁸ Meeks 1983, 165f., 190. The earlier writer often cited as having reintroduced a discussion of monotheism is Dahl 1977, ch. 10; one wonders how NT scholars got by in those days without even considering monotheism as a relevant topic. Meeks is misleading, though, when he speaks of the contrast between the one God and the false gods as ‘dualistic’ (166): there is a duality, yes, but from the point of view of Jewish and early Christian monotheists this was precisely a way of rejecting the various popular ‘dualisms’ of the day ([see above, on ‘dualisms’ and ‘dualities’](#)).

¹⁷⁹ For some reason this point seems to be missed by Horrell 2005, 177: Ps. 24.1 is not just ‘a quotation from scripture’, but an invocation of just that Jewish-style creational monotheism which is the foundation for the community, and its behaviour, which are Paul’s central symbol. Horrell is right to see the christological grounding of Paul’s imperatives, but this too is anchored, as we shall see again, in monotheism itself.

¹⁸⁰ See, e.g., in parallel to Engberg-Pedersen, the remarkable statement by Betz 1994, 89: ‘the shaping of rituals and the setting of moral standards for Christian behavior constitutes most of the content of the letters.’ So much, then, for theology.

¹⁸¹ See Horrell 2005, 87, quoting Hays 1983, 267 n. 1 [= Hays 2002 [1983], 210 n. 1] against e.g. Martyn 1997 and, behind him, Bultmann.

¹⁸² Rightly, Meeks 1983, 92f.

¹⁸³ e.g. Martyn 1997, 377, 382, 574–6, seeing completely the ‘incorporative’ point but without any ‘messianic’ meaning to back it up. Similarly, Meeks 1983, 92f. (Meeks sees the importance of ‘messiahship’ as a category but not its incorporative significance). Fitzmyer 2007 appears to downplay both; see e.g. Bird 2009a, 37–40, 88. On incorporative christology see e.g. Cummins 2007; and see the discussion [below, 825–35](#), with *Perspectives*, ch. 31.

¹⁸⁴ Rom. 1.5; 16.26.

¹⁸⁵ 2 Cor. 4.4; Col. 1.15.

¹⁸⁶ It is *Christos*, not *Iēsous*, who is spoken of in 2 Cor. 4.4.

¹⁸⁷ 2 Cor. 3.18, on which [see 677–80 below](#).

¹⁸⁸ Horrell 2005, 85, quoting Pickett 1997, 29, 34f. See too e.g. Meeks 1983, 180.

¹⁸⁹ For an account of some early evidence, see *NTPG* 366f.; and cf. now Skarsaune 2002, 182f.

¹⁹⁰ I say ‘him’; women were occasionally crucified, but most victims were male. There were other ways of crushing and humiliating women.

¹⁹¹ [See ch. 10 below](#).

¹⁹² Dt. 21.23. [See below, 864](#). On Jewish attitudes to crucifixion see now e.g. Chapman 2008; Wise 2010.

¹⁹³ Gal. 2.19f.

¹⁹⁴ For the objection that there were other strands of early Christianity which took a different view, see *RSG*, esp. 534–51.

¹⁹⁵ I have set this out at length in *RSG*, developed the argument further at a different level in *Surprised by Hope* (= Wright 2008), and responded to some of the debates in e.g. *JSNT* 2004 (= Wright 2004) and *JSHJ* 2005 (= Wright 2005a).

¹⁹⁶ 2 Cor. 6.2. On Paul’s theology of the resurrection see esp. *RSG* Part II.

¹⁹⁷ See Wright 2002 (= Wright, *Romans*), 538; and cf. Kirk 2008, 107–17.

¹⁹⁸ 1 Cor. 6.18–20.

¹⁹⁹ Rom. 11.15.

²⁰⁰ Rom. 8.21; Paul does not say (despite some translations) that creation will share the ‘glorious liberty’ of God’s children. Rather, the ‘freedom’ of the renewed creation will come about as a result

of the 'glory', i.e. the sovereign rule, of God's resurrected children. See [below, 488f.](#)

²⁰¹ Pss. 2; 72; Isa. 11.1–10; etc. The geographical references mean, more or less, 'all the known world that's worth bothering about'. [See above](#) on 'land' becoming 'world'.

²⁰² cf. e.g. Mt. 28.18.

²⁰³ The point is well made by Käsemann in his posthumous collection of essays (Käsemann 2010). His opening autobiographical sketch makes the point: 'Discipleship of the Crucified leads necessarily to resistance to idolatry on every front. This resistance is and must be the most important mark of Christian freedom' (xxi).

²⁰⁴ e.g. Isa. 52.7, quoted in Rom. 10.15.

²⁰⁵ Rom. 1.1, 16; 1 Cor. 1.17; 9.16, 23; 15.1f.; 2 Cor. 4.4; 9.13; Gal. 1.11; 2.5; Eph. 3.8; Phil. 1.12, 27; Col. 1.23; 1 Thess. 1.5; Philem. 13.

²⁰⁶ mBer. 9 (here at 2). A moving modern equivalent was the practice of Temple Gairdner, developing a personal version of the 'Benedicite' to incorporate all the things for which he gave thanks, until at the close of his life it was 'enormously enlarged': see Padwick 1930 [1929], 322.

²⁰⁷ mBer. 9.5.

²⁰⁸ Rom. 1.8; 1 Cor. 1.4–7; 2 Cor. 1.3f.; Phil. 1.3–5; Col. 1.3–5; 1 Thess. 1.3; 2 Thess. 1.3; Philem. 4f. Interestingly, neither 1 Tim. nor Tit. have an opening 'thanksgiving' (though cf. the gratitude expressed in 1 Tim. 1.12); 2 Tim. (1.3) has a characteristically 'Pauline' one.

²⁰⁹ Eph. 1.3–14.

²¹⁰ Col. 3.15–17; cf. 1.12; 2.7; 4.2; see too Phil. 4.10f.

²¹¹ mBer. 9.2.

²¹² Eph. 5.20.

²¹³ Gal. 5.22; cf. too e.g. Rom. 14.17; 15.13; 2 Cor. 7.4; Phil. 1.4; 1 Thess. 1.6.

²¹⁴ [See ch. 9 below.](#)

²¹⁵ Hays's comment (Hays 1989a, 43) about Paul's knowledge of the Psalms and other scripture is apposite: 'We, belated rootless readers, can learn only through marginalia and concordances – like novice guitarists learning blues riffs from sheet music – what Paul knew by heart.'

²¹⁶ 2 Cor. 12.1–10 (on which see Gooder 2006; Rowland and Morray-Jones 2009); for the shipwrecks, 11.25.

²¹⁷ Col. 2.18.

²¹⁸ e.g. Bockmuehl 1997 [1990]; Rowland 1996; Gooder 2006; and now esp. Rowland and Morray-Jones 2009.

²¹⁹ Rowland 1996, 413.

²²⁰ See Meeks 1983, 92 for the Christian 'apocalypse' as a worldview-marker.

²²¹ On the christology of Col. 1 [see below, 670–7.](#)

²²² I deliberately leave this as a suggestion for further work, which might take account of e.g. Rom. 10.6; Eph. 4.9f. On the possibility that Paul might have been meditating on the throne-chariot on the road to Damascus see RSG 391.

²²³ Sanders 2008b, 347; Sanders 2009, 77f.: 'it was much simpler and easier for children to memorize than it was for adults to look things up,' and referring to the modern 'heinous and destructive view that people do not need habitual knowledge carried securely in their heads'. See too esp. Hengel 1991, 35f.; Wagner 2002, 22–6, against e.g. Koch 1986; Stanley 1992; Stanley 2004; Schnelle 2005 [2003], 108–11; [see below, 1449–56](#), and *Perspectives*, ch. 32.

²²⁴ cf. 2 Tim 4.13, where the request for 'the books and the parchments' has sparked off many guesses as to what either Paul, or the 'Paul' of an imitator, might have had in mind: see Johnson

2001, 440f.; Towner 2006, 629f.

²²⁵ cf. Hays 2005, 8f., drawing out the significance of ‘our fathers’ in 1 Cor. 10.1 and ‘when you were *ethnē*’, in 12.2 – the clear implication being that they weren’t ‘gentiles’ any more. The whole essay (1–24) is very significant for the question of *education* in Paul’s churches: what did ‘teachers’ teach new converts? Presumably the primary answer was: scripture.

²²⁶ See the use of Isa. 49.1–6 in e.g. 2 Cor. 6.2; Gal. 1.15f., 24; 2.2; Phil. 2.16; 1 Thess. 3.5; of Isa. 52.7 (and 53.1) in Rom. 10.15f. See Munck 1959 [1954], 24–30; Hays 1989a, 14; and among many others, e.g. Ciampa 1998; Wagner 2002.

²²⁷ Hays 2005, 5.

²²⁸ Rom. 15.8f.

²²⁹ Meeks 1983, 137–9, has a nice discussion of this point, though never quite seeing the full sense of a completed narrative. However, his statement (137) catches the central point: Paul’s predominantly gentile congregations ‘interpreted [the scriptures] from the special perspective of believers in the crucified Messiah Jesus’.

²³⁰ Hays 1996a, 47 (= Hays 2005, 161).

²³¹ Horrell 2005, 90f., 101.

²³² See e.g. Neyrey 1990, ch. 4. Horrell 2005, 90f. states a preference for ‘rite’ and ‘ceremony’, using ‘ritual’ to cover, more generally, both of these and more beyond.

²³³ Nobody, perhaps, except James Dunn, whose attempt to argue that ‘baptism’ was a ‘metaphor’ has not won favour: Dunn 1978; set out more modestly in Dunn 1998, ch. 17, against which see e.g. Horrell 102, 11. Cf. too Meeks 1983, 84, against Judge 1960 (= Judge 2008a, ch. 34), who seems disposed to minimize anything that might be called ‘cultic’, and who makes more central the ‘sophistic’ tradition in which Paul can be placed, on which see above, 236f.

²³⁴ The mention of ‘baptism on behalf of the dead’ in 1 Cor. 15.29–34 is merely tantalizing, not informative.

²³⁵ On second-Temple beliefs and practices, see *RSG* ch. 4; on early Christian customs, 509, 579.

²³⁶ Eph. 5.32: the Greek is *mystērion* and the Vulgate is *sacramentum*, on which see e.g. Robinson 1904 [1903], 208f., 234–40; Lincoln 1990, 380f.; Hoehner 2002, 706f. The ‘new vulgate’ of 1998, however, has *mysterium*.

²³⁷ This caveat is aimed, not least, at Schnelle 1983. For the point about ‘hymns’ and the danger in attempted reconstructions, see *Climax* 99f.

²³⁸ e.g. Betz 1994. Betz 99f., like Schnelle 2005 [2003], 330, is clearly frustrated that the massively learned study of Wedderburn 1987a found so strongly against any connection between Pauline baptism and the pagan mysteries (see too Wagner 1967 [1962]). Schnelle acknowledges (331) that the NT ideas in question are ‘not derived from these [mystery] texts in terms of genealogy or analogy’, but still insists that the mystery cults ‘illustrate the intellectual milieu within which the imagery and concepts developed in [Rom.] 6:3–4 could be thought out and received’. The fact that Wedderburn’s study ended with a negative should not (as Betz, 100) be regarded as a bad thing: now we know, one should say, where *not* to look. Contemporary genetics suggests a further tart comment: even if the parallels were as high as 99%, which they are not, that is more or less the amount of DNA which chimpanzees share with humans. The really interesting thing with Paul, as with humans, is the other 1% – or, in the case of Paul in relation to his hellenistic context, the other at least 50%. The well-known comment of Schweitzer 1931, 140 about the gardener ‘who should bring water from a long distance in a leaky watering-can in order to water a garden lying beside a stream’ is also apposite.

²³⁹ See now Lawrence 2006 and 2010.

[240](#) 1 Cor. 10.1–5.

[241](#) On John the Baptist see *JVG* 160–2 and, recently, Evans 2008, with full bibliography.

[242](#) See Hays 2005, 1–24.

[243](#) 1 Cor. 10.7–10; cf. the various stories in Num., e.g. Num. 25.

[244](#) In 1 Cor. 10.20 (‘they sacrifice to *daimonia*, not to God’) Paul is alluding to Dt. 32.17, where this is part of the charge of Moses against Israel itself; Paul is using this, in the context of the implicit exodus-story of 1 Cor. 10 as a whole, as a warning to the present *ekklēsia* (so rightly e.g. Hays 1989a, 93; Hays 1997, 168–70).

[245](#) See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 510–12, 533f., and *Perspectives*, ch. 11.

[246](#) And indeed recalling the ‘sin-offering’ which has dealt with the problems under Torah (8.3f.: cf. *Climax* ch. 11).

[247](#) See the close parallel in Gal. 2.19f. See the fuller exposition in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 538; and e.g. *RSG* 252.

[248](#) On Gal. 3 see *Perspectives*, ch. 31.

[249](#) On the change of pronoun (‘we’ in 23–5; ‘you’ in 26–9): see e.g. Dunn 1993, 201f.; de Boer 2011, 242.

[250](#) Ex. 4.22.

[251](#) See Wright 1986 [*Colossians and Philemon*], 23–30; Wright 2005b [*Fresh Perspectives*], 117f. Others who have taken a similar line include Dunn 1996, 23–35; Bird 2009b, 15–26 (a mystical form of Judaism).

[252](#) cf. Dt. 10.16; 30.6; Jer. 4.4; 9.26; Rom. 2.25–9.

[253](#) Col. 2.11–12.

[254](#) ‘Putting off the body of flesh’ goes with ‘abolishing the body of sin’ in Rom. 6.6b; ‘buried with him and raised with him’ echoes Rom. 6.4. Attempts to drive a wedge between the pairs, such that divergent theologies would emerge, strikes me as the sort of thing the author of Ecclesiastes would confidently describe as ‘vanity and chasing after wind’.

[255](#) cf. Lk. 2.21.

[256](#) 1.13, 15: the Greek is *eis to onoma*, ‘into’ the name, not ‘in’ as in some translations.

[257](#) See Thiselton 2000, 142: ‘It would be a mistake and also anachronistic to suppose that Paul draws a contrast between a sacramental ministry and a preaching ministry as such.’

[258](#) Cp. the similar breakdown offered by Mitchell 1991/2, 267–70, though without suggesting such a focus on vv. 12f. An argument with this shape need not necessarily make its short central section the main focus: contrast 1 Cor. 15 (see *RSG* 312f.) where the ‘central’ passage, 15.29–34, appears to be a small, sharp aside.

[259](#) 12.12f.

[260](#) This does not at all mean that the phrases were ‘traditional’; it shows that they were routinely used by *Paul himself*. This is how frequent speakers and frequent writers frequently speak and frequently write.

[261](#) See below, [ch. 9](#), on the trinitarian development of monotheism in 12.4–11.

[262](#) On the passage see *RSG* 338–40.

[263](#) Eph. 4.2–6.

[264](#) See, recently, Koenig 2000; D. E. Smith 2003; Bradshaw 2004.

[265](#) Horrell 2005, 106f.

[266](#) See the helpful study of Marshall 2008.

[267](#) see *JVG* ch. 12.

[268](#) 10.18. This meaning is naturally resisted by more protestant commentators, but it seems to me at least strongly hinted at by the parallel with the pagan meals. See Thiselton 2000, 772: ‘the participant and the participant’s group or community appropriate the reality or influence which “the altar of sacrifice” represents and conveys.’ This too is a bit of a circumlocution, but ‘the reality’ which the altar ‘represents and conveys’ is surely that of the divinity.

[269](#) See recently Kloppenborg 2008. For my own recent statement cf. Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn*; US title *After You Believe*] esp. 156–9 [US edn. 181–5].

[270](#) Rom. 12.9a (cf. 2 Cor. 6.6). This small clause is sometimes linked to what follows, but there is something to be said for seeing it as the climax of the previous list of exhortations, following naturally from the previous verse’s mention of generosity and practical compassion (see the echo of 12.8c, the command to ‘cheerful’ deeds of mercy, in the more overtly financial appeal of 2 Cor. 9.7).

[271](#) Col. 1.8; cf. 1 Thess. 3.6.

[272](#) Rom. 14.15.

[273](#) See again Wright 2010, ch. 6.

[274](#) 1 Thess. 4.9; cf. Phil. 1.9.

[275](#) 2 Cor. 5.14.

[276](#) e.g. Eph. 5.2, 25.

[277](#) Rom. 13.10.

[278](#) Gal. 5.6.

[279](#) Eph. 3.17–19.

[280](#) 1 Cor. 4.9–13.

[281](#) 2 Cor. 1.8.

[282](#) 2 Cor. 4.7–12. It is hard to translate *nekrōsis* in v. 10; LSJ give ‘death’ as a rare meaning, citing this passage, but as I hear it I think Paul is referring to an ongoing state, not a one-off event.

[283](#) 2 Cor. 6.3–10.

[284](#) 2 Cor. 11.23–33. On the special significance of the escape over the wall, see Furnish 1984, 542. Here as elsewhere the insights of Edwin Judge have been very helpful (e.g. Judge 1968); and on the Roman culture of ‘boasting’ and the quest for glory, see esp. Harrison 2011, 205–32.

[285](#) 2 Cor. 12.7b–10.

[286](#) Phil. 2.19–30; on Socrates cf. [ch. 3 above](#).

[287](#) See, rightly, e.g. Käsemann 1980, 250; Malherbe 1989b, 73.

[288](#) *JVG* ch. 12.

[289](#) Col. 1.24.

[290](#) Or at least those who had been converted through him at second hand: Epaphras, who had evangelized Colossae, was one of Paul’s own converts.

[291](#) Rom. 6.9.

[292](#) Gal. 6.17.

[293](#) Rom. 8.17–27.

[294](#) Phil. 1.12–14, 17–18.

[295](#) 1.27–30; see e.g. Oakes 2001, ch. 3.

[296](#) 1 Thess. 2.14; 3.1–5.

[297](#) Wis. 1–5.

[298](#) The Thessalonians' faith across northern Greece: 1 Thess. 1.8–10. The Romans' faith 'around the world': Rom. 1.8.

[299](#) cp. 2 Thess. 3.1.

[300](#) Ware 2011 [2005], ch. 6 has made a strong case for 'hold forth', as part of his argument that Paul did indeed expect his churches to engage in 'mission'; but it remains striking that there are no other obvious references to this anywhere else in his letters, and several commentators hold back from this interpretation (e.g. Bockmuehl 1998, 159; Reumann 2008, 413). Barram 2011 argues that one may detect hints of what he calls a 'salvific intentionality' (236f.) – for instance, with the question of whether the believing spouse will 'save' the unbelieving one (1 Cor. 7.16); but even so this is scarcely a prominent theme in the letters.

[301](#) See *Perspectives*, ch. 23.

[302](#) See, similarly, Gorman 2001, ch. 13. Gorman, however, goes a little beyond this in his forthcoming book *Becoming the Gospel* (Gorman 2014).

[303](#) See the earlier exposition of the point in *NTPG* 262–8; and see above all [ch. 10 below](#).

[304](#) On Paul's eschatological ethics [see ch. 11 below](#).

[305](#) 1 Cor. 15.42–9; see *RSG* 347–56. The following discussion depends on the whole section, *RSG* 312–61.

[306](#) 1 Cor. 15 invites analysis in terms of a deliberate chiasmic structure, ABCB¹A¹. I suggested in *RSG* a shape of A=1–11; B=12–28 (subdivided into 12–19 and 20–28); C=29–34; B¹=35–49 (subdivided into 35–41 and 42–9); A¹=50–8. This puts the 'Adam/Messiah' contrast at the start of the second subdivision of B (15.20–2) and the end of the second subdivision of B¹ (15.47–9). Alternatively, we could see 1–19 as a prolonged A, with B starting at 20, thus making the Adam/Messiah contrast open the first B section and closing the second. Nothing much hinges on this, so long as we note that the main body of Paul's argument is quite deliberately sandwiched between these two references, emphasizing and highlighting them as the framing and loadbearing main point.

[307](#) Gen. 1.26: *betsalmēnu* and *cidemuthēnu*, LXX *kat' eikona kai kath' homoiōsin*; 5.3: *bidemuthō* and *cetsalmō*, LXX (perhaps surprisingly) *kata tēn idian autou kai kata tēn eikona autou*. The reversal of order between *tselem* and *demuth*, 'image' and 'likeness', in the two passages has been variously interpreted, but (perhaps fortunately) is irrelevant for our purposes.

[308](#) [See below](#); and cp. Rom. 8.29.

[309](#) See the fuller exposition of these and other passages in *RSG* 278–97.

[310](#) On this see e.g. Byrne 1996, 130f., quoting *Apoc. Mos.* 20.1; 21.6; 3 *Apoc. Bar.* 4.16; similarly Witherington 2004, 102.

[311](#) Rom. 8.29f.

[312](#) So, esp., 5.17 and 8.19–21. Ps. 8.3–8 stands behind this whole theme.

[313](#) 2 Cor. 3.18; 4.5f.

[314](#) On 2 Cor. 3, and 3.18 in particular, cf. *Climax* ch. 9.

[315](#) e.g. 3.12; Rom. 13.14; Eph. 4.24.

[316](#) That, by the way, is why the command 'Don't tell lies to each other' is the one which is here undergirded by this notion of 'renewed in the image'. Messiah-people are to reflect the true image of the true God; the world offers false images which induce lying both verbally and in other ways. Cf. again Rom. 1.25.

[317](#) See again Rowe 2005a.

[318](#) See Chester 2003, 39, etc.; also Meeks 1993, 4, speaking of an 'only partly conscious set' of values and habits. Horrell 2005, 40, 96 is right to defend Hays against the charge of Esler 2003b, 57,

who suggests that Hays reinstates deontology. We should not make the mistake of supposing that once an ethic is located as ‘communitarian’, or as a ‘virtue ethic’, it cannot then ever state, in shorthand form where necessary, that some actions are right and others are wrong.

³¹⁹ Geertz 2000 [1973], 127. Paul, I think, would want to say that the synthesis is fully justified philosophically, or better still theologically.

³²⁰ 1 Cor. 1.2; cf. Rom. 1.7; 8.27; 12.13; 15.25, 26, 31; 16.2, 15; 1 Cor. 6.1, 2; 14.33; 16.1, 15; 2 Cor. 1.1; 8.4; 9.1, 12; 13.12; and e.g. Eph. 1.1; Phil. 1.1; Col. 1.2; Philem. 5.

³²¹ e.g. 1 Cor. 6.2; so Horrell 2005, 111.

³²² Horrell 2005, e.g. 45f. Horrell himself seems to fall into the trap when he appears to assume that Bultmann’s analysis was heading in the right direction; Bultmann himself was a massive and central figure in the early C20 drive to see emerging Christianity in as unJewish a light as possible.

³²³ 2 Macc. 6.18–31/4 Macc. 5.1—6.30; for the suggestion of pretence, 2 Macc. 6.21/4 Macc. 6.15.

³²⁴ Rom. 14.14 with 1 Cor. 10.25f.

³²⁵ 1 Cor. 7.39; 2 Cor. 6.14.

³²⁶ I have in mind here Dunn 2009 [1987], ch. 3. Dunn sees rightly that Paul set aside the (scripturally warranted) symbols of Jewish identity, but ‘explains’ this simply in terms of Paul being, in his own day, a ‘heretic’, living ‘on the boundary’ (on a par with Jesus, whom Dunn describes as a ‘liberal’), and thus providing a model for further challenging of scripture, including early Christian scripture, in our own day. This seems to me to miss Paul’s point entirely. Horrell 2005, 151 n. 52 gets this nearly right, though does not quite close in on the full interpretation here proposed.

³²⁷ For the *saeculum* view, explicitly stated, see e.g. Jenkins 2002, 170–5. In Pauline studies see the ‘new moralisms’ by which Paul himself is to be judged, in e.g. Seesengood 2010, ch. 7.

³²⁸ Barclay 1996; see above, 354f.

³²⁹ Gal. 5.24; cf. e.g. Col. 3.5; cp. e.g. 4 Macc. 1.6.

³³⁰ Horrell 2005, 119, noting Paul’s strict no-tolerance policy, suggests that this provides an interesting parallel with ‘liberal ethics’, i.e. with the post-Enlightenment attempt to state a set of values which would be recognized as universally valid for all people, cultures and times. As Horrell knows, this is an attempt to use ethic categories for Paul, fitting him into our modern and postmodern debates. Insofar as there is an obvious grain of truth in what he says, it may be because ‘liberalism’ in this sense, the Enlightenment vision of a new, humanistic, universal truth, is actually a parasitic parody on the older European Christian faith, granted that the older European faith was itself only a shadow of the full-blooded Pauline reality. The irony then is that a communitarian ethic, supposedly striking back from a ‘Christian’ point of view against the imposition of the secularized and potentially tyrannical ‘liberal’ position, itself loses a key element of Paul’s worldview (perhaps because of its pathological fear of something it calls ‘Christendom’?). On Paul’s ethics [see further below, 1095–1128](#).

³³¹ 1 Cor. 7.10f.; cf. Rom. 7.1–3. See the extended discussion in Thiselton 2000, 519–43.

³³² 7.12–16 with 7.39.

³³³ As indeed with Jesus himself: e.g. Mk. 10.2–12, on which see *JVG* 282–7.

³³⁴ So rightly Horrell 2005, 143, 151, against Countryman 1988. Horrell cites May 2001 [= now May 2004].

³³⁵ Horrell 2005, 142, expounding 1 Cor. 5. Note the parallel to this in the Jewish community in Egypt, who excluded those who were compromising their loyalty, depriving them of ‘companionship and mutual help’ (*synanastrophē kai euchrēsteia*: 3 Macc. 2.33).

³³⁶ Horrell 2005, 142.

³³⁷ I was struck, thinking these thoughts, by the radical statement of the ‘communitarian’ position in Smith 2009, chs. 20 and 21.

³³⁸ Against Horrell 2005, 275–80. Horrell is right to stress the large degree of overlap in Paul’s moral concerns with concerns held by both Jews and non-Jews in his world. But for some reason he screens out three things which are absolutely central to Paul: monotheism, election (as redefined by the Messiah’s cross and resurrection), and new creation. These (to be explored further [in Part III below](#)) are of course vital parts of what Horrell calls ‘the Christian myth’, and when factored in to the discussion they do explain what Horrell says Paul’s theology and christology cannot (279). I thus agree with, but go beyond, Richard Hays’s proposal (Hays 1996b) to see ‘community, cross, new creation’ (the subtitle of Hays’s book) as the central themes of NT ethics.

³³⁹ Phil. 2.15; 1 Thess. 5.8 with Eph. 6.10–20; Gal. 5.16–26; cp. 1 Thess 4.1–8. Once again this emerges most clearly in Eph.: here at 4.17—5.20. See here the discussion in Horrell 2005, 161–3. The reason there is so much ‘common ground’ between Paul and contemporary moralists both Jewish and non-Jewish is precisely that his vision is of a renewed humanity. That does not lessen the fact that he envisages a considerable tension between how Messiah-people behave and how most others do, not simply because Messiah-people live up to their codes and the others do not (and already there are notable exceptions there, as Paul knows well) but because in certain key respects the Messiah-people live by a different code. Humility, charity, patience and chastity, writes Simon Blackburn, all of which were central to early Christian virtue, ‘would have been unintelligible as ethical virtues to classical Greeks’ (Blackburn 2008 [1994], 381). That may be overstating the point, but not by much (see my discussion in Wright 2010 [*Virtue*], 210–20 [US edn. [*After You Believe*], 243–55]).

³⁴⁰ On the C2 Apologists see the standard work of Grant 1988. On Tertullian in particular cf. Rankin 1995.

³⁴¹ Phil. 4.8.

³⁴² On *epieikes* see the full note in Reumann 2008, 611–13, 634f., offering a bewildering range of possible meanings including ‘patient steadfastness’, ‘lenience’, ‘clemency’, ‘gentleness’, ‘forbearance’. Reumann comments, interestingly, that ‘Non-Christians and Christians are called to this Gk. virtue of balance and amiability, but with different motivation’ (613). Bockmuehl 1998, 244f. points out that the word in question is used of God himself, and that it comes to the Christian as ‘a quality of godliness that derives from the character of the lord himself’, comparing 2 Cor. 10.1. BDAG suggests as one meaning ‘not insisting on the letter of the law’, which fits rather well with Phil. 2 and 3: someone who exhibits this quality will not ‘insist on their rights’.

³⁴³ Phil. 4.9.

³⁴⁴ See above, chs. 3, 4.

³⁴⁵ Gal. 6.10, etc.: [see above, 380](#).

³⁴⁶ On the size of early communities see e.g. Stark 1996, esp. ch. 1. On living with this tension (the *ekklēsia* as a social, cultural and political space but not encompassing the whole of life) see Horrell 2005, 128f.

³⁴⁷ See Mendels 1996, 444, 446–8.

³⁴⁸ cf. *NTPG* 346–57, 449–52. Cp. e.g. Justin *1 Apol.* 26: charges of ritual murder, orgies under cover of darkness, etc., were common.

³⁴⁹ On Isa. 49 in Paul [see above 416, n. 226](#).

³⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 9.16.

³⁵¹ Phil. 4.11: [see below, 1376f.](#)

³⁵² We should note, as we shall later on, that in Rom. 12.2 the *logikē latreia* is in accordance not with the *kosmos* as it stands, the present *aiōn*, but precisely with the new age that has now been

inaugurated (cp. Gal. 1.4; 2 Cor. 5.17; etc.). Here is the vital difference between Paul and the Stoics, which the normal antithesis between world-affirming Stoics and world-denying (Jewish or Christian?) piety never catches (see further [ch. 14 below](#)). New *creation* indicates both radical continuity and radical discontinuity, something history-of-religions analyses have shown themselves peculiarly bad at grasping.

³⁵³ See e.g. Murphy-O'Connor 1995. Studies of particular aspects of Paul's writing in their greco-roman setting include several essays in the very helpful volume Sampley 2003a, e.g. Agosto 2003; Forbes 2003; Hock 2003; Sampley 2003b.

³⁵⁴ Funk 1967; Stowers 1986. On the actual mechanics of ancient letter-writing see e.g. Richards 2004.

³⁵⁵ Gal. 2.9f.: [see below, 1507](#).

³⁵⁶ 2 Cor 8.9; 9.8–10.

Chapter Seven

THE PLOT, THE PLAN AND THE STORIED WORLDVIEW

1. Introduction: to Narrate or Not to Narrate

It is a truth insufficiently acknowledged that a sensible worldview equipped with appropriate symbolic praxis must be in want of a story.

This is not simply a plea entered, against the grain of the subject, from the quirky standpoint of a ‘narrative theologian’, translating everything into ‘story’ to conform to some contemporary fad.¹ It is the hard-won observation of the study of worldviews in general, and of the early Christian worldview in particular. Indeed, until the narrative element has been recognized it is open to doubt whether one has yet fully understood what ‘worldview’ (in the sense I and others use the term) is all about.² Symbols and actions mean what they mean within a worldview, and until that worldview has been expressed in terms of its underlying story it will not be clear what that meaning is. There are, no doubt, some ‘narrative’ enthusiasts for whom the business of life is to get their worldviews hitched up to stories, and whose solace is fantasy fiction and actantial analyses. But the extreme behaviour of some should not scare us off proper investigation. Just because one daughter elopes with an unsuitable partner, one does not for that reason send all the others to a nunnery. ‘Story’ has a well-documented role within the analysis of cultures and worldviews, and it is time biblical scholars took it more seriously.³

This becomes clearer if, for the moment, we use the term familiar to sociologists, namely *myth*. I employ this word here purely heuristically, without prejudice to the question of ‘reference in the public world’: I am not at all implying that the events thus narrated need not, or can not, actually have happened. In this context ‘myth’ simply means ‘story as an element within a worldview’. Clifford Geertz speaks of the way in which early hunter-gatherer societies relied for orientation, communication and self-

control on ‘systems of significant symbols’, which he lists as ‘language, art, myth, ritual’.⁴ In order to make up our minds, he proposes,

we must know how we feel about things; and to know how we feel about things we need the public images of sentiment that only ritual, myth, and art can provide.⁵

Having obliquely criticized David Horrell on various points in the previous chapter, I am glad now to acknowledge his picking up of the same theme as Geertz in the context of recent Pauline study. Speaking only of a ‘symbolic universe’, he says, is not enough. It can be shown, he writes,

that a narrative underpins Paul’s ‘theologizing’: the story of God’s saving act in Jesus Christ ... Paul’s letters are shaped and informed by a ‘myth’.⁶

Horrell is well aware of the negative impact such a word can have on anxious theological readers, and moves quickly to reassure them. In particular, the well-known use of ‘myth’ by Rudolf Bultmann, in which several different meanings were hopelessly muddled up together (so that people lumped together such disparate meanings as ‘stories by which communities order their worldviews’ and ‘things we can’t believe today because we have modern medicine and electric lights’, and other things as well) has given the term a bad name.⁷ It may be time to rehabilitate it. To ‘demythologize’, as Bultmann insisted we must do, is not merely to make a mistake about ‘what we can and can’t believe in the modern world’. It is to insist on screening out one of the fundamental strands of meaning in a worldview. In any worldview. One can understand why someone whose national story had gone so badly wrong as Bultmann’s had (fancy living in Germany through the first half of the twentieth century!) might want to sweep all stories aside. But that is to lock up all the daughters because one has brought shame on the family.

The main problem with Bultmann’s proposal, in addition to the muddling of different senses of ‘myth’, is that when he insisted that we should strip the early Christian world of its ‘mythology’ he meant not only that we should express the existential challenge of the gospel without its pre-Enlightenment scientific assumptions, but also that we should re-conceptualize the gospel *in*

a non-narrational form, reducing it to the pure existential challenge of every moment, in which one is called to hear God's word *now* rather than think in terms of the waste, sad time stretching before and after.⁸ Actually, of course, there is no such thing as a moment without some kind of narrative:

Bultmann encoded his own basic narrative (which he assumed to be the 'real thing' that Paul and the other early Christians were trying to express) in his *New Testament Theology*, in which 'Man Prior to the Revelation of Faith' gave way to 'Man under Faith'. Granted the intervening moment of grace, faith and reconciliation, this produced a three-stage narrative, corresponding easily and obviously to a standard 'protestant' analysis of the individual Christian life: (1) a sinner prior to the arrival and impact of the gospel; (2) the event of grace and faith (in Bultmann's case, through the activity of God's word); (3) the newborn Christian living by faith as though in a new world. Bultmann's attempt to 'demythologize' thus already contained a need to 're-mythologize', however much he would have said that the threefold narrative he employed to flesh out Paul's meaning was both implicit and explicit in the texts themselves (compare Paul's famous and frequent 'But now').⁹

What is more, Bultmann's analysis corresponded easily, and unsurprisingly given his history-of-religions move in the early 1930s, to the implicit narrative of various types of gnosticism: (1) a human, unaware that a spark of divine life is hidden within this clod of earth; (2) the arrival of revelation, perhaps even of a Revealer, whose word draws attention to this inner spark; (3) the human, now living in tune with this inner spark, abandoning the concerns of the clod of earth. The shape of the narrative proposed by Bultmann for the New Testament is thus the same as that of gnosticism.¹⁰

More is at stake here than simply a recognition that even Bultmann ended up with a narrative, albeit a simple one. The deeper aim of Bultmann's analysis can be seen, with hindsight, to be a radical *deJudaizing*, not only of the gospels (where his 'demythologizing' is best known) but of Paul as well. Consistently with his lifelong project, he translated Paul's thought into the thought-forms of the hellenistic world, whether it was the style of the

philosophical ‘diatribe’ (about which he wrote as a young man), the mystery-religion categories which Bousset had offered as the framework for understanding Paul’s announcement of Jesus as ‘lord’ or the explicitly gnostic categories Bultmann came to employ in the years when his neo-Kantianism, modified by his encounter with Heidegger, produced the account we just mentioned.¹¹

Hardly anyone today would offer such a ‘gnostic’ or even ‘proto-gnostic’ context, or even narrative, as the best and most appropriate context for understanding Paul. But that does not mean that Bultmann’s influence has been shrugged off. His treatment was just one aspect of the essentially deJudaizing programme, supposedly in the service of a proper ‘Pauline’ theology, that characterized a good deal of scholarship between the wars. Such a thing, it was assumed, meant a proper *protestant* theology, in which one would highlight ‘justification by faith apart from works of the law’ in some sense or other; Bultmann’s followers continue to squabble over what sense precisely will work within this paradigm. After all (so ran the implicit imperative throughout such work), we know that Paul rejected ‘Judaism’ and the ‘works of the law’ which stood at its heart; we know he was the ‘apostle to the gentiles’; very well then, he must have left behind not only the specifics of self-righteous Jewish theology but also the thought-forms of Judaism as a whole. He must, therefore, have recast the message into non-Jewish forms, and we should try to discern what those forms were.¹² Since ‘justification by faith apart from law’ appears to imply a strong critique of Jewish *theology* and/or *religion* (that and/or represents a fateful move within the discipline, from which we are still trying to recover), the best means of advancing such an analysis, it was thought, would be a history-of-religions account in which Judaism *as a source of Paul’s ideas or beliefs* was pushed aside, and anything – Stoicism, hellenistic rhetoric, mystery religions, gnosticism, whatever, so long as it was not Jewish – would then be brought in to fill the gap. And, though one may indeed find brief three-stage narratives about personal faith, self-discovery or ethical advancement within such a framework, one will not find larger narratives.¹³ That is part of the point. Larger narratives are what scholarship was getting away from. They

reminded people too much of the large, powerful story told by the Jews. And, like the story told by the Jews, they might begin to compete with the large, implicit stories which were buried but powerful – all the more powerful, in fact, for being buried – within western modernism.

That was the project within which a good deal of mid-twentieth-century New Testament study was located, and from whose non-narrative grip it has struggled to be free – though some, it seems, have given up the struggle and discovered that they really do love Big Brother. That is the project whose echoes still resonate through the continuing debates about narrative and non-narrative analyses. Not all non-narrative proposals, of course, are Bultmannian, just as not all narrative proposals are clearly anti-Bultmannian in their aims, methods and results. But, with due awareness of the dangers of oversimplification, we may comment that a great many of today's debates about the first two centuries of Christian history boil down to this question: were the early Christians aware, or were they not aware, of living within a narrative that was larger than that of their own sin, salvation and spirituality?

This, I suggest, is the deep, underlying point at which we can discern what the so-called 'new perspective on Paul' might really have been all about. It is not so much a matter of whether 'Jews believed in grace too', whether Paul was interested in 'staying in' rather than 'getting in', or whether the 'solution' preceded the 'plight' or vice versa, important though all those questions are. Rather, it was and is a matter of discerning whether the underlying narrative which we have seen to be so powerful for so many (not all) Jews in Paul's day was taken over, modified or simply abandoned.¹⁴ For the 'old perspective', Paul had to ditch everything about his previous worldview, theology and culture – the old symbols, the ancient stories, the praxis, the view of God himself. For the 'new perspective', in its manifold and frequently contradictory manifestations, the skirmishing about what precisely Paul meant by 'works of the law' and so on has masked a much deeper question: did Paul actually reaffirm something basic about the underlying Jewish narrative, or did he reject it? More: did he make use of any 'underlying narrative' at all, or did his thinking move into an essentially non-narrative (and hence, I suggest, non-Jewish) mode? Until we address

the question at that level, much of the discussion will revert to the condition of ignorant armies clashing by night.

Even the current revival of enthusiasm for something which, however confusingly, has appropriated the word ‘apocalyptic’ follows all too closely the thought of its paternal grandfather (the blood-lines seem to run, with variations, from Bultmann through Käsemann on the one side and from Schweitzer through Sanders on the other).¹⁵ ‘Apocalyptic’ as the breaker of ‘narrative’, the saving divine power ‘invading’ the world vertically from the outside without connection to anything that has gone before, can move in the direction of the same anti-narrative, or at least anti-*Jewish*-narrative, worldview. It has its own narrative, of course, but that corresponds, at a cosmic level, to Bultmann’s: first, the world (including the Jewish world with its ‘religion’) in chaos and darkness; second, the apocalypse, in this case the revelation of Jesus Christ and his world-overthrowing death; third, the new world thus opened up, complete with its freshly worked epistemology and ontology.¹⁶ This is basically a corporate and ‘cosmic’ version of the same western protestant narrative as before, and pays just as little attention to the actual stories told, in a variety of ways, by actual Jewish ‘apocalyptic’ writers of the period.

‘Apocalyptic’, including this sense of something radically new coming to pass and hence coming to be, must, I believe, be retained as part of Paul’s worldview – but it must be retained *within* the larger historical framework which we are exploring. How that ‘works’ remains to be seen. How it does *not* work is by elevating ‘apocalyptic’ as an overarching principle and insisting *a priori* that it rules out all continuity, all sense of a larger narrative within which the story of Jesus the Messiah, the story of Paul himself and the story of the communities he founded, make the sense they do.¹⁷ That is to deJudaize the context before we even begin – ironically, considering the implicit claim of a historical context which lies beneath the appeal to ‘apocalyptic’ in the first place.

Into this complex and often confusing set of debates, I propose, and shall now argue, that Paul’s worldview had a strongly implicit and frequently explicit narrative. Or rather, like most mature narratives, Paul’s worldview

had a set of underlying stories whose tendency to interlock and overlap is not a weakness, but rather a sign that, as with a good novel or play, the sub-plots and secondary narratives not only illustrate but also materially effect key moments and key transitions in the main plot. Thus the story of Elizabeth and Darcy is balanced, within *Pride and Prejudice*, by the happy sub-plot of Jane and Bingley on the one hand and by the decidedly less happy sub-plot of Lydia and Wickham on the other. Both help the main story along. Darcy is after all Bingley's friend; that is the only reason for his being welcomed into the Bennet household in the first place. But it is the darker sub-plot that provides the key to the main story. When Elizabeth learns of Darcy's remarkable generosity to her undeserving brother-in-law, she glimpses a whole new side of his character, which opens the way for love. The sub-plots not only strengthen the main plot, keeping it as it were in place, but also radically transform it. They looked, to begin with, like threats to the obvious happy ending, but they turned out in the end to be part of its inner disclosure and meaning.

Thus, too, more obviously but with darker effect, the 'play within the play' in *Hamlet*. The prince, seeing the king's conscience caught by the staging of his previously hidden crime, now knows that his father's ghost has spoken the truth. His uncle is indeed guilty, and vengeance must be done (though he still can't bring himself to do it). On a happier Shakespearean note, the play within the play (within the play) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, coming as it does not at the turning point, as with *Hamlet*, but right at the end of the larger play itself, confirms and draws together, perhaps even redemptively, the confusions and clarifications that have taken place at the several other levels on which the drama has unfolded. To this we shall return.

Before going any further, it may be as well to pause and remind ourselves what exactly we are talking about in all this discussion of 'story' and 'narrative'. (I, like many others, use these two terms interchangeably.) This is important if we are to overcome the obstacles that have been placed in our path. J. C. Beker declared thirty years ago that Paul was 'a man of the proposition, the argument, and the dialogue, not a man of the parable or

story’.¹⁸ So too, more recently, Francis Watson has argued trenchantly that Paul’s gospel is ‘essentially nonnarratable’. Watson recognizes that ‘there is indeed a “narrative substructure” to Pauline theology,’ but says that ‘this consists in the scriptural narratives relating to Israel’s history with God,’ which Paul interprets but does not ‘retell’. His gospel ‘must be correlated with “the story of God and creation” and “the story of Israel”’, but ‘what Paul does *not* do is to incorporate his gospel into a linear story of creation and Israel as the end and goal of that story.’ This gospel does not ‘become part of a story, its climax indeed, through insertion into a scriptural metanarrative’.¹⁹ This appears to be a conclusion reached from a quite strict *a priori*, namely that for Paul ‘the gospel’ is ‘a *singular* saving action of God’ which ‘occurs in the vertical plane rather than the horizontal one’.²⁰ This is a sharp, though well-nuanced, statement of a position against which I must now argue – just as, though he does not cite my work, it appears from his reference to ‘its climax indeed’ that Watson intends to rule out my own previous statements in particular.²¹

Watson advances his case by pointing out that Paul is not a ‘storyteller’, meaning (as with Beker) that stories do not usually lie on the surface of his text. (Watson allows for Galatians 1 and 2 as an exception, since there Paul is specifically telling part of his own story; one might suggest that Philippians 2.6–11, and 3.2–11, deserve to be in there as well.) This, however, strikes me as strange, and makes me wonder already whether the point is being missed.²² The whole quest for implicit story, whether in Paul or anyone else, is the hunt (as with Geertz, Berger and Luckman and others) for the signs of a *worldview*, and a worldview is precisely that which, like a pair of spectacles, you normally look *through*, not at. It is presupposed, and only comes to attention when challenged. To point out Paul’s lack of actual stories (there are surely more exceptions, as well: Romans 7.1—8.11 comes to mind, as does 9.6—10.21, but we shall let these pass for the moment) looks, at least to begin with, like a sort of category mistake: as though one were to declare that the singer could not be singing a song because she was not singing the words ‘a song’. To object that, because worldview-narratives do not lie on the surface of a text, one must assume that they do not exist, is

like objecting that, because I have not up to this point written the words ‘I am sitting at a desk writing a book,’ I cannot therefore be sitting at a desk writing a book. Indeed, normally, if I were to write those words, it would mean that I was *not* writing a book, but something else – a letter, perhaps. Thus it is no objection to observe that Paul never says ‘Once upon a time’, and hardly ever lays out his material in an explicit narrative sequence with a beginning, a middle and an end. To observe this fact ought not to lead to the conclusion that Paul did not have a narratable gospel.

To make that conclusion, as Beker and Watson appear to do, does indeed miss the point. Even when a writer is writing a story, whether a novel, a short story or a play, the *implicit worldview*, and the narrative within which that worldview might come to expression, are highly unlikely to coincide with the narrative on the page. Whatever Jane Austen’s worldview may have been, and in whatever underlying narratives we might wish to express that (implicit, out-of-sight) worldview, it is highly unlikely to coincide with the actual order of events in *Pride and Prejudice*. That is the point of Norman Petersen’s well-known distinction between the *poetic sequence* (the order in which material appears in the text itself) and the *referential sequence* (the order in which, if we try to reconstruct the world which the text both presupposes and addresses, this same material, and more besides, will appear).²³ Behind that *referential sequence* again there lies a deeper and more powerful implicit narrative, that which expresses the worldview within which the writer approaches the whole matter, and indeed the whole of life. As Petersen points out, using Philemon as a good example, the ‘poetic sequence’ in which Paul makes his case in the actual letter is not at all the same as the ‘referential sequence’ which must be reconstructed by any reader wishing to understand what the letter is about (an implicit narrative, whose details can of course be debated, about Onesimus running away or otherwise leaving Philemon, finding or being found by Paul, receiving the life-transforming message of the gospel, becoming a useful colleague, but now having to be sent back). As I showed in chapter 1, these two ‘sequences’ depend, for their fuller understanding, on the strongly implicit worldview, with its attendant theology, which comes to particular expression

in this ‘poetic sequence’ as it addresses this ‘referential sequence’: a worldview about a good God, active in strange providence and in the story of Israel, but particularly in the gospel of the Messiah and the life and work of the apostle, challenging other worldviews with the implicit narrative of the exodus in its fully redemptive, Messiah-shaped form.

These three levels – poetic sequence, referential sequence and worldview-narrative – are, I suggest, normal things to look for in texts of many different sorts. The search for them is not quirky or faddish. Discovering and displaying them does not, of itself, pull texts out of shape or impose alien schemes upon them. Many texts, not only novels and plays, include plots, sub-plots and narrative twists of this or that kind. That too is normal, and ought to be taken into account and thought through.

Another couple of examples. Some poems appear to be telling one story, only gradually revealing that they are telling another, and still more gradually revealing the worldview underneath. Thus Robert Browning’s ‘My Last Duchess’ has, as its ‘poetic sequence’ the story of an unnamed duke displaying the portrait of his late wife to the man who is acting on behalf of the father of his intended new bride. The ‘referential sequence’, however, is quite different, and much darker:

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now ... She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, ’t was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody’s gift ...
 ... Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!²⁴

One can only hope that the referential sequence will be revealed to the Count and his endangered daughter before this awful man inflicts his dry, greedy selfishness on another unsuspecting victim. And behind that implicit narrative again we detect, surely enough, Browning's own worldview, an arrow to the heart of aristocratic arrogance: this, runs his worldview-story, is what money and 'breeding' can produce. Not to see all this is to fail to read the poem Browning wrote.

A similar point from a very different kind of poem. Listening recently to a favourite old folk-song sung in a new version, I was struck by the change of one word, and the way in which the entire song now meant something different. The song concerns 'Stewball', a horse who has just won a race, and the speaker now realizes that he should have bet on him rather than on the others. The song has existed in different versions, in some of which the racehorse may himself have been likened to a slave, whipped on to do his master's bidding. The version I first knew was sung as if by a slave in the old American South, who had been hoping for a big win through which he would gain a yet larger prize.

I bet on the gray mare
I bet on the bay;
If I'd have bet on old Stewball
I'd be ...

The new version I heard recently finished the line with: 'I'd be a rich man today.' That makes sense, if rather obvious sense. A simple story: poor boy

at the races, bets on the wrong horse, could have been rich, now still poor. But the earlier version I knew (which, as I say, may not be the original version: it's hard enough to reconstruct early themes in the New Testament without having to do it for folk-songs too) had the crucial, and worldview-shifting line:

If I'd have bet on old Stewball
*I'd be a free man today.*²⁵

Now at last we see what was really going on, the implicit narrative that had been lurking underneath all the time, the reason for the plaintive tone in both words and melody from the start. The 'poetic sequence' is the story of a day at the races. The 'referential sequence', at least in the version I first knew, is a slave's failed attempt to win the money which will buy him freedom. The worldview narrative underneath it all is about the plight of slavery and the chance of liberty – and the ease with which that chance slips through the fingers. We are back with Onesimus and Philemon, but with the glimmer of hope offered by a racehorse instead of an apostle. And the hope is now gone. In the fresh version I heard, the change of one word has transformed both the referential sequence and the worldview, from a sad story of the old South to a normal, rather obvious, contemporary narrative about the usual business of getting rich by one means or another.

One might not have thought to have to make this point again. Since it seems necessary, let me emphasize it. The 'story' element in a worldview is not a matter of 'whether this writer (or this community) sometimes articulates this or that in narrative form': he or she may, or it may well emerge in some ritualized or symbolic fashion, but that is not the point. As with Geertz, Berger and Luckman, Petersen and the thousand writers who have made this and similar points (and with whom the real quarrel should take place if the dissenters want to pick one), I insist that it is possible in principle, and not actually difficult in practice, to discover within the larger worldview and mindset, to which we have remarkably good access, what implicit story Paul is telling, behind, above, underneath, in and through (whatever spatial metaphor you like) the particular things he says in this or

that letter. Discerning this is not arcane, not dependent on some fancy French philosophy, not particularly difficult.²⁶

After all, all exegetes of virtually all texts have to assume various things from time to time if they are to ‘make sense of’ what lies before them. A skilled music critic, discovering a manuscript from an earlier century, might come to the conclusion that it was written for a type of instrument which no longer exists. Archaeologists and palaeontologists, as I said in an earlier volume, have to decide whether this stone belonged to an arch, a pillar or something else, or whether this bone came from the foot of a brontosaurus or the claw of a pterodactyl. It ill befits a critic to retreat into a kind of negative positivism (‘I see no story in this text’) to save a theological point.²⁷ As C. S. Lewis pointed out about words, when we read old books we go to the dictionaries to look up the hard words, the ones we don’t know at all. The apparently easy words, the ones we use every day, pass by us without our realizing the very different meaning they may have carried five centuries ago.²⁸ So it is with texts in general. If we do not make the effort to check out the underlying worldview, we will all too easily assume that the writer shared, on this or that point, a worldview (including an implicit narrative) we ourselves know well. The writer *must really* have been talking ‘about’ what we assume he was talking about, and we ignore the hints within the text of a different worldview, a different underlying narrative. Paul ‘must really’ have been talking about ‘how I can find a gracious God’, and the turns and twists of his argument must then be explained as his use of this pre-Pauline tradition, that hellenistic *topos*, these themes his opponents introduced into the argument – anything rather than a narrative about the larger purposes of the God of Israel.

What alerts us, often enough, to the fact that there is ‘something else going on’, something we had not bargained for, is the casual remark, the throwaway line on the edge of something else, which stands as a signpost down the passage which we did not take, towards the door we never opened. So it is, often enough, with Paul. When he says that God promised Abraham that he would inherit ‘the world’; when he says that those who receive God’s gift of *dikaiosynē* will ‘reign’; when he says that the result of the Messiah’s

curse-bearing death is that ‘the blessing of Abraham might come upon the gentiles’ – in these and many other places he is, quite simply, not saying what any of the major western theological traditions might have expected him to say.²⁹ At such points, we either conclude that he has expressed himself imprecisely, or inaccurately – presuming, in the so-called method of *Sachkritik*, to know better than Paul did what he ‘really’ intended to say – or we stop in our tracks and re-examine our hypotheses about what he was in fact thinking and talking about. In doing so we are, of course, investigating his theology. But before very long we find that we are also investigating his worldview. The two are closely related, as I have already argued. And that worldview can, in principle and in practice, be expressed not only in symbol and praxis but also in story. Without the story, we cannot be sure we have discerned the meaning of the symbolic praxis.

What is going on, clearly enough, in the objection to discovering a story in Paul’s text is a matter not simply of textual analysis, but of a theological a priori. Paul must not be allowed, it seems (in some quarters), to have a gospel which is actually narratable in the form of a fully fledged story, lest he cease – I was going to say, to be a good Barthian, but that may be misleading; lest he cease to believe in sovereign divine action, in a God who bursts in from outside, from vertically above, in a new event, a fresh revelation (‘apocalypse’). Paul must not have a narrative, otherwise grace would no longer be grace! But what might Paul himself have to say to all this?

Several recent writers have expressed surprise, which I echo, that this should even be a question. Richard Hays has been one of the main proponents of Paul’s narrative world, and we might quote several passages where he develops his earlier proposals in new directions.³⁰ Hays might, however, be thought to be (as it were) part of the problem; certainly it is against Hays and myself that much of the newer resistance to narrative readings of Paul has been directed. So I quote an exegete known for her ability to strike out along independent paths, Morna Hooker:

The importance of narrative for the great majority of our biblical writers seems to me to be self-evident ... In what sense is the narrative approach to Paul doing anything essentially new? Is it not

simply putting a welcome emphasis on the feature that underlies Paul's theology and reminding us that attempts to force Paul's thought into the patterns imposed by systematic theologians are doomed to failure? ... If ... 'narrative approach' means simply the recognition that behind Paul's theological arguments there is a fundamental belief in God's purpose for the world, and that this is inevitably expressed in the form of narrative, then that recognition can, indeed, act as 'a necessary exegetical control' ... Since Paul's theology is concerned with God's activity through history, it is clear that his interpreters should not ignore the role of 'narrative'.³¹

I suppose it is exactly that final presupposition ('Since Paul's theology is concerned with God's activity through history') that will be challenged. Might that not be taken to denote some kind of 'immanent process', a 'salvation' that merely emerges from the ongoing evolutionary development of natural forces? Is that not what some of the greatest theologians and exegetes of the twentieth century fought against?³²

Well, maybe they did, though arguably they pulled texts out of shape in order to do so. And even those who made the most strident protests against such an 'immanent process', for obvious reasons, were prepared to acknowledge that there is such a thing in Paul as 'salvation history', and that indeed one cannot understand him without it.³³ And so we return to the texts themselves, to argue a coherent and careful case for the comprehensible, and indeed comprehensive, narrative, and then, within that, for the set of coherently and comprehensibly interlocking narratives, that form an inalienable part of Paul's own mindset. This is a marriage made in worldview heaven, quite unlike the unfortunate one envisaged in Browning's poem; and the protests of that other aristocratic lady, who tried to argue against Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy, are not going to prevent it.

[2. Meanwhile, in Another Part of the Wood: Plots, Sub-plots and Narrative Themes](#)

Consider this opening exchange between a very different pre-nuptial pair:

THESEUS

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow

This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires
Like to a step-dame, or a dowager,
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.³⁴

The scene is set for a wedding. The bridegroom is eager for it *now*, whereas the time, set by the new moon, is still four days off. The bride, more patient, sees things differently. Both invoke the moon. The Athenian king complains that the old moon is taking its time to wane, like an elderly relative spending the next generation's inheritance. Not so, replies his fiancée, queen of the Amazons: the moon will soon take on a different aspect, and be like a silver bow freshly bent in heaven – alluding, it seems, to Cupid's bow, shooting the arrow of love.

The moon was a multivalent symbol in the late-medieval world – a world which provided Shakespeare with a much richer source of imagery than would be available, through such an allusion, in our own day.³⁵ But one might not have anticipated the way in which it accompanies, and then finally concludes, the play. Into the royal wedding preparations there burst the central characters of the drama: Lysander and Hermia, eager to marry one another (following a moonlight courtship),³⁶ but thwarted by Demetrius, who also wants to marry Hermia and has the backing of her father, Egeus. Hermia, declares King Theseus, must choose. Either she must marry Demetrius, as her father wishes, or she must die; her only alternative is to become a nun. The decision must be made by the next new moon. But, if she goes to a convent, she will meet the moon, not as the blesser of nuptials, not as the silvery love-bow, but wearing a very different face:

For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.³⁷

Hermia and Lysander decide to run away and marry elsewhere, in the house of Lysander's 'widow aunt, a dowager of great revenue, and she hath no child' – an allusion, but a potentially redemptive one, both to Theseus's opening speech and then to his warning to Hermia.³⁸ Hermia's response to Lysander's proposal likewise picks up themes from the opening: she swears 'by Cupid's strongest bow, By his best arrow with the golden head'.³⁹

We are then introduced to Helena, an old friend of Hermia, who is herself helplessly in love with Demetrius. Lysander explains the plan to her: tomorrow night they will elope, when Phoebe (Apollo's sister Artemis, the moon-goddess) is looking down to bless them:

Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:
Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold
Her silver visage in the watery glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass –
A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal –
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.⁴⁰

Helena, receiving this intelligence, decides on a risky bid to win back Demetrius's favour: she will tell him of the plan, knowing he will go in pursuit. The plot is thus set up: a royal wedding and a secret elopement, both timed by the moon in her different guises.

A very different company then appears: a group of 'hard-handed men', local workmen from various lowly professions (joiner, weaver, bellow-mender, tinker and tailor), who have got together to cast, rehearse and perform a play (a short but tragic love-story) for the king's wedding festivities. They will rehearse 'in the palace-wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight'.⁴¹ The players themselves, in their preparations, constitute a separate sub-plot to the two which are already on their way. We now have three intermingled plots: the king and his intended bride: two pairs of puzzled and anxious lovers; and the workers rehearsing their drama.

The fourth sub-plot follows at once. Oberon, king of the fairies, has a quarrel with Titania, his queen. 'Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania':⁴² Oberon locates their stand-off by the same means as all the previous elements. The plots then begin to intertwine; some directors have signalled

this by having the same couple play Oberon and Titania as are playing Theseus and Hippolyta, reflecting a critical theory according to which the fairy couple are in some sense a dream-version of the king and his bride. The players are rehearsing for the king's wedding festivities; Oberon's task will be to bless that same marriage; he and Titania have a further squabble about his having a love for Hippolyta and she for Theseus. Indeed, Titania says, Oberon has behaved so badly that the seasons are out of joint, and the moon itself is angry and causing 'rheumatic diseases' to abound among mortals.⁴³ Titania intends to stay in the wood until after the king's wedding, and if Oberon would like to stay 'and see our moonlight revels', he is welcome.

Oberon, however, has other ideas. Once upon a time, Cupid (there he is again) shot an arrow which missed its intended mark, and instead struck a little flower, whose juice now functions as a powerful love-potion. Spread on a sleeper's eyes, it causes the victim, on waking, to fall helplessly in love with whatever creature first appears. Oberon intends to use this to play a trick on Titania, but hopes as well (having overheard the conversation between Demetrius and his dotting but unrequited Helena) to solve that problem while creating one for his own queen. However, he makes matters worse. Puck, Oberon's fairy-servant, thinking to do his master's bidding, anoints Lysander instead, and he, waking in the forest, sets eyes on Helena and instantly declares his passionate love for her.

We are then left to muse on the possible consequences of all this as, in another part of the forest, the players are preparing to rehearse. The tragic narrative of Pyramus and Thisbe runs into a snag: the tragic lovers are supposed to meet by moonlight. They therefore decide upon a separate character, 'Moonshine', complete with the appropriate symbols. But then disaster strikes, as Sub-plots Three and Four collide: Puck, on Oberon's bidding, gives the weaver Nick Bottom the head of an ass. The other players flee in dismay; Titania wakes up, and falls in love with the donkey-headed Bottom. Oberon has his way: Titania is now made totally ridiculous.

But his purpose with the moon-struck lovers has gone badly wrong. The play assumes the normal confusion of an Italian opera. Lysander adores Helena who doesn't believe him. Demetrius loves Hermia who continues to

reject him. Hermia – realizing that her adored Lysander really has transferred his affections – threatens to scratch Helena’s eyes out. Helena despairs, convinced that they are all laughing at her. Oberon, who has used Titania’s besotted state to get the better of her in their original quarrel, sets about repairing the damage, removing the magic from Lysander’s eyes and restoring Demetrius’s earlier love for Helena. There is a collective sigh of relief. The couples return to Athens with Theseus and Hippolyta for a triple wedding; Oberon and Titania are now prepared to bless the king and queen; and, with Bottom de-donkeyfied, the players are in shape for their performance.

It might seem that the drama has come to an end a bit too soon, at the end of Act 4 indeed. It might seem, too, that the moon, so important in the early setting up of the story, has been quietly forgotten as the plot has thickened. Not so: the ‘play within the play’ now takes place, and at last the classic lover’s fears, unspoken but real, are acted out before their eyes, in a miniature *Romeo and Juliet* (which Shakespeare was writing about the same time as the *Dream*).⁴⁴ Pyramus, discovering Thisbe’s bloodstained mantle, wrongly assumes that his beloved is dead, and commits suicide, whereupon Thisbe, finding him dead, does the same. The stage Lion takes great care to reassure the ladies that he is only an actor playing a lion, just as Shakespeare is taking great care that the players should reassure the company that this is only a bad dream; but the reality of it, acting out the potential disaster as a kind of redemption, has its purgative effect, exorcizing the horrors of the night. The ‘play within the play’ functions as the key, the final sub-plot, making a subtle and dark sense of all the others, laying to rest, in sharp Romeo-and-Juliet style, the potential tragedies that had hovered over the rest of the drama.

And the central character of the odd little production turns out to be, of course, Moonshine. Here he comes with his symbols: the lantern for the moon itself, and himself the man-in-the-moon with the other symbols, the thorn-bush and the dog that the ancients saw within the full orb. The moon needed to shine before the king’s wedding could take place, but it is not now the thin crescent of the new moon, but the sudden light of a full moon,

illuminating aspects of the human drama that would otherwise have remained hidden. Shakespeare is careful to echo, in reverse, the original complaint of Theseus and the calming reply of Hippolyta:

HIPPOLYTA

I am a-weary of this moon: would he would change!

THESEUS

It appears, by his small light of discretion, that he is in the wane; but yet, in courtesy, in all reason, we must stay the time.⁴⁵

The moon shines on: Pyramus thanks him ‘for shining now so bright’, because he hopes thereby to see Thisbe.⁴⁶ Instead, he sees the torn, bloodstained mantle she has left behind while fleeing the lion. He thinks the worst, and kills himself, but not before bidding the moon to disappear:

Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.

Now am I dead,

Now am I fled;

My soul is in the sky;

Tongue, lose thy light;

Moon, take thy flight: –

[Exit MOONSHINE.

Now die, die, die, die, die. [Dies.⁴⁷

Hippolyta, watching this drama, comments that Moonshine is gone before Thisbe comes back. She will have to find her dead lover by starlight, explains Theseus, ‘and her passion ends the play’.⁴⁸ Quite so: the ‘hard-handed’ players, whose performance Shakespeare has taken care shall be seen as comical in several directions at once, nevertheless contains the dark truth hidden underneath the rest of the drama, behind all the frustrations, anger and threats: lovers do sometimes get it horribly wrong, and in any case death awaits us all. Moonshine, having played a wide variety of parts, mythical and actual, throughout the drama, is there at the end, with Lion, ‘to bury the dead’.⁴⁹ With that, the king can call the lovers to their nuptials, and to a two-week party, while Oberon can bestow his blessing on their future issue. The larger framing drama (Theseus and Hippolyta) has held the whole thing together, while the subordinate criss-crossing sub-plots, climaxing with

the play within the play, have dealt with the underlying, otherwise unspoken, tensions and threats. And this whole drama, of course, takes its place on Shakespeare's stage as itself a play 'within the play' of the ordinary lives and loves, fears and fantasies, of the audience and their society. A room full of mirrors; a plot full of plots; a comedy full of tragedy; a world full of stories. A lot like real life, in fact, complete with the Moon as, it seems, the symbol and herald of most if not all of the key moments, the key themes, the key revelations.

Revelations! Aye, there's the rub. The meaning of a 'revelation', we might suppose, is the job it does within the larger narrative: changing it, breaking in with fresh news, transforming it. But maybe (so someone will say) when Paul speaks of a 'revelation', an 'apocalypse', he has in mind not the kind of 'revelation' that comes about when new elements of a character are unveiled, but the sort of 'revelation' that would happen if the theatre manager came on stage in the middle of the performance, declared that the house was on fire, stopped all the plots and sub-plots in their tracks and sent the audience home. That, it seems, is what 'apocalyptic' is now taken to mean in some quarters. Thus, because Paul can be shown to express some elements at least of something that can be called 'apocalyptic', it is concluded, or at least proposed, that he cannot be living in, or encouraging others to live within, an ongoing narrative, with or without complexity of plot. Is that really the case?

Now of course (as someone else will be eager to point out) Paul is not writing dramas, whether tragic or comic. It would be a category mistake to place him and Shakespeare on the same side of the page. But that, of course, is not my proposal. My proposal is that, having reminded ourselves of how narratives can interlock, with an overall quite simple narrative generating more complicated sub-plots which can interrelate, and with something happening near the heart which then turns the key in all the other locks, we might, by way of analogy, be able to bring some order to the chaos of speculation about the various 'stories' to be found within, underneath or around the edges of Paul's writings. Just as we are focusing on one theme in his writings, something else is going on, as we might say, in another part of

the wood, to which we need to pay attention as well. And these ‘themes’ turn out to be stories which actually belong closely together.

Some structuralists, for all I know, might leap in at this point. They might say that the reason this question has a good chance of success is that what we call ‘drama’ actually relates, at a deep psychological or archetypal level, whether individual or corporate, to patterns and structures which are inalienably woven into all human life. I shall not comment on that, but I do think in this instance that the idea of underlying stories and/or dramas can and does prove remarkably fruitful.

There are, after all, several ‘stories’ which are commonly thus detected within the implicit worldview of the apostle Paul. I have outlined these differently myself in different places, at times drawing the narratives together to show their overall coherence, at other times insisting on telling them separately so that their particular emphases may emerge.⁵⁰ Others have suggested three stories, or four, or five, that dominate Paul’s understanding: a threefold account might highlight the story of Israel, the story of Christ and Paul’s own story (including that of his followers); all these plus a larger one about the world might be a fourfold set; and we could turn this into five by separating out the story of Paul himself from the various stories of other believers both before and after his day.⁵¹

I shall now suggest that these various stories do actually have a coherent interlocking shape, nesting within one another like the sub-plots in a play (I said *like*, not *in exactly the same way*). And, if anything more important, I shall begin to show (the rest of the book will continue this demonstration) that looking at Paul’s worldview with the aid of this narrative analysis sheds a positive flood of light – direct light, not surreptitious moonbeams – on passage after passage of tricky exegesis, and problem after problem in the theological coherence of the letters. That last comment, responding to those who have doubted whether all this talk of ‘story’ will have any ‘exegetical results’ or ‘payoff’, is more than just a rebuff to such scepticism. It is an indication of how the implicit hermeneutical spiral of my own method is supposed to work: having begun (a long time ago) with exegesis, I have been driven to worldview models to try to understand what early Christianity was

all about. At every point, the aim is to be able to return to exegesis, not saying, ‘Well, that was an interesting diversion; now let’s get on with the real thing’, but ‘Now at last we can make sense of what before was incomprehensible.’⁵²

Where, then, to start? The obvious answer is to begin with what seems the largest, framing story of all, which also happens to be the one element of narrative which is allowed even by the contemporary proponents of ‘apocalyptic’: the story of God and the world.

3. The Outer Story: God and Creation

If anything corresponds, within Paul’s worldview, to the ‘framing narrative’ of Theseus and Hippolyta, it is the overall story of the creator God and the cosmos. One could scarcely get a larger framework than that. This ‘cosmic’ story, like the forthcoming wedding of the royal couple in the *Dream*, is not often found explicitly within Paul’s writings, but when it does show up we should realize that it is crucial and foundational for everything else. We would be correct to suppose that it is in principle present to his heart and imagination, as a shaping influence on all else, even when it remains unstated.

The story of creator and cosmos is in fact everywhere presupposed. Paul assumes that the God of whom he speaks is the creator, the maker of heaven and earth. This God has made a world in which the signs of his power, glory and even his very deity ought to be picked up by humans.⁵³ He has made all things, and humans can and should thank him for them all. ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’: Paul can quote obvious biblical statements of the worldview-shaping premise.⁵⁴ There is one God from whom all things come, to whom we owe our allegiance, our very selves. ‘From him and through him and to him are all things.’⁵⁵

By itself this is a statement, not a narrative. The creator God makes a world; the world belongs to him: that isn’t a story, any more than ‘The cat sat on the mat’ is a story. For a story, a narrative, something has to challenge the equilibrium of the original statement: ‘The mat caught fire,’ or ‘Up came

a mouse and tweaked its tail.’ The reason there is a story about this God and his world is twofold. First, the creator God made a world *with a purpose*, and entrusted that purpose to humans: ah, now we have the beginning of a story – a quest, a task to be undertaken. Then, second, the humans to whom the task was entrusted abused that trust and rebelled. Now there is a problem to solve as well as a task to complete. It is not simply that the relationship between the creator and his world has become problematic. The *purpose* of that relationship appears to be thwarted. We are pitched into the plot at a point when everybody knows something has gone horribly wrong and everybody is wondering what can be done about it, how the original purpose can be put back on track.

In the Jewish versions of the story one is seldom told what it is that has gone wrong. One is presented with the fact that things *are* wrong, and that the creator needs to put them right. There are plenty of hints, and some writers two or three centuries before Paul explore the passage in Genesis about the fallen angels who bring corruption on the earth.⁵⁶ Only after the destruction of Jerusalem, when things had gone even worse for the Jews than they could have previously imagined, did two writers reach for Genesis 3, rather than Genesis 6, as the ultimate explanation for the wickedness not only of humanity in general but for Israel as well.⁵⁷ Paul, faced with a similar crisis in the failure of Israel, first to accept its Messiah when he came, and then to believe in him after his resurrection, goes back to the same point. Adam’s trespass is named, though scarcely explained; creation has been put out of joint because the humans who were supposed to be looking after it have fallen down on the job. Behind that, though again never explained, there are ‘powers’ at work that apparently seek to thwart the creator’s plan, and that need to be overcome.⁵⁸ That much is clear from the promises about what will be put right, which also include the assurance that the forces which at present threaten to destroy the cosmos, and thereby to undo the creator’s work, will themselves be defeated, indeed in a measure have already been defeated through the achievement of the Messiah. Through all this, we sense a story, much larger than anything we can piece together from the fragments we are given, but a story none the less whose

plot frames all the sub-plots that constitute the more obvious and immediate subject-matter of Paul's writings. This is Paul's equivalent of the overarching theme of Theseus and Hippolyta.

One of the standard Jewish ways of addressing the problem of the creator and the cosmos was to speak in terms of two epochs of world history: the present age and the age to come.⁵⁹ (There could in principle have been three such epochs, but the implicit first one, a supposed golden age corresponding to Genesis 1 and 2, does not feature in the normal Jewish divisions of time.) This is an interesting solution, because it essentially affirms *continuity* between the present state of things and the future intention, as well as a radical *discontinuity*. Without the continuity, one might doubt whether this was a story about 'creator and creation' at all; it might look as though the narrative had collapsed into something else, a kind of gnostic scheme in which the present world was the work of a lesser god, or even (as in Epicureanism) the product of blind chance. Without the discontinuity, however, one would deduce that the problem had not, after all, been so acute; a minor wrinkle within the original creation, rather than a dangerous and threatening fault line. Thus we have the two epochs: the present age, *ha-'olam ha-zeh*, where evil and death are rampant, and the coming age, *ha-'olam ha-ba*, where they will be abolished, and where justice and peace will triumph *but still, in some sense, within the created order*.⁶⁰ This is a way of reaffirming that the 'big story' is indeed about the creator and the cosmos, while recognizing that the creator has some serious work to do to rescue his creation from what seems to be imminent ruin.

Paul's specific contribution to this overarching narrative is to insist that the 'coming age' has already been inaugurated (though not yet completed) through Jesus. That is why, not as an extra flourish on top of something else but as an indication of where the main plot lies, he can speak of the result of Jesus' accomplishment in terms of 'new creation'.⁶¹ It is why, in particular, he relates the story of humans and their rescue so directly to the larger picture of God reclaiming the whole cosmos. How and why the work of Jesus has this effect is part of one of the subsequent sub-plots. But there is

no doubt that this is the framework within which his mind is working. Take the opening statement of his sharpest letter, that to the Galatians:

Grace to you and peace from God our father and Jesus the Messiah, our lord, who gave himself for our sins, *to rescue us from the present evil age*, according to the will of God, our father, to whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen.⁶²

Jesus the Messiah ‘gave himself ... to rescue us from the present evil age’. Paul is careful to qualify that at once: this is not some action which has rescued us *from* the creator God and his world (that way lies gnosticism, the idea of a rescue *out of* the cosmos), but something that has taken place in accordance with the will of that same creator, and to his glory. But it is a clear statement of the ‘two ages’ belief, together with an equally clear statement of the particular Pauline claim that these ages now *overlap*. God’s future, the ‘age to come’, has broken into the present age in Jesus the Messiah, and those who are rescued by him (who these people are is another matter to which we shall come in due course) are rescued *from* the ‘present evil age’ so that they may now belong, it seems, within that ‘age to come’. This accords easily and naturally with a plethora of passages in Paul which speak of the Messiah’s people as belonging to the future time which has already burst into the present.⁶³ And it points ahead, within Galatians itself, to the massively important closing statement, showing that for Paul, even though much of the work in between has not been explicitly ‘about’ the narrative of creator and creation, this is indeed (like the forthcoming marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta) the overarching plot which holds the other ones together and to which they contribute:

As for me, God forbid that I should boast – except in the cross of our lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Circumcision, you see, is nothing; neither is uncircumcision! *What matters is new creation*. Peace and mercy on everyone who lines up by that standard – yes, on God’s Israel.⁶⁴

Paul means what he says. ‘It is the *kosmos* that has been crucified, not merely Paul’s perception of the *kosmos* ... A new reality has been brought into being that determines the destiny of the whole creation.’⁶⁵ That is why Paul can go on at once to speak of ‘new creation’, one of those phrases

which, like a rare diamond, is found only occasionally in his writings but which glistens with weighty meaning when it does. What matters is new creation, which comes about through ‘the world’ being crucified through the cross of the Messiah, and likewise through the ‘I’ being crucified ‘to’ the world (whatever that means).⁶⁶ This, then, is how the transition from ‘present evil age’ to ‘coming age’ will take place: through the events of the Messiah’s death and, by implication, resurrection. This perspective, and also the reticence with which the main ‘plot’ is stated, is characteristic of all Paul’s letters.

The other key statement of this theme, 2 Corinthians 5.17 (‘if anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation! Old things have gone, and look – everything has become new!’) fits exactly within this framework. So do commands like the great summons at the start of Romans 12:

Don’t let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God’s will is, what is good, acceptable and complete.⁶⁷

The ‘present age’ is continuing, but followers of the Messiah must no longer conform to it. And what Paul believes to be the case in terms of *time* is also the case in terms of *matter*. The creator intends to create a new world, a new *kosmos*, out of the womb of the old:

The sufferings we go through in the present time are not worth putting in the scale alongside the glory that is going to be unveiled [*apokalyphthēnai*] for us. Yes: creation itself is on tiptoe with expectation, eagerly awaiting the moment when God’s children will be revealed [literally, for the *apokalypsis* of God’s children]. Creation, you see, was subjected to pointless futility, not of its own volition, but because of the one who placed it in this subjection, in the hope that creation itself would be freed from its slavery to decay, to enjoy the freedom that comes when God’s children are glorified.

Let me explain. We know that the entire creation is groaning together, and going through labour pains together, up until the present time. Not only so: we too, we who have the first fruits of the spirit’s life within us – we groan within ourselves, as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our body. We were saved, you see, in hope. But hope isn’t hope if you can see it! Who hopes for what they can see? But if we hope for what we don’t see, we wait for it eagerly – but also patiently.⁶⁸

This spectacular passage, unique in Paul but placed at the rhetorical climax of the carefully crafted second section of his greatest letter, fits once more into this narrative framework. The ‘apocalypse’ of the gospel itself, to which we shall come later, will give rise to a further ‘revelation’ or ‘unveiling’, in which the Messiah’s people will be transformed, being raised from the dead, and creation itself will be transformed in consequence.

What this means in terms of the underlying story, the large-scale narrative of creator and cosmos, we shall shortly discover. But first we need one more piece of the jigsaw. In a chapter which ranks close to Romans 8 in terms both of its careful construction and its explosive theology, Paul outlines how he sees this cosmic drama unfolding:

But in fact the Messiah has been raised from the dead, as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since it was through a human that death arrived, it’s through a human that the resurrection from the dead has arrived. All die in Adam, you see, and all will be made alive in the Messiah.

Each, however, in proper order. The Messiah rises as the first fruits; then those who belong to the Messiah will rise at the time of his royal arrival. Then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. He has to go on ruling, you see, until ‘he has put all his enemies under his feet’. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, because ‘he has put all things in order under his feet’. But when it says that everything is put in order under him, it’s obvious that this doesn’t include the one who put everything in order under him. No: when everything is put in order under him, then the son himself will be placed in proper order under the one who placed everything in order under him, so that God may be all in all.⁶⁹

We shall return later to the detail of this remarkable argument. For the moment we note the basic point: this is a deeply *creational* view of the future, in which ‘death’, the thing that threatens the goodness and God-giveness of creation itself, is cast in the role of the ‘enemy’ to be defeated. This defeat has already happened in the case of Jesus himself, the Messiah who has been raised from the dead. That victory will be implemented at last for the entire creation, leaving God the creator as ‘all in all’. This paragraph then serves as the ground plan, the basic statement, upon which the detailed argument about the resurrection of the body will be mounted in the rest of the chapter.

So what has gone wrong with the creator's original plans for his creation? Part of the answer appears to be not simply the failure of humans (to which we shall return presently) but the presence of non-human evil forces. We are left to infer from Paul's various references to 'the satan', to *daimonia*, and to other shadowy forces such as the *stoicheia*, that such forces do exist; that their general aim is to thwart the creator's plan for the creation; that one such quasi-personal force in particular ('the satan') has malevolent designs on the creator's plan and on every level of sub-plot within it; and that through the events concerning Jesus this set of destructive intelligences have been defeated, and their evil plans thwarted once and for all.⁷⁰ The defeat and overthrow of these evil powers, and the consequent clearing of the way for creation to be renewed, appears to be an essential though again often unstated element within this first, and all-embracing, Pauline narrative.

Within this narrative, it has recently and rightly been emphasized that, in Paul's understanding, the creator has shown himself *faithful* to the creation. Having made it in the beginning, and devised plans for it (only hinted at in Paul, but tantalizingly important even if mostly off stage), he has not decided to abandon it when so much seemed to be going wrong, but has remained true to what the Psalmist calls 'the work of his own hands'.⁷¹ This main plot could, indeed, be characterized in terms of the creator's 'faithfulness', and some have proposed as well that this includes, or might also be expressed as, his 'righteousness'. This is the point which some have made in relation to the much-controverted phrase *dikaiosynē theou*: it is, we are told, a 'technical term' for the creator's power through which creation itself is rescued.⁷² I agree that this is the ultimate *effect of* the revelation of the divine 'righteousness', but as we shall see I suggest that the phrase belongs better within one of the subsequent sub-plots. Since, however, all the sub-plots eventually join up, it is not entirely misleading to mention it in this connection also. Certainly part of the point of the overarching narrative is that the creator's will in creation is ultimately fulfilled. God is neither mocked nor thwarted. Merely crucified ...

But that takes us too far ahead. The other theme that belongs emphatically within the large, overarching plot is that of the *reign of God* over the whole

creation. This theme, which we meet in the canonical gospels in terms of the *basileia tou theou*, the ‘kingdom of God’, seldom appears on the surface of Paul’s text, but when it does it is quite significant. It is not simply a miscellaneous ‘theologoumenon’, an arm-waving slogan that simply means ‘this thing that we followers of the Messiah are on about’, ‘this new religious experience we all enjoy’. As several of the related passages show, Paul has reflected carefully on what it means that God will reign, that the Messiah is presently reigning, that the Messiah’s people will reign in the future and that they can, somehow, start to do so here and now. The phrase appears to denote for Paul a state of affairs of which he sometimes can speak in terms of present reality (‘God’s kingdom doesn’t mean food and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the holy spirit’), and at other times as a future state (‘those who do such things won’t inherit God’s kingdom’).⁷³ Sometimes, as we saw in the passage from 1 Corinthians 15, this is expressed in terms of a two-stage kingly rule, with the Messiah ruling the world in the present time but then, when all hostile powers are defeated, handing that ‘kingdom’ over to the creator himself, ‘so that God will be all in all.’⁷⁴ The important thing, the place where Paul’s main implicit plot comes to expression, is that the creator is seen to be ruling the whole creation. This, in other words, is how God is reclaiming his sovereign rule over the world.⁷⁵

All this is to say, in one way or another, that the large outer story is a story of *judgment*. This theme is constantly bound up with the biblical idea of Israel’s God, the creator, coming to set up his rule. The word ‘judgment’ has of course been allowed to slip into negative mode in the contemporary western world, with ‘judgmentalism’ one of the classic postmodern villains. But even a postmodernist whose car has been damaged by a drunk driver wants a court to pass ‘judgment’ against the offender. ‘Judgment’ is in fact a positive thing. It is what restores health to a society, a balance to the world. It replaces chaos with order. The fact that it can be abused – that humans, whether or not in positions of authority, can take it upon themselves to ‘pass judgment’ on one another in negative and destructive ways – indicates, not

that it is a bad thing in itself, but that like all good and important things it can generate unpleasant parodies.

The reality, however, seen from within the outer story in Paul's world, is utterly positive:

Say among the nations, 'YHWH is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity.'
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before YHWH; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.⁷⁶

This is how the large story always ends: with Israel's God dealing firmly and decisively with everything that has distorted and corrupted his good creation, so that creation itself can be rescued from all its ills and transformed into the new world he now has in mind. 'Judgment' is thus the other end of the long outer narrative from 'good creation' itself. Part of our difficulty with the word, and concept, in the contemporary world may in fact arise because we have seen 'judgment' out of the context of a good creator making and restoring his good world, and have understood it instead in the context of a dualistic mindset where the aim of 'judgment' would be to destroy the present world and rescue only a chosen few. Place it back in its larger biblical framework, however, and the story is very different – bad news, to be sure, for any who want to go on distorting, corrupting and destroying God's good creation, but good news for all who long to see creation restored. A case can be made for seeing this positive note of final 'judgment' as the ultimate context within which all penultimate 'judgments' of human authorities are to be understood.⁷⁷

This is the more important because, exactly in line with the original vision in Genesis, the biblical picture of the creator's purpose within the world regularly includes the instrumentality of one or more human beings. Some of

the greatest ancient images of the positive final judgment, of the abolition from God's good world of all that defaces it, thus include the strange, idealistic vision of a coming king who will put this 'judgment' into effect:

I will tell of the decree of YHWH:
He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.⁷⁸

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of YHWH shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of YHWH.
His delight shall be in the fear of YHWH.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH
as the waters cover the sea.
On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.⁷⁹

There is every sign that these passages and others like them were regular points of reference for Jews of Paul's day who reflected on the largest of the

implicit narratives in which they were living. It is part of creational monotheism itself to believe that the good creator will one day sort out his world by uprooting all causes of wickedness and transforming it so that it is ‘full of knowing-YHWH’, full of a deep understanding of his life-giving purposes. Believing that he will do this through human agency, in this case the agency of a coming Davidic king, is one way in which this larger belief came to classic expression. In later theological shorthand, ‘judgment’ is what happens when the creator says ‘No’ to all that stands out against his good, positive purposes for his world, in order to say ‘Yes’ to that world itself, in all its fullness. This kind of ‘final judgment’ is part of the implicit worldview-narrative within the Jewish world of Saul of Tarsus, and it clearly remained so within the rethought worldview of Paul the apostle.

The large-scale narrative we have so far sketched remains an inescapably second-Temple Jewish one. In that world, it might be filled out in one of various ways. We might expect to find a cosmogony (a theory of how creation happened) in which ‘Wisdom’ played some part, as in Proverbs 8 and the derivative passages such as Wisdom of Solomon 7—9. We might expect a cosmology (a theory about the present state of the cosmos) in which the Temple in Jerusalem was seen as mirroring the created order, and playing some part within its destiny, as in Sirach 24 and other passages we noted earlier.⁸⁰ We might, indeed, find Torah as well in that same picture, in those same passages, as the blueprint for the making of the world, the moon-like reflection of God’s creative purposes.⁸¹ Paul will introduce dramatic new variations into these expressions of basic Jewish creational monotheism, but, as we shall see, the story remains intact.

All this (the ‘two ages’ view of history, the defeat of evil powers, the ‘kingdom of God’, the Jewish-style treatment of cosmogony and cosmology) indicates that we are moving here in the area commonly if misleadingly designated ‘apocalyptic’. Many second-Temple Jewish writings which have regularly been so designated possess these features. This ‘apocalyptic’ strand is underscored when Paul speaks, as he often does, of God ‘revealing’ or ‘unveiling’ what appears to be his proposed solution to the plight of the world. With the ‘revelation’ or ‘apocalypse’ of Jesus, and particularly his

death and resurrection, the ‘age to come’ has not only been unveiled; it has been opened for others to enter, in advance of its full and final appearing. But the fact that the play is ultimately about Theseus and Hippolyta doesn’t mean it isn’t also about the star-crossed lovers, about Oberon and Titania, about Pyramus and Thisbe, and indeed about Moonshine. We cannot simply select one of these sub-plots, put it quickly together with the overarching plot and then declare that we have solved the riddle of the play.⁸²

So how does this ‘outer story’, this framing plot of creator and creation, function in relation to all the other things Paul is talking about in his letters? Is it just a loose, wide framework, so big, so unrelated to the detailed concerns of his churches, that for the most part it has little or no effect on what he actually says, on the line he takes, on what he urgently wants his congregations to reflect on and to embody?

That might be said (for instance) about the Stoic belief in the great periodic Conflagration. The serious philosopher can see the connection in theory, and can live ‘in accordance with nature’ in the light of it. But for most of the time Stoic ethics, as we saw, has no need to look beyond the horizon of the particular human being and, perhaps, the particular *polis*. One may well be able to develop the classic virtues without being too concerned about, or even conscious of, living in a universe that may one day go up in smoke and then, phoenix-like, reappear and repeat the entire story. One can believe in that framing story without it having an immediate impact on day-to-day living.

But with Paul it is different. This framing story, though it appears only seldom, functions dynamically *in relation to* the other stories, precisely as an outer story in a Shakespearean plot might function in relation to the smaller stories that nest within it and are joined to it by all kinds of subtle threads. To explain this next move we need to go slowly and carefully. We must ask: what are Paul’s sub-plots, and how do they relate to the main, overarching plot itself?

To make life easy as things get more complex, I shall now do what good storytellers would never do, and reveal in advance the shape of what is to come. The first sub-plot, I suggest, is the story of the human creatures

through whom the creator intended to bring order to his world. Their failure, and the creator's determination to put that failure right and so get the original plan back on track, demands a second sub-plot, which is the story of Israel as the people called to be the light of the world. This is the level of plot at which the Mosaic law plays out its various roles, like the complex but integrated roles given to the Moon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Then, because of Israel's own failure, we find the third and final sub-plot, which is the story of Jesus, Israel's crucified and risen Messiah. His work, at the centre of Paul's narrative world, resolves the other sub-plots, and provides a glimpse, as we have just seen, of the resolution for the main plot itself, the creator's purpose for the whole cosmos. It is only when these various levels of plot are ignored, confused or conflated that problems arise. Allow each to do its proper job, and the Pauline story will work.

[4. Meanwhile, in Another Part of the Wood: the First Sub-plot \(Humans, Their Vocation, Failure, Rescue and Reinstatement\)](#)

As with Shakespeare, so with Paul: it is when we get to the first sub-plot that we feel the story is really starting. Indeed, just as some theatregoers may leave the play thinking only of Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, and perhaps the strange story of Bottom the Ass by which their problems are first intensified and then resolved, so some readers of Paul come away with the impression that his sole concern is the human plight and the strange means of its resolution. It is important, however, to see that, for Paul, the human plight is related directly to the overarching plot.

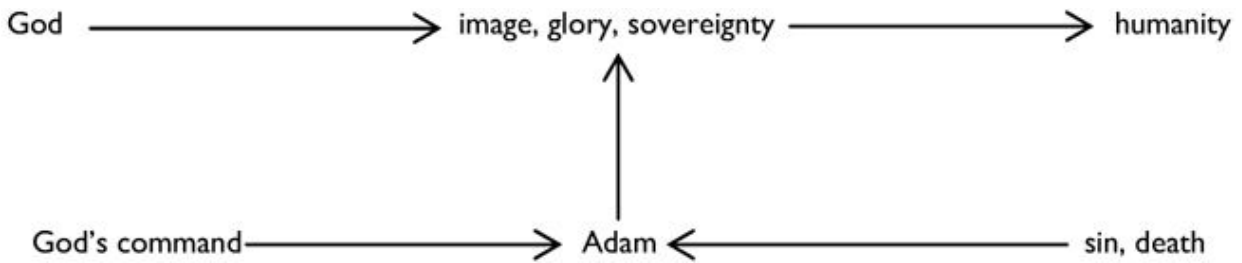
The overarching plot is clear. The creator's plan for the cosmos was that humans should be given stewardship of it, to tend it and enable it to flourish. The failure of humans to accomplish this, to be obedient to the creator's intention, is thus a problem not just for them but for the creation itself. As we saw, creation itself is waiting for God's children to be revealed. Only when human beings, restored to their full dignity, are placed in authority over creation will creation be what it was intended to be; that is the point of Paul's decisive and climactic statement in Romans 8.18–21, picking up on

the otherwise surprising line, about the redeemed humans ‘reigning’, in 5.17 (see below). This, it seems, is part at least of what Paul means by humans sharing the ‘glory’, and the inheritance, of the Messiah.⁸³ The violin-maker has made beautiful instruments, and has called musicians to make wonderful music with them; but the musicians have refused, and have tried to play tunes on bits of scrappy wood and grass they have found lying about the place. It is no good the violin-maker wringing his hands and deciding to do without the musicians; they are needed if the violins are to make the music they are supposed to make. He has to set about rescuing the musicians from their folly, not just for their own sake (because it’s frustrating and dishonouring for them to try to get music out of lifeless objects) but because they are needed precisely to make the wonderful music he had in mind all along.

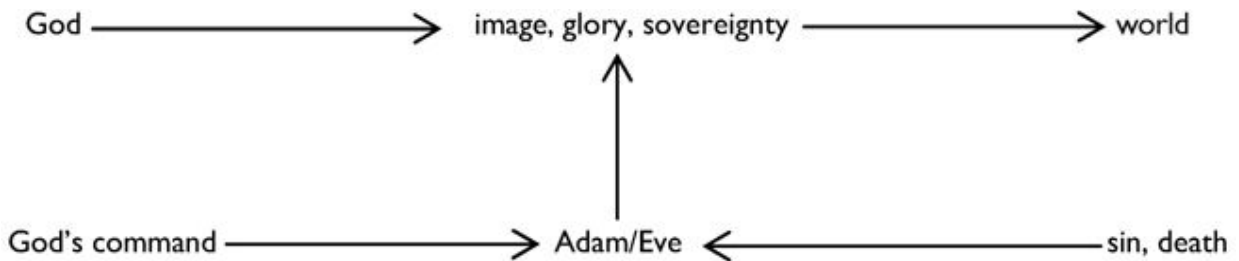
Like all allegories, that one is a mere signpost pointing to a larger reality, but I hope it makes the basic point: that the first of the sub-plots, the story of humankind, is a vital part of the larger one. Just because we are aware of the cosmic drama we must not downplay the story of humans being rescued from their plight. Paul has the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2, and the tragic story of human failure in Genesis 3, as a constant backdrop. He understands the human plight, not in terms of the gnostic idea of humans finding themselves adrift in a hostile universe from which they need to be rescued, but in terms of humans finding themselves called to play a vital role in the larger purposes of the creator for the creation. When humans rebel and worship other gods, it is not merely the case that they lose their own identity, their own meaning and even potentially their own life and existence. Nor is it simply the case that they then fail to have an appropriate ‘relationship with God’, a category which popular contemporary Christianity often supplies to fill the blank left by ignoring the actual human vocation. It means, rather, that they fail to play their part in that larger divine purpose, the part in which they will be fulfilled and ennobled, not as free-standing entities, but by serving the creator’s glorious plans. This is part at least of what Paul means when he speaks of humans sinning and so ‘losing the glory of God’.⁸⁴

Nor, if we look the other way (from gnostic dualism to Stoic pantheism), are humans to find their identity as lonely, proud individuals, getting in tune with the 'nature' of the cosmos so that they can rise to their full height. The point about human beings, in the original creation story to which Paul alludes again and again (especially in passages like 1 Corinthians 15), is that they are God's agents, God's appointed stewards over creation. This is what it means to be 'in God's image': to reflect God's wise, fruitful ordering into creation, and to reflect creation's praise back to the creator. Humans are the creatures through whom God had intended to tend his world, to make the garden fruitful, to name the animals, to reflect his glory into the whole creation. God's purpose, at this level, was not to make the created world as a mere backdrop, a cardboard stage set within which human beings, his real interest, could as it were have somewhere to live and something to do while they were getting to know him. God's purpose in creating humans was so that through them creation itself might flourish. But we must keep the balance. God made, for this purpose, creatures who reflected his own 'image', and retains a special love for them. They are not mere tools through which he intends to accomplish his plan, but delightful, unique creatures who have the capacity to know his love and reflect it back to him not least through gladly and freely carrying out his purposes. The love and the purposes dovetail together. Recognizing that one has musically gifted children will involve translating one's love into the provision of music lessons, so that they will be able to play the music one has written specially for them, and specially to bring joy to others through them. Being in God's image is *both* about reflecting God into the world (the purpose) *and* about receiving and returning the divine love (the relationship). The two go together. In the book of Revelation this is expressed, picking up an ancient Jewish idea, in terms of the 'royal priesthood'.⁸⁵

That is why I take issue with Edward Adams's otherwise careful model of the basic story, in which the purpose of God was to give his image and glory to human beings.⁸⁶ Adams proposes an initial sequence for this drama that looks like this (with due commiseration for the groans that will come from our mutual friend Jimmy Dunn at the sight of another actantial analysis):



In this model, God’s ultimate concern is with ‘humanity’, and ‘Adam’ is supposed to be serving that concern – a strangely self-referential vocation, one might suppose. This scarcely represents either Genesis or Paul. God’s purpose, in our texts, was that through *humankind* (Adam and Eve), God would reflect his image and glory into the *world*:



This explains what went wrong, in a way that the model offered by Adams cannot do. The cunning of the serpent jeopardized the plan, so that, as Paul says, ‘Creation was subjected to pointless futility, not of its own volition, but because of the one who placed it in this subjection,’ that is, God the creator.⁸⁷ Creation cannot be put right until humans are put right; that is why the creation is waiting on tiptoe for ‘the apocalypse of God’s children’. Or, to see this from the other end of the telescope, this is why Paul speaks of the ‘inheritance’ of God’s people, not in the restrictive Jewish terms of the ‘land’, but rather in the wider (and still Jewish) terms of the whole world. The Messiah was promised the nations of the world as his inheritance. Paul, taking his cue from the worldwide scope of God’s promise to Abraham, insists that those who share the Messiah’s inheritance will be set in authority over the whole world.⁸⁸

That is why, at the centre of Paul's densest paragraph (like the nucleus of an atom, it is highly compact but full of explosive charge), we find him saying something which many readers skip over, because it is not what they expect:

For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace, and of the gift of covenant membership, of 'being in the right', *reign in life* through the one man Jesus the Messiah.⁸⁹

We expect Paul to say, 'If, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through that one, how much more will life reign, through the Messiah, for the many', or words to that effect. That, indeed, would have conformed, more or less, to the diagram offered by Edward Adams. Instead, Paul restores human beings to the place they have in Genesis, the place he will give them in the cosmic/apocalyptic scenario in chapter 8: How much more will those who receive God's abundant gift *reign in life* through the Messiah. The *reign* of human beings is what will matter in the new world. Humans are not to be passive recipients of God's mercy and grace; they are to have 'glory', in the sense that they are to be given stewardship of the world, as the creator always intended.⁹⁰ They are even, remarkably, to be entrusted with sharing God's final judgment.⁹¹ Like the 'judgment' in the larger story, this has a positive intent, to uproot evil and establish God's world as it should be. When humans are 'glorified', the creation itself will be liberated.

At this point in Romans 8 ('creation itself would be freed from its slavery to decay, to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified' (v. 21)) we must ward off two regular exegetical misapprehensions, reflected often enough in the translations. First, 'the glory of God's children' refers to the glorious *rule* or 'reign' of God's children, as in 5.17, and is not to be reduced to an adjective ('glorious liberty'), as though 'liberty of the glory' was a hendiadys. What Paul is speaking of is precisely the freedom that will come to the whole cosmos when God's children are 'glorified', that is, 'reigning'. Second, therefore, it is wrong to imagine that creation will *share* the 'glory' of God's children. Creation is indeed itself a vessel for the divine glory, as in the song of the seraphim in Isaiah 6 and the promise of the

prophet in Habakkuk 2, but that is not what Paul is talking about here.⁹² When they are ‘glorified’, that is, given full stewardship at last, reflecting God’s own power and glory into the world, then creation will be given the freedom, the chance at last to be its true self, for which it has waited and longed. Creation will be free from its slavery to corruption and decay at the great ‘apocalypse’ of God’s children, the moment when they will be seen, in the resurrection, as what they already are in Christ and by the spirit.⁹³ Entropy, and death itself, will no longer have the last word. For contemporary western persons to imagine such a thing will require, no doubt, an effort, not to say an education; but it is precisely the sort of conversion of imagination that a creational monotheist would call for. If the creator has made a good world, and if this power we call death, and the corruption and decay that lead to it and from it, are threatening to thwart the creator’s plans, only a victory over corruption and death itself will restore things as they should be. *Only so, in other words, will the narrative grammar of the largest ‘story’ of all come out right.*

Thus the story of humankind falls, like the most obvious sub-plot in a play, *within* the larger plot, and cannot properly be understood (in Paul’s terms at least) independently from that larger narrative. The plot and the first sub-plot thus fit together as follows, explicitly in Romans 5—8 and 1 Corinthians 15 and, because these are so obviously central for Paul, by implication elsewhere as well:

1. The creator’s intention was to bring fruitful order to the world through his image-bearing human creatures.
2. Humans fail to reflect God’s image into the world, and the world in consequence fails to attain its fruitful order; the result, instead, is corruption and decay.
3. God intends to restore humankind to its proper place, resulting in the rescue and restoration of creation itself.⁹⁴

So far, so good – though of course we have not yet explored the question of how the creator will accomplish Stage 3. This three-stage outline is not yet,

in point of fact, a complete narrative, though it has the shape of one. There are many blanks still to be filled in. The passages we have already glanced at contain the clues, which we shall follow up presently.

Within this framework, we can at last set out the actual dynamics of this main sub-plot, which so many have assumed to be the main plot itself: the story of humankind, its plight and its rescue. One regularly hears it said, or sees it written, that the implicit story goes like this:

1. Humans are made for fellowship with God;
2. Humans sin and refuse God's love;
3. God acts to restore humans to a 'right relationship' with himself.

This drastic truncation of Paul's narrative world – sometimes, indeed, supposed to be the sum total of Paul's gospel! – then results in many puzzles which western theology has struggled unsuccessfully to solve, and many slippery arguments in which the idea of a 'relationship' can at one moment be almost forensic (the 'relation' in which the accused stands to the court) and at another almost familial (the 'relationship' between a parent and child). Please note, I am not saying that Paul is not concerned either with the 'forensic' situation or the 'familial'. He is. Both of them are important. But all in their proper time. These problems are soluble if and only if we allow the main sub-plot, the story of God and humans, to be seen in its proper relation to the larger plot, the story of creation.

Granted all that, how does the narrative of God and humans play out in Paul? Here we are on much better known territory. Humans are made in God's image, charged with the vocation we have seen in relation to creation. But instead of picking up the cues of God's power and deity in creation itself, and worshipping him as the creator, they manufacture and then worship idols – items from within creation itself, which were supposed to serve as signposts to God's glory and majesty, but which humans treat as substitutes for it, like someone settling down for the night at the signpost that points to their destination rather than proceeding with the journey to the place which the signpost is indicating. As in classic Jewish theology, the point about analyzing the human plight in terms of idolatry is that this

retains a firm grip on the goodness of the created order, and locates the problem in terms of an abuse of that creation rather than in terms of the evil nature of creation leading poor humans astray. True, Paul like his Jewish predecessors does believe that evil forces can work through parts of creation. But creation itself remains good; the human problem is traced to the abuse of the good creation rather than any evil in creation itself.⁹⁵

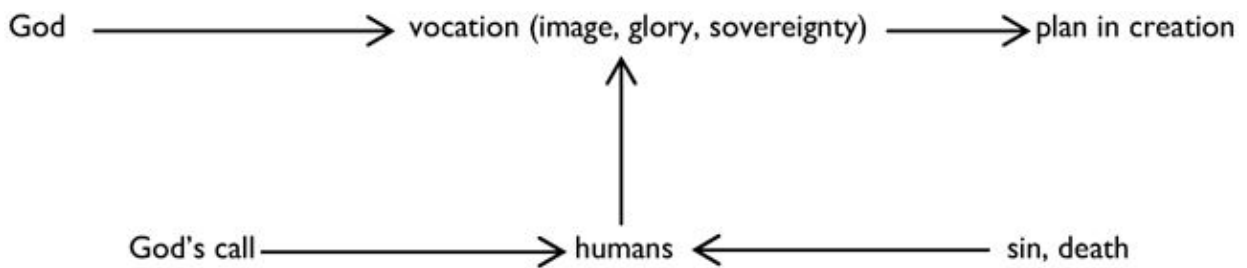
Paul's detailed understanding of what human beings actually *are* can again be seen in continuity with his Jewish traditions, but also in implicit dialogue with the surrounding culture in which, ever since the pre-Socratics, quite sophisticated analyses of human interiority had been offered. Humans, noble in reason, infinite in faculties, can be understood from a variety of angles, or perhaps in terms of several interlocking features: 'body', 'flesh', 'mind', 'heart', 'spirit', 'soul' and 'will'. These words sometimes appear to designate different 'parts' of a human being, but, as many have pointed out, it is better to see them as each encoding a particular way of looking at the human being *as a whole* but *from one particular angle*; as though one were to describe a piece of music in terms of its basic theme, its harmonic structure or its tempo – or indeed its orchestration, its historical period, its place within the composer's career or even its role within a wider cultural narrative. The song or symphony would be exactly the same, the rich, rounded whole. Each of the aspects means what it means because of all the others; but one would use different language to draw attention to these different facets or aspects of it, without implying that this facet or aspect could be split off from all the others.

So it is with what are often called Paul's 'anthropological terms'. Each has been extensively studied, and we do not need, in giving an account of the sub-plot which concerns humans, to explain them in detail. What matters is to draw attention to the way they variously encode the different aspects of the narrative, and to flag up, in addition, the way in which humans, at those different points in the story, are linked to the other sub-plots – upwards (as it were) to the large plot of creation itself, and downwards (as it were) to the plots which follow, of Israel, Torah and above all of Jesus himself.⁹⁶

It is important, to begin with, to note that *all* Paul's terms for human beings carry, in principle, a positive connotation. Even *sarx*, 'flesh', which quickly picks up and locates some of the key problems of humankind, is at least potentially neutral: there are different kinds of *sarx*, and all of them part of God's good creation.⁹⁷ The point here is that Paul's terms do not designate one 'part' of the human being as 'good', and another as 'bad', as (for instance) in a gnostic scheme. The human body, *sōma* (the word *denotes* the entire human being and *connotes* the public, visible and tangible physical presence in, and in relation to, the world) is God's creation, but is going to die 'because of sin', not because of its own inherent nature or quality. But the *sōma*, at least of those who are 'in Christ' and animated by the spirit, will be raised to new life; and in the present time the 'body' is the locus and the means of obedience, and as such is to be 'presented' to God the creator for his service.⁹⁸ The 'flesh', however, though itself neither good nor bad, comes to connote the whole human being seen from the angle of being essentially corruptible, decaying, a quintessence of dust that has no permanence or stability. Paul's critique of 'works of the flesh' and the 'mind of the flesh' is thereby linked with his critique of idolatry: 'flesh' draws attention to the creaturely existence which, owing its life to God the creator, has none in itself apart from him. That is near the heart of Paul's analysis of 'sin' seen as a human propensity and action (as opposed to 'sin' as a force or power, almost a euphemism for 'the satan').⁹⁹

If 'flesh' thus denotes the physical, made-of-dust nature of humans, connoting particularly their corruptibility and instability, the five terms for interiority, 'mind', 'heart', 'spirit', 'soul' and 'will', likewise point towards the whole human being but seen from a variety of angles. 'Mind' (*nous*) indicates the human as a thinking, reasoning creature;¹⁰⁰ 'heart' (*kardia*) the human as a creature with mysterious hidden depths from which motivations, longings and loves emerge;¹⁰¹ 'spirit' (*pneuma*) the human seen in terms of an interiority which is open to the presence and power of the creator (not least by his spirit);¹⁰² 'soul' (*psychē*) the human seen in terms of the ordinary human life with its consciousness, self-awareness, memory and imagination;¹⁰³ 'will' (*thelēma*) the human seen as one in whom the

motivations of the heart produce a settled intention towards a particular course of action.¹⁰⁴ Each can be corrupted by idolatry and sin, or just distracted and dismayed by the pressures of the world: the mind darkened and distorted, the heart a source of evil intentions, the spirit turbulent and ill at ease, the soul confused and blown about, the will bent upon doing evil. And each can be rescued, redeemed and redirected, the mind to be renewed and transformed so as to think through and approve what is good, the heart to be flooded with the love of God so that new motivations spring from its depths, the spirit to be assured by God’s spirit of its new reality, the soul to be the healthy and fruitful interiority of a God-reflecting human being, and the will to be energized towards God’s work in the world.¹⁰⁵ All of these aspects of humanity, save only ‘flesh’ or ‘flesh and blood’, which has come to designate precisely the human in rebellion and corruption, will be reaffirmed in the resurrection.¹⁰⁶ All these then are ways of saying: human beings in all their rich, multifaceted identity have a vocation, a tragedy, a rescue and a destiny, a complete narrative which nests within the larger story of God and the cosmos. We start with the initial picture of God’s plan for human beings, to which Paul refers frequently enough:

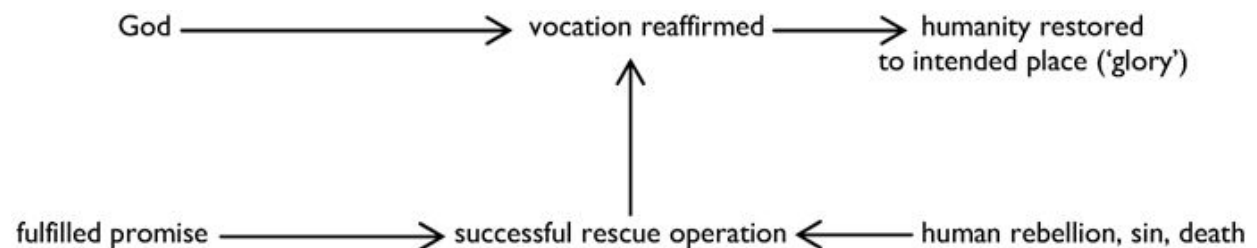


This plan for humans is thwarted because sin and death lure humans to disaster, so that the vocation bestowed on them fails. They obey the voice of the serpent; they commit idolatry; and, so far from being set in authority over the world, they have no control over themselves.¹⁰⁷ This regular Pauline analysis goes deeper than normal accounts of ‘sin’ would indicate; it has to do with a corruption, a distortion, a fatal twisting of genuine humanness into a ghastly perversion, an abuse of power which is destructive

both to those affected by the human actions and to the humans themselves. Thus the rescue operation needs to deal with this corruption as well as to restore humans to their proper place:



Already we can see that many of the accounts of what is sometimes called ‘Paul’s anthropology’, coupled with ‘Paul’s soteriology’, are at best inadequate and at worst seriously misleading. It is not simply a matter of humans being made for ‘fellowship with God’, this being spoilt by ‘sin’, and the ‘rescue operation’ being seen in terms of ‘restoring the broken fellowship’ (a scheme of thought which then grabs Paul’s language about ‘reconciliation’ and ‘righteousness’ and assumes that both are talking about this ‘relationship’, confusing both categories with one another and with this larger one). Rather, the point is that in the ‘final sequence’ of this major subplot God will, through his plan of rescue backed up by his promise, restore humans to their dignity, their ‘glory’, their place in glad, free obedience to himself and in wise, stewardly authority over the world:



This narrative, told in a hundred different hints and fuller passages in Paul’s writings, is the element that most western readers over the last half millennium or so assume is *the* main story: humans sin, God rescues them,

humans are saved. I hope it is becoming clear that though this is indeed one way (a somewhat truncated way) of pointing to the sub-plot in question it is by itself inadequate, and that when we explore this sub-plot we see the sin/salvation dynamic within its larger framework.

Just as the normal ‘sin/salvation’ scheme usually fails to spot the connection with the larger cosmic plot, so it usually fails to spot the proper answer to the question, ‘What then is God’s rescue operation, and how is it “successful”?’ The normal answer would be, of course, that the ‘successful rescue operation’ is ‘Jesus Christ’, or perhaps ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’. That would of course be true – as far as it goes. But simply to insert ‘Jesus Christ’ into the equation at this point, and to make the events of his death and resurrection bear the entire narrational load which not only rescues humankind from sin and death but also reaffirms the human vocation to be set in authority over the world, is to miss entirely Paul’s answer to the question as to *why and how* ‘Jesus Christ’ provides that answer, that rescue operation. And when that happens, not surprisingly, elements within Paul’s account of Jesus Christ are pulled out of shape and made to bear weight for which they were not designed. This dilemma runs very deep not only within protestant theology, not only within western theology whether catholic or protestant, but worryingly within a great deal of Christian theology from the third or fourth century onwards. The solution to it is to pay attention to the next sub-plot which is absolutely vital for Paul, even though it has been screened out from the official traditions of the church from at least the time of the great creeds. The Pauline answer to the question, ‘So what is the creator’s promise, and what is the intended rescue operation?’ is not ‘Jesus Christ’ as a bolt from the blue, with merely a few prototypes, hints and vague promises to point ahead to him. It is, rather, Jesus Christ – or, as we shall now say for reasons that will become obvious, Jesus the Messiah – as the fulfilment of the creator’s rescue plan. And the creator’s rescue plan was to call Abraham and his family. Here is the vital narrative element, the crucial turn in the road which (so far as I can see) almost all exegetes miss – which explains why they so often end up in the wrong part of the forest. *The story of Israel* is the thing: without it there is a hiatus, a gap, a break in the

sequence. Since some theologians have precisely wanted such a break, omitting Israel's story has been perceived as a strength rather than a weakness. But if we are to understand the way Paul thought we must allow him to tell the story in his way, not ours.

5. Yet Another Part of the (Theological) Wood: the Story of Israel

Almost all writers on the question of 'story' in Paul have agreed that the story of God and Israel must count as a crucial narrative within Paul's world. For some, though, the story of God and his people is simply a kind of detached reminiscence: Yes, they think, that was then; but this is now. The story of Israel was a problem in the first century, not least for Paul, but it is not for us, or not centrally, or not in the same way.¹⁰⁸ Go in that direction, and 'God and his people' will mean, simply and solely, the divinely constituted company of those who, like Paul, 'believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead'; in other words, the story of 'God and his people' will mean, without remainder, the story of the church, of those 'in Christ' – forgetting what the word 'Christ' meant. For Paul, however, the story of Israel is the vital, non-negotiable sub-plot, through which the action is decisively advanced.¹⁰⁹ For him, Jesus the Messiah means what he means because in and through him the creator has been faithful to his purpose not only for creation, not only for humankind, but also for Israel itself. Behind the main plot and the main sub-plot there stands a further sub-plot: like the story of Oberon and Titania, this one will have a vital effect on the entire action.

What happens if we ignore this narrative, and never enquire about its placement within Paul's largest story, that of the creator and the cosmos? The answer is obvious, because a great many readers of Paul have done exactly that. First, it will then be assumed that Paul is talking, not about the plight of creation, but simply about the plight of humans. Second, it will be assumed that when he appears to speak of a 'solution' to this 'plight', this solution is basically something to do with Jesus and his death and resurrection, seen in isolation. Insofar as Paul refers from time to time to

Abraham, he is simply a ‘predecessor’, someone in the scriptures who had faith (or: the right sort of faith!).¹¹⁰ Instead, I propose, and shall now argue, that Paul’s entire theology gains enormously in coherence and impetus if we see that he affirmed, even though he radically redrew, the particular second-Temple Jewish narrative which we studied in chapter 2: the story of God’s people, of Abraham’s people, as the people *through whom the creator was intending to rescue his creation*. This makes sense of so many passages in Paul’s letters that it ought not to be open to doubt that Paul had this narrative in mind, and gave it substantially the same meaning it had within his native Judaism – except, of course, for the radical redescription to which he had come through the shocking and totally unexpected way in which the story had in fact reached its denouement. But to read the same story with new eyes as a result of its surprising ending is still to read the same story.

This bold claim will be so counter-intuitive to so many contemporary readers of Paul (who are nevertheless often puzzled by some of his detailed discussions of Abraham, Moses, the law, ‘Israel’, and so on, but do not seek the solution to their puzzlement in the right place) that we must take it slowly, step by exegetical step.¹¹¹

To begin with, Paul affirmed the classic Pharisaic position that Israel, or as he puts it ‘the Jew’, was indeed called to be

a guide to the blind, a light to people in darkness, a teacher of the foolish, an instructor for children – all because, in the law, you possess the outline of knowledge and truth.¹¹²

This is not, we should note, a statement simply about the supposed *moral superiority* of ‘the Jew’. Paul has already addressed that, and called it into question (along with the similar supposed moral superiority of the pagan moral philosopher), in Romans 2.1–16. Jew and gentile alike have already been called to the bar of God’s tribunal. This passage is about something different: about the vocation of Israel to be *the means by which the creator God will solve the problem of the world*. It is not about the question, ‘Are Jews an exception to the rule that all have sinned?’ It depends on an implicit negative answer to that question (in line with the universal testimony of the prophets), but the actual question it is raising is, ‘Is “the Jew” then indeed

God's means of *solving the problem* of human sin and idolatry?' Part of the trouble here is that the long western tradition of reading Romans as Paul's answer to Luther's question has resulted in an implicit hermeneutical principle: we know, ahead of time, that the whole of 1.18—3.20 is simply a long-drawn-out way of saying, 'All have sinned.' Not so: it does indeed fall within the larger point that 'All have sinned,' but it is, more specifically, a way of saying, 'And Israel, called to be God's solution to the problem, has itself become part of the same problem.'

It would be easy to suppose that Paul's answer to the question as to whether 'the Jew' might indeed be God's means of solving the problem of humankind was, 'No, not at all.' He does after all lay serious charges, not indeed against every single Israelite, but against Israel as a whole. Paul knew perfectly well that he personally had not been a temple-robber, an adulterer, or a thief; it is foolish to rebuke him for implying that all Jews are guilty of these things. His point is this: the fact that such deeds can be found within Israel as a whole demonstrates that Israel, *as it stands*, cannot fulfil the scriptural vocation to be the light of the world. Paul does not, however, deny that this vocation was real, just as he does not deny that, in the law, Israel really does possess 'the outline of knowledge and truth'. Most readers, I think, do not even notice that he is here talking about *vocation* rather than *salvation*. (The very idea of Israel having a vocation to be 'God's means of rescuing the world' is itself, after all, a closed book in much theology.) As a result, most likewise ignore the fact that he *reaffirms* this vocation – despite paradoxically declaring not only that the vocation has been turned upside down, with the pagan nations blaspheming Israel's God because of Israel's behaviour (2.24), but also that God can and will call 'uncircumcised lawkeepers' to be 'the Jew', and to sit in judgment over the circumcised lawbreakers (2.25–9). This is all very shocking, but it is vital, and through it all Paul simultaneously *affirms that the vocation of Israel was true, and has not been abandoned*, and *denies that it can be carried out through ethnic Israel as it stands*.

The meaning of this strange but vital passage is something to which we must return.¹¹³ For the moment we note the all-important train of thought

which is then picked up in Romans 3.1: ‘What advantage, then, does the Jew possess?’ This is not, to repeat, to ask the question ‘Who can be saved from the debacle of the human race?’ (though that is, to be sure, in view as well in the further distance) but about the question, ‘Is “the Jew” then after all God’s agent in bringing about that rescue?’ This is why, after the initial question and answer (‘What’s the point in being a Jew? What’s the advantage in being circumcised? Much in every way’), Paul’s explanation does not highlight a gift that God has given *to* Israel, but precisely the gift that God intended to give *through* Israel. ‘To begin with,’ he writes, ‘the Jews were *entrusted with God’s oracles*’ (3.2). It is clear what ‘entrusted’ means (though you might not know it from most commentators): if John *entrusts* Bill with a message for Frank, the message is from John to Frank, not from John to Bill. This is clearly how Paul uses the term ‘entrust’: he himself has been ‘entrusted’ with the gospel, which obviously does not mean that he himself has received it and been thereby converted and saved, but that God has entrusted it to him *to pass on to others*.¹¹⁴ Here, however, what is referred to is not God’s ‘entrusting’ of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah to Paul or other apostles, but God’s ‘entrusting’ of *oracles for the nations* to the people of Israel.¹¹⁵ And the major point of the whole train of thought from 3.3 onwards is just this: to declare, powerfully if briefly, that *the creator God has not abandoned his plan of saving the world through Israel*. What was required, as in the apostolic commission, was that those entrusted with the message should be ‘faithful’. That is what Paul says about his own vocation in 1 Corinthians 4.2: ‘the main requirement for a manager is to be trustworthy’, *pistos*, ‘faithful’. Israel was supposed to be *pistos*, not simply (in other words) ‘believing in God’, but *being faithful, trustworthy, to his commission to bear his oracles to the nations*, to be ‘a guide to the blind’ and so forth, as in 2.19–20.¹¹⁶ But the nation as a whole had failed in this commission. How then was Israel’s God to be faithful to his original purpose?

This is not, as I said, something which many contemporary readers of Paul have even seen as a problem, because the theme they have been looking for is ‘How will anyone be saved?’ rather than ‘How will God rescue the world *through Israel*?’ But Paul’s specific language leaves us no choice, not only

in the positive affirmations of 2.18–20 but also with *episteuthēsan* in 3.2 and its emphatic sequel in the following verses. ‘Let God be true, and every human being false!’ God will somehow be true, faithful and just. What he has said, he will perform. He *will* rule the world through obedient humanity; that was his purpose in creation, and he will be faithful to that purpose. He *will* rescue humanity through Israel; that was his purpose in calling Abraham, and he will be faithful to that purpose.

But how will he do all this? As we shall see, Romans 3.21–26 gives the answer: *through the faithful Israelite, the Messiah*. To this we shall return. But for now we note the way this theme hurries on to its triumphant initial conclusion in Romans 4: God is *faithful* to the promises he made to Abraham, specifically here the promises of Genesis 15 which reached their climax in the strange covenant ritual of 15.12–21, the revelation to Abram while he was in a ‘deep sleep’, recalling the ‘deep sleep’ of Adam when one side of him was removed to create Eve.¹¹⁷ This promise, that Abram would ‘inherit the world’, is to be accomplished through the exodus which is spoken of in the covenant passage, and will mean that God will indeed be true to what he had said to ‘the Jew’. Through the Messiah, Jesus, the purpose in calling Abraham, the purpose of ‘the Jew’, is fulfilled: God is rescuing the human race, and thereby the whole creation, through his faithfulness to the original promise.¹¹⁸ God is rescuing the world through Abraham’s seed. Thus, whereas for most modern readers the story seems to presuppose that God *has* changed his mind, first trying to rescue the world through Israel and then, when that didn’t work, going a different route by sending his son, for Paul the latter move is the *fulfilment* of the former; and in Romans 9—11 he argues strongly that this fulfilment was in fact the one which God had always had in mind.¹¹⁹

Romans 2.17–24 and its follow-up passages in 3.1–4 and chapter 4 are by no means the only places where Paul highlights God’s promise not only *to* Israel but *through* Israel. Though, again, this point is often missed, it lies behind the whole argument of Galatians 2—4: if Paul could have said (as many of his interpreters would have preferred him to say), ‘Why are you bothering about Israel, about being a member of Abraham’s family? That has

all now been swept away in Jesus,' he could have made the argument much shorter and simpler (and, of course, considerably more Marcionite). The reason he does not do that is not because of some atavistic, ancestral pride, the inability after all to give up his own sense that there must be *something* at least important in his own national tradition.¹²⁰ His reason is that he believes that in the gospel Israel's God has in fact been faithful to the purpose *through* Israel for the world, and that, unless one recognizes this point, one has not even arrived at the place where subsequent discussions can begin.

It is this, of course, which then generates the sharp distinction he draws between the promises to Abraham and the Torah-covenant with Moses, to which we shall return. But the point ought to be clear, not least in the closing verses of Galatians 3: in the Messiah, God has done what he said he would do to and through Abraham, and the result of that is that at last the gentiles can share in 'Abraham's blessing'.¹²¹

This comes to highly paradoxical expression in the great narrative of Romans 9—11. If there was any doubt that Paul was working with the large-scale narrative of Israel, a close reading of Romans 9.6—10.21 ought to dispel it: this is a classic restatement of the story of Abraham's family, and it leads exactly to the conclusion we might have expected from our earlier study of the closing chapters of Deuteronomy and the way they were read in the second-Temple period. God has been 'righteous', has been 'faithful' to the promises he made all along; that, in line with 3.1–8 which is the earlier, clipped statement of the same sequence of thought, is the point of the whole narrative. 'God has not been unjust' (9.14), even though every human being has been false. Through the Messiah he has done what he said, and has thereby generated the renewed covenant promised in Deuteronomy 30, a covenant which now stands open to all peoples. The covenant narrative has generated the covenant solution: Israel's story has been the motor propelling God's purposes forwards and accomplishing salvation for the whole world, Jew and gentile alike. That is the point of Romans 9 and 10.

This, then, is where we find the strong and central affirmation that there is indeed a *single divine plan* to which God has been faithful. This is how the

vital sub-plot works within the larger narrative. At this point Reformed and Lutheran theology have traditionally parted company (with plenty of local variations), with the Reformed stressing the single plan and the Lutherans tending to say that God has cut off the Israel-plan and done something completely different – a view which now finds fresh expression in today’s would-be ‘apocalyptic’ viewpoint. Nevertheless, as we shall now discover, the idea of a single divine plan to which God has been faithful is precisely what Paul is arguing. *This is how he sees the complex story working out.* It is important to realize that, though we can speak of his ‘redefinition’ of traditional Jewish ways of conceiving all this, as far as Paul was concerned God had finally unveiled the single original purpose, whose sharp differences from other continuing Jewish ideas was to be attributed to Israel’s failure (and Paul’s own earlier failure) to understand what was going on, not to bizarre new ideas which Paul was foisting onto the tradition, thereby distorting it in service of mere quirky novelty. Granted, the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah, and the whole idea of the overlap of the ages which that great double event brought about, were not only completely unexpected but also shocking in their implication for how the story was meant to run. But Paul insisted that what God had in fact done was what God had in fact always intended to do. The sense he now made of Israel’s story was the sense it took on in the light of its scandalous and unanticipated conclusion. But the story still did, for him, the job it was designed to do within the larger narrative world.

As becomes apparent in Romans 9—11, this single divine plan has been hugely paradoxical, because the way in which Israel’s story has been God’s instrument in the salvation of the world has been precisely through Israel’s ‘casting away’. This is the point of the (to us) strange passage about negative predestination in 9.14–29: Israel is simultaneously ‘the Messiah’s people’ and ‘the Messiah’s people *according to the flesh*’, as we might have deduced from the opening summary statement in 9.4–5. Israel’s story, that is, was always designed (as many second-Temple Jews would have insisted) to come to its climax in the arrival and accomplishment of the Messiah; but that accomplishment, as Paul had come to see, involved the Messiah himself

being ‘cast away for the sake of the world’. Thus Israel, as the Messiah’s people, is seen to have exercised its vocational instrumentality in God’s rescue operation for the world precisely by acting out that newly discovered and deeply shocking ‘messianic’ vocation: Israel is indeed the means of bringing God’s rescue to the world, but it will be through Israel’s acting out of the Messiah-shaped vocation, of being ‘cast away’ for the sake of the world. Paul finally says it out loud (at a point where most interpreters have long since lost the thread and so fail to make the connection) in 11.12, 15; this is where we see why Paul did not deny the ‘boast’ of 2.19–20, but went on affirming it paradoxically, even though it raised the questions of 3.1–8 to which he has at last returned and which he has at last answered.¹²² Salvation has come to the gentiles – through Israel’s *paraptōma*, the ‘stumble’ in which Israel recapitulates the sin of Adam, as in 5.20. ‘The reconciliation of the world’ has come about – through Israel’s *apobolē*, ‘casting away’, the ‘rejection’ in which Israel recapitulates the death of the Messiah, as in 5.10–11. At the heart of one of Paul’s strangest and most challenging chapters we find exactly this theme: that the creator God, having entered into a covenant with Abraham’s family that he would bless the world through that family, has been faithful to his promise, even though it has been in the upside-down and inside-out way now unveiled in the Messiah.

As often in Paul, one or two single-sentence summaries in one chapter indicate what he thinks he has been arguing in the previous ones. We should certainly take 11.11, 13 in that way, as his own summary of the entire line of thought in 9.6—10.21.¹²³ This is what the famous (notorious?) passages about ‘election’ are getting at. And that is why, in the same chapter, Paul can turn so dramatically on the gentile Christians among his Roman audience and warn them severely against any incipient anti-Jewish sentiment, still less wrong theological conclusions: if what has happened to Abraham’s physical family, in being ‘cast away for the sake of the Gentiles’, has been part of the long and unexpected outworking of the original purpose, to bless the world through Abraham’s family even though that family itself might turn away from its vocation, there can be no reason whatever to suggest that God has now finished with the Jewish people, that Jews are no longer welcome in the

Messiah's renewed family. That family remains their own 'olive tree', the tree in which they were branches but from which they were cut out because of unbelief (11.20). How appropriate it would then be for them to be grafted back in.

This, then, is the first and in some ways the most important point about Paul's understanding of the story of Israel and where it belongs within the larger plot of creator and cosmos. Paul reaffirms God's vocation to Israel, the vocation to be the means of rescuing humanity and thus creation itself, even though he radically redefines that vocation around the Messiah. Granted, this picture emerges into the full light only in Romans (and only in passages which, through a long tradition, have not usually been read in this way). But once we grasp the point we can see it under the crucial central chapters of Galatians, too. This, after all, is how elements of worldviews work: normally hidden, only emerging into the light when necessary. Once we have this element in focus from Romans and Galatians, however, we can glimpse it elsewhere too.

The second thing about the story of Israel for Paul is that, just as in the second-Temple texts we examined in chapter 2, Paul believed that the *single story of Israel* had passed through a long tunnel which, for want of a better way of putting it, we have labelled 'exile'.¹²⁴ Again, the story of Romans 9.6—10.13 should make this clear: from 9.6 onwards, Paul is telling the story in a careful narrative sequence, from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (and their respective brothers) and on to the time of Moses, Pharaoh and the exodus, coming forwards then to the time of the prophets and the disaster of exile. But at this point we begin to see, looming up behind the continuous narrative, the promise to which Paul had alluded already as far back as 2.26: the circumcision of the heart which would enable people to 'keep the precepts of the Torah', as in Deuteronomy 30.

Paul makes considerable use of the closing chapters of Deuteronomy in this whole line of thought, alluding to Deuteronomy 32 in particular at various places,¹²⁵ and allowing (as in 4QMMT) the climactic chapter Deuteronomy 30 to shape his own statement of the new reality which has come into being through the Messiah. Deuteronomy 27—30, as we saw in

chapter 2, functioned for many second-Temple Jews (including, most likely, the kind of Pharisee that Saul of Tarsus had been) not merely as a type, or as the model of an abstract pattern of divine action in history, but as long-range *narrative prophecy*. It told a *story*: Israel would fail, would be disloyal to YHWH and would fall under the ‘curse’. The ultimate sanction of that ‘curse’ was exile, not as an arbitrary punishment but precisely because the covenant had always been about the land. There would come a time, however, when God would circumcise the hearts of his people so that they were at last able to fulfil Torah. That was when the great renewal would come. This is the second-Temple story, rooted in Deuteronomy, which Paul inherited.

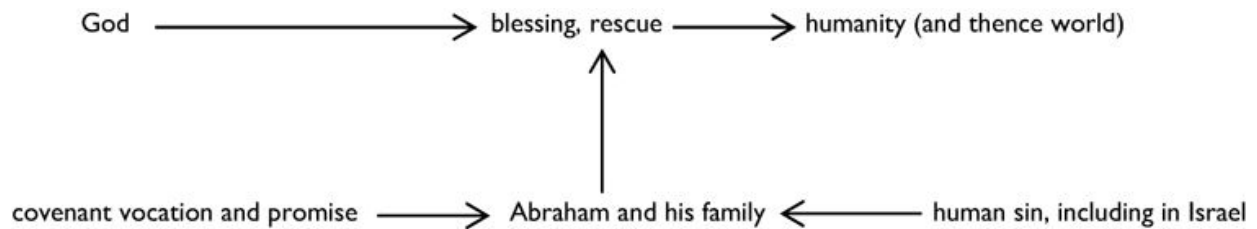
Paul has taken this narrative, the basic script for his second sub-plot, and has fused it together with the story to which we shall shortly come, the third and central sub-plot, the one which makes sense of all the others, namely, the story of the crucified and risen Messiah. Through the Messiah, the ‘end and goal of the law’ as in Romans 10.4, Deuteronomy 30 is at last fulfilled – not only by Abraham’s physical family but also, as in Romans 2.25–29, by Gentiles as well. The faithfulness of God is matched by the faithfulness of this renewed people, a people now composed of Abraham’s ‘seed’ – called from every nation.¹²⁶ Israel’s covenant story has thus borne the fruit that had always been promised: Abraham is ‘inheriting the world’, discovering that he has a worldwide family, characterized by *pistis* (‘faith’/‘faithfulness’), constituting the Deuteronomy-30 people, the returned-from-exile people, the people of the new covenant.¹²⁷ That is how the human story gets back on track, which was what Israel’s story was designed to do in the first place. And that is how the creator’s purpose for the whole cosmos is to be accomplished. There is no opposition between a ‘theology of creation’ and a ‘theology of covenant’. The creator’s purpose for the cosmos is the ultimate plot; the covenant plan for Israel is a vital link in the chain of sub-plots by which that ultimate plot is resolved.

Mention of the ‘new covenant’ – which is as good a shorthand as we are likely to find for what is going on in Deuteronomy 30, despite the continuing prejudice against such terminology – nudges us towards 2 Corinthians 3,

where there is a longer story to be told than we need to embark on at the present point. Suffice it here to note one thing. There is indeed a serious and substantial contrast between the two ‘ministries’, that of the ‘old covenant’ under Moses and that of the ‘new’ of which Paul himself is a minister. But Paul has not introduced the topic of Moses and the ‘covenant’ because some shadowy opponents have insisted on talking about Moses (or, indeed, on introducing Jewish categories at all) and thus have forced him to think of a suitable reply even though he would not normally bother with such categories.¹²⁸ As in 1 Corinthians 10.1–4, where Paul makes it clear that he envisages the Corinthian congregation as, in some sense or other, the true descendants of those who accompanied Moses out of Egypt, so here he sees the church in Corinth as the covenant community promised in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. And we should note, not least, the way in which the whole ‘new covenant’ theme of 2 Corinthians 3 pushes the argument forwards towards the explicit ‘new creation’ theme of 2 Corinthians 5. That is exactly how we should expect the logic to work. The stories fit together in the way that plots and sub-plots regularly do.

There are many other ways in which the story of Israel emerges in Paul’s writings as a major theme. We shall keep track of them as the argument proceeds. But we have said enough at this point to nail down the point of the present exposition: that this story, the narrative of Abraham’s family which reached its climax in the Messiah, had always been intended (by God himself) to be the means through which the world and humankind would be rescued from their plight. It has now arrived, however paradoxically (with a crucified Messiah!), at the point where that purpose is fulfilled. This is the third level of plot, the second sub-plot within the larger narrative, and we can display it like this.

First, we have Israel’s original vocation, to bring blessing to the world poisoned by idolatry, pride and violence:

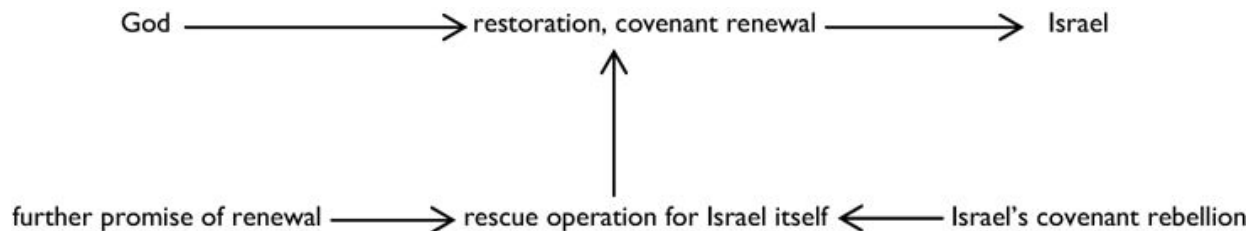


Then, however, the fact that Israel too is ‘in Adam’ (which is the point of Romans 5.20 and 7.7–25) appears to overthrow all this.¹²⁹ Abraham and his family are stuck within their own failure to keep the covenant. According to Deuteronomy 27—30 and 32, the result of this is not some otherworldly ‘punishment’, but the direct corollary of the failure: exile. If the promise focused on the land, faithlessness leads to exile.

This is the direct result, as Paul was aware, of the creator God choosing not to abandon his purpose to work in the world through human beings. Even when humans rebelled, God would still work through a human: all die in Adam, and all will be made alive in the Messiah.¹³⁰ How would this happen? God would choose a human nation, knowing them to be, as Adam’s descendants, potential and actual rebels: Abraham himself was scarcely a straightforward ‘saint’, and as for Isaac and Jacob ... Through this people God would rescue humans, and thus the world. Thus far the main plot (God bringing order to his world through humans) and the first sub-plot (God deciding to rescue humans in order to succeed in the main plot). This second sub-plot – the story of Israel – then runs into its own problem: the chosen people is potentially and actually ‘faithless’. This, once more, does not mean that God will abandon the plan. Deuteronomy already envisaged, rather strikingly, just that kind of disaster in chapters 27—9 and 32, and it also envisaged the rescue and restoration that would be necessary for the entire plan, now with its three layers, to get back on track none the less. And these are precisely the passages, in Deuteronomy 30 and 32, on which Paul draws to reflect on where the great narrative has now arrived.

What was needed, for the plan to work out, was a rescue operation *for* the rescue operation; as though a fire engine were to become stuck in a ditch on the way to rescuing people from a burning building, so that the fire engine

would itself need rescuing in order then to proceed on its way to the original rescuing mission. What would be needed for Israel, and what Deuteronomy and Paul's other prophetic sources insist is to be provided, is a rescue operation for the people whose vocation was to rescue the world:



Once again, as with the story of humanity in need of rescue, this raises the question, 'But what is this rescue operation?' That will lead us to the final sub-plot, the deepest and most central theme of all Paul's thinking and storytelling. That will then generate the 'final sequence' for the Israel-sub-plot, in which Israel's purpose will be accomplished and, through this 'Israel', God will indeed bless the whole world:



This, we note, is exactly the point Paul is making in Galatians 3.14: that now at last 'the blessing of Abraham might come upon the gentiles'. We note Romans 15.8–9 as well, where (to anticipate our own conclusion by glancing at Paul's) the Messiah became a servant of the circumcised to demonstrate the truthfulness of God, by accomplishing the promises he had made to the patriarchs, and by bringing the nations to praise God for his mercy.¹³¹ But before we can move to discover how this 'rescue operation for Israel' has taken place – the 'play within the play' around which all else, in the end, will revolve – we must explore another story, related to the one we have

been examining, the one which causes so many puzzles to Pauline interpreters but which, if approached from this angle, can be seen in a new, silvery light. I refer to the story of the Torah.

[6. The Multiple Meanings of Moonshine: the Role of Torah in the Story of Israel](#)

The story of Torah has been made unnecessarily complicated within both scholarly and popular presentations of Paul's thought. There is one main reason, and clarifying this will vindicate (in case any are still doubtful) the kind of narrative analysis I am currently offering. The reason why Paul's handling of Torah has seemed so strange is simple: it has been located within the wrong sub-plot within Paul's complex narrative world. My proposal here, to be filled out as the book progresses, is that when we see Paul's statements about Torah in their proper context, which is primarily that of the sub-plot we have just been studying, namely the story of Israel, then a good deal if not all of the confusion evaporates.

Indeed, we might go further. The fact that a good many interpreters have ignored this sub-plot altogether has forced them to locate Torah within one or other of the other implicit narratives, where, not surprisingly, it has appeared puzzling and contradictory. When, instead, we do a close analysis of the story of Israel in Paul, it appears that Torah emerges in a variety of roles, which are nevertheless comprehensible within the larger narrative as a whole. It is, to that extent, like the role of the moon, and Moonshine, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: it is always there somewhere, but will play different roles within the different levels of the narrative. And it will play a crucial role when it matters most.^{[132](#)}

It is increasingly apparent to many readers of Paul, whether or not they fully work the point through, that when Paul writes *nomos* he normally means the Jewish law, the Torah. The two other options have proved less sustainable. The once fashionable practice of treating it more generally, as a kind of universal moral law, is very difficult to square with the actual texts and arguments.^{[133](#)} Similarly, the once popular suggestion that at certain

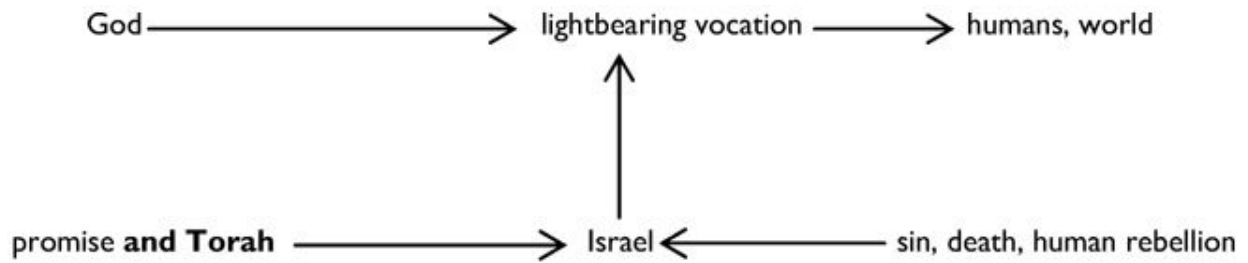
important points Paul uses *nomos* to refer to a ‘law’ in the sense of ‘principle’ or even ‘system’ has not lasted the course. As we shall see, it reduces Paul’s subtle, sharp-edged comments to bland and blunted statements which do not really belong in the actual arguments he is mounting.¹³⁴

We shall look at many relevant passages as the book progresses. For the moment we simply sketch the *implicit narrative* in which Torah plays its role, and show how that framework makes sense of some key statements.¹³⁵

To begin with, we locate Torah firmly within Paul’s implied retelling of the story of Israel, where, from the biblical origins onwards, Torah is the good gift of God. Though Paul does not refer specifically to Israel’s vocation to be God’s ‘royal priesthood and holy nation’,¹³⁶ his remarks about Israel’s vocation indicate that he was clearly aware of this theme. Paul highlights, rather, Torah’s promise of life.¹³⁷ This goes back to Deuteronomy 30 once more, where Israel is invited to ‘choose life’, reflecting the promise which Paul quotes twice from Leviticus 18: ‘the one who does these things shall live in them.’¹³⁸

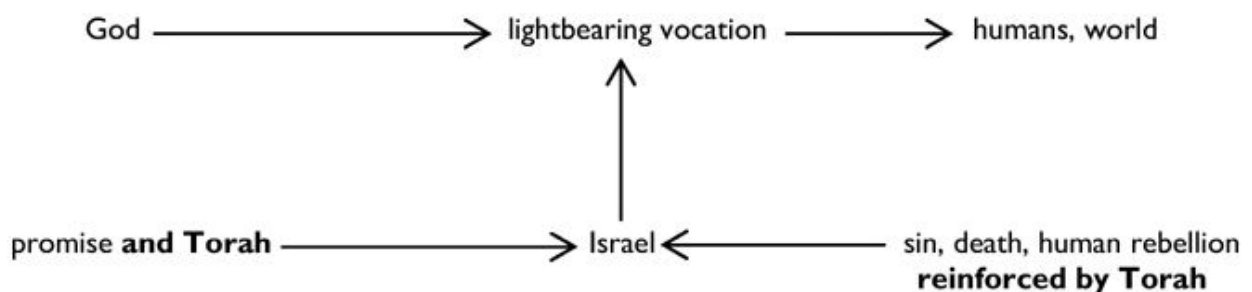
This sense of overall purpose is complemented by other aspects of the Sinai revelation. Torah is given to bind Israel to God as in a marriage covenant, to separate Israel from the pagan world so that Israel may be the bearer of God’s light to that world, rather than having the world snuff it out.¹³⁹ Torah will be the standard by which Israel will be judged at the last day: Israel, called to be the people through whom, in some texts, God would exercise his final judgment on the world, is now itself to be judged.¹⁴⁰

Torah thus appears to play a role, within Paul’s retelling of the story of Israel, as a ‘helper’ within Israel’s original vocation: it will help Israel to be God’s people, the nation called (as in Romans 2, picking up the Isaianic vocation) to be a light to those in darkness:



Torah, in other words, is given to help Israel live out its vocation.

But from the very start it is apparent that Torah does a quite different job as well. On its first appearance, when Moses comes down the mountain for the first time, it condemns Israel for worshipping the golden calf, an important incident in later rabbinic thinking and one to which Paul alludes as well. *Because the chosen nation, the bearers of God's solution to the plight of the world, are themselves infected with that plight, Torah must remind them of their ambiguous position.* We thus find Torah apparently preventing the Israel-purpose from going ahead: the curse of Torah, falling on Israel, prevents the intended Abrahamic blessing from reaching the world, and brings wrath on God's people themselves, magnifying their 'trespass' so that the Adamic nature they share with the rest of humankind is writ large. That is the combined message of Galatians 3.10–14, Romans 4.15 and 5.20. Torah is thus apparently an 'opponent', in terms of the divine purpose for Israel, not simply a 'helper'. This, however, is not in the least inconsistent, because the double role of Torah is *a direct result and function of the ambiguous role of Israel itself*, the solution-bearing people who are also part of the problem:



Like the moon in the *Dream*, Torah appears on both sides of the equation, not because there is anything wrong with Torah – or with Paul’s argument! – but because of the double-edged nature of the story, of Israel’s vocation and identity. That is the point underneath 2 Corinthians 3: the apparent comparison between Paul’s ministry and that of Moses turns out, in the end, to be a comparison between Paul’s *audience* and that of Moses. There wasn’t anything wrong with Torah, but only with the people to whom it was given. Exactly the same is true in Romans 8.3: the Torah was incapable of giving the life it promised, *because it was ‘weak through the flesh’*, in other words, because the material on which it had to work was inadequate for the project it had in mind. This is why Paul can say in Romans 3.20 that ‘through the law comes the knowledge of sin.’

Nevertheless, Israel is bound to live ‘under Torah’, because Torah is the necessary guardian, to look after God’s people, to keep them heading in the right direction, against the day when the solution will be provided. Hence the chronological sequence in Galatians 3 and 4, in which the law is introduced into the Abrahamic narrative which has already been running for nearly half a millennium, in order to keep guard on God’s people like a *paidagōgos*, one who looks after a child and keeps it (as it were) house trained.¹⁴¹ The narrative is all: the role of Torah is its role within the story. Insofar as Torah tells Israel to remain separate from the nations, and provides the basic symbolic markers to indicate how that is to work (circumcision, food laws, sabbath), it is *both* necessary and God-given on the one hand *and* strictly temporary on the other. Like a vital piece of scaffolding, Torah must do its job while the building is going up, but when the building is completed – ‘when the time had fully come’, as in Galatians 4.4 – then a different marker will be appropriate, not because the Torah was demonic, or given by wicked angels, or badly thought out, or a blundering nuisance distorting the nature of true religion, but *because its necessary preliminary role had been accomplished*. The larger structure, in God’s mind from the call of Abraham onwards, had now arrived. Here the double role of Torah, which appears so strange and paradoxical within a non-narrative would-be soteriology,

appears instead natural and appropriate. Get the story right, and the other elements of the worldview emerge into clarity and consistency.

The sharpest statement of the apparent paradox is found in Romans 7, and the diagram above shows already, from quite a simple starting-point, what Paul has in mind in that dense and demanding, but also fascinating, passage. (I assume for present purposes that the 'I' in this passage is a rhetorical device, not unlike what we find in Galatians 2.18–21, through which Paul is able to describe what has happened to 'Israel according to the flesh' but without seeming to distance himself by telling the story in the third person.¹⁴²) First, he describes the Sinai event, the arrival of Torah in Israel, in terms which deliberately evoke the arrival of the primal command in the Garden of Eden. Here already we see the double effect of Torah, as above: it promises life, but also accuses and condemns:

I would not have known covetousness if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin grabbed its opportunity through the commandment, and produced all kinds of covetousness within me. Apart from the law, sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. The commandment which pointed to life turned out, in my case, to bring death. For sin grabbed its opportunity through the commandment. It deceived me, and, through it, killed me.¹⁴³

So far, so good (at least in terms of comprehensibility; the situation described is not a happy one, but at least we can grasp what is being said). But then a new twist enters the argument, signalled already by the dense and initially surprising 5.20a, where Paul says, 'the law came in alongside, so that the trespass might be filled out to its full extent.' Once we consider what is going on, however, it becomes clear: 5.12–21 is telling, in briefest outline, the enormous overarching story of Adam and the Messiah, of trespass and grace, and the law 'comes in alongside' into this larger story with the deliberate effect of filling out the 'trespass' of Adam to its full extent. This is only comprehensible if we assume the scenario we have been sketching, namely the vocation of Israel to be the people through whom God was to rescue the human race, and the new twist that Paul has discerned in that story, namely that the rescue operation involves Israel being 'cast away for the reconciliation of the world', acting out Adam's transgression. That is

exactly the point, and Paul is already sketching the groundwork for it in 5.20 and 7.7–25, before he can then spell it out in detail in 9—11.

It now emerges that the way this ‘casting away’ has taken place is precisely *through Torah*. Here is the dark mystery which emerges in Paul’s otherwise puzzling phrases: *I through the law died to the law?*¹⁴⁴ Yes: Torah’s condemnation of Israel is the means by which the divine purpose is strangely fulfilled. The ‘I’ of Galatians 2.18–21 must die with the Messiah and rise again; and Torah is the appointed means by which that happens, fulfilling its strange task of ‘shutting up everything under sin’ (3.22).¹⁴⁵ There is a depth to Paul’s analysis which is missed entirely when exegetes suppose that the only alternative is to imagine Paul having either a ‘positive’ or a ‘negative’ view of Torah – and then accusing him of inconsistency because he seems to oscillate between the two. Understand the relevant subplot, and its role in relation to the other layers of plot, and the roles which Torah plays will become clear. Paul is not flailing around, waving his arms in the air vaguely, now this way, now that. He has said exactly what he wanted to say at each point.¹⁴⁶

This then explains the repeated *hina*, ‘so that’, in Romans 7.13, which exactly and emphatically picks up 5.20:

5.20: The law came in alongside, *so that [hina]* the trespass might be filled out to its full extent.

7.13a: Was it that good thing, then [i.e. the law], that brought death to me? Certainly not! On the contrary; it was sin, *in order that [hina]* it might appear as sin, working through the good thing and producing death in me.

7.13b: This was *in order that [hina]* sin might become very sinful indeed, through the commandment.

The point is that God’s plan, through Israel, for the rescue of the human race (and thus for the rescue and restoration of the whole creation) meant that Israel had to become the place where ‘sin’, the personified power opposed to God’s plan and purpose, would be ‘increased’, would ‘appear as sin’, would ‘become exceedingly sinful’. *And Torah was playing its God-given role within that strange purpose.*

This is the point which Paul explains in the well-known passage which follows, describing the continuing state of Israel under Torah. As we saw in

one of the diagrams above, *Torah appears both as ‘helper’ and as ‘opponent’*. Only if we have failed to understand how the narratives work, how the sub-plots fit together, would this seem surprising or contradictory. Torah is the means of making Israel what Israel must be in God’s purposes. But God’s purpose is that Israel, though rightly drawn to Torah insofar as it is God’s holy and good law, must be shown up not only as the people of God but as a people who are still ‘in Adam’. This is exactly the effect of Torah:

We know, you see, that the law is spiritual. I, however, am made of flesh, sold as a slave under sin’s authority. I don’t understand what I do. I don’t do what I want, you see, but I do what I hate. So if I do what I don’t want to do, I am agreeing that the law is good.

But now it is no longer I that do it; it’s sin, living within me. I know, you see, that no good thing lives in me, that is, in my human flesh. For I can will the good, but I can’t perform it. For I don’t do the good thing I want to do, but I end up doing the evil thing I don’t want to do. So if I do what I don’t want to do, it’s no longer ‘I’ doing it; it’s sin, living inside me.

This, then, is what I find about the law: when I want to do what is right, evil lies close at hand! I delight in God’s law, you see, according to my inmost self; but I see another ‘law’ in my limbs and organs, fighting a battle against the law of my mind, and taking me as a prisoner in the law of sin which is in my limbs and organs.¹⁴⁷

Nothing whatever is gained, exegetically or theologically, by supposing that the ‘law’ in the last few lines of that passage is a ‘principle’ or ‘system’. The whole passage has been about the law, the Mosaic law, the Torah; and the frustration the passage expresses is neither (a) the psychological torment of the young Jew, discovering law and lust at the same time, nor (b) the puzzle of the existentialist, trying to seize life by the performance of the categorical imperative only to discover that this produces inauthenticity, nor yet (c) the frustration of the Christian, wanting to serve God wholeheartedly but finding that sin continues to clog the wheels.¹⁴⁸ No doubt all of those interpretations may represent true accounts of that which they purport to describe, but none of them catches the reality of what Paul himself is talking about when he declares that ‘the Jew’, as in 2.17–24, really and rightly delights in the God-given law but discovers that the law continually reminds him that he too is ‘in Adam’. The law has come in, as in Romans 5.20, in order to fill out the (Adamic) trespass to its full height.

This is actually the same dilemma as we find in that earlier rhetorically autobiographical fragment, Galatians 2.17–18:

Well, then; if, in seeking to be declared ‘righteous’ in the Messiah, we ourselves are found to be ‘sinners’, does that make the Messiah an agent of ‘sin’? Certainly not! If I build up once more the things which I tore down, I demonstrate that I am a lawbreaker.

The choice here is clear: either (a) come with the Messiah, dying and so moving outside the realm of the law (as in Romans 7.1–6), and as a result be a ‘sinner’ in the technical and now irrelevant sense precisely of being ‘outside the law’; or (b) embrace Torah, delight in it, build up the fence of Torah around yourself – and discover that Torah will then say, ‘You are a lawbreaker’, a transgressor, a *parabatēs*. The point of Paul’s long description of this Israelite ‘under the law’ in Romans 7 is then to say, simultaneously, (a) that this is the necessary thing, the thing that had to happen, the thing for which God gave Torah in the first place (hence the repeated *hina* of 5.20 and 7.13, hence the firm statement in Galatians 3.22 that ‘scripture concluded everything under sin’), and (b) that this nevertheless leaves ‘Israel according to the flesh’ in the position of lament, rightly delighting in God’s Law and inevitably finding that this same law pronounces the sentence of condemnation. The cry of distress is thus the corporate version of the cry from the cross. This was how the divine plan to save the world through Israel had to come about:

What a miserable person I am! Who is going to rescue me from the body of this death? Thank God – through Jesus our Messiah and lord! So then, left to my own self I am enslaved to God’s law with my mind, but to sin’s law with my human flesh.¹⁴⁹

At this point I want to propose a slight modification of an earlier argument. I suggested twenty years ago that this then sets up the dense statement of Romans 8.3–4 in terms of a narrative in which, this time, Torah itself is the ‘hero’, the character who has been set a task, who finds this task impossible, but who, with fresh help, is able after all to succeed in the task.¹⁵⁰ This then renders the statement as a strongly positive one about Torah, in line with the positive statements in 7.12, 14. The Torah is not a bad thing, now happily swept aside by the Pauline gospel message in favour of something else. It is

a good thing, given by Israel's God, but it was frustrated in its purpose by the 'sinful flesh' of the Israel on which it had to operate. Now that the 'sinful flesh' has been dealt with in the death of the Messiah, Torah is able at last to fulfil its original purpose – through the death of the Messiah and the power of the spirit.

I am not so sure now that this account catches exactly what Paul is saying, though the result is still a positive account of Torah. Translations of 8.3 often turn *nomos* into the subject ('What the law could not do'), but the Greek is *to gar adynaton tou nomou*, 'for the impossible thing of the law', which leaves the question more open. One could, perhaps, say, 'what was impossible through the law, God has done.' But, as the continuing sentence makes clear, the task was always to produce a *people* in whom *to dikaiōma tou nomou*, 'the righteous decree of the Torah', might be fulfilled. On the other hand, the law is firmly the subject of the strongly positive 8.2 ('the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus, released you from the law of sin and death'), which is then explained by 8.3. So, though 8.3 may need to be read with more nuance, the overall result is much the same.¹⁵¹

At this point, after all, Paul is exactly in line with the earlier hints in 2.25–9. That passage is regularly ignored or downplayed on the assumption that it functions simply as an aside within a general argument for universal sinfulness. Not so. When Paul spoke there of uncircumcised people who 'keep the righteous decrees of the Torah' (*dikaiōmata tou nomou*), which he can then say more briefly in terms of 'the uncircumcision who fulfil the law' (*ton nomon telousa*), he means what he says. We should not make a sharp distinction between the singular and plural of *dikaiōma* in 8.4 and 2.26, but should pay attention instead to the wider clues in the surrounding passages which indicate that Paul is working with the same train of thought, only now at a different level of the argument.

So who is he talking about? In 2.29 he refers, cryptically, to 'the Jew in secret'. This person is 'circumcised', but 'in spirit not in letter' (*en pneumatī ou grammati*, 2.29), just as in 7.6 he speaks of those who, through the Messiah's death, are set free from their bondage to serve 'in the newness of the spirit, not in the oldness of the letter' (*en kainotēti pneumatos kai ou*

palaiotēti grammatos). It is the same point, more fully expressed. What has happened, in terms of the analysis of the implicit narrative, is not so much that Torah, as the hero of a story, has been successful in its quest, but that the *Israel*-story, in which Torah played two necessary roles at once, both ‘helper’ and ‘opponent’, has been resolved by the death of Israel-in-person, the Messiah:



Torah now has no fewer than three roles within the story, not unlike the Moon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As usual, Paul does not say all that is in his mind at any one time, but to understand the things he does say with such dense and often cryptic brevity we need to spell out these stories and see how their different elements actually work. (Hence the virtue, as I unrepentantly believe, of actantial analyses, which enable us to put under the microscope narratives which might otherwise remain opaque.) Here, helped by the clues from 2.26–9 and 7.1–6 (with their parallels in 2 Corinthians 3.1–6), further reinforced by the language of law-keeping and law-fulfilment in 8.4–8, we can see the claim that Paul is making. *Something has happened*, an event of great magnitude, which has transformed the situation from that of the frustration of Israel according to the flesh into what, in his own words, is now a ‘new covenant’, involving ‘the circumcision of the heart’.

Two correlated events, in other words, have taken place. First, we have the decisive action of the Messiah (see below), which is precisely aimed at bringing to its fulfilment the divine plan for Israel, and which therefore enters into the place, and the narrative moment, where Torah’s different and necessary roles come rushing together. Second, we have the establishment of a renewed people of God, a people ‘in the Messiah’, a people that ‘fulfils Torah’, that ‘keeps Torah’s commands’ through the renewal and indwelling

of the spirit,¹⁵² but which does so without finding itself trapped by Torah's condemnation of those who, though delighting in Torah as God's holy and just law, are nevertheless 'in Adam'. These two events (the work of Messiah and spirit) are clearly the fruit of the narrative Paul has been unfolding since Romans 5, which was itself grounded in, and indeed summed up, the story of 1.18—4.25, not least the specific narrative of Romans 6 and 7.1–6. There, through the Messiah's death and resurrection, and by implication (7.6) the work of the spirit (which will be spelled out more fully in chapter 8), a people has been constituted 'in the Messiah', a people who have themselves died 'in him', thereby leaving behind the solidarity of Adam, and the solidarity of Torah-under-Adam where Israel according to the flesh continues to languish (6.14). It is this people, this in-Messiah people, this led-by-the-spirit people, this died-to-sin-and-living-to-God people (6.11) that now, with great but comprehensible paradox, simultaneously find themselves (a) 'not under Torah' (6.14) and also (b) 'fulfilling the decrees of Torah' (2.26). This new-covenant people is 'not under Torah' in the sense that it is not 'Israel according to the flesh', living in the place where Torah goes on pronouncing the necessary and proper sentence of condemnation. But it 'fulfils the decrees of Torah', and indeed 'keeps God's commandments', insofar as it is the Deuteronomy-30 people in whom what had been impossible under Torah, because of Israel's fleshly identification with Adam, is now accomplished by the spirit.¹⁵³

The resolution of the paradox, then, is easy once we realize *how the narrative works*, the narrative (that is) of Israel, within which the narrative role of Torah is to be located. (Think again of the moon in the *Dream*: is it a positive symbol or a negative one? Answer: it is both, of course, and much, much more, depending on where it occurs within the story.) It is no good trying to squash the air out of Paul's stories to fit them into the little boxes of either Reformation thought (is the law a good thing [Calvin] or a bad thing [Luther]?) or post-Enlightenment debates about Kant's categorical imperative (do we believe in deontology, consequentialism, or existentialism? – in other words, do we believe in moral rules, or do we find them to be artificial or even dehumanizing?). Rather, we have to follow the

story the way Paul tells it. And, since he is constantly giving hints and clues that he is himself following the much older Jewish story in which Israel's long period of desolation is followed by a moment when the covenant is renewed, when exile is over, and when God's people will at last fulfil Torah because their hearts have been circumcised through the work of the spirit, we should not be surprised when, in the next turn in his argument within the poetic narrative of Romans, we find the referential narrative coming back to the same point. Once we realize the role that Deuteronomy 27—30, and particularly chapter 30 itself, played within some strands of second-Temple Judaism, we should be able to see what is going on at the very centre of the passage which itself forms the very centre of Romans 9—11. *This, at last, is what it means to 'do the Torah' and so to find the life it promised:*

Moses writes, you see, about the covenant membership defined by the law, that 'the person who performs the law's commands shall live in them.' But the *faith*-based covenant membership puts it like this: 'Don't say in your heart, Who shall go up to heaven?' (in other words, to bring the Messiah down), or, 'Who shall go down into the depths?' (in other words, to bring the Messiah up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we proclaim); because if you profess with your mouth that Jesus is lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁵⁴

I have rendered *dikaiosynē* here as 'covenant membership', to make the point which is very evident in Deuteronomy itself. God is fulfilling his covenant with his people, but the covenant involves (a) God's judgment on Israel because of unfaithfulness and then (b) renewal at the time when God will 'circumcise the heart'. Covenant membership here will *include* the inner renewal, and its ongoing fruit, which was what Torah wanted to produce but could not because of 'the flesh' (i.e. the Adamic nature of Israel). What Paul has done, in parallel with other second-Temple retrievals of this great narrative such as we find in 4QMMT or Baruch, is to say: *now at last we see what it means to 'fulfil Torah' in the sense Deuteronomy 30 had in mind.* Professing that Jesus is lord, and believing that God raised him from the dead, together constitute the reality towards which Deuteronomy 30 was pointing. This is the real 'return from exile', the lifting of the covenantal curse, the giving of the 'life' which Torah itself had promised but by itself

could not give. Hence the ambiguity of Paul's use of Leviticus 18.5, here (Romans 10.5) and in Galatians (3.12). Leviticus truly declared that 'doing Torah' was the way to 'life'; but by itself Leviticus could only point down a road in which Israel, delighting in Torah, was nevertheless bound to find that 'through Torah comes the knowledge of sin.' That is why, in Galatians 3.12, Paul says so sharply that 'the Torah is not of faith.' Nevertheless, when we arrive in Deuteronomy 30, through the covenant-renewing action of God by the spirit, we discover that even Leviticus is picked up, like the elder brother deciding at last to join in the party, so that when we find the constant promise to 'do these things and so find life' in Deuteronomy 30.15–20, the passage immediately after the one Paul here uses, we should not suppose that he is driving a wedge between the third and fifth Pentateuchal books:

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of YHWH your God that I am commanding you today, by loving YHWH your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and YHWH your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving YHWH your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that YHWH swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.¹⁵⁵

The numerous echoes of other Pauline passages here, and the obvious links into the argument of Romans where the narrative of God's promises to Abraham plays such a vital role (in chapters 4 and 9), indicate that Paul has not snatched these verses out of their context. He is precisely declaring that when the gospel of Jesus the Messiah does its work, and when people whether Jewish or gentile come to believe that God raised him from the dead and so to confess him as *kyrios*, this is in fact the vital sign that the 'doing of Torah' (which Deuteronomy envisaged as the mark of the new-covenant people, the returned-from-exile people, the people who now find the 'life' the Torah had promised) has been launched. This is where Torah itself, seen now as the narrative from Adam to Moses, from the beginning of Genesis to the close of Deuteronomy, was going all along: it has reached its *telos*, its goal. The story of Torah began in the garden of promise, with the creator

walking alongside the humans; it ends on the threshold of the land of promise, with the covenant God journeying with his people to lead them back home at last – and to warn about the multiple ambiguities that lay ahead. For Paul this narrative has stretched across the centuries to a greater goal, where the Messiah and his people now inherit the world. From here on it is no surprise to find Paul referring to Torah, not at all as the boundary-marker around God's people, but as a vital signpost to the behaviour (as we saw, both redefined and intensified) which must now characterize that new-covenant family.

The 'story of Torah', then, is comprehensible when, and only when, we see it as part of the story of God's people: not as an independent narrative, not even really as the 'hero' or 'villain' of a comic or tragic narrative of its own, but as the means by which God sheds the bright light both of promise and of warning on Abraham's family, Israel according to the flesh, in their Adamic state. The paradox of Torah is a subset of the paradox of Israel, and the paradox of Israel is the direct result of the fact that the creator, having determined to act within his world through human beings, was thereby committed (out of his sovereign faithfulness to the created order he had made) to act to *rescue* human beings, and hence the creation, through other human beings *who were themselves in need of the same rescue* they were to hold out to the world. Paul's many statements about Torah appear confusing because at certain times in Christian history this multi-layered story has not been known, not been told, not even been glimpsed. And where the true story is ignored, other stories are told instead, and texts squashed flat to fit them. It won't work. Give Paul back his full narrative framework, and there is no need to squash the texts.

Once we grasp how the plots and sub-plots of the story work, then, we can be quite clear that for Paul Torah is the divine gift which defines and shapes God's people. God's people follow their strange vocation through the long years of preparation, through the period (particularly) of failure, curse and exile, and finally to the unexpected (and indeed 'apocalyptic') events which Paul sees both as the fulfilment of all the earlier promises and the new creation which has arrived as a fresh divine gift. Torah accompanies them all

the way, like a faithful servant doing what is required in each new eventuality, taking on the different roles demanded by and at the different stages of Israel's journey, and finally attaining a new kind of 'fulfilment' in the heart-circumcision promised by Deuteronomy and supplied by the spirit. At one moment in the narrative the moon is waning; at another it is full; at another, it helps to bury the dead. This narrative framework frees Torah from the burden of always playing the villain in a Lutheran would-be reading of Paul, or the hero in a Reformed one. It offers, instead, a chance for Torah to be what Paul insists it always was: God's law, holy and just and good, but given a task which, like the task of the Messiah himself, would involve terrible paradox before attaining astonishing resolution. The Torah shines with borrowed light, and the horned dilemmas it has presented to exegetes are only resolved when the complete cycle of waxing and waning has played itself out.

It is to the task of the Messiah himself that we must now turn. We have examined the main plot (creation and new creation), the main sub-plot (the human vocation, plight and solution) and the second but vital sub-plot (the story of Israel, with Torah nested within it). We must now come to the play within the play, tragic and then comic, through which at last all the other layers of drama will find their resolution.

[7. The King's New Play: Jesus and His Storied Roles](#)

Can we speak of 'the story of Jesus' within Paul's writings or his worldview? In one sense, obviously yes: Jesus is the central character of so much of his thinking, and he can draw at will on several different 'moments' within what might be (but never appears in any one place as) a full and complete account of 'everything Paul knows about Jesus'. He speaks occasionally of his ancestry and birth; occasionally of his public ministry; very often of his death by crucifixion and his resurrection; quite often of his 'royal appearing' to judge and to save. That sounds like a story. Some have argued recently that in a passage like Philippians 2.6–11 we see precisely the

central ‘story of Jesus’ around which everything else Paul might want to say is clustered.¹⁵⁶

At the same time, it is important to stress that ‘the story of Jesus in Paul’, were we to tell it, would always appear as the denouement of some *other* story or set of stories. Paul does not introduce, or appear to think of, Jesus as a character facing a task or problem, finding it difficult or impossible, needing to seek fresh help or to ward off difficulties, and finally succeeding in the task or surmounting the problem. As with Torah, only in quite a different mode, everything Paul says about Jesus belongs *within one or more of the other stories*, of the story of the creator and the cosmos, of the story of God and humankind and/or the story of God and Israel. Because these three layers of plot interlock in the way I have described, what Paul says about Jesus, and what he could have said were he to have laid out his worldview-narrative end to end for us to contemplate, makes the sense it does *as the crucial factor within* those other narratives. Thus there really is, in one sense, a Pauline ‘story of Jesus’, but it is always the story of *how Jesus enables the other stories* to proceed to their appointed resolution.

We can see this if we consider for a moment the term ‘gospel’. ‘Good news’, whether we trace that word back to Isaiah’s heraldic announcement or set it within the *euangelion* of Caesar widely known in Paul’s day, implies a narrative. To say ‘good news’ appears to imply that (a) things have been going to the bad, (b) they stand in need of severe transformation, and now (c) something has happened which moves everything on to a new plane, resolving the problems that had faced the characters in the story and opening up the new possibilities for which they had longed. But the announcement itself is not a ‘story’, even though it implies one, and needs one for it to make the sense it does.

Here, I suspect, is part of the point which has puzzled interpreters. ‘Gospel’ implies something fresh happening, not simply a new twist in an old story. Yet, for ‘gospel’ to be what it must be, there must be an old story which, like Simeon in the Temple, has been waiting patiently for the new child to be born and for the new narrative possibilities that will then appear.

‘Gospel’ implies discontinuity at the same moment as it needs continuity. That is how ‘good news’ functions.

Paul sums up the ‘good news’ of Jesus in a formula which he tells the Corinthians is traditional, but which he does not disown, resist or modify:

What I handed on to you at the beginning, you see, was what I received, namely this: ‘The Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Bible; he was buried; he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Bible; he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve; then he was seen by over five hundred brothers and sisters at once, most of whom are still with us, though some fell asleep; then he was seen by James, then by all the apostles; and, last of all, as to one ripped from the womb, he appeared even to me.’¹⁵⁷

The ‘good news’ here is good news because of the ‘back story’, the implicit narrative, which emerges in three ways in particular. First, this is an account of the achievement of the *Messiah*. It has of course been fashionable for most of the last century at least to treat *Christos* in Paul as merely a proper name, with only one or two occurrences retaining any titular, ‘messianic’ meaning. But it is time to put this right, and to insist that in passage after passage Paul’s long, essentially Jewish, narratives, in which this *Christos* figure plays the decisive part, cry out to be seen as ‘messianic’, albeit of course redefined by the events themselves.¹⁵⁸ The chapter introduced with this formula contains, as its main thematic exposition, the clearest statement in the whole New Testament of the sovereign rule of this *Christos* figure, under the overall sovereignty of God the creator; and *Christos* will fight the battle against God’s last enemies, explicitly recalling two ‘messianic’ psalms of conquest and lordship.¹⁵⁹ How can this not be the Messiah?

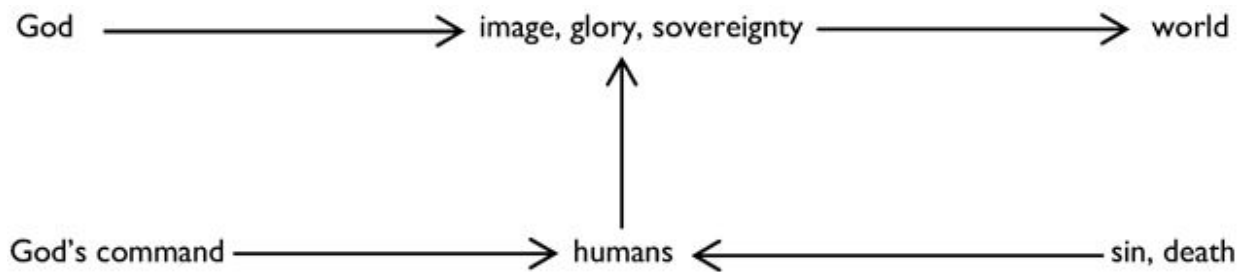
But if this is so here, why not elsewhere? The only real answer is, because for the last hundred years or more Paul has been seen as the ‘apostle to the gentiles’, and it has been supposed that a nationalist Jewish category like ‘Messiah’ would be irrelevant in such an apostolate. How wrong can a tradition be? It is of the very essence of Paul’s worldview, rooted in Israel’s scriptures, that Israel’s Messiah brings Israel’s history to its strange and unexpected conclusion precisely so that he can then bring God’s justice to the nations. The world needs, and has been promised, the Jewish Messiah as its rightful lord. Paul insists that this promise has now been fulfilled.¹⁶⁰

The second element which points to a strongly implicit ‘back story’ is the phrase ‘for our sins’, *hyper tōn hamartian hēmon*. Here at least we can see the narrative framework within which the ‘new event’ of the gospel makes the sense it does. The ‘we’ implied by ‘our’ presumably, in a letter addressed mainly to gentile Messiah-people, indicates both Jews and gentiles. Both were apparently in a condition, not merely of guilt because of actual wrong deeds done, but of imprisonment within the state and power of ‘sin’ itself. The martial language and promised final victory of 15.20–8 seem to indicate this, as does the insistence in 15.17: ‘if the Messiah has not been raised, your faith is pointless, *and you are still in your sins.*’ Something has *happened*, which can be spoken of in one breath (verse 3) as accomplished through the Messiah’s death and in almost the next (verse 17) as effected or at least validated through his resurrection, and thus, it appears, in some sense through both: through the death of the one who was then raised, and/or through the resurrection of the crucified one. And the thing that has happened is that a condition or state which could not otherwise be broken, a state of ‘being in sin’, has been dealt with, so that ‘you’ or ‘we’ are now no longer ‘in (y)our sins’. By only a little probing, then, the terse phrase ‘for our sins’ in verse 3 opens up to reveal a solid little nugget of narrative to which the Messiah’s death and resurrection has made the decisive contribution. Paul does not in any way distance himself from this ‘traditional’ idea. He embraces it, works with it, develops it as part of his own argument.

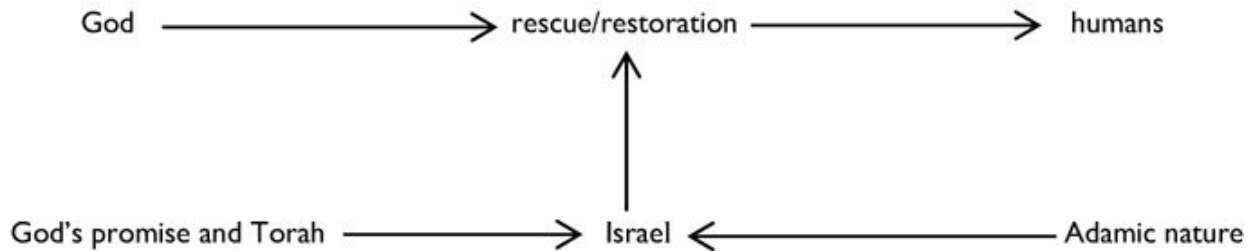
The third phrase in this tradition which indicates the ‘back story’ for Paul’s gospel is the repeated ‘in accordance with the Bible’ (verses 3 and 4). Here Paul makes explicit what we were already beginning to tease out: he sees the events of the Messiah’s death and resurrection as supplying the key element, the radical new moment which resolves everything that had gone before, in relation to the vast, sprawling narrative of the ancient Israelite scriptures. *In accordance with* could in theory indicate mere typology, or simply a string of proof-texting prophetic passages. But even within the present chapter (1 Corinthians 15) it becomes clear that Paul is not going to stop at such atomized and dehistoricized (and de-storified) readings of his

scriptures. Scripture tells a great story, the triple story of God and the world, and humankind, and Israel; each has faced a great problem, to which the next story in the sequence appears to offer the solution; and now we come to the play within the play, the small, close-up story in which the others are resolved. Just as we come down from the heights of royalty (Theseus and Hippolyta) to the group of rustic players rehearsing and then performing their tragic tale of misunderstanding and death, with Moonshine looking on, so Paul comes down from the grand sweep of cosmic narrative, through the huge history of humankind, through even the noble but puzzling story of Israel, to the events of one man in very recent history, the one man whom Paul declares to be the key to all the locks, the answer to all the longings, the king who has finally come into his inheritance. He is the fulcrum of Paul's worldview. If we want to understand Paul, instead of imposing later categories (like 'religion'!) on to him, we must understand him within an ongoing multi-layered story whose denouement had recently come to pass.

This is what I mean when I say that Paul's messianic story is not free-standing. Like Torah itself, it means what it means within that triple, and itself interlocking, narrative. First, the story of God and the world:



– but this went wrong, because of human sin. And so, to rescue the human race and restore the original intention, we witnessed the introduction of the second sub-plot, the call of Israel:

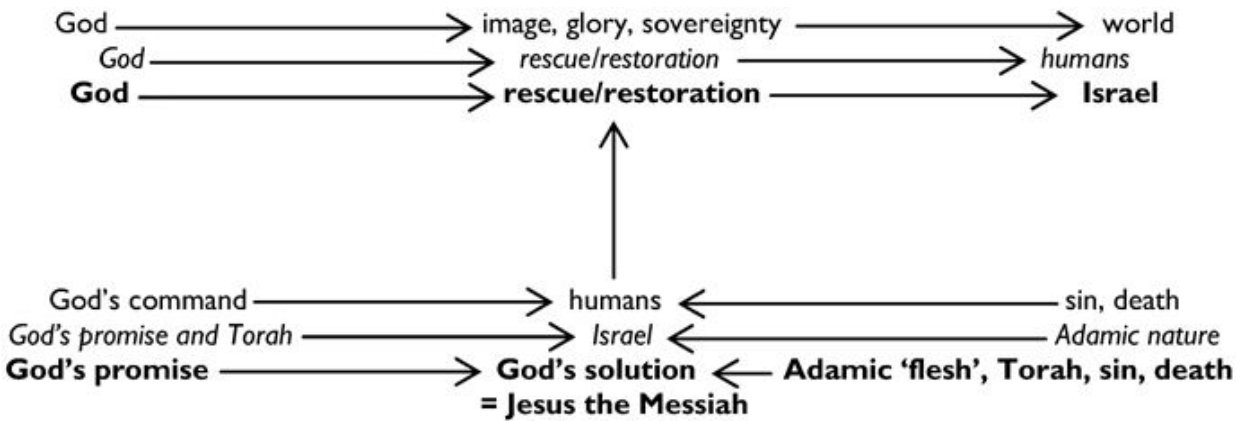


This too, however, appears to have failed, because of the ‘Adam within Israel’ evident in Romans 7 and elsewhere. Now Israel itself needs rescuing:



Now at last we see what ‘God’s solution’ actually is. In fact, of course, plenty of second-Temple Jews would have reckoned that the solution, if it was to be ‘in accordance with the scriptures’, would involve God’s Messiah. Some others might have mused that the solution would have to involve some kind of intense suffering through which Israel would have to pass.¹⁶¹ All would have known that for the world to be put right the creator God would have to pass judgment on all that was wrong in order to move ahead, free from the threat of continuing corruption, into the new creation.

Paul has seen these solutions come together in Jesus. The resurrection disclosed him as Messiah and his death as ‘messianic’. This disclosed the true meaning of the scriptural story and promise. In Jesus, therefore, Paul believed that the triple narrative had at last found its resolution:



Here is the point of all these pretty little diagrams, and I hope this exposition functions redemptively in their direction too, after the scepticism even of some of their former users. When we understand the triple narrative which forms the basis of Paul's worldview, we can see the way in which, bewildering though it often seems to us, Jesus the Messiah functions for him in relation to all three stories simultaneously. As Israel's Messiah, he has accomplished Israel's rescue from its own plight, passing judgment on the evil that has infiltrated even his own people. As Israel-in-person, which is one of the things a Messiah is (see below), he has completed Israel's own vocation, to bring rescue and restoration to the human race, passing judgment on human wickedness in order to establish true humanness instead. And as the truly human one (Psalm 8, blended with Psalm 110, as in 1 Corinthians 15) he has re-established God's rule over the cosmos, defeating the enemies that had threatened to destroy the work of the creator in order to bring about new creation. Jesus does not have an independent 'story' all on his own. He plays the leading role within all the others. He is Adam; he is Israel; he is the Messiah. Only when we understand all this does Paul's worldview, particularly its implicit complex narrative, make sense.

In particular, at the heart of Paul's worldview we discern that this complex narrative requires him to find ways of saying that the divine judgment on evil, which as we saw will happen at the end of the story, and will (for Paul) happen through Jesus, ¹⁶² *has already happened* in Jesus' death. It is scarcely controversial to suggest that the cross stands at the heart of his worldview, as

of his theology. What we can see now, with the help of the multi-layered narrative analysis, is the way in which his many and varied statements of what the cross achieved make the sense they do in relation to the different layers of the story. We must pursue this further when we focus on his theology itself.¹⁶³

Before we leave 1 Corinthians, we note that Paul began this letter with a more long drawn out statement of the same ‘gospel’. In the first chapter, he stresses that a crucified Messiah, though not (to put it mildly) what either pagans or Jews had envisaged, is actually what both needed. The Jewish Messiah is the revelation of the true wisdom that the Greeks had been searching for, and Israel’s *crucified* Messiah is the solution to the problem of Israel:

The word of the cross, you see, is madness to people who are being destroyed. But to us – those who are being saved – it is God’s power. This is what the Bible says, after all:

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
The shrewdness of the clever I’ll abolish.

Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the debater of this present age? Don’t you see that God has turned the world’s wisdom into folly? This is how it’s happened: in God’s wisdom, the world didn’t know God through wisdom, so it gave God pleasure, through the folly of our proclamation, to save those who believe. Jews look for signs, you see, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we announce the crucified Messiah, a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, the Messiah – God’s power and God’s wisdom. God’s folly is wiser than humans, you see, and God’s weakness is stronger than humans.¹⁶⁴

God’s folly! But, we note, *God’s* folly: the crucified Messiah was *God’s* answer to the problems both of Israel and of the world. This, again, is not a freestanding narrative about Jesus. It is the insertion of Jesus into the longer narratives of Israel and the world, enabling them to do what they were meant to do:

Who and what you now are is a gift from God in the Messiah Jesus, who has become for us God’s wisdom – and righteousness, sanctification and redemption as well; so that, as the Bible puts it, ‘Anyone who boasts should boast in the lord.’¹⁶⁵

This in turn has opened up a whole new world, a world of wisdom, insight, spiritual knowledge beyond describing, all through this final sub-plot, this ‘play within the play’:

None of the rulers of this present age knew about this wisdom. If they had, you see, they wouldn’t have crucified the lord of glory. But, as the Bible says,

Human eyes have never seen,
human ears have never heard,
it’s never entered human hearts:
all that God has now prepared
for those who truly love him.¹⁶⁶

It is clear from this tantalizing glimpse that a further part of the ‘back story’ of the event of Jesus’ death is a story about the powers of the world, their putting Jesus on the cross, and their folly in thereby sealing their own doom – a story to which Paul alludes at various points, including in chapter 15 when he describes the Messiah’s final victory over all rebel forces.¹⁶⁷

This talk of the Messiah’s victory and lordship sends us back to the three thematic passages in Romans where the messianic narrative functions as a kind of frame for the whole argument. To begin with, there is the famous, and famously dense, opening statement of Jesus’ identity as the Davidic Messiah. This, again, only makes the sense it does if we see it as implying, and belonging within, the much larger narrative of Israel and, by that token, the larger again story of the whole world:

Paul, a slave of Messiah Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for God’s good news, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the sacred writings – the good news about his son, who was descended from David’s seed in terms of flesh, and who was marked out powerfully as God’s son in terms of the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead: Jesus, the Messiah, our lord!

Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about believing obedience among all the nations for the sake of his name. That includes you, too, who are called by Jesus the Messiah.¹⁶⁸

Here, as in the avowedly ‘traditional’ statement in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul anchors the events to do with the Messiah in the scriptural promises. Here, too, there should be no question that he is speaking of Jesus as Messiah; the

mention of Davidic descent, though admittedly very unusual in Paul, is nevertheless completely fitting.¹⁶⁹ Paul returns to it, tellingly, in the closing flourish at the end of the huge theological exposition:

Welcome one another, therefore, as the Messiah has welcomed you, to God's glory. Let me tell you why: the Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy. As the Bible says:

That is why I will praise you among the nations,
and will sing to your name.

And again it says,

Rejoice, you nations, with his people.

And again,

Praise the Lord, all nations,
And let all the peoples sing his praise.

And Isaiah says once more:

There shall be the root of Jesse,
the one who rises up to rule the nations;
the nations shall hope in him.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy spirit.¹⁷⁰

This is a *messianic* narrative through and through. The one who, as the 'servant of the circumcised', demonstrates that God has been true to his word to ancient Israel and then welcomes the nations of the earth – the one who is then called 'the root of Jesse' – this cannot be other than the Messiah, and his work cannot be understood other than through the ancient scriptural narratives which he has now brought to fulfilment. This is where the story was supposed to go all along: the story of humans and the world, with the story of Israel and its vocation coming in behind that, and the story of Jesus as Messiah doing for Israel, and so for the whole world, what they could not do for themselves.

This messianic opening and closing of Romans, which is fully worked out in the intervening chapters, also receives a brief further statement as Paul opens his argument about God's faithfulness to Israel. 'It is from them, according to the flesh, that the Messiah has come – who is God over all, blessed for ever, Amen!'¹⁷¹ When we put these messianic markers together, and reflect on how the story of Jesus thus functions within the other

narratives, it is clear that for Paul the events concerning Jesus are seen as the eschatological turning-point, the launching of God's new world. He is declared to be 'God's son' (itself a royal, messianic title) in power by 'resurrection of the dead', *anastasis nekrōn*; the plural, 'of dead persons', indicates that in this opening formula the resurrection of Jesus, through which he is publicly declared to be Messiah, is in fact the opening scene of a much larger event, the total 'resurrection of the dead', which he anticipates and inaugurates. (This is filled out, of course, in the argument of 1 Corinthians 15.) Thus, once again, the meaning of the events concerning Jesus is given by the larger story, forward as well as backward, by which these events are framed. The Davidic Messiah, in some presentations at least, was traditionally charged with various tasks, such as rebuilding or cleansing the Temple, defeating Israel's enemies and bringing justice and peace to the world. Paul has his own ways of indicating that all these commissions have either already been fulfilled by the Messiah or are even now on their way to such fulfilment.

For the moment we note, in particular, that it is precisely Israel's Messiah who is now summoning the whole world to 'believing obedience', or in the more traditional language 'the obedience of faith'. The 'gospel' is not mere information: it is summons. Something has happened which requires action. Better, *someone* is now named, acclaimed, exalted as the world's true *kyrios*, and one cannot name and acclaim him as such without summoning all people everywhere to submit to his rule. That submission, that 'obedience', consists primarily of the 'faith' which confesses him as 'lord' and believes that he is raised from the dead (10.9). But it is equally important to stress that for Paul this *pistis*, this faith/faithfulness, is indeed a faith which *obeys* that summons, not simply a 'religious awareness' on the one hand or an assent to a doctrinal formula on the other (it is remarkable just how many false antitheses, down the years, have put stumbling-blocks in the way of understanding). Once again, therefore, the point to be made is that the gospel announcement of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah means what it means within the larger story of Israel, within the story of the whole human race which is larger still, and within the story of the whole world which is

the ultimate narrative horizon. And the ‘faithfulness’ and ‘obedience’ of the Messiah himself – ‘faithfulness’ in Romans 3, ‘obedience’ in Romans 5, but both referring from different angles to the same reality – are the ground on which that ‘obedience of faith’ is now built.¹⁷²

The fact of Jesus’ resurrection launching the new world sends us back to Galatians, and to the somewhat similar opening summary at which we glanced earlier in another connection. Here it is quite explicit: as in 1 Corinthians 15, what has happened through the Messiah is nothing short of a cosmic rescue operation – not, however, as in gnosticism, a rescue *from* the world of space, time and matter, but a rescue from *the present evil age* which has so radically infected God’s creation and into which ‘the new age’, ‘the age to come’, has now broken:

Grace to you and peace from God our father and Jesus the Messiah, our lord, who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of God, our father, to whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen.¹⁷³

This is focused on twin statements about Jesus: first, what he actually did, and second, the larger effect of this. We note, again, the way in which the sharp-edged statement (‘he gave himself for our sins’) nests within the larger implicit narrative (rescue from ‘the present evil age’). Saying that the Messiah ‘gave himself for our sins’ corresponds, obviously, to ‘died for our sins’ in the traditional formula Paul quotes approvingly in 1 Corinthians 15.3, but with the extra note of the Messiah’s ‘giving himself’ to this fate, with this aim. If this, too, is or reflects a traditional saying which predates Paul, it is one he has made thoroughly his own, since at the climax of one of his most intense paragraphs, nearly two chapters later, he uses it with the first person singular: the son of God *loved me and gave himself for me*.¹⁷⁴ Again the implicit drama: humans, and Israel too, are sinful and need to be rescued from that sin. But this story (a combination of the two main subplots in Paul’s worldview-narrative) then contributes at once to the much larger one, the overarching cosmic plot in which God is bringing to birth the ‘age to come’ out of the womb of the ‘present evil age’. These two statements should not be played off against one another. They belong exactly together.

In fact, it is only when we hold them together, rather than splitting them apart as is sometimes done, that we can then understand the compressed narrative statements about Jesus which play such a vital role in the developing argument of Galatians, and which have been studied as such quite intensively.¹⁷⁵ In both of these, I suggest, the role played by Jesus the Messiah makes the sense it does within that implicit triple narrative of God and the world, God and humans (designed as the means of God's ruling of the world) and particularly God and Israel (designed as the means of God's rescue of humankind). Thus, first, there is the famous passage in Galatians 3.10–14:

¹⁰Because, you see, those who belong to the 'works-of-the-law' camp are under a curse! Yes, that's what the Bible says: 'Cursed is everyone who doesn't stick fast by everything written in the book of the law, to perform it.' ¹¹But, because nobody is justified before God in the law, it's clear that 'the righteous shall live by faith'. ¹²The law, however, is not by faith: rather, 'the one who does them shall live in them'.

¹³The Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse on our behalf, as the Bible says: 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.' ¹⁴This was so that the blessing of Abraham could flow through to the nations in the Messiah, Jesus – and so that we might receive the promise of the spirit, through faith.¹⁷⁶

It is vital to pay attention to where Paul at least thinks this argument is going. Most interpreters have tried to place the key statement of the work of the Messiah in verse 13 within the narrative of 'humans sin/God rescues them'. But Paul places it somewhere else. Verse 14 is clear: the controlling story at this point is that of God's plan *through Israel for the world*. The bearing of the 'curse' was not, as in the reductionist accounts of much traditional Protestantism, a matter of (a) humans in general being 'cursed' because of sin and the law, (b) the Messiah taking the curse on himself, and so (c) humans being released from it (and, perhaps, (d) the law itself being shown to be wrong, or evil, or unnecessary). The 'curse' in question is the curse of Deuteronomy 27.26, summing up all the previous curses into one. And the 'curse' consists of a steady crescendo of ill fortune which, as we saw in chapter 2, ends up with our old friend 'exile'.¹⁷⁷ The problem addressed in Galatians 3.10–14 is not, then, 'How can sinners find a gracious

God?', but the twofold challenge: first, how can Israel according to the flesh be rescued from the 'curse' of Deuteronomy 27, and second, how can the promises to Abraham be fulfilled (the promises, that is, of a blessing going out to the whole world, as in 3.8), granted that Israel was to be the bearer of those promises?

Once we place this element of the Jesus-story within the Israel-story we studied in the previous section, all becomes clear. First, the problem, outlined in verses 10–12: those who insist on 'works of Torah' (as the 'agitators' are doing in Galatia, and as Peter and Barnabas, following 'those who came from James', had done in Antioch) find themselves facing the problem already summarized in the dense 2.18: they are building again the wall of 'works' that separates Jew from gentile, and discovering thereby that the law, to which they are appealing, merely reminds them that they have broken it. They are thus *neither* able to fulfil Israel's vocation of bringing 'the Abrahamic blessing' to the nations, *nor* able to rest content with their own status of membership in God's people, since Torah declares that they themselves are under its 'curse'. (This is analogous to the problem articulated so brilliantly in Romans 7.) This double problem is exactly what is resolved, Paul declares, through the Messiah's bearing the 'curse': first, the Abrahamic blessing can now flow to the nations *in the Messiah* (who is thereby doing the job for which Israel was called); second, 'we' – which here, I suggest, most naturally means 'we Jews who believe', following 2.16b and the 'I' of 2.19–20 – receive 'the promise of the Spirit through faith'. In other words, we find ourselves, as in Romans 2.25–9 and 2 Corinthians 3, as new-covenant people. Once we place the small, sharp-edged 'story of Jesus' within the story of Israel (itself within the story of humanity and of the world) it makes exact sense.

The same is true of the 'story of the son of God' in Galatians 4:

When we were children, we were kept in 'slavery' under the 'elements of the world'.⁴ But when the fullness of time arrived, God sent out his son, born of a woman, born under the law,⁵ so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

⁶And, because you are sons, God sent out the spirit of his son into our hearts, calling out 'Abba, father!' ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son! And, if you're a son, you are an heir, through

God.¹⁷⁸

The context this time is not so much the curse of exile as the slavery in Egypt. Paul has been expounding the promise to Abraham, rooted in Genesis 12 and 15, throughout the previous chapter. There he alludes to the promise that God would liberate Abraham's family from a foreign land, and gradually he elaborates on the condition of those prior to the coming of the Messiah, and of *pistis*: they are shut up under sin, kept under guard, 'under the *paidagōgos*'.¹⁷⁹ Now this turns into a fully-blown statement of slavery: the 'heir' in a house (Paul is illustrating the point about being 'Abraham's heirs') is like a slave until the time of inheritance. So, he says, we were in slavery until the time when the promise was fulfilled – not when God sent Moses to bring Israel out of Egypt, but when God sent his son. Here, once again, the sense of the story of Jesus is the sense which it has *within this larger narrative*. All attempts to make the fact of Jesus burst in upon Paul's world without visible antecedents founder on the 'fulfilment of time', the *plērōma tou chronou*, of 4.4. Just as Paul was aware, echoing Genesis and Exodus, of a promised time, a sum of years that had to be completed before the promise would be put into effect, so he is aware of a larger narrative within which the 'sending out' of God's son means what it means.¹⁸⁰

Here the force is again twofold, corresponding to the quite different situations of Jews and gentiles – and remembering that the main point of Galatians is to reassure the gentile Christians there that they are already full members of God's people (i.e. of Abraham's worldwide family) and thus do not need to get circumcised. Verses 5–7 thus correspond to 3.13–14. This is where Paul thinks his argument is going: first, the son of God (a messianic title¹⁸¹) has come 'under the law' in order to redeem those who are 'under the law', in other words, the Jews; and, second, 'we' – this time the 'we' of the whole family of Abraham, gentile as well as Jew – receive 'adoption as sons', being brought into God's single family. The note struck so briefly in 3.14 is expanded: the 'sending out' of the spirit, in parallel to the 'sending out' of the son (4.6 with 4.4), enables Jew and gentile alike to cry, 'Abba, father'.¹⁸² Paul then makes this personal, with the second person singular:

‘You (singular) are no longer a slave but a son; and, if a son, then an heir, through God.’ Just as the QED at the end of the long argument of chapter 3 was, ‘If you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham’s seed,’ so now the QED is ‘if you are God’s son, you are an heir [of Abraham, understood], through God.’¹⁸³ For our present purposes the point once again is this: that the story of the sending of God’s son makes the sense it makes within the story of Israel, the ongoing chronological story (compare the *chronos* of 4.4!) into which God bursts with the new ‘sending out’ of his ‘son’.

So far we have seen that what Paul says about Jesus can be understood, in these passages, within the narrative of Israel in particular, which he understands as the divinely appointed means of rescuing humanity and so restoring creation. This is massively underlined in the much fuller account in Romans. To begin with, the ‘but now’ passage in Romans 3.21–6 links in exactly to the problem we studied earlier, the problem of Israel’s failure to be faithful to the divine commission:

²¹But now, quite apart from the law (though the law and the prophets bore witness to it), God’s covenant justice has been displayed. ²²God’s covenant justice comes into operation *through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, for the benefit of all who have faith. For there is no distinction: ²³all sinned, and fell short of God’s glory – ²⁴and by God’s grace they are freely declared to be in the right, to be members of the covenant, through the redemption which is found in the Messiah, Jesus.

²⁵God put Jesus forth as the place of mercy, through faithfulness, by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his covenant justice, because of the passing over (in divine forbearance) of sins committed beforehand. ²⁶This was to demonstrate his covenant justice in the present time: that is, that he himself is in the right, and that he declares to be in the right everyone who trusts in the faithfulness of Jesus.

The point to note here above all is that this extract answers to 2.17—3.8. This is how God has been faithful to his promise to rescue the world through Israel, even though Israel as a whole has been ‘faithless’.¹⁸⁴ God’s faithfulness, his ‘covenant justice’,¹⁸⁵ has been freshly displayed apart from the Torah, outside the world of ethnic Israel which was both protected by Torah and accused of sin by Torah. ‘The faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah’ is, in the person of this one representative figure, ‘the faithfulness’ that God

required from Israel if the promise was to be valid for the whole world, as always promised. This 'faithfulness', it turns out, is a synecdochic reference to Jesus' death, *seen as* 'the faithfulness of Israel to God's saving plan' on the one hand and also as 'the faithfulness of Israel's God to his covenant promise and purpose' on the other.¹⁸⁶ No wonder the passage is so dense: Paul is telescoping his stories together, the story of humans and their failure to be God's glorious agents in creation, the story of Israel as the means of rescuing the world and now itself needing rescuing and, behind and through it all, the story of God himself rescuing Israel, humans and the world. These various stories are not to be played off against one another. They must be understood in their rich interlocking texture.

This leads at once into the statement of the universal family of faith in 3.27–31, based on the monotheism of the *Shema* itself (3.30), and opening up to demonstrate that Abraham is not 'our father' in the sense of 'the father of Jews, plus gentile proselytes', but the father of *all* who 'believe in the [God] who raised from the dead Jesus our lord, who was handed over because of our trespasses and raised because of our justification'.¹⁸⁷ Here once again the 'story of Jesus' is scrunched down into a single dense formulation, because the purpose it serves is not to relate things about Jesus as it were for their own sake but to explain how the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15) has now been fulfilled. Romans 4.24–5 thus sums up what was said, already densely, in 3.21–6: the death and resurrection of the Messiah is the way by which what God said he would do through Israel, through Abraham's family, has now come to pass.

This is then developed at much greater length in the two halves of Romans 5. In the first, specifically in 5.6–11, we find the Messiah within the story of *the love of God*. 'Love', though here introduced for the first time in the letter, appears not as a new idea but as the large, overarching summary of the 'faithfulness' and the 'covenant justice' which had been explored to this point. Now, with the single Jew-plus-gentile family already established, the 'we' refers to the whole group, the full sweep: the weak, the ungodly, the sinners, whether Jew or gentile. This is the application of the story of Jesus to the *human* problem, consequent upon the solution of the *specifically*

Israel-shaped problem. And, with this narrative analysis starting to take full shape, we begin to glimpse a central point for this whole book, which we shall explore more fully in Part III: that the supposed clash or conflict between two ‘models of salvation’ in Paul, the ‘forensic’ or ‘juristic’ on the one hand and the ‘incorporative’ on the other, is itself a category mistake, the result of a failure to see how his different stories actually work. Once we sort them out, the two supposedly warring schemes of thought fit together with no difficulty. They are, together, part of a larger whole, to which those traditionally divisive labels are as it were signposts from different angles – as also are those other labels, ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘salvation history’, and indeed ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’. On this, more anon.

This time, in addition, Paul spells out more fully a significant difference between the meaning and effects of Jesus’ death and those of his resurrection:

How much more, in that case – since we have been declared to be in the right by his blood – are we going to be saved by him from God’s coming anger! ¹⁰When we were enemies, you see, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son; if that’s so, how much more, having already been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.¹⁸⁸

Here the sequence of the Messiah’s death and resurrection is reflected in the sequence of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘salvation’. These are elements we must look at in more detail elsewhere, but for the moment we may comment that this paves the way for the distinction of the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’ which is so characteristic of Romans 6—8. We are *already* delivered from the ‘present evil age’; but the ‘age to come’, though truly present in the Messiah and for his people, is not yet complete. Much of the argument of these next chapters in Romans will be about the way in which this in-between life, a life of obedience, suffering and hope, is to be understood; Paul is clearing the way for a further narrative, to which also we shall return, the narrative of *the people of God in the Messiah*.

This strand of thought, stated in advance in 5.1–11, is the point to which he returns at the celebratory summary of the whole section of 5—8, that is, 8.31–9. The Messiah is God’s gift, ‘given up for us’ (8.32, echoing 4.25),

with his death as the ultimate demonstration of the divine love, and his present work of intercession as his people's ultimate safeguard. Now, however, as in Galatians 2.20, the love in question is not just the divine love, but the love of the Messiah himself (8.35); or, as the argument broadens out to its conclusion, it is, more fully, 'the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord' (8.39). Here the Messiah, and particularly his death, are the crucial elements in the stories of God and humans, and of God and the whole world. The powers of the world that still appear so strong (death, life, angels, principalities and so forth) are none of them 'able to separate us' from that divine love enacted in the Messiah.

When we see the logical integration of the three main narratives for which we argued earlier (God and creation, God and humans, God and Israel), we can see how, in the actual argument of Romans, Paul moves from Jesus the Messiah as 'the faithful Israelite', fulfilling the salvific role of Israel on behalf of humanity (chapters 3 and 4), through 'the embodiment of God's love', rescuing humans from the plight of sin and death (5.6–11), to the great statement, cryptic and dense but vital as the very heart of everything, of the Adam-narrative, which grounds the God-and-creation narrative itself (5.12–21, pointing ahead to 8.18–27). Here we see the three stories nested together, with the Messiah's role in relation to each:

1. Creation was supposed to be looked after by Adam, but he sinned and so lost 'the glory of God' (3.23). He is replaced not just by the Messiah but by 'those who receive the abundance of grace, and of the gift of covenant membership, of "being in the right"': they will 'reign in life through the one man Jesus the Messiah' (5.17). By this means, creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption (8.18–26). That is the big story, the overarching plot. This is how creation itself is to be renewed. This is the 'cosmic' story.
2. Humans in their sin, which prevents them from attaining their true vocation, are rescued through 'the obedience of the one man'. Here, 'obedience' has taken the place of 'faithfulness', in 3.22 and elsewhere, as a summary of the Messiah's completion of the work marked out for

Israel.¹⁸⁹ This is the (perhaps unhappily named) ‘anthropological’ story, which is not to be played off against the ‘cosmic’, which it is designed to serve. It is because humans are rescued from their sin that they are able once more to play their part in God’s worldwide purposes.

3. The specific problem of Israel, highlighted and exacerbated by the arrival of the Torah (5.20), has been met, and more than met, by the grace which has abounded in the Messiah. He has done on Israel’s behalf what Israel could not do, and also has done for Israel itself what Israel needed to be done. His Israel-work rescues Adam’s people; his Adam-work rescues creation itself. This is the ‘covenantal’ vision, which again must not be played off against either the ‘anthropological’ or the ‘cosmic’ stories. It is because the Messiah has fulfilled Israel’s calling that humans are rescued from idolatry, sin and death.

Paul has thus pulled together the key narratives in the form of a single summary story from Adam to the Messiah, and on to ‘the life of the age to come’.¹⁹⁰ He can then draw on this messianic narrative as the framework and context ‘in which’ Messiah-people find their identity. They die with him and rise with him, bringing them into a new life ‘to God’,¹⁹¹ in which, like freed slaves, they are able to, and required to, resist the lure of the old slave-master. This can then be summarized in terms of 5.20, where Torah intruded into the Adam-Messiah sequence: Torah bound Israel to Adam, but the death of the ‘old human being’ in 6.6 means that Torah no longer has any hold on those who have ‘died through the Messiah’s body’ (7.4, reaching back to 6.2–11 and 6.14). They are now, exactly as in 2.25–9 or 2 Corinthians 3, able to serve God ‘in the newness of the spirit, not the oldness of the letter’.¹⁹² The ‘story of Jesus’ at this point is the story of the Messiah ‘in whom’ people die and rise, leaving the ‘present evil age’ where the Torah still condemns Israel, and entering into the ‘age to come’ in which resurrection life already happens.

This then leads the argument towards one of the richest and densest of Paul’s abbreviated Jesus-stories, Romans 8.3–4. There is no space for more

than a brief comment, but no need for more since I have discussed the passage elsewhere. We shall in any case return to it in another connection.¹⁹³

The point for our present purpose is that the implicit narrative into which Jesus is here placed is the story of God and his people: his people Israel according to the flesh, who found the Torah condemning them despite their proper delight in it, and now his worldwide people who find that ‘the righteous decree of Torah’ is in fact fulfilled in their life in the spirit. As in Galatians 4.4, the key moment comes with the ‘sending’ of the son of God, and the death in which God deals properly with ‘sin’, which had been the culprit in chapter 7. Here, as we saw in the section on the Torah, it appears that ‘sin’ has been using Torah as a way of magnifying itself (5.20; 7.13). And it appears that this, too, was actually part of the purpose of Torah, since it was God’s aim to ‘condemn sin’, and the place where this had to happen was ‘in the flesh’ where it had been at work; but now it was the flesh of the son of God. There are parallels here to the story in Galatians 3.10–14: the Messiah comes to the place where the people of God are hopelessly stuck in the sin which the law merely confirms,¹⁹⁴ and by dealing with that problem he unlocks the new possibility of a fresh ‘fulfilment’ of Torah which, enabled by the spirit, points forward to the resurrection.¹⁹⁵ This is the point where ‘what was impossible for Torah’ in 8.3 is disclosed: it promised life,¹⁹⁶ but by itself could not give it. Now, because of the sin-condemning death of the Messiah, the way is open for the spirit to give the ‘life’, the eschatological life of God’s new age, that the Torah held out like a mirage but to which it could not provide a road.

One might easily miss the role of the Messiah at the summit of the argument of chapter 8 and, with it, of the letter as a whole to this point. Once we have grasped the narrative logic of the restoration of Adam in chapter 5, within the story of God and the cosmos, it ought to be clear that the story will sweep forward to God’s renewal of the whole cosmos through the agency of the newly obedient humanity. But when this happens it will be a matter of claiming the *inheritance*: the heritage promised to Abraham (4.13), but also the heritage promised to the Messiah in Psalm 2:

I will tell of YHWH’s decree:

He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage (*dōsō soi ethnē tēn klēronomian sou*)
and the ends of the earth your possession.¹⁹⁷

This is exactly cognate with the ‘Davidic’ agenda of 1.3–4, and the ‘Davidic’ summary of 15.12: when the Messiah appears, wins the great victory, and is exalted, he will ‘inherit the world’, and will summon all nations to believing allegiance. Here, then, at the decisive rhetorical moment in Romans 8, the Messiah completes the story of God and the cosmos, the largest story of all. From here there is a straight line across to Philippians 2.9–11, to which we shall presently turn.

Staying with Romans for the moment, however, we note that in 9.30—10.13 we find a very similar train of thought to that which we observed in 8.3–4, only now, as it were, one floor higher up in the building. Here, in 9.30–3 and then 10.1–4, we are at the heart, one might almost say the climax, of a typical second-Temple narrative of the great story of Israel. Paul faces the fact that ‘Israel’ according to the flesh has ‘stumbled over the stumbling stone’, which from one point of view appears to be Torah and from another appears to be the Messiah: Israel’s abuse of Torah as a charter of national privilege is the other side of the coin of Israel’s rejection of the Messiah whose crucifixion, for Paul, means precisely the death of all such national status.¹⁹⁸ But God has been bringing gentiles into the status of *dikaiosynē* anyway (9.30), as all along he had warned Israel he would do.¹⁹⁹ How has this come about? Once again the Messiah is at the centre of the story. Israel has been unaware of God’s great covenant plan, to which he has been faithful despite the initial appearances of Israel’s unbelief.²⁰⁰ The covenant plan, that the nations should come into the one family, has now been fulfilled in the Messiah: the Messiah is the goal of Torah, so that there may be covenant status for all who believe (*telos gar nomou Christos eis dikaiosynēn panti tō pisteuonti*). This is where the story of the Messiah, adumbrated all the way back in 1.3–4 and developed stage by stage in chapters 3 to 8, reaches its own focal point. The messianic events, and the resultant belief of both Jews and Gentiles, constitutes the covenant renewal long promised and now accomplished.

If the story of the Messiah thus provides the lynch-pin for the story of Israel in the purposes of God, broadening out in Romans to be the lynch-pin also of the story of humans and ultimately the story of the cosmos itself, we find Paul able to construct a whole brief narrative about the Messiah in which all these points come together:

Who, though in God's form, did not
Regard his equality with God
As something he ought to exploit.

Instead, he emptied himself,
And received the form of a slave,
Being born in the likeness of humans.

And then, having human appearance,
He humbled himself, and became
Obedient even to death,
Yes, even the death of the cross.

And so God has greatly exalted him,
And to him in his favour has given
The name which is over all names:

That now at the name of Jesus
Every knee within heaven shall bow –
On earth, too, and under the earth;

And every tongue shall confess
That Jesus, Messiah, is lord,
To the glory of God, the father.²⁰¹

This well-known passage contains, of course, a whole wealth of theology, all here in the service of Paul's appeal for unity in the Philippian church. Our present interest lies particularly in the way the poem – for that is what it seems to be – embodies all three of the worldview narratives, and draws out the Messiah's place within them.

Starting with the sharpest focus, there is first the narrative of Israel. The echoes of Isaiah 40—55 are not far away: the Messiah is the 'servant', who does what no-one else could or would do. Second, there is the narrative of Adam: Adam who snatched at 'equality with God' and so lost his dignity, his

‘glory’. Third, there is the story of God and the cosmos: now at last there is, as God always intended, a human being at the helm of the universe.²⁰² This is what gives the poem its particular political emphasis and flavour. It corresponds in outline to the sort of story which the Caesars told about themselves, or caused others to tell on their behalf: the soldier or politician who becomes a ‘servant of the state’ in some way, and is then acclaimed as *kyrios*, emperor, ‘saviour’ or whatever.²⁰³ Here, cognate with Romans 1.3–4, 8.17–18 and 15.12, we find Jesus as Messiah, precisely through his fulfilling of the Israel-role and the Adam-role (signalled here, as in Romans 5.12–21, by highlighting his ‘obedience’), now exalted as the true world ruler. Interestingly, there is no explicit ‘soteriology’ as such in this poem; that is not at issue in the surrounding passages in the letter.²⁰⁴ Rather, we pass straight from the Messiah as Israel and Adam to the Messiah as the creator’s appointed overlord for the whole world, very much as in 1 Corinthians 15.20–8.

This sense of Jesus the Messiah as the creator’s appointed overlord finds resonance in other passages as well. Paul is capable of drawing on this theme in a swift, deft move, to ground an argument about something else: here, for instance, he reveals in one glance that he sees Jesus, presumably on the analogy with the figure of ‘wisdom’, as the one through whom the worlds were made:

There is one God, the father,
from whom are all things, and we belong to him;
and one lord, Jesus the Messiah,
through whom are all things, and we live through him.²⁰⁵

Here is a whole story in a phrase: Jesus is the lord, *kyrios*, corresponding to YHWH in the Septuagint, and it is *through* him that God the father created the world, and now summons humans to share in his life. This passage, together with the much fuller statement of Colossians 1, will come up for consideration in chapter 9 below, and we may hold back from further exploration until that point. The thing to note in our present context is the way in which the story of the Messiah coheres with the overarching narrative

of God and the cosmos. The cosmos was made through him, and the new cosmos is coming into being through him.

My argument has been that the elements of Messiah-narrative which we find in Paul are mostly brought in to complete the blanks in one of the three main narratives. Sometimes, as in Philippians 2 and Colossians 1, the ‘story of the Messiah’, told from a particular point of view and in high poetic manner, can be laid out more fully (though never with anything like all the elements which could in principle have been there). But more often Jesus the Messiah is the one ‘through whom’ or ‘in whom’ the key moments in the other narratives are seen to happen. As in any worldview-narrative, we should not expect the full picture at any given moment, but we should expect that a good hypothesis about such a necessarily implicit full picture would have considerable explanatory power. I submit that my reconstruction of this worldview narrative, with its plots, sub-plots and play-within-the-play, resulting (like Pyramus and Thisbe) in the death of the hero, has just this kind of explanatory power. As we move from letter to letter, and passage to passage, we can see that, within a much richer worldview-narrative than is normally imagined, Paul has grasped the point that the Messiah embodies and enacts the creative power and saving love of God the creator himself; that he is the true Adam, reflecting God’s image and glory into the world; that he is the true Israel, rescuing Adam and so the world from their plight; and that, as Messiah, he stands over against even Israel, doing for Israel, and hence for Adam and the world, what they could not do for themselves. Once we recognize this set of narratives at the worldview level of the Apostle, passage after passage makes fresh sense.

The play-within-the-play is thus the moment of revelation, when the other dramas find their centre and meaning, and fully interlock at last. Perhaps this is after all what Shakespeare was getting at when he gave Bottom the speech which echoes, and parodies, Paul’s description of his visions (about which he isn’t allowed to speak) and his declaration that ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard, what God has prepared for those who love him’:

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, – past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was – there is no man can tell

what. Methought I was, and methought I had, – but man is but a patcht fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was ...²⁰⁶

But, Paul would say, God has revealed it by the spirit. The story of the Messiah, seldom stated fully but everywhere presupposed, brings the other worldview-stories to their climax, and enables them to dovetail together into full coherence. And the moon will shine, now in this way, now in that.

8. Conclusion: Tracking the Worldview-Story/Stories

There are, no doubt, several other ‘stories’ that one might detect in Paul. I have restrained myself in particular from setting out what seems to me a strong implicit story, consistent across his writings, about the people of God in the Messiah, indwelt by the spirit. As an excuse for this unwonted and no doubt unwelcome brevity, let me suggest that the ‘story of the church’ is less of a worldview element for Paul, and more of an actual argument, coming as it does on the surface of his letters rather than being embedded down below. He *assumes* the narratives of God and the world, of Israel and of Jesus; he *expounds* the narrative of the church. Worldviews are what you look *through*; but the church is what Paul regularly looks *at*. (This is not to detract from the point made in chapter 6, to which we shall return, that the *ekklēsia* itself, in its unity, holiness and witness, constitutes the central symbol of Paul’s worldview.)

Perhaps the most important thing to stress, in presenting this argument for a narrative substructure to Paul’s worldview, is the one to which (despite the long chorus of denial) he returns again and again: that there is after all a single narrative of creation, a single narrative of humankind, and not least but most controversially a single though deeply paradoxical narrative of Israel itself. As Richard Hays stresses, following Terry Donaldson, this is anything but a smooth crescendo, a straight line of development, into which Gentile Christians are somehow absorbed. ‘Rather,’ he says,

the ‘Israel’ into which Paul’s Corinthian converts were embraced was an Israel whose story had been hermeneutically reconfigured by the cross and resurrection. The result was that Jew and

Gentile alike found themselves summoned by the gospel story to a sweeping reevaluation of their identities, an imaginative paradigm shift so comprehensive that it can only be described as a ‘conversion of the imagination’.²⁰⁷

This result will no doubt be as unwelcome in some quarters as anything else in this book; but appeal must be made to the texts themselves. Those texts, not only but not least in Romans, indicate that Paul’s view of the faithfulness of God went all the way down to the deepest depths of his mind and heart. ‘Let God be true’: it is because that grand scriptural statement summarizes so much in Paul that it became the obvious hint towards the title of the present book. The worldview expressed in the symbolic praxis studied in the previous chapter resonated with that faithfulness at point after point, and we have now laid out the narratives, the main plot and the sequential sub-plots in which that same faithfulness was expressed in action. The worldview has found its narrative. The marriage can now bear fruit by providing answers to the key questions which any worldview must face.

¹ See the discussion in Longenecker 2002b, 3–16. For the potential charge of ‘faddishness’: Stroup 1981, 6. A helpful introduction to the field, though excluding Paul from consideration, is Powell 1993 [1990].

² See the discussions in chs. [1](#), [6 above \(24–36, 352–4\)](#).

³ I am mindful of the question of O’Donovan 2002, 195: ‘Would it make any difference, I wonder, if Tom Wright were to abandon his attempt to make every theme look like a story?’ As usual, O’Donovan’s friendly probing demands more clarity (in this case, about what is and isn’t meant by ‘story’), and I hope this chapter will contribute to that.

⁴ Geertz 2000 [1973], 48.

⁵ Geertz 2000 [1973], 82.

⁶ Horrell 2005, 85.

⁷ On Bultmann and ‘myth’ see above all Caird 1980, ch. 13; Thiselton 1980, chs. 35, 36; and *NTPG* 135, 424–7.

⁸ I here follow the critique of Bultmann’s denarrativized world in e.g. Hays 2002 [1983], 47–52; see too e.g. Hooker 2002, 85f. For the rejection of the ‘time stretching forward and backward’ see Cullmann’s engagement (Cullmann 1962 [1951], 63) with Barth *KD* 2.1.686 (= *CD* 2.1.608)). I owe to my friend the Reverend B. J. H. de la Mare the suggestion, in a paper written shortly before his death and still I hope to be published somewhere, that certain themes in T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* appear to engage with Barth’s commentary on Romans. Thus, for instance, the idea in ‘East Coker’ of a ‘moment/ Isolated, with no before and after’ appears to be questioning Barth’s comment on Rom. 4.28 (Barth 1968 [1933], 145–8); and the meditation on ‘the intersection of the timeless with time’ (‘Dry Salvages’) resonates with Barth on Rom. 1.20f. (Barth 47).

⁹ Bultmann 1958; for ‘but now’ see e.g. Rom. 3.21, and 143, 374f., 528, 554, 546. On ‘remythologizing’ see Vanhoozer 2010.

¹⁰ On Bultmann's gnostic tendencies, and their location within his wider project, see *Interpreters*. This agenda was taken further by Bultmann's pupil Helmut Koester: see, e.g., Koester 1982a and b; Koester 1990. On types of gnosticism see now e.g. Williams 1996; King 2003; Logan 2006; and see my own brief assessment in Wright 2006b.

¹¹ Details in Thiselton, [as above](#).

¹² Schweitzer, of course, stood out in the same period for a Jewish and indeed apocalyptic reading of Paul: see *Interpreters*.

¹³ e.g. the diagram in Engberg-Pedersen 2000, 34, which certainly embodies a story, though in my view a very truncated and generalized one; [see ch. 14 below](#).

¹⁴ Here is an irony: Sanders, the principal originator of the ‘new perspective’ (hereafter ‘NP’), paid almost no attention to the narrative dimension either in Jewish thought or in Paul, preferring to stick with a simplified ‘getting in and staying in’ narrative which was a lot more like one variation within the western protestant schemes which in other respects he rejected. For Dunn, too, the question of narrative has never been a major issue. To this extent my proposal here about the ‘real nature’ of the NP is not only controversial but polemical.

¹⁵ See the discussion in *Interpreters*.

¹⁶ See above all Martyn 1997 and his various other writings, discussed in *Interpreters*.

¹⁷ See the discussion of ‘apocalyptic’ in *Interpreters*.

¹⁸ Beker 1980, 353. He goes on: ‘The story unfolds; the concept defines. The story is multidimensional, the concept singular.’ I am arguing in the present chapter precisely for an unfolding and multidimensional narrative at the heart of Paul’s worldview.

¹⁹ Watson 2002, 239, 232, 234 (his italics), 239 again.

²⁰ Watson 2002, 232 (his italics), 239. Watson is here (surely consciously) standing within the long narrative of Barthian reaction against the perceived follies of ‘salvation history’: see Cullmann’s report of the Barthian reaction to his work: ‘these critics say that the crucial thing in the NT is the *vertical saving act of God in Christ*’ (Cullmann 1967 [1965], 16: italics original). It seems a shame to pull a very different discussion (proposals by myself, Hays and others, set against various alternatives) back into that post-war German world, which appealed to different texts, paid virtually no attention to second-Temple Judaism (and not much to Israel’s scriptures, either) and was, in the last analysis, significantly different people talking about significantly different things when compared with the personnel, the subject-matter and the whole orientation of today’s discussions.

²¹ As does John Barclay in a remarkable passage (Barclay 2002, 134f.) in which, by dint of what I assume is friendly caricature (‘Wright’s use of the term “story” becomes so all-encompassing that it is hard to know what would *not* qualify for this category’ [his italics]), Barclay excuses himself from having to engage with my actual arguments, let alone their textual base. To his charge that I find story all over the place, I reply with a shrewd saying of Umberto Eco: ‘It is usually possible to transform a non-narrative text into a narrative one’ (Eco 1979, 13). I explained the role and nature of worldview-related narratives clearly enough in *NTPG* 47–80, 215–23 and, in relation to Paul, 403–9. Critics who want to engage in discussion rather than pre-empt it might start there. Other positive treatments of ‘narrative’ in Paul include Witherington 1994.

²² See too Marshall 2002, 213, saying that he sides with those who think Paul has a story underlying what he is doing, rather than a story he is retelling; but that is just what most narrative theorists are normally saying. Where there are exceptions, they are highly significant; [see below](#).

²³ Petersen 1985.

²⁴ Robert Browning, ‘My Last Duchess’, in Ricks 1999, 435f.

²⁵ Lyrics (of this version) by Bob Yellen, Ralph Rinzler, John Herald: copyright © Lyrics@Universal Music Publishing Group.

²⁶ It does not, for instance, commit one to agreeing with everything other story-detectors have argued: e.g. Cupitt and Crossan (Longenecker 2002b, 4).

²⁷ Watson happily discerns all sorts of currents underneath various Pauline texts. As often as not, I agree with him.

²⁸ Lewis 1964, vii.

²⁹ Rom. 4.13; 5.17; Gal. 3.14.

³⁰ e.g. Hays 2002 [1983], 41, 45 (on Schweitzer's breaking off of the 'story' at the point where he might, instead, have gone on to show that one 'participates' in the life of the Messiah not by a kind of ahistorical magic but precisely by participating in the sacred story); Hays 2005, xi (noting that Paul offers *both* narrative continuity with Israel's story *and* a radical apocalyptic transformation).

³¹ Hooker 2002, 85f., 96 (the beginning and end of her article). Italics original, referring back to Longenecker 2002c, 83.

³² e.g. Käsemann's famous protest against Stendahl (though in fact, as Stendahl pointed out, aimed more particularly at Cullmann; and, as Cullmann might have pointed out, accusing him of things he was at pains to deny): Käsemann 1971 [1969], ch. 3, e.g. 62f.: 'to put it bluntly: with salvation history one is always on the safe side. For it allows us to think in terms of a development which ... leads to growing understanding and ultimately to the goal which the church has before it ... In no case should what we call the divine plan of salvation be absorbed by an immanent [not 'imminent' as in Horrell 2002, 159 n. 5] evolutionary process whose meaning can be grasped on earth, or which we can control and calculate.' On Käsemann's debate with Stendahl see already Wright 1978 (now *Perspectives*, ch. 1).

³³ Käsemann 1971 [1969], 63.

³⁴ W. Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.1.1–11. Following refs. are to this play.

³⁵ See Ward 2008, ch. 6 (on the moon's instability and ambiguity, see e.g. 121–6).

³⁶ 1.1.30. I follow the edn. of Holland 1994.

³⁷ 1.1.71–3, 83.

³⁸ 1.1.157f.

³⁹ 1.1.169f.

⁴⁰ 1.1.208–13

⁴¹ 1.2.97. The description of them as 'hard-handed men' is at 5.1.72.

⁴² 2.1.60.

⁴³ 2.1.103–5.

⁴⁴ On the comparative dating of *Romeo and Juliet* and the *Dream*, see Holland 1994, 110f. The bard seems to have been working on both at more or less the same time, some time between late 1594 and early 1596. 'Pyramus and Thisbe' (itself adapted from Ovid *Met.* 4.55–166) appears in retrospect as a highly abbreviated and caricatured version of *Romeo and Juliet*, and the normal view of tragedy – a means by which the audience achieves *katharsis* of the darker emotions (Aristotle *Poetics* 1449b.22–8) – fits well with Shakespeare's intent at this point, the main 'audience' in this case being of course the characters in the main 'plots' of the *Dream*. On the role of the mini-play see Holland 1994, 93.

⁴⁵ 5.1.241–5.

⁴⁶ 5.1.261–5.

⁴⁷ 5.1.289–95.

⁴⁸ 5.1.3–5.

⁴⁹ 5.1.337.

⁵⁰ For the ‘single’ account: e.g. *NTPG* 79, 403–9 (though I was there concentrating particularly on the way in which Paul’s compressed accounts of Jesus’ death draw together the other, larger stories into a single dense whole); for five different (though interlocking) narratives: e.g. Wright 1995 [‘Romans and the Theology of Paul’, now *Perspectives*, ch. 7], 67. One of the (to me) most puzzling features in Matera 2012 is his proposing (10f.) of only three stories in Paul (the story of saving grace in Paul’s own life; of that same grace in Christ; and of that same grace in the lives of those in Christ), omitting altogether the larger narratives of the creator and the cosmos and, particularly, of the covenant God and his people.

⁵¹ Thus, e.g., Matera 1999, 86; Witherington 1994, 5; Dunn 1998, 17f. Longenecker 2002b, 11f. notes, in highlighting these, that Meeks 1993, 196, 205 indicates a different three: Jesus, Israel, cosmos; and that Cupitt 1991, 114f. agrees with the fivefold model set out by Dunn.

⁵² See O'Donovan, cited above, 456 n. 3. Marshall 2002, 214 continues to express doubts about whether 'story' is the right category, and suggests that 'the actual relationship between God and his people' is what 'underlies and gives birth to the story' – without seeing, it appears, that 'the relationship between God and his people', to a second-Temple Jew, would precisely mean the long and problematic story of God and Israel. Even Bruce Longenecker can say (2002c, 83) that he is 'not aware of any significant way in which a heightened attentiveness to narrative dynamics has resulted in new exegetical insights or the profiling of certain textual features in unprecedented ways', suggesting that the real pay-off may come in ethics and practical or systematic theology. Dunn 1998, 17–19 gives the impression of proceeding in this way. This is cognate with his remarks in Dunn 2002, 220f., where he declares that he groans when he sees an actual analysis. The fact that Dunn still, after all his massive effort, has not resolved to his own satisfaction some of the central problems in integrating elements in Paul's thinking (e.g. Dunn 2002, 222; Dunn 2008 [2005], 96f., 430f.), seems to suggest that a fresh way in to the subject-matter might be a good idea. For a recent helpful survey of stories in Paul see Bird 2008b, ch. 3.

⁵³ Rom. 1.18–24.

⁵⁴ 1 Cor. 10.26, quoting Ps. 24.1; cf. Rom. 14.14.

⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 8.6; Rom. 11.36; cf. too e.g. Col. 1.15–17.

⁵⁶ Gen. 6.2–4; cf. *1 En.* 1–36 (normally regarded as a composite text).

⁵⁷ *4 Ez.* 3.7; 4.30; 7.11; *2 Bar.* 17.3; 23.4; 48.42; 54.15, 19 (though here each human is his or her own Adam); 56.5f.

⁵⁸ Rom. 5; 8; 1 Cor. 15; on the 'powers', Rom. 8.34–9; 1 Cor. 2.1–10; 15.20–8; Col. 2.14f.; Eph. 6.10–20.

⁵⁹ The 'two ages' is found both in 'apocalyptic' works and rabbinic thought; [see above, 178 n. 397](#).

⁶⁰ See above, 163–75, for discussion of the continuity of creation through to the new age.

⁶¹ 2 Cor. 5.17; Gal. 6.15; [see below](#).

⁶² Gal. 1.3–5. Michael Bird has pointed out to me in private conversation that both Romans and Galatians are framed by 'apocalyptic' or 'cosmic' statements concerning revelation, mystery, wrath, judgment, rescue, the evil age, and new creation: cf. Gal. 1.3f. with 6.15; Rom. 1.3f., 16–18, with 16.25f.

⁶³ e.g. Rom. 13.12f.; 1 Thess. 5.5; etc.

⁶⁴ Gal. 6.14–16. Italics of course added, though one could argue that, had they been available to him, Paul might well have employed them here.

⁶⁵ Hays 2000, 344.

⁶⁶ [See below, 1143–51](#).

⁶⁷ Rom. 12.2.

⁶⁸ Rom. 8.18–25.

⁶⁹ 1 Cor. 15.20–8.

⁷⁰ [See below, 878](#) and elsewhere (see index s.v. 'demons' and *stoicheia*).

⁷¹ Ps. 138.8; cf. 8.3; Pss. 95.5; 100.3.

⁷² The classic statement of this is in Käsemann 1969 [1965], 168–82; he developed it particularly in his Romans commentary, and returned to the theme in a popular lecture now in Käsemann 2010, 15–26.

⁷³ Rom. 14.17; Gal. 5.21 (see too 1 Cor. 6.9; Eph. 5.5).

⁷⁴ 1 Cor. 15.20–8; cf. Eph. 5.5, where 'the kingdom of the Messiah' appears to be distinguished from 'the kingdom of God'.

⁷⁵ See Käsemann 1969 [1965], 182. In 1 Cor. 15.23–8, ‘kingdom of God’ is not a slogan or cypher, but an encoded *narrative* about the way in which the Messiah will ‘reign’ until he hands over the ‘kingdom’ to God the father (15.24). For other uses of explicit ‘kingdom’-language in Paul see Rom. 14.17; 1 Cor. 4.20; 6.9f.; 15.50; Gal. 5.21; Eph. 5.5; Col. 1.13; 4.11; 1 Thess. 2.12; 2 Thess. 1.5. Perhaps equally significantly, cp. the uses of ‘reigning’ language: Rom. 5.17, already noted; 5.21; 6.12–23; 1 Cor. 4.8. The Pastorals have similar language: 1 Tim. 1.17; 6.15; 2 Tim. 4.1, 18. See again Allison 2010, 164–204, though I have a sense that Allison does not distinguish carefully enough the precise nuances of the phrase, particularly in Paul.

⁷⁶ Ps. 96.10–13; cp. the very similar 98.7–9, and e.g. Isa. 11.1–10; 55.12, etc.

⁷⁷ See e.g. O’Donovan 2005.

⁷⁸ Ps. 2.7–9.

⁷⁹ Isa. 11.1–10.

⁸⁰ On the Temple as microcosm [see above, 101](#).

⁸¹ So e.g. *Gen. Rabb.* 1.2, where Torah speaks the words from Prov. 8.30 (‘I was the work-plan of the Holy One’): ‘Thus the Holy One, blessed be he, consulted the Torah when he created the world.’ This is repeated in 1.4, where both Torah and the throne of glory were created before the world was made, citing Prov. 8.22; Ps. 93.2. A debate is recorded as to which of those two came first. Torah, not surprisingly, was chosen ahead of the throne.

⁸² Let the reader understand; but, for those who don’t, see the discussion of ‘apocalyptic’ approaches to Paul in *Interpreters*.

⁸³ Rom. 8.17, 29f.

⁸⁴ Rom. 3.23. As will become clear in Rom. 8.18–30, Ps. 8.5–8 forms an important part of the background.

⁸⁵ Rev. 1.6; 5.10; 20.6; cf. Ex. 19.6; Isa. 61.6; 1 Pet. 2.5, 9.

⁸⁶ Adams 2002, 31. Adams also, confusingly, switches the placings of ‘helper’ and ‘opponent’. In Greimas’s model, which Hays and I have followed, the ‘helper’ comes at the bottom left and the ‘opponent’ at the bottom right. I have reversed Adams’s lower line so that his model can the more easily be brought into dialogue with the one I have used elsewhere in this series, and in the present volume.

⁸⁷ Rom. 8.20.

⁸⁸ Ps. 2; Rom. 4.13; 8.17f. See *Perspectives*, ch. 33.

⁸⁹ Rom. 5.17.

⁹⁰ See ‘glory’ in 1.23; 3.23; 5.2; 8.30. For the meaning ‘power’, see e.g. 6.4 (the Messiah was raised from the dead ‘through the glory of the father’). On the wider context see Harrison 2011, ch. 6.

⁹¹ So e.g. 1 Cor. 6.2f.

⁹² Isa. 6.3; Hab. 2.14. Creation also proclaims the divine glory, as in Ps. 19.1.

⁹³ See e.g. Col. 3.1–4. Among misleading translations cf. e.g. NIV (1984): ‘the creation itself will be ... brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God’; RSV: ‘the creation itself ... will obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (altered in NRSV to ‘obtain the freedom of the glory’, cf. ESV ‘freedom of the glory’; ‘glorious liberty’ goes back, through AV, to Tyndale); NEB: ‘the universe itself is to ... enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God’; NJB: ‘the whole creation might be ... brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God.’ All these miss the careful point Paul is making.

⁹⁴ There is a sense in which, for Paul, this purpose has already been accomplished: ‘those he justified, them he also glorified’ (Rom. 8.30). [See below, 959, 1092, 1116](#).

⁹⁵ The classic statement of this is Rom. 1.18–25; but Paul presupposes this basically Jewish critique of idolatry at various other places, e.g. 1 Cor. 12.2; Gal. 4.8; 1 Thess. 1.9f. For the sense of something new, a reflex of the gospel itself, in Paul's critique [see below, end of ch. 9](#).

⁹⁶ On Paul's various terms connected with human beings, [see below](#).

⁹⁷ 1 Cor. 15.39.

⁹⁸ Rom. 8.12–16 (body to be raised); 12.1f. (as locus of obedience); 6.12–23 (presented to the creator). See *RSG* 248–59, 263f.

⁹⁹ On Paul's anthropological terms a useful back marker for contemporary discussion is Jewett 1971. Many commentators have added their own stones to the growing pile: e.g. Schreiner 2001, ch. 6; Schnelle 2005 [2003], ch. 19.

¹⁰⁰ For *nous* cf. Rom. 1.28; 7.23, 25; 12.2; 14.5; 1 Cor. 1.10; 2.16; 14.14, 15 (twice), 19; Eph. 4.17, 23; Phil. 4.7; Col. 2.18; 2 Thess. 2.2.

¹⁰¹ This is a favourite of Paul's. A representative sample might include Rom. 1.21, 24; 2.5, 15, 29; 5.5; 6.17; 8.27; 2 Cor. 1.22; 2.4; 3.2, 3, 15.

¹⁰² Many of Paul's refs. to *pneuma* are of course to the divine spirit, and in several passages it is notoriously difficult to be clear which he intends. Among the clear references to the human spirit are Rom. 1.9; 2.29; 8.16; 9.1; Gal. 6.18; Phil. 1.27; 4.13; Philem. 25. Cf. too the importance of *pneuma* in Stoicism ([chs. 3 above and 14 below](#)).

¹⁰³ This term is comparatively rare in Paul: cf. Rom. 2.9; 11.3; 13.1; 16.4; 1 Cor. 15.45; 2 Cor. 1.23; 12.15; Eph. 6.6; Phil. 1.27; 2.30; Col. 3.23; 1 Thess. 2.8; 5.23.

¹⁰⁴ This is even rarer: 1 Cor. 7.37; 16.12; Eph. 2.3.

¹⁰⁵ For the *nous* being darkened: Rom. 1.28; Eph. 4.17; Col. 2.18; and being redeemed: Rom. 12.2; 1 Cor. 2.16; Eph. 4.23. The *kardia* darkened: Rom. 1.21, 24; 2.5; 16.18; 2 Cor. 3.15; Eph. 4.18; and redeemed: Rom. 2.29; 5.5; 6.17; 10.8–10; 2 Cor. 1.22; 3.2; 4.6; Gal. 4.6; Eph. 1.18; 3.17; 5.19; Col. 3.15. The *pneuma*, more complex because of the overlap with other ‘spirits’ that may influence or take over the human, may be seen negatively in e.g. Rom. 11.8, and positively in e.g. Rom. 2.29; 7.6; 8.16. The *psychē* and the *thelēma*, reflecting different modes of interiority, can again go either way as well as being in ‘neutral’ mode.

¹⁰⁶ cf. 1 Cor. 15.50. It is important to note that this usage is not uniform across the NT: cf. e.g. Lk. 24.39, where the risen Jesus speaks of his having ‘flesh and bones’. See RSG 389f.

¹⁰⁷ Paul does not often mention the serpent (though cf. 2 Cor. 11.3); but the personification of ‘sin’ in Rom. 7.7–25, especially in 7.11, looks as though it is doing the same job.

¹⁰⁸ cf. e.g. the treatment of Rom. 9–11 in Dodd 1959 [1932].

¹⁰⁹ Calling the story of Israel a ‘sub-plot’ will not, to those who have understood the controlling image of the play, imply any diminishment of its significance. After all, the final sub-plot – the central action which then enables everything else to work out right – is the story of Jesus himself.

¹¹⁰ See Lincoln 2002; to be fair, his assigned topic was shaped by Dunn’s proposal of categories.

¹¹¹ See too the discussion of the whole area in relation to the theological sequence of Paul’s thought in [ch. 10 below](#).

¹¹² Rom. 2.19f. See *Perspectives*, ch. 30; I shall not repeat the sub-arguments and secondary references here.

¹¹³ See below, [512](#), [812–14](#), [836f](#), and esp. [921–5](#).

¹¹⁴ Gal. 1.11; 1 Thess. 2.4; cf. 1 Tim. 1.11; Tit. 1.3.

¹¹⁵ Perhaps this is why he uses the word ‘oracles’, thinking already into the situation of non-Jews, where a fresh word from some divinity might well be thought of in such terms.

¹¹⁶ For this meaning of ‘faithful’ elsewhere in Romans, cf. Poirier 2008.

¹¹⁷ Gen. 2.21 with 15.12; cf. Walton 2001, 177.

¹¹⁸ This point is still often completely missed, e.g. Dunn 2002, 221, speaking of Paul’s ‘excerpting’ Abraham ‘from the story of Israel’ and thereby ‘reinserting’ him into Paul’s own story, resulting in ‘convolutions in the arguments of Galatians 3 and even Romans 4’. Any convolutions here are not in Paul’s mind or arguments. See further *Perspectives*, ch. 33.

¹¹⁹ See below, [1156–1258](#).

¹²⁰ contra Dodd 1959 [1932], 68, on Paul’s ‘deeply ingrained’ patriotism. And cf. the NEB (for which Dodd wrote the draft of Romans) of Rom. 11.1: ‘Has God rejected his people? I cannot believe it!’ That paraphrase of *mē genoito* well expressed Dodd’s sense that Paul’s argument should have driven him to say ‘yes’ and that it was a deep-level prejudice which made him react and seek another way.

¹²¹ Gal. 3.14; cf. 863–7.

¹²² For all this see Wright 1991 [*Climax*] ch. 13, and [below, 1156–1258](#).

¹²³ Other examples of the same point: the summary refs. to the ‘obedience’ of the Messiah in 5.12–21, referring back to the more detailed statements of his death and its meaning in 3.24–6; 4.24f.; 5.6–10.

¹²⁴ See above, [139–63](#).

¹²⁵ 32.4: Rom. 9.14; 32.21: Rom. 10.19; 32.43: Rom. 15.10. See Hays 1989a, 163f.

¹²⁶ 9.30f.; 10.12f. It is, indeed, possible that we should read *telos nomou* in relation to the fact that Paul has been expounding the story of Israel from Genesis to Deuteronomy, and is finding the achievement of the Messiah at the ‘end of the Torah’ in that sense as well as others. The idea of God’s faithfulness being met and matched by human faithfulness opens up afresh as an exegetical option for ‘from faith to faith’ in Rom. 1.17.

¹²⁷ cf. the refs. to Dt. 8.17 and esp. 9.4: see Hays 1989a, 78f.

¹²⁸ See, rightly, Furnish 1984, 242–5 (against e.g. Schulz and Georgi).

¹²⁹ Again, as in *4 Ez.* and *2 Bar.*

¹³⁰ 1 Cor. 15.22.

¹³¹ See below, 1455f.

¹³² On Torah see e.g. Hays 2005, ch. 5; see the summary on xiii: ‘Paul’s diverse statements about the Law, which have caused so much difficulty for interpreters who seek systematic uniformity in Paul’s thought, are best understood as narratively ordered within an unfolding dramatic plot, so that the role of the Law changes at different stages of the story.’ See also, very differently, Westerholm 2004, chs. 16 and 19. The analogy with the Shakespearian moon is not, of course, intended as a one-for-one allegory, but only as a loose but still potentially illuminating illustration. Still, it is interesting that when Moonshine appears and announces that his lantern ‘doth the horned moon present’, Demetrius declares that ‘he should have worn the horns on his head’ (5.1.233f.). Shakespeare would have been familiar with the horns regularly given to Moses in iconography, due to a C12 mistranslation of Exodus 34.30 which had Moses ‘horned’ instead of ‘shining’, explaining his portrayal on e.g. Perugino’s fresco in the Cambio, Perugia (early C16) and Michelangelo’s statue of Moses on the tomb of Julius II in the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome (1513–16), and frequently thereafter.

¹³³ Schnelle 2005 [2003], 506–21 sees three options for (*ho*) *nomos*: first, referring to the Sinai revelation and its associated complex of traditions; second, for a reference which includes that but goes beyond its foundational character into a wider reference to ‘law’ in the non-Jewish world; third, for a law/rule/principle/norm without reference to Torah (see esp. 506 n. 43).

¹³⁴ See the brief but helpful discussion in Jewett 2007, 297. Cranfield 1975, 1979, 361f. finds it ‘incredible’ that all the uses of *nomos* should refer to the Mosaic Torah.

¹³⁵ cf. Wright 1991 [*Climax*], Part II; and also *Climax* 4–7 on contradictions, tensions, inconsistencies, antinomies, and so forth.

¹³⁶ Ex. 19.6.

¹³⁷ Rom. 7.10; Gal. 3.21.

¹³⁸ Lev. 18.5; cf. Rom. 10.5; Gal. 3.12.

¹³⁹ e.g. again Rom. 2.17–24; and the whole vocation of, and covenant with, Abraham.

¹⁴⁰ Rom. 2.12. (For ‘the saints’ judging the world cf. Dan. 7.14, 18, 22, 27.) Paul is clear that those ‘outside the law’ will be judged ‘without the law’, in other words, that Torah does not address the pagan nations *per se*. On Rom. 3.19f., sometimes thought an exception to this, see below.

¹⁴¹ Longenecker 2002c, 66 boldly (but in my view rightly) claims that ‘Galatians as much as Romans exhibits a robust covenantal linearity.’

¹⁴² See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 551–4.

¹⁴³ Rom. 7.8–11.

¹⁴⁴ Gal. 2.19a.

¹⁴⁵ cf. too 3.19: it was added ‘because of transgressions’, on which see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 171f.

¹⁴⁶ This enables us both to resist the shallow analyses of Sanders, Räisänen and others (see *Interpreters*) and to resist, too, the interpretation of Paul's statements in Galatians which proposes that the law is there not only 'negative' but actually 'demonic'. One should not, either, separate out the apparently 'negative' portrayal of Torah in Gal. from a more 'positive' one in Rom. Respecting the integrity and unique argument of each letter does not necessarily lead to postulating a substantial change of view between them. The same apparent negativity appears in both, but in Rom. we see more clearly the *divine purpose* of this apparent negativity: it is part of the necessary back story to Paul's view of the achievement of the death of the Messiah. See e.g. Meyer 1990, 82 n. 31.

¹⁴⁷ Rom. 7.14–23.

¹⁴⁸ For these three interpretations cf. respectively e.g. (a) Dodd 1959 [1932] ad loc., and Gundry 1980; (b) Bultmann 1960, 173–85, and Kümmel 1974 [1929] (and see Jewett 2007, 440–73); (c) Cranfield 1975 and Dunn 1988a ad loc.

¹⁴⁹ Rom. 7.24f.

¹⁵⁰ *Climax* ch. 10.

¹⁵¹ See too Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 577f.

¹⁵² As in Gal. 4.6–7 and 5.16–26, and of course Rom. 8 as a whole, anticipated in 2.29 and 7.6.

¹⁵³ Paul seems happy with the paradox (cf. 1 Cor. 7.19, on which [see below, 1434–43](#)), in a way that has proved notoriously difficult for his interpreters, stuck as they often have been between the deJudaized alternatives of a 'positive' and 'negative' reading of 'the law'.

¹⁵⁴ Rom. 10.5–9.

¹⁵⁵ Dt. 30.15–16, 19–20.

¹⁵⁶ See now the strong statement of this in Gorman 2009, ch. 1. I am broadly happy with this, except for the fact that, by not highlighting the resurrection of Jesus, Phil. 2.6–11 cannot as it stands claim to be a complete, or even fully balanced, statement of Paul's view.

¹⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 15.3–8 (vv. 1–2 make it clear that this is a statement of 'the gospel'). It is an open question how much of this passage Paul thinks is 'the tradition he received'; did it continue to 'all the apostles'? or to 'some fell asleep'? or even further? Certainly Paul has added his own voice here in the first person; but might it be possible that an 'official' tradition already included the appearance to him, which he has simply turned into a first-person statement (from 'last of all he appeared to Paul' to 'last of all he appeared to me')? For the debates about the extent of the early tradition here encapsulated see e.g. Fitzmyer 2008, 540–43.

¹⁵⁸ See the argument in *Perspectives*, ch. 31.

¹⁵⁹ 15.25, 27, quoting Pss. 110 and 8.

¹⁶⁰ On Jesus' Messiahship [see below, 690–701, 815–36](#).

¹⁶¹ On Messiahship, see *NTPG* 307–20, *JVG* ch. 11, and [above, 122–35](#); for the 'messianic woes', see e.g. *JVG* 465f., 577–9; and [above, 434](#).

¹⁶² Rom. 2.16 etc.; [see 1085–9](#).

¹⁶³ [See below, ch. 10, esp. 879–911](#).

¹⁶⁴ 1 Cor. 1.18–25.

¹⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 1.30f.

¹⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 2.8f.

¹⁶⁷ See too Col. 2.14f.

¹⁶⁸ Rom. 1.1–6.

¹⁶⁹ This is of course, predictably, one of the reasons why some scholars have tried to suggest that 1.3f. does not really represent something Paul himself wants to say. See e.g. Jewett 2007, 103–8, who

traces a complex hypothetical development in which Paul is correcting earlier formulae which were at least potentially ‘chauvinistic’ or ‘adoptionist’ (104), coming from a pre-Pauline Jewish Christian context which might have reflected ‘zealotism’ and ‘pride’ (108) and which Paul therefore wanted to modify, albeit with eirenic intent *vis-à-vis* the Roman church. All this seems to me to depend on now largely outdated theories about pre-Pauline Jewish Christianity on the one hand and Paul’s own supposedly non-Davidic christology on the other.

[170](#) Rom. 15.7–13. See Longenecker 2002c, 63f.; Söding 2001.

[171](#) Rom. 9.5, on which see [below, 707–9](#).

[172](#) For this, see below, [836–51](#).

[173](#) Gal. 1.3–5. This is hardly, then, a statement about God invading essentially foreign territory as one might imagine from some ‘apocalyptic’ theories.

[174](#) Gal. 2.20.

[175](#) Hays 2002 [1983].

[176](#) On the translation of v. 11, especially the *dēlon hoti*, see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 149 n. 42. I hope that the present context will strengthen the argument there suggested.

[177](#) 27.15–68; [see above, 139–63](#).

[178](#) Gal. 4.3–7.

[179](#) 3.17, alluding to Ex. 12.40 and behind that Gen. 15.13 (cf. Ac. 7.6); 3.22 (shut up under sin), 3.23 (kept under guard by the law), 3.24 (under the *paidagōgos*).

[180](#) For the Messiah coming when God’s appointed time had run its full course, see e.g. 2 *Bar.* 72.2 etc.

[181](#) See below, 818f.; and Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 43f.

[182](#) See the obvious parallel with Rom. 8.15.

[183](#) Despite e.g. Martyn 1997, 392, we should certainly see 4.7 as reaffirming 3.29’s emphasis on the Galatians being heirs of Abraham – albeit, of course, in a thoroughly redefined way.

[184](#) See again *Perspectives*, ch. 30.

[185](#) For the relation of *dikaiosynē* and *pistis*, [see ch. 10 below, esp. e.g. 925–66](#).

[186](#) This is, I believe, the biblical reality underneath the later patristic formulations (e.g. at Chalcedon in 451) of the ‘divinity’ and ‘humanity’ of Jesus: [see below, 694](#).

[187](#) Rom. 4.24f.

[188](#) Rom. 5.9f.

[189](#) cp. too Phil. 2.6–8.

[190](#) Full details in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 508–14, and Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 2. On ‘life’ and ‘age to come’, and the relation of both to ‘kingdom’, see Allison 2010, 164–203.

[191](#) Rom. 6.11; cp. Gal. 2.19.

[192](#) 7.6, looking back to 6.22.

[193](#) See Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 10; Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 577–81.

[194](#) 7.21–5.

[195](#) 8.10–11.

[196](#) 7.10, echoing our old friend Lev. 18.5 and the passages in Dt. 30.

[197](#) Ps. 2.7f.

[198](#) cp. again Gal. 2.19f.

[199](#) 10.19, quoting – tellingly! – from Dt. 32.21.

[200](#) 9.6–29.

[201](#) Phil. 2.6–11.

[202](#) Again, these three narratives are not to be played off against one another: thus, discerning ‘Adam’ in the story is not an argument against discerning an incarnational christology (against Dunn), and vice versa (against Bauckham) ([see ch. 9 below](#)).

[203](#) See Oakes 2001, esp. ch. 5; Hellerman 2005, esp. ch. 6.

[204](#) Though cf. ‘work out your own salvation’ in 2.12. I take this in terms of ‘figure out the specifically Messiah-shaped “salvation”, rather than the Caesar-shaped one you are being offered all the time.’ [See ch. 12 below](#).

[205](#) 1 Cor. 8.6. Strictly speaking there is no ‘belong to’ or ‘live through’, but simply ‘from whom all things and we to him ... through whom all things, and we to him’. Greek can do without verbs when these are felt to be obvious; English finds it much harder. On the christology of the verse, [see ch. 9 below](#).

[206](#) *Dream* 4.1.205–16.

[207](#) Hays 2005, 5f., citing Donaldson 1997, 236. See too Hays 1989a, 183, 185f., 191.

Chapter Eight

FIVE SIGNPOSTS TO THE APOSTOLIC MINDSET

1. Introduction

We return to Kipling's 'honest serving men', who come into their own when we analyze worldviews. To repeat what we said at the end of chapter 6: we approach Kipling's list, 'what, why, when, how, where and who', in a different order, consonant with our earlier worldview analysis: (1) 'Who are we?' (2) 'Where are we?' (not just geographically, but in wider terms); (3) 'What's wrong?' (Even after the victory of Jesus the Messiah, all is not well in the world, and we must see how Paul describes the present state of things.) Kipling's 'How' appears here in the guise of the question (4), 'What's the solution?' – or, if you like, 'How is this situation rectified?', and Paul's answer to that will take us further ahead. But perhaps the most important question, still controversial after two thousand years, is (5) When: 'What time is it?'¹

The final question, (6) 'Why?', will be postponed to the next part of the book. Paul has an answer for it, which can be unhelpfully summarized as 'because of God'. More useful, perhaps, is to say: that is the question which will take him, and us, from worldview to theology. In Paul's case, as I have already hinted, that move is vitally important, since the strange worldview within which he operates, within which his own particular mindset is what it is, has none of the symbolic anchors provided either by his ancestral culture or by the cultures into which he went with the good news. To look at the five other questions will be to understand that worldview and mindset from one more angle, and to see more clearly why 'theology' was necessary not only to answer the ultimate question, 'Why?', but more particularly to stabilize, reinforce and energize the communities in whose common life Paul wanted that worldview to become second nature.

2. Who Are We?

The first question is not difficult. As we saw at the conclusion of the previous chapter, we should not resist (as some have tried to do) the conclusion that Paul saw himself and those who like him were ‘in the Messiah’, as ‘seed of Abraham’, ‘the Jew’, ‘the circumcision’ and even ‘Israel’. Not even, we note, ‘*true* seed of Abraham’, ‘true Jew’, ‘true circumcision’ or ‘true Israel’. The word ‘true’ does not occur in any of the key texts, most of which we have already noted in other connections, but which we may simply log once more at this point:

²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no ‘male and female’; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus. ²⁹And, if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham’s seed. You stand to inherit the promise.²

²⁸The ‘Jew’ isn’t the person who appears to be one, you see. Nor is ‘circumcision’ what it appears to be, a matter of physical flesh. ²⁹The ‘Jew’ is the one in secret; and ‘circumcision’ is a matter of the heart, in the spirit rather than the letter. Such a person gets ‘praise’, not from humans, but from God.³

³We are the ‘circumcision’, you see – we who worship God by the spirit, and boast in the Messiah Jesus, and refuse to trust in the flesh.⁴

¹⁵Circumcision, you see, is nothing; neither is uncircumcision! What matters is new creation.

¹⁶Peace and mercy on everyone who lines up by that standard – yes, on God’s Israel.⁵

Of these, only the last is controversial in its meaning, since many have argued that ‘God’s Israel’ here refers not to the whole company of Messiah-believing Jews and gentiles, but to a Jewish-specific category, whether present Jewish Messiah-believers, present and future Jewish Messiah-believers, or indeed Jews past, present and/or future, irrespective of Messiah-belief. There are translation difficulties there, too, hinging on the meaning of the *kai* which I have rendered ‘yes’ before the final phrase, in the sense of ‘yes, even on God’s Israel’, but which has often been taken to mean ‘and’, making ‘God’s Israel’ a different category of people to those

described as ‘everyone who lines up by that standard’.⁶ However, the force of the arguments for taking the verse in company with the other three just noted is very strong. The whole argument of Galatians is precisely that Abraham has one family, not two, and that this single family consists of all those who believe in Jesus the Messiah. Is Paul going to pull back from this at the last minute? Scarcely.

More controversial is the use of ‘Israel’ in Romans 9—11. In that section Paul clearly uses the word to denote what elsewhere he can refer to as ‘Israel according to the flesh’.⁷ But then he makes a distinction between two kinds of ‘Israel’, which at first (9.6–13) looks as if it might mean simply a subdivision of ethnic Israel (‘not all who are from Israel are in fact Israel’, 9.6). The question remains moot whether the ‘true Israel’ implied by this distinction is the same family that is then broadened out in 9.24 to include a much larger family, ‘not only from Jews but also from the nations’, let alone whether the phrase ‘all Israel’ in 11.26 refers to both the ‘Israel’s of 9.6, or to an extension of the ‘true Israel’ subset, or what. We note, however, that in 11.17–24 the point is that gentile Christians have been ‘grafted in’ to the single olive tree. Paul’s argument is about that single tree, the strange things that have happened to it, and the even stranger things that might yet happen to it – not, in other words, about two trees standing side by side. When we add that picture to Paul’s clear and unambiguous use of words like ‘Jew’, ‘circumcision’, ‘God’s chosen ones’, ‘saints’, ‘those who call on the lord’s name’, all to designate Messiah-believers, there should be no doubt as to what is going on.

A similar conclusion is reached by a slightly different route if we return to the passages about the *ekklēsia*, and in particular the remarkable *ekklēsia tou theou* which seems to designate a third category, alongside ‘Jews and Greeks’, in 1 Corinthians 10.32.⁸ The same phrase is able to denote the specific local community: Paul addresses the letter to *tē ekklēsia tou theou tē ousē en Korinthō*, ‘to the church of God which is in Corinth’.⁹ Wayne Meeks, tracing this usage to the biblical phrase ‘assembly of the lord’, which referred to ‘a formal gathering of all the tribes of ancient Israel or their representatives’, notes the partial parallel in Qumran, and concludes

The precise connection between such usage and that of Paul is elusive, but there can be little doubt that the concept of belonging to a single, universal people of God, which so distinguished the Pauline Christians from other clubs and cults, came directly from Judaism.¹⁰

So, too, Richard Hays offers the following reflection on Paul's use of Deuteronomic material in 1 Corinthians 5:

Paul thinks of his Gentile Corinthian readers as having been taken up into Israel in such a way that they now share in Israel's covenant privileges and obligations ... [He addresses them] as participants in the covenant community, using the language of Scripture. He is trying to reshape their consciousness so that they take corporate responsibility for the holiness of their community; he does this by using Scripture to address them as Israel.¹¹

If these are the positive signs that Paul assumes that he and his fellow Messiah-believers are 'Abraham's seed', 'the Jew' and so forth, there are equally striking negative signposts against alternative analyses. Even when young churches and their members are showing every sign of not having understood what has happened to them in coming to be 'in the Messiah', and of still thinking and living in the way they had done as pagans, if not more so, Paul refuses to think of them or refer to them (as some scholars have done) as 'gentile Christians':

²You know that *when you were still pagans (hote ethnē ēte)* you were led off, carried away again and again, after speechless idols.¹²

This is extraordinary: they used to be *ethnē*, 'nations', that is (from a Jewish point of view) 'pagans', but they are that no longer. Commenting on this, Hays rubs in the point:

Within Paul's symbolic world, they are no longer among the *goyim*, because they have been taken up into the story of Israel. It should be noted that Paul is not trying to convince his Gentile readers to accept this identity description as a novel claim; rather, he assumes their identification with Israel as a given and tries to reshape their behavior in light of this identification.¹³

The same point emerges precisely when Paul is rebuking the community for a glaring moral lapse: such behaviour, he insists, is 'a kind of immorality that even the pagans don't practise'.¹⁴ The force depends on the suppressed *a fortiori*: even the pagans don't do this, so how much more should you

refrain from such behaviour, since you are no longer ‘pagans’! In all these passages we should note, as Hays stresses, that this double identification – no longer ‘pagans’, now part of the covenant community – is not something for which Paul has to argue. It is a given. It is, in my language, a matter of worldview: something you look *through*, not something you look at. It is part of Paul’s primary answer to the question, ‘Who are we?’

There were times, however, when Paul was forced to take off his spectacles, or to tell his hearers they had better take off theirs, for cleaning if not repair. Then, and only then, does one look *at* the lenses rather than *through* them. One such moment has to do precisely with identity, with ‘Who are we?’ If Paul and his community were ‘the circumcision’, ‘the Jew’, ‘the seed of Abraham’, what did that say about the community of Jews who were not Messiah-believers – and what did it say about his own relation to that community? From one point of view, he already knew the answer, having been on the other side of the fence: a deep hostility was to be expected against the scandalous suggestion of a crucified Messiah. It is no good pretending, as some scholars have tried to do, that this belief was not so scandalous after all; not only does Paul say so, he has the scars to prove it.¹⁵ Paul can speak in terms of a real differentiation, a real distancing of himself from ‘his former life in *Ioudaismos*’.¹⁶ That in itself is a remarkable way of putting it. Likewise, he can spell out the privileges which were his as a Jew of the strictest sort, and then say that he regards them all as garbage.¹⁷ But at the same time he can point out that he is just as Jewish as the ‘false apostles’ in Corinth; that he ‘becomes as a Jew to the Jews’, and ‘as one under the law to those under the law’ (whatever that means) ‘in order to win Jews’ and ‘in order to win those under the law’, even though he himself is ‘not under the law’.¹⁸ And, movingly and memorably, he can speak of his unceasing and heart-rending sorrow over ‘my brothers, my kinsfolk according to the flesh’. He can pray for their salvation, and can cite himself, an Israelite, as an example of the fact that God is still in the business of rescuing Israelites, that he has not ‘forsaken his people whom he foreknew’.¹⁹

Scholarship has come and gone around the apparent twin poles of this answer to ‘Who are we?’. To read some, it might seem almost as though Paul is sweeping away everything Jewish and replacing it with an entirely new construct.²⁰ At other times it has seemed as though Paul is still basically a Jew who happens to have a particular commission to bring gentiles into the fold.²¹ Neither of these extremes gets near the heart of the matter. As we have seen, there is a real, substantial and (to a non-Messiah-believing Jew) deeply offensive claim that those who do believe in Jesus as Messiah constitute the ‘seed of Abraham’, ‘the circumcision’, and so on. I do not know whether this constitutes Paul’s communities as, in sociological terms, a ‘reform movement’ or a ‘sect’. Some might say it makes them a ‘sect’, but the overtones of that word do not fit the Pauline reality as it appears in the texts.²² From Paul’s point of view it is not the Messiah-people who are the ‘sect’: they are in direct continuity with Abraham himself. If anything, the ‘sect’, for Paul, consists of those who refuse to believe in Jesus, the group that is, by its own decision, cut off from the parent body, the branches broken off from the olive tree.²³ Of course, those in that category might well say the same about Paul, but it is not up to the social historian to take sides in that dispute. What we are trying to do is to track Paul’s own worldview, not pronounce lofty sociological judgments.

Let us put it like this: to anyone who might say, ‘But, Paul, you are turning your back on everything Jewish; you are rejecting your own people; you are encouraging people to think that Jews are the wrong sort of people, that “Judaism” (to call it that for the moment) is the wrong sort of religion,’ Paul would answer, ‘*mē genoito!* Absolutely not! I worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; everything I say, do and think is rooted entirely in Israel’s scriptures; I celebrate the fulfilment of our national hope, the resurrection of the dead; I am a follower of the Jewish Messiah, who (as our scriptures have taught us) is the lord of the whole world.’ This is a deeply Jewish position to take. To deny any scrap of this would be to take a step towards a non-Jewish, or anti-Jewish stance, but Paul never moves his little toe an inch in that direction.

Similarly, to anyone who might say, ‘But, Paul, you are simply saying that the great Jewish story has opened up to reveal its own Messiah, so that people now simply need to get on board with God’s ongoing historical purposes, through which they will be carried forwards in a smooth developmental process to their ultimate salvation,’²⁴ Paul would again answer with a *mē genoito*. The cross of the Messiah bars the way to any such neat developmental scheme, any such smooth upward path. That’s why it’s a scandal; that’s why people throw stones at him; that’s why the ‘word of the cross’ has created a new community, a community which both is and isn’t ‘Israel’, a community that has died and been raised, that lives in God’s new age (but also, though in a different sense, still lives in the present one too, with all the problems which that dual location implies). That is why the terminology he uses to describe this new community is controversial still today, as it probably was when originally written. It is no good trying to fit the wind of Paul’s ecclesiology into the bottle of the modernist alternatives, insisting that Paul was either ‘anti-Jewish’ or ‘pro-Jewish’ (just as it was silly to try to decide whether he was ‘for’ or ‘against’ the Mosaic law). We must let him tell his own story and construct his own identity (or rather, he would say, to live within the new identity constructed by God through the Messiah). Anachronistic alternatives will never catch his meaning.

One element in this new identity is already emerging strongly, and we must mention it here explicitly. The people to whom Paul reckons he belongs could almost be defined as those who tell the scriptural story, the great story of God and Israel, as *their own story now fulfilled in, and transformed by, the Messiah*. That is clear from such passages as Galatians 3—4 and 1 Corinthians 10.1–10, but also from many others. This great story is, indeed, the subtext of Romans 5—8 as a whole, which lays out the scriptural narrative from the creation of the cosmos to its great forthcoming redemption in terms of the Israelite deliverance-narrative, the story of the exodus, now coming to new expression in the Messiah and the spirit.²⁵ This brings us, of course, to the central claim, the central identity-marker of this

people. Who are we? We are the Messiah's people; we are indwelt by the spirit of God, the spirit of the Messiah.

We shall explore this more fully when studying Paul's redefinition of the Jewish doctrine of election. But for the moment, at the level of what Paul looks *through* rather than *at*, we may say this. Paul can refer in several different overlapping and interlocking ways to the identity which the community finds 'in the Messiah'. He can use a straightforward genitive: *hoi tou Christou*, 'those of the Messiah'. He can refer to them, famously, as those *en Christō*, 'in the Messiah'; and he can use other prepositional phrases too. I have set these out elsewhere, and argued the following case about them.²⁶

Far and away the most likely origin for this characteristic usage, indicating also its intended meaning, is the (admittedly very varied) Jewish context of royal narrative and messianic expectation. From this seed-bed Paul draws the following: (1) that *Christos* does indeed mean 'Messiah' for Paul (though it can sometimes function as a fairly 'quiet' meaning, pointing forward to the time, not yet reached in Paul, when the word would become simply a proper name);²⁷ (2) that one of the main significant things about 'Messiah' for Paul is that the Messiah draws Israel's long story to its climax (but see (4) below), and through his achievement inaugurates the 'age to come'; (3) that in doing so the Messiah embodies Israel's vocation and destiny in himself, so that what is true of him is true of his people; (4) that in the case of Jesus the notion of Messiahship has been radically redrawn around his death and resurrection, so that 'his people' now means 'those who share this death and resurrection', and the 'long story' just referred to is prevented from ever being mistaken for a straightforward crescendo; (5) that the Messiah's faithful obedience to the divine plan for Israel means that the identifying mark of the Messiah's people is precisely their own *pistis*, indeed their own *hypakoē pisteōs*, 'obedience of faith' (which Paul would have said, and sometimes did say, was the result of the spirit's work through the gospel);²⁸ (6) that Paul has rethought the agenda whereby the Messiah is the one who builds the new Temple, fights the true battle against Israel's enemies and establishes God's justice and peace on the earth, and claims

that all this has been done, though in a transformed sense, through Jesus the Messiah; (7) that the Messiah, in line with Psalm 2, Isaiah 11 and 42, and similar passages, is constituted as the lord and eschatological Judge of the whole world, though this too, as with his ‘reign’, is a role he shares with his people.²⁹ Paul’s understanding of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah offers all this and, as the advertisements say, much, much more. His central answer to the question, ‘Who are we?’, is: ‘We are the Messiah’s people, defined by our membership “in” him, marked out by our sharing of his *pistis*,³⁰ celebrating our status as having died and been raised “with” him, living in the “age to come” which he has inaugurated.’³¹ In a passage at once both deeply theological and deeply personal, Paul takes off the worldview spectacles that normally he looks through and tells his audience what it is like to look *at* them instead. To make quite clear the answer to the question, ‘Who are we?’, he personalizes it: ‘Who am I?’ In answer, he pours out the whole story:

If anyone else thinks they have reason to trust in the flesh, I’ve got more.⁵ Circumcised? On the eighth day. Race? Israelite. Tribe? Benjamin. Descent? Hebrew through and through. Torah-observance? A Pharisee.⁶ Zealous? I persecuted the church! Official status under the law? Blameless.

⁷Does that sound as though my account was well in credit? Well, maybe; but whatever I had written in on the profit side, I calculated it instead as a loss – because of the Messiah.⁸ Yes, I know that’s weird, but there’s more: I calculate everything as a loss, because knowing the Messiah, Jesus as my lord is worth far more than everything else put together! In fact, because of the Messiah I’ve suffered the loss of everything, and I now calculate it as trash, so that my profit may be the Messiah,⁹ and that I may be discovered in him, not having my own covenant status defined by Torah, but the status which comes through the Messiah’s faithfulness: the covenant status from God which is given to faith.¹⁰ This means knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, and knowing the partnership of his sufferings. It means sharing the form and pattern of his death,¹¹ so that somehow I may arrive at the final resurrection from the dead.³²

What strikes us about this passage is its deep *Jewishness*, at the very moment that Paul is distancing himself from his own Pharisaic heritage. The suffering which points on to resurrection is straight out of the Maccabean literature. The utter devotion to the Messiah, rejecting

everything else to cling on to him, would have done credit to a follower of Simeon ben-Kosiba himself. And the determination to seek what comes from God, the God of Israel, the God of the covenant, even though it may lead through strange and dark paths, is utterly characteristic of Israelite and Jewish piety. Think of the Psalms. By defining himself and his communities in terms of the crucified and risen Messiah, Paul has not ceased to be profoundly Jewish. But in the Messiah, he might have said, he has discovered a new way, or perhaps we should say *the* new way, to be Jewish. This, he would certainly have said, is what it means to be 'Jewish' in the 'age to come', which is already present.

As a result, Messiah-people constitute a *family*, who are to live in practical ways as befits siblings. One of Paul's most frequent words of address to his hearers is *adelphoi*, 'brothers and sisters', and though he can also use that, as we saw, to denote his 'kinsfolk according to the flesh', the remarkable thing is that a former Pharisee can use such a word to embrace, all at one go, people of such a wide variety of ethnic, cultural and moral backgrounds. But this is precisely because his deep-level understanding of the 'Who are we?' question is that, because 'we' are the age-to-come people of the one God, 'we' are the *new humanity*.³³ We are those who look forward to the resurrection of the dead with a new kind of hope, because we belong to the Messiah who has already been raised. We are therefore those who anticipate the 'glory' of genuine humanity, restored in the Messiah, and glimpsed by faith already within the Messiah's people.³⁴

The 'already' of that statement hints at the final category for 'Who are we?': we are those indwelt by the holy spirit, by the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of Israel's God. This essentially *eschatological* claim is also a way of claiming to be the 'renewed Temple' and, with that, to be the place and the people in which and in whom the living God himself has come to dwell, opening the possibility of seeing the community in terms of *theōsis*, 'divinization'. Much protestant theology has resisted this, fearful of an ecclesial triumphalism, but it is hard to see that one can simultaneously speak of the spirit's indwelling and refuse to speak of divinization. To this we shall return.³⁵ But we have said enough to see that for Paul the answer

to ‘Who are we?’ was rich, dense and above all rooted in the fact of Jesus as Messiah, and the relation of this community to him and his death and resurrection. If, as we suggested two chapters ago, the *ekklēsia* is itself the central symbol of Paul’s worldview, it is so because it is the community of the Messiah, and as such is called to be united and holy. But that points on to a later category.

3. Where Are We?

At one level, there is not much problem with this question. ‘We’, the Pauline communities with their apostle shuttling between them, are in the various provinces of the Roman empire at the north-east end of the Mediterranean (modern Greece and Turkey). But that is of course just the start of it – though it hints already at some of the further questions to be addressed.

On a much wider scale, it matters to Paul that ‘we’, he and his communities, live within the good creation of the good creator, whose wise providence has ordered the world, giving it human as well as non-human structures, giving humans the natural world to enjoy, even though the way all this works out in practice is often puzzling.³⁶ Despite the thousand natural shocks that flesh, particularly apostolic flesh, is heir to, Paul never wavers in his conviction that the world remains God’s world and that it is on its way to being rescued from all that corrupts and defaces it.

What is more, Paul believes that he is living in the world *over which Jesus, the Messiah, already reigns as lord*. The present reign of the Messiah is clear in such passages as 1 Corinthians 15.20–8, already quoted, and this simply increases the confidence of the answer to the question. This is God’s world; it is the Messiah’s domain. It is the new creation, and the Messiah has brought together heaven and earth in himself.

That in turn, of course, simply highlights the ongoing corruption and defacing of the world. That, too, is part of the answer, and still drives some interpreters to deny that Jesus really achieved anything very much.³⁷ The

world is still groaning in travail. Paul knows it well; it is carved into his body. Indeed, he may perhaps suppose that this groaning, these new-age birthpangs, have actually increased with the inauguration of the ‘age to come’ in the midst of the ‘present age’ (see the fifth question, below). And the world where this ‘groaning’ takes place is not simply a place where sorrow and suffering just happen to reside. It is also, Paul believes, the sphere where evil powers operate, namely the satan and its emissaries. They disguise themselves as angels of light; they can infiltrate the church through false teachers, even through people who might in themselves be good, yet who (like Peter himself, rebuked by Jesus) may turn out, for the moment at least, to be adversaries and accusers, that is, to embody the presence of the satan and to speak his accusing and attacking words.³⁸

Even there, however, Paul believes that the forces of evil are already in principle defeated. (That phrase ‘in principle’ is helpful up to a point; yet is also a way of saying, ‘We can’t easily put into words how the “now” and the “not yet” function in relation to one another.’ It is at least better than the arm-waving phrase ‘in a very real sense’, which, as students, clergy and politicians often need reminding, means ‘I very much want to assert this but I haven’t yet figured out how.’) So he can be confident, because the world where he and his churches are situated is the world where they shine like lights in the dark, the sphere where they are to embody, as living temples, the hope that one day God’s glory will dwell in the entire cosmos.³⁹ The ultimate answer to ‘Where are we?’ has to do, for Paul, with the whole created order, the entire cosmos, and the belief that God created it *through the agency of* the same Messiah, Jesus, to whom the *ekklēsia* belongs.⁴⁰ Jesus’ followers do not live in the created world as aliens, however much it may feel like that when surrounded by the murky muddle of so much street-level paganism and the arrogance of power. They live there as the rightful citizens of the coming kingdom, the subjects of the king who has already been enthroned and will one day complete his work of restorative justice.

But that leads already to the next two questions: What, and How? What’s wrong, and how is it to be fixed? Or, in the language I have used before, ‘What’s Wrong?’ and ‘What’s the Solution?’

4. What's Wrong, and What's the Solution?

We take these two questions together for obvious reasons. They dovetail into one another, since Paul's vision of the future world set free from corruption and decay affects the way he analyzes the remaining problems. The first thing to say is that, for Paul, part of the astonishment of the gospel, generating this whole renewed worldview, is that what *was* wrong before has in principle (there it is again) been put right through the Messiah's death and resurrection. That is where Paul starts. The victory he believes to be already won by the Messiah remains the ultimate answer, the source of the victory which is yet to come.⁴¹

The time-lag between those two victorious moments, to be explored presently, is one of the most obvious and significant characteristics of his worldview. We should not imagine, as in Cullmann's famous image of D-Day and V-Day, that Paul supposes the present time to be a matter of a steady advance, with the world gradually getting better and better as God (or even the church) engages in a kind of 'mopping-up operation', eliminating bit by bit pockets of resistance to the restorative justice which God has established and is establishing in the Messiah. Any attempt to read church history that way is manifestly doomed to failure, but, more importantly, there is no sign of such a 'progressive kingdom' in Paul. Instead we find the analysis of 'what's wrong' focusing on the fact that the Messiah's reign, though emphatically present, is not complete. The 'last enemy', death, remains as yet still powerful, though defeated in principle through the resurrection. There is no progressive overcoming of death; it isn't the case that, because of the work of the gospel, people die a little less, or that death is less unpleasant. The ultimate resurrection will not be the final coping-stone on a building that has been steadily growing up to that point. It will be as sudden, new and shocking as was Easter Day itself.

Enemies, then, are still at work, inside the church and outside it.⁴² Dangers lurk at every corner, in every journey. Misunderstanding, jealousy and accusation creep in.⁴³ Meanwhile, the powers of the world are still present and real, whether this means Caesar on his throne, the local officials

who ultimately answer to him, or the shadowy forces that Paul believes stand behind all rulers and sometimes work evil through them. There is a battle to be fought, a battle of prayer and counsel to prevent a repetition of the primal victory of the satan over the first humans.⁴⁴ Sudden warnings flash out from Paul's letters: look out for those who cause divisions! They are serving their own bellies! Beware of the dogs! Don't let anyone ensnare you! And the God of peace will soon crush the satan under your feet!⁴⁵

It is perhaps no accident that a fair amount of the evidence for answering 'What's wrong?' comes from 2 Corinthians, the letter above all where Paul is only too horribly aware of what can go wrong, what has gone wrong, within the church (in this case, the church in Corinth) and within the wider world (in this case, the world of Ephesus, where he felt that he had received the sentence of death).⁴⁶ But it is in this letter too, therefore, that we should perhaps look first for help in addressing the question, 'What's the solution?' There we find the usual, but vital, trio: prayer, the spirit, the resurrection.⁴⁷ So, too, in the 'armour' passages in 1 Thessalonians 5 and Ephesians 6, there is indeed a battle to be fought, as Messiah-followers ought to assume; but it is a battle fought with faith, love and hope, and, more fully, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, God's word and prayer.⁴⁸ The fact that Paul describes the 'solution' in terms both of a battle which the Messiah's followers have to fight and win, and of the Messiah's own sovereign rule, indicates once more the solidarity between the Messiah and his people and, actually, the dignity that Messiah-people already have. They are not mere passive spectators or beneficiaries in the ongoing struggle. They have a part to play.⁴⁹

In particular, the 'solution' will of course include judgment. In line with what was said in the previous chapter, we note that again and again when Paul looks ahead to the way in which the one God will sort everything out he refers to either God, or Jesus, or somehow both, doing what the Psalms and Isaiah said needed to be done. Evil must be confronted, must be denied the possibility of once again defacing and distorting God's good world. When this happens in a human situation we speak of 'judgment' being passed by a court, resulting in 'condemnation' for those who have wrought

evil, damage, hurt or destruction, so that the world can return to some kind of balance. Paul reaffirmed the ancient scriptural sense that this provided at least an appropriate analogy for what had to be done by the creator, and/or by the Messiah. He spoke of it in connection with his belief that the creator's *dikaiosynē* had been revealed, even while speaking of other, wider notions which cluster around that complex word.⁵⁰ He even suggests, tantalizingly, that the Messiah's people will share in this ultimate judicial task.⁵¹

One feature in particular of 'What's the solution?' deserves particular comment. Paul clearly believes that *his own apostolic work*, planting and sustaining *ekklēsiai* around the world of Greece and Turkey, within Caesar's domain and coming ever closer to Rome itself, is part of the 'solution', part of the way in which the creator God is establishing his strange sovereign rule over the world. Some have even suggested that he refers to his own work cryptically in 2 Thessalonians as part of the way in which evil is being restrained in the present from growing to its full height, though that remains controversial and in my judgment less likely than some other proposals for that very difficult passage.⁵² The main thing, though, is that the apostolic commission to which he is obedient is not something other than the work of God's spirit, revealing to the world its rightful lord. It is part of that work, part of the much larger solution which, energized by the spirit in the present time, still awaits the full solution as a fresh gift in the future.

Above all, then, the 'solution' is the full establishment of the Messiah's rule over the whole world, reaching its goal when he 'hands over the kingly rule to God the father ... so that God may be all in all'.⁵³ It is vital that we understand the *parousia*, the 'royal appearing' of Jesus the Messiah, in Paul's own way, which involves the establishment of the Messiah's rule over the whole world, rather than in the modernist ways which involve the obliteration or the abandonment of the world. The reign of God's restorative justice and healing peace is meant *for* this world, not for some other. That is endemic in the promises upon which Paul's messianic theology depends. We will look at this in much more detail when the time comes to consider Paul's reimagining of classic Jewish eschatology, in which creational

monotheism, and the election of God's people to serve his rescuing purposes, will finally be brought together.⁵⁴

5. What Time Is It?

The fifth question, 'When?', is perhaps the most revealing. Dovetailing with all the others, of course, it nevertheless determines the shape of much of Paul's explicit thought.⁵⁵ It emerges on the edge of an argument, as worldview-hints usually do, indicating once more what Paul takes for granted rather than that for which he has to argue. It should be no surprise to find that Paul insists, again and again, on two things: first, that something has happened through which the 'present evil age' has lost its power to hold people captive, and the 'age to come' has broken in to rescue them; second, that this work is as yet incomplete, so that both in cosmic and in personal terms there remains a further step, a different level of fulfilment and victory, with Messiah-people poised between the one and the other. In the now hackneyed language, Paul emphasizes both the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the messianic narrative.

This is seen to excellent effect in the continuation of the passage quoted a few pages ago:

¹⁰This means knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, and knowing the partnership of his sufferings. It means sharing the form and pattern of his death, ¹¹so that somehow I may arrive at the final resurrection from the dead.

¹²I'm not implying that I've already received 'resurrection', or that I've already become complete and mature! No; I'm hurrying on, eager to overtake it, because the Messiah Jesus has overtaken me. ¹³My dear family, I don't reckon that I have yet overtaken it. But this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what's ahead. ¹⁴I mean to chase on towards the finishing post, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God in the Messiah Jesus.

¹⁵Those of us who are mature should think like this! If you think differently about it, God will reveal this to you as well. ¹⁶Only let's be sure to keep in line with the position we have reached.⁵⁶

There we have it, replete with satisfying irony: maturity consists in knowing that you have not yet reached maturity! The actual, bodily resurrection has not yet occurred. However, because the Messiah's people are 'in him', there is a sense (hard for us to describe) in which Paul believes they have already been raised, and know the power of the resurrection even in the present time. The tension between that necessary 'sense' and the promised ultimate actuality are of the essence of Paul's understanding of God's strange new timing and what it involves.

All this is to be mapped on to the vision of a two-stage resurrection which we know from 1 Corinthians 15. Whereas Jews up to his time had expected 'the resurrection' as the single great event at the end of the present world order, part of Paul's great insight was to grasp and explore the fact that 'the resurrection' had split into two, with the Messiah preceding his people into this new state, and with Easter seen not as a strange, isolated event, but as the beginning of the full, collective one. As we saw, Jesus for Paul is publicly declared 'son of God' not simply because of *his* resurrection, as though it were a private matter, but because the event of Easter is the beginning of 'the resurrection of the dead ones', the *anastasis nekrōn*. That was the early Christian message, and it was Paul's as well.⁵⁷ Thus: first the Messiah, then all the rest at his *parousia*:

²³Each, however, in proper order. The Messiah rises as the first fruits; then those who belong to the Messiah will rise at the time of his royal arrival (*parousia*). ²⁴Then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the father, when he has destroyed all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵He has to go on ruling, you see, until 'he has put all his enemies under his feet'. ²⁶Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, ²⁷because 'he has put all things in order under his feet'. But when it says that everything is put in order under him, it's obvious that this doesn't include the one who put everything in order under him. ²⁸No: when everything is put in order under him, then the son himself will be placed in proper order under the one who placed everything in order under him, so that God may be all in all.⁵⁸

I have discussed this fascinating passage elsewhere. For our present purpose we need only note that the interval between the Messiah's resurrection and his 'royal arrival' constitutes and characterizes the time which is Paul's

answer to our question.⁵⁹ He can speak of this time from these two points of view again and again, in different but converging language, leaving us in no doubt that, still thinking very much as a second-Temple Jew, he sees the whole of history – cosmic history, human history and Israel’s history – coming together to the point of the Messiah, and thus generating a new kind of temporal space. That is what he means by saying ‘when the time had fully come’ in Galatians, or the somewhat similar ‘plan for the fullness of the times’ in Ephesians.⁶⁰ He is thinking of the long story of God’s purposes, from the time of Abraham in Galatians, and the time of creation itself in Ephesians, though the cosmic vision is there in Galatians as well (1.4; 6.15) and the covenantal vision is there in Ephesians as well (2.11–22). This is the time when the ancient prophecies are being fulfilled.⁶¹ This is the moment at which Paul can say that he and his communities are those ‘upon whom the ends of the ages have now come’. It is not clear how far we should push Paul’s actual language here, but the fact that he says ‘ends’, not ‘end’, and that he uses the verb *katēntēken*, which literally means ‘met’, in the perfect as of a completed action, might indicate that he sees the end of the ‘present age’ meeting up with, and overlapping with, the leading edge of the ‘age to come’, and that these two, thus converging in the single event of Jesus the Messiah, do so ‘in relation to us’, or even ‘for our benefit’. Or – the clause is one of the trickier little bits of Pauline exegesis, after all – it may be that he is simply saying, rather grandly, that the great ages of world history have converged onto their intended goal, and that in doing so they have come to meet us at that point.⁶²

Paul uses the simple image of the dawning day to indicate that Messiah-people are already ‘daytime’ people, and should behave that way, even though the world is still apparently in darkness.⁶³ When he develops this idea further, however, it is equally clear that he sees Messiah-people as poised in between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’:

¹¹This is all the more important because you know what time it is. The hour has come for you to wake up from sleep. Our salvation, you see, is nearer now than it was when first we came to faith.

¹²The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. So let’s put off the works of darkness, and put

on the armour of light. ¹³Let's behave appropriately, as in the daytime: not in wild parties and drunkenness, not in orgies and shameless immorality, not in bad temper and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the lord Jesus, the Messiah, and don't make any allowance for the flesh and its lusts. ⁶⁴

This sense of already belonging to God's future, and needing to learn the habits of heart and life appropriate for it even in the strange present time, finds its way into the poem about *agapē*, where this 'love', along with 'faith' and 'hope', are the things that will last from the inaugurated-eschatological present into the ultimate future:

⁸Love never fails. But prophecies will be abolished; tongues will stop; and knowledge, too, be done away. ⁹We know, you see, in part; we prophesy in part; ¹⁰but, with perfection, the partial is abolished. ¹¹As a child I spoke, and thought, and reasoned like a child; when I grew up, I threw off childish ways. ¹²For at the moment all that we can see are puzzling reflections in a mirror; then, face to face. I know in part, for now; but then I'll know completely, through and through, even as I'm completely known. So, now, faith, hope, and love remain, these three; and, of them all, love is the greatest. ⁶⁵

Here, expressed in personal and pastoral poetry, is Paul's inaugurated eschatology: the future remains future, but its power has burst into the present, and Messiah-people must learn the way of life that belongs to the future, and practice it even amidst the puzzles that continue.

There remains, then, a great future moment, which, as in this passage, will be a time of sudden and direct knowledge of what is currently strange and dim. This future moment will be a time both of disclosure and of judgment. The two, indeed, seem not far apart. 'The day of the lord Jesus' will show everything up, will disclose secrets and intentions of the heart. That is the moment when 'God's kingdom' will be fully instantiated, and the behaviour of the Messiah's people in the present must be such as can be affirmed and validated on that final day, the day when the creator will be 'all in all'. ⁶⁶ To all this we shall return when studying Paul's reimagined eschatology. ⁶⁷

We cannot leave this brief note of Paul's future hope, however, without completing the sequence of thought we noted under 'Who are we?' Having

declared that he is now a Messiah-person, defined in terms of his membership in that family and the messianic death and resurrection by which it is constituted and characterized, and having insisted that though he already knows the power of the resurrection the full reality is yet to be revealed, Paul concludes with a clear, sharp statement of the ultimate future hope, which formed an essential part of his worldview:

¹⁸You see, there are several people who behave as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. I told you about them often enough, and now I'm weeping as I say it again. ¹⁹They are on the road to destruction; their stomach is their god, and they find glory in their own shame. All they ever think about is what's on the earth.

²⁰We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we're eagerly waiting for the saviour, the lord, Messiah Jesus, who is going to come from there. ²¹Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he's going to transform it so that it's just like his glorious body. And he's going to do this by the power which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority.⁶⁸

The future transformation will be massive. It will be a fresh gift of grace. But it is already transforming the present, since when people eagerly await this future event their present lives already take on a new quality. Anthony Thiselton draws on Wittgenstein to make the point: 'expectation' is not simply a 'mental state', nor a matter of making calculations or dreaming imaginatively about the future. Expectation consists, he says, of 'appropriate conduct or behaviour in a given situation'. To 'expect' a guest to come to tea does not mean 'to imagine a guest's arrival'; it means 'to put out cups, saucers, and plates, to buy cake, and perhaps to tidy the room and to begin boiling the kettle'. For the Thessalonians, to 'expect' the coming of the lord means that 'they must seek holiness and work hard.'⁶⁹ Even so, in the deep places of Paul's worldview, here revealed but everywhere assumed, the 'expectation' of the return of the lord from his present life in heaven, to join heaven to earth and thereby to transform the present world and the bodies of his people, means already in the present a totally different kind of life from those whose horizon is bounded by 'what is on the earth'.

If the future dimension is one vital pole in Paul's worldview, forming part of his implicit answer to 'What time is it?', the present dimension is equally

vital, if anything more so. ‘But now ...’, he says: something has *happened*, something has *occurred* that has changed for ever the way the world is, the way Israel is, the way God’s people are. That note rings through passage after passage.⁷⁰ This is especially the case in Romans. This is the time of revelation, of ‘apocalypse’: God has unveiled his saving plan, his faithfulness to the covenant, and also, indeed, his coming wrath on human idolatry and wickedness.⁷¹ He has done so in ‘the gospel’, which is not ‘the message of justification by faith’, but is rather ‘the message about Jesus the Messiah, crucified and risen’.⁷² There seems to be, in other words, a primary ‘revelation’ – the events themselves, the fact of the crucified and risen Messiah – and then a secondary and consequent ‘revelation’, which happens every time the apostolic message, the gospel itself, is announced. *A new time is opening up*, a new day is dawning. Through these events the cold, hard grip of ‘the present evil age’ has been broken, and humans from every quarter are summoned to belong to ‘the age to come’, the eschatological springtime which is already present in the Messiah and, through his spirit, in and through his people.

This note of a new time, a new *sort* of time, sends strange resonances across Paul’s symbolic world, which have not to my knowledge been much explored. He is, after all, manifestly a theologian of creation and new creation. He believes that the creator’s purpose, focused on the covenant with Abraham, has been realized in the Messiah, Jesus, and that through this realization the rescue of Adamic humanity has been accomplished, and the creator’s new world launched, bringing heaven and earth together. We are here trembling on the verge of a hypothesis which to my knowledge has not been glimpsed before, let alone essayed.⁷³

Consider. The Jewish symbol of ‘the land’ has been transposed by Paul (with some second-Temple Jewish antecedents) into the reality of the whole world, now claimed by the creator as the Messiah’s inheritance. The ultimate Jewish symbol of space, the Temple, has been transposed by Paul, again with some antecedents, into the reality of the new community where the living God dwells in his glory, anticipating the filling of the whole world with that same glory. Thus the close relationship between the Temple

and the holy land has been transposed into the close relationship between the *ekklēsia* and the whole world; that, as we saw, is near the centre of Paul's symbolic universe. Might we suggest, perhaps (with worldview analyses there must always be a 'perhaps', as Paul himself knew, but this doesn't reduce everything to mere speculation⁷⁴), that another major Jewish symbol, omnipresent both in second-Temple Judaism and through to the present day, yet otherwise astonishingly absent in Paul, has been transposed into the whole new reality of time which has dawned in the Messiah? Has Paul transformed the sabbath into a sense of 'messianic time'?

How would this work? Just as God's plan for space and matter was to unite it all, everything in heaven and on earth, in the Messiah (Ephesians 1.10), so (perhaps) God's plan for *time itself* was to bring everything to a head in the Messiah. The great 'now' of the gospel, in other words, is the fresh reality for which the antecedent signpost was the sabbath.

This proposal is advanced from an oblique angle by Giorgio Agamben, not indeed within a worldview-model such as ours, and not at all correlated with a study of the way in which other Jewish worldview-markers have been transposed by Paul into fresh signs of the messianic reality.⁷⁵ It is for that reason all the more striking, constituting an undesigned coincidence with our own investigation.

Let us first note, though, the data, which is found in Romans in particular but is echoed powerfully elsewhere as well. Granted, Paul does not use the language of sabbath, as he does (occasionally) use the language of land and Temple. Allusions to land and Temple thus have, as it were, safe and explicit hooks on which to hang their hats, but allusions to the sabbath, if such there be, must make their own from scratch. What we have rather, in relation to time and its fulfilment, is a succession of evocative phrases. The phrase 'but now', and the note of 'in the present time' (literally 'in the *now* time', *en tō nyn kairō*), rings again and again through Romans, echoing at some of its key points with the *now* which says, urgently, 'This can't be put off; it belongs in the present, not simply to the future.'⁷⁶ The great concluding summary of the theological argument in 15.7–13 breathes the air of present reality, the combined praise and worship of Jew and gentile

celebrating the Messiah's completed achievement and his enthronement as lord of the nations; something *has happened*, something has been *completed*, and we are now in a time of *worship*.⁷⁷ That makes its own point. And the opening exhortation of chapter 12 indicates particularly clearly that the rescue from the 'present evil age' of which the apostle had spoken in Galatians 1.4 must have its full effect in bringing the *mind* into line with the age to come:

Don't let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God's will is, what is good, acceptable and complete.⁷⁸

This command only makes sense if the 'age to come' is already powerfully present, if the 'but now' of the gospel means what it says. A new time has dawned.

The same emphasis on a long plan which has *now* come to fruition, a fruition which means the disclosure of long-secret divine plans, is found in Ephesians. After the opening statement of 1.10 (the plan for the *plērōma tōn kairōn*, 'the fullness of times'), we find a crescendo of 'now' moments: *now*, in the Messiah Jesus, the gentiles have been brought near to the God of Israel; *now* the mystery of full gentile inclusion has been revealed; *now* the age-old mystery can be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.⁷⁹ It would be the height of folly to see this as a sign that Ephesians was settling down and making itself comfortable in the world (a regular sneer designed, in the teeth of the evidence, to keep the supposedly 'deutero-Pauline' letters in their place!). On the contrary: it is precisely inaugurated eschatology that generates the hostility of the principalities and powers (6.10–20).

Perhaps the most powerful statement, though, is the one we find in 2 Corinthians 6, at the climax of Paul's description of his own apostolic labours. Surrounded by passages whose descriptions of suffering, misunderstanding, poverty and all kinds of trouble make it clear that this can never be a triumphalist 'realized eschatology' of the sort which so

frightens good protestant theologians, he declares that the present time is the moment of which the prophets had spoken:

So, as we work together with God, we appeal to you in particular: when you accept God's grace, don't let it go to waste! ²This is what he says:

I listened to you when the time was right,
I came to your aid on the day of salvation.

Look! The right time is now! Look! The day of salvation is here!⁸⁰

Isaiah's promise has come true: as Paul said earlier in the letter, all God's promises find their 'yes' in the Messiah. Indeed, that earlier statement should also be listed as one of the emphatic 'present tense' references.⁸¹ And when we put the Isaiah passage into its larger context, as we should, we discover a powerful network of Pauline themes which here combine to declare to the Corinthians that he is not simply some wandering preacher who happens to get into all kinds of trouble, but is rather the herald of a particular moment, a 'day' long promised and at last arrived. Such a herald should be expected to face trouble, and hard and apparently unfruitful labour. But he would nevertheless be the one through whom and in whom God's covenant would be fulfilled, his promised salvation would be unveiled, and the great 'day' would dawn at last. Here are the highlights of the passage:

YHWH said to me, 'You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'
But I said, 'I have laboured in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with YHWH, and my reward with my God.'
And now YHWH says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honoured in the sight of YHWH,
and my God has become my strength –
he says, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'

Thus says YHWH,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
‘Kings shall see and stand up,
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of YHWH, who is faithful (*ne’eman, pistos*),
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.’
Thus says YHWH:
In a time of favour I have answered you,
on a day of salvation I have helped you;
I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people (*librith ’am, eis diathēkēn ethnōn*)⁸²
to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages;
saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out’,
to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves’ ...
Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For YHWH has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.⁸³

Isaiah’s vision of cosmic renewal and joy, of heaven and earth coming together because of the work of the Servant, because of the establishment of the covenant, fits exactly with Paul’s understanding of his own apostolic labour. Suffering and joy are woven closely together; Paul himself has ‘become’ the covenant faithfulness of God;⁸⁴ the present time has become ‘the time of favour’, ‘the day of salvation’. Paul expands the Septuagint phrase for ‘the acceptable time’ (*kairos dektos*), so that it becomes ‘the time most acceptable’, *kairos euprosdektos*.⁸⁵ And the passage hastens on, through Paul’s catalogue of apostolic hardships and comfort, to the promise that God will build the new Temple, the Temple which will consist of his people, among whom he will dwell.⁸⁶

The point of all this is to say: Paul has stated about as emphatically as he could that the present time, the time of the Messiah and of the strange apostolate through which God’s covenant faithfulness in the Messiah is embodied before the world, is the new, special time for which the whole creation had been waiting. ‘If anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation!’⁸⁷ This is therefore *messianic time*, a new sort of time, not just

another part of ongoing *chronos* (though it falls within, and gives new dimensions to, part of that *chronos*, as Galatians 4.4 makes clear), but the *kairos*, indeed the moment when all *kairoi* are drawn together. This is in consequence the divine ‘plan for the fullness of times’, the *plērōma tōn kairōn*, the time when God will sum up everything, bring everything in heaven and on earth to its head (*anakephalaiōsasthai ta panta*) in the Messiah. We can no longer hold back from admitting that Ephesians 1.10 itself sums up, and brings to its head in Christ, the emphasis on ‘the present time’ and its significance which we find elsewhere in Paul, particularly in Romans and 2 Corinthians. This is the time of new creation; the time of the new Temple; the time which, I suggest, constitutes the new sabbath. What the creator has always intended to do in respect of the whole cosmos he has done, proleptically but decisively, in the person of the Messiah.

The two ages, the ‘present age’ and the ‘age to come’, thus come to look one another in the eye. To put it in the pregnant words of Giorgio Agamben,

two times enter into the constellation the apostle called *ho nyn kairos* [the present time] ... Messianic time is a summary recapitulation of the past ... This recapitulation of the past produces a *plērōma*, a saturation and fulfilment of *kairoi* (messianic *kairoi* are therefore literally full of *chronos*, but an abbreviated, summary *chronos*), that anticipates eschatological *plērōma* when God ‘will be all in all.’ Messianic *plērōma* is therefore an abridgment and anticipation of eschatological fulfilment.⁸⁸

Agamben suggestively joins this Pauline motif with the rabbinic explanation of ‘the seventh day’ in Genesis 2.2: for the rabbis, as for the church Fathers, the sabbath

constituted a kind of small-scale model for messianic time ... Saturday – messianic time – is not another day, homogeneous to others; rather, it is that innermost disjointedness within time through which one may – by a hairsbreadth – grasp time and accomplish it.⁸⁹

These are not, to be sure, the kind of reflections commentators normally offer on Paul’s emphatic ‘now’. Yet their very strangeness in contemporary western thought, where ‘sabbath’ has been reduced to a generalized ‘day off’, if that, may be a reason why the question has scarcely been raised as to what has happened to the sabbath, that vital Jewish worldview-marker, in

Paul's newly constituted worldview. My proposal here is that his emphasis on 'the now time', the time when the Messiah is ruling in heaven over all things in heaven and on earth, implies within the Jewish mindset at least that the new creation has been accomplished, and that the 'Sabbath', not in terms of cessation of work but in terms of God's dwelling in, and ruling within, the new world he has made, has been inaugurated. Just as the promise relating to the land has been translated into the promise relating to the whole creation (to be fulfilled by the worldwide mission of the church), so the gift of *a different sort of time* in which, celebrating the completion of heaven and earth, God now 'rests' in the sense of 'taking up residence', is utterly appropriate for Paul's worldview in which Jesus, having completed his work, is now in himself the foundation stone of the new creation. All the divine fullness 'was pleased to dwell' in the Messiah as he reconciled all things in heaven and on earth to God the creator. As with sacred space, so with sacred time. He was in himself the new Temple; now he has inaugurated, through his cosmic triumph, the new Time, the great Jubilee, the messianic Sabbath.

This rather dramatic proposal – the kind of thing wise friends advise one to publish in a recondite journal rather than a mainline monograph – receives oblique support, in my view, from the understanding of sabbath within the creation story as expounded by a near eastern expert, John Walton. In his Genesis commentary, and another short related book, he explains that, to anyone familiar with near eastern culture of the period, a story of a six-day divine construction project ending with the deity 'resting' would be seen, without hesitation or puzzlement, as the building of a Temple into which the deity would enter to 'take up residence'.⁹⁰ The 'rest' would not be seen as a relaxation, a 'time off' after a long week's work. It would be seen in terms of 'entering to reside', 'taking possession of this house, in order to begin living and working there'. Walton cites Psalm 132, which nicely joins temple-building, 'rest' in terms of habitation and work from within the new home, and the establishment from there of the messianic kingdom:

YHWH has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:
‘This is my resting-place (*menuchathi, katapausis*) for ever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.
its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.
There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.
His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
but on him, his crown will gleam.⁹¹

It is clear from this that ‘rest for ever’ precisely does not mean ‘cease from labour’, but rather ‘use as the new base of operations’. For God to be blessing Zion with food, its priests with salvation and its king with strength and victory, hardly sounds like the creator putting his feet up and listening to the angels playing Mozart. Walton argues on this basis, together with the wide variety of near eastern sources already referred to, that ‘rest’ in this context, of a deity constructing a temple and then dwelling in it, approximates more or less exactly to ‘establishing one’s rule’, so that, with the housebuilding complete, the ‘rule’ can begin from this new ‘settled’, and in that sense ‘resting’, position.

If that is so – and it does seem to make good sense of the psalm, and the wider non-biblical material – then there opens up from these two somewhat disparate sources, the Italian philosopher and the American ancient near eastern expert, the possibility of understanding Paul’s emphasis on the *present rule of the Messiah* as the newly constituted ‘sabbath’, the ‘messianic time’ in which Jesus himself is now ruling the whole world, following its reconstitution through his death and resurrection. First Corinthians 15.20–8 once more comes up for consideration here, since it is there that Paul speaks so emphatically of the sovereign rule of Jesus exercised in this ‘messianic time’, this ‘now time’ between his own resurrection and that of all his people, described by Paul within a narrative which is shaped decisively by Genesis 1–3. We should not forget, as well, the way in which a first-century Jew (as we saw in chapter 2) might well be

thinking, at least in the back of the mind, about the long-range prophecy in Daniel 9, the ‘seventy times seven’ which would link up with the notion of Jubilee, the sabbath of sabbaths when freedom and forgiveness would flood the nation and perhaps the world. It is of course the letter to the Hebrews that develops the main early Christian discussion of God’s ‘rest’, and the invitation to his people to share it.⁹² But Paul’s vision of new creation, of the whole world flooded with God’s glory at last, corresponds to the Isaianic vision in which the Temple itself is relativized by the whole creation, heaven and earth together, becoming God’s ‘resting place’.⁹³ Paul develops this christologically in Colossians 1, and theologically – with creator, Messiah and spirit all fully involved – in Ephesians 1.3–14. And one of the psalm passages which he regularly uses to describe the present rule of the Messiah is the very psalm (8) which recalls the climax of Genesis 1 in the rule of humankind, under God, over the rest of creation.⁹⁴ There is a convergence here precisely at the point of the question, ‘What time is it?’

This convergence points to the completion of the new creation in terms of the full indwelling of God in the Messiah himself and then, by his spirit, in his people. The explosion of meaning (Agamben’s phrase) latent in Ephesians 1.10 should then be given a full and generous exegesis. This is the great Sabbath, the time when all the fullness of God has been pleased to dwell in the Messiah to establish the new creation, and now to indwell it by his spirit and to enable the rule of the Messiah himself over the new creation, uniting things in heaven and things on earth.⁹⁵ The final worldview-question reveals the final worldview-redefinition. The time is Now. God’s Now.

It remains simply to note again, lest any should forget or imagine we have slipped into an easy-going triumphalism, that this ‘now time’, splendid and celebratory though it is, continues to be contested and fraught with trouble. That is the burden of Paul’s song through much of 2 Corinthians, with its repeated theme of the two ages as the framework for understanding the nature of apostleship.⁹⁶ The third chapter, not least, speaks of the frustration that continues ‘to this day’ when unbelieving Jews read Torah.

Both Colossians and Ephesians can speak of ‘redeeming the time (*kairos*)’, with Ephesians adding ‘because the days are evil’.⁹⁷ And, famously, Paul addresses a particular situation in Corinth by speaking of the *kairos* being *synestalmenos*, the ‘appointed time’ being ‘constrained’, and saying that ‘the form of this world’ (*to schēma tou kosmou toutou*) is ‘passing away’ (*paragei*).⁹⁸ This could be taken, and some have taken it thus, as an indication of a radical ‘not yet’ which might appear to overbalance the ‘now’, a looking forward from the irrelevant present to the certain and imminent future. I do not think this is the right interpretation. To be sure, Paul can see all the ordinary business of this life in terms of ‘the present age’, and his constant plea is that Messiah-people learn to think and act as members of ‘the age to come’. That, I think, is what he means by ‘the form of this world’ and its ‘passing away’. But I am inclined to agree with those who have pressed the case that the ‘present constraint’ is not so much about ultimate eschatology (as in the usual translation, ‘has grown short’⁹⁹) as about the sudden widespread crisis of a famine across the Aegean world in the year after Paul left Corinth.¹⁰⁰ The point to note here, by way of a sober final reminder when faced with the glorious heralding of ‘messianic time’, with Jesus already ruling the renewed cosmos, is that for Paul this truth sits in sharp and constant tension with the daily and hourly reminders that ‘I have not yet attained this, nor am already complete.’ Maturity lies in the celebration of messianic time within the muddle and misery of the present age. Such a stance leaves behind both the gloomy pessimist who sees nothing but continuing corruption and decay and the grinning optimist who supposes that the resurrection is past already. The mature mixture of times is foundational to Paul’s entire worldview.

6. Conclusion: Paul’s Worldview and the Questions that Remain

We have now studied three things: (1) the symbolic praxis which takes us to the heart of Paul’s implicit worldview, (2) the complex implicit interlocking narratives upon which he can draw to make sense of those symbols and that

praxis and (3) the worldview-questions which enable us to put under the microscope the tell-tale indications of things which Paul took for granted and wanted his fellow believers to take for granted also. Throughout this we have seen that Paul's worldview is a variant on the more generalized early Christian worldview we surveyed in Part IV of *The New Testament and the People of God*, which was itself a radicalization and reorientation of the overall worldview we found within second-Temple Judaism (recognizing fully the rich, dense and sometimes mutually contradictory variations within that latter entity). For Paul, the second-Temple Jewish worldview had been simultaneously affirmed and transformed; one might almost say destroyed and rebuilt: 'I have been crucified with the Messiah; nevertheless I live.' The shameful death and astonishing resurrection of the Messiah have caused him to rethink, to relive, to rework the whole question of what it means to be a loyal Jew, a true Israelite, a member of 'the circumcision', at this essentially new moment in the age-old story of God, the world and God's people. And, since part of what this means is that the God who always promised to bring the entire world into subjection under the Messiah¹⁰¹ seems to have begun to do just that, and moreover to use this one-time hard-line Pharisee as his agent in the implementation of that rule, it makes sense to enquire (in advance of the fuller treatment in chapters 12–14 below) how Paul envisaged the engagement between the message of this Messiah and the various worldviews, agendas, hopes, beliefs and fears of the world of ancient paganism.

We have seen that Paul solidly resisted any 'paganization' of the message of the one God, while also solidly insisting that the *ekklēsia* he established and served were not marked out by the symbolic universe of mainline second-Temple Judaism. Indeed, we have come to the striking conclusion that Paul's worldview had as its central symbol the unity and holiness of the *ekklēsia* itself, grounded in what he believed to be true about the Messiah and the spirit, and grounded beneath that again in the one God, the creator, who had now acted surprisingly and decisively to fulfil the ancient promises, while also appearing to overthrow the expectations of those who were most eagerly awaiting just that fulfilment.

Paul hoped, it seems, that his *ekklēsiai* were sharing this worldview with him. He often seems to assume this in his letters, leaving us wondering whether they really did share it or whether he was only saying it like that to jolt them into fresh thought. But, whether they did or not, this is the point where we can track the change of gear from the worldview which he understood to be in principle common to all Messiah-believers to the ‘mindset’ which was his own private variation, his local version as it were, within that worldview.

He believed, to begin with, that Israel’s God had called him personally to be the ‘apostle to the gentiles’. That was unique to him, a point not often noted; Paul was aware of opponents, and rival ‘apostles’ of this or that sort, but, so far as we know, nobody else was going around claiming to be *the* ‘apostle to the gentiles’. This was a strange and powerful calling which he interpreted not least in terms of his coming to embody the vocation which had been Israel’s vocation, to be the light of the world, rooted not least in the Servant-picture in Isaiah. The boldness of this move, granted that it is Paul himself who insists that Israel’s Servant-vocation has devolved on to the Messiah himself, can only be explained if we take as seriously as Paul himself did his own claim to be living ‘in the Messiah’, and to have the Messiah living ‘in him’.¹⁰² He understood, at the level of mindset which he took for granted, that his particular background as an ultra-zealous Pharisee had been both exactly right and exactly wrong in terms of the fresh revelation of God’s purpose, God’s righteousness and God’s faithfulness in the gospel message about Jesus the Messiah. That rightness and wrongness emerges again and again as he slips into the quasi-autobiographical ‘I’ of passages like Galatians 2.17–21 or the actually autobiographical passages such as Philippians 3.4–14. And because of his quick, sharp intellect, able to draw clear conclusions from a wide range of biblical data which he had thought through in the light of the gospel, he took, and I suggest he took for granted, the ‘strong’ position in the debates about what food to eat, what days to observe.¹⁰³ The worldview he did his best to inculcate among his churches was built on that, yet because of troubled consciences Paul was happy to argue for the position of (what we misleadingly call) tolerance on

such issues. But for himself, in his own mindset, there was no doubt: ‘I know, and am persuaded in the lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself’; ‘the earth is the lord’s and the fullness thereof.’¹⁰⁴ Those were basic. Paul would not normally have needed to take those spectacles off to show someone else the lenses he habitually looked through.

We return to the worldview-model I set out earlier. Symbol and praxis, story and questions are surrounded by habits of the heart (worship and prayer, which Paul again took for granted), and habits of life (the cultural assumptions about travel, lodging, what to do when arriving in a strange city, and so on). On the latter: how we wish we knew what sort of inns Paul stayed in, how he transported the Collection-money, whether he did indeed travel with animals as beasts of burden, what he liked to eat for breakfast ... so much of his own ‘culture’ is hidden from us, and we can only guess. But, importantly, there are two things which emerge from any worldview: ‘theology’, in terms of ‘basic beliefs’ and ‘consequent beliefs’; and ‘aims’ and ‘intentions’, the motivations which energize and direct action. Part III of this book will look at Paul’s ‘theology’. Part IV, especially the final chapter, will examine his aims and intentions, and how they led to and energized the things he actually did. A word or two, in concluding the present Part II, on how all this fits together.

Any worldview, I suggest, will at least by implication generate a move towards ‘theology’. Even an atheistical worldview will do this. One must still, in principle, give answers to the questions about God/god/the gods and the world. The only difference is that the atheist will, of course, give different answers, but the questions remain the same (though, in the case of the so-called ‘problem of evil’, the atheist might be confronted by the ‘problem of good’). It makes sense for current writers on philosophy, ancient and modern, to speak of the ‘theology’ of the Stoics, the Epicureans, or other ancient groups, including of course the ancient Israelites and the second-Temple Jews. ‘Theology’ is not in itself a private Christian category. The question of what one believes about the divine and the human, the divine and the world, the divine and the past and future, is always open. Whether we call these things ‘theology’, as has been done

here, or ‘physics’ (i.e. the study of ‘nature’, ‘the way things are’), as the ancient Stoics did, or by some other name, we arrive reasonably soon at the same basic set of topics. But with Paul the turn from worldview to theology takes on a different kind of importance. This brings us face to face with one of the central claims of the present book.

With Paul, we now see more clearly *what a specifically Christian theology is and why it matters*. It matters because the worldview which Paul held, and which he did his best to make second nature for his *ekklēsiai*, had none of the normal worldview-anchors that second-Temple Judaism had had, and did not take on board, to replace them, the major worldview-anchors of ancient paganism. In fact, as we saw, the *ekklēsia*, in its unity and holiness, *was itself the central worldview-marker*, the loadbearing symbol, generating its own necessary and organically appropriate praxis in worship, prayer, scripture reading and (what came to be called) the sacraments. But the *ekklēsia* could not bear this worldview-weight all by itself. It would not stay in place simply because Paul and others said it should. As Wayne Meeks saw in his groundbreaking 1983 work, the community of Messiah-believers needed ‘theology’ as its stabilizing, reinforcing, undergirding element.¹⁰⁵

Meeks emphasized the role of monotheism in this task. Paul’s monotheism needed to do much more worldview-work than the doctrine ever had in Judaism. Sanders pointed out that in second-Temple Judaism ‘the meaning of monotheism was flexible.’¹⁰⁶ It could afford to be. Judaism had the other symbols, the food laws, circumcision and the sabbath. Paganism, too, offered a rich, if confusing, symbolic world, in which ‘theology’, speculation about the gods (including monotheistic speculations), belonged as one activity among many, interesting to a small number while the majority got on with life and performed such religious activities as local custom dictated and personal predilection suggested. For Paul, however, *thinking through who God himself really was* mattered enormously, not because of a new level of insatiable intellectual curiosity but because without it the worldview would not stay in place. Questions

about God, and wrestling with these questions as part of the personal and corporate renewal of the mind, had a worldview-sustaining job to do.

Not that Jewish-style monotheism was itself an abstract intellectual exercise on a par with the theological speculations of a Cicero or a Seneca. Precisely because the Jews distinguished sharply between the one God and the entire creation (unlike Aristotle's god, the 'prime mover', who was merely the ultimately superior being within the world), their monotheism found immediate expression in the rejection of pagan idolatry and all that went with it.¹⁰⁷ This doctrine, therefore, had an immediate socio-cultural impact. For Paul, lacking the other symbolic praxis that went with the Jewish worldview, the same was true only much more so. His revised and freshly explored monotheism (and the other doctrines which flanked it) had to shoulder the load which his ancestral monotheism already carried, and also to bear the extra weight that had been diffused across a much larger symbolic system. Theology, for Paul, was quite simply essential if the worldview, especially the united and holy *ekklēsia* which was its central symbol, was to stand firm and remain in good repair. Paul's rethought monotheism is the subject of chapter 9.

This monotheism, rethought around Jesus the Messiah and the spirit, necessarily precipitated a train of scripturally induced reflection, leading directly to Paul's revised doctrine of election. Those who were 'in the Messiah' really were the people of the one true God. Paul discovered very early on that if people failed to grasp this point the central worldview-symbol of a single united *ekklēsia* collapsed at once. That is why his rethinking of election, in constant implicit and sometimes explicit dialogue with various sorts of Jewish conversation partners but also in implicit dialogue with pagan worldviews about community, looms so large at the centre of his theology. This will be the subject of the necessarily long chapter 10, which is the right place to tackle the traditional questions of justification and the law.

Reworking election led in turn to the reimagined hope, the subject of our chapter 11. Jewish eschatology had now been inaugurated in a quite unexpected way, while retaining a strong but thoroughly redefined future

dimension. That in turn pointed back to monotheism itself. For Paul, the question of hope for the world, for the human race and for God's people themselves made sense in relation to the question, 'Who then is God?' Indeed, it helped to clarify that question itself. Where Saul the Pharisee hoped and prayed for Israel's God to come back at last, to unveil his sovereignty, his righteousness and his faithfulness before the watching world, Paul the apostle believed that the one God had already done all this in and as Jesus the Messiah and in and through the spirit. The focus of his future hope, therefore, was not now expressed in terms of the return of God to Zion – that had, astonishingly, already happened – but in terms of the return of Jesus to claim the whole world as his rightful inheritance. The messianic inauguration of Jewish eschatology thus led directly to a messianic revision of the still-Jewish, and now Christian, hope.

From Christian Origins, then, to the Question of God. We have come to the point in this book, and in this sequence of volumes, where we can see more precisely *why* 'theology' was necessary for Paul and the other early Christians, and why it had to take the shape it did. This particular worldview needed theology for its own clarity, stability and sustainability. If the worldview was to stand up, shorn of the traditional cultural symbols of Judaism and refusing to take on board the symbolic praxis of paganism, it needed to put down roots more carefully and explicitly, and those roots needed to be the roots of serious human thinking that would penetrate deep into the soil of the being and character of Israel's God, the creator. That is the task, fuelled at every point by reflection on Israel's scriptures, to which Paul constantly summons his hearers. If the *ekklēsia* of God in Jesus the Messiah, in its unity and holiness, is to constitute as it were its own worldview, to be its own central symbol, it needs to *think*: to be 'transformed by the renewal of the mind', to think as age-to-come people rather than present-age people, to understand who this God is, who this Messiah Jesus is, who this strange powerful spirit is, and what it means to be, and to live as, the renewed people of God, the renewed humanity. This is a worldview, in other words, which will only function if it is held by humans with transformed minds, and who use those transformed minds

constantly to wrestle with the biggest questions of all, those of God and the world.

It is almost as though the entire system is designed to challenge humans to grow up in their understanding. Paul tells the Corinthians to do that, but it isn't just they who need the command: it is all Messiah-people.¹⁰⁸ Only mature thinking will sustain the worldview. The subsequent history of the church, not least of the western church, indicates only too clearly what happens when people stop doing theology and try to sustain an ecclesial reality by some other means.¹⁰⁹

'Theology', as we now call it (though Paul did not) thus plays a new role in Paul's world, and thereafter in principle throughout the history of the church. It was new in relation both to Judaism and to paganism.

First, this role was new *vis-à-vis* Judaism. Judaism had a fairly clear idea of who its God was, what he had done in the past and what he had promised to do in the future. The only question was how and when he would get on and do it, how (in other words) he would be faithful to what he had said, to what he was committed to do. For Paul, the question works the other way round. Granted that the events concerning Jesus the Messiah *were* the revelation of 'the faithfulness of God', what did that now say about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the creator of the world? Unless we can answer that question, the central worldview-symbol will not do its job. In such a case, the *ekklēsia* will cease to be its true self, and be forced to lean on symbols from other worldviews, whether Jewish or pagan or some odd combination of the two.

Second, this role for 'theology' was new in relation to paganism. Ordinary street-level pagans knew enough about the gods to get by from day to day. The more up-market debates between Stoics, Epicureans and Academics, and the other philosophical ideas that came and went, were interesting and relevant in various ways. But the task of thinking through what precisely one meant by 'god', and what relation such a being might have to the world, did not play a role, for ancient pagans, anything remotely like the role that Paul's kind of theology – the urgent, challenging, prayerful

and scriptural reflection on the creator and covenant God and his purposes for the world – needed to play in his writings to his churches.

So when people say, as they often do, that Paul ‘was not a systematic theologian’, meaning that ‘Paul didn’t write a medieval *Summa Theologica* or a book that corresponds to Calvin’s *Institutes*,’ we will want to say: Fair enough. So far as we know, he didn’t. But the statement is often taken to mean that Paul was therefore just a jumbled, rambling sort of thinker, who would grab odd ideas out of the assortment of junk in his mental cupboard and throw them roughly in the direction of the problems presented to him by his beloved and frustrating *ekklēsiai*. And that is simply nonsense. The more time we spend in the careful reading of Paul, and in the study of his worldview, his theology and his aims and intentions, the more he emerges as a deeply *coherent* thinker.¹¹⁰ His main themes may well not fit the boxes constructed by later Christian dogmatics of whatever type. They generate their own categories, precisely as they are transforming the ancient Jewish ones, which are often sadly neglected in later Christian dogmatics. They emerge, whole and entire, thought through with a rigour which those who criticize Paul today (and those who claim to follow him, too!) would do well to match.

What is more, the reason Paul was ‘doing theology’ was not that he happened to have the kind of brain that delighted in playing with and rearranging large, complex abstract ideas. He was doing theology because the life of God’s people depended on it, depended on his doing it initially *for* them, then as soon as possible *with* them, and then on them being able to go on doing it for themselves. All Paul’s theology is thus pastoral theology, not in the sense of an unsystematic therapeutic model which concentrates on meeting the felt needs of the ‘client’, but in the sense that the shepherd needs to feed the flock with clean food and water, and keep a sharp eye out for wolves. For that, pastoral theology needs to be crystal clear, thought out and presented in a way that teaches others to think as well. That, too, is part of the point: Christian theology, for Paul, was not just about *what* you know, but about *how* you know. And, just as the Christian worldview compels people to think in a new way, because otherwise the worldview itself is

unstable, so Christian theology remains both a *corporate* task, one in which the church as a whole has to engage, rather than being spoon-fed by one or two high-octane teachers, and also an *incomplete* task, because each generation needs to become mature in its thinking, which wouldn't happen if Paul, Athanasius, Aquinas, Luther, Barth or anyone else had closed off the questions with answers that could then simply be looked up. The 'authority' of Paul did not consist in his providing lots of correct answers to puzzling questions. That would have left his converts, and subsequent generations, with no work to do on the questions he had answered, and no starting-point for the ones he hadn't. They would have remained radically and residually immature. Give someone a thought, and you help them for a day; teach someone to think, and you transform them for life. Paul's authority consisted in his setting up a particular framework and posing a specific challenge. Living as Messiah-people demanded, he would have said, that people work within that framework and wrestle with that challenge.

The new role, then, which 'theology' needed to play, precisely because of the worldview we have studied, demanded of Paul that he explore the meaning of monotheism in particular. That was always the central Jewish dogma, already setting Israel apart from its neighbours. Paul's development of the Jewish doctrine of the one God stands at the heart of his theology, and with even sharper effect than in Judaism itself. Belief in the one God, the creator, known through Jesus the Messiah, the lord, and known also in the mysterious presence and power of the spirit, not only defined the *ekklēsia* at its most fundamental level, declaring that this was the place where it was at, the middle of everywhere. It thereby put down a marker which said, in the face of other similar claims: this is the Kingdom at the heart of it all. Draw a line through the world at this point, and all else will be east or west from here.

¹ On the 'questions' which open up the heart of a worldview cf. *NTPG* 122–6. In *JVG* I added 'What time is it?' to the initial four (see *JVG* 138 and 467–74).

² Gal. 3.28f. More widely, cf. 1 Cor. 10.1f., where Paul assumes that he can refer to the exodus generation as 'our ancestors': see Hays 2005, 9, and above, 416f. 1 Cor. 10.1f. is balanced by the equally striking 12.2, 'when you were still pagans', on which [see below](#).

³ Rom. 2.28f.

⁴ Phil. 3.3.

⁵ Gal. 6.15f.

⁶ [See below, 1148f.](#)

⁷ cf. 9.4: they (unbelieving Jews) are ‘Israelites’ (as is Paul himself: 11.1); 9.6 (though there he differentiates two different ‘Israel’s); 9.27, 31; 10.19, 21; 11.2, 7. (11.25 is controversial: [see below, 1231–52.](#)) For ‘Israel according to the flesh’ cf. 1 Cor. 10.18; cp. Rom. 11.14, ‘my flesh’ (meaning, with 9.3, ‘my kinsfolk according to the flesh’).

⁸ I suppose it is possible that the Jews and Greeks in question are *Christian Jews* and *Christian Greeks*, and that we should read the final *kai* as epexegetic: be blameless before Christian Jews and Christian Greeks, *in other words*, ‘the church of God’. I regard this as far less likely than the proposal in the text.

⁹ 1 Cor. 1.2.

¹⁰ Meeks 1983, 108.

¹¹ Hays 2005, 23.

¹² 1 Cor. 12.2.

¹³ Hays 2005, 9.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 5.1; cf. Hays 2005, 21.

¹⁵ For the idea of scandal, cf. 1 Cor. 1.18–25; Gal. 5.11; of Paul’s scars: 2 Cor. 11.24; Gal. 6.17. On the various contemporary attempts to avoid the scandal, see e.g. the work of Nanos (e.g. 2011) and Eisenbaum 2009, discussed briefly in *Interpreters*.

¹⁶ On the term *Ioudaismos*, which confusingly means something importantly different from our modern ‘Judaism’, see above, xxiv, 76, 82, 89.

¹⁷ Gal. 1.13f.; Phil. 3.4–8.

¹⁸ 2 Cor. 11.22; 1 Cor. 9.20 ([see below, 1434–43](#)).

¹⁹ Rom. 9.3; 10.1; 11.1f.

²⁰ See the discussion of Martyn 1997 and his proposed ‘apocalyptic’ reading in *Interpreters*.

²¹ See esp. Nanos 1996; 2002a; 2011.

²² See the discussion of Watson 2007 [1986]. Watson has significantly modified the view expounded in the earlier edition.

²³ Rom. 11.17–24.

²⁴ This is not too far from the position advocated by Nanos; see *Interpreters*.

²⁵ See *Perspectives*, ch. 11.

²⁶ See esp. Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 2; and below, [815–36](#).

²⁷ See again below, [815–36](#).

²⁸ [See ch. 10 below](#). On faith and the spirit cf. 1 Cor. 12.3; Gal. 3.2; by implication, Eph. 2.8. The two are of course closely correlated throughout Gal., e.g. 3.23–9 in parallel with 4.1–7.

²⁹ Judge: Rom. 2.16 and 14.10–12 with 2.27; 1 Cor. 6.3. Rom. 5.17; 1 Cor. 4.8.

³⁰ Indeed, (*hoi*) *pistoi*, or more often *hoi pisteuontes*, ‘believers’, are among Paul’s other regular taken-for-granted ways of demarcating Messiah-people. Cf. 2 Cor. 6.15; Rom. 1.16; 3.22; 4.11; 10.4; 1 Cor. 1.21; 14.22; Gal. 3.22; 1 Thess. 1.7; 2.10, 13; 2 Thess. 1.10.

³¹ Rom. 5.21; 6.23; etc. This alone – the inauguration of the ‘age to come’ – would be almost enough, granted the Jewish context, to declare that when Paul said *Christos* he meant ‘Messiah’.

³² Phil. 3.4–11.

³³ See the linkage of Adam and Israel [in the previous chapter](#) and elsewhere.

³⁴ Rom. 5.2, 4f., 10; 8.18, 21, 28–30; 2 Cor. 3.7–4.6.

³⁵ [See below, 1021–3](#). On the current interest in ‘divinization’ see esp. Gorman 2009; Blackwell 2011.

³⁶ [cf. below, 638–41](#) on monotheism and creation.

³⁷ See the consistent polemic against any even partially inaugurated eschatology in Allison 2010.

³⁸ 2 Cor. 11.12–15; cp. Mk. 8.33 par. *Hasatan* in Hebrew is of course ‘the accuser’; here as elsewhere we may see a sense in which Paul, confronted by ‘accusation’, naturally thinks of ‘the satan’, the prime ‘accuser’.

³⁹ Phil. 2.15; Col. 1.27.

⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 8.6; Col. 1.15–17.

⁴¹ This way of framing the answer to this particular pair of worldview-questions looks ahead to our discussion, at the end of ch. 8 below, of the now well-known question of ‘plight and solution’ in Paul.

⁴² The identity of Paul’s opponents in almost every letter (e.g. Rom. 2.17–3.8; 16.17–20; 2 Cor. 10.10–11.15; Gal. *passim*; Phil. 1.15–18; 3.2, 17–19; Col. 2.8–23) is a matter of inevitably tendentious mirror-reading upon which no consensus currently exists in any particular case. See the survey of Barnett 1993.

⁴³ 2 Cor.; all through, esp. 11.21–32.

⁴⁴ 2 Cor. 11.3; cf. 2.11.

⁴⁵ Rom. 16.17–20; Phil. 3.2; Col. 2.8. For ‘the god of the belly’ cf. Phil. 3.19.

⁴⁶ 2 Cor. 1.8–11.

⁴⁷ e.g. 2 Cor. 1.11; 4.15f.; 9.11f.

⁴⁸ 1 Thess. 5.8; Eph. 6.10–20.

⁴⁹ For the interesting overlap between human will and action and the divine will and action, see the recent work of Barclay and Gathercole 2006.

⁵⁰ Rom. 1.17 with 3.21–6; see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], ad loc., and [ch. 10 below](#).

⁵¹ Cf. Rom. 1.31; 2.16; 14.10–12; 1 Cor. 4.5; 2 Cor. 5.10; for ‘the saints’ sharing in this (which can only be an allusion to Dan. 7; [see above, ch. 7](#)), 1 Cor. 6.2f.

⁵² On the ‘restrainer’ of 2 Thess. 2.5–8 see Röcker 2009 (who sees the restraining influence as both God himself and the one who preaches the gospel), and the discussion of Harrison 2011, 92 (who favours the possibility that Paul refers to a restraining archangel). Among the commentators, see the clear presentations of e.g. Malherbe 2000, 431–3; Fee 2009, 284–8, both suitably cautious.

⁵³ 1 Cor. 15.24, 28.

⁵⁴ [See below, ch. 11](#).

⁵⁵ So, rightly, Martyn 1997, 104, speaking of ‘a radically new perception of time’, the time ‘after the apocalypse of the faith of Christ’. Martyn does not, however, seem to me fully to have grasped how Paul’s sense of this new time relates to the time of promise that has gone before.

⁵⁶ Phil. 3.10–16.

⁵⁷ Ac. 4.2; cf. *RSG* 452, 727.

⁵⁸ 1 Cor. 15.23–8. See discussion in *RSG* 335–8.

⁵⁹ See Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 26–9; *RSG* 335–8. Käsemann makes this passage thematic for his major treatment of ‘apocalyptic’ as the ‘mother of Christian theology’, but his eager anxiety to have Paul combat ‘hellenistic enthusiasts’ (the mothers of some of Käsemann’s own over-zealous antagonists, it seems), leads him constantly to downplay the reality of the present reign of the Messiah and to overstress the future reference: ‘the Resurrection of Christ is therefore, even while it

counts as the beginning of the general resurrection, still for the time being the great exception, in which we can participate by hope alone' (Käsemann 1969 [1965], 134; see the comments in *NTPG* 462–4). Here is a major difference between Käsemann on the one hand, for whom 'apocalyptic' refers to the future event, and Martyn and others, for whom it refers to the victory already won on the cross.

⁶⁰ Gal. 4.4: *to plērōma tou chronou*. Eph. 1.10: *eis oikonomian tou plērōmatos tōn kairōn*. As I explained in ch. 1, I do not regard the continuing fashion for excluding Eph. from consideration in Pauline theology as necessary or helpful.

⁶¹ Rom. 1.2; 3.21b; 4.13, 17, 23–5; 15.4, 8–13; 1 Cor. 2.7; and, not least, 2 Cor. 1.20.

⁶² 1 Cor. 10.11: see Hays 1989a, 168f.; 2005, 8–12; Héring 1966 [1962], 89, followed by Thiselton 2000, 743f.; Agamben 2006, 73: the ages 'are come to face each other'; Fitzmyer 2008, 388. BDAG 32f., however, in line with Conzelmann 1975 [1969], 168, points out that *telos* could not refer to the beginning of the new age (the English 'ends' is misleading, encouraging us to think of the two 'ages' as like two bits of string, each having two 'ends', but if we are talking about 'ages', they would each have a beginning and an end, an *archē* and a *telos*); that *ta telē*, 'the ends', plural, is sometimes used as a dramatic form of the singular; and that likewise the plural *aiōnes*, 'ages', can be used in a 'purely formal' sense (citing *T. Lev.* 14.1). In this case Paul's statement would simply be a dramatized way of saying, 'The ages of the world have reached their goal, and have met us there,' or words to that effect.

⁶³ 1 Thess. 5.4–10.

⁶⁴ Rom. 13.11–14. See the suggestive comments of Agamben 2006, 75f.; and Cullmann 1962 [1951], 137, with the discussion in Matlock 1996, 138.

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 13.8–13.

⁶⁶ cf. Rom. 2.16, 27–9; 1 Cor. 4.5; 6.9; 11.29–32; 15.28; cf. 15.50; 2 Cor. 5.10; Gal. 5.21; Eph. 5.5. For 'the day of lord Jesus' etc. cf. 1 Cor. 1.8; 2 Cor. 1.14; Phil. 1.6, 10; 2.16; 4.5; 1 Thess. 5.2, 4; 2 Thess. 1.5–10; 2.2–12.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Rom. 2.5–16, 27; 14.11f.; 1 Cor. 3.13; 4.4f.; 2 Cor. 5.10; and see below, ch. 11.

⁶⁸ Phil. 3.18–21.

⁶⁹ Thiselton 2009, 138 ('appropriate ... situation' is all italic in the original); see Wittgenstein 1958, Iix, 191–2; I, 572–86; Wittgenstein 1967, paras 67 and 71–7.

⁷⁰ Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 44–9, makes this theme of 'the fullness of the time' the starting-point of his whole exposition of Paul's theology, the grounding even for christology itself (49–53, etc.).

⁷¹ Rom. 1.16–18; for the repeated *apokalyptetai* and its significance see 764–7.

⁷² Rom. 1.3f.; 1 Cor. 15.3–9.

⁷³ For another pointer in this direction, see Wright 2011b [2005], ch. 9.

⁷⁴ See the 'maybe' in Philem. 15 (above, 9f.).

⁷⁵ See the remarkable, indeed explosive, proposals of Agamben 2006, 59–87, about the nature of messianic time.

⁷⁶ Rom. 3.21, 26; 5.9; 7.6; 8.1; 11.5, 31 (on which [see below, 1252](#)); 16.26.

⁷⁷ 15.7–13.

⁷⁸ Rom. 12.2.

⁷⁹ Eph. 2.13; 3.6, 10.

⁸⁰ 2 Cor. 6.1–2, quoting Isa. 49.8.

⁸¹ 2 Cor. 1.20.

⁸² NRSV says ‘meaning of Heb uncertain’ (as also with the same phrase in 42.6). Why? Cf. Motyer 1993, 391: the Servant ‘is in his own person the Lord’s covenant’.

⁸³ Isa. 49.3–9, 13.

⁸⁴ 2 Cor. 5.21: see 879–85

⁸⁵ cf. the use of the adjective in Rom. 15.16, 31 in relation to ‘the offering of the gentiles’, first in its acceptability to God and second in its acceptability to the church in Jerusalem.

⁸⁶ 6.16—7.1, quoting Lev. 26.11f.; Ezek. 37.27; Isa. 52.11; 2 Sam. 7.8, 14 – all passages replete with covenantal eschatology.

⁸⁷ 5.17.

⁸⁸ Agamben 2006, 75f.

⁸⁹ Agamben 2006, 71f.

⁹⁰ Walton 2001, 146–55; 2009, 72–7. Cp. the idea of David’s ‘finding a place for God to rest’ in Ps. 132.8, 13–18 ([see below](#)); 1 Chr. 28.2. Hayward 1999, 35f. points out that this is the basis of the Targumic interpretations of ‘rest’ as meaning Temple, and suggests that this may reflect a tradition already visible in Sir. 24.7, 11 and also 36.13.

⁹¹ Ps. 132 (LXX 131), 13–18. *katapausis* in v. 14 recalls *katapausen*, ‘he rested,’ in Gen. 2.2.

⁹² Heb. 3.7—4.11, drawing on Ps. 95.11.

⁹³ Isa. 66.1f.: ‘place of my resting’ is *maqōm menuchathi*, LXX *topos tēs katapauseōs mou*.

⁹⁴ cf. 1 Cor. 15.27; Eph. 1.22; Phil. 3.21.

⁹⁵ See esp. again 2 Cor. 5.17—6.2.

⁹⁶ So, rightly, Martyn 1997, 92.

⁹⁷ Col. 4.5; Eph. 5.16.

⁹⁸ 1 Cor. 7.29–31.

⁹⁹ NRSV, citing Rom. 13.11 as a parallel.

¹⁰⁰ Winter 2001, 215–68. Horrell 2005, 147 n. 41, discussing this, points out the parallel drawn by Yarborough 1985, 103 n. 38 to those in 3 Macc. 1.16–19 who abandoned their marriage plans because of the sudden crisis. They did not, however, suppose that the world was coming to an end; a major social and political threat had suddenly appeared.

¹⁰¹ Ps. 2; Isa. 11; etc.

¹⁰² See 2 Cor. 5.11—6.2, above, with ref. to Isa. 49.8; cp. too Rom. 10.15 (Isa. 52.7); Gal 1.15 (Isa. 49.1, 5); 1.24 (Isa. 49.3); and the repeated suggestion of Gal. 2.2; 4.11; Phil. 2.16; 1 Thess. 3.5, all echoing Isa. 49.4 (cp. Isa. 65.23; 1 Cor. 15.58). See too, perhaps surprisingly, Eisenbaum 2009, 253f.

¹⁰³ Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8—10.

¹⁰⁴ Rom. 14.14; 1 Cor. 10.26, quoting Ps. 24.1.

¹⁰⁵ See esp. Meeks 1983, 90–3, citing the ‘exclusive monotheism’, at once so similar and so different to the ‘intellectual monotheism’ already alive in Hellenistic culture; the belief in special revelation to believers; and, as ‘the heart of the secret’, ‘the significance of Jesus’ death as God’s messiah and his resurrection’ (92). Early Christian monotheism, says Meeks, ‘served as the focus of their difference from others and signified also the basis for unity among the believers’ (92); those who shared the belief which focused on the dying and rising of Jesus ‘shared a religious symbol of enormous generative power’ (93). Thus does Christian theology belong in an intimate relationship with the symbolic universe, the worldview, of the early Pauline communities. It is one of the ironies of recent scholarship that this central theological insight, often missed by theologians themselves, has been articulated so clearly from within socio-historical study.

¹⁰⁶ Sanders 1992, 247.

[107](#) See the comments of Rowe 2005a, 293f.

[108](#) 1 Cor. 14.20.

[109](#) See Horrell 2005, 62 (part of his discussion of Habermas).

[110](#) This relates to the proposal ('coherence and contingency') of Beker 1980. The question is, of course, what counts as 'coherence', and on what criteria. There are many themes which, previously declared incompatible by exegetes, are overdue for comments such as those of D. A. Campbell 2008, 380, declaring that Messiahship, resurrection and exaltation 'are not just isolated points of emphasis for Paul' but rather 'tightly integrated concerns that fulfill important argumentative and theological roles'.

中 *Chū*

Medium

Straight downward through a rectangle
A swift bisecting bar
A stroke that likely started out
An arrow that pierces
Its target's 'medium', 'mid-point', 'midst'.
Definite line between
Refocusing our edge-lured minds.
Golden mean. Middle way.

Shot and follow-through.
A true shaft and singing arc.
Spot on. A bull's-eye.

The sign too for Middle Kingdom.
A centered self-belief:
All else east or west of China.
Assured parishioners.
Poet Kavanagh would have approved
How any dynasty
Knew the axis of everything
Drew a line through their world.

The place where it's at.
Middle of everywhere.
Arrow's *you are here*.

Micheal O'Siadhail

Part III

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION TO PART III

From worldview to theology. This is not, and should never be, an either/or distinction. My central argument in the present book is that when we analyze Paul's worldview we understand why his theology needed to be what it was. This works the other way round, too: when we analyze Paul's theology we understand better why his worldview was what it was – though of course, in a book, one cannot present both of these arguments sequentially. Worldview and theology go together in a chicken-and-egg sort of way, as opposed to a fish-and-chips sort of way. If, as some do, we replace 'worldview' with something like 'cosmology', we would see that this double reality, worldview plus theology, belongs on the same map as, say, Engberg-Pedersen's presentation of Stoicism (theology plus 'cosmology').¹ I find that usage inadequate and potentially confusing, but it is worth noting that I am doing something similar to those who employ it.

The hypothesis I shall now present, as the material centre of my argument, is that there is a way of understanding Paul's theology which does justice to the whole and the parts, to the multiple historical contexts within which Paul lived and the multiple social and ecclesial pressures and questions he faced – and, particularly, to the actual texts of the actual letters. Locating this overall aim within contemporary Pauline scholarship, I shall argue that this way of approaching him will draw together, and hold in a recognizably Pauline balance, the different strands or themes which have been highlighted and, all too often, played off against one another ('juristic', 'participationist', 'transformational', 'apocalyptic', 'covenantal' and 'salvation-historical' – and no doubt many more besides, including those old and potentially dualistic geometrical metaphors, 'vertical' and 'horizontal'). There are, no doubt, rough edges and craggy outcrops of thought here and there in Paul, as in any great thinker. But the inner coherence, not simply of a small central core, but of the large and broad

sweep of his writing will emerge from the perspective I propose. This will constitute the major argument in its favour.

I shall repeatedly appeal to the *sequence of thought* in a letter as a whole, a section as a whole, a chapter or paragraph as a whole. I marvel at the extent to which this is often not done in works on Paul's theology or particular aspects of it. I marvel in particular that many commentaries, which one might suppose to be committed to following the argument of the text they are studying, manage not to do that, but instead to treat a Pauline letter as if it were a collection of maxims, detached theological statements, plus occasional 'proofs from scripture' and the like.² I take it as axiomatic, on the contrary, that Paul deliberately laid out whole arguments, not just bits and pieces, miscellaneous *topoi* which just happen to turn up in these irrelevant 'contingent' contexts like oddly shaped pearls on an irrelevant string.³ In any case, the point is that a thematic analysis of Paul's theological topics in themselves, and in their mutual interrelation, ought to enhance our appreciation of the flow of thought in his letters and their component parts, while also demonstrating coherence among themselves. The best argument in favour of the hypothesis is that this end is in fact achieved by this means. As Ernst Käsemann put it at the start of his great Romans commentary:

Until I have proof to the contrary I proceed on the assumption that the text has a central concern and a remarkable inner logic that may no longer be entirely comprehensible to us.⁴

The first half of that statement (the assumption of a central concern and inner logic) constitutes the invitation to exegesis; the second half (the question of comprehensibility) constitutes its particular challenge. The study of Pauline theology is intended, at least in my own case, to contribute to the comprehensibility of the text's assumed 'central concern' and 'remarkable inner logic' by clarifying the underlying themes and concepts upon which Paul is drawing at any one time. And part of that clarifying, as will quickly become apparent, consists in recognizing that though there were 'many gods, many lords' in Paul's world, when he used the word *theos* he referred to the being he regarded as the one and only divinity, the

creator, the one who had entered into covenant with Israel. That is why, in the present volume, I have been using the capital letter for the word ‘God’.

My particular proposal in this Part has a simple outline, unfolding in three stages.

1. I take as the framework the three main elements of second-Temple Jewish ‘theology’, namely monotheism, election and eschatology. I am aware, as I have said before, that second-Temple Jews did not characteristically write works of systematic theology, but I am also aware that these three topics have a clear and well-known claim to summarize beliefs widely held at the time.⁵ I am equally aware that many essays in ‘Pauline theology’ have assumed that its central, dominant or even sole theme will be soteriology, and that my proposal may appear to be ignoring this and setting off in a quite different direction. However, as will become clear, I believe that the theme of ‘election’ is the best frame within which to understand Paul’s soteriology, and that ‘election’ in turn is only properly understood within the larger frame of beliefs about the one God and the promised future (and the particular problem of evil which only emerges into full light once the reality of the one God has been glimpsed). Soteriology thus remains at the centre. Part of the strength of my proposal is, I believe, the clarity which it brings to the many debates which still buzz around Paul’s exposition of salvation like bees around a hive.

Each of these topics – monotheism, election, eschatology – is of course controversial and complex in its own right in second-Temple Judaism, let alone in early Christianity.⁶ But once we home in on what, more or less, these themes might have meant to a first-century Pharisee, we see not only that they do indeed shape Jewish thinking but that they form a tightly integrated whole: one God, one people of God, one future for Israel and the world. Each is kept in place by the others, and each is partly defined in relation to the others.

The first move in my overall hypothesis, then, is to propose that Paul remained a thoroughly Jewish thinker, and that these three topics substantially and satisfyingly cover the main things he was talking about and insisting upon, the central points upon which he drew when addressing

the wide range of concerns which appear in his letters. This opening (theological) move is correlated with my basic (historical; an earlier generation would have said, 'religio-historical') assumption about where Paul stood in relation to the thought-worlds of his day. Like many other Jewish thinkers of his and other days, he radically revised and rethought his Jewish tradition (in his case, the viewpoint of a Pharisee) around a fresh understanding of the divine purposes, thus gaining a fresh hermeneutical principle. In other words, I proceed on the assumption that, however we describe what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus ('conversion'? 'call'?), its effect was not that he rejected everything about his Jewish life and thought and invented a new scheme, with or without borrowed non-Jewish elements, but that he thought through and transformed his existing Jewish worldview and theology in the light of the cataclysmic revelation that the crucified Jesus had been raised from the dead.⁷ If this means that Paul held an 'apocalyptic' theology, so be it; though, over against some schemes that have claimed that title, what it means is that Paul remained, in his own mind at least, firmly on the Jewish map. He did not, as many have wanted to believe, sweep that map off the table and replace it with something quite different, a fresh and essentially non-Jewish 'revelation'.

2. This brings us to the second stage of the hypothesis. I shall argue, in the case of each of these three central and correlated topics, that Paul rethought, reworked and reimagined them around Jesus the Messiah on the one hand and the spirit on the other.⁸ As Wayne Meeks put it: 'the belief in the crucified Messiah introduces a new and controlling paradigm of God's mode of action.'⁹ This hypothesis, of a christological and pneumatological reworking of the three central Jewish beliefs, will necessarily involve important sub-hypotheses about Jesus and the spirit: about Jesus as the personal revelation-in-action of Israel's God (in chapter 9); about Jesus' 'Messiahship' in Paul, and the relationship between that and Paul's view of Israel as the people of the one God (in chapter 10); about the spirit as the presence of the living God inhabiting the new temple (in chapter 9), and as the agent of covenant renewal (in chapter 10). Each of these, inevitably, will plunge us into topics which are often treated at monograph length in their

own right, not least because they all correlate, in the treatment of ‘election’, with Paul’s complex cluster of soteriological themes. There will not be room, of course, for such full treatment. But I hope that this framing of debates within the larger outline will nevertheless bring fresh clarity, and that the new proposals I advance will build on at least some of the strengths of recent scholarship.

There are, no doubt, other ways of lining up these dense, interlocking themes. I think this way has at least two important merits. First, it retains, and indeed emphasizes, Paul’s location within second-Temple Judaism. Second, it highlights his serious and substantial reworking of traditional concepts.¹⁰ When (for instance) he spoke about Jesus, or the spirit, or the law, or salvation, he was not freewheeling, inventing new ideas and foisting them on his readers. He was thinking through, in the light of the traditions (particularly the biblical traditions) he had inherited, what it meant to say that Israel’s Messiah had been crucified and raised from the dead, and that the divine spirit had been poured out in a fresh way.

3. The third stage of the hypothesis is to demonstrate that this christologically and pneumatologically redefined complex of monotheism, election and eschatology was directed by Paul in three further ways, which we postpone to Part IV of the present book. I list them here in the reverse order in which they appear in that Part.

First, it was what drove and governed the main aims of his letter-writing. This activity, like Paul’s praying and pastoral work themselves, was aimed at constructing and maintaining communities ‘in the Messiah’ across the world of first-century Turkey, Greece and Italy. It is important to note this here, in case it might appear that the real aim of all exegesis and historical or theological reconstruction, namely the understanding of Paul’s letters themselves, had fallen out of sight. To the contrary: that is where it’s all going. This is where the project finally comes in to land, in chapter 16.

Second, though, if Paul was indeed redefining the central beliefs of Second-Temple Judaism, we might expect to find, at least by implication, a running debate between him and others within that world, focused not least on how they were reading scripture. Sometimes, as in the controversy in

Galatia, this debate emerges into the light of day (a very bright light, in that case, casting very large shadows). At other times it is more implicit than actual. But, as Francis Watson and others have shown, we can see in principle how Paul's reading of scripture stands in parallel to, and often in tension with, other readings taking place around the same time.¹¹ This involves another particular hypothesis, this time in relation to how Paul's reading of scripture actually works. Over against those who see it as atomistic or opportunistic, I follow those who see Paul dealing with the larger scriptural wholes from which he draws particular phrases and sentences, and particularly with the larger scriptural *narratives* which he wants his communities to inhabit for themselves.¹² This is the final element in the historical 'placing' of Paul, and it will occupy us in chapter 15, corresponding to chapter 2 in Part I.

Third, this christologically and pneumatologically redefined Jewish theology was in reasonably constant engagement, again sometimes explicitly and sometimes not, with the pagan world of Paul's day.¹³ We will track this in the three stages we used in Part I: (a) Paul believed that the transforming power of his gospel upstaged the philosophers' quest, the pagan dream of a genuine humanness; (b) he articulated, and encouraged his churches to live with, a spirituality and *koinōnia*, again generated by the gospel, which he saw as the reality to which the 'religious' world of late antiquity obliquely pointed in its belief in suprahuman forces and intelligences which influenced and affected the ordinary world; (c) he believed that the universal lordship of Jesus, as Israel's true Messiah, upstaged the imperial dream of a single world-kingdom. I shall work through these themes, too, in reverse order, providing in Part IV a mirror image to the treatment in Part I. Thus chapter 12 deals with 'empire'; chapter 13 with 'religion'; and chapter 14 with 'philosophy'. In each case I choose, out of the plethora of modern studies, one or two particular conversation partners. This third part of the overall hypothesis – mapping out the ways in which the worldview and theology of Parts II and III impacted on the contexts studied in Part I – forms a vital part of the overall argument.

One interesting reflection already follows from this. Paul was quite capable, as he says in 2 Corinthians 10.5, of ‘taking every thought prisoner and making it obey the Messiah’. Like some of the Stoics, who could snatch ‘Epicurean’ or ‘dualistic’ concepts in order to show that in fact they supported their own position, Paul was quite capable of using language and ideas from the world of pagan philosophy in order to bring them, as it were, on side with his own project.¹⁴ This in turn reflects an interesting emphasis which is often omitted: that Paul is at least implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, advocating the beginnings of a genuine ‘public theology’ – an aspiration far above the pragmatic reality of his tiny communities in the vast world of greco-roman antiquity, but a theme strongly hinted at in his attempt to create and sustain communities that were living the life of a genuine, God-reflecting humanness. Paul was, after all (to return to where we began), a full-blooded Jewish-style creational monotheist, which meant that in taking creation and humanness very seriously he held a view of redemption which affirmed the goodness of both rather than undermining it. The fact that humanness had been spoiled by idolatry did not mean that the divine plan of salvation involved the abandonment of humanness and its particular status and vocation. The fact that creation itself had been subjected to decay did not mean that the creator had given up on the vision of a good creation in need of renewal. For Paul, the gospel rendered people more human, not less, renewing the vocation of bearing the divine image, reflecting the divine wisdom into the rest of the world and reflecting the praises of creation back to its maker. This vision carried, from the start, strong and sometimes subversive meaning for real, public life.¹⁵

The result of all this (again, this will come in chapter 16) was the founding and maintaining of communities which, in terms of the first-century world of Diaspora Judaism, were bound to look extremely anomalous.¹⁶ On the one hand, they would seem very Jewish, indeed ‘conservatively’ so. On the other hand, they would seem very ‘assimilated’, since they did not practise the customs and commandments that marked out Jews from their pagan neighbours. But these communities, Paul believed, possessed their own inner coherence, due to the freshly worked elements in

the theology which he expounded, elements that were not bolted onto the outside of the parent Jewish theology as extraneous foreign bodies but were discerned to lie at the very heart of what that theology had most deeply affirmed.¹⁷

The picture I have in mind of the hypothesis I am outlining can be sketched in terms of a rectangular box. As we look at this box from the front, we see the main elements of Jewish theology: monotheism, election and eschatology:



These three run, as it were, all the way through the box from front to back. As we look at the sides of the box, however, we see the two fresh themes which now redefine each of those three categories: Jesus the Messiah, the lord, and the spirit:

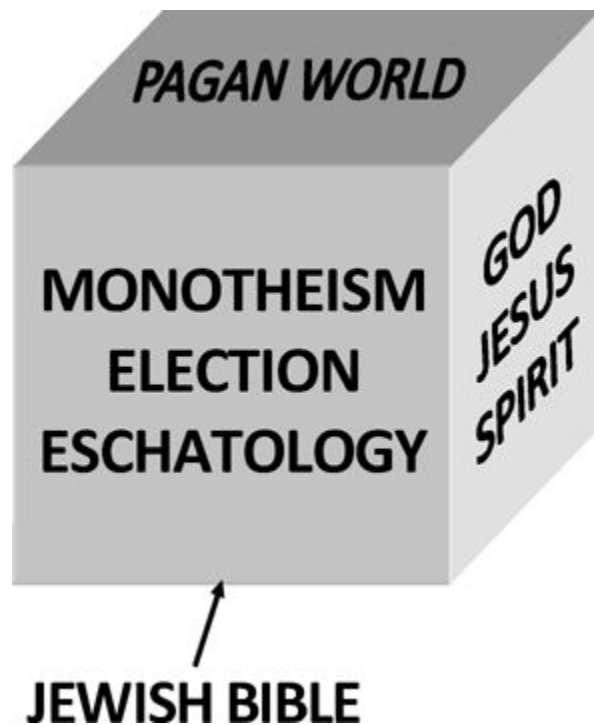


Again, these two run as it were all the way through from side to side, so that at every point in the content of the box we now have monotheism, election and eschatology redefined by Jesus and the spirit. Of course, Jesus and the spirit do not *replace* God the creator; somehow God the creator, already there of course at the heart of Jewish monotheism, is also there alongside the two new elements:



The base and the top of the box now come into play. The base is undoubtedly the Jewish Bible, foundational for Paul's thinking both traditional and creative. And the top is the world of paganism with which he

found himself in constant engagement, sometimes in large but outflanking agreement, sometimes in sharp confrontation.



All this is of course complex, but necessarily so. Attempts to reduce that complexity in the pursuit of an easier comprehensibility are the equivalent of trying to make a model railway locomotive out of Playdough. Some parts may look familiar, but the train won't run down the track. The necessary complexity in question corresponds to the complexity of (a) the world(s) in which Paul lived, (b) the vocation he believed himself to have and particularly (c) the beliefs about the creator God and his purposes that formed the central material of his thinking. When we get these more or less right, the model locomotive will now work. We will find that Paul's various letters, our primary material, can be located comprehensibly and coherently somewhere within this box.

'Coherence' is after all what counts. We are not looking for the small-minded consistency which, though scorned by many Pauline scholars, is nevertheless wheeled out whenever they want to reject (say) Ephesians or 2 Thessalonians. We are looking for a larger consistency: this was, after all, a

virtue prized by ancient Stoics as well as by some moderns.¹⁸ Paul himself constantly urges his hearers to a ‘consistency’ of belief and life. We are looking for a coherence in which the different major themes, and their varied contextual expression, will be seen to offer mutual reinforcement even if not always expressed in precisely the same terminology.¹⁹

This hypothetical proposal, I submit, has strong initial plausibility. After the long years in which any ‘explanation’ of Paul’s thinking was attractive so long as it did not involve much organic contact with Judaism, we are now much more attuned to thinking of him as a substantially Jewish figure and thinker, though this has meant that the problem has been rephrased: how did such a Jewish thinker manage to say things which sound, on occasion, so unJewish? My proposal addresses exactly this question. To see the shape of Jewish thought in the traditional terms of the one God, the one people of God, and the one future, and to see the coming of the Messiah and the giving of the spirit within that as the new defining point, is both to say, ‘This is a very Jewish scheme’ and ‘This redefinition around Messiah and spirit is radical indeed.’ (One might of course say exactly the same about the early Christian belief in Jesus’ resurrection. That belief only made sense within the Jewish world, but it was something no Jew had imagined before, and it compelled radical revision of the things they *had* imagined before.²⁰) To say all this sort of thing about tradition and redefinition is itself, I think, characteristically Jewish – and of course characteristically Pauline.

We should not be surprised to find that Paul was at his most world-challenging when he was at his most Jewish. The way I have drawn the ‘box’ of the different elements of Paul’s thought indicates that he understood his radically reworked theology to be an account of the one God and the world, of Israel and the nations, of Jesus and his spirit-equipped people – an account which would address the wider non-Jewish world with news that, however apparently ridiculous and politically dangerous, could and would transform that world. Paul believed, after all, that with the crucified and risen Messiah the one God had tipped his hand, had drawn a line through the world, had placed a swift bisecting bar through the rectangular box, had refocused the edge-lured minds of the world onto this

new strange centre. That is indeed how empires think. Paul believed in a different empire, a different *kind* of empire. He called it the kingdom of God.

And so to work. We begin with the centre of Jewish life and thought: the one creator God.

¹ On ancient meanings of ‘theology’ [see above, 216f., esp. n. 69](#).

² A classic example of this is Betz 1979.

³ I am reminded of Morna Hooker’s famous remarks (Hooker 1972) about the way in which form critics, studying small ‘units’ of tradition strung together with no apparent regard for their mutual relationship, used to refer to such units as ‘pearls on a string’. This, she said, was a typically masculine approach; any woman would know that the relative placing of the pearls was just as important as their individual value.

⁴ Käsemann 1980 [1973], viii.

⁵ [See above, 179–93](#). It is noteworthy that, despite our other quite radical disagreements, Eisenbaum 2009 ch. 5 highlights the same three basic components: worship, Torah, redemption, where ‘worship’ focuses naturally on monotheism, ‘Torah’ on election and covenant, and ‘redemption’ on Israel’s hope of new creation.

⁶ [See ch. 2 above](#).

⁷ For the placing of this assumption within the history of scholarship on Paul, see *Interpreters*.

⁸ For an earlier, extremely brief, outline of this argument, see Wright 2005a [*Fresh Perspectives*], chs. 5, 6 and 7.

⁹ Meeks 1983, 180. See too 168: ‘For Paul himself, the central problem is not just to spell out the implications of monotheism, but to explain how the unified purpose of God through history could encompass the *novum* of a crucified Messiah.’ That is exactly right, though I do not think that Meeks worked out fully the way in which Paul solved that problem.

¹⁰ See Keck 1984, 231.

¹¹ Watson 2004, e.g. 517; recently, cf. e.g. Moyise 2010.

¹² Against e.g. Tuckett 2000; Stanley 2004; Segal 2003, 164–7, speaking of ‘Midrash to back up experience’. On all this [see ch. 7 above, ch. 15 below](#), and the article in *Perspectives* ch. 32.

¹³ Horrell 2005, 46 speaks of a ‘broad consensus’ on this point, but the legacy of Bultmann, with his attempt to derive early Christian ideas from pagan ones, lives on. See the remarks of Malherbe 1987, 32f.

¹⁴ See Gill 2003, 49; White 2003, 136.

¹⁵ e.g. Phil. 1.27.

¹⁶ See Barclay 1996, 381–95.

¹⁷ This outflanks the implicit critique of scholars of ancient religion such as Rüpke 2007 [2001], ch. 5, who see ‘Christian theology’ as a second-century apologetic invention which became a weapon of political control for the new priestly caste. For Paul, ‘theology’ was the necessary activity if this community, with this worldview, was to survive, let alone flourish. Watson 2007 [1986], 26 rightly insists that to see Paul as ‘thinker’ is not enough unless we see that his thinking ‘is at every point bound up with his action as founder of Christian communities’. Founder, yes; equally, maintainer, teacher, encourager.

¹⁸ On ‘consistency’ as a Stoic aim: Gill 2003, 42; see Epict. *Disc.* 3.2.1–15; Schofield 2003b, 236.

¹⁹ On Pauline ‘consistency’ see e.g. Horrell 2005; Sanders 1977, 518; 2008, 329; Achtemeier 1996; Beker 1980, e.g. 143 (where he says that only a ‘consistent apocalyptic’ will do); Roetzel 2003, 87 (his chapter 3 is entitled, provocatively, ‘Paul as Organic Intellectual’).

²⁰ So *RSG*, *passim*.

Chapter Nine

THE ONE GOD OF ISRAEL, FRESHLY REVEALED

1. First-Century Jewish ‘Monotheism’

The word ‘monotheism’ has a dry, abstract sound, reminiscent of its origin in seventeenth-century European theology.¹ But if we want to know what believing in the One God of Israel would have meant to the young Saul of Tarsus, we have to look to a different context, not of philosophical speculation but of blood and breath, prayer and persecution, family and flesh. Roughly a century after Saul of Tarsus had gone off to do battle with the strange new sect of the Nazarenes on behalf of Israel’s God and Torah, we find the last great teacher of Torah and Kingdom, Rabbi Akiba, on his way to torture and death for continuing to teach Torah in defiance of the Roman edict, and for his support of the bar-Kochba rebellion.

It was, explains the Talmud,

the hour for the recital of the *Shema*. While they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven [i.e. he was reciting the *Shema*].² His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? [i.e. Are you able still to pray the prayer while under such torture?] He said to them, ‘All my days I have been troubled by this verse, “with all your soul”, [which I interpret as] “even if he takes your soul”. I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this commandment? And now I finally have the opportunity to do so, shall I not fulfil it?’ He prolonged the word *echad* [one], until he expired while saying it.³

In a parallel tradition, Akiba is asked by one of the Roman torturers why he was reciting the *Shema* as they were slowly killing him. He is even accused of being a sorcerer, since he appeared to feel no pain. He gives a similar explanation: up to now he has been able to love the Lord with all his might and his heart, but now the time has come to love him with his very life. He then continues to recite the prayer until he dies with ‘*adonai echad*’, ‘YHWH is one’, on his lips.⁴

That is what ‘monotheism’ meant in the second-Temple period. That is how it functioned for the last great teacher of the stricter school of rabbinic thought, whose all-out commitment to God and Torah, and to the re-founding of the Jerusalem Temple (which had remained the focal point of the Jewish hope despite, or perhaps because of, Hadrian’s decision to construct a pagan shrine on the site), led him to hail Simeon ben-Kosiba as ‘son of the star, ‘bar-Kochba’, thus supporting the last great Jewish revolt.⁵ That was a ‘kingdom-of-God’ movement, aimed at re-establishing the sovereignty of Israel’s God, the creator, over the whole world, and especially over the Romans who were consolidating the victory of AD 70 by forbidding the very practices which defined Jewish life. As we saw earlier, the most intimate and personal way of ‘taking on oneself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven’ was the praying of the *Shema*, two or more times a day. Invoking YHWH as the ‘one God’ and determining to love him with mind, heart and *nephesh*, life itself, meant a total commitment to the sovereignty of this one God, the creator, the God of Israel, and a repudiation of all the idols of paganism and the cruel empires which served them. That is, more or less, the very heart of what ‘monotheism’ meant to a devout Jew of the period.⁶

Akiba’s death came more or less seventy years after that of Paul (mid-130s as against mid-60s). If we go back roughly the same length of time before Paul’s day, we find pious writers describing the ‘zeal’ of the Maccabees in ways which likewise evoked the ‘monotheism’ we may assume to have been that of Saul of Tarsus:

Judas said to those who were with him, ‘Do not fear their numbers or be afraid when they charge. Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Red Sea, when Pharaoh with his forces pursued them. And now, let us cry to Heaven, to see whether he will favour us and remember his covenant with our ancestors and crush this army before us today. Then all the Gentiles will know that there is one who redeems and saves Israel.’⁷

O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, you are awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful (*phoberos kai ischyros kai dikaios kai eleēmōn*), you alone are king and are kind (*ho monos basileus kai chrēstos*), you alone are bountiful, you alone are just and almighty and eternal (*ho monos chorēgos, ho monos dikaios kai pantocratōr kai aiōnios*). You rescue Israel from every evil; you chose the ancestors and consecrated them. Accept this sacrifice on behalf of all your people

Israel and preserve your portion and make it holy. Gather together our scattered people, set free those who are slaves among the Gentiles, look on those who are rejected and despised, and let the Gentiles know that you are our God. Punish those who oppress and are insolent with pride. Plant your people in your holy place, as Moses promised.⁸

Ho monos ... ho monos ... ho monos. ‘Monotheism’ indeed: neither a philosophical speculation nor an easy-going generalized religious supposition, but the clear, sharp, bright belief that Israel’s God was the creator of all, unique among claimants to divinity in possessing all those specific attributes, in the middle of which we find the politically explosive one, *basileus*, ‘king’. Monotheism and ‘the kingdom of God’ are here linked firmly, in the Maccabaeen literature as in Akiba’s day two hundred years later.⁹ This is how zealous Jews, eager for God and the law, understood their God and their commitment to him. We have no reason to suppose it was any different for Saul of Tarsus. My contention throughout the present chapter is that what Saul came to believe about Jesus, and about the spirit, are best understood in terms of precisely this monotheism, freshly understood – or, as he would probably have said, freshly revealed. To understand this we must first recapitulate briefly how this monotheism was expressed at the time.

The zealous monotheism of the second-Temple period came to expression not least in a context of extreme suffering. The martyrs invoke the one true God, creator of all, who (they believe) will raise them from the dead. Thus, as we saw in chapter 2 above, the mother of the seven brothers whispers to her youngest son, giving him the theological encouragement he needs:

I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God made them out of things that did not exist. And in the same way the human race came into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers.

And the young man himself answers the tyrant similarly:

You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life, under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and

by trial and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God (*monos autos theos estin*), and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.¹⁰

‘That he alone is God’: there we have it again. Israel’s God, the creator, is the only suprahuman being worthy of the name ‘God’. The compelling evidence of this will come in the form both of his rescue of Israel, if not *from* suffering and death, then *through* them at the final resurrection, and also of his eventual judgment on all those who, worshipping other gods, have behaved with arrogance, folly and cruelty. This is what ‘monotheism’ looks like on the ground of second-Temple Judaism.

That, of course, only increases the personal as well as the theological tension when things appear to be working out in very different ways. Thus we find, in the aftermath of the terrible events of AD 70, the perplexed but still determined monotheism of *4 Ezra*:

All this I have spoken before you, O Lord, because you have said that it was for us that you created this world. As for the other nations that have descended from Adam, you have said that they are nothing, and that they are like spittle, and you have compared their abundance to a drop from a bucket. And now, O Lord, these nations, which are reputed to be as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we your people, whom you have called your firstborn, only-begotten, zealous for you, and most dear, have been given into their hands. If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?¹¹

God the creator, God the God of Israel: this identification is both the source of the Israel-specific problem of theodicy and the ground of continuing hope for ‘inheriting the world’.¹² That is the constant refrain, not least for those who believe themselves to be living in a continuing ‘exile’. Their God is the true God, and his rescue of Israel will reveal that fact to the nations.¹³

The contrast between the living creator, Israel’s God, and the ‘gods’ of the nations, is made sharply through portrayals such as the romance (if that is the right word) of *Joseph and Aseneth*.¹⁴ Aseneth’s prayer of repentance states the contrast as sharply as anything in Israel’s scriptures themselves:

And the Lord the God of the powerful Joseph, the Most High, hates all those who worship idols, because he is a jealous and terrible God toward all those who worship strange gods. Therefore he has come to hate me, too, because I worshipped dead and dumb idols, and blessed them, and ate

from their sacrifices, and my mouth is defiled from their table, and I do not have the boldness to call on the Lord God of Heaven, the Most High, the Mighty One of the powerful Joseph, because my mouth is defiled from the sacrifices of the idols.

But I have heard many saying that the God of the Hebrews is a true God, and a living God, and a merciful God, and compassionate and long-suffering and pitiful and gentle, and does not count the sin of a humble person, nor expose the lawless deeds of an afflicted person at the time of his affliction. Therefore I will take courage too and turn to him, and take refuge with him, and confess all my sins to him, and pour out my supplication before him ...¹⁵

A very different kind of relationship between a Jew and a gentile is found in the book of Judith. There, the stunningly beautiful Jewish widow Judith tricks the pagan king Holofernes into thinking she might be sexually available, in order that, when he is thoroughly drunk in anticipation of his conquest, she can behead him and thus save the Jewish people from his army. The heart of the book is Judith's prayer, in which classic second-Temple monotheism comes to glorious expression:

You are the God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, saviour of those without hope. Please, please, God of my father, God of the heritage of Israel, Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of the waters, King of all your creation, hear my prayer! May my deceitful words [the words with which she will trick Holofernes] bring wound and bruise on those who have planned cruel things against your covenant, and against your sacred house, and against Mount Zion, and against the house your children possess. Let your whole nation and every tribe know and understand that you are God, the God of all power and might, and that there is no other who protects the people of Israel but you alone!¹⁶

The trick works. Judith cuts off Holofernes's head and brings it back with her. The people congratulate her, and praise the one creator God for this deliverance.¹⁷ This is second-Temple monotheism in action.

The same monotheism undergirds the warlike messianic hope expressed in the last two *Psalms of Solomon*:

Lord, you are our king for evermore, for in you, O God, does our soul take pride.

How long is the time of a person's life on the earth?

As is his time, so also is his hope in him.

But we hope in God our saviour, for the strength of our God is forever with mercy.

And the kingdom of our God is forever over the nations in judgment.

Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel,

and swore to him about his descendants forever ...

See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David,

to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God ...
May God dispatch his mercy to Israel;
may he deliver us from the pollution of profane enemies;
the Lord himself is our king forevermore.¹⁸

O Lord, your mercy is upon the works of your hands forever.
You show your goodness to Israel with a rich gift ...
May God cleanse Israel for the day of mercy in blessing,
for the appointed day when his Messiah will reign ...
Our God is great and glorious, living in the highest heavens,
who arranges the stars into orbits to mark time of the hours from day to day.¹⁹

Hundreds of other texts point in more or less the same direction. If what we loosely summarize as ‘monotheism’ is to be clarified in terms of the world of thought and practice we may safely ascribe to Saul of Tarsus, we should expect to find it, not in the realm of fine-tuned religious or philosophical speculation, not in debates about how many angels are permitted in the divine entourage before they compromise the divine unity, but in the sphere of Israel’s aspirations, Israel’s kingdom-of-God expectations. Monotheism of the sort which fired Saul of Tarsus meant invoking God as creator and judge, and also as the God specifically of Israel, and doing this within a framework of actual events, including not least the fierce opposition by pagan tyrants, leading in some cases to torture and death. Jewish monotheism was rooted in prayer, particularly in praying of the *Shema*. To pray this prayer was not to make a subtle affirmation about the inner nature of the one God, but *to claim the sovereign rule of this one creator God over the whole world, and to offer oneself in allegiance of mind, heart and life itself in the service of this God and this kingdom.*

I begin with all this because it seems to me necessary, in view of recent scholarship, to shift the focus of discussion. It is of course important to be aware of the solid tradition of high-flown Jewish statements about the unity of God, such as we find in the *Letter of Aristeas*, in Philo and in Josephus.²⁰ But these are all couched in the framework of explaining Jewish belief to outsiders, and consequently in the language of quasi-philosophical reflection. They do not catch the vivid flavour and drama which the

‘doctrine’ had in real life (the very word ‘doctrine’ may throw some imaginations in the wrong direction, towards a dry dogma rather than a living faith and a socio-political agenda). Similarly, it is important to be aware that in the second-Temple period many Jews found themselves able to refer to a variety of (what we may call) intermediary figures who, acting on God’s behalf or being greeted or hailed in such a capacity, might appear from some points of view to be themselves almost quasi-divine. Much work has been done in this area, but I agree with Richard Bauckham that it is of less significance for understanding Paul and the other early Christians than is sometimes thought.²¹ Rather, the ‘monotheism’ that matters for our present concerns must be reimagined in the light of this tradition of zeal for God, for Israel, for the Torah, for God’s kingdom. To get this straight is to place first-century Jewish monotheism back where it most securely belongs in the real life of the period. This is particularly so when we try to bring into focus the worldview and theology of a zealous first-century Pharisee.

It is no doubt an inestimably good thing that, in comparison with thirty or forty years ago, New Testament scholarship has begun to discuss the nature and meaning of first-century ‘monotheism’. That was almost unheard of in the long winter of existentialist exegesis, where ‘God’ was more or less taken for granted (or, notoriously, subsumed under ‘man’).²² When Nils Dahl published his now famous short essay on ‘The One God of Jews and Gentiles’, it stuck out: nobody else, much, had thought there was even a topic there worth discussing.²³ But it will be an even better thing that, having studied the complex arguments about quasi-divine mediator-figures and the like, we turn our attention back to the question of what zealous first-century Jews had in mind, and indeed in heart and life, when they thought, spoke, prayed and acted in relation to the one God whom they thus evoked day by day and hour by hour. And for that we need the line of actual history that runs from the Maccabees to Akiba, a line in which what we loosely call ‘monotheism’ was a matter, not of intellectual speculation and abstract discussion, but of life and death.²⁴

This is all the more important if, as I have suggested already in line with the work of Wayne Meeks, the ‘monotheism’ we can ascribe to Paul the

apostle played a significantly different role within his worldview, and the formation of his communities, from the role played by Jewish monotheism within the worldview Saul of Tarsus had held as a Pharisee. We are here approaching the very centre of the present book, the fulcrum around which the argument turns. Monotheism and its reframing is the arrow that pierces the mid-point of the target. We have looked at Paul's three worlds, and then at the worldview which he himself held and did his best to inculcate. We now make the major move through this mid-point to the cognate but quite different set of questions we call 'theology': beliefs about God, about the world, about humans, about Israel, about the future. I have already suggested that Paul's worldview was on the one hand very much like that of second-Temple Judaism, and on the other hand very different, and that if such an unusual and innovative worldview were to gain stability and coherence it would require rigorous fresh work on theology, particularly on the question of God and his faithfulness. That is where we are now going.

To be more explicit: the passages already quoted would be enough to indicate that this second-Temple monotheism played a very significant role within the worldview of a zealous Pharisee. It was the solid rock on which Jewish identity was built. But when, as we saw in chapter 5, the major symbolic praxis of that worldview (circumcision, food laws and so on) had been deemed *adiaphora*, 'indifferent', then 'theology', and particularly 'monotheism', needed to take on far more of the load in sustaining the worldview in its radically new form. This point can be sharpened further. If Paul's communities were going to be able to hold on to their very identity, to retain coherence and unity on the one hand and holiness and hope on the other, they needed to know who the God was in whom they were putting their trust, not as an armchair question for those who liked to muse about distant supernatural realities but as the day-to-day immediate lifeblood for those facing social, cultural and political challenges which could at any moment turn into a repeat performance of the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes or an advance foretaste of Hadrian's crushing of the bar-Kochba rebellion. If Paul's communities were facing that kind of threat – and Paul regularly implies that they were – then they needed to strengthen their

resolve like the young brother in 2 Maccabees, to cling on to their faith like the author of the *Psalms of Solomon*, and, not least, to pray as Akiba would pray. They needed to be kingdom-of-God people, *Shema*-people, Jewish-style monotheists in a world of ‘many gods, many lords’. They needed to be able to evoke the great bookending doctrines of creation and judgment, to tell the story of the God who was responsible for both and to know where they themselves came within that story. Only so could Paul’s communities live as he believed they were called to live, as the *ekklēsia tou theou*, composed equally of Jews and gentiles but also defining themselves over against both those categories in and as a strange new entity.²⁵ They had to be the one-God people, but to be that people in a quite new way. A rethought theology had to arise to do the worldview-work previously done by the social and cultural boundary-markers. That is the challenge which drove Paul to some of his most breathtaking theological reformulations, which until recently have passed with little exegetical comment due to the fact that scholars were simply not asking the question in the way that, I am suggesting, it needs to be asked.²⁶

The key thing about second-Temple monotheism was not, therefore, a particular proposal about the inner nature of the one God.²⁷ The substantial and fascinating discussions that have taken place over the last couple of decades about the role and status of ‘intermediary’ figures in Jewish thought – angels, patriarchs, ‘wisdom’ and so forth – seem to me mostly beside the point in a discussion of what ‘monotheism’ really meant in practice.²⁸ In particular, it is simply wrong-headed to suggest that such ‘monotheism’ might be compromised by a recognition of the existence of non-human powers or intelligences, whether good (angels) or evil (demons); it was no part of second-Temple monotheism to suggest that Israel’s God was the only non-human intelligence existing in the cosmos.²⁹ (It is also very misleading to refer to such speculations about other non-human powers as ‘dualism’; that would only obtain if one or more of them were equal and opposite to the one God.³⁰) The first time we get a hint of ‘monotheism’ being used to say ‘therefore your speculations about the inner being of the one God are out of line’ is actually in the reaction to Akiba

himself, when he speculated that the ‘thrones’ in the heavenly scene in Daniel 7 were ‘one for God, one for David’, resulting in there being ‘two powers in heaven’.³¹ Akiba, as we saw, had a candidate in mind to sit on the second throne: he thought Simeon ben-Kosiba was the true ‘son of David’, and was hoping that now at last ‘one like a son of man’ would be exalted in exercising God’s judgment over the last great ‘beast’. But the strong likelihood is that Akiba’s opponents were using the notion of God’s oneness as a way of opposing him, not primarily on grounds of philosophical theology, but because they either disapproved of his revolutionary kingdom-of-God stance or disagreed with him about bar-Kochba’s being Messiah. Or both.³² I am not aware of evidence prior to this point, i.e. before around AD 130, that Jewish thinkers were debating questions to do with the inner being of the one God. When such debates happen, the best explanation is almost certainly that they were generated precisely in reaction to the Christian claims about Jesus.³³

Interestingly, despite frequent scholarly assertions that the high status accorded to Jesus by the early Christians ‘must have’ caused difficulty for non-Christian Jews, there is actually no evidence of this throughout the first generation. Paul does not need to *argue* the points he makes about Jesus in dialogue with cautious Jewish monotheists who thought he was going too far. We see clearly into the heart of several controversies in his churches, including fierce debates with those who were insisting on some key aspects of the mainline Jewish worldview, but we never find Paul having to debate the massive affirmations he makes about Jesus. Granted what we shall see presently about the actual content of those affirmations, this absence of controversy itself tells us something, in retrospect as it were, about what ‘Jewish monotheism’ meant and did not mean in the period. And about how firmly Paul’s belief about Jesus’ identity *vis-à-vis* the one true God had already taken root, was already a given in early Christianity.

The main focus of Jewish monotheism in our period, then, looked not as it were inward, towards an analysis of the one God, but decidedly outward, to the relation of the one God to the world. Exploring the latter point will bring certain other features into focus. First, and foundational to everything

else, when the Jewish monotheist looked at the world of creation, what he or she saw was a good cosmos made by a good God. The world of space, time and matter; the lights in the heavens and the creatures crawling on the ground; times and seasons, day and night, winter and summer, seedtime and harvest; the life-cycle of humans, beasts and plants, and the specific activities and functions concerning marriage, childbirth, food, drink, sleep, play, work, rest – all of these were good, and to be enjoyed in the proper ways at the proper times. To everything there was a season. To affirm the ‘oneness’ of Israel’s God meant, in practical terms, a cheerful and guiltless partaking in and celebration of the world as a good gift to humans, a world full of strange beauty, massive power and silent song.³⁴ In particular, and following from the vocation of human beings to reflect God’s wise order into the world, this kind of monotheism included the vocation to humans in general to bring God’s justice to the world: justice is to human society what flourishing order is to the garden. It was thus, in principle, part of the inner structure of creational monotheism that humans should set up and run structures of governance, making and implementing laws, deciding cases, constantly working to bring a balance to God’s world. Human government was a good thing: it was how the one God intended the world to be run. Human *judgment* was a good thing, the making of wise and proper decisions about what should and should not be done. In terms of society, anarchy would have been seen as threatening a return to *tohu wa-bohu*, the primeval chaos into which the creative act of the one God had brought order. The world, human life, including *ordered* human life: all of this was good and God-given. Evil was not an equal and opposite force to the one God. It was the corruption of the good creation, including the corruption of the human vocation to rule God’s world.

Monotheism therefore meant, foundationally and scripturally, the renunciation of ontological dualism.³⁵ Renouncing the world itself, pretending it was a dark and gloomy place, complaining about the soul being imprisoned within a material body, or grumbling at the very existence of human rulers and power structures, was not part of that worldview.³⁶ There is, actually, no particular reason to suppose that very many first-

century Jews were tempted in that direction, until the horrible failure of the bar-Kochba revolt drove some to stand their worldview on its head and to develop what we now know as gnosticism.³⁷ Granted the huge pressure first-century Jews were often under politically and culturally, the resistance to dualism is an indication of how strongly creational monotheism had soaked down into their hearts, minds and lives.

This celebration of creation, as part of classic second-Temple monotheism, could (as we saw earlier) be expressed in terms of God acting through his ‘word’ or his ‘wisdom’. As is now generally recognized, this was never intended as a way of cunningly inventing, or claiming to discern, a second and separate divine being alongside the creator himself.³⁸ It was a way of putting the wind into a bottle, of speaking of the utterly transcendent and holy creator acting *here* and *now*, working first to create space, time and matter and then to sustain and direct them. It was a way of saying that when God created, he did so by speaking (i.e. highlighting his sovereignty: he didn’t have to struggle or wrestle, but simply spoke and things happened³⁹), and he did so wisely (i.e. highlighting the goodness of creation: it was not a foolish, pointless or random venture, but possessed proper order and beauty). We have already explored this, and merely need to remind ourselves of it as we move forwards.

This deep-level commitment to the goodness of the created order is the proper context for understanding what otherwise might be seen, and indeed has often been seen, as the negative stance which first-century Jewish monotheists took against idolatry and all that went with it. Much ink has been spilt, some of it quite helpfully, in clarifying the extent to which pre-Christian Judaism was in fact ‘monotheist’, and whether, from our late-modern perspective, this was even a good thing. Fortunately for the size of the present book, that is not our primary concern.⁴⁰ It may well be that ancient Israel was far less committed to the one God than we might have supposed from a surface-level reading of the Pentateuch, and that it was only with the experience of exile, and the slow, horrid realization of the kind of society generated and sustained by the worship of Bel and Nebo and their like, that the grand vision opened up, as we find it in Isaiah 40—55:

YHWH as the absolutely only God, not just supreme over lesser divinities but gloriously alone, unique, all-powerful, majestic. Perhaps only then did the sense dawn on a surprised people that their God claimed the right to propose and dispose in the affairs of nations, to take up the isles like fine dust, to rescue muddled and still-rebellious Israel from captivity, to call up, commission and use a new pagan ruler within the divine covenantal purposes. Certainly after the exile we do not hear of the same problems which, according to the Deuteronomic historian with various prophets in support, had occurred again and again in the years of the monarchy.⁴¹ Again, whether this was a good or bad thing – whether, in other words, the second-Temple commitment to monotheism was healthy, as Jews and Christians have mostly supposed, or unhealthy, as some postmodern moralists, naturally concerned about totalizing systems and their effects on human society and life, have suggested – is a different sort of question again.⁴² So too is the matter of whether Isaiah 40—55 represents the eventual flowering of a generous, open-hearted, ‘inclusive’ monotheism such as we moderns can enthusiastically embrace, as opposed to the negative, exclusivist monotheism of some other texts, and whether that kind of ‘progressive revelation’ does any justice to the scriptural texts it seeks to use in support.⁴³ What matters for our purpose is to note, as with the line from the Maccabees to Akiba, that when first-century Jews thought of their God, when they committed themselves to his law, and above all when they prayed the *Shema* twice or more each day, they knew that they were opposed, in heart, mind and with the breath of life, to idols, to the making and worshipping of them, to the way of life that went with them and – not least – to the actual human beings and actual human systems whose lives revolved around ‘the gods of the nations’, their temples and their worship. To that extent, those recent writers are absolutely correct who have spoken of the monotheism of the period as ‘exclusive’. It was, most emphatically, not a way of saying, as ‘Aristeas’ tried to say, that everybody, Israel included, worships the same divinity, but that they simply call this divinity by different names, YHWH here, Zeus there.⁴⁴ It was a way of saying what the Psalmist said, that the ‘gods’ of the nations are mere idols, and that it

was YHWH who made the heavens; in other words, he didn't simply live in that house (heaven itself), he built it in the first place.

This is seen to spectacular effect in books like Daniel, which we know to have been a favourite in the first century. In the first half of the book, Daniel and his friends face challenge after challenge to their Jewish way of life, starting comparatively straightforwardly with the question of diet, but moving on rapidly to other demands, first that they worship the great image which the king has set up (chapter 3), and then that they pray to the king himself, and to him alone (chapter 6). The very phrase 'him alone' echoes so strongly with the normal claims of Jewish monotheism that we can see the clash coming.⁴⁵ Daniel's three friends refuse to worship the image, and are thrown into the fiery furnace (where, according to the apocryphal addition, they sing a great hymn about creation, inviting every aspect of the world to praise the creator: the best possible answer to the pagan challenge). Daniel, with his window open towards Jerusalem, goes on praying to the God of Israel, and is thrown into the den of lions. In each case, of course, they are rescued, and in each case the king then acknowledges that Israel's God is the only true God.⁴⁶

Stylized stories, of course. But again, if we want to know what monotheism looked like and felt like in the time of Saul of Tarsus, what people supposed it meant in practice, these will give us a strong clue. And, meanwhile, as in Isaiah 40—55, the great idolatrous empire is overthrown: Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind and his kingdom, Belshazzar his throne, and Darius acknowledges that Daniel's God is the only God and that his kingdom will never be destroyed. As with the constant refrain in the Maccabaeen literature, pagan rulers who oppose the true God are brought crashing down from their proud eminence. All this then frames the visions of the second half of the book, in which 'Daniel' dreams dreams and sees visions which are themselves part of the outworking of the same monotheism: the four beasts in chapter 7 are four kingdoms, strongly reminiscent of the four parts of the statue in chapter 2, and the one God then sets up a kingdom which cannot be shaken.⁴⁷ Monotheism and the kingdom of God: here it is again. Kingdoms, and particularly empires, set up their

signs of centered self-belief: the sign that means 'Medium' is also the sign for 'Middle Kingdom', with all else east or west of China. From the beginning, Jewish monotheism was a way of saying 'no' to this claim, whether from Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Syria, Rome or anywhere else, and a way of claiming instead (to the alarm of postmodernists who had imagined that the Jewish denunciation of pagan regimes would play out in support of an extreme laissez-faire relativism) that the God who made all the earth would set up his own kingdom, would draw his own line through the world, refocusing the edge-lured minds of his human creatures, in his own way and time.

Once again the Psalms bring all this into poetry. YHWH made the heavens and the earth; he is Israel's God; he will set his king in Zion, and will laugh at the nations who huff and puff all around. The Psalms repeat, over and over, the claim that Israel's God will judge the nations, indeed the whole world. Sometimes they suggest that the princes of the nations will come and join in the worship of this one God; sometimes, as in Isaiah 11, that God's Messiah will rule over them and bring justice to the ends of the earth. Always there is the note of celebration, even in sorrow and gloom. Jewish-style monotheism is seen to equally good effect in the darkness of Psalm 88 ('You have put lover and friend far from me') and in the royal glory of Psalm 89 ('His dominion shall be from the one sea to the other, from the River to the ends of the earth'); in the tub-thumping cheeriness of Psalm 136 ('Yea, and slew mighty kings, for his mercy endures for ever; Sihon, king of the Amorites, for his mercy endures for ever; and Og the king of Bashan, for his mercy endures for ever') and the utter desolation of Psalm 137 ('How shall we sing YHWH's song in a strange land?'). Monotheism intensifies the problems. A pagan would give a shrug of the shoulders and blame misfortune on a malevolent deity, perhaps bribed by an opponent. A dualist would blame it on The Dark Side. Those options are not open to the monotheist. But monotheism also regrounds hope: 'Have you not known? Have you not heard? YHWH is the everlasting God.'⁴⁸

Within this world of belief, there was plenty of room for speculation about how precisely evil did its work. It appeared to be more than the sum

total of human folly. Idolatry, it seemed, released forces, dark powers, into the world, which masqueraded under the names of gods and goddesses, and which could do real damage, but which were not on the same level as YHWH himself. The question of what precisely second-Temple Jews thought about such forces and powers, what kind of ontological status they assigned them, need not concern us in detail.⁴⁹ It is a red herring to ask whether belief in the possible existence of such powers in any way compromised the belief in the one God. That was always possible, of course; we see it in some later forms of syncretism and indeed in Jewish gnosticism. But, as with angels and other *benign* non-human intelligences and forces, so with demons and other *malevolent* non-human intelligences and forces. A belief in the reality of such things had nothing to do with ‘monotheism’ itself. The fact that there was one God did not entail any necessary conclusion about the existence or otherwise of other non-material beings. The discovery of protreptic amulets and similar objects at Qumran and elsewhere tells us, hardly to our surprise, that people who take seriously the existence of worlds beyond that of space, time and matter may well come to believe that these worlds are inhabited by creatures who may, or quite possibly may not, be kindly disposed towards them. They do nothing to undermine the claim of the same people to believe in one God, the creator, the God of Israel. It is precisely the dry Enlightenment Deism, not first-century Jewish monotheism, that scooped up all other non-spatio-temporal existences into the oneness of its ‘monotheism’. In second-Temple monotheism, the fact that there was one God, utterly supreme, the only creator and governor of all, did not rule out the possibility of other inhabitants of the heavenly realm, but actually tended to entail that possibility.

If belief in the existence of lesser but still non-human powers did not undermine the strong belief in the *unity* of the one God, so too belief in the reality of demonic powers did not undermine the strong belief in the *goodness* of the one God. Such a belief merely reminds us, if we needed it, that believing in this God did not mean believing that everything in the world was just fine as it was, with no problems and nothing much to hope

for. Anything but. Once again, monotheism intensifies the problems: Why is all this happening? And, once again, it offers a hard-won solution, demanding patience and courage: YHWH's justice will triumph, his faithfulness will be revealed, and all flesh shall see his salvation.

This is what Richard Bauckham labels, helpfully, as 'eschatological monotheism'. YHWH will be one, and his name one.⁵⁰ I shall argue below that this eschatological focus, particularly when sharpened up (as we saw in chapter 2) in relation to the underlying exodus-narrative on the one hand and the closely related expectation of the return of Israel's God to Zion on the other, is the missing key to many current debates. This theme enables us to get to the heart of what Paul and other early Christians believed about both Jesus and the spirit, and enables us more particularly to understand why and how they came to that belief. The monotheism in which they were rooted was a belief in the God of the exodus, a God who (they believed) had abandoned Jerusalem at the time of the exile but who had promised to return in person to rescue his people and dwell in their midst. Early christology, I shall argue presently, was not a modification of pre-Christian Jewish beliefs about this or that mediator-figure. It was a radical concretization of pre-Christian Jewish beliefs about the one God, and particularly about what this one God had promised to *do*.

The people who lived and prayed this belief naturally formed a community whose commitment was reflected in practice. The goodness of creation, and YHWH's saving acts for Israel, were celebrated in festivals which were simultaneously agricultural and salvation-historical. The people were admonished to take great care to avoid the dangers of idolatry wherever they occurred. Questions have rightly been raised about the extent to which this teaching was effective in pre-exilic times, but it seems to have been more solidly observed in the second-Temple period. It is not hard to see how monotheism of this sort (as opposed to other sorts to which we shall return) generated and sustained such a community, and belonged closely with the world of symbolic praxis and narrative we studied in chapter 2. And it is idolatry, of course, together with the power of pagan empire built on that idolatry, that formed the basic monotheistic answer to

the question, ‘What’s wrong?’ The other obvious answers, that of the pagan or the dualist, were not open. The philosophical answers, that nothing could possibly be ‘wrong’ (Stoicism) or that things might not be as one might wish but one had to make the best of them (Epicureanism), were equally unsatisfactory. The Jewish monotheist, looking out on the world, understood evil to be the result of idolatry, not of an inherent badness within creation itself, and looked for the day when Israel’s God would set up his kingdom of justice and peace. This kind of monotheism thus generated and sustained a view of God’s people and God’s future. The three together – monotheism, election and eschatology – formed then, as they form here in our exposition, the substructure of what it meant to be Israel, the people of this one true God.

2. Paul’s Reaffirmed Monotheism

(i) Suffering for the One God

The central claim of this chapter, and in a measure of this whole book, is that Paul clearly, solidly, skilfully and dramatically reworked exactly this ‘monotheism’ around Jesus the Messiah and also around the spirit. It is for the sake of Jesus, and in the power of the spirit, that Paul faces, and knows that his *ekklēsiai* are facing, the equivalent challenges to those faced by the Maccabees before him. Empires can tolerate people picking up funny religious ideas, adding another divinity to an already crowded pantheon, developing new styles of private spirituality. Empires thrive on religious relativism; the more gods the better, since the more there are the less likely they are to challenge the ruling ideology.⁵¹ Indeed, as with the challenges to Daniel and his friends, it becomes easy for empires to suggest that actually all the intimations of immortality, all the hints of divine presence in the world, have now been drawn together in a fresh way in the new power that has emerged, whether that of Augustus in the first century or Hitler in the twentieth.⁵² Before we look at the central and obvious passages where Paul

appears to be redefining monotheism around Jesus the Messiah, we notice one or two passages where we hear the echo of the Maccabaeans monotheists facing the pagan tyrants, and the advance echoes of Akiba himself:

²⁸We know, in fact, that God works all things together for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹Those he foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family. ³⁰And those he marked out in advance, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ⁵³

This is a dense but majestic statement of Jewish-style monotheism, summarizing the line of thought from Paul's preceding four chapters. But it gives rise to something even more, something utterly Jewish, utterly monotheistic, holding out against tyrants of every kind by holding on to the one true God:

³¹What then shall we say to all this?
If God is for us, who is against us?

³²God, after all, did not spare his own son; he gave him up for us all!
How then will he not, with him, freely give all things to us?

³³Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones?
It is God who declares them in the right.

³⁴Who is going to condemn?
It is the Messiah, Jesus, who has died, or rather has been raised;
who is at God's right hand, and who also prays on our behalf!

³⁵Who shall separate us from the Messiah's love?
Suffering, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As the Bible says,

Because of you we are being killed all day long
We are regarded as sheep destined for slaughter.

³⁷No: in all these things we are completely victorious through the one who loved us. ³⁸I am persuaded, you see, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor the present, nor the future, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord. ⁵⁴

This passage is, I suppose, as well known as anything else in Paul, and rightly so. But its very familiarity may have blinded us to what might have been more obvious to some at least of its first hearers: that it constituted a victorious paean of praise to the one God, the creator and lord of all, the lifegiver, the one who rescues his people from the power of all tyrants, death itself included, and through their present suffering brings his new creation to birth and gives them new and glorious life within it. It is a glorious expression of second-Temple monotheism in the face of all the powers of the pagan world. The psalm from which Paul quotes in verse 36 is itself a classic monotheistic prayer, looking back to God's mighty acts of redemption, claiming God as 'king' and celebrating his name. We have not abandoned you, says the Psalmist, or been false to your covenant. We have been good monotheists:

If we had forgotten the name of our God,
or spread out our hands to a strange god,
would not God discover this?
For he knows the secrets of the heart.
Because of you we are being killed all day long,
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.⁵⁵

Paul, quoting the final two lines, appears to have had the larger context in mind all along. In verse 27 he had spoken of God 'searching the hearts' and thereby knowing 'the mind of the spirit', at work within God's people as they groan, longing for redemption.⁵⁶ The people he is describing in 8.18–27 are on their way to the 'inheritance' which is the whole renewed creation, and their present suffering is a sign of that, a sign that they are living already in the new world which is at violent odds with the present one. The whole passage in Romans 8 is monotheistic through and through, echoing the whole psalm, but instead of appealing to God to arise ('Get up! Why are you asleep? Stand up and help us!'⁵⁷), it celebrates the fact that Jesus has *already* died and been raised, and on that basis it claims with confidence that the victory is already won.⁵⁸ And the people who enjoy that confidence are precisely the people of the new monotheism, the renewed *Shema*: 'We know that God works all things together for good to those who

love him, who are called according to his purpose.’ Being ‘called according to his purpose’ is an obvious Israel-phrase; what we might miss, in the flurry of dramatic statement, is the echo that would be clear to anyone who prayed the prayer two or three times a day: *to those who love him*. ‘Hear, O Israel, YHWH our God, YHWH is one, *and you shall love YHWH your God ...*’ Here, half way between the Maccabees and Akiba, we find a monotheism as Jewish as theirs, as contested as theirs, as dangerous as theirs, as trusting as theirs, as *Shema*-based as theirs, and yet radically, breathtakingly different. The same God is now revealed as the father who sent the beloved son to die.⁵⁹ The same suffering is now understood in the light of the death of God’s son. The same faith, hope and love; but now *at a different moment*: the time of new creation, introduced by the resurrection of God’s son.

We see the same thing in 2 Corinthians 4. Here, as part of his apologia for the nature of his apostleship, Paul goes back to the very beginning, to creation itself:

the God who said ‘let light shine out of darkness’ has shone in our hearts, to produce the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah.⁶⁰

Creation and new creation; the same God at work in both. ‘The God of this world’ may have blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they will not see the light revealed by the Messiah, who is God’s image (4.4). But new creation is happening anyway, even though those through whom it is being effected are

under all kinds of pressure, but ... not crushed completely; we are at a loss, but not at our wits’ end; ⁹we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are cast down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry the deadness of Jesus about in the body, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body.

¹¹Although we are still alive, you see, we are always being given over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal humanity.⁶¹

To be the people of the new creation, looking death in the face but claiming the power of the creator God: this is the kind of monotheism we saw in those ancient Jewish heroes. And again Paul quotes a psalm, this time the

one we know as 116: ‘I believed, and therefore I spoke.’ Why? Perhaps because the whole psalm is about the Psalmist’s steadfast loyalty to YHWH (in other words, he has not gone wandering off after other gods), affirming his trust that YHWH will therefore bring him through his present distress.⁶²

A further example of the same phenomenon – the pattern of second-Temple monotheism worked out through faithful witness to the one God of creation and covenant despite suffering at the hands of idolaters – is found in the letter to the Philippians. As we shall see, this letter contains, and indeed showcases, one of the most obvious and spectacular christological redefinitions of Jewish monotheism. But for the moment we highlight the Maccabees-to-Akiba line, and once again find Paul standing right in the middle of it:

¹⁴There must be no grumbling and disputing in anything you do. ¹⁵That way, nobody will be able to fault you, and you’ll be pure and spotless children of God in the middle of a twisted and depraved generation. You are to shine among them like lights in the world, ¹⁶clinging on to the word of life. That’s what I will be proud of on the day of the Messiah. It will prove that I didn’t run a useless race, or work to no purpose.

¹⁷Yes: even if I am to be poured out like a drink-offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I shall celebrate, and celebrate jointly with you all. ¹⁸In the same way, you should celebrate, yes, and celebrate with me.⁶³

Like the Maccabaeen martyrs, Paul sees his own potential death in sacrificial terms, related directly to God’s purposes for his people.⁶⁴ And that people are to be the light-bearers in the midst of the dark pagan world – a point Paul then spells out in Philippians 3.17–21. The ‘day’ of liberation they look forward to is now, as we shall see in chapter 10, ‘the day of the Messiah’, rather than the ancient Israelite hope of the ‘day of the lord’. But, granted that modification, we are still clearly in the same world.

The final example of the same point is in 1 Thessalonians, a letter which begins with a classic and uncompromising statement of second-Temple monotheism revised around the gospel:

⁹They themselves tell the story of the kind of welcome we had from you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he

raised from the dead – Jesus, who delivers us from the coming fury.⁶⁵

That is the context in which, once again, the note of suffering because of allegiance to the one God and his kingdom makes the sense it does, though this time there is a new, dark note. The persecuting opposition is now not merely pagans, it is the unbelieving Judaeans themselves:

¹¹You know how, like a father to his own children, ¹²we encouraged each of you, and strengthened you, and made it clear to you that you should behave in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³So, therefore, we thank God constantly that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of a mere human being but – as it really is! – the word of God which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴For, my dear family, you came to copy God's assemblies in Judaea in the Messiah, Jesus. You suffered the same things from your own people as they did from those of the Judaeans ¹⁵who killed the lord Jesus and the prophets, and who expelled us. They displease God; they oppose all people; ¹⁶they forbid us to speak to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.⁶⁶

How this works out we shall see later. But this quick glance at passages in a line from the Maccabees to Akiba shows that Paul knows the very practical meaning of monotheism: allegiance to the one God will mean persecution from the surrounding world. We must now look at the larger themes in which he reaffirms the basic structure of second-Temple monotheism, before then turning to the central point: the way in which he explicitly and dramatically reworks this monotheism around Jesus the Messiah.

(ii) Monotheism Reaffirmed: God the Creator, the Judge

Monotheism of the second-Temple Jewish kind, as we saw, was the belief not so much that there was one supernatural being rather than many, or that this God was a single and indivisible entity, but that the one true God was the creator of the world, supreme over all other orders of being, that he would be the judge of all, and that in between creation and final putting-to-rights he had a single purpose which arched its way over the multiple smaller stories of his creation and, not least, of Israel. This emphasis on the

goodness of creation, on the single great story, and on the commitment of this God to put the world to rights at the last, are all strongly reaffirmed by Paul:

¹⁹What can be known of God, you see, is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them.

²⁰Ever since the world was made, his eternal power and deity have been seen and known in the things he made.⁶⁷

But it can't be the case that God's word has failed!⁶⁸

³³O, the depth of the riches
and the wisdom and knowledge of God!
We cannot search his judgments,
we cannot fathom his ways.

³⁴For 'who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has given him counsel?

³⁵Who has given a gift to him
which needs to be repaid?'

³⁶For from him, through him and to him are all things.
Glory to him for ever! Amen.⁶⁹

²³Each, however, in proper order. The Messiah rises as the first fruits; then those who belong to the Messiah will rise at the time of his royal arrival. ²⁴Then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the father, when he has destroyed all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵He has to go on ruling, you see, until 'he has put all his enemies under his feet'. ²⁶Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, ²⁷because 'he has put all things in order under his feet'. But when it says that everything is put in order under him, it's obvious that this doesn't include the one who put everything in order under him. ²⁸No: when everything is put in order under him, then the son himself will be placed in proper order under the one who placed everything in order under him, so that God may be all in all.⁷⁰

This strong creational emphasis provides the context for Paul's positive evaluation of the created order in such passages as 1 Corinthians 10.26, where, grounding the advice to eat whatever meat is sold in the open market, he quotes Psalm 24.1: 'the earth and its fullness belong to the lord'.⁷¹ This belongs, too, with his emphasis in 1 Corinthians 7 on the goodness and God-giveness of marriage, and of sexual relations within

marriage. He will argue the case for the possibility of a vocation to celibacy, but he is at pains to make clear that this has nothing whatever to do with a dualism that would reject the goodness of the created order.⁷² This positive view of creation also explains the passages where Paul indicates that, even among pagans, there is a moral sense which will recognize the good behaviour of the Messiah's people and from which, in turn, one can even learn by example.⁷³ It is this, too, which enables Paul, exactly in line with at least one regular second-Temple viewpoint, to affirm the goodness and God-giveness of governments and authorities, even while (as it appears) reserving the right both to remind them of their God-given duty and to hold them to account in relation to it, and to proclaim energetically the ultimate sovereignty of the one God as revealed in his Messiah.⁷⁴

In particular, we must note Paul's emphatic rejection of pagan idolatry. We have already seen his reminder to the Thessalonians that they 'turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God'. That remains basic. So, too, does the standard Jewish polemic against the pagan world which, through worshipping idols, has brought about the fracturing of its own image-bearing humanness:

²⁰Ever since the world was made, his eternal power and deity have been seen and known in the things he made. As a result, they have no excuse: ²¹they knew God, but didn't honour him as God or thank him. Instead, they learned to think in useless ways, and their unwise heart grew dark. ²²They declared themselves to be wise, but in fact they became foolish. ²³They swapped the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of the image of mortal humans – and of birds, animals and reptiles. ²⁴So God gave them up to uncleanness in the desires of their hearts, with the result that they dishonoured their bodies among themselves. ²⁵They swapped God's truth for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen.⁷⁵

¹⁴Therefore, my dear people, run away from idolatry. ¹⁵I'm speaking as to intelligent people: you yourselves must weigh my words. ¹⁶The cup of blessing which we bless is a sharing in the Messiah's blood, isn't it? The bread we break is a sharing in the Messiah's body, isn't it? ¹⁷There is one loaf; well, then, there may be several of us, but we are one body, because we all share the one loaf.

¹⁸Consider ethnic Israel. Those who eat from the sacrifices share in the altar, don't they?

¹⁹So what am I saying? That idol-food is real, or that an idol is a real being? ²⁰No: but when they

offer sacrifices, they offer them to demons, not to God. And *I don't want you to be table-partners with demons.* ²¹You can't drink the cup of the lord and the cup of demons. You can't share in the table of the lord and the table of demons. ²²Surely you don't want to provoke the lord to jealousy? We aren't stronger than him, are we?⁷⁶

Here Paul stands exactly within the world, and one regular form of argumentation, of second-Temple Jews. The fact that there is one God means that idols – the actual supposed divinities, and their becoming present through a statue or image – are mere fictions, the creations of human imagination. But that doesn't mean that they are spiritually irrelevant. Demons, lurking in the shadows, masquerading behind the pomp and glory of pagan worship, will use these 'idols' to lure people away from the living God, and into a corrupting of their own genuine, image-bearing humanity. There is after all one 'image' of God, and that, for Paul, is Jesus the Messiah himself, the truly human one.⁷⁷ Those who are 'in the Messiah' are themselves to be renewed according to that 'image'.⁷⁸ And that affirmation is itself grounded, for Paul, in another central psalm, Psalm 8: 'God has put all things in subjection under his feet.'⁷⁹ This in turn points back to another denunciation of classic pagan behaviour, and to the typically Jewish claim that in the Messiah the one God will judge the world and rescue his people:

¹⁸You see, there are several people who behave as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. I told you about them often enough, and now I'm weeping as I say it again. ¹⁹They are on the road to destruction; their stomach is their God, and they find glory in their own shame. All they ever think about is what's on the earth.

²⁰We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we're eagerly waiting for the saviour, the lord, King Jesus, who is going to come from there. ²¹Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he's going to transform it so that it's just like his glorious body. And he's going to do this by the power which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority.⁸⁰

So Paul reaffirms the goodness and God-giveness of the created world, of food and drink, of marriage and sexuality, of political structures; the goodness and image-bearing vocation of human beings; the coming judgment at which the creator will put the world to rights, in line with the

promises in the Psalms; the danger of idols and of the dehumanizing behaviour that results from worshipping them. He is, up and down, a classic second-Temple monotheist, and he must have been fully aware of the fact.

(iii) Monotheism in Practice: One God, Therefore One People

A further tell-tale sign of Paul's foundational commitment to his ancestral Jewish monotheism comes in a couple of short but crucial passages. In all of these we see Paul drawing on the basic monotheistic heritage to argue for the unity – not indeed of ethnic Israel, but for what he saw as the renewed people of God in the Messiah.

The first of these passages is in Romans 3.21–31. 'There is no distinction,' Paul insists in 3.23, echoing the point made in 1.17 and anticipating the parallel statement in 10.12–13. The preceding discussion, not least 2.1–16, indicates clearly enough that the 'distinction' which Paul is declaring to be irrelevant is that between Jew and gentile. In chapter 3 Paul continues with a statement, not of the universal lordship of Jesus, but of the universal state of sin: 'all sinned, and fell short of God's glory' (3.23). However, the monotheistically grounded unity of Jew and gentile returns to centre stage six verses later, when Paul is insisting, exactly as in 10.4–13, that justification by faith is the same for all, of whatever ethnic origin:

²⁹Or does God belong only to Jews? Doesn't he belong to the nations as well? Yes, of course, to the nations as well, ³⁰since God is one. He will make the declaration 'in the right' over the circumcised on the basis of faith, and over the uncircumcised through faith.⁸¹

This is one of Paul's most obvious evocations of the *Shema*. His point, echoing Zechariah 14.9, is that the unity of God himself grounds the unity of the community. And the community in question here consists of those marked out by *pistis*, 'faith', the faith which is the answering 'faith' to 'the faithfulness of the Messiah' in 3.22, which is itself the outworking of God's own faithfulness, his truthfulness and justice.⁸² Here again we see the basic point of our present chapter: Jewish-style monotheism, rethought from top

to bottom around the events concerning Jesus, is the necessary anchor for the radically revised worldview in which the united community, in its faith, worship and holiness, is the sole visible symbol.

Fascinatingly, when Paul speaks so powerfully of monotheism as the anchor of the worldview, he moves at once to Abraham, who within Jewish tradition (whatever the verdict of today's Old Testament historians!) was *the* monotheist par excellence. Abraham believed, declares Paul, in God as the lifegiver, the creator *ex nihilo*, giving this God the glory in a way in which pagan idolaters had not (1.16–25).⁸³ This kind of belief is precisely what we find in second-Temple monotheism, and Abraham modelled it, becoming 'the father of many nations' (4.17). Paul, throughout the chapter, is insisting that faith in 'the God who raised Jesus from the dead' is to be identified with this classic type of monotheism, and that this faith is the sole defining characteristic of the single family which God promised Abraham.⁸⁴ From here there is a straight line back to 10.1–13.

There is also a straight line to the close parallel in Galatians 3. Here the statement of monotheism comes at the heart of one of the densest and most difficult Pauline passages:

¹⁹Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the family should come to whom it had been promised. It was laid down by angels, at the hand of a mediator. ²⁰He, however, is not the mediator of the 'one' – but God is one!⁸⁵

I have argued at length elsewhere that this compressed statement belongs exactly within the argument that runs from 3.6 to 4.7, with climactic moments at 3.14, 18, 22 and 29.⁸⁶ This sequence of thought emphasizes the *singularity of the family* which God promised Abraham:

²⁷You see, every one of you who has been baptized into the Messiah has put on the Messiah.

²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no 'male and female'; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus.

²⁹And, if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham's family. You stand to inherit the promise.⁸⁷

All one: Abraham's family, inheriting the promises; belonging to the Messiah. Those are the dominant themes. Meanwhile, as 3.10–14 makes clear, the Mosaic Torah had got in the way of this fulfilment;⁸⁸ and, as 3.15–18 insists, God still intends a single 'seed', which is *ho Christos*, the Messiah, the one who, as in 3.27, includes all his people in himself.⁸⁹ Once all this is grasped (which is difficult, because each move I have just made represents a point of view which scholarship has largely ignored, and the argument therefore has to be made inch by inch), the only difficulty in 3.19–20 is its characteristically Pauline overcompression. Here again, though, Paul is insisting that monotheism itself is the ground on which the single, united community stands. This claim confronts head on any attempt to divide the community again – which, in Galatians, refers to the work of the 'agitators', following the pattern of 'certain who came from James' to Antioch (2.12). To expand verses 19 and 20 only slightly, we might paraphrase to bring out the meaning:

Why then did God give the Torah? It was added because of trespasses (because, in other words, Israel, the bearers of the promise, were themselves sinful), until the time came when the 'seed', the single promised seed which is the Messiah and his people, should arrive. The Torah was ordained through angels, by the hand of a mediator, in other words, through Moses. Moses, however, is not the mediator of the 'one', the 'single seed' promised to Abraham; but God is one, and therefore desires that single family.

This works perfectly with the condensed Greek and, more importantly, with Paul's larger argument, which then flows easily throughout the chapter – and reflects exactly what he says later in Romans 3 and 4.

Equally importantly, we have, once again, monotheism undergirding the single family, within the context of Abraham's faith in God's promise. This time, rather than emphasizing Abraham's faith in terms of his belief in God as creator *ex nihilo* and lifegiver, Paul emphasizes it in terms of the forthcoming exodus.⁹⁰ All humankind was enslaved, Jew as well as gentile. But God, in fulfilment of his promise and 'when the fullness of time arrived' (*hote de ēlthen to plērōma tou chronou*, 4.4), sent his son and his spirit to rescue the slaves and confer on them the status of 'sons'. The idea of the single plan now coming to fruition, as we saw earlier, is itself again

an outflowing of monotheism: God has been in charge all along. And this fulfilment, just as in the original exodus, has constituted a fresh revelation of God's identity: 'now that you've come to know God – or, better, to be known by God', says Paul in 4.9.⁹¹ The line of thought that runs all the way from Galatians 2.11 to 4.11, centred on the promises to Abraham as now fulfilled in the Messiah, thus constitutes a complex but powerful statement of radically revised second-Temple monotheism, presented as the foundation of the single family which, shorn of other worldview-symbols, urgently needs just this theological narrative of Abraham, exodus and Messiah for its foundation to be secure and its communal life stable.

All this is seen to excellent advantage in the entire letter to the Ephesians. But since the points to be made there depend on the exposition of Paul's revised monotheism in the next section of this chapter, we shall save them for later.

3. Monotheism Freshly Revealed (1): Jesus

(i) Introduction: Paul and the 'Origin of Christology'

If Paul must have been aware that he was reaffirming the classic Jewish monotheism of his day, he must equally have been aware of the fact that he had redrawn this monotheism quite dramatically around Jesus himself.⁹² This bold claim will be made good in what follows.

To understand how Paul came to speak of Jesus in the way he did, however, we need to set this question within the larger one: what did the earliest Christians say about Jesus, and why? Paul is regularly and rightly summoned as the first witness in the long-running debates about how the early Christians came to embrace and articulate their shocking belief in the 'divinity' of Jesus; and those larger debates have in turn exercised a powerful reflex action on the way he himself has been read. These matters are, rather obviously, at the centre of any investigation of 'Christian origins and the question of God'.

Early christology in general, with Pauline christology as a particular focus, has been a storm centre now for at least a generation. Significant shifts have taken place in the kinds of questions that are asked and the ways in which they are addressed. The older habit of studying the so-called ‘christological titles’ no longer holds; more attention is now paid, for reasons that will become clear, to minute analyses of second-Temple Jewish texts which might be thought to have a bearing on the topic.⁹³ The underlying question, though, remains in my view skewed by the assumptions of post-Enlightenment western discourse, in which the question as to whether Jesus was or was not ‘divine’ – and the sub-question of at what stage and in what terms did the first Christians come to think of him in that way – has become a kind of litmus test of the two competing ‘orthodoxies’ of the western world. The first, claiming the high ground of the Enlightenment, seeks to reduce Jesus to the status of a great teacher whose followers, some considerable time afterwards, tried to ‘divinize’ him. The second, claiming to speak for the Christian tradition, seeks to rehabilitate the ‘divinity’ of Jesus. Neither side has usually noticed that this question has been posed and addressed as though it could be detached from the equally important early Christian question to do with the coming of the ‘kingdom of God’ on earth as in heaven, which was after all the central message of the gospels and, arguably, a central underlying theme for Paul as well. Nor has either side paused to reflect on the effect this omission has had on the meanings of the words ‘God’ and ‘divine’ themselves. Nor, in particular, has either side appeared to notice that it is possible to give an ‘orthodox’ answer to the question ‘Was Jesus divine?’, and to the sub-question ‘When did the early Christians realize this?’, while ignoring the dynamics of what this embodied God was actually up to. These vast and disturbing issues deserve fuller treatment, for which there is no space here. But we cannot proceed with this chapter without at least noting that the regular assumptions behind the ongoing debates are themselves in need of clarification if not correction. The fact that one can observe a storm centre does not mean that, so to speak, the storm is taking place in the right teacup.⁹⁴

The question of what the early Christians thought about Jesus has slid to and fro along a hypothetical line co-ordinating two different axes: (a) how early was 'high christology'? (b) was it basically Jewish or non-Jewish? The working assumption has been that if the idea that Jesus was in some sense 'divine' only gradually dawned on the early Christians forty or more years after his lifetime, and within an essentially non-Jewish environment, it could be dismissed as a later and inauthentic development, whereas if the idea turned out to be early and Jewish the same could not be said, or not so easily. In terms of the misleading post-Enlightenment polarizations I mentioned a moment ago, this naturally means that the orthodoxy of the Enlightenment has wanted to see high christology as a late and non-Jewish development, and the responding would-be Christian orthodoxy has wanted to argue for a high christology that is both early and (in some sense) Jewish.

This whole uneasy debate urgently needs to be mapped on to two quite different ones, both of which rest on premises that ought now to be seen as dubious. First, there was a sea-change, some time in the middle of the twentieth century, in the evaluation of 'Jewish' and 'non-Jewish' ideas. Following Hegel and other Enlightenment thinkers, and combining that train of thought with a Lutheran reading of Paul in which 'Judaism' represented the wrong way of doing religion, 'Jewish' ideas were regarded as at best inadequate and at worst dangerous. The history-of-religions school a hundred years ago was eager, in its rejection of all things Jewish, to 'derive' Paul's view of Jesus from the pagan environment in which there were many *kyrioi*, 'lords': Jesus was simply a new one, a cult deity with certain specific features. Paul (on this view) purposely abandoned the Jewish category of 'Messiahship', since it would be incomprehensible to his pagan audience, and gave them something which made sense in their world. As a sub-category of this, many suggested that, with Caesar-worship on the rise in the eastern Mediterranean, Paul took some of the regular Caesar-language and applied it to Jesus. Such scholarship, represented in the early twentieth century by Bousset and Bultmann among others, was seeking to commend Christianity. It accidentally colluded with the long-running

Jewish polemic in which, from at least Paul onwards, Christianity had become a form of paganism.⁹⁵

All this changed after the Second World War. In Pauline studies this was marked especially by W. D. Davies's groundbreaking book *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, helped on the one hand by excitement over the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and on the other hand by a horrified dismay (and guilt?) over the disclosure of the holocaust.⁹⁶ Within the post-war mood, many have shown that Paul's language about Jesus remained rooted in his native Judaism, even though Judaism did not have a belief in a 'divine Messiah' or anything remotely like it. The texts which speak of or address Jesus as 'lord', *kyrios*, are not on this view borrowed from paganism; they are, in many cases, quotations from or allusions to Septuagintal passages where the word clearly denotes YHWH himself. At that point, as with the word *euangelion*, we have to reckon with *derivation* from ancient Jewish sources and *confrontation* with the pagan world around – something that history-of-religion study has always found difficult.

We shall return to these matters later; I only mention them here as an indication of the way things have changed quite radically. It is now in fact difficult, especially for non-Germans, to imagine the mindset in which older generations took it for granted that F. C. Baur had been right and that 'early Jewish' Christianity was something from which the movement had needed to escape, with Paul leading the break-out and being responsible for the all-important transformation and innovation. But it is harder still for scholars in whatever camp to escape the mood shared by both sides, in which the historical and cultural analysis of elements of a movement has been linked directly to evaluative assumptions, so that to show an idea to be 'Jewish' or 'non-Jewish' at once sends a signal that the idea in question is 'good' or 'bad'. The signals, as we have seen, can be switched this way and that, which calls their usefulness into question.

The second tendency has often been in tension with the first, but still exercises a powerful influence. Protestantism appealed over the head of later ecclesial developments to the fountain-head: to the Bible and the Fathers, against the medieval church. If one went back to the beginning, one

would strip off folly and rediscover faith. With the Enlightenment, the ‘bad period’ was quietly extended: now, everything between the Bible and the Enlightenment itself was under judgment, and the Bible itself was picked apart for signs of a genuine early religion, whether that of Jesus himself or at least that of Paul. At the same time, Romanticism constantly implied that the ‘primitive’ form of any movement was the genuine, inspired article, the original vision which would fade over time as people moved from charisma to committees, from adoration to administration, from spontaneous and subversive spirituality to stable structures and a salaried sacerdotalism.

The newer history-of-religions movement, and the lingering Romanticism, have thus combined: for the last half century at least, to discover that something was ‘Jewish’ on the one hand, and that it was ‘early’ on the other, was to give it double praise. To discover that something called ‘high christology’ could be said to be both early and Jewish – the massively argued claim of, among others, the late great Tübingen scholar Martin Hengel – was to strike gold. It was enough to make people raise a flag, or at least a glass; to form new societies, or at least clubs.⁹⁷

All this, of course, needs probing and questioning at various levels. Hengel was himself responsible for the dawning scholarly awareness that the Jewish world of the first century was itself hellenistic through and through, so that to do what some earlier generations had done and go looking for a pre-hellenistic, and indeed *non*-hellenistic, strand of primitive ‘Jewish Christianity’ was to search blindly in a dark room for a black cat that wasn’t there in the first place.⁹⁸ And the fad for the ‘primitive’, which afflicted anthropology as much as theology, has likewise been challenged, as indeed the earlier liberal Protestants themselves challenged it, privileging supposedly ‘primitive’ *Pauline* Christianity over an earlier ‘Jewish Christianity’ (hence the attempted detection of ‘pre-Pauline’ formulae containing worryingly ‘Jewish’ notions like Davidic Messiahship or covenantal theology, which could then be put to one side) as much as over later supposedly deuterio-Pauline ‘developments’ (hence the rejection of Ephesians).⁹⁹ In any case, the attempt to perform an essentially historical operation, i.e. the investigation of the dating and cultural setting of

particular early Christian beliefs and motifs, was always at best an uneasy guide to the question of what might actually be true. Even if we came upon documents which demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that all Christians in the first decade of the movement believed most surely in a fully trinitarian theology, and believed that they could hold this view while remaining good Jews, that would be interesting but theologically inconclusive. Jewish thinkers would conclude that even the very early Christians were indeed deluded. Post-Enlightenment savants would sigh that the rot obviously set in even sooner than they had supposed.

About these things we cannot now speak in detail. I mention them only to show that the assumed foundations even of the questions that have been asked, let alone of the answers that have been given, ought themselves to be examined. However, none of this should cast a pall over the extraordinary achievements in recent decades, not only of Hengel but of other scholars, particularly Larry Hurtado and Richard Bauckham, who have done just as much as Hengel in their own ways to make it almost inconceivable that one would go back to the older days of Bousset and Bultmann (or even of Dunn, Casey and Vermes) by suggesting once more that people only began to think of Jesus as ‘divine’ after one or two generations, and (Casey and Vermes, but not Dunn) only after the early Christians had lost their grip on their Jewish heritage.¹⁰⁰ This story is now often told; indeed, it has become part of the miniature *Heilsgeschichte* of one branch of the discipline. The idea that a high christology must be late and non-Jewish has in fact been so widely rejected that a recent Jewish scholar, Daniel Boyarin, has swung round in the opposite direction, arguing that most if not all of the elements of early christology, not least the ‘divinity’ of the expected Messiah, were in fact present within pre-Christian Judaism itself.¹⁰¹

Even if such revisionist proposals were to be accepted – and my own view is that Boyarin has claimed much more than the texts will support – we would still have to recognize that the early Christians, already by the time of Paul, had articulated a belief in the ‘divinity’ of Jesus far more powerfully, and indeed poetically, than anyone had previously imagined. Paul can, in fact, assume his (very ‘high’) view of Jesus as a given. He

never says, even to Corinth, ‘How then can some of you be saying that Jesus was simply a wonderful human being and nothing more?’ Nor does christology seem to be a point of contention between him and (say) the church in Jerusalem.¹⁰² Despite regular assumptions and assertions, there is no historical evidence for an early ‘Jewish Christianity’ which (like the later ‘Ebionites’) denied any identification between Jesus and Israel’s God.

All this tells us, from the start, that Paul’s view of Jesus cannot have been simply the result of a private revelation. Even if his Damascus Road experience was indeed the moment when, and perhaps also the means by which, he himself arrived at the view that when one saw the face of Jesus one was looking at the glory of God, that was simply his own particular unconventional path to the goal which ‘those who were “in the Messiah” before him’ (as he puts it in Romans 16.7) had reached by other means. No: as with the summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15.3–11, there is no good reason to suppose that Paul would not have said, of his view of Jesus within the reality of the one God, that ‘whether it was me or them, that was the way we announced it, and that was the way you believed.’¹⁰³ But we still have to ask – indeed, this quick glance ahead at Paul compels us to ask: what was it exactly that pushed the early Christians in that direction? What was it that provided, if not a full pre-Christian anticipation of that early belief, nevertheless a pre-Christian set of ideas which could be catalysed, whether by Jesus himself, by his resurrection, or by his experienced presence in the early church, to produce the early high christology which is now regularly acknowledged not only in John’s gospel, not only in Paul himself, but in such passages as may reasonably be supposed to have taken shape before Paul incorporated them in his letters?¹⁰⁴

This is the point at which the present chapter has a major new proposal to advance, and since space is limited I will have to take for granted most of the history of recent research which, in a fuller treatment, might be expected.¹⁰⁵ But we must at least note the high points.

An older view would have said that Jesus himself made it clear, by his use of ‘son of man’ language at least, that he was claiming some kind of equality or identity with Israel’s God, and that the early church saw his

resurrection as confirming that. I regard such a view as hopelessly short-circuited, though not entirely misleading or mistaken. Certainly without the personal impact of Jesus himself it is impossible seriously to imagine anyone inventing the christology which was already in place by the mid-50s.¹⁰⁶ Many have stressed in the last generation the point that would be obvious to the naked eye had it not been so obscured in the Bultmann school, namely that the impact of Jesus' own life, his personality, his words and deeds, not to mention the drama of his death and resurrection, were bound to have a continuing impact on those who had known him,¹⁰⁷ just as the friends of C. S. Lewis still bring out books of reminiscences about the great man forty or fifty years after his death, and people who worked with Winston Churchill during the war still dine out on their memories of his temper, his wit and his prodigious intake of alcohol. All this can, I think, be taken for granted – and with a large *a fortiori* to reflect the striking differences between those two great, but flawed, human beings and Jesus himself. But this still requires an account of how Jesus' teaching might have been heard and understood among Jews of his place and time, and how the early church found a matrix of thought within which to interpret what it remembered about him.

A second older view claimed that Paul's Damascus Road experience provided him, then and there, with the christological categories he proceeded to develop.¹⁰⁸ Again, there is I think more than a grain of truth in drawing attention to that extraordinary encounter as part of the formation of Paul's view of Jesus at least.¹⁰⁹ But those who have built most strongly at this point still have to invoke the Jewish categories which the pre-Christian Paul would have had in his head, and which were reconfigured by the experience. And Paul's conversion can hardly account for christologies other than his own, whether those of the earliest pre-Pauline churches (unknown to us of course, but presumably in place before the Damascus Road event) or those of later movements such as those reflected in Hebrews or John.¹¹⁰

One of the two most important hypotheses which have been advanced in our own day is that of Larry Hurtado.¹¹¹ In his major assault on the older

history-of-religions hypothesis represented by Bousset in particular, he proposes that it was *the sense and experience of the personal presence of the exalted Jesus*, in the way that one might expect to experience the presence of the living God, that led Jesus' earliest disciples first to worship him (without any sense of compromising their monotheism), then to re-read Israel's scriptures in such a way as to 'discover' him in passages which were about the One God, and then to develop ways of speaking about him in which this new, extraordinary belief was encapsulated. It was, to re-coin an older phrase, 'early Christian experience' of the risen lord in their midst that compelled them to the first stirrings of what would later become trinitarian and incarnational theology.¹¹²

Hurtado has thus argued at length for two interlocking points. First, the world of the pre-Christian Jews contained, in many different texts and movements, ideas about figures who were treated as quasi-divine: patriarchs (Enoch, Abraham, Moses), angels, possibly even a Messiah, and abstract entities such as 'wisdom'. Second, the early Christian experience of the presence of the risen and exalted Jesus in worship and prayer formed the context within which those pre-Christian Jewish ideas could come together and be formed into a new pattern. Led by their experience to think of Jesus in terms previously confined to the one God, and to worship him as such while continuing to think of themselves as monotheistic Jews, they drew on these various figures to cast this previously unimagined notion into language which claimed some coherence in itself and also some consistency with earlier Jewish patterns of thought and speech.¹¹³

I do not wish to challenge this view head on. Indeed, I am convinced that Hurtado is basically right in his presentation and analysis of the phenomena, which really do point to a central and major feature of the important early period, and really do rule out completely the hypotheses of Bousset and others which were so popular a hundred years ago and which still sometimes lurk behind the scholarly scenes.¹¹⁴ But I have become convinced that there is still an element missing. Once we get that in place all kinds of things will come into focus which, without it, remain fuzzy.

A different dimension within a similar argument has recently been offered by Chris Tilling.¹¹⁵ He has pointed out in considerable detail that Paul's descriptions of the relationship between the early Christians and Jesus matches the scriptural descriptions of the relationship between Israel and the one God. 'The way Second Temple Judaism understood God as unique, namely through the God-relation pattern, was used by Paul to express the Christ-relation.'¹¹⁶ This ought I believe to be factored in, alongside Hurtado's arguments, to any future statement of how Paul saw Jesus.

But the hypothesis I regard as even more important among recent explorations of early christology is that of Richard Bauckham, to which I have already referred several times. Bauckham rejects the attempt to discover pre-Christian Jewish 'anticipations' of incarnation in the figures of ancient patriarchs, leading angels or even a Messiah.¹¹⁷ He draws out a wealth of biblical themes as they re-emerge in a wide range of New Testament writings, building in particular on his earlier work on Revelation in which he demonstrated the clear distinction between the fiercely monotheistic rejection of worship of angels and the taken-for-granted worship of 'God and the Lamb'.¹¹⁸

Bauckham's main proposal is that the New Testament, Paul included, offers a 'christology of "divine identity"' in which Jesus is included 'in the unique identity of this one God'.¹¹⁹ He sets out clearly what he does and does not mean by 'identity', contrasting it with the notions of 'essence' or 'nature' that appear in later theology:

Identity concerns *who* God is; nature concerns *what* God is or what divinity is ... If we wish to know in what Second Temple Judaism considered the uniqueness of the one God to consist, what distinguished God as unique from all other reality, including beings worshipped as gods by Gentiles, we must look not for a definition of divine nature but for ways of characterizing the unique divine identity.¹²⁰

Israel's God disclosed himself, and his name, YHWH, in his covenant relationship with Israel, demonstrating not just *what* he was but *who* he was:

The acts of God and the character description of God [in Exodus 34.6 and elsewhere] combine to indicate a consistent identity of the one who acts graciously towards his people and can be expected to do so. Through the consistency of his acts and character, the one called YHWH shows himself to be one and the same.¹²¹

Israel's covenant God reveals, not least, that he is the sole creator of all things, the sole ruler of all things. This is sufficient to set this God apart from all other beings, who in the nature of the case are part of his creation, part of the world over which he rules. This naturally meant claiming exclusive worship; the various intermediary figures which flit through ancient literature, and which are sometimes claimed to be quasi-divine, do not sit on the divine throne, but rather stand before the one God in the position of servants, and (like the angels in Revelation) they explicitly reject worship.¹²² The notions of the divine 'word' or 'wisdom', however, even if they come to be personified in later Jewish literature, are not to be thought of as created beings, or semi-divine entities 'occupying some ambiguous status between the One God and the rest of reality'. They are simply graphic ways of describing the one, unique God at work; 'they belong to the unique divine identity.'¹²³

Bauckham's proposal is simple and striking: that

the highest possible Christology – the inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity – was central to the faith of the early church even before any of the New Testament writings were written, since it occurs in all of them.

Nor did this require any backing away from ancient Jewish monotheism:

... this high Christology was entirely possible within the understanding of Jewish monotheism we have outlined. Novel as it was, it did not require any repudiation of the monotheistic faith which the first Christians axiomatically shared with all Jews. That Jewish monotheism and high Christology were in some way in tension is one of the prevalent illusions in this field that we must allow the texts to dispel.¹²⁴

When we come to the texts, then, we discover something beyond the older and largely sterile debates between a 'functional' and an 'ontic' christology: a 'christology of divine identity'.¹²⁵ It is this that Bauckham then expounds in the writings of Paul.

Jewish Monotheism, he here clarifies, has three aspects: creational, eschatological and cultic. God is the sole creator; he will at the last establish his universal kingdom; and he and he alone is to be worshipped.¹²⁶ This launches Bauckham into a detailed, and necessarily technical, account of Paul's language about Jesus, from which he concludes that Paul, like the rest of early Christianity, unhesitatingly ascribed to Jesus precisely this triple divine identity. He is the agent of creation; he is the one through whom all things are reconciled; he is to be worshipped.

With all of this I am in agreement. But there is one thing missing, and it is the burden of my song in this chapter to propose it and explain it. And it seems to me that when we do so all kinds of other evidence comes back into the picture to make an even larger, more comprehensive and satisfying whole.

The strength of Bauckham's position, I think, is his insistence that scholars have been looking in the wrong place. The question has been put in the form, Did Judaism have any figures – angels, mediators, messiahs, whatever – who were regarded in an 'exalted' fashion prior to the first century, so that there were Jewish categories available when someone came along whose followers wanted to find 'exalted' language to use of him? Quite apart from the apparently ad hoc nature of any such development, it seems unlikely that the entire early movement would scoop up the same language at the same time and would then make the same moves, out beyond such an initial identification, to a full early, high christology. That second move, in any case, remains very strange on such an account: exalted mediator-figures might be all very well, but they would still not explain the phenomena.

But to raise the question in this way is, I believe, to start at the wrong end. If the phenomenon to be explained is the fact that from extremely early on the followers of Jesus used language for him (and engaged in practices, such as worship, in which he was invoked) which might previously have been thought appropriate only for Israel's God, why should we not begin, not with 'exalted figures' who might as it were be assimilated into the one God, but with the One God himself? Did Judaism have any beliefs, stories,

ideas *about God himself* upon which they might have drawn to say what they now wanted to say about Jesus?

The answer is: yes, they did. And this is where, in agreeing with Bauckham's positive proposal as far as it goes, I want to take a significant step beyond it to a point where a larger perspective altogether begins to emerge. Bauckham speaks of 'eschatological monotheism', but perhaps surprisingly does not develop it in this direction. Central to second-Temple monotheism was the belief we sketched in chapter 2: that *Israel's God, having abandoned Jerusalem and the Temple at the time of the Babylonian exile, would one day return*. He would return in person. He would return in glory. He would return to judge and save. He would return to bring about the new exodus, overthrowing the enemies that had enslaved his people. He would return to establish his glorious, tabernacling presence in their midst. He would return to rule over the whole world. *He would come back to be king.*¹²⁷ This act, still in the future from the perspective of the pre-Christian Jews, was a vital part of what they believed about 'divine identity'. And this is the part that best explains not only Paul's view of Jesus but also that of the entire early church.¹²⁸ The long-awaited return of YHWH to Zion is, I suggest, the hidden clue to the origin of christology.

Devout Jews longed for that return. They saw it prophesied across the scriptures, and they prayed for its coming. Some such people, seeing the events concerning Jesus, deduced that it had happened. This is what, to their great surprise, it would look like when Israel's God returned to reign. Once more, the astonishing and unexpected apocalypse meant what it meant within the context of the long, dark story of second-Temple Judaism. Long before Paul dictated his first letter; long before the 'pre-Pauline' material, if such there was, took shape in the early worshipping community; before, even, the risen Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, the early Christians believed that Israel's one God had returned in person. In the person of Jesus. The evidence for this proposal is found all over the New Testament, but especially of course in the letters of Paul, to which we shall shortly turn.

Notice, though, even at this stage, what follows. Whereas in the modern period people have come to the New Testament with the question of Jesus' 'divinity' as one of the uppermost worries in their mind, and have struggled to think of how a human being could come to be thought of as 'divine', for Jesus' first followers the question will have posed itself the other way round. It was not a matter of them pondering this or that human, angelic, perhaps quasi-divine figure, and then transferring such categories to Jesus in such a way as to move him up (so to speak) to the level of the one God. It was a matter of them pondering the promises of the one God whose identity, as Bauckham has rightly stressed, was made clear in the scriptures, and wondering what it would look like when he returned to Zion, when he came back to judge the world and rescue his people, when he did again what he had done at the exodus. Not for nothing had Jesus chosen Passover as the moment for his decisive action, and his decisive Passion. It was then a matter of Jesus' followers coming to believe that in him, and supremely in his death and resurrection – the resurrection, of course, revealing that the death was itself to be radically re-evaluated – Israel's God had done what he had long promised. He had returned to be king. He had 'visited' his people and 'redeemed' them.¹²⁹ He had returned to dwell in the midst of his people. Jesus had done what God had said he and he alone would do. Early christology did not begin, I suggest, as a strange new belief based on memories of earlier Jewish language for mediator-figures, or even on the strong sense of Jesus' personal presence during worship and prayer, important though that was as well. The former was not, I think, relevant, and the latter was, I suggest, important but essentially secondary. The most important thing was that in his life, death and resurrection Jesus had accomplished the new exodus, had done in person what Israel's God had said he would do in person. He had inaugurated God's kingdom on earth as in heaven. Scholars have spent too long looking for pre-Christian Jewish ideas about human figures, angels or other intermediaries. What matters is the pre-Christian Jewish ideas about Israel's God. *Jesus' first followers found themselves not only (as it were) permitted to use God-language for Jesus, but compelled to use Jesus-language for the one God.*

All this, as I say, seems to have taken place before Paul ever put pen to paper. But it is in his letters that it emerges as already fully formed. It explodes into life, claiming to be the newly revealed form of ancient Jewish monotheism. It is, in particular, exodus-theology, which means a rich and dense combination of themes: sacrifice, redemption from slavery, the fresh revelation of YHWH's name, the giving of Torah, the personal presence of the divine glory in the pillar of cloud and fire and then in the newly constructed tabernacle. And it is return-to-Zion theology, not as a separate idea but as the necessary post-exilic focus of the exodus-hope, as in Ezekiel or Isaiah 40—66, Zechariah or Malachi: YHWH would return to the Temple, as he came down to Egypt to rescue his people, as he consented to dwell in the tabernacle even after Israel's sin. And the theme of YHWH's return itself opens up to reveal the strand which most recent interpreters have seen as important for New Testament christology but without understanding why, or what it meant. The one place in all of second-Temple literature where someone tried to suggest that Israel's God had perhaps returned to the Temple after all was Ben-Sirach 24. *And there the mode of the 'return' was the figure of Wisdom.* Wisdom had been sent from on high to 'tabernacle' on the holy mount, and there to be known through Torah. As the Wisdom of Solomon saw so clearly, it was the divine 'wisdom', responsible for the exodus itself, that was to be invoked by Israel's king as the key requirement for his promised worldwide rule. 'Wisdom-christology' is not part of a random ransacking of miscellaneous quasi-divine abstractions. It is one way in which some second-Temple Jews, and then many early Christians, spoke of the strange and unexpected return of Israel's God. And it was also one way in which some second-Temple Jews, and then many early Christians, spoke of the commissioning and equipment of the coming king. Here is the very centre of the early Christian innovation. Nobody, so far as I am aware, joined these particular threads together before Jesus. The events concerning Jesus compelled the first Christians to do just that. Paul reflects that joining of threads – indeed, he celebrates it and takes it forward in several giant leaps – but he did not invent the idea.

All these themes, then, lead into one another, spill over into one another, presuppose one another, interact with one another: exodus, redemption, tabernacle, presence, return, wisdom, kingship. The more we understand the second-Temple belief in the *eschatological monotheism* at the heart of the divine identity, the better we can see how the first Christians came at once to regard Jesus in the way they did, and the better we can see how Paul could draw on that already established belief at several decisive points in his writings.

It is high time, then, to examine the key texts.

(ii) Jesus and the God of Exodus, Return and Wisdom

(a) Galatians 4.1–11

If we look in Paul's letters for signs of an exodus-theology (or, to be more precise, a 'new-exodus' theology), one natural place to begin is a dense and pivotal section at the heart of Galatians, the first eleven verses of chapter 4:

Let me put it like this. As long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave – even if, in fact, he is master of everything! He is kept under guardians and stewards until the time set by his father.

Well, it's like that with us. When we were children, we were kept in 'slavery' under the 'elements of the world'. But when the fullness of time arrived, God sent out his son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And, because you are sons, God sent out the spirit of his son into our hearts, calling out 'Abba, father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son! And, if you're a son, you are an heir, through God.

However, at that stage you didn't know God, and so you were enslaved to beings that, in their proper nature, are not gods. But now that you've come to know God – or, better, to be known *by* God – how can you turn back again to that weak and poverty-stricken line-up of elements that you want to serve all over again? You are observing days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid for you; perhaps my hard work with you is all going to be wasted.

Anyone familiar with second-Temple Jewish writing, with its complex webs of allusion and echo, will recognize at once that this is indeed a compact exodus-story.¹³⁰ Here is a group of slaves; here is the sovereign God, acting

‘in the fullness of time’; he redeems the slaves, and addresses them as his ‘sons’. Every element of this rings with exodus-echoes. But there is more. As we have seen, one of the other central elements in the exodus-narrative is the personal presence of Israel’s God, acting dramatically to rescue his people, to lead them on their journey and ultimately to live in their midst in the tabernacle; and the promise of this personal presence was one of the ultimate back reference points for the second-Temple hope that this same God, having abandoned the Temple at the time of the Babylonian exile, would return at last to Zion. The ‘sending’ both of the unique ‘son’ and then of the ‘spirit of the son’ echoes the ‘sending’ of wisdom to dwell in the midst of Israel, as the mode by which, in Ben-Sirach, Israel’s God was to come back and dwell in the Temple at last. Paul does not here join those particular dots, but as we shall see later it is central to his understanding of the spirit that, by its ‘indwelling’ within believers, the spirit constitutes the tabernacling presence of Israel’s God, on the analogy of the pillar of cloud and fire accompanying the Israelites on their wilderness journey.

In case there should be any doubt on the question, Paul continues with several further echoes of the exodus. Those now redeemed and addressed as ‘sons’ are ‘heirs’, like Israel in the wilderness on the way to their ‘inheritance’. They have been rescued from a former life of ignorance, through the revealing of the one true God, just like the Israelites in Exodus 4. Paul uses in verse 8 the word for ‘you were enslaved’, *edouleusate*, which was used to describe the same point in Genesis 15.13 – from the chapter which he was expounding through most of the previous chapter in Galatians. And the warning he issues in verses 8 and 9 reflects exactly the challenge faced again and again in the story of the people in the wilderness: how can you think of going back to slavery, of making a run for it back to Egypt?¹³¹ He is doing his best, in other words, to place the present predicament and puzzlement of the Galatian Christians on to the well-known map of the exodus narrative, in order to draw the moral: don’t go back to slavery, but go on to your inheritance, led by that indwelling divine presence. (This, of course, is more fully set out in Romans 8, to which we shall return presently.)

What does this tell us about Paul's revision of a second-Temple monotheism of eschatological divine identity? First, if this is indeed an exodus-narrative it is, by definition, a statement of one of the foundation stories of all Jewish monotheism. It was at the exodus that Israel's God revealed his covenant faithfulness and saving power. Paul is clear that, as with the Israelites in Exodus 3.13–15 and elsewhere, the events concerning Jesus and the spirit have constituted a fresh and full revelation of who the one God actually is. The key phrase is at the start of verse 9: 'now that you've come to know God – or, better, to be known *by* God ...' In other words, the events concerning Jesus and the spirit have unveiled the true God in such a way that, so far from being a celestial object available as it were for inspection, he is the one who has taken the initiative in 'knowing', establishing a mutual relationship with, the Galatians.

But the God who is thus establishing this 'knowing' is defined precisely, in terms echoing the wisdom-traditions and hence the promise of YHWH's strange return, as the God who sent the son and who now sends the spirit of the son. Paul sketches in verses 8–9 a typically Jewish contrast between the true God and the pagan gods; but the true God here is the son-sending, spirit-sending God.

This then draws the eye back once more to verse 4, and to the central but multivalent image of Jesus as the 'son'. The context makes it clear that one of the obvious overtones is of Israel as God's 'son'; that is why, when the 'spirit of the son' is sent in turn, those in whom the spirit comes to dwell are constituted as, themselves, 'sons'.¹³² But at this point we meet, converging in a way that we shall have to examine more closely later on, the equally clear overtone of the 'son' as Messiah. If there was any doubt, the close parallel in Romans 8 once more clarifies the matter, since the themes of son of God/Messiah and inheritance are joined through the strong allusion to Psalm 2.7–8:

I will tell of the decree of YHWH:

He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you.

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage (*tēn klēronomian sou*)
and the ends of the earth your possession.'

The Jesus of Galatians 4.4 is thus *both* the representative of God's people *and* the Davidic Messiah – which, as I shall explain later, is hardly accidental. But the context indicates that there is something more as well.

The phrase 'son of God' was not used in the pre-Christian Jewish world, so far as we know, for anyone thought to be a human embodiment of Israel's God – for the very good reason that such people did not exist. But I suggest that we have here, at or near the very start of the theological writing of the early church, the move which points on to the later usage in which 'son of God' straightforwardly and univocally denotes 'the incarnate one'. This is in fact a gross short-circuiting of a much more complex line of thought, and regularly results in an almost docetic reading of Paul. The phrase 'son of God' did not, in his day, mean 'the divine incarnate one'. But here in Galatians 4 it *comes* to mean that, by the explicit joining together of (a) the new-exodus theme in which Israel's God returns at last to deliver his people (and is now warning them against returning to Egypt!), (b) the wisdom-theme in which the wise presence of Israel's God is 'sent' to dwell among the people and to redeem them, (c) the new-revelation-of-God theme, with the one God made known in action as the son-sender and the spirit-sender, and then not least (d) the Messiah theme, in which the *Christos* who has been prominent in the letter up to this point is now referred to, not least in order to bring out the force of the exodus-story, as 'son of God', in keeping with the classic passages of Psalm 2.7, 2 Samuel 7.14, and Psalm 89.26–7.¹³³ The Jesus who is spoken of in Galatians 4.4 is thus not only Israel's Messiah and the representative of the new-exodus people; he is the embodiment of the one God, returning as promised to rescue his people. This is a christology of divine identity, specifically of exodus-shaped and then Messiah-shaped eschatological monotheism.¹³⁴

We shall return to Galatians 4 later, to inspect the way the spirit fills out the same picture. For the moment we move on to the even more complex and dense parallel passage, Romans 8.1–4.

[\(b\) Romans 8.1–4](#)

I have argued elsewhere that Romans 6—8 as a whole constitutes (among other things) a massive retelling of the exodus-narrative. It takes us on the journey through the water by which the slaves are set free (chapter 6), up to the mountain where the Torah is given, with its attendant paradox in that it simultaneously (a) invites Israel to keep it and so find life and (b) confronts Israel with the fact of indwelling sin (chapter 7), and then on the homeward march to the ‘inheritance’, again with sombre warnings about not wanting to go back to Egypt:

You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery, did you, to go back again into a state of fear? But you received the spirit of sonship, in whom we call out ‘Abba, father!’ When that happens, it is the spirit itself giving supporting witness to what our own spirit is saying, that we are God’s children. And if we’re children, we are also heirs: heirs of God, and fellow heirs with the Messiah, as long as we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.¹³⁵

Here the echoes of Psalm 2 are clear, anchoring the passage in between the exodus-story and the promise of the coming king who will be given the whole world, the whole created order, as his *klēronomia*, his ‘inheritance’. This is, in other words, new-exodus theology, in a freshly messianic mode, once more placing the church on the map at the point where the people are being led through the desert by the personal presence of the one God. This has particular relevance to Paul’s understanding of the spirit, as we shall see later on.

But it is with the christological redefinition of monotheism that we are primarily concerned at the moment, and here, as in Galatians, we find in 8.1–4 a further rich and complex statement of who Jesus is and what he has done – or, more specifically, what the one God has done in and through and as Jesus. The first two verses of the chapter constitute what broadcasters call a ‘tease’, a dense and provocative statement of what is then to be explained:

So, therefore, there is no condemnation for those in the Messiah, Jesus! Why not? Because the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus, released you from the law of sin and death.¹³⁶

Then, as is his wont, Paul spells out what he means, explaining what has happened at the heart of the gospel events. This, as I have often told

students, is one of his most central summaries:

For God has done what the law (being weak because of human flesh) was incapable of doing. God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin-offering; and, right there in the flesh, he condemned sin. This was in order that the right and proper verdict of the law could be fulfilled in us, as we live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.¹³⁷

‘God sent his own son’: here again we have the wisdom-motif, the ‘sending’ of the one who is God’s own second self, drawing together the language of Messiahship (‘son of God’) and the language of ‘wisdom’ which, through the fictive person of Solomon, itself already belonged closely with the idea of kingship.

The Wisdom of Solomon, in fact, offers its own complex meditation on themes very closely related to Romans 8. I am not suggesting that Paul got the ideas from there, only that the parallel themes are remarkable in themselves. The opening six chapters of Wisdom portray the ‘wicked’ who kill the ‘righteous’, but who are then confronted with divine judgment, and with the presence of the resurrected ‘righteous’ themselves, who are shown to be ‘sons of God’, with an inheritance among the holy ones (5.5). This leads in chapter 6 to an extended warning to the rulers of the earth, which is strongly reminiscent of Psalm 2.10 (‘Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth’). Wisdom is what earth’s rulers require, and Solomon is there to testify that he gained it through his prayer (7.1–22). Wisdom is indeed ‘a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness’ (7.26), so that rulers who gain her are enabled to act wisely in their governing of peoples. The heart of Solomon’s reported prayer is the request for ‘wisdom’ to be sent forth to enable him to do God’s will. It is a pregnant poem, full of resonances both with Israel’s ancient scriptures and with the early Christian writings:

With you is wisdom, she who knows your works
and was present when you made the world;
she understands what is pleasing in your sight
and what is right according to your commandments.
Send her forth from the holy heavens,
and from the throne of your glory send her,

that she may labour at my side
and that I may learn what is pleasing to you.
For she knows and understands all things
and she will guide me wisely in my actions
and guard me with her glory.
Then my works will be acceptable
and I shall judge your people justly,
and shall be worthy of the throne (Greek *thronōn*, ‘thrones’ plural) of my father.
For who can learn the counsel of God?
Or who can discern what the Lord wills? ...
Who has learned your counsel,
unless you have given wisdom
and sent your holy spirit from on high?¹³⁸

There are so many Pauline echoes here that it would be tedious to tabulate them all, and in any case my purpose here is to move on rapidly having made the point; for the book turns at once to the long retelling of the story of the human race and more especially of Israel, and all in terms of the guiding and leading of Wisdom. The concluding ten chapters consist mostly of a lengthy account of the exodus itself, with attendant meditations on the wickedness of both Egyptian and Canaanite idolaters, and indeed on idol-worship in general, and on the benefits of belonging to God’s people and on trusting and obeying him alone. Those who thus obey Israel’s God, the creator, will be acknowledged as ‘God’s son’ (18.13). Here we have exactly that combination of themes of which we have spoken: exodus, redemption, wisdom and kingship, with the implied reader encouraged to remain faithful to Israel’s one God and to trust that the deliverance he accomplished in the past will occur again, decisively, in the future.

This is exactly what we find in Romans 6—8 as a whole, so that although the word ‘wisdom’ does not occur we should not hesitate to see the same idea behind the ‘sending of the son’ in 8.3. The link with Torah-fulfilment provides another clue.¹³⁹ The detail of the task allotted to the messianic and divine son will be studied in the next chapter. Here we simply note that again, in one of Paul’s most decisive and definitive sections, we find a classic monotheistic account of divine identity, radically revised around the fresh revelation of the death and resurrection of the Messiah.

Romans 8.1–4 is not, of course, detachable from 8.5–11, and we shall return to that in a later section of the present chapter. It is also closely cognate with Romans 10.6–13, to which again we shall return later. But for the moment we move on to another passage in which Paul evokes the exodus-narrative in order to locate the church on the map at the point where the people are in danger of disastrous rebellion.

[\(c\) 1 Corinthians 8—10](#)

It has recently been customary, and for good reason, to examine 1 Corinthians 8.6 as one of the key texts in which Paul's christologically revised monotheism comes to sharp and startling expression.¹⁴⁰ But in fact the entire section of the letter, addressing the question of how to live as a loyal follower of Jesus within the world of pagan culture, resonates at several points with the theme of monotheism and its revision, so that there is something to be said for seeing 8.6, like Romans 1.3–4 in relation to the rest of Romans, as a dense opening christological statement to be worked out in practice in what follows. Exactly as with the Jewish 'monotheism' of divine identity, this monotheism is both *creational* and *cultic*: the whole passage insists on the goodness of the present creation, and also on the need to be sure one is worshipping the one God and him alone, avoiding the snares of pagan idolatry wherever they may appear. And the whole passage, in particular, is *eschatological*. The church is the people 'upon whom the ends of the ages have come' (10.11). It evokes, centrally to the argument, the great exodus-narrative: Paul's exposition of his own apostolic 'freedom' in chapter 9 is meant as an illustration of the 'freedom' in the Messiah which the Christians are to enjoy, but just as he says elsewhere the freedom that results from the Passover-event must not be followed by licentious or rebellious behaviour in the wilderness (10.1–13). The context is different, the tone of voice is different, but theologically and exegetically we are here on the same ground as in Galatians 4 (and indeed the exposition of freedom in Galatians 5) or Romans 8.

And it is of course in this context – the exodus, the wilderness journeys and the anticipated entry into the ‘inheritance’ – that the Pentateuch provides the prayer which summed up what monotheism meant for Jews in the ancient world and to this day. It is a prayer of loyalty to the one God when surrounded by pagan temptations. The prayer is dense and notoriously difficult to translate, just as Paul’s reformulation of it is dense and resists easy rendering:

*shema’ israēl YHWH elohēnu YHWH echad
w’ahabtha eth YHWH eloheka becol lebabka ubecol naphsheka ubecol m’odeka.*

Hear, O Israel: YHWH is our God, YHWH alone.¹⁴¹
You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.¹⁴²

This is the natural place for a first-century Jew to begin when thinking of how one should behave within a surrounding pagan culture.

This passage must have been as dear to Saul of Tarsus as it was a hundred years later to Akiba. But what Paul the apostle – or someone else before him – has done with this famous prayer is utterly breathtaking. This central, decisive, sharply focused prayer of loyalty to the one God has been restated *so as to include Jesus at its very heart*.

It is a measure of the dramatic shift that has come over contemporary New Testament scholarship in the last generation that this conclusion, which was hardly even noticed thirty or forty years ago, now seems unavoidable and central to our understanding of Paul’s christology.¹⁴³ But even among those who now see this point there is room for further exploration, not least in terms of the way in which the revised (Paul might say clarified and strengthened) monotheism functions in relation to the central worldview-symbol of the new movement, the one community itself and the way in which its common life was to be ordered. Here, in parallel with Philippians 2 (see below), we see how it is that theology (fresh, prayerful, scripturally rooted thinking about the one God, and about Jesus within that picture) sustains the vision of the one community, under

pressure on every side yet finding the way forward precisely through this activity.

First, though, the basic point, in case it has still not been grasped. We have seen how central the *Shema* was for second-Temple Jewish monotheists. It was an acted sign that spoke of this ‘monotheism’ not as an abstract dogma (the evolutionary goal of the ‘theisms’ imagined by Enlightenment philosophers), but as the deeply personal reality that evoked the deeply personal response of prayer, love and allegiance. Personal: but also cosmic. To pray the *Shema* was to embrace the yoke of God’s kingdom, to commit oneself to God’s purposes on earth as in heaven, whatever it might cost. It was to invoke, and declare one’s loyalty to, the one God who had revealed himself in action at the exodus and was now giving his people their inheritance. Paul uses the *Shema* in this passage in exactly this way, not as a detached statement of a dogma, not as a ‘spiritual aside, not simply in order to swat away the ‘many “gods” and many “lords” ’ of the previous verse,¹⁴⁴ but in order to be the foundation for the community which is living, or which Paul is teaching to live, as the kingdom-people in the midst of the pagan world. (As we shall see presently, it is fascinating that one of Paul’s rare explicit mentions of God’s kingdom occurs at the relevant point in the parallel discussion in Romans.¹⁴⁵) But the *Shema* as he uses it here is the redefined *Shema*. It has Jesus, and not least the *crucified* Jesus, at its centre: the cross is not mentioned explicitly in the revised prayer, but as soon as Paul applies the prayer to the challenge facing the community, it becomes apparent that he is assuming it there. And the underlying point should be clear, once we recognize the exodus-context of the original prayer and the new-exodus context of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 8—10. Just as the exodus was launched by the coming of Israel’s God in person to rescue his people, so the new exodus has been launched by the long-awaited return of this same God *in and as Jesus himself*. Paul’s use of the *Shema* here is, to repeat, not a detached dogmatic aside or maxim to be drawn on in a pragmatic ethical argument, but a statement of eschatological and monotheistic divine identity. This is what it looked like when Israel’s God came back at last.

How does this work out? The Greek form of the prayer, in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 6.4 which most Jews across the Diaspora would say day by day, stands thus:

akoue Israēl

kyrios ho theos hēmon

kyrios heis estin.

Hear, Israel

YHWH our God

YHWH is one.

And the prayer continues, ‘And you shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, with all your *psychē*, and with all your power.’¹⁴⁶

If there is ever any doubt about scriptural allusions and echoes in Paul, there should be none here.¹⁴⁷ Faced with a classic question about how to navigate the choppy waters of a pagan environment with its idols and temples, the obvious place to start is with second-Temple monotheism; and one of the easiest ways of referring to that belief would be through a reference to the *Shema*. The basic point for a follower of Jesus in a world full of idols was simple: ‘We are monotheists, not pagan polytheists.’ The *Shema*-based allusions and echoes gather momentum from three verses back. First, ‘if anybody loves God’ (verse 3); then ‘no God but one’ (verse 4); then, as the rhetorical climax, verses 5 and 6. Here is the key verse with its build-up:

⁴So when it comes to food that has been offered to idols, we know that ‘idols are nothing in the world’, and that ‘there is no God but one’. ⁵Yes, indeed: there may be many so-called ‘gods’, whether in heaven or on earth, just as there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’. ⁶But for us

There is one God, the father,
from whom are all things, and we to him;
and one lord, Jesus the Messiah,
through whom are all things, and we through him.¹⁴⁸

This is already dense. ‘We to him’ and ‘we through him’ are initially puzzling. But actually the Greek is even denser:

all’ hēmin
heis theos ho patēr,
ex hou ta panta

but for us
one God the father,
from whom all things

kai hēmeis eis auton

and we to him

*kai heis kyrios Iēsous Christos,
di'hou ta panta
kai hēmeis di'autou.*

and one lord Jesus Messiah,
through whom all things
and we through him.

There are, in fact, no verbs in the entire formula (just as there were none in the opening lines of the *Shema* itself), but Paul and his hearers would hardly need them. They would understand ‘there is’, as in the earlier translation, and ‘are’, repeated, in the two main lines: ‘*there is* one God the father, from whom *are* all things and we *are* to him, and one lord Jesus Messiah, through whom *are* all things and we *are* through him.’

Even that might be thought somewhat obscure. Perhaps we should gloss the first main line with ‘and we *belong* to him’, though the bare ‘to him’ seems to mean more than ‘belonging’: something more like ‘we exist in relation to him’, ‘we live towards him’. Perhaps, in the second line, we should reckon with something more explicit in relation to the saving work of the Messiah: not just ‘and we *live* through him’ but ‘and we *have been saved* through him’.¹⁴⁹ Or perhaps these are precisely the sort of limiting moves that we should not make. Perhaps the formula was deliberately evocative and mysterious.¹⁵⁰

We do not need to decide these questions for our present purpose, since the real shock of the passage is of course simply the expansion of the *Shema* to include Jesus within it. The fact that Paul can do what he has done here in verse 6, without explanation or justification, speaks volumes for the theological revolution that *had already taken place*, which as I (and Bauckham, and others) have said seems by this stage to be uncontroversially part of the Christian landscape. Paul is going to argue at length for positions that would be difficult and controversial for the Corinthians to grasp; he sees no need to argue for, or even explain any further, the astonishing theological claim of verse 6. We may even guess that Paul, accustomed since childhood to pray the *Shema* at regular hours, had himself now been praying it and teaching others to pray it in this new fashion, perhaps for several years, invoking the kingdom of Jesus the

Messiah as the present instantiation of the kingdom of God the father, as in 1 Corinthians 15.20–8.

The force of the revision is obvious. What Paul has done (or what someone else has done, which Paul is here quoting) is to separate out *theos* and *kyrios*, ‘God’ and ‘lord’, in the original prayer, adding brief explanations: ‘God’ is glossed with ‘the father’, with the further phrase about God as source and goal of everything, ourselves included, and ‘lord’ is glossed with ‘Jesus Messiah’, with the further phrase about Jesus as the means of everything, the one through whom all was made, ourselves included. ‘One God (the father), one lord (Jesus Messiah).’ A small step for the language; a giant leap for the theology. Jesus is not a ‘second God’: that would abrogate monotheism entirely. He is not a semi-divine intermediate figure. He is the one in whom the identity of Israel’s God is revealed, so that one cannot now speak of this God without thinking of Jesus, or of Jesus without thinking of the one God, the creator, Israel’s God.

The context, and the way the chapter and the whole discussion flows out from here, rubs in the point. In a world of ‘many gods and many lords’, with idols on every street and ‘tainted’ idol-meat in every market, the point of the statement is that ‘For us there is One.’ To have said, or implied, ‘For us there are Two,’ would have meant, ‘We are simply a new, curiously restricted, form of paganism’; whereas Paul, throughout the letter, is claiming to be standing on the ground of Jewish-style monotheism over against the pagan world. The long argument which begins here, and carries on to the end of chapter 10, develops exactly this point.

In particular, the way Paul moves into that argument shows that verse 6 is not just a flourish, a decorative allusion to a tradition, but is designed as the driving force for what follows. There is one God, one lord ... therefore pagan idols, the gods and goddesses in the pantheon (including, of course, the emperor and his family, whose cult was flourishing at Corinth as elsewhere), were non-existent. Caligula, Claudius, Nero and the rest did of course ‘exist’. They were, or had been, people in the real world. The point was that they claimed to be divine, but were not so in fact. As ‘divinities’ they were non-existent. Paul will later say that when pagans invoke idols

they are worshipping demons, lesser non-physical, supranatural entities; but the idols themselves, invoked by their devotees as divine, are a deceitful sham.¹⁵¹ The result is dramatic: food that has been offered to these non-gods and non-lords is simply food. Nothing of major theological, cultic or sociological relevance has actually happened to it. A follower of the one God, one lord can eat it with a clear conscience. That is the point Paul makes more or less at once in chapter 8, and to which he will return in chapter 10.

Now we see what it means to say that second-Temple monotheism, reworked in this fashion in accordance with the new-exodus belief that Israel's God has returned at last in and as Jesus, anchors the key worldview-symbol, the single community of the Messiah's followers. The revised *Shema* sustains both the *unity* and the *holiness* of the community. The starting point, addressing the question of holiness (should one eat 'tainted' food?), is that people who understand this robust redefined monotheism can have a clear conscience in eating anything they like. The 'gods' are hollow nonentities; don't worry about them. Holiness will not be compromised if you eat. But what about unity? What about those whose conscience is not yet clear on these matters, but is rather, in Paul's manner of speaking, 'weak'? And what about those with a 'strong' conscience who find themselves in the same community as the 'weak'? Answer: think through what it means that *the monotheism upon which the worldview now rests has the crucified Messiah at its centre*. As we shall see in Philippians 2, the cross stands at the heart of the revelation of the one God, and hence at the heart of the worldview. If, on the basis of this rediscovered 'monotheism', believers go ahead and eat despite the scruples of the person with a 'weak conscience', they will be spurning the very inner nature of that same 'monotheism'. The Messiah's death is thus not simply a convenient way for God to deal with sins. It reflects the heart and character of the one true God, and that reflection must shine through the life of the community that invokes this one God, one lord. Otherwise, if 'you', with 'knowledge' of this one God, one lord, go ahead and eat despite the weaker fellow-believer, 'you' may encourage such a person back into genuine idolatry:

¹¹And so, you see, the weak person – a brother or sister for whom the Messiah died! – is then destroyed by your ‘knowledge’. ¹²That means you’ll be sinning against your brother or sister, and attacking their weak conscience; and in doing this you’ll be sinning against the Messiah. [152](#)

The revolution in theology is thus not simply the inclusion of Jesus within the *Shema*, but the inclusion of *the crucified Messiah* at that point. Here is the ultimate ‘scandal’, as in 1 Corinthians 1.23; but not to recognize this point, and not to act upon it, will be the new ‘scandal’, the thing that will trip up the ‘weaker sibling’. [153](#) Choose your ‘scandal’, Paul seems to be saying: either the scandal of a crucified Messiah, or the scandal of a destroyed fellow-believer. The cross at the heart of God means the cross at the heart of the worldview-symbol which is the united and holy family itself. All this follows directly from the belief in inaugurated-eschatological monotheism, the belief that Israel’s God has returned in the person of Jesus.

This vital move, the direct consequence of the revised *Shema*, does not leave behind the Jewish context in which, as we saw, to pray the *Shema* is to invoke and commit oneself to God’s kingdom. In the very similar passage in Romans 14, where Paul has once again been using an essentially monotheistic argument to ground his appeal to regard food, drink and holy days as ‘things indifferent’, he explains:

¹⁷God’s kingdom, you see, isn’t about food and drink, but about justice, peace, and joy in the holy spirit. ¹⁸Anyone who serves the Messiah like this pleases God and deserves respect from other people. [154](#)

In other words, Paul sees the community of those who live by the rule of the one God, one lord – which is the community of the crucified Messiah, defined by him in his death and resurrection (14.9) – as the community in and through whom God’s sovereign rule is coming to birth. To pray the revised *Shema*, just as much as the ancient one, was to take upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom. Putting 1 Corinthians 8 together with Romans 14, we can say that for Paul those who pray the *Shema* in the new way are thereby committed to the sovereign rule of the one true God coming true through the victory of Jesus the Messiah on the cross in the past, and

through the victory he will win over all enemies, including death itself, in the future (1 Corinthians 15.20–8). In between those two victories, however, there will be a third: the quiet but significant victory which comes about as members of his family learn to live, not by insisting on their rights, but by looking out for one another's needs and consciences. This is how the community will learn to live together as the united and holy people of God, which is Paul's principal aim at so many points: by the prayerful understanding, with renewed minds, of the identity of the one God, one lord.

This sends us back to 1 Corinthians 8—10, this time to the conclusion of the long argument.¹⁵⁵ Paul has spent chapter 9 explaining his own apostolic practice of 'freedom', of knowing what his 'rights' are and then not insisting on them, in order to ground his appeal to the 'strong' that they should not insist on theirs. He then moves, in chapter 10, to a serious warning against idolatry – perhaps knowing that some will be tempted to say that they are 'strong' because they want to be 'allowed' to flirt once more with idolatry and the behaviour that goes with it. Not so, he says: you are the new-exodus people (10.1–13), the people upon whom 'the ends of the ages have come' (10.11).¹⁵⁶ You must learn from the mistakes of the first exodus-people; you must discover what it means that the Rock is the Messiah (10.4).¹⁵⁷ And this means that, for the 'strong' as well, there must be none of the false logic that draws from 'monotheism' the conclusion that, since idols don't exist, one might as well visit their temples from time to time. Paul does not draw back an inch from his basic principle, which he grounds in scripture: 'The earth and its fullness belong to the lord.' The opening line of Psalm 24 gives as clear a statement of creational monotheism as one could wish, providing clear and unambiguous permission to 'eat whatever is sold in the market without making any judgments on the basis of conscience' (10.25).

But there is more to this quotation than meets the eye. As often, Paul may well have more than the individual verse in mind, and when we look at the whole psalm other perspectives emerge.¹⁵⁸

First, the psalm is not just a statement about the fact that ‘the lord’, having made all things, now owns all things, so that his people can expect to enjoy them. It is a strong appeal for monotheistic worship and holiness of life, focused on access to the Temple:

Who shall ascend the hill of YHWH? And who shall stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.¹⁵⁹

‘Lifting up their souls to what is false’: in other words, to idols, false divinities. Yes, we hear as Paul quotes the first verse: monotheism means that the lord owns all things and gives them freely to you. But this also means that you must worship him alone, and that you must abjure the behaviour that idolatry awakens. That is exactly the message of 1 Corinthians 10, as we see in another biblical allusion in verse 22 (‘Surely you don’t want to provoke the lord to jealousy? We aren’t stronger than him, are we?’), which echoes one of Paul’s favourite passages, Deuteronomy 32.¹⁶⁰

But there is still more. Those who follow the Psalmist’s call to monotheistic holiness

will receive blessing from YHWH, and vindication from the God of their salvation.¹⁶¹

Paul has already spoken of the key motivation for avoiding idolatry: we are the people who eat and drink at the table of the Messiah, and we must not also share the table of demons (10.16–22). The way he makes this point provides another echo of the psalm:

¹⁶The cup of blessing which we bless is a sharing in the Messiah’s blood, isn’t it? The bread we break is a sharing in the Messiah’s body, isn’t it? ¹⁷There is one loaf; well, then, there may be several of us, but we are one body, because we all share the one loaf.¹⁶²

The *blessing* is the thing, and one must not trample upon it. The cultic setting of the psalm, with the cleansing of hands and heart in order to share in the worship, is matched exactly by Paul’s appeal. He has not abandoned the Jewish call for holiness; merely redefined it. Nor need we be in doubt as

to how – at least in 1 Corinthians – Paul would have understood the closing verses of the psalm:

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the king of glory may come in.
Who is the king of glory?

YHWH, strong and mighty, YHWH, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the king of glory may come in.

Who is this king of glory?

YHWH of hosts, he is the king of glory.¹⁶³

The king of glory who, mighty in battle, has now entered into the place where earth and heaven meet, and who is celebrated as such by his followers – this king, Paul would have said, is Jesus the Messiah. He is the one, mighty in battle, who has won the initial victory and will go on to win the final one (1 Corinthians 15.20–8). And this, finally, increases the probability that when Paul quotes Psalm 24.1 in 1 Corinthians 10.26 he understands *kyrios*, as in 8.6, to refer to Jesus himself.¹⁶⁴ Paul's entire argument in 1 Corinthians 8–10 is rooted in a second-Temple monotheism reworked around Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah, and reapplied, in the new eschatological situation that has thereby come about (10.11), to the life of the community that invokes him, that eats at his table, shares his blessing and celebrates his victory. The fresh theology provides the stable basis for the united, holy community, even though that community has none of the regular Jewish worldview-symbols on which to rely for support. And that fresh theology – creational, eschatological and cultic monotheism, brought into three dimensions through having the crucified Jesus at its heart – finds its richest and densest expression in Paul's radical revision of the *Shema*. 'For us there is one *theos*, one *kyrios*.'

(d) Creation, Exodus and Wisdom: Colossians 1

We have already studied the theme of 'wisdom' in the second-Temple period from various angles, and found it almost ubiquitous, closely linked to the themes of king and Temple, expressive of that great flow of narrative

and symbol in which the world's creator is revealed as Israel's God, the giver of Torah, the one who dwells in the Temple, the one who acts through the chosen king, the one who renews the covenant ... 'Wisdom', in other words, is not so much (as one might think from some studies) a kind of added extra in second-Temple theology, an interesting metaphor or personification to be dropped into an argument to add extra flavour. To speak of 'wisdom' is to draw together several themes into a rich and coherent picture.

To speak of this 'wisdom' is, after all, to speak of the creator God as good, wise, fruitful, utterly and beautifully creative and inventive, unveiling creation as the theatre of his spectacular and harmonious work, revealing Israel (the recipients of Torah, itself conceived as a wisdom-vehicle) as the true humanity reflecting God's image, disclosing the Temple as the place of God's 'dwelling', and, not least, revealing God's plan for the future, the secret wisdom made known in glimpses and mysteries to sages and seers, to (what we call) apocalyptists and mystics. 'Wisdom' is to be found in all of this and more.

Granted all this, and granted all that we have said so far about Paul's vision of Jesus himself, it would be a reasonable hypothesis that he would apply this 'wisdom' teaching, in some way or other, to Jesus. As we have already hinted, some of the passages we have been studying do just this. God 'sends' the son, according to Romans 8.3 and Galatians 4.4, just as the creator 'sends' Wisdom into the world, into the Temple, into Israel, in and as Torah:

Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people ...
'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist ...
Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway.¹⁶⁵
Among all these I sought a resting-place; in whose territory should I abide?
Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent.
He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.'
Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.
In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion ...
All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God,
the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob.¹⁶⁶

This famous ‘wisdom’ poem is matched by the one quoted above in connection with Romans 8, namely the ‘prayer of Solomon’ from Wisdom of Solomon 9. These poems are rich and dense in motif and allusion. They draw together almost every important aspect of the Jewish monotheism of the period: the good creation; humans made to rule God’s world; the revelation to Israel through Torah; God’s powerful rescuing action in the exodus and his tabernacling presence in the Temple; the sending forth both of Wisdom and of the ‘holy spirit’ to guide and direct humans in general, Israel in particular, and above all the Davidic king. Sirach is claiming that Israel’s one God has really returned to dwell in the Temple, under the form of the ‘wisdom’ which one acquires through the study and teaching of Torah, the ‘book of the covenant’. (Since the book climaxes with the portrait of the high priest, the central figure both in the Temple-liturgy and in the teaching of Torah, this is hardly surprising.) Wisdom is claiming that the divine breath by which the world was made was available, on request, to the kings of the earth (and to Israel’s king in particular) to enable them to fulfil their awesome responsibilities.

This is the combination of traditional belief which Paul has taken and poured through the funnel of his breathtaking christology into the passages we have already studied. This is the set of themes latent within 1 Corinthians 8.6, with its sense of creation and redemption being accomplished *through* Jesus the Messiah; within Romans 8.3 and Galatians 4.4, with the ‘sending of the son’; within the passages we shall study in the next section, where the Messiah constitutes the renewed Temple, the dwelling place of the living God. And this is the set of themes which emerge in the poem which ranks with Sirach 24, Wisdom 9 and Baruch 3 as among the greatest monotheistic poems of the period.¹⁶⁷

This one, though, is different from those three predecessors in the same way that 1 Corinthians 8.6 is different from the *Shema*. Here, just as with Philippians 2.6–11, we find Jesus himself at the heart of the freshly inscribed monotheistic celebration:

¹⁵He is the image of God, the invisible one,

the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶For in him all things were created,
in the heavens and here on the earth.
Things we can see and things we cannot,
– thrones and lordships and rulers and powers –
all things were created both through him and for him.

¹⁷And he is ahead, prior to all else
and in him all things hold together;

¹⁸and he himself is supreme, the head
over the body, the church.

He is the start of it all,
firstborn from realms of the dead;
so in all things he might be the chief.

¹⁹For in him all the Fullness was glad to dwell
²⁰and through him to reconcile all to himself,
making peace through the blood of his cross,
through him – yes, things on the earth,
and also the things in the heavens.^{[168](#)}

This translation of the well-known poem attempts to bring out the balance between the different elements, and also, crucially, the structural divisions which are more obvious in Greek than in English (though I have tried to make it obvious in the way the poem has been here translated and printed), especially the way in which verse 17 and the first two lines of 18 form a closely balanced middle section in between the outer sections of verses 15 and 16 on the one hand and 18b, 19 and 20 on the other.^{[169](#)}

This is not the place for a complete exegesis of this stunning passage.^{[170](#)} Nor is it the moment to justify, over against the doubters, the satisfying rightness of C. F. Burney's brilliant hypothesis about the way in which the writer^{[171](#)} has exploited (a) the link of Proverbs 8.22 ('YHWH created me the beginning of his way', *reshith darcō, archē hodōn autou*) with Genesis 1.1 ('in the beginning', *bereshith, en archē*) and (b) the three possible meanings of the preposition *be* and the four possible meanings of *reshith* in that first word of scripture.^{[172](#)} Who knows what distant ears may hear, of echoes far, allusions near, of rhythms strange and unexpected, patterns

earlier undetected? My point here is that, whatever subtleties of poetic composition and biblical (quasi-rabbinic?) allusion we may discern, the poem taken at face value displays exactly that blend of second-Temple monotheism and early, high christology which we have seen to be characteristic of Paul all through. It is a classic statement of the one creator God, Israel's God, and of the one 'through whom' or 'in whom' this God accomplishes every stage of his work. And the 'work' in question, we note, is once again the exodus (see below on 1.13–14). We have, in other words, the same combination of themes that we have observed, in very different contexts, in the other passages studied so far.

What, then, needs to be said about this passage in relation to the christological redefinition of second-Temple monotheism? How does this poem express what Bauckham calls a 'christology of divine identity' while adding the particular dimension of the long-awaited return of Israel's God to his people and to the world?

First, as to the monotheism. The balance of the two main sections displays just that balance of creation and redemption which is so characteristic of the Psalms and other ancient Israelite poetry, not least in Isaiah 40—55: the creator is also the redeemer, and vice versa, and when redemption happens it will be as a result of the long-awaited return of the creator in person. This has the effect of ruling out, before it can even begin, any suggestion of dualism, of a God who might be invoked to rescue people *from* an evil creation. (The suggestion which used to be made, that the poem had a gnostic origin, always was absurd.¹⁷³) No: creation is good and God-given, and the work of redemption in verses 18b–20 has nothing to do with abandoning creation and beginning again in some different mode. It is aimed precisely at *new creation*. The poem does not downplay the problems which have arisen within the good creation. That is why there was a task (here unexplained) of 'reconciliation' to be undertaken, as in verse 20. But the problems have not stretched the competence of the creator God. Through the one spoken of here in the third person, the one through whom all things were made in the first place, the creator has accomplished that work of redemption, drawing a line straight down through the world,

declaring ‘you are here’ to the surprised Colossians and to anyone else listening in. Heaven and earth and all that is in them, including all the power structures of the world, were created ‘in him, through him and for him’ and are now reconciled ‘to him and through him’.

So who is this ‘he’? Clearly, it is Jesus the Messiah; but, interestingly, the immediately prior description of him is in terms both of ‘sonship’ and of his ‘kingdom’. The poem flows out of Paul’s prayer for the young church, with its echoes of the rescue and ‘redemption’ which found their historical anchor in the exodus, the time when the one God revealed himself in action and then came to dwell in the midst of his people:

I pray that you will learn to give thanks to the father, who has made you fit to share the inheritance of God’s holy ones in the light. ¹³He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son [literally, ‘the son of his love’, *tou huiou tēs agapēs autou*].
¹⁴He is the one in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁷⁴

The poem is thus linked closely to the themes we have already studied. What has been accomplished through Jesus is the rescuing kingdom-act of Israel’s one God. But its particular christological contribution lies, clearly, in the far more explicit unfolding of the way in which both creation and redemption are accomplished ‘through’ the Messiah, God’s son; in other words, in the large expansion of the *dia*, ‘through’, which we observed in the terse prayer of 1 Corinthians 8.6. Paul thus both draws on and relativizes the Jewish wisdom-tradition represented for us in Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. ¹⁷⁵ If it’s ‘wisdom’ you want, he is saying, you have it all in the Messiah (he draws out exactly this point in 2.3): you can find it in and through the one we now know as Jesus, the ‘son of the father’s love’, in whom all things were created, and through whom all things have been reconciled. The appropriateness of the Messiah, David’s heir, Solomon’s true successor, as the living embodiment of Wisdom would not be lost on anyone who knew Wisdom 9 or 1 Kings 3, just as the appropriateness of this figure coming to embody the newly built Temple (see below) would be clear to anyone who knew those passages and Sirach 24, and was aware that

Solomon's building of the Temple was the major achievement that followed the gift of divine wisdom.

Whether or not Burney was right (though I think he was) to suggest a more subtle exegesis of Genesis 1.1, the mention of the Messiah as both 'image' (verse 15) and 'beginning' (verse 18b) would assuredly send the first-century Jewish ear back to the opening of the Bible. And if, as we considered possible in our earlier discussion, that same first-century ear would discern in the six-day pattern of Genesis 1 a reference to the building of a temple – the whole creation, heaven and earth, as the dwelling place for the creator – then we would not be surprised to discover temple-language, and the language of the divine indwelling within the completed building, within the poem itself. What is more surprising is that, whereas we might expect the poem to speak of the Messiah now dwelling in the new creation, we find instead 'the fullness of deity' dwelling in the Messiah (verse 19). He is now the true temple, the place where heaven and earth meet (appropriately, since he was God's agent in their creation), the means by which, through his shed blood on the cross, heaven and earth are reconciled to God and, it seems, to one another. Within the strongly implicit wisdom-christology of the poem, then, itself building on the notion of the kingdom of God's son in verse 13, we have a temple-christology, which, granted the larger context indicated by Sirach 24 and Wisdom 9, is just what we should have expected. *This is another Pauline statement about the return of Israel's God.* In case we missed the point first time round, Paul says it again in the next chapter:

In him, you see, all the full measure of divinity has taken up bodily residence.¹⁰ What's more, you are fulfilled in him, since he's the head of all rule and authority.¹⁷⁶

Granted the multiple resonances between this passage and 2 Corinthians 5 (new creation through the Messiah, as a result of God's reconciling love), I suggest we should take the key christological statement there in the same way, as an expression of the full indwelling of divinity in the Messiah for the accomplishment of reconciliation and new creation:

¹⁶From this moment on, therefore, we don't regard anybody from a merely human point of view. Even if we once regarded the Messiah that way, we don't do so any longer. ¹⁷Thus, if anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation! Old things have gone, and look – everything has become new! ¹⁸It all comes from God. He reconciled us to himself through the Messiah, and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹This is how it came about: *God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah*, not counting their transgressions against them, and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation.¹⁷⁷

Or, in the words of the King James Version: *God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself*. This is not to be watered down to *through* Christ, as though the Messiah was a mere agent (as in 'God was punishing Israel *through Assyria*'). By now we have a sufficiently broad-based picture of Paul's christological monotheism to insist that he was saying something much more than this, in line with the earlier statement in 2 Corinthians 4 which is likewise close to the present passage in Colossians, and which we shall study in the next sub-section.

Returning to Colossians, we find this christological monotheism, or monotheistic christology, filled out by the short middle section, verses 17 and 18a, with its two parts each marked with the opening *kai autos*, 'and he'. He – again, the Messiah/Wisdom – is 'ahead, prior to all else', both in the temporal sense and in the sense of ontological priority: he is chief, part of a different order of being, superior not only to ordinary mortal humans but also to angels. 'In him all things hold together': the monotheistic providence with which second-Temple Jews believed the one God governed the world is exercised through the Messiah/Wisdom. Then, in verse 18a, he is the head: not just in relation to 'the body, the church', as though the metaphor of 'head' depended entirely on 'body' at this point, but 'head' in the sense of 'the senior, the supreme one'. He is the place where 'the church' finds its identity, as itself the new creation (once again, we note the obvious resonances with 2 Corinthians 5.17), or at least as the beginning of that much larger project.

This is, then, a christological monotheism which is most obviously *creational*, affirming the goodness of the original creation and announcing the dawn of its renewal. It is also *eschatological* monotheism, in the

inaugurated sense that Jesus, as the divine Wisdom, is in himself the God of Israel who has returned to dwell among his people, and in the future sense that looks ahead to the final accomplishment of what has been launched in the Messiah's resurrection. What is more, it is all in the service of worship, of thanksgiving: it is, in other words, also *cultic* monotheism. The aim of it all is that the Colossians will learn how to *give thanks* to God the father for all he has done (1.12). Thanksgiving is, in fact, a major theme of the whole letter.¹⁷⁸ And this thanksgiving is the exact correlate of creational and covenantal monotheism, the appropriate response of God's people to their creator, rescuer and lord. It is what the Psalms are all about. It is the glad celebration of the goodness of God the creator, and the special and particular goodness which has now rescued people in and through the Messiah. Colossians as a whole, and especially in the poem which encapsulates its main theme, is one of the finest expressions of second-Temple monotheism, and all redefined and reworked around Jesus the Messiah.

[\(e\) 2 Corinthians 3 and 4](#)

We alluded just now to the start of 2 Corinthians 4, which bears a close relationship to the themes we have seen in Colossians 1. The similarity is more than skin deep. This is a passage where the echoes of exodus are profound, speaking directly to the question of a christology of divine identity reworked around the notion that, in Jesus, Israel's God has finally returned.

The point is often missed because of the complexity of the exposition at the end of 2 Corinthians 3, where Paul compares his own hearers with those of Moses. The hearts of Moses' hearers were hard, so that the glory on Moses' face had to be veiled. The hearts of Paul's hearers, however, had been transformed by the new-covenant work of the spirit through which the one God had accomplished what the Mosaic Torah could not (3.1–6), so that they could now gaze at the glory of the Lord without a veil. This passage comes up for fuller treatment elsewhere in the present volume.¹⁷⁹

Many commentators simply assume that the biblical context of the passage Paul is using is irrelevant. Indeed, many have declared that Paul would not, left to himself, have wanted to drag Moses into his argument, and that he only did so because his opponents forced him into it. Whatever the likelihood of opponents in Corinth quoting Moses against him, what we have in the present passage, from at least 3.7 through to 4.6, is a sustained reflection on one of the most important and profound incidents in the Pentateuch, one with continuing relevance for the second-Temple Jewish expectation of the return of YHWH, that aspect of eschatological monotheism which formed such a vital part of the question (Bauckham's question) of *who* God was (as opposed to *what* God was). He was *the God who had promised to come back*. And that return, to dwell in the restored Temple as in Ezekiel 43, looked back to the scriptural precedent in Exodus 32—40. After the sin of the golden calf, YHWH had declared to Moses that he would no longer accompany the Israelites on their journey.¹⁸⁰ He would absent himself. The tabernacle (whose building-plan Moses had already received) would not be constructed, since it would have no inhabitant. But then Moses intercedes for the people. It is a moving account, which forms the turning-point for the whole book, and thus in a measure for the whole Pentateuch: will YHWH go up in the midst of his people to the promised inheritance, or will he not? Will the tabernacle, the little cosmos, be built in Israel's midst, like a little Eden, or will it not?

Part of the complexity of the passage lies in the repeated use of the Hebrew *panim*, 'face'. (The Septuagint gives up at this point, treating 'face' simply as a synonym for 'God himself'.) Despite having said that YHWH and Moses were accustomed to speak with one another 'face to face', *panim el-panim*,¹⁸¹ YHWH now solemnly declares that even Moses will not see his face, because nobody can do that and live. Thus the 'face' of Israel's God will go with the people, in answer to Moses' earnest prayer; but Moses himself, though granted a vision of the divine glory (consisting, it seems, of a recital of the divine characteristics, 'who God is' once more), will not see his face:

Moses said to YHWH, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' He said, 'My presence [*panai*] will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he said to him, 'If your presence [*paneika*] will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.'

YHWH said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "YHWH"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But', he said, 'you cannot see my face [*panai*]; for no one shall see me and live.' And YHWH continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face [*panai*] shall not be seen.'¹⁸²

And so it happens. The divine glory is displayed before Moses, but he does not see the divine face. More commands and injunctions are issued, and then finally Moses comes back down the mountain to the frightened, waiting people. That is the point at which Moses' face shines, because he has been talking with God. The people are afraid, so he puts on a veil when speaking to them, taking it off again when he goes back into the tent of meeting to speak with God.

Only after this is the tabernacle finally constructed, with all its furniture, the priestly vestments and so forth. Then, at last,

the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle.¹⁸³

Divine presence, despite Israel's sin; divine glory, despite Israel's shame. This closing scene provides both the huge sigh of relief at the end of the dramatic, long-drawn-out story of Israel's rebellion at the giving of Torah, and also the closure of the longer narrative that began in the garden of Eden. Despite idolatry, rebellion and sin, Israel has been constituted as the new humanity, the people in whose midst the glory of the one God had

deigned to dwell, leading them on their journey to the promised inheritance. The tabernacle is indeed the sign of new creation: the glory that fills it now will one day fill the whole world.¹⁸⁴

There are no doubt mysteries in plenty to be pondered in all this. But it seems clear where Paul was taking the story.¹⁸⁵ Any second-Temple Jew, reading the exodus narrative and knowing the present Temple to be frustratingly incomplete, would pick up the sense of closure in the text, the fresh act of grace through which YHWH came, despite everything, to dwell with his people, and would long for the same thing to happen once more, for the prophecies of Isaiah 40.5 to come true ('Then the glory of YHWH shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together'), for the prayer of Isaiah 64.1 to be answered ('O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence'). The exodus-narrative, in other words, would point forwards to the moment when Israel's eschatological monotheism would be fulfilled, and YHWH would return to his people at last.

This is the context in which we can see the full import of the statement about Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4.3–6:

However, if our gospel still remains 'veiled', it is veiled for people who are perishing. What's happening there is that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they won't see the light of the gospel of the glory of the Messiah, who is God's image.⁵ We don't proclaim ourselves, you see, but Jesus the Messiah as lord, and ourselves as your servants because of Jesus;⁶ because the God who said 'let light shine out of darkness' has shone in our hearts, to produce the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah.

The Messiah as God's image; as the *kyrios* of the world; as the one through whom new creation has come about, the one in whose very face we recognize, in our hearts, 'the light of the knowledge of God's glory': all this is very similar to Colossians 1, and likewise expressive of wisdom-christology, temple-christology and 'glory'-christology. It is, in other words, classic second-Temple monotheism, redesigned around Jesus.¹⁸⁶ It is, in particular, the transposition into the new key of the twin themes of 'face' and 'glory'. The God who would not show his face to Moses has shown his

face to his people in and as Jesus. To speak of seeing ‘the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah’, in the context of a long discussion of Exodus 33—4, can only mean one thing. *The God who abandoned Israel at the exile, because of idolatry and sin, but who promised to return one day, as he had done in Exodus after the threat of withdrawing his ‘presence’, has returned at last in and as Jesus the Messiah.* When we read 2 Corinthians 4 in the light of the expectation of YHWH’s return, the high christology, as the expression of creational, cultic and above all eschatological monotheism, rings out clearly. Like all Paul’s high christology, it is of course focused remarkably on Jesus as the *crucified* one; he has redefined Messiahship around his cross. And, as we shall now see in Philippians 2, he has thereby dramatically redefined the very meaning of the word ‘God’ itself.

[\(f\) Philippians 2.6–11](#)

There can be no question about Paul’s awareness of what he was doing. By the time he was writing the letters, he was, like Shakespeare, doing nothing by accident.¹⁸⁷ An intelligent second-Temple Jew could not use the language he used about Jesus, and about Israel’s one God, without intending the meanings we are discerning. His redrawing of the monotheism of divine identity around Jesus was not arbitrary, a flight of theological fancy. Nor was it simply stuck on to the outside of his view of God, the world, idolatry and the coming judgment. On the contrary, it was right at the heart of it all:

⁹And so God has greatly exalted him,
And to him in his favour has given
The name which is over all names:

¹⁰That now at the name of Jesus
Every knee within heaven shall bow –
On earth, too, and under the earth;

¹¹And every tongue shall confess
That Jesus, Messiah, is lord,

To the glory of God, the father.¹⁸⁸

This is of course the second half of the famous poem of Philippians 2. Entire monographs have been written on this passage, and we have no space here to offer the full exegesis for which it cries out.¹⁸⁹ I leave aside, too, the question of original authorship. Paul might have written it himself; it is not unknown for authors to quote their own previous work; or he might have incorporated the work of another, which again is not unknown; but one does not do such a thing without considering quite carefully the way in which the incorporated work contributes to one's intended theme. One does not invite extra birds to nest in one's tree for decorative purposes alone. I therefore treat the poem as, at least in its present context, a deliberate statement of exactly what Paul wanted to say at this point.¹⁹⁰

For our present purpose seven points must be made, and made with full and due emphasis.

First, and most important, the whole poem is itself a glorious reaffirmation of second-Temple eschatological monotheism. The key scriptural allusion comes in verse 10, and the passage evoked, Isaiah 45, is by common consent one of the most important texts from one of the most important monotheistic affirmations in the whole of Israel's scripture:

Assemble yourselves and come together, draw near, you survivors of the nations!
They have no knowledge – those who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together!

Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old?

Was it not I, YHWH? There is no other god besides me,

A righteous God and a Saviour; there is no one besides me.

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return:

'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'

Only in YHWH, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength;

All who were incensed against him shall come to him and be ashamed.

In YHWH all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory.¹⁹¹

And on goes the prophet in a scathing denunciation of Bel, Nebo and the Babylonians who worship them.¹⁹² YHWH will not share his glory with another; he will not allow carved images to steal the praise that is his alone.¹⁹³ The Isaiah text, which conveys this sense of majestic monotheism, is not added on to Paul's poem as a kind of closing flourish, a surface adornment on a poem which has been about something else. Isaiah's extended poem (chapters 40—55) is a statement of that same monotheism, celebrating the strange but victorious work of Israel's God, triumphing over all evil, and his enthronement as the world's true lord. It is a central statement of kingdom-of-God theology in the face of the powers and rulers of the world.

It is, in particular, a central statement, perhaps *the* central statement, of *the return of YHWH to Zion*. The glory will come back (40.5); the watchmen will see and declare it as 'the good news' (40.9); he will come with power, and his 'arm' will rule for him (40.10). He will come as the creator, reducing idols to the worthless rubbish they are, and princes of the earth to irrelevance (40.12–26). He will be with his people on their journey home (43.2). He will act because of his own righteousness; the promise that to him alone every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear is itself 'a word in righteousness that shall not return' (45.23).¹⁹⁴ He will place salvation in Zion 'for Israel my glory' (46.13).¹⁹⁵ He will bring his righteousness near; his arm will rule the peoples (51.5). The messengers who announce the good news will see the great, central event for which Israel had longed:

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'
Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of YHWH to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;

for YHWH has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

YHWH has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.¹⁹⁶

Israel's one God will do all this, comforting and restoring his people (chapter 54) and issuing an invitation to the whole world to come and join in the blessing (chapter 55). And all will be done through the powerful divine 'word' which will not fail to accomplish its purpose (40.8; 45.23; 55.11).

All this might be enough to keep one occupied. But of course the mysterious power of this prophetic tapestry is found in the strange, dark strand which is woven in at four key moments. These are the poems which speak of the vocation and accomplishment of the 'servant', who at one level is 'Israel' and at another level stands over against 'Israel', doing for the people what they cannot do for themselves.¹⁹⁷ And the 'servant', in the final climactic poem, is finally identified as 'the arm of YHWH', albeit unrecognizable in his shameful and disfigured state (53.1). The prophet never resolves this puzzle. Somehow the work of the 'servant', and specifically the redemptive achievement of his suffering and death, are the manifestation in action of the divine 'righteousness', the accomplishment of the divine 'salvation', and above all the full expression of what it means that YHWH, Israel's one God, has at last returned in glory to Zion. He has come back to be enthroned, not only as Israel's true king but as king of the world.

This is, of course, a 'Pauline' exegesis of Isaiah 40—55. So far as I know, the passage was not being read in this way before the public career of Jesus.¹⁹⁸ But when we draw out its central themes in this way and place them as it were on a facing page to Philipians 2.6–11 we discover that not only can a highly plausible case be made for saying that the entire Pauline poem is a fresh meditation on the original Isaianic passage, but that once again Paul's christological revision of Israel's monotheism of divine identity has taken place at its key eschatological moment. *This is what it looked like when YHWH returned to Zion.* The God who refused to share

his glory with another has shared it with Jesus; because Jesus has accomplished the task which Israel's God had declared that, at the heart of his 'return', he would accomplish himself. I thus reaffirm the case made recently by Richard Bauckham, that we should almost certainly see here a reference to the Isaianic 'suffering servant'.¹⁹⁹ The idea of the one who is humble and obedient to the divine saving plan, all the way to death, and is then vindicated, is so clearly an echo of the fourth 'song' in particular, and it is so clear that Paul has Isaiah 45 in mind in the climax to the present poem, that it is more reasonable to allow the allusion, and with it the rich scriptural theology of the whole of Isaiah 40—66, than to disallow it out of caution (or, as it may be, out of fear of the theological consequences). Where I go beyond Bauckham is in drawing the implication: Paul, here as elsewhere, is drawing out the christological focus of the ancient Isaianic hope for YHWH's return.

The first thing to note about the present passage, then, is that when read within the context of ancient Jewish hope as expressed classically in scripture it offers itself as a statement of fulfilment. This is how Israel's God came back to do what he had promised.

Second, therefore, this majestic, exultant scriptural declaration of the absolute uniqueness of Israel's God, and his victory over all idols, is the passage chosen as the vehicle through which now to say: the God who will not share his glory with another *has shared it with Jesus*. At the name of *Jesus* 'every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess' (the Septuagint of Isaiah 45.23 has 'shall confess God', *exomologēsetai tō theō*). But what they will now confess is not simply 'God', as in Isaiah, but 'that Jesus, Messiah, is *kyrios*': the last word in that sentence is the first in the Greek, *kyrios Iēsous Christos*. And there can be neither doubt nor cavil, here as in many other cases in Paul, that when Paul writes *kyrios* in relation to Jesus he means his readers to understand, as anyone familiar with the Septuagint would understand, the word YHWH.

The best word for this might be 'explosive'. Paul must have known exactly what he was doing. At the centre of his Jewish-style monotheism is a human being who lived, died and rose in very recent memory. Jesus is not

a new God added to a pantheon. He is the human being in whom YHWH, Israel's one and only God, has acted within cosmic history, human history and Israel's history to do for Israel, humanity and the world what they could not do for themselves. Jesus is to be seen as *part of the identity of Israel's God*, and vice versa. Israel had longed for its God to return after his extended absence. Paul, like the writers of the gospels, saw that longing fulfilled in Jesus.

Third, there should likewise be no doubt that when Paul says that Jesus has received 'the name which is over all names', that name is the holy, divine name, YHWH itself.²⁰⁰ This theme must then be joined up with Paul's multiple references elsewhere to the 'name' either of God or of Jesus. Now, when people hear the name 'Jesus', they are to bow down, because with that name there is given 'the name above all names'. Jesus, Messiah, is *kyrios*, is YHWH. That is why Paul can speak of things being done 'for the sake of his name', or things happening through Jesus for the sake of God's name. This is a rich seam of thought which we here simply mention.²⁰¹ This too is a major monotheistic motif – the 'name' of the one true God over against all the other 'names' that might be named around the world²⁰² – which Paul has transferred to Jesus himself.

Fourth, the use of such a clear 'YHWH-text' in reference to Jesus opens up the possibility, which has in recent years been extensively studied, of reading several other similar texts the same way. We shall study some of the other central texts in this category in due course.²⁰³

The fifth point to be noted clearly in Philippians 2.9–11 is the striking differentiation, within this emphatically monotheistic construction, between Jesus the *kyrios* and 'the father'. Confessing Jesus as *kyrios* brings glory to God the father, just as in 1 Corinthians 15.26–8 all things are put in subjection under the Messiah's feet, and then the Messiah himself hands over the sovereignty to the father, so that God is 'all in all'. How are we to explain this remarkable phenomenon (which we shall presently see repeated in other passages)?

One way of explaining this differentiation within a monotheistic statement might be to appeal to pre-Christian Jewish notions of apparently

similar phenomena: Philo's *deuteros theos*, for example, or the hypothetical 'great angel' postulated by some as a 'second divinity' within ancient Israel.²⁰⁴ The work of Richard Bauckham has more or less barred the way to this kind of explanation.²⁰⁵ There were various ways of speaking in a differentiated fashion about the one God of second-Temple Judaism, some of which ways may function in retrospect as signposts to what we find here in Paul. But in no case do they have any sense of referring to an actual human being in recent memory. The one counter-example which might prove the rule is the high-flown language about the Messiah, drawn most likely from Daniel 7 and elsewhere, which as we saw was apparently used by Akiba himself, whose orthodoxy, though not unimpeachable (a clever later rabbi could pick holes in almost anyone), was certainly hard to question at the time.²⁰⁶ This cautious and apparently risky exploration of the meaning of Messiahship in some strands of Judaism may have provided raw material for the early Christian innovation, but that is rather like saying that the compositor in the music publishing house had a stack of crochets, quavers and minims all ready for the first chord of Beethoven's first symphony. Raw material may be a necessary condition of the music's appearance, but it hardly explains the new thing that then happened. The clear, sharp and unambiguous statements by Paul stand out in a different category from anything we find among his second-Temple near-contemporaries. The only explanation is the obvious one: what drove him to this remarkable fresh use of existing categories, and then to his own coinages out beyond that, was the fact of Jesus – his messianic life and death, and particularly his resurrection and exaltation, without which, of course, his life and death would not have been seen as messianic in the first place.²⁰⁷

The sixth point about Philippians 2.9–11 is the way the first half of the poem contributes to the meaning. I have written about this extensively elsewhere and can here briefly summarize. Here are the three stanzas, with Paul's introduction:

⁵This is how you should think among yourselves – with the mind that you have because you belong to the Messiah, Jesus:

⁶Who, though in God's form, did not
Regard his equality with God
As something he ought to exploit.

⁷Instead, he emptied himself,
And received the form of a slave,
Being born in the likeness of humans.

And then, having human appearance,

⁸He humbled himself, and became
Obedient even to death,
Yes, even the death of the cross.^{[208](#)}

Six sub-points now, apocalypse-like, within this sixth point. First, there is no reasonable doubt that the poem refers to Jesus as the human being who is to be identified with one who, prior to his human conception and birth, was 'in God's form', and who, being already 'equal with God', neither snatched at such a status (he did not need to, since he already possessed it), nor abandoned it, as has often been thought, but rather *gave it its proper interpretation*: not the self-aggrandizement one might have imagined, but a life and a death of self-emptying, humble service.^{[209](#)}

Second, I persist in thinking that among the many resonances of this poem we are right to discern an echo of Adam in Genesis 1—3. Adam is made to be God's vicegerent over creation, the role which Jesus himself attains in 2.9–11. Adam covets 'equality with God', and thereby incurs the penalty of death; Jesus, already possessing that equality, dies Adam's death as the supreme act of 'obedience', which at once resonates with that most famous Adam/Messiah passage, Romans 5.12–21.^{[210](#)} The fact that the poem is about much more than this does not mean that we must rule Adam out. On the contrary, the apparent echo of Genesis 1.26 in 2.7, and of Psalm 8.5–6 in the poem as a whole,^{[211](#)} should alert us to the fact that, though not the main theme, the Adamic reference must not be ignored.^{[212](#)} Part of Paul's overall narrative world, as we saw, is that God's eventual solution to Israel's

plight will thereby solve Adam's plight, and through that in turn re-establish God's kingdom over the whole creation.

Third, we should also see, as I did not see twenty-five years ago in my earlier work on this passage, a clear allusion, relevant not least to the Philippians, to the imperial ideology which, having already been clear enough from the time of Alexander onwards, was now flooding the world in a new form through Augustus and his successors. Jesus is lord, so Caesar is not; his are among the knees that will bow at Jesus' name. The Philippians need to know this if they are to figure out what their own version of 'salvation' means, as opposed to the version which Caesar was enthusiastically proclaiming.²¹³

Fourth, this robustly monotheistic poem is introduced primarily in the service of the unity of the church. Verse 5 indicates, not a new topic to verses 1–4, but the way in which their impassioned and detailed appeal for unity is to be accomplished. The Philippians are to think in the same way, to be in full accord, of one mind, having the same love, to renounce ambition and vanity, and to look out for one another's best interests. This apparently impossible ideal is theirs because, being 'in the Messiah', they have 'the mind of the Messiah', as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2.16; and the Messiah's mind is as we find it in 2.6–8. Learning that mind, and following that path, is the only way to the unity which, as we saw earlier, is so vital as the central feature of Paul's worldview. Here we see, indeed, the development of our key point, the fulcrum of our entire book: for this worldview-symbol to stand, granted that it has been shorn of the symbolic praxis of second-Temple Judaism (circumcision, food laws, sabbath, Temple and so forth), what is required is the robust monotheism that will enable the community to hold firm around its centre. That robust monotheism has been, for Paul, fully rethought around Jesus the Messiah. Messiah-shaped monotheism, focused on self-emptying and crucifixion, is the only thing which will enable the community to hold on to unity and holiness.

Fifth, the poem as it stands thus points onwards to the ecclesiology of 3.2–11. As we shall see in the next chapter, the pattern of christological

monotheism turns naturally and properly into the pattern of christological election.

Sixth (the last sub-point): the fulcrum of the poem – the extra line around which everything else balances – is of course the last line of verse 8, *thanatou de staurou*, ‘even the death of the cross’. It is indeed possible, as some have suggested, that Paul has added this line in between the carefully balanced three-times-three stanzas of an earlier poem. But it is equally possible that either the poem’s original author, or Paul himself if he was that author, saw the Messiah’s shameful crucifixion as the paradoxical but utterly appropriate focal point of the whole picture, the moment when the divine purpose was finally unveiled, confronting empires of every sort with the news of God’s kingdom, and so placed that line deliberately at the midpoint of the narrative. At the centre of the poem, at the climax of the purpose, at the beating heart of all things, stands the sign of shame and glory: all else east or west of Jesus. Exaltation through obedience of God’s equal, of the bearer of the name: at this mere mention kings and princes own allegiance.

To return, then, to 2.9–11, after that sixfold digression within the sixth main point, we come at last to the seventh and last one. The flow of thought across the whole poem is remarkably redolent of those ancient stories of Israelite and Jewish heroes, from Joseph to Daniel, who faced shame, humiliation and suffering, and were then exalted to become senior rulers (in Joseph’s case, second ruler) in their respective kingdoms.²¹⁴ These stories are, again and again, a way of speaking of Israel’s God as the one who confronts the pagans with his own kingdom and glory, and whose faithful agents, though suffering in various ways, come to instantiate his rule even in foreign nations. The narrational echoes, resonating back through Israel’s scriptures, are thus themselves echoes of specifically Jewish-monotheistic stories. It is not just that Paul has made Isaiah 45.23, that most sternly monotheistic of texts, the key with which to unlock the mysteries of the Messiah’s identity and achievement. The door which swings open when that key is turned in the lock is the door to the entire scriptural vision of Israel’s one God working out his sovereign purpose through his obedient, and as

often as not suffering, servant, and then exalting that servant to power and glory. The radically new note – that the one thus obedient, suffering and glorified is somehow identified as Israel’s God himself in person – is of course dramatic and startling, but it does not distort or subvert the larger picture. Indeed, that larger picture always included the promise that Israel’s God would come back in person to rescue his people and establish his kingdom, even though nobody imagined that this event would look like the story we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Paul’s picture of Jesus the Messiah, exalted as *kyrios*, does not destroy Jewish monotheism. It fulfils it.

One fascinating verse from another letter may be added here as a tailpiece. Writing to the recalcitrant Corinthians, and teasing them somewhat about the collection money which he was hoping they would have ready in time for his arrival, Paul drops in, almost as a casual aside, a remark about Jesus which, without the other passages we are examining, might be taken in various different ways but which, in the light of Philippians 2 in particular, must be taken as a further indication of the divine status of the one who became human in order to rescue the world:

You know the grace of our lord, King Jesus: he was rich, but because of you he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.^{[215](#)}

It is of course open to anyone to point out that the specific means by which Jesus ‘made people rich’ is the cross, and that since Paul is here asking for self-sacrificial giving that itself makes good sense in the context. But Jesus’ descent from ‘rich’ to ‘poor’ does not seem a good description of, say, a supposed contrast between the early and ‘successful’ days of his Galilean ministry and the later, sorrowful march to the cross. Much more appropriate, with most commentators, is a reading which lines up the verse alongside Philippians 2.6–8. The cross is at the end of the road, to be sure; but the path to the cross begins with the becoming human of the one who from all eternity was ‘equal with God’. And, once again, part of the shock of this verse is that Paul can drop such a remark into a different context without any further explanation. He and the Corinthians had many controversial things to sort out, but he could take this point for granted.

What he is saying and implying here must be something which was common coin across all his churches, indeed across the whole early church. Without that, he could not so naturally have appealed to it.

(g) Jesus and the Return of YHWH: Conclusion

My argument so far is that the Jewish-style monotheism of ‘divine identity’ which Paul so emphatically reaffirmed had also emphatically been redrawn around Jesus. In particular, I have argued that in several key passages we can detect the overtones of that exodus-based narrative which formed the basis for the hope that YHWH, having long since abandoned Jerusalem to its fate, would one day return to save his people and to establish his glorious presence in the Temple. As we have seen, there is excellent evidence that this was what Paul intended to convey, in one way and another, in one kind of argument or another. For him, Jesus was to be identified within the second-Temple Jewish belief in who the one God was – *and would be*. This is the full expression of the eschatological dimension of monotheism, carrying within itself also the creational and cultic dimensions. In him, that is to say, Israel’s God had indeed returned, and to him therefore could be transferred all that had been said about ‘wisdom’ as the mode of his presence, the ‘wisdom’ through which the worlds were made. He was therefore to be discovered in biblical texts which spoke of the *kyrios*, translating the *adonai* which devout Jews said in preference for the sacred name YHWH; and, as such, was to be worshipped, and invoked in prayer.²¹⁶ The relationship his followers enjoyed with him was to be understood, and could be spoken of, in the way that devout Israelites from ancient times had spoken of their relationship with YHWH himself. So far, so good.

But is this enough to enable us to understand *why* not only Paul, but apparently all his Christian predecessors and contemporaries, came to this belief? I think not. We have demonstrated *that* Paul (and presumably his predecessors and contemporaries) thought of Jesus in categories belonging to Israel’s God, and particularly within the narrative which spoke of the

long-awaited return of this God to Zion. We have not quite explained *why* they would think this way. This brings us to the second major hypothesis of the present chapter.

(iii) Jesus as Risen and Enthroned Messiah

(a) Messiah and 'Son of God'

There are, I suggest, two reasons why Jesus' first followers came to think of him as the embodiment of the returning YHWH. The first has to do with his Messiahship, and we shall examine that now. The second has to do with their sense of his presence through what they understood to be the work of the holy spirit in their hearts and in their midst. We shall examine that in the next section of the chapter.

None of these three lines of approach (the return of YHWH; Jesus' Messiahship; the sense of his continuing presence) constitutes by itself a *sufficient* condition for the rise of the earliest christology such as we find already taken for granted in Paul. Nor would any two of them taken together have been sufficient, I think, without the third. Only the full set of three will do to sustain the historical hypothesis of how this dramatic and extraordinary belief took such a firm hold so early on. Each of these three lines of approach thus constitutes a *necessary* but in itself *insufficient* part of the ultimately sufficient threefold total.

That may seem somewhat abstract; let me put the point more concretely. First, there were plenty of Jews who cherished the hope that YHWH would return one day. None of them came up with anything remotely like early christology. Second, many believed that this or that leader might well be Israel's Messiah. But even Akiba, if rightly reported, did not develop more than a hint of his possible candidate being 'son of the star' in any 'divine' sense. (It is impossible to say what if anything the great sage had in mind by imagining the Messiah sitting on the second of the 'thrones' in Daniel 7.9.) Third, the early Christians did undoubtedly enjoy many vivid 'experiences' of the presence and power of Jesus, but these by themselves

would not, I think, have generated the focused and clear set of scriptural echoes and theological articulations which we find in the earliest christology. None of these three lines of approach, then, would by itself generate the kind of evidence we are finding in Paul, our earliest source.

But if, (a) granted the expectation of YHWH's return, (b) a would-be Messiah were to be raised from the dead and thereby vindicated as Messiah, 'son of God'; if such a person were believed to have been exalted to heaven and enthroned as 'lord'; and (c) if his followers were thereafter convinced that he was personally and powerfully present to and with them in a new mode – then the almost instantaneous rise of the christology we find already firmly established by the time of Paul is fully explained. The three elements converge to produce and provide something which none of them, by itself, would have been able to do.

This point places in a larger context the important proposals of Carey Newman and Larry Hurtado. Newman, perhaps twenty years ahead of his time, proposed that the origin of Paul's christology could be found in the motif of 'glory': Paul's experiences of the 'glory' of the exalted Christ convinced him that in Jesus was to be found the divine 'glory' spoken of in scripture.²¹⁷ Newman did not explicitly investigate the theme of YHWH's return, or the specific temple-christology which it generates. But even when we place his conception of Paul's (and others') 'experiences' of the glorious Christ within that context, it remains, I suggest, insufficient to explain the christology we actually find. In particular, such experiences do not explain that same most striking title, 'son of God'. That belongs with Messiahship (and with the sense that the Messiah represents Israel, the corporate 'son of God' as in the exodus-narrative). And belief in Jesus' Messiahship depends not on 'exaltation' alone but more specifically on resurrection. Only when we join up the themes of the divine 'return', Messiahship itself (as demonstrated by the resurrection), and the sense of Jesus' continuing presence by the spirit can we explain the phenomena before us.

By the same token, Hurtado's proposal, though vital as a demonstration of just how wrong-headed Bousset's influential construct in fact was, does not in my view go far enough, and places too much weight on the supposed

parallels, however partial, between the early Christian view of Jesus and pre-Christian Jewish views of various mediator-figures. Hurtado's emphasis on the context of early Christian worship as the matrix within which christology took shape is I think exactly right as far as it goes, but it fails to take account both of the Jewish hope of YHWH's return and, not least, of the belief in Jesus' Messiahship which had been dramatically confirmed by his resurrection. Indeed Hurtado, like Newman, seems to me to make far too little of the resurrection itself, collapsing it in effect into the concept of 'glorification', and supposing that the early Christian awareness of the latter came through visions and revelations. Such visions and revelations there certainly were, but my point is that without the theme of YHWH's return on the one hand, and the Messiahship of Jesus on the other, demonstrated by the resurrection, they would not have generated that early christology which we find already in Paul.²¹⁸ We need a convergence of all three elements to explain the 'why', as well as the 'what', of the earliest christology.

We turn, then, to my hypothesis about the contribution of Jesus' Messiahship to the earliest christology as we see it reflected in Paul.

The starting-point is the meaning of the resurrection itself. When Jesus was found to be bodily alive again three days after his crucifixion, in a transformed physicality for which there was no precedent or expectation, this convinced his first followers that he really was Israel's Messiah. I have argued this case elsewhere and do not need to repeat the point.²¹⁹

It is of course important to note that resurrection by itself would not mean Messiahship. The Maccabaeen martyrs are reported to have predicted their own coming resurrection, and that would not make them Messiahs. If one of the brigands crucified alongside Jesus had been found to be alive again three days later, people would have said the world was a very odd place, but they would not have said he was Messiah. The resurrection, as has often been argued, was taken by the early Christians to demonstrate the truth of the claim which Jesus himself had actually made. He was known to have been crucified as a messianic pretender (the 'title' over his head, 'King of the Jews', must be regarded as historically certain); the resurrection was

understood to have reversed the verdict of the court, and thus to have constituted an unambiguous divine declaration that he really was Messiah.

But if Jesus was Messiah, then in some sense or other the central scriptural passages about such a figure must, his followers knew, have come true. Among these, with echoes in Qumran and elsewhere, were of course 2 Samuel 7.12–14 and Psalm 2.7, with their indication that the Messiah would be, in some sense, ‘son of God’. This, coupled with the memory of Jesus’ own usage of ‘father’, and indeed ‘Abba’, in addressing Israel’s God, already made it natural for the first disciples to think of him as ‘son of God’ in this primarily messianic sense. In 2 Samuel 7.12, the early Christians undoubtedly seized on the phrase, ‘I will raise up your seed after you,’ which appears in the Septuagint as *kai anastēsō to sperma sou meta se*, ‘I will *resurrect* your seed after you.’ We need look no further for the scripturally generated origins of the statement in Romans 1.3–4: Jesus, from the seed of David according to the flesh, was marked out as ‘son of God’ through the resurrection from among the dead.²²⁰

We must note carefully how this argument actually works. I am *not* saying that there was a pre-Christian Jewish belief that the Messiah, if and when he turned up, would be in any sense ‘divine’. There are indeed texts which, with hindsight, could be taken to point that way, but despite the best efforts of scholars such as Horbury and Boyarin I remain unconvinced that anyone before Jesus’ first followers read them in this sense. Nor am I saying that anyone prior to Jesus’ first followers had read 2 Samuel 7.12 as predicting a resurrected Messiah (this is hardly surprising since there is no pre-Christian evidence for a dying Messiah²²¹). What I am suggesting is that *the resurrection, demonstrating the truth of Jesus’s pre-crucifixion messianic claim, joined up with the expectation of YHWH’s return on the one hand and the presence of the spirit of Jesus on the other to generate a fresh reading of ‘messianic’ texts which enabled a full christological awareness to dawn on the disciples*. I do not think that pre-Christian Jews had read 2 Samuel 7, or Psalm 110 (‘YHWH says to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool” ’), or Daniel 7 (‘one like a son of man’ being exalted to sit on a throne beside that of the ‘ancient

of days’) in ways that anticipated, or could be said to be an antecedent cause of, the very early christology. What I propose is that the combination of (a) the widely held expectation of the divine return to defeat Israel’s enemies and rescue his people and (b) Jesus’ resurrection, compelling the conclusion that he really was Messiah, created exactly the conditions within which, in a context of (c) worship and an awareness of the presence and power of the same Jesus, texts which had been there all along but never seen in this way (except, perhaps, in sayings of Jesus himself!) sprang into life.²²² The earliest christology was thus firmly anchored in scripture, but the reading of scripture in question was highly innovatory, and did not itself generate the belief.

In particular, the texts I just mentioned quickly attained a prominence within early Christianity which they do not seem to have had before. 2 Samuel 7 is indeed used ‘messianically’ in the pre-Christian period,²²³ but not, as I said, as a prediction of a resurrected Messiah, and not with any sense that the messianic ‘son of God’ will be identified with the returning YHWH. Psalm 110 crops up all over the early Christian movement, even though we do not find it as a ‘messianic’ text before then.²²⁴ Daniel 7 was certainly important in pre-Christian Jewish circles, but among the most prominent first-century re-readings of it we find Josephus’s implication that it predicts a ‘world ruler’ and *4 Ezra*’s translation of it into the lion who triumphs over the eagle. In neither case is the ‘son of man’ figure transformed into the embodiment of Israel’s God himself.²²⁵

What is most striking, I suggest, is that the messianic title ‘son of God’ came to be used, not least by Paul himself, as the apparently ideal vehicle to express just that combination of ideas I am suggesting. At its ancient heart was the messianic meaning, as in the Psalms and 2 Samuel. But when the early Christians wanted to join this up with their sense that in Jesus Israel’s God had returned in person, that very phrase was found to be ideal as a way of expressing differentiation within the identity of the one God, a differentiation with ‘wisdom’ as its partial explanation: ‘when the time had fully come, God sent forth his son ...’ The idea of ‘wisdom’, indeed, helped forge exactly this link, since according to Wisdom of Solomon 7—9 it was

simultaneously the self-expression of the one God and the necessary equipment for David's true heir. And, as we saw already in Galatians 4 and Romans 8, the category of 'sonship' at once allowed for expansion to include, as in scripture itself, the whole people of God. This is only comprehensible when we add the spirit into the equation; but, once that is done, the 'sonship' of Jesus is shared with all his people. 'Because you are sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, calling out "Abba, father!".' 'All who are led by the spirit of God are God's sons ... you received the spirit of sonship, in whom we call out "Abba, father".' ... 'Those he foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family.'²²⁶ And so on.

It is important, therefore, to explore further this category of 'son of God'. People used to appeal to this phrase as though one could thereby 'prove' a high christology in Paul. Older commentaries on Romans 1.3–4 sometimes suggested that Paul was affirming Jesus' 'humanity' and 'divinity' when he declared that Jesus was descended from David's seed 'according to the flesh' and then designated 'son of God in power' through the resurrection.²²⁷ It used to be accepted without question that when Paul referred to Jesus as 'son of God' he was expressing, more or less, a high, virtually Nicene, christology – which he had very likely obtained by drawing on non-Jewish sources for the phrase.²²⁸ That (the non-Jewish origin of the phrase, and the attendant ideas) is the view of Bousset which Hurtado rightly rejects, though without seeing the way in which Paul allows the messianic meaning of 'son of God' then to become the vehicle through which he can appropriately express the simultaneous sense that in this Messiah Israel's one God has at last returned to his people.²²⁹ That older way of reading 'son of God' was called into question when it was pointed out (for instance by Martin Hengel) that the phrase had three possible meanings at the time, all rooted in Israel's scriptures and re-expressed variously in second-Temple literature: first, angels or angelic beings, as in Genesis and Job;²³⁰ second, Israel as a whole, especially at the time of the exodus;²³¹ third, the son of David, sometimes seen as the coming

Messiah.²³² The first of these seems not to be in Paul's mind (nobody has seriously suggested that his view of Jesus as 'son of God' has anything to do with the kind of angelic beings mentioned in Genesis and Job), but the second and particularly the third – which are themselves after all closely linked, since part of the role of the king, it may be suggested, is to sum up the national life of Israel in himself – are extremely relevant. We shall explore this further in the next chapter. But our present task is to look at the ways in which the 'messianic' meaning of the phrase comes to take on fresh meaning, in Paul at least and arguably earlier, through its association with the 'sending' of the son as *the mode of divine return*. Paul has not left the messianic sense behind. As we see at various points in his writings, it remains presupposed, and loadbearing. But he has, as it were, discovered a further sense hidden within it. One might say that Messiahship turns out to have been a category designed for the personal use of Israel's God himself.

This is where something that was already part of Paul's mental furniture seems to have opened up to disclose a deeper truth than had previously been suspected. People have tried from time to time to discern incarnational hints within pre-Christian messianic speculation, but as we have seen these remain uncertain and imprecise.²³³ What we have in Paul is firm and clear:

This is how God demonstrates his own love for us: the Messiah died for us while we were still sinners. ⁹How much more, in that case – since we have been declared to be in the right by his blood – are we going to be saved by him from God's coming anger! ¹⁰When we were enemies, you see, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son; if that's so, how much more, having already been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.²³⁴

³For God has done what the law (being weak because of human flesh) was incapable of doing. God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin-offering; and, right there in the flesh, he condemned sin. ⁴This was in order that the right and proper verdict of the law could be fulfilled in us, as we live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.²³⁵

²⁹Those he foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family.²³⁶

³¹What then shall we say to all this? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²God, after all, did not spare his own son; he gave him up for us all! How then will he not, with him, freely give all things to us? ³³Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who declares them in the right. ³⁴Who is going to condemn? It is the Messiah, Jesus, who has died, or rather has been raised; who is at God's right hand, and who also prays on our behalf! ³⁵Who shall separate us from the Messiah's love? ... ³⁸I am persuaded, you see, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor the present, nor the future, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord. [237](#)

¹⁹I have been crucified with the Messiah. ²⁰I am, however, alive – but it isn't me any longer, it's the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [238](#)

⁴But when the fullness of time arrived, God sent out his son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

⁶And, because you are sons, God sent out the spirit of his son into our hearts, calling out 'Abba, father!' ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son! And, if you're a son, you are an heir, through God. [239](#)

These dense, rich passages, in each case gathering to a greatness a whole flowing argument, express the two traditional senses ('son of God' as (a) Messiah and (b) Israel-in-person). Indeed, it is partly the obvious linkage of those two, in passages like Romans 8 and Galatians 4, which presses the case that Paul saw Israel's king as summing up his people in himself, to which we shall return. But the point of God *sending* the 'son' introduces a new element. One could say, as Isaiah did, that God had 'sent' the 'servant', or a prophet, or the Messiah. This 'sending', though not directly linked to any 'son of God' reference, does seem to echo Paul's language in these passages:

Draw near to me, hear this!

From the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there. And now the Sovereign YHWH has sent me (*apestalken me*) and his spirit. [240](#)

The spirit of the Sovereign YHWH is upon me, because YHWH has anointed me; he has sent me (*apestalken me*) to bring good news to the oppressed ... [241](#)

The sending of a figure equipped with (or accompanied by) the spirit, to do YHWH's work of salvation, fits well within the larger framework of Isaiah 40—66 which was, arguably, one of Paul's two or three favourite scriptural passages. We cannot demonstrate that he had these passages in mind, but we do not need to. The key point is that the 'sending' here implies someone going with a commission from Israel's God to do the work of rescue which will require this figure to be equipped with the spirit of this God. That by itself would not be enough (were we constructing a christology from scratch around this point rather than filling in significant details within a pattern already established) to make us say, 'Ah: so the Messiah is "sent from God", and is therefore in some sense "divine".' But two further considerations point strongly in this direction – in the direction, that is, of understanding 'the sending of the son' in Romans 8 and Galatians 4, and the other 'son of God' passages just noted, to be further signs that, for Paul, Jesus is seen as the second self (so to speak) of Israel's God.

First, there is the notion, which we have already explored, of the figure of Wisdom being 'sent' from God, sent into the world which was made 'through' Wisdom in the first place. Second, there is the remarkable picture in Romans 5 and 8 of the son's death as revealing the father's *love*. This makes no sense unless in some sense father and son are identified, much more closely even than Abraham and Isaac (the obvious biblical paradigm for a father giving up a son to death). In Abraham's case, this was a test of obedience, a challenge to see whether his love for God would override his love for his son. But in God's case, the giving up of the son is seen as God's own love for the world, not only for his people Israel but for the whole creation.

This, perhaps, is why reference to the Aqedah (the 'Binding' of Isaac, as in Genesis 22) is always muted in Paul. He cannot, I think, have been ignorant of the semi-parallel, and seems to allude to it in Romans 8.31–2.²⁴² But the differences between the two pictures are as important as the similarities, and it is never simply a matter of 'God displacing Abraham' in a traditional picture, still less of 'Jesus displacing Isaac' in a plot-line which otherwise continues as before, only now with a different cast.²⁴³ It is

actually a significantly *different* narrative, and we might even say that Paul is *correcting* the already dominant understanding of the story of Abraham and Isaac, relativizing it (and its very ethno-specific application) in favour of the larger story which, he might say, has been supplanted by the growth of the Aqedah-tradition: the equally biblical story of Israel's God sending the servant, or sending 'Wisdom', to accomplish his saving purpose.²⁴⁴

So why does Paul stress the sending of the *son*? Quite possibly because he has already developed, or has even inherited from earlier tradition, ways of speaking and praying which belong with a christological monotheism (and, as Bauckham rightly suggests, an eschatological and cultic, as well as creational and covenantal, christological monotheism). These ways of speaking, as we have already seen, identify 'God' as the source and goal of all things by designating him 'father', even while Jesus is designated 'lord', *kyrios*. We might then hypothesize a development in several stages, though as always with such things there is no way we can plot these chronologically. One might imagine the very early Christians, under the impact of the resurrection of Jesus and the fresh scriptural study which it precipitated, doing a variety of interlocking things very early on:

1. using *theos* for God the source and goal of all things, and *kyrios* for Jesus, as in 1 Corinthians 8.6, aware that these corresponded to the Hebrew *elohim* and YHWH, and intending to stress both the unity and the differentiation between the two of them;
2. using the biblical term 'father' to denote *God/theos/elohim*;
3. drawing in the originally messianic title 'son of God', already in use for Jesus because of its Davidic overtones and because of Jesus' own way of speaking, as the natural corollary of this 'father'. The one denoted as *theos* is thus seen as 'father' specifically of this 'son', and the one denoted as *kyrios* is seen as 'son' specifically of this 'father', even when that connection is not made explicitly;
4. speaking of 'father and son' in parallel to speaking of 'God and lord';

5. drawing on the ‘wisdom’ traditions, which were already in use in terms of both the return of YHWH to Zion (Sirach 24) and the equipping of David’s son for his royal task (Wisdom 7—9), to speak of the father ‘sending’ the son (Romans 8.3; Galatians 4.4), and of the father transferring people into ‘the kingdom of the son of his love’ (Colossians 1.12–13, with the great ‘wisdom’-poem of 1.15–20 to follow), and of the *kyrios* as the one through whom all things were made (1 Corinthians 8.6; Colossians 1.16);
6. understanding the whole sequence in terms of the climactic and decisive rescuing act of the one God, the new exodus in which this God had revealed himself fully and finally precisely in fulfilling his ancient promises, saving his people and coming to dwell in their midst.

All this, I stress, is necessarily hypothetical. Unless fresh evidence from the first twenty years of the Jesus-movement were to turn up (the age-old dream of a Christian archaeologist!) it remains impossible to demonstrate that any such sequence of thought actually took place. And ‘a sequence of thought’ has nothing to do with chronological extension. A mind well stocked with scripture, allied to a heart understanding itself to be transformed by the spirit and attuned to the worship of Jesus, could grasp in an instant what we are forced to reconstruct slowly and carefully. But I submit that this does seem to reflect some aspects of the data we actually possess. Interestingly, though move (4) seems somewhat obvious, Paul seldom uses the word ‘father’ in direct connection to a designation of Jesus as ‘son’. The closest we come in the passages already discussed is where believers cry ‘Abba, father’, because the spirit of the son has been sent into their hearts, and in Colossians 1.12–14, where ‘the father’ has ‘transferred us into the kingdom of the son of his love’.

All this indicates that, if Paul had been aware of any quasi-divine status accorded to a coming Messiah in the pre-Christian Jewish world, he does not appear to build on such a notion. Rather, he *works up to this conclusion*. He regarded the Messiah as ‘divine’, in the senses so far explored, not

because ‘everyone knew’ (or some people supposed) that the Messiah would be ‘divine’, but because of Jesus himself. The person of Jesus himself, and the events of his death, resurrection and exaltation, indicated so firmly that he was to be discerned as the personal presence of Israel’s returning God that it was natural to look back at the messianic categories, particularly the striking phrase ‘son of God’, and to discern within such phraseology hints both of a previously unsuspected identity and of a richly appropriate way of expressing it. In particular, Paul saw in Jesus the shocking and explosive vision of *Israel’s God returning at last, as he had always promised*. The ‘glory’ of Israel’s God, which had departed from the Temple so long before, just as had been threatened at the time of the golden calf incident, had returned at last: not, as in Exodus, with God hiding his face so that Moses could only see his back, but rather with his glory shining in full strength ‘in the face of Jesus the Messiah’, so that those indwelt by the spirit could themselves behold that glory ‘with unveiled face’.²⁴⁵

All this then plays back into a fresh consideration both of the underlying christology of Romans 1.3–4 and of its essentially monotheistic framework and claim:

¹Paul, a slave of Messiah Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for God’s good news, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the sacred writings – ³the good news about his son, who was descended from David’s seed in terms of flesh, ⁴and who was marked out powerfully as God’s son in terms of the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead: Jesus, the Messiah, our lord!

⁵Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about believing obedience among all the nations for the sake of his name.²⁴⁶

Look first at the classic signs of second-Temple monotheism in this, the grand and solemn opening to Paul’s greatest letter.²⁴⁷ The ‘good news’ of the one true God, looking back to the Isaianic proclamation on the one hand and out to the imperial announcements on the other, already speaks of the creator God who claims the whole world, and who therefore confronts idols and rulers who try to claim that world for themselves. This is further highlighted in verse 5: Paul’s apostleship itself is grounded in the revised

monotheism which addresses ‘all the nations’. As is now more frequently noted than it used to be, this introduction forms a circle with the dramatic conclusion of the theological exposition of the letter in 15.7–13, where, quoting Isaiah 11.10, Paul speaks of the Davidic Messiah who ‘rises to rule the nations, and in [whom] the nations shall hope’ (15.12). Again, it is the resurrection that unveils the messianic identity, and with it the summons to worship, to ‘hope in him’. This is deeply monotheistic language, of the second-Temple creational, covenantal, cultic and especially eschatological variety. And it joins up exactly with second-Temple messianic expectations, though until Jesus nobody, so far as we know, had thought of making that link.

Further, in Romans 1.4 the resurrection of Jesus had now ‘marked him out’ as what he already was: God’s son, the Messiah. Many others of David’s line had come and gone. Some from that extended family, for all we know, might even have been crucified (thousands of young Jews suffered that fate in the suppression of earlier rebellions). What marked Jesus out, what made the early Christians say ‘he really was God’s son’, was not his death, but the resurrection which vindicated the claims, both explicit and implicit, he had made during his public career, and which therefore unveiled the identity he had possessed all along – and which therefore also unveiled a new and hitherto unsuspected meaning for his death: a decisive, redemptive meaning.²⁴⁸

It is important to stress here, as I have done elsewhere, that though the resurrection thus *unveils* what was there before, it does not *confer or create* a new status or identity for Jesus.²⁴⁹ The key word *horisthentos*, with its root meaning to do with ‘marking a boundary’, and hence ‘defining’ or ‘determining’, has to do with the public clarification, validation or vindication of a previously made claim, not with a claim or status newly introduced. That is quite clear for three reasons. First, in the passages we studied earlier it is the death of God’s son that reveals God’s love in Romans 5 and 8, and for that to make any sense Jesus must obviously have been ‘God’s son’ when he was crucified. Second, in Romans 1.3–4 itself, the messianic status of ‘son of David’ already, according to Psalm 2 and 2

Samuel 7, implied that this person was ‘son of God’, so that the logical order of verses 3 and 4 has the force of a Davidic messianic claim to divine sonship being then validated in the resurrection. Third, and also in this passage, the whole double clause is introduced by the phrase ‘the gospel of God ... concerning his son’: in other words, the ‘son’ is the subject of the whole sequence. If there is anything new about Jesus’ post-resurrection sonship in this verse, it is simply that his sonship, possessed all along, is now ‘in power’.²⁵⁰

Indeed, when Paul elsewhere speaks of God ‘sending his son’, he clearly refers in Galatians 4.4 to his human conception and birth (‘born of a woman’), and we may assume that meaning for Romans 8.3 as well, echoing across to Philippians 2.6–8:

God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh (*en homoiōmati sarkos hamartias*), and as a sin-offering; and, right there in the flesh, he condemned sin.²⁵¹

Instead, he emptied himself, and received the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of humans (*en homoiōmati anthrōpōn genomenos*). And then, having human appearance, he humbled himself, and became obedient even to death, yes, even the death of the cross.²⁵²

Thus, just as in Philippians 2 we saw solid evidence that Paul was identifying the human Jesus as the one who from the beginning was ‘equal with God’, so in Romans 8.3 and Galatians 4.4 we should be clear that the ‘sending of the son’, while retaining the messianic overtones of Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89,²⁵³ now clearly also incorporates the theme of what came to be called ‘incarnation’. By that I refer to the conception and birth, as a human being, of one who in retrospect is discerned as ‘God’s son’, not just in the messianic or ‘Israel’ sense but in a sense which passages such as Philippians 2, 1 Corinthians 8 and Colossians 1 attempted to express in the mode of doxology, poetry and prayer.

The joining together of God the father and Jesus the lord is of course regularly made explicit in the opening greetings formulae, or general introductory remarks, of several of the letters. Paul’s standard greetings convey ‘grace and peace from God the father and the lord Jesus the Messiah’: all the letters except Colossians and 1 Thessalonians follow this

pattern more or less word for word.²⁵⁴ While it is noticeable that Paul's habitual phraseology does not include the immediate coupling of 'father' and 'son', preferring 'father' and 'lord', he can with no difficulty speak of the 'son' in the same breath.

All this points to a further element of messianic identification. Not only is the Messiah 'son of God'; he is also *kyrios*, 'lord'. And, in case there were any doubt about his meaning, it has repeatedly been demonstrated in recent times that Paul used this term as a further way of identifying Jesus within the 'divine identity' of YHWH himself.

(b) Jesus as *Kyrios*, Especially in Biblical Quotations

It is now a commonplace to point out that Paul regularly referred to Jesus using scriptural quotations where the Septuagintal word *kyrios* stands for the Tetragrammaton, YHWH.²⁵⁵ We have seen that in 1 Corinthians 8.6 and Philippians 2.11 Paul quotes two of the most obvious 'monotheistic' passages in the whole of Israel's scripture (the *Shema* in the first case, Isaiah 45 in the second). He clearly intends in these passages that the *kyrios*, which in the original stands for YHWH, should now be understood to refer to Jesus himself. Paul is of course quite capable of using *kyrios* in a Septuagint quotation simply to refer to Israel's God, not necessarily to Jesus at all. He is neither wooden nor formal in his usage. But in many passages the reference is clear, and these need to be logged as part of Paul's major and revolutionary redefinition of second-Temple monotheism around Jesus himself.²⁵⁶

An obvious place to pick up the thread is Romans 14.11. We have already looked at the passage in another connection, and it is another occasion when, as in Philippians 2, Paul quotes Isaiah 45.23. This is one of the cases when it is not immediately apparent whether the reference is to God himself or to Jesus:

⁷None of us lives to ourselves; none of us dies to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the lord, and if we die, we die to the lord. So, then, whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the lord.

⁹That is why the Messiah died and came back to life, so that he might be lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰You, then: why do you condemn your fellow Christian? Or you: why do you despise a fellow Christian? We must all appear before the judgment seat of God, ¹¹as the Bible says:

As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee shall bow,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.

¹²So then, we must each give an account of ourselves to God. [257](#)

One natural way of reading this passage is to take the reference to the ‘judgment seat of God’ in verse 10, the ‘praise to God’ in the Isaiah quotation, and the ‘giving account to God’ in verse 12, as together indicating that ‘the Lord’ in the Isaiah quotation is likewise a straightforward reference to God the creator, the father, the judge. However, a case can nevertheless be made for reading ‘the Lord’ here as referring to Jesus, as in Philippians 2.

The case for the reference to Jesus depends on the earlier part of the passage, where verse 9 stresses that the Messiah who ‘died and came back to life’ (*apethanen kai ezēsen*) now rules as lord over both dead and living, a theme which is then picked up in the phrase ‘As I live, says the Lord’ (*zō egō, legei kyrios*) at the start of the quotation. [258](#) I am inclined to follow those scholars who have argued that this is the determinative context, and that therefore the first line in the Isaiah couplet refers to Jesus and the second to God, very much as in the double reference in Philippians 2.10–11. [259](#) We have here, then, a probable further coupling of Jesus’ messianic identity (as the coming judge [260](#)) with his embodiment of the returning YHWH himself.

A less controversial and equally important reference to Jesus as *kyrios* within a scriptural quotation where *kyrios* stands for the divine name is found earlier in Romans, in 10.13:

¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same lord is lord of all, and is rich towards all who call upon him. ¹³‘All who call upon the name of the lord’, you see, ‘will be saved.’ [261](#)

This is the climax of what is arguably the central passage of Romans 9—11, the point around which the rest of the argument revolves.²⁶² Paul has told the great story of Israel, from Abraham to the Messiah (9.6—10.4), arguing that in the *Christos*, however paradoxically, God’s single purpose and promise from the beginning has found its *telos*, its goal. The result is that the covenant renewal spoken of in Deuteronomy 30 has been inaugurated, and the way to participate in that renewal is precisely to confess Jesus as *kyrios* and to believe that God raised him from the dead (10.9). Paul then amplifies and supports this with two scriptural quotations, first from Isaiah 28.16 (‘all who believe in him will not be put to shame’), and then, decisively, from LXX Joel 3.5: ‘All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved’.²⁶³ The context makes it clear both that this refers to Jesus himself, the one who is confessed as *kyrios*, and that Paul intends the full meaning of *kyrios*/YHWH to resonate across from Joel’s statement to his own. Once again an essentially *messianic* narrative (with the *Christos* as the goal of Israel’s long story) opens up to indicate that this *Christos* is to be identified with the *kyrios* of the Septuagint.

This is not simply a happy linguistic accident in which ‘those who call on YHWH’s name’ happens to have a double referent through being (a) a regular scriptural way of denoting God’s people and connoting their faithful allegiance to him over other gods and (b) a regular early Christian way of demarcating the followers of Jesus (though both of these are true as well).²⁶⁴ The point is more organic than that. Joel’s statement coheres with the Deuteronomy passage in pointing to the renewal of the covenant, following the repentance of Israel and the confession that YHWH is indeed her God, ‘and there is no other’.²⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 30 envisaged the transformation of the people’s hearts; Joel indicates that God will pour out his spirit upon all flesh, which for Paul elsewhere in Romans is the means by which that heart-transformation will come about.²⁶⁶ The two naturally go together in Paul’s mind. Both passages envisage the coming eschatological moment. In the case of Deuteronomy, this moment will be the ultimate ‘return from exile’, while for Joel there will be signs in the heavens and on the earth, anticipating ‘the great and terrible day of

YHWH'.²⁶⁷ At that time, says the prophet, 'everyone who calls on the name of YHWH will be saved'. Romans 10 thus joins up closely with Philippians 2 and the other texts we have studied. It strengthens and broadens the picture we have been drawing of Paul's christologically revised Jewish monotheism, especially in its eschatological form, and it does so from within an explicitly messianic context.²⁶⁸

If this is right, it opens up a possible 'incarnational' reading of Romans 10.6 as well which joins up with the theme explored earlier, that of Jesus as the embodiment of the return of YHWH.²⁶⁹ I have argued elsewhere that Paul's exegesis of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10.6–8 belongs exactly with his understanding of the entire story of Israel from Abraham to the present, with the climax of the story being the arrival of the Messiah, the *telos nomou*, in 10.4.²⁷⁰ Now, Paul declares, the long-range prophecy of Deuteronomy 30 has been fulfilled: there is a new kind of 'doing of Torah' available through the Messiah and the spirit, and all who 'do Torah' in this way will be saved. But Paul appears to find a further level of meaning within the text. One does not need to go up to heaven, 'to bring the Messiah down' (10.6), or to go down to the depths, 'to bring the Messiah up from the dead' (10.7). The meaning of the second is obvious, but what about the first? Commentators are divided. Some see the incarnation here; others, the second coming.²⁷¹ But the way Paul develops the thought strongly favours the former. In 10.9 he explains: 'if you profess with your mouth that Jesus is lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' If the latter half corresponds, as it does, to 10.7, we should assume that the former half is intended to correspond to 10.6:

If you profess with your mouth that Jesus is lord (10.9a) ... to bring the Messiah down (10.6)
and believe that God raised him from the dead (10.9b) ... to bring the Messiah up from the dead
(10.7)

But the confession 'Jesus is lord' (10.9a) is at once spelled out, as we have just seen, in the strong affirmation, replete with Septuagintal YHWH-echoes, that 'the same lord is lord of all' and that 'all who call upon the name of the lord will be saved' (10.12–13). This implies that in 10.6, as

well, Paul is thinking not simply of the ‘coming of the Messiah’ in a purely human sense, nor yet of his second coming, but of *YHWH himself arriving in the person of the Messiah*, at the climax of the story of Israel.

Paul was after all working, all through, with the larger second-Temple narrative in which, as the crucial element in the renewal of the covenant, YHWH himself would appear from heaven, would return to his people to judge and to rescue. The echoes of ‘wisdom’ which many have detected in this passage are there, but as elsewhere they are pointers to the larger reality, since ‘wisdom’ itself was, as we have seen, a way of speaking about a kind of ‘return’ of YHWH, perhaps in the form of Torah. What we are looking at in this dense and decisive passage, at the heart of the paragraph which stands at the heart of one of Paul’s most carefully constructed arguments, is a retelling of the story of Israel in which the YHWH-christology which is often recognized in 10.12–13, and perhaps also in 10.9, is rooted in a *return-of-YHWH* christology in 10.6. Once again, Israel’s God has done, in person, what Torah could not do. And this, as we shall see presently, carries strong implications for the proper reading of the advance summary of Paul’s argument at the start of chapter 9.

Before we get there, however, there is one further *kyrios*-text which stands out from the much longer possible list. We have referred to Isaiah 40—55 and Deuteronomy 6 as prime candidates for the clearest and sharpest monotheistic statements in Israel’s scriptures. Alongside these we must place Zechariah 14.5–9:

Then YHWH my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there shall not be either cold or frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to YHWH), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light. On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter. And YHWH will become king over all the earth; on that day YHWH will be one and his name one.

This prophecy of new creation, with the rivers flowing out of the restored Jerusalem, echoes the end of Ezekiel and thereby also Genesis 2. It also picks up the older vision of Deuteronomy 33.2, where YHWH comes from Sinai with myriads of his holy ones. The combination is instructive: the

final ‘coming’ of YHWH will be both a reprise of the Sinai theophany and a restoration of Genesis 2. The Pentateuch completes its circle, with the prophets pointing to the same fulfilment. The coming kingship of YHWH over all the earth will be his final claiming of sovereignty, as in several psalms, in Daniel and elsewhere; and this will mean the renewal of all creation. And, strikingly, this universal reign of YHWH will mean a kind of eschatological fulfilment of the *Shema* itself: YHWH will be one, and his name one. What began as Israel’s prayer of dedication and loyalty will end as the universal, global reality.²⁷²

Paul alludes to the opening verse of this sequence in 1 Thessalonians 3.13:

¹¹Now may God himself, our father, and our lord Jesus, steer us on our way to you. ¹²And may the lord make your love for one another, and for everybody, abound and overflow, just as ours does for you. ¹³That way, your hearts will be strengthened and kept blameless in holiness before God our father when our lord Jesus is present again with all his holy ones (*en tē parousia tou kuriou Iēsou meta pantōn tōn hagiōn autou*). Amen.²⁷³

But the echoes resonate out more widely again. We shall return to this passage when looking at Paul’s revised eschatology in chapter 11;²⁷⁴ but the Zechariah allusion indicates a vision of the oneness of Israel’s God that grounds the eschatological reality in which, as in Philippians 2.9–11, all creation joins together in confessing Jesus as *kyrios*, the sovereign one who bears the Name of Israel’s God.

This eschatological vision, according to Paul, *has already become a reality in Jesus the Messiah, and in his people*. Here we see the point of the revised monotheism in relation to the central worldview-symbol, the people of God ‘in the Messiah’. We shall explore this more fully in chapter 10 below, but it is important to note even at this stage what is going on. Paul’s vision of Jesus as ‘the human face of God’, as the instantiation of YHWH himself, related to ‘God the father’ as the unique son (see below), is the ground of his vision of the single community, the one people of God who must be guarded as such and defended against all divisions of whatever sort, and must be taught to worship the one God, the father of the lord Jesus

the Messiah, ‘with one heart and voice’.²⁷⁵ That which Zechariah envisaged as the final reality, and that to which Paul himself still looked forward in 1 Thessalonians 3.13 and in great passages such as 1 Corinthians 15.20–8, had already been inaugurated through the Messiah’s death and resurrection. As in Romans 10.12–13, the fact that there is now ‘no distinction’ between Jew and gentile who confess Jesus as *kyrios* and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead is grounded foursquare on this vision: *ho gar autos kyrios pantōn*, ‘the same “lord” is lord of all’.

This fusion of messianic and ‘divine’ categories in Romans 10 points back to one of the most controversial of Paul’s references to Jesus, that in Romans 9.5.

[\(c\) Romans 9.5: Does Paul Call Jesus ‘God’?](#)

Two quite different lines of thought might indicate, *a priori*, that Paul did not call Jesus *theos*. On the one hand, those in the mainstream line of modern interpretation have doubted whether Paul ever considered Jesus to be in any sense ‘divine’ (sometimes because of the assumption that no Jew could entertain such an idea), so that the ascription of the word *theos* to Jesus would already be deeply problematical.²⁷⁶ The reference in Titus 2.13 (‘the blessed hope and royal appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour, Jesus the Messiah’) could either be translated differently, so as to distinguish between ‘our great God’ and ‘our saviour Jesus’, or it could in any case be dismissed as non-Pauline, leaving only the controversial Romans 9.5.

On the other hand, those who have followed the kind of argument I have advanced so far will have noted that again and again Paul refers to Jesus as *kyrios* in contexts (such as 1 Corinthians 8.6 and 15.28, and Philippians 2.11) where he is thereby precisely distinguished from ‘God the father’. Anyone following this line will have realized that Paul does indeed believe that Jesus bears as of right the holy Name of God, but it might still appear peculiar for him to muddy the waters by using the word *theos*, uniquely, for the divine son rather than for the father. Why not stick with *kyrios*?

There are, however, strong grounds for supposing that Paul does indeed call Jesus *theos* in Romans 9.5. I have argued this elsewhere and here need only recapitulate.²⁷⁷ The key point to note is that Paul again fuses two categories: (a) Jesus as Messiah and (b) the final coming of the one true God.

Romans 9.5 concludes Paul's brief catalogue of Israel's privileges. The whole list, translated literally and without punctuation, reads:

... they are Israelites of whom the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the lawgiving and the worship and the promises of whom the fathers and from whom the Messiah the one according to the flesh who is over all God blessed for ever Amen.

The view has gradually gained ground among translators and commentators that the 'traditional' interpretation is right after all: the final clause really does say 'who is over all God', and really does ascribe that to the Messiah.²⁷⁸ Grammatically this seems clearly preferable. But the strongest argument in this direction is that this verse constitutes a programmatic summary statement, comparable to 1.3–4 in relation to the first eight chapters of Romans, which is then cashed out in 10.1–13 particularly, and more especially in 10.12–13 where 'lord of all', with *kyrios* (as we saw) evoking the Name of YHWH, stands at the very heart of the three-chapter section. It is the rejection of this *kyrios* by his fellow Israelites that causes Paul such grief and anguish, but his double formulation here shows how he will proceed to wrestle with the problem: the Messiah belongs to Israel 'according to the flesh', but he is also God *over all*, Jew and gentile alike. That represents and summarizes both the tragedy of Israel's unbelief and the prospect of God's greater plan, the dialogue between which constitutes the primary argument of chapters 9–11.

I suggest, then, that though Romans 9.5 stands alone in Paul (apart from Titus 2.13) in terms of a direct ascription of *theos* to Jesus, we should not for that reason deny this most natural reading. Theologically it adds nothing to the very high, monotheistically grounded christology we have already seen. Dramatically it adds a great deal; and the start of Romans 9, of all turning-points in Paul's writings, is exactly where we might expect such a

gesture. The idea, after all, that Romans 9—11 was somehow soft-peddling any talk of Jesus, in order to find a non-Jesus-based way forward for Paul's Jewish contemporaries, was always a somewhat desperate move.²⁷⁹ Rather, we should see a line from this verse through to 10.1–13, and from there to the emphatically monotheistic celebration of 11.33–6 (not that the latter passage is short of christological reference, rather the reverse, as its echoes of christological passages in 1 Corinthians indicate²⁸⁰). But for further exploration of that we must wait until the next chapter.

More to the point, we should ask: what then does a reference to the Messiah as *theos* in this verse have to do with a revised monotheism? Simply this: that the whole of Romans 9—11 is in fact one great second-Temple monotheistic argument, telling the story of the covenant God and Israel and insisting that the one God who called Abraham in the first place has been *dikaios*, 'just', true to his promises and his covenant, and that in and through the Messiah he has now renewed the covenant so that there can be *dikaiosynē* for all who believe (10.4). The central section, 10.1–13, which itself climaxes (10.12) in the statement of christological monotheism we have already studied, *ho gar autos kyrios pantōn*, 'for the same lord is lord of all', draws the whole thing together. It insists, once again, that the glorious and classic celebration of monotheism at the end of chapter 11 should not be understood apart from the Messiah, in whose life, death and resurrection, Paul believed, YHWH himself was personally embodied. We might even suggest that, just as the Messiah comes at the end of the list of privileges (as he comes at the *telos* of the narrative in 10.4), so that is the place where the one God is mentioned at last, not merely as the greatest privilege of all for Israel (to be the people of the God who is 'over all'), but as an indication that, in Jewish eschatology, the final 'coming of God' was the centre of it all. Once more, the facts concerning Jesus have enabled Paul to draw together what had previously been kept apart: messianic beliefs on the one hand, the hope for the coming of YHWH on the other.

This brings us back to a point we have made already and which can now be reiterated with renewed force. *None of this seems to have been a matter of controversy within the earliest church.* This indicates, against the drift of

studies of early christology for most of the twentieth century, that what we think of as a 'high' christology was thoroughly established within, at the most, twenty years of Jesus' resurrection. In fact, to employ the kind of argument that used to be popular when it ran in the opposite direction, we might suggest that this christology must have been well established even sooner, since if it had only been accepted, say, in the late 40s we might have expected to catch some trace of anxiety or controversy on this point in Paul's early letters at least. And we do not. The identification of Jesus with YHWH seems to have been part of (what later came to be called) Christianity from more or less the very beginning. Paul can refer to it, and weave it into arguments, poems, prayers and throwaway remarks, as common coin. Recognizing Jesus within the identity of Israel's one God, and following through that recognition in worship (where monotheism really counts), seems to have been part of 'the way' from the start.

[4. Monotheism Freshly Revealed \(2\): the Spirit](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

So far we have seen substantial evidence that Paul consciously and deliberately spoke of Jesus within the framework of second-Temple Jewish monotheism, intending thereby not to add Jesus to an incipient pantheon, smuggling in a second God under cover of rhetoric, but to declare that in the gospel events the inner character, being and identity of the one God of Jewish monotheism had been made known in person. A striking enough claim, indeed. But Paul goes further: the God who sent the son also sends 'the spirit of the son'. This is not nearly so prominent as the christological redefinition, but it is there none the less, and it is striking.

The lack of prominence (as also in the 'binitarian' formulae we see so often, for instance, in the picture of 'God and the Lamb' in the book of Revelation²⁸¹) might be taken to indicate a kind of slow development, in which, so to speak, christology was sorted out first while the church took its

time to think about whether or not the spirit was equally divine. That is of course how things proceeded as dogma developed in the later councils of the church, with the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers finally getting around to defining the ‘divinity’ of the spirit. But I want in this section to challenge strongly any sense that we should project that process back into the earliest period. What we find in the patristic period, not least in the great pneumatological works of Basil and the two Gregorys, seems to me more a question of the attempt to appropriate, in language that would then be comprehensible, what was already fully present, in the language of second-Temple Judaism reworked around Jesus and indeed around the spirit, in the very earliest period.²⁸²

Indeed, with both christology and pneumatology it seems that the normal assumption of many writers is radically mistaken. It is not the case that the New Testament is unclear or fuzzy on these subjects, and that the early Fathers invented a high view of Jesus and the spirit which was then wrongly read back into the early period. Rather, it seems as though the earliest Christians, precisely from within their second-Temple Jewish monotheism, leapt without difficulty straight to an identification of both Jesus and the spirit within the divine identity, which the early Fathers then struggled to recapture in the very different categories of hellenistic philosophy. As with christology, so with pneumatology. The idea of a ‘low’ Jewish beginning, from which a gradual ‘ascent’ was made on the dictates of Greek philosophy, is exactly wrong. The Jewish context provided the framework for a thoroughly ‘high’ christology and pneumatology, and it was the attempt to restate that within the language of hellenistic philosophy, and without the help of the key Jewish categories, that gave the impression of a difficult doctrine gradually attained.

It is of course true that for the early followers of Jesus the spirit was not first and foremost a topic one talked *about*. There was no question of turning the spirit into an object outside oneself, towards which one might point, about which one might hold ‘objective’ discussions. The spirit was the one who enabled the community as a whole to worship, to live the holy lives required of God’s people, to pray, to believe, to worship with a sense

of the living presence of God in the midst, to abound in hope, to love, to be transformed by the renewal of the mind, to experience the power of God in healing of bodies and lives, to be united in heart and soul. The early Christians might have said of the spirit what we have said often enough of a worldview: it isn't what you look *at*, it's what you look *through*. The spirit was not, for Paul and his contemporaries, a 'doctrine' or 'dogma' to be discussed, but the breath of life which put them in a position to discuss everything else – and, more to the point, to worship, pray, love and work. We should not, then, be surprised at the relative absence of discourse, including monotheistic discourse, *about* the spirit.

But when it comes, it is clear. In particular, exactly as with christology, what strikes me as most important is what has normally been omitted from discussions. Paul uses, of the spirit, (a) language associated with the long-awaited return of YHWH to Zion, with Israel's God coming back at last to dwell within his Temple and (b) the closely related biblical language associated with YHWH being present with his people in the exodus, leading them in their wilderness wanderings. These features indicate that, for Paul at least, the spirit was not simply a generalized or sub-personal divine force that later theology would turn into a third 'person of the Trinity'. As far as Paul was concerned, the spirit, just like Jesus, was doing what YHWH himself had said he would do. The spirit was the further, and ongoing, manifestation of the personal presence of the one God.

[\(ii\) The Spirit as the New Shekinah](#)

It is of course well known that Paul can describe both the church as a whole and the individual Christian as the place where the living God dwells through his spirit. But because the centrality of the Temple in Jewish theology, not least eschatology, has not been brought out, and particularly because the theme of YHWH's return to Zion has not been factored in to discussions of Jewish eschatological monotheism, the full significance of this well-known theme has not been realized. Nor, as a result, have some passages which in fact deserve to be treated within this context received the

attention they deserve. My point can be simply stated. When Paul speaks of the individual Christian, or the whole church, as the ‘temple’ in which the spirit ‘dwells’, such language from a second-Temple Jew can only mean (a) that YHWH has returned to his Temple as he had promised and (b) that the mode of this long-awaited, glorious, tabernacling presence is the spirit. If we can speak, as we have done, of a christology of divine identity, drawing on the eschatological side of second-Temple monotheism, the evidence compels us to do exactly the same with pneumatology.²⁸³

The obvious ‘temple’ passages are quickly listed: three of them in the Corinthian correspondence and one in Ephesians. These passages are, strikingly, associated with Paul’s appeal for the two characteristics which we saw to be central to his vision of the church, namely unity and holiness.

First, 1 Corinthians 3. Faced with the problem of personality cults in the church, Paul describes the way in which different tasks have been allotted to different workers. ‘I planted,’ he says, ‘and Apollos watered, but it was God who gave the growth’ (3.7). He then changes the image from a farmer’s field to an architect’s building. He, Paul, has laid the foundation, and other people are building on it. What matters is the quality of material used in the building. Will it be ‘gold, silver, precious stones’, or will it be ‘wood, grass or straw’ (3.12)? Sooner or later the truth will out: the coming Day will be revealed in fire, and the work will either shine out the more brightly or be burned up. One might have guessed, through the development of the building metaphor, where all this was going, and as often in Paul the climax of the passage makes the underlying metaphor at last explicit:

Don’t you see? You are God’s Temple! God’s spirit lives in you (*oikei en hymin*)! If anyone destroys God’s Temple, God will destroy them. God’s Temple is holy, you see, and that is precisely what you are.²⁸⁴

There is no mistaking the point. This is no mere metaphor, a random image culled from Paul’s fertile imagination. No ex-Pharisee could write this without intending to say that the founding and building up of the church through the gospel constituted the long-awaited rebuilding of the Temple, and that *the indwelling of the spirit constituted the long-awaited return of*

YHWH to Zion. To speak of some force or power ‘dwelling’ in a ‘temple’ is one thing; in the ancient pagan world it would already be taken as an indication of the presence of some divinity. To do so in a first-century Jewish context can only mean – must only mean – some kind of identification of the divine spirit with the long-awaited returning Shekinah. For the divine spirit to take up residence in the church is for Exodus 40 and Ezekiel 43 to find a radical, unexpected and even shocking new fulfilment.²⁸⁵ But there can be no doubt that this is what Paul meant to say.

Granted, for Paul to say this of the Corinthian church, muddled and rebellious as they were, sounds heavily ironic. But he means it. This new Temple is vulnerable. Factional fighting could destroy it. But there is no ‘as if’ about verses 16 and 17. Unless Paul is totally deceived, the divine spirit has taken up residence in the fellowship of Corinthian believers. The church, as it stands, is thus already the new Temple, and the spirit that dwells within is the new Shekinah. It is hard to see how a second-Temple Jew could give the spirit a higher value than this.

The same is obviously true in the second passage, this time applied perhaps even more strikingly to the individual Christian. Here the challenge is to holiness, particularly sexual holiness:

Run away from immorality. Every sin that it’s possible for someone to commit happens outside the body; but immorality involves sinning against your own body. Or don’t you know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit within you, the spirit God gave you, so that you don’t belong to yourselves? You were quite an expensive purchase! So glorify God in your body.²⁸⁶

It is one thing for ‘the church’ as a whole to be designated as the new Temple, and for the indwelling spirit to take the role of the Shekinah within it. But it is always possible (and we see this possibility at various points in 1 Corinthians) for particular Christians within the church to be happy with the general truth but not to apply it to themselves. Paul will have none of it. What is true of the church as a whole is true of every single Christian. To sin against the body is to deface the divine Temple, to ignore the Shekinah who, in shocking fulfilment of ancient promises, has returned to dwell in that Temple at last.²⁸⁷ The ethical force of this is obvious; the implications

for a theology of the cross (‘You were quite an expensive purchase!’) are strong; but for our present purposes it is the revised monotheism that is most striking. Once again we must conclude that Paul, thoroughly soaked in the language and hopes of second-Temple Judaism, could only write such a thing if he were fully convinced that the promises of YHWH’s return had been fulfilled, not only in Jesus but also in the spirit.

The third passage, 2 Corinthians 6.14—7.1, has sometimes been regarded as an intrusion into the flow of thought of 2 Corinthians.²⁸⁸ The letter at that point is indeed jerky, switching quickly from the long apologia for Paul’s apostleship (2.14—6.13) to the account of his journey through Macedonia which appeared to have been broken off earlier (7.5–16 with 1.15—2.13). That account itself, however, indicates that Paul may well have been writing while on the move, and while in turmoil of spirit. I am inclined to agree with those recent commentators who have regarded it as more plausible to think that 2 Corinthians always was a bits-and-pieces letter, in more or less this order, than to suppose that some later editor has stitched together a number of fragments into the present patchwork quilt. That said, there is no good reason to regard as non-Pauline the very striking ‘temple’ passage which, once again, comes as part of an appeal for holiness:

Don’t be drawn into partnership with unbelievers. What kind of sharing can there be, after all, between justice and lawlessness? What partnership can there be between light and darkness? What kind of harmony can the Messiah have with Beliar? What has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What kind of agreement can there be between God’s temple and idols? We are the temple of the living God, you see, just as God said:

I will live among them (*enoikēsō en autois*) and walk about with them;
I will be their God, and they will be my people.
So come out from the midst of them,
and separate yourselves, says YHWH;
no unclean thing must you touch.
Then I will receive you gladly,
and I will be to you as a father,
and you will be to me as sons and daughters,
says YHWH, the Almighty.

So, my beloved people, with promises like these, let's make ourselves clean from everything that defiles us, outside and inside, and let's become completely holy in the fear of God.²⁸⁹

The remarkable web of biblical allusions amplifies what we might have deduced already from the straightforward statement that 'we are the temple of the living God'. First, there is the promise in the Torah that God will place his tabernacle in the midst of the people; he will dwell with them and 'walk among them'. This promise, rooted in the events of the exodus, and applied to the need for holiness, is reiterated in Exodus, Leviticus and elsewhere.²⁹⁰ The same promise is linked directly, in Ezekiel 37 (the chapter, of course, which predicts the 'resurrection' of exiled Israel), to the regular covenantal promise 'I will be their God and they shall be my people.'²⁹¹

This would already be enough to tell us that the idea of the church as Temple in this passage was being linked explicitly to the theme of the new exodus in which Israel's God would once again dwell in the midst of his people. But there is more. The appeal to 'come out and separate yourselves' is a direct quotation from Isaiah 52.11:

Depart, depart, go out from there!
Touch no unclean thing;
go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves,
you who carry the vessels of YHWH.²⁹²

But this passage is of course part of the climax of the great reiterated promise, the major theme of the whole prophetic poem: Israel's God reigns; he has comforted his people; the watchmen sing for joy because in plain sight they see YHWH returning to Zion. And the warning about coming out from Babylon, so as not to be polluted by its idolatry or harmed by its imminent destruction, leads directly to a further statement about the personal presence of Israel's God, leading the people through the wilderness as at the time of the exodus: 'YHWH will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearguard'.²⁹³ Indeed, the whole passage is framed as a new exodus: Israel's God is determined to rescue his people from their present slavery as he did when they were in Egypt, and then again when

they were oppressed by Assyria.²⁹⁴ The appeal to ‘come out and be separate’ flows directly from the promise of the new exodus in which Israel’s God will once again come to dwell in the midst of his people. This is the foundation of Paul’s belief that the church is ‘the temple of the living God’.

And still he is not finished. Those who are thus escaping Babylon are the renewed family of David, the promised messianic people. ‘I will be to you as a father, and you will be to me as sons and daughters’ is an evocation, and a democratization, of the promise to David concerning his coming ‘son’, the one who will be ‘raised up’ – and who will build the Temple:

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.²⁹⁵

Even the final flourish, ‘says YHWH, the Almighty’, turns out to be a reference to the same passage.²⁹⁶ And the concluding appeal for a cleansing from all defilement, for a complete holiness, goes of course very closely with the entire theme of the church as the place where the living God has come to dwell as he had always promised.

It is of course true that the spirit is not mentioned at any point in this remarkable passage (unless ‘spirit’ in the phrase ‘flesh and spirit’ in 7.1 should be taken that way). But with 2 Corinthians 3 as part of the wider context we can surely take it for granted that this detailed exposition of the church as Temple must presuppose the spirit as the new form of the Shekinah, the tabernacling presence of the God who has accomplished the new exodus. And once more we are aware that it is this theology – a thought-out, scripturally grounded reflection on the one true God in the light of the realities of Jesus and the spirit – that enables the church to be the church, to be both united and holy.

Both of those characteristics are again in strong evidence in the final explicit ‘temple’ passage. Ephesians began by stating, within the context of an exodus-based paean of praise, that the divine purpose was to sum up all things in heaven and on earth in the Messiah (1.10). The letter then argues

in chapter 2 that the powerful redeeming action of divine grace which rescues sinner by grace through faith (2.1–10) results in the coming together into a single family of Jew and gentile alike. As in 1 Corinthians 3, there are advance hints that this is going to turn into a ‘temple’-image: the dividing wall that kept Jews and gentiles apart, and which is abolished in the Messiah, may well be a reference to the wall that divided the ‘court of the gentiles’ in the Jerusalem Temple from the inner area where only Jews could go.²⁹⁷ Once again Isaiah 52 is not far away: the ‘good news’ of ‘peace’ was announced to those both near and far.²⁹⁸

With all this in place, the temple-theme finally becomes explicit:

You are no longer foreigners or strangers. No: you are fellow-citizens with God’s holy people. You are members of God’s household. You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with King Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building is fitted together, and grows into a holy temple in the lord. You, too, are being built up together, in him, into a place where God will live (*eis katoikētērion tou theou*) by the spirit.²⁹⁹

In context, both of Ephesians and of second-Temple expectations, this too can only mean one thing. The hope that one day YHWH would return to Zion, to dwell in the renewed Temple for ever, has now been fulfilled – but in a radical, shocking and unexpected fashion. The role of God’s living presence, the glorious Shekinah, is taken by the spirit. Once again, in second-Temple Jewish terms there cannot be a higher pneumatology than this. The spirit is incorporated within the divine identity, the identity which is shaped particularly by the eschatology of YHWH’s ‘return’.³⁰⁰

Once this theme of the spirit as the long-promised indwelling Shekinah is recognized, other passages emerge from the shadows to suggest that they, too, should be included in the reckoning. Among these perhaps the most striking is Romans 8, where the theme of the spirit’s ‘indwelling’ strongly echoes the use of the same word in the 1 Corinthians passages above:

You’re not people of flesh; you’re people of the spirit (if indeed God’s spirit lives within you [*oikei en hymin*]; note that anyone who doesn’t have the spirit of the Messiah doesn’t belong to him). But if the Messiah is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of covenant justice. So, then, if the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you (*oikei en hymin*), the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal

bodies, too, through his spirit who lives within you (*dia tou enoikountos autou pneumatos en hymin*).³⁰¹

We notice here, of course, what we might have expected from the fact which we have now clarified, that *both* the Messiah *and* the spirit can be spoken of in terms of the returning and indwelling Shekinah: that Paul can shuttle to and fro between them, not making them straightforwardly identical or interchangeable but nevertheless aligning them closely. This corresponds to Ephesians 3.17, where Paul prays that ‘the Messiah may make his home (*katoikēsai*) in your hearts, through faith’. We shall consider this further in the next chapter where we shall observe that Paul’s occasional use of ‘Messiah in you’ (as opposed to the much more frequent ‘you in Messiah’) is functionally the same as ‘spirit in you’. But the main point stands: this is once again temple-language.³⁰²

That, after all, is more or less what we should have expected both from the dense themes of 8.1–4 and from the larger exodus-narrative which stands under the whole section of Romans. This is the point where, once the problem caused by Torah has been dealt with, the Shekinah can and will come to dwell in the newly built tabernacle, as in Exodus 33–40. And, as we shall shortly see in the second part of our treatment of the spirit within Paul’s revised monotheism, this gives rise at once to a theme we might naturally expect. If YHWH has returned to dwell in the newly built Temple or tabernacle, the exodus-narrative would then require that this divine presence would lead the people through the wilderness to their promised inheritance. For the moment, though, we note the conclusion – which ought, I submit, to be as weighty for systematic theologians as it certainly is within the exegesis of Paul: that the spirit has taken the role of the returning Shekinah. We must say it one more time: in terms of Paul’s Jewish world, one cannot conceive of a higher pneumatology than this.

The one remaining passage that might be considered relevant is in Colossians. In that letter, too, there is a reference to the divine ‘word’ ‘dwelling richly among you’, and granted the uses of ‘word’ in second-Temple Judaism and the New Testament it is not impossible that we should

see there, too, a sense of the personal presence of the one God, active through the ministries of teaching, exhortation, wisdom and (not least) song.³⁰³ But the passage I have in mind comes at the point where Paul is applying to the Colossians what he said about Jesus himself in the wisdom-poem of 1.15–20, particularly the apparent temple-image of 1.19 (‘for in him all the Fullness was glad to dwell [*eudokēsen katoikēsai*]’). He repeats this christological point in 2.9: ‘in him all the full measure of divinity has taken up bodily residence (*en autō katoikei pan to plērōma tēs theotētos sōmatikōs*)’, and then draws his audience into the same reality: ‘you are fulfilled in him (*este en autō peplērōmenoi*), since he’s the head of all rule and authority.’ There is of course much more going on here than simply this theme, but we should not ignore this passage in considering Paul’s vision of the church as the place where the living presence of the one God has come to dwell.

All of this points us forward to the closely correlated theme in which, once more, Paul’s second-Temple monotheism of divine identity, especially in its eschatological form, has been reworked. If the spirit is the one who comes to ‘dwell’ in the ‘new Temple’ which is the people of God in the Messiah, the spirit is also the one who, like the fiery presence of Israel’s God in the wilderness, leads them home to their promised land.

[\(iii\) The Spirit and the New Exodus](#)

Three passages in particular stand out as expressing this view of the spirit. In each case the equivalent features are prominent. First, the spirit is spoken of as the divine spirit, God’s own spirit, and also at the same time as the spirit of Jesus or the spirit of the Messiah. There seems at this point to be an interchangeability, which itself tells us quite a lot about how Jesus himself was being perceived; if Jesus’ spirit and God’s spirit are basically the same, then he, Jesus, has already been placed solidly and inalienably within the meaning of the word ‘God’. Second, the passages in question are once more characteristic statements of Jewish-style monotheism (creational,

covenantal, eschatological, cultic). This is once more the same pattern that we have observed in the case of Jesus himself.

The first piece of evidence is all the more remarkable if, as I think, it is very early, perhaps in the late 40s. We have already glanced at it in another connection. Paul is speaking about the birth of the renewed people of God, the single family promised to Abraham. In good Jewish style, he does this by retelling the story of the exodus: God rescues his people from their slavery, and then, addressing them as his ‘sons’, he comes with his own strange presence to accompany them on the journey to their ‘inheritance’ (though they do their best to rebel, wanting at various stages to go back to Egypt). In doing all this God reveals his own Name: now at last the people discover who he really is (which may mean, in Exodus as we have it, that now at last they discover the meaning of the Name that their ancestors had already used without knowing its full import).³⁰⁴

So Paul puts it like this, at the climax of the letter to the Galatians:

When we were children, we were kept in ‘slavery’ under the ‘elements of the world’. ⁴But when the fullness of time arrived, God sent out his son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And, because you are sons, God sent out the spirit of his son into our hearts, calling out ‘Abba, father!’ ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son! And, if you’re a son, you are an heir, through God.

⁸However, at that stage you didn’t know God, and so you were enslaved to beings that, in their proper nature, are not gods. ⁹But now that you’ve come to know God – or, better, to be known by God – how can you turn back again to that weak and poverty-stricken line-up of elements that you want to serve all over again? ¹⁰You are observing days, and months, and seasons, and years! ¹¹I am afraid for you; perhaps my hard work with you is all going to be wasted.³⁰⁵

They are, in other words, trying to sneak off back to Egypt, trying to return to the slavery from which they had been rescued.³⁰⁶ That forms the polemical thrust of the letter all through: to embrace Torah is to embrace a slavery no different in essence from that of the paganism from which the gospel of Jesus the Messiah has rescued you.³⁰⁷ Here, of course, lies the greatest irony in Paul’s use of the exodus narrative for this purpose. In the original story, the gift of Torah was itself the high point, the moment of

vision and revelation, the culmination of the rescue from Egypt, the disclosure of God himself and his will for his people. For Paul, however, *the role both of Torah and of the tabernacling presence of God with his people has been taken, jointly, by the Messiah and the spirit*. God sent the son; God sent the spirit of the son, making ‘you’ no longer slaves but sons, just as in the exodus story. And the point, not to be missed in the middle of all this dense exposition, is that with this sending of son and spirit *we now know the name of God*. We have discovered, fully and truly, who YHWH is. To go back from this revelation is to go back to Egypt. This is the classic narrative of Jewish monotheism in action: Abraham’s God fulfils the covenant by rescuing his people from slavery and leading them home to their inheritance. The God who is revealed in this new-exodus story is the son-sending, spirit-sending God.³⁰⁸

The second passage includes a section closely cognate with this short and sharp pneumatological monotheism. In Romans 8 (where almost all Paul’s key themes can be found somewhere or other) we find a bewildering flurry of spirit-reference, with the same cumulative impact. The spirit is the personal, powerful manifestation of the one God of Jewish monotheism, the God who, having given Torah, has at last enabled his people to fulfil it and so come into the blessings of covenant renewal; the God who will raise his people from the dead; the God who leads his people home to their true inheritance; the God who, ‘searching the hearts’, groans within his groaning people within the groaning of all creation; the God from whose love nothing can separate his people. This is, of course, one of the greatest passages in one of the greatest letters ever written. Highlighting one single theme does it scant justice. But to understand the theme, here picked out in bold, we must at least glance at the whole context:

¹So, therefore, there is no condemnation for those in the Messiah, Jesus! ²Why not? Because **the law of the spirit of life** in the Messiah, Jesus, released you from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law (being weak because of human flesh) was incapable of doing. God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin-offering; and, right there in the flesh, he condemned sin. ⁴This was in order that the right and proper verdict of the law could be fulfilled in us, as we live **not according to the flesh but according to the spirit**.

⁵Look at it like this. People whose lives are determined by human flesh focus their minds on matters to do with the flesh, but **people whose lives are determined by the spirit focus their minds on matters to do with the spirit.** ⁶Focus the mind on the flesh, and you'll die; but **focus it on the spirit, and you'll have life, and peace.** ⁷The mind focused on the flesh, you see, is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law; in fact, it can't. ⁸Those who are determined by the flesh can't please God.

⁹But you're not people of flesh; **you're people of the spirit (if indeed God's spirit lives within you; note that anyone who doesn't have the spirit of the Messiah doesn't belong to him).**

¹⁰**But if the Messiah is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of covenant justice.** ¹¹**So, then, if the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you, the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, too, through his spirit who lives within you.**

¹²So then, my dear family, we are in debt – but not to human flesh, to live our life in that way. ¹³If you live in accordance with the flesh, you will die; but **if, by the spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

¹⁴**All who are led by the spirit of God, you see, are God's children.** ¹⁵**You didn't receive a spirit of slavery, did you, to go back again into a state of fear? But you received the spirit of sonship, in whom we call out 'Abba, father!'** ¹⁶**When that happens, it is the spirit itself giving supporting witness to what our own spirit is saying, that we are God's children.** ¹⁷And if we're children, we are also heirs: heirs of God, and fellow heirs with the Messiah, as long as we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. [309](#)

And then, after the climactic promise of the renewal of all creation in verses 19–21, we return to the present reality:

²²Let me explain. We know that the entire creation is groaning together, and going through labour pains together, up until the present time. ²³Not only so: we too, **we who have the first fruits of the spirit's life within us**, are groaning within ourselves, as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴We were saved, you see, in hope. But hope isn't hope if you can see it! Who hopes for what they can see? ²⁵But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it eagerly – but also patiently.

²⁶In the same way, too, **the spirit comes alongside and helps us in our weakness.** We don't know what to pray for as we ought to; but **that same spirit pleads on our behalf**, with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷And the Searcher of Hearts knows **what the spirit is thinking, because the spirit pleads for God's people according to God's will.** [310](#)

Resisting the temptation to offer a lengthy exposition of this extraordinary piece of writing, I restrict myself to the three barest points for our present purpose.³¹¹

First, the entire passage breathes the very air of second-Temple monotheism. The underlying narrative is that of the creator whose good creation has been spoiled and corrupted but who is determined none the less to carry out the plans laid down long ago, plans to rescue and restore it. These covenantal plans, expressed through Torah, had apparently come to nothing because of ‘the weakness of the flesh’, in other words, the incapacity of the people to whom Torah had been given. (That is what Romans 7.7–25 is all about.) But God has done what Torah could not, accomplishing in the Messiah and by the spirit not only the rescue of humans but the restoration of creation, breathing his own life-giving spirit into human nostrils to give life where there was none. The echoes of Ezekiel 37 in Romans 8.9–11 (the passage we studied a moment ago in another connection) make clear what this is about: resurrection indicates covenant restoration and renewal. And the echoes of Exodus in 8.12–17³¹² indicate that, as in Galatians 4, we should understand that the presence of the spirit in 8.12–17, assuring God’s people that they are indeed his children (and enabling them to call him ‘Abba, father’), is accomplishing what was accomplished in the original story through the tabernacling presence of YHWH during the wilderness wanderings.³¹³ All this is classic Jewish monotheism, picking up multiple resonances of creation and exodus, of covenant renewal and fulfilment, and expressing the presence of Israel’s God in terms of the spirit, the spirit of the Messiah, the spirit of the-one-who-raised-Jesus-from-the-dead.³¹⁴

Second, therefore, as with christology, the spirit is not an extra divine force added on to ‘God’ at the outside, or (worse) a new God added to an incipient pantheon. It was of course a little easier for Paul to say this about the spirit than it was for him to say similar things about Jesus, since readers of Israel’s scriptures knew about God’s spirit at work in the life of Israel, speaking through the prophets, and so on.³¹⁵ But it is striking none the less. *What the one God of Israel had done in the exodus narrative, and had*

promised to do himself at the eschaton, Paul sees being accomplished by the spirit.

Third, therefore, we see in this passage, as already in Galatians 4, what even with cautious hindsight we are bound to describe as a nascent trinitarian monotheism. It has none of the hallmarks of the later trinitarian controversies: no mention of ‘persons’, ‘substance’, ‘natures’, of any such analytic or philosophical trappings. But here, at the heart of first-generation Christianity, we have a theology which compelled the later theologians to engage in that kind of discussion: a portrayal of Israel’s God in action, fulfilling his ancient promises in utterly characteristic fashion, and doing so not only through, but *as*, ‘son’ and ‘spirit’. There is at least a major question here to which the later trinitarian theologians were giving the best answers they could, granted that they seem to have left behind or bracketed out the more helpful categories of second-Temple Judaism and done their best to express the same ideas in the language of Greek philosophy.

A tailpiece on Romans 8, connecting up with Romans 5. When we began our exploration of Paul’s revised second-Temple monotheism, we noticed, in the course of exploring some of his statements about suffering, that in Romans 8.28 he hinted at a connection with the praying of the *Shema*. That passage comes immediately after the passage we were discussing. Here it is, with verse 27 as its lead-in:

²⁷And the Searcher of Hearts knows what the spirit is thinking, because the spirit pleads for God’s people according to God’s will. ²⁸We know, in fact, that God works all things together for good **to those who love him**, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹Those he foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family. ³⁰And those he marked out in advance, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. [316](#)

The connection between 8.27 and 8.28 is important: Paul is not plucking ‘those who love God’ as a new category out of the air, but is indicating that ‘loving God’ is the proper way to describe what is going on at the heart of the experience he is describing. The inarticulate groaning of the spirit deep within God’s people is heard and understood by the listening ‘heart-searcher’. God works all things together for good, he says, ‘to those who love him’: in other words, to those who keep the great command that

belongs with ‘Hear, O Israel’, to love YHWH with all the heart, life and strength, that is the ‘obedience’ that Jewish monotheism requires. *The spirit enables God’s people to keep the Shema.*

The very word *Shema*, in fact, means not merely ‘hear’, as in ‘allow your ears to take in the sound’, but ‘hear’ as in ‘hear *and obey*’.³¹⁷ A case can be made, in this light, for allowing Paul’s remarkable phrase ‘the obedience of faith’, *hypakoē pisteōs*, to resonate closely with the *Shema*: this is the ‘obedience’ in which the ‘hearing’ takes place, namely *pistis*. That link, already at least an echo in Romans 3.30 where, as we saw, the *Shema* is invoked in order to insist that all those who have *pistis* in Paul’s sense are part of God’s people, points us back to Romans 5, to the passage where the reference to ‘loving God’ in Romans 8.28 is, I believe, anticipated. I refer to 5.5:

We also celebrate in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patience,⁴ patience produces a well-formed character, and a character like that produces hope.⁵ Hope, in its turn, does not make us ashamed, because **the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us.**³¹⁸

Most commentators, reacting against Augustine’s exegesis which was theologically significant for him in a way it is not for me, have read *agapē theou*, ‘the love of God’, in Romans 5.5 as denoting God’s love for his people, anticipating that theme in 5.8–10 and 8.31–9. But, just as Paul can switch from a clear reference to ‘our love for God’ in 8.28 to ‘God’s love for us’ in the passage immediately following, and just as ‘our love for God’ in 8.28 consists in the fact that the inarticulate groaning which comes from the depth of the believer’s own personality is nevertheless searched for, heard and known by the ‘heart-searcher’ himself, so I suggest that in 5.5 ‘the love of God’ refers once more, not to God’s love for his people, but to their love for God. This is consonant with the emphasis of the previous passage, which has been not on God’s action towards his people but on the development of a spirit-transformed life: suffering, patience, character, hope and, at the bottom of it all, love, the love that is itself enabled, just as in 8.27–8, by the spirit.

It is not clear, in any case, what sense it would make to see God's love for his people located in their *hearts*.³¹⁹ On the contrary: the hearts of believers are the places where, and the means by which, they are to love God, according to the *Shema* and in accordance with the restatement of the same theme in 8.27–8. Here again, therefore, we see what we might appropriately call pneumatological monotheism: the spirit, understood as the outpouring of the personal presence and energy of the one true God, enables his people to do what the *Shema* required, to love God with the heart, with the strength (6.12–23; 8.12–17)), with the mind (8.5–11; 12.1–2) and if need be, as with Akiba himself, with the life (8.31–9).

The third and final passage that stands out as an example of pneumatological monotheism has a very different character. Here Paul is addressing his beloved and infuriating Corinthians, who need to learn that even though they have all sorts of different gifts, which are genuine gifts from the one true God, they are precisely gifts *of* that one and the same God, and are therefore to be used, not as a means of pulling apart from one another, but rather in order to build one another up in a united 'body'. Yet, at the very moment when he wants so much to speak of the singularity of giftedness and the unity of the *ekklēsia* that results, he says it in three different but interlocking ways:

⁴There are different types of spiritual gifts, but the same spirit; ⁵there are different types of service, but the same lord; ⁶and there are different types of activity, but it is the same God who operates all of them in everyone.³²⁰

Just as in 1 Corinthians 8.6 Paul expanded the *Shema* so as to include Jesus within it, so now he expands the simple statement we might expect him to have made ('all gifts come from the one God') so that it now explicitly includes both the spirit and Jesus.

Whatever else this is, it is certainly not the sudden construction of a tritheistic structure. That would have made entirely the wrong point within the present argument for unity, and would in any case have straightforwardly undermined the theological substructure of the whole letter so far, as well as of Paul's whole theology. The passage appears to be,

again, an early and unphilosophical statement of what later writers would refer to as the doctrine of the Trinity. Paul seems to have thought of it as simply the irreducible threefoldness of the divine work in and among his people, even at the point where he is stressing so strongly that in fact it is all one:

¹¹It is the one spirit, the same one, whose work produces all these things, and the spirit gives different gifts to each one in accordance with the spirit's own wishes.

¹²Let me explain. Just as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the Messiah. ¹³For we all were baptized into one body, by one spirit – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and we were all given one spirit to drink.³²¹

Once this point is grasped there is a further passage which, though not so obviously an affirmation of Jewish-style monotheism, nevertheless resonates with the material we have just studied. It also allows us to see the way in which what Paul said about Jesus in relation to the one God of Israel could then as it were spill over into what he said about the spirit. We move forward to the very different second letter to Corinth, where a chastened and embattled Paul appears to be facing a much more hostile audience than before. We are at this point revisiting a passage which was important in our earlier discussion of monotheistic christology; here we invoke it in terms of a similarly monotheistic pneumatology.

Second Corinthians 2.14—6.13 is all about the strange character of Paul's apostleship. At least, it has seemed strange to the Corinthians, to the point where they have been taught by other leaders that Paul hardly counts as an apostle at all, and that if he wants to return to Corinth he will have to provide fresh letters of recommendation (3.1). In response to this somewhat brazen challenge, Paul composes, not without considerable irony, a defence of the Messiah-shaped character of his apostleship, and in particular of the way in which his constant trouble and suffering does not undermine his apostolic status but actually constitutes and supports it. Much of this writing, though, is not about the Messiah as such, but about the way in which, by the spirit, Paul's own ministry exemplifies, encapsulates and

actually embodies God's faithfulness – that faithfulness which, seen in the Messiah and specifically in his death and resurrection, is then lived out in the true apostolic ministry.³²²

It is the work of the spirit which is highlighted in the spectacular 'new covenant' passage in chapter 3.³²³ Paul comes out of his corner fighting:

¹So: we're starting to 'recommend ourselves' again, are we? Or perhaps we need – as some do – official references to give to you? Or perhaps even to get from you? ²You are our official reference! It's written on our hearts! Everybody can know it and read it! ³It's quite plain that you are a letter from the Messiah, with us as the messengers – a letter not written with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on the tablets of beating hearts.

The reference is of course to the promise of Jeremiah and Ezekiel: Israel's God will renew the covenant by writing his law on the hearts of his people, by taking out of their flesh the heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh instead.³²⁴ In the light of what we have said so far in the present chapter it should be clear that this mention of the heart as the location of law-observance takes us straight back to Deuteronomy, to the *Shema* on the one hand with its following emphasis that the words spoken are to be kept 'in your heart' (Deuteronomy 6.6), and to the promise of covenant renewal on the other, when God's people, after their shameful exile, will seek him with all their heart and soul:

From there you will seek YHWH your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul ...

[If you] return to YHWH your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then YHWH your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you ... Moreover, YHWH will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live ... The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.³²⁵

Paul is claiming, in other words, that by the spirit his own apostolic ministry, and indeed the life of the Corinthian Christians, is a fulfilment of that complex of new-covenant promises which are prominent in the Deuteronomic and prophetic tradition, linked directly to the worship of

YHWH as the one true God and the forswearing of other gods. The spirit, in other words, enables the Messiah's people to fulfil Torah in the new-covenantal fashion. 'God has qualified us,' Paul continues, 'to be stewards of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life'.³²⁶

But this opens up a further possibility which Paul now exploits dramatically in support of his basic contention, that his style of apostolic ministry, in which he uses great 'boldness' and 'freedom', so offensive to the cultural snobs at Corinth, is in fact validated by the inner nature of the gospel itself. Alongside Torah, as the flagship symbol of the life of Israel, stands the Temple; and in the Temple dwells the Shekinah, the 'glory', the radiance of the one true God (as opposed to the shame of the golden calf) which Moses was allowed not only to behold, though not face to face, but actually to reflect. Very well, says Paul, that same glory is what is now bestowed through the work of the spirit: yes, even through the strange, shabby, uncouth, uncultured, and apparently humiliating life and work of the apostle. The key to this passage is to realize that the contrast Paul is drawing is not between Moses and the Messiah, or indeed between Moses and himself, Paul, but rather between (a) the people who heard Moses and (b) the people who hear and receive the apostolic testimony. As in Romans 8.3, the inability of the law to do what it promised was not because of any inherent weakness in itself but because 'it was weak through the flesh' – in other words, because the flawed human beings to whom it was given were incapable of responding appropriately. But now, by the spirit, Paul claims, we are capable, and we do respond:

⁷But just think about it: when death was being distributed, carved in letters of stone, it was a glorious thing, so glorious in fact that the children of Israel couldn't look at Moses's face because of the glory of his face – a glory that was to be abolished. ⁸But in that case, when the spirit is being distributed, won't that be glorious too? ⁹If distributing condemnation is glorious, you see, how much more glorious is it to distribute vindication! ¹⁰In fact, what used to be glorious has come in this respect to have no glory at all, because of the new glory which goes so far beyond it. ¹¹For if the thing which was to be abolished came with glory, how much more glory will there be

for the thing that lasts. ¹²So, because that's the kind of hope we have, we speak with great freedom. [327](#)

There is of course a paradox here, as so often in Paul. If there really is 'glory' to be had in the gospel, we can imagine the Corinthians responding, then why can't we see it? That's the point, Paul will respond: we walk by faith, not by sight (5.7). But it is true none the less: if this is really the ministry of the new covenant (and Paul's belief in that depends, ultimately, on his belief in Jesus' resurrection and the gift of the spirit itself), then 'the glory' is in fact being unveiled for all God's people to gaze at. And where do they go in order to do this? Not to the Temple in Jerusalem; not, of course, back to the wilderness tabernacle where Moses met with Israel's God while all Israel waited in fear and trembling outside. For Paul, the place where 'the glory' is now revealed – in other words, the new temple – is in the fellowship of the Messiah's people, where the spirit is at work:

¹⁵Yes, even to this day, whenever Moses is read, the veil lies upon their hearts; ¹⁶but 'whenever he turns back to the lord, the veil is removed'. ¹⁷Now 'the lord' here means the spirit; and where the spirit of the lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And all of us, without any veil on our faces, gaze at the glory of the lord as in a mirror, and so are being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as you'd expect from the lord, the spirit. [328](#)

This is, of course, the pneumatological correlate of the underlying christology which then emerges in 4.5–6. [329](#) The quotation in 3.16 is from Exodus 34.34, referring to Moses going back into the tabernacle and so removing the veil which he had put over his face to prevent the Israelites looking at his glory-reflecting face. Paul, uniquely, takes *ho kyrios* here as a reference to the spirit (though instantly glossing this with 'the spirit of the lord', in case anyone should suppose there to be a gulf opening up between the spirit and the lord himself). But the point is that 'freedom', the liberty which the apostle uses as his characteristic style, is validated and vindicated by the inner nature of God's work through the spirit. Where and how, after all, do 'all of us ... gaze at the glory of the lord as in a mirror'? Clearly, I believe, when 'we' are looking at one another: the Corinthians at the

apostle, *and the apostle at the Corinthians*, and indeed *the Corinthians at one another*. The lord, the spirit, is at work in their midst, and they are being transformed, whether they know it or not, whether they like its effects or not, whether it is culturally offensive or not, into ‘the same image’, since each is ‘reflecting’ in his or her own way the same lord, who is himself ‘the image of God’, as Paul will say a few verses later (4.4).

With that, we have joined up the present discussion to our earlier one, where it was the Messiah himself who, as God’s image, shone with his own face (Paul has not forgotten where he was a few moments earlier) ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God’. And the place where this light has shone is ‘in our hearts’. In other words (since the division between chapters 3 and 4 is of course irrelevant), this is what happens when the spirit does what Paul says it does in 3.3 and 3.6.

Putting all this together, we reach the following conclusion from these major passages about the spirit. At precisely those points where Paul most strongly highlights the special work of the spirit, he does so within a narrative framework which reinforces the second-Temple Jewish monotheistic structure of thought. The spirit is the one through whom the new exodus comes about, and with it the Deuteronomic fulfilment/renewal of the covenant, the keeping of the *Shema*, the loving of God from the heart and (not least) the establishment of the community as the true temple. Interestingly, as we have seen, the minute the apologia for apostleship is finished, in chapter 6, Paul launches into an exposition of just that, the community as the true/new temple.³³⁰

(iv) Monotheism and Spirit: Conclusion

All of this indicates that Paul regularly spoke of the spirit, in a variety of contexts, in ways which indicate, granted his own theological context, that he regarded the spirit, as he regarded the Messiah, as the personal presence of YHWH himself. This conclusion is not dependent on one or two verbal echoes, though these are important too. It is dependent on the regular and repeated invocation of the various elements of the foundational exodus-

narrative, and on the way in which Paul clearly saw the events concerning Jesus as constituting the new exodus and hence saw the life of the church, indwelt and led by the spirit, as constituting the new version of the time of wilderness wandering. The christology of ‘divine identity’ is thus matched by the pneumatology of ‘divine identity’, in both cases focused in particular on the Jewish eschatology of the return of YHWH.

It is perhaps appropriate that it is at the end of 2 Corinthians, where some of the richest christological and pneumatological material is found, that we find one of Paul’s most explicitly ‘trinitarian’ blessings:

³The grace of the lord Jesus the Messiah, the love of God, and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all.³³¹

That blessing trips unreflectively off the tongue of many a practising Christian in our own day. But for Paul it was a hard-won statement. Paul remained a robust second-Temple Jewish monotheist. That monotheism, ranged against both the dualism that would see the created order as the shabby mistake of a lesser God and the paganism that would cheerfully add yet more ‘gods’ and ‘lords’ to an ever-widening pantheon, was now irreducibly threefold. One God, one lord, Paul prays in his radical revision of the *Shema*. But, precisely as he prays that prayer, and invokes grace and peace from ‘God the father and the lord Jesus the Messiah’, he believes that the spirit is at work to enable that prayer and that invocation. Hence: one God, one lord, one spirit.

That, of course, points us on to Ephesians.

[5. Monotheism and the Single United Family: Ephesians](#)

It is hard to imagine a more emphatic declaration of ‘oneness’ than the statement which opens the second half of Ephesians:

⁴There is one body and one spirit; you were, after all, called to one hope which goes with your call. ⁵There is one lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and father of all, who is over all, through all and in all.³³²

The occasion for this remarkable statement is the need to ground the appeal for unity which forms the preceding three verses, echoing passages such as Philippians 2.1–4: love, humility, meekness, patience, making every effort ‘to guard the unity that the spirit gives’, being bound together in peace.³³³ It is, after all, the *unity* of the Messiah’s followers that will demonstrate that they are indeed the new humanity, the true people of the one God of Israel. The multiple gifts which the Messiah gives them by the spirit are to be the means, as in 1 Corinthians 12, not of a fissiparous corporate life in which everyone’s gifts are used for selfish and separatist ends, but of a common life in which

we should all reach unity in our belief and loyalty, and in knowing God’s son. Then we shall reach the stature of the mature Man measured by the standards of the Messiah’s fullness.¹⁴ As a result, we won’t be babies any longer! We won’t be thrown this way and that on a stormy sea, blown about by every gust of teaching, by human tricksters, by their cunning and deceitful scheming.¹⁵ Instead, we must speak the truth in love, and so grow up in everything into him – that is, into the Messiah, who is the head.¹⁶ He supplies the growth that the whole body needs, linked as it is and held together by every joint which supports it, with each member doing its own proper work. Then the body builds itself up in love.³³⁴

This is the point at which we can see the point towards which the whole present chapter, and in a measure this entire book, has been building up. We saw in chapter 6 that the symbolic praxis of Paul’s worldview – the place where the worldview became visible and tangible – was the concrete reality of the united community, for which Paul works in letter after letter, against one danger after another, from one angle after another. But that worldview, bereft of the community-strengthening symbolic praxis of second-Temple Judaism which Paul has declared redundant on the basis of nothing less than the Messiah’s crucifixion (Galatians 2.19–21), has needed the support which only a robust and redefined monotheism can give it. That is what we have found right across the letters. Ephesians 4 is either Paul’s own exposition of where this all leads, or the work of someone thoroughly in tune with his worldview and theology.

This remarkable statement of monotheistically grounded ecclesial unity is itself firmly anchored in the structured and measured exposition of

Ephesians 1, 2 and 3. At the heart of this we find, once again, the new Temple which is also the new humanity; and once more, when Paul speaks of this emphatic unity, he does so in reference to the one God, to the lord Jesus as Messiah and to the spirit. You, he says to the ex-pagans of western Asia Minor, are no longer foreigners or strangers, separated from God's people: you are being built into the new Temple.³³⁵ The central symbol of Israel's life, of second-Temple Jewish aspirations, is being reconstructed – in bits and pieces, scattered all over the pagan world. It is no longer a temple of stone, timber and fine decorations. It is a temple consisting of human beings, a structure 'in the lord', the Messiah being its cornerstone and the living God dwelling within it in the person and power of the spirit. This is Jewish monotheism all right, but thoroughly and controversially revised and reframed. This is a theology developed precisely in order to enable the community of Messiah-believers to stand firm within their worldview, without the symbolic praxis either of Judaism or of paganism (though Jews, seeing the loss of their symbolic praxis, will accuse this community of quasi-paganism, and pagans, seeing its essentially Jewish character, will accuse it of atheism). This is indeed the quintessence of Paulinism, whether it was Paul or someone else who boiled it down into this form.³³⁶

Once that point is grasped, the threefold monotheism of the letter's majestic opening can be glimpsed as well. Using yet again the narrative framework of Israel's scriptures, with election and redemption signalling an Exodus-and-Deuteronomy context, we find a prayer of blessing, a *berakah*, which is every bit as Jewish in style and content as the *Shema* itself, and again, as with the densely brief 1 Corinthians 8.6, expanded so as to highlight Jesus himself at its heart:

³Let us bless God, the father of our lord Jesus, the Messiah! He has blessed us in the Messiah with every spirit-inspired blessing in the heavenly realm. ⁴He chose us in him before the world was made, so as to be holy and irreproachable before him in love. ⁵He foreordained us for himself, to be adopted as sons and daughters through Jesus the Messiah. That's how he wanted it, and that's

what gave him delight,⁶ so that the glory of his grace, the grace he poured on us in his beloved one, might receive its due praise.

⁷In the Messiah, and through his blood, we have deliverance – that is, our sins have been forgiven – through the wealth of his grace⁸ which he lavished on us. Yes, with all wisdom and insight⁹ he has made known to us the secret of his purpose, just as he wanted it to be and set it forward in him¹⁰ as a blueprint for when the time was ripe. His plan was to sum up the whole cosmos in the Messiah – yes, everything in heaven and on earth, in him.

¹¹In him we have received the inheritance! We were foreordained to this, according to the intention of the one who does all things in accordance with the counsel of his purpose.¹² This was so that we, we who first hoped in the Messiah, might live for the praise of his glory.¹³ In him you too, who heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed it – in him you were marked out with the spirit of promise, the holy one.¹⁴ The spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance, until the time when the people who are God's special possession are finally reclaimed and freed. This, too, is for the praise of his glory.³³⁷

This passage rivals Romans 8 in its multiple themes and rich depths, but again we confine ourselves to a few brief observations. As I said, the prayer, deeply Jewish in character, is built around the single purpose of the creator and covenant God, a plan 'for when the time was ripe', to join up the whole cosmos, things in heaven and on earth, in the Messiah.³³⁸ This, in Bauckham's language, is 'eschatological monotheism', comparable to 1 Corinthians 15.20–8 and achieved by the same means, namely the saving work of the Messiah. There the stress was on his victory over the powers of evil and death; here it is on his redemptive death, with echoes of the Passover (deliverance through his blood). The theme of 'inheritance', as in Galatians 3–4 and Romans 8, reminds us once again of Israel's 'inheritance' (the land of Canaan) in Exodus and Deuteronomy, of the Messiah's 'inheritance' (the nations of the world) in Psalm 2, and of the reflection of the latter point in some Jewish texts about Abraham's promised 'inheritance', which would be not simply the land of Canaan but the whole world.³³⁹ All this, in structure and in detail, is deeply rooted in the life and prayer of second-Temple Judaism. And all this, in structure and in detail, has been rethought, reworked and is now (one might say) to be reprayed in terms of the Messiah and the spirit. This is creational and

covenantal monotheism recast, without losing its creational and covenantal character, as christological and pneumatological monotheism, and expressed – if we can bear those two further adjectives once again! – as eschatological and cultic monotheism. This framework, and this content, are what the very earliest Christians needed if they were to stand firm, if they were to survive with a worldview that had no symbolic praxis except that which was generated from within the gospel itself. This theology, a lived theology of worship of and prayer to the one creator God, was the vitally necessary adjunct to the nascent worldview.

It was necessary not least because, as with second-Temple Judaism in general, so with this remarkable mutation from within it, such a community, living by such a worldview, was bound to come into confrontation, and sooner or later conflict, with the principalities and powers that claimed to run the world. Judaism, in the Diaspora, had done its best to make and maintain its peace with its pagan neighbours and particularly with Rome, gaining permission to practise the ancestral faith without needing to take part in the local cults, particularly, in the first century, the burgeoning cult of Rome and the emperor.³⁴⁰ Paul is well aware of the challenges that will be faced by a people claiming to belong to the family of the Messiah, the Jewish ‘royal family’ as it were, and claiming to tell the Jewish story and so to claim the inheritance of the world: all history had been waiting for *this* moment, not the birth or accession of Caesar; all space, time and matter was summed up in *this* King, not the putative world ruler in Rome! This Messiah, raised from the dead, is the one who has been exalted

above all rule and authority and power and lordship, and above every name that is invoked, both in the present age and also in the age to come.³⁴¹

The creation of the single family, the new humanity and new Temple, is thus a major *political* act, with resonances out into the world of power. This worldview is not adopted without full awareness of the challenge and the risk. Paul is already suffering the consequences, but that only makes him the more determined. My task, he says,

is to make clear to everyone just what the secret plan is, the purpose that's been hidden from the very beginning of the world in God who created all things. ¹⁰This is it: that God's wisdom, in all its rich variety, was to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places – through the church! ¹¹This was God's eternal purpose, and he's accomplished it in Jesus the Messiah, our lord. ¹²We have confidence, and access to God, in him, in full assurance, through his faithfulness. ¹³So, I beg you: don't lose heart because of my sufferings on your behalf! That's your glory!³⁴²

The key line here is verse 10, which draws together the sense of a single great overarching purpose with the sense of the unveiling of God's previously hidden wisdom ('salvation history' and 'apocalyptic', if you like), and enables both to ground the richly varied unity of God's people in the Messiah and thereby to confront the powers of the world (which like to think that *they* can bring unity to the human race) with the news that Jesus is lord, and that they are not. 'God's wisdom in all its rich variety': *hē polypoikilos sophia tou theou*, the many-coloured and many-splendoured wisdom of God; that is what is revealed when the church is being what it was meant to be. This would be Paul's answer to those who charge him, in our low-grade postmodern pseudo-morality, with introducing 'sameness' rather than celebrating 'difference'.³⁴³ Not at all, he would reply. It is Caesar who introduces 'sameness'. In the Messiah, God's richly varied creation is enhanced and celebrated. That, indeed, is why Caesar, and all other secular rulers whether official or not, are afraid of it.

And that is why we are not surprised when, at the close of the letter, we discover not a triumphalist, tub-thumping affirmation that everything is basically all right, but a clear-eyed, sober assessment of the battle that still lies ahead. Once again, our modern categories fail to come anywhere near to what Paul is saying. The theology and ecclesiology of the first four chapters of Ephesians sound to western (and particularly protestant) ears as though they proclaim an over-realized eschatology: God has established the church, and all it has to do is to go on celebrating its own existence! That is scarcely even a parody of what Paul is trying to convey. Writing from prison, he knows only too well that the wonderful vision he has laid out, grounded on the resurrection of Jesus, can only be seen if one looks through

the lens of suffering, can only be affirmed in the teeth of the apparent evidence of continuing sorrow, wickedness and corruption, and also of powers and authorities both political and ‘spiritual’:

¹⁰Be strong in the lord, and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on God’s complete armour. Then you’ll be able to stand firm against the devil’s trickery. ¹²The warfare we’re engaged in, you see, isn’t against flesh and blood. It’s against the leaders, against the authorities, against the powers that rule the world in this dark age, against the wicked spiritual elements in the heavenly places. ¹³For this reason, you must take up God’s complete armour. Then, when wickedness grabs its moment, you’ll be able to withstand, to do what needs to be done, and still to be on your feet when it’s all over. ¹⁴So stand firm! Put the belt of truth round your waist; put on justice as your breastplate; ¹⁵for shoes on your feet, ready for battle, take the good news of peace. ¹⁶With it all, take the shield of faith; if you’ve got that, you’ll be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is God’s word. ¹⁸Pray on every occasion in the spirit, with every type of prayer and intercession. You’ll need to keep awake and alert for this, with all perseverance and intercession for all God’s holy ones – ¹⁹and also for me! Please pray that God will give me his words to speak when I open my mouth, so that I can make known, loud and clear, the secret truth of the gospel. ²⁰That, after all, is why I’m a chained-up ambassador! Pray that I may announce it boldly; that’s what I’m duty-bound to do. [344](#)

A chained-up ambassador! There is the shame and the glory of the gospel, cutting across the ways of the world with the powerful and practical revised monotheism which, as one would expect in the second-Temple Jewish world, finds itself pitted against spiritual wickedness of various kinds. Just as the idols in Corinth, though dismissed as ‘non-existent’ in 1 Corinthians 8.4, are nevertheless the shelter for demonic powers in 10.20, so the official authorities, from Caesar downwards (the ‘names that are invoked’ in Ephesians 1.21), are put out of business by the exaltation of Jesus, but they still provide flesh-and-blood shelter for the real enemy, the demonic horde and their satanic master, who will act through them given half a chance. One might say that the revised monotheism of Paul’s theology is never more truly itself than at this moment, when because of his gospel he is facing, and knows that his communities will face, the kind of struggle which loyal Jews had faced for hundreds of years. The story of Daniel and

his friends, of the Maccabees, of heroes and heroines known and unknown, who had invoked the one true God and remained loyal to him under terrible attack – these stories are now claimed by Paul the apostle as part of his own monotheism. Creational, covenantal; christological, pneumatological; eschatological, cultic; and now, counter-imperial. A new line had been drawn through the world. All this is part of the picture we need to hold in our minds if we are to understand the monotheism which Paul thought through, prayed through, taught through, lived through. And, in the end, died for.

[6. Revised Monotheism and the Kingdom of God: 1 Corinthians 15.20–8](#)

This brings us at last to what one might call the real *point* of monotheism, whether in the pre-Christian form by which Saul of Tarsus lived or the Christian form he developed with such astonishing effect. It is possible, alas, that some reading this chapter will suppose that the real point is to ‘prove that Paul believed Jesus (or the spirit) was “divine”’. That is cognate with a problem about which I have written elsewhere, that in reading the gospels many generations of Christians have supposed that the real question they were addressing was whether Jesus was, or wasn’t, in some sense ‘God incarnate’.³⁴⁵ But with Paul, as with the gospels, that question can all too easily represent a step back from what is actually at issue. When a Pharisee prayed the *Shema*, he was, as we saw, ‘taking upon himself the yoke of God’s kingdom’. Yes: and when Paul wrote of Jesus (and the spirit) in the ways we have observed, he was doing so, not in order to affirm their ‘divinity’ for its own sake (indeed, he was presupposing it), but in order to affirm that in and through Jesus and the spirit *the one God had established his kingdom in a totally new and unexpected way*. The point of declaring ‘Jesus is lord’, with the full sense of *kyrios* we saw earlier, was not, then, that one might feel happy about having made a crucial dogmatic confession. The point was to sign up under the banner of this *kyrios*, implicitly at least

against all other claimants to that title, for the kingdom-work in which Paul and his colleagues saw themselves engaged.³⁴⁶ As I have said elsewhere, incarnational belief is the key in which the music is set, but the tune is the great, swelling theme of the inaugurated kingdom of the one God.

Thus Philippians 2, one of the key texts we studied earlier in the present chapter, *presupposes* the divinity of Jesus but *establishes* his universal sovereignty, both its truth and, equally important, its mode (that it was reached by humiliation and death). Paul at once stresses the need for those who hail this Jesus as *kyrios* to ‘work out their own salvation’, which I have suggested envisages an opposition to the ‘salvation’ on offer under the *kyrios* well known to all residents of Philippi. Thus 1 Corinthians 8.6, the small nugget of atomic power which drives the whole discussion of chapters 8—10, states in microcosmic form Paul’s belief that Jesus belongs at the heart of the *Shema*, not in order to make that dogmatic point for its own sake (as many today may be inclined to read it, and indeed as some today may be inclined to avoid reading it) but in order to stress that the community founded by the work of this ‘one God, one lord’ must learn what it means to live under the *rule* of the crucified one, and not to engage in a trial of strength with him by flirting with the *daimonia* who are only too ready to catch them out.³⁴⁷

Once we realize, in fact, where the deep roots of Paul’s monotheism (and its revision) are to be found, we should not be surprised that, for him, monotheism (in whatever form) is not a bare belief but an *agenda*. Those roots are found in the Psalms, especially favourites such as 2, 8 and 110; in Isaiah, especially chapters 11 and 40—55; in Deuteronomy. All these speak of Israel’s God as the one and only lord of the world, establishing his rule over the nations. They are not about individual human beings believing a dogma and so joining a religion, still less about people assenting to a proposition and so being saved. They are about the fact of God’s kingdom – or rather, the hope for God to become king by sweeping aside the pagan idols and the regimes that worship them, by establishing his chosen king, by returning in personal triumph and glory to Jerusalem, to the Temple, to his people.

This, not some abstract doctrinal scheme, is the monotheistic vision of which Paul's redefinitions constitute a fresh and unexpected version. When he speaks of Jesus as God's son, Psalm 2 is never far away. When he speaks of him as the last Adam, we have suggested that Daniel, though perhaps hidden, is not far from the surface of his mind, and Daniel of course shares massively in the kingdom-vision which inspired psalms and prophets alike. And, despite those who have tried to dismiss Colossians and Ephesians as showing signs of a bourgeois second-generation Christianity, settling down in the world, both those letters bear witness to a vision of Jesus, rooted in Israel's scriptures and confronting the powers of the world, which shows every sign of the same counter-cultural, counter-imperial kingdom-theme. For the zealous Pharisee, monotheism could never be a comfortable intellectual affirmation, the considered and judicious opinion of the thoughtful theoretician. It was always something to be invoked in prayer and implemented in kingdom-work and kingdom-living. For the zealous apostle it was exactly the same, with the crucial addition that the kingdom was accomplished through the *death* of the king, and was therefore to be implemented through the suffering, and perhaps also the death, of his witnesses. 'Don't lose heart because of my sufferings on your behalf,' he writes in Ephesians 3.13. 'They are your glory!'

That is why, as we shall see in the next chapter, Paul's hailing of Jesus precisely as *Messiah* is so important – and why, we may suppose, that category has for so long been thoroughly out of fashion in New Testament scholarship. Without pre-empting our later discussion, we may just say this: where theologians concentrated their efforts on the task either of demonstrating Jesus' 'divinity' or of questioning it (or, at least, of questioning whether it was present in the earliest Christian sources), the category of Messiahship seemed irrelevant. It was Jewish; it was political; what role could it play in Paul's 'Christian' theology? How could it be fitted in with the obviously central theme, that of the crucifixion? But such a way of thinking (which has now in any case run into the sand) comes nowhere near the rich integration of themes in Paul's actual letters. This, in fact, is where the present chapter and the next two are tied tightly together. It is

because the redefinition of monotheism we find in Paul focuses on Jesus *in order to highlight the inauguration of God's kingdom in and through him, particularly through his crucifixion* that we are forced to put the category of Messiahship back where it belongs, right at the centre of Paul's thought.³⁴⁸ The kingdom has been inaugurated through the work of Jesus, who, both as the embodiment of Israel's God and as the single bearer of Israel's destiny, has defeated the old enemy, has accomplished the new exodus, and is now, by his spirit, leading his people to their inheritance – not, of course, 'heaven', but the reclaiming of all creation.

All this comes to classic expression in a passage we have studied elsewhere, but may simply refer to as one last powerful expression of revised monotheism. This is Paul's vision of 'the kingdom of God':

But in fact the Messiah has been raised from the dead, as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since it was through a human that death arrived, it's through a human that the resurrection from the dead has arrived. All die in Adam, you see, and all will be made alive in the Messiah.

Each, however, in proper order. The Messiah rises as the first fruits; then those who belong to the Messiah will rise at the time of his royal arrival. Then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the father, when he has destroyed all rule and all authority and power. He has to go on ruling, you see, until 'he has put all his enemies under his feet'. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, because 'he has put all things in order under his feet'. But when it says that everything is put in order under him, it's obvious that this doesn't include the one who put everything in order under him. No: when everything is put in order under him, then the son himself will be placed in proper order under the one who places everything in order under him, so that God may be all in all.³⁴⁹

Of course, those thinkers ancient and modern who have been eager to wish on Paul a thoroughly 'subordinationist' christology have seized upon the last sentences of this passage: here, they say, we see that Jesus is not, for Paul, truly identical with the one God.³⁵⁰ Not only, however, would this conflict sharply with Paul's christological monotheism elsewhere, not least in 1 Corinthians itself. The point is this. The passage clearly belongs with second-Temple monotheism, in declaring that the kingdom of the creator God is to be established in all the world, making no concessions to paganism on the one hand and ruling out dualism ('all in all'!) by insisting

that death itself, the corruption and decay of the present physical cosmos, is itself to be defeated and destroyed. But within this monotheism *Jesus is allotted a role which in ancient Israel was spoken of as that of YHWH himself*. He is the one who, as in the Psalms and Isaiah, wins the victory over all enemies. The theme of YHWH's triumph over all enemies goes back to Exodus 15, and comes again and again in the Psalms, and in Isaiah 40—66, where it is clear that the victory belongs to Israel's God and to nobody else.

In particular, the defeat and destruction of death itself, here attributed to the Messiah, is spoken of as part of the work of Israel's one God:

On this mountain YHWH of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on his mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the Sovereign YHWH³⁵¹ will wipe away the tears from all faces ... ³⁵²

The task which Isaiah declared would be accomplished by YHWH is thus accomplished by Jesus, the Messiah. This passage, then, so far from undermining our earlier christological conclusions, strengthens them, and points beyond them to the larger vision of the kingdom which remained so important for Paul even though it has often been ousted from consideration in post-Enlightenment exegesis.

The point, once more, is that the new state of affairs has been brought about through *the resurrection of the Messiah*. Here again we see the convergence of the two strands which, in the context of early Christian worship and a sense of the abiding presence of the lord, join forces to establish Paul's monotheistic christology. First, Israel's one God has promised to return and accomplish in person the work of salvation. Second, the messianic claimant Jesus of Nazareth has been raised from the dead. These lines of thought, as we saw earlier, enabled the early church to draw on favourite texts, not least Psalm 110.1 and Psalm 8.6, to ground the vision

of the Jesus who accomplishes the work of YHWH in the reality of his messianic status and enthronement. That is exactly what we find here. The overlap between the two psalms, both speaking of things being ‘put under his feet’, points to the enthronement of the Messiah as the truly human being (Psalm 8) and the Messiah (Psalm 110), sitting at the right hand of the father. It would be a shallow reading of this passage to insist, on the basis of verses 27 and 28, on the separation of Jesus from any sharing of divine status.³⁵³ The whole passage is about the eschatological dimension of a differentiated monotheism, exactly in line with what we have seen in, for instance, 1 Corinthians 8.6, Philippians 2.6–11 and Colossians 1.15–20. And here it is quite explicit that this redefined monotheism does not exist for its own sake as a kind of strange, arbitrary dogma requiring mental assent. To adapt my previous illustration, the redefined monotheism is the grammar and syntax of what Paul is saying. But the sentence he writes is about the one God becoming king.

All this, however, raised in the first century, and raises for Paul’s interpreters today, a further and in some ways quite different question. How then did Paul regard the forces over which Jesus had now won the decisive victory? If the notion of the kingdom itself, so often seen as the new exodus, had been transformed by the events concerning Jesus, what about the notions of evil itself, of the powerful slave-master that had kept humans in general, and even Israel in particular, in chains for so long? Or, to put it another way, granted that Paul, like most other second-Temple Jews, expresses a hope for ‘salvation’, what did he think people needed to be saved *from*?

[7. The Dark Side of Revised Monotheism: the New Vision of Evil](#)

[\(i\) Introduction: Jewish Monotheism and the ‘Problem of Evil’](#)

The stronger your monotheism, the sharper your problem of evil. That is inevitable: if there is one God, why are things in such a mess? The paradox

that then results – God, and yet evil! – has driven monotheistic theorists to a range of solutions. And by ‘solutions’ here I mean two things: first, the analytic ‘solution’ of understanding what is going on; second, the practical ‘solution’ of lessening or alleviating the actual evil and its effects, or rescuing people from it. In various forms of the Jewish tradition, the second has loomed much larger. As Marx said, the philosophers have only interpreted the world, but the point is to change it.³⁵⁴

There are, of course, two easy ways out. The first is to say that what seems ‘evil’ to us is only an outward appearance. The second is to say that ‘God’ or ‘the gods’ are detached from this world: bad stuff happens, but they have nothing to do with it.³⁵⁵

The first position is that of the Stoic. ‘God’ and the world are more or less the same. The world is the embodiment of the divine: the way things are is the way things are, and if you don’t like it, you are free to leave. The only remaining puzzle for the Stoic, as for Aristotle, was that however wise and virtuous human beings became, they still faced the problem of weakness of will, the failure to live in true harmony with *physis*, ‘nature’. They never quite succeeded in becoming the fully virtuous, completely formed, human beings they should have been.³⁵⁶

The second position is that of the Epicureans. If the Stoic effectively denies the reality of evil, the Epicurean denies the relevance of the god(s). They (or it) are detached, upstairs, out of sight, uninvolved. The world is developing in its own way and under its own steam, with earthquakes and cancers and all the other interesting phenomena thrown up by the natural processes of the present order; but the god(s) is, or are, safely out of the picture, taking no responsibility for what happens as a result of the random movements of atoms. That is, more or less, how the Enlightenment ‘solved’ the problem of ‘natural evil’, ever since the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. The western world has been living with the consequences.³⁵⁷ This is, as it were, the extreme way of dealing with the ‘problem’, the polar opposite of the Jewish way. The Jew complains to the creator God and demands that he do something about the problem; the Epicurean denies that any ‘god’ has ever

been, or could ever be, involved. Not for nothing did later Jewish teachers use the word *apikoros*, a version of ‘Epicurean’, as a term of sharp abuse.

Both of the two great ancient schools, the Stoic and the Epicurean, thus held a kind of theism (in the Stoic case, a kind of monotheism) which generated answers to the worldview questions ‘What’s wrong?’ and ‘What’s the solution?’ The analytic ‘solutions’ differed, but the practical ‘solutions’ were simply variations on the shoulder-shrugging suggestion, ‘Learn to cope.’ The Stoic coped by persuading himself that things outside his own control ought not to be the subject of regret. The Epicurean coped by retreating from the painful world and enjoying such quiet pleasures as might be available.

Some ancient thinkers resisted both of these options and pushed the boundaries towards various types of dualism. It is not easy to reconstruct the history of ancient Zoroastrianism or its later cousin Manicheism, but it seems that, in both systems, there might be one god but there was also an equal and opposite evil force. The good and the bad, the light and the dark, were locked in a long, perhaps interminable, struggle.³⁵⁸ Meanwhile the ‘Academic’ philosophers, unsure whether there was enough evidence to make up one’s mind, simply held on to a vision of public life and the ‘civic religion’ which encapsulated it. There was not much ‘problem of evil’ there; only the random puzzles and sorrows of the world’s changes and chances, in which the gods might or might not be involved.

For ordinary, unphilosophically minded ancient pagans, the ‘problem of evil’ was what happened when, for whatever reason, the gods were angry, or had been bribed by one’s enemies, so that bad things happened to the family or the city. Such people, then as now, shrugged their shoulders, grieved over things that brought sorrow whether or not it was logical to do so, experienced the usual human range of guilt and gladness, moral striving and moral failure, and they ran through the range of hopes and fears that, in almost all worldviews, accompany these things. They did their best to bring the gods round to their side (and to enlist their support against enemies) by sacrifices and prayers, by votive offerings, by spells and charms and the thousand small strategies for which the more sophisticated, in the ancient

world as in the modern, used terms like ‘superstition’. Polytheism has an easier job than monotheism when it comes to guessing why evil happens, but arguably a harder task, certainly a more complicated one, when it comes to doing something about it.

It is important to begin here, if only to get some critical distance on the problems of analysis which have clustered around Paul’s account of evil, sin and death, not least (in the primary sources) in the early chapters of Romans and (in contemporary writing) in the approach of Ed Sanders and Douglas Campbell, among others, on the question of ‘plight and solution’. What was Paul’s analysis of the ‘problem of evil’? What was he really saying in the long account of universal sinfulness in Romans 1.18—3.20? How does that fit with what he says about evil and sin elsewhere? Did he start with a view of evil and sin and then discover that Jesus was the answer, or did he start with the fact of Jesus and then, as it were scratching his head in puzzlement, deduce that if God had acted to save people through Jesus there must have been a problem of some sort? Or what?

This question belongs emphatically in the present chapter. Any serious philosophy or religion must give an account of the problems of the world, and that account will be closely correlated with a larger understanding of God (or gods) and the world, and of humans in particular. The monotheism held by most second-Temple Jews was no exception. My argument here is that Paul’s account of evil demonstrably belongs within that second-Temple Jewish monotheistic family of ‘solutions’, that is, analyses on the one hand and practical ‘solutions’ on the other. What we see in Paul at this point consists, one more time, both of a fundamental reaffirmation of Jewish-style monotheism and of a radical revision of it in the light of Jesus and the spirit. If we are to understand both of these it is important to grasp a bit more fully the ways in which ancient Jewish monotheism thought about evil.

The monotheism of second-Temple Jews generated a more sharply etched idea of evil than we see in the surrounding pagan worldviews, including those of ‘monotheists’ such as the Stoics. Once you offer, and celebrate, an account of creational and covenantal monotheism such as we find in Israel’s scriptures, you are going to run into major problems. If there

is one God, if he is the creator of a good world and still basically in charge of it, and if he is in covenant with Israel in particular, then neither the Stoic nor the Epicurean solution will do. Nor is serious dualism an option, though there are times when it will look attractive. If the book of Job had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent it.

Ancient Israel did not, however, attempt a ‘solution’ in terms of a coherent analysis of why evil existed within the good creation. Job did not ‘solve’ the problem, but, like some of the Psalms, simply and strikingly reaffirmed the basic monotheistic creed – and complained sharply about the way things were. In the Torah, evil might be traced back to Adam and Eve in the garden, though interestingly there is no sign of this being offered as an ultimate analysis prior to the late first century AD.³⁵⁹ Or evil might have entered the world through the invasion of strange angelic powers, as in Genesis 6. One might also look back to the arrogance of empire, as in the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Or, in relation more specifically to evil within Israel, one could lay the blame on the primal sin of Aaron in making the golden calf (Exodus 32).

These ‘solutions’ were not, of course, mutually exclusive. That was not how ancient Jews read their scriptures. The various accounts of evil functioned, not as scientific ‘explanations’, but as signposts to dark and puzzling realities. Human rebellion, idolatry and arrogance, mingled with shadowy forces from beyond the present world, had infected the world, humans and Israel itself. The narratives drew attention to different apparent elements within the problem, and left it at that. No solution was offered to the question of what modern philosophers have called ‘natural evil’ (earthquakes, sickness and the like). Prophets might highlight particular events as warning signs from the one God – a line of thought echoed at one point by Paul³⁶⁰ – but nobody, not even Job, seems to have asked why such things existed at all within a good creation. The occasional prophetic promise of a transformed creation bore witness to the fact that some at least had an inkling that the trouble ran right through the cosmos itself; but the offer of an eschatological solution was not matched by an analysis of why a problem existed in the first place.³⁶¹

But if scripture offered no ‘solution’ in terms of a coherent account of why ‘evil’ existed in the good creation, it offered instead a ‘solution’ in terms of what was to be done – specifically, what was to be done by the creator God. The major proposal was first *covenantal* and then *eschatological*: not ‘Where did evil come from?’ but ‘What will the creator God do about it?’ Faced with the creational project apparently in ruins, the creator God, according to the ancient narrative, called Abram, promised that all the nations would be blessed through him, and renamed him *Abraham*, father of many nations. This is how things would be put right, sooner or later. It turned out to be later. Much later. Abraham’s family held within itself the tension not only of weakness of will, as with Aristotle and the Stoics; not only of a sometimes apparently absent god, as with the Epicureans; not only of regular perplexity when all the signs of divine favour or presence seemed to be missing, as with the Academics; not only of a seemingly invincible force of evil, which historically has turned many into dualists; but of a historical combination of all four. Israel went through a repeating cycle, held within the larger implicit narrative of the Deuteronomic tradition: idolatry, divine displeasure, and covenantal punishment (ultimately, exile), followed by at least the promise of an undeserved restoration. The hints of renewed creation which had lurked within the covenantal promise of the holy land seemed to be quashed for ever when the chosen people were taken by force to Babylon. The godless triumphed. Jeremiah’s warning about everything reverting to *tohu wa-bohu* seemed to be coming true.

All this emerges powerfully in the Psalms. The promise and prophetic vision are there in Psalm 2, with the nations in uproar and the covenant God settling the matter by enthroning his adopted son as king in Zion; or in the glorious Psalms 96 and 98, which celebrate the coming enthronement of Israel’s God as king of the world, returning at last to judge the entire creation, to sort it out once and for all. But the cry of pain is there, too, in Psalms 73 and 74 with their varied pattern of lament, complaint and prayer; in Psalm 88 which leaves the whole sorry matter unresolved in the presence of the covenant God; and in psalms such as 89, which celebrate the great

covenant promises and then, in parallel, lament the present distress. The answer provided by the Psalms and the prophets to the larger problems of the whole creation ('God has chosen Israel as the means of the world's redemption; God will one day act to judge and save' – in other words, covenant and eschatology) simply increased the problem. The covenant appeared to fail. Hope seemed endlessly deferred. I described this in chapter 2 above in terms of a harmonic sequence that fails to reach the expected final chord, leaving an increasing, unresolved tension. Or we might describe it as being like a journey whose end seems constantly just around the corner, only for yet another mile of tortuous road to unfold instead. The sense that *we should have arrived by now* became shrill and unbearable.

The more devout one was, the more the problem might seem pressing: 'Why have we fasted, and you haven't taken any notice?'³⁶² The pagans still ran the world. In Israel itself, wickedness, including collusion with paganism, seemed to earn not divine retribution but political and economic advantage. Some made their peace with the new situation; the book of Ben-Sirach, written perhaps two hundred and fifty years before Paul's letter-writing period, seems not to regard the problems of the world, or of Israel, in a particularly serious light. Follow Torah, celebrate the Temple cult, and all will be well. The Qumran Scrolls, emerging from the shadows later in the second century, took a very different view, labelling everyone but those of their own sect as 'sons of darkness'. Faced with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, two writers did what nobody (so far as we know) had done before: they traced the problem back, not simply to pagan idolatry, not simply to the calves which led Israel into sin (that made by Aaron, and those made by Jeroboam son of Nebat), not simply to the mysterious but wicked angels of Genesis 6, but to the primal sin of Adam.³⁶³ Paul's Jewish world, in other words, already supplies us with a spectrum within a spectrum (varieties of ancient Jewish belief, to be located among the varieties of ancient non-Jewish belief) on the subject of evil, including human evil; and by implication, of what might be done about it, by whatever means.³⁶⁴

To repeat, none of these approaches attempts to explain why there is ‘evil’ in the first place within the good creation of the wise creator. They are all ways of articulating the tension, not of resolving it. They are ways, in fact, of saying that there is something absurd about evil, something out of joint, something that doesn’t fit. *The fact that one cannot really understand evil is itself an element of creational monotheism*, a demonstration that evil is an intruder, a force not only bent on distorting and destroying the good creation but also on resisting comprehension. If one could understand it, if one could glimpse a framework within which it ‘made sense’, it would no longer be the radical, anti-creation, anti-God force it actually is.³⁶⁵

We note, importantly as part of Paul’s context, that for most people in the ancient world the question of ‘what might be done about evil’ was not a matter of ‘salvation’. Most ancients did not suppose that there was anything that one could be ‘rescued’ from, except perhaps short-term dangers, illnesses or other irritants. Angry gods might be bought off, for a while. The mystery religions, and gnosticism when eventually it developed, did indeed offer a ‘salvation’ of sorts, but they were the exceptions. And the ‘salvation’ they offered was very different from that spoken of in most Jewish literature. The gnostic, from within a basically Platonic worldview, wanted to be saved *from* the world. Many later Christians have taken this line, producing considerable confusion which persists to this day. When ancient Jews spoke of salvation, however, they were usually referring to the salvation *of* the world, or of Israel: of a world, or at least a people, over which evil no longer had any power. Neither the average ancient pagan, nor the average ancient Jew, was walking around worrying about how their soul might get to a disembodied heaven after they had died.

This emerges clearly if we take the polarized positions of, on the one hand, an extreme Epicureanism, in which all that happens in the present world is a matter of random, blind and godless chance, and on the other hand a solid second-Temple Jewish monotheism, creational, covenantal, cultic and eschatological.

Today’s western world is familiar enough with extreme Epicureanism. If the world is a random cosmic accident, why should anything be thought

‘evil’ or ‘wrong’ in the first place? Would not all such categories collapse into the projection of our emotions (‘theft is wrong’ would simply mean ‘I don’t like theft’)? And is not that reduction to emotivism, in fact, what has happened in the post-Epicurean world of modern western morality? Get rid of ‘god’, and you no longer have a ‘problem of evil’. All you have is unwelcome ‘attitudes’ or ‘prejudices’. Not that people can easily live like that. They quickly invent new ‘moralities’ around the one or two fixed points that appear to transcend that subjective, emotive analysis: the badness of Adolf Hitler, the goodness of ecological activism, the importance of ‘embracing the Other’, and so on. Better than nothing, perhaps; but people who try to sail the moral seas with that equipment look suspiciously like a handful of survivors clinging to a broken spar as the ship goes down and the sharks close in.

But if you are a monotheist – if you are a *creational monotheist of the second-Temple Jewish variety* – then things look very different. You may not have a grand theory as to why evil exists as a whole. There was, after all, no pre-Christian equivalent to the later doctrine of the ‘Fall’. But you as a devout Jew will know, well enough, how evil goes about its daily business. You observe that most of the world, being non-Jewish, worships idols. As a Jew, you know that idols are seriously bad for you. They cramp your style, luring you into subhuman or dehumanized behaviour. What’s more, they are bad for the world. You, as a human being, are supposed to worship the God whose image you bear, and thus to learn the wisdom you need if you are to look after the world on his behalf. But if you worship idols you merely become like them, dehumanized, unable to exercise your God-given human responsibilities. That much one can learn from the Psalmists, and also from first-century works like the Wisdom of Solomon.^{[366](#)}

In addition, as we have seen, from the Jewish perspective idols and their temples can be the means by which demons can get their barbed claws into the life of a human, a family or a nation. Demons, within this analysis, are nasty, tricky little things; they are not the actual ‘divinities’ that the statues in the temples claim to represent (Zeus and his badly behaved tribe, who

don't actually exist), but they can still do a lot of damage. Idolatry, in other words, isn't just something you choose to do from time to time. It gives away the responsibility which humans should be exercising over the world to unpleasant and destructive forces. Within human life itself, idolatry becomes habit-forming, character-shaping, progressively more destructive. It *enslaves* people. Ultimately, it *kills* people. And it allows creation itself to collapse into chaos. Thus we arrive at 'the problem of human sin', seen from a second-Temple Jewish perspective such as that of Saul of Tarsus. *There are idolaters out there*, and we Jews must not be drawn into their ways. If we allow that to happen, we are back in a new slavery. A new Egypt.

Of course, ever since the regrettable incident of the golden calf, and its sequel at Baal-Peor, it had become clear that the tendency to idolatry was also firmly rooted in Israel itself.³⁶⁷ Moses' great Song in Deuteronomy 32 had said as much. The Wisdom tradition constantly warned about the dangerous allure of Folly. The prophets routinely rubbed the point home, with the northern Israelite prophet Amos playing the standard rhetorical trick of pointing the finger first at the surrounding nations, then at Judah (well, that was all right, thought his audience, we never liked those southerners anyway), and then, finally, at his native northern Israel as well. Paul pulls off a similar trick in Romans 2.1, to which we shall return.

No doubt there were a thousand different ways in which 'ordinary' Jews – the ones who left no writings, belonged to no parties, joined no revolutions – thought, and presumably prayed, about what was wrong in their world, in their nation, in their own lives. Scripture taught them as clear a moral code as anyone in the ancient or modern world might wish for, and gave them a framework for what to do when they broke it: repentance and sacrifice. That doesn't mean there were no troubled consciences in ancient Judaism. Psalm 51 shows that the idea of a broken and contrite heart was not (as some have oddly suggested) invented by Augustine. What it means, though, is that the Jewish frame of reference, insofar as we understand it, gave people little reason to continue in their anguished or guilty frame of mind. They could say sorry. They could make the appropriate offering.

Unless, of course, they were determined to go on sinning (i.e. ‘with a high hand’); in which case the problem might be, at least in theory, not so much the troubled conscience as the threat of punitive action.³⁶⁸ But for most second-Temple writers it seems that ‘the problem’ could be pushed out into the wider, non-Jewish world. Granted that Israel had sinned grievously and been well and truly punished for it, landing up in exile as Deuteronomy had always warned, the problem now was that the Babylonian pagans were in charge, or maybe the Greeks, or the Syrians. Or, ultimately, the Romans.

And that, of course, was where the problem was intensified beyond bearability. When the Romans took the Temple in AD 70 there was no quick reversal as with the Maccabean revolt, no sudden lightning-bolt to strike them down, no glorious angels to rescue Israel at the last moment. Some, to be sure, declared that the Temple was unnecessary because Israel’s God had provided alternative means of dealing with sin.³⁶⁹ That looks in retrospect like the most desperate of rationalizations. The best guess is that most of those lucky enough – or unlucky enough! – to survive the fall of Jerusalem and its attendant horrors saw the event in the way that *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* describe it: as a deep and unmitigated disaster. The only possible explanation they could offer – not, to be sure, worked out in systematic detail, but indicated clearly enough – was that the sickness of evil in the world was a deeper disease than anyone had supposed, and that Israel was just as badly affected by it as everybody else. The disease went all the way back to Adam himself. That was why it was no use Israel expecting somehow to be exempt from catastrophic divine judgment. Israel was just as much subject to Adam’s iniquity as the rest of the world. That notion, so far as we can tell, was not taken up by the rabbis, who as we saw did not have an explicit doctrine of the ‘Fall’ corresponding to anything like the later Christian formulation. Tracing the world’s problems back to Adam was one thing. That was built into the structure of Genesis itself, and recognized as such by some much later rabbis. Understanding that problem to be so deep and dangerous as to make subsequent sin inevitable, even for Israel, was an innovation in those post-70 apocalypses. It was a new idea for Jewish thinkers. With one exception.

Before we explore the way in which Paul provides that one exception, we note the most important point. The idea that for Saul of Tarsus there was no ‘problem’ in the world, nothing ‘wrong’ to which the one God was supposed to be providing a solution, is to shrink the second-Temple worldview to a myopic, head-in-the-sand perspective. Just because the soul-searchings of a Martin Luther are not readily paralleled in the Jewish literature of the time, that doesn’t mean there is no ‘problem’ to be seen in such writings. Of course there is: generations have trod, have trod, have trod, and the toil and trade of human folly, the smudge and smell of human idolatry and immorality, have spread their poison around the world, across the holy land, even into the hearts and minds of Israel’s rulers ... That was the kind of ‘problem’ a devout first-century Pharisee would have known: a problem that nagged like a bad tooth, infecting all other joys and sorrows, evoking prayers and scripture-searchings and a constant attempt to make sure that he, at least, was part of the solution, not part of that same problem, an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile, no guilt, a light to those in darkness (as Isaiah had said), one who in the God-given Torah had the key to what human life should be, how the world should be.

A devout Pharisee, faced with this second-Temple problem, would therefore hope and pray, as Daniel did in chapter 9, that Israel’s God would do again what he did in Egypt: that he would take pity on his people, remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, unveil his long-awaited rescue operation, be faithful to his promises. Perhaps, even, that he would send a Messiah, to do what Isaiah had promised in chapter 11. When that great Pharisaic rabbi, Akiba, hailed bar-Kochba as ‘son of the star’, people disagreed with his timing, or his candidate, or his back-up exegesis and theology, but not with the idea of a Messiah coming to liberate Israel from the pagans, to rebuild the Temple, to establish God’s kingdom at last.³⁷⁰ That was how first-century Jewish monotheism saw ‘the problem’; that was the kind of ‘solution’ for which many longed.

My point thus far can be summarized like this:

1. All views about 'evil' are the correlate of a basic, and often theistic, worldview;
2. All worldviews, except those of the most shallow and unreflective optimist, have some idea that something is seriously wrong with the world, and indeed with human beings, often including one's own self;
3. Monotheists in particular run into a problem which polytheists do not have, and there have been various ways, historically, of addressing that problem;
4. Monotheists of the second-Temple Jewish variety, that is, creational and covenantal monotheists, were bound to have a particularly sharp version of the wider monotheistic problem:
 - (a) the world is God's creation, and yet there is evil in it;
 - (b) humans are in God's image, and yet they rebel;
 - (c) Israel is called to be God's covenant people, and yet is trodden down by the nations.
5. This was addressed
 - (a) by varied use of the ancient narratives of Genesis and Exodus;
 - (b) by cultic monotheism (especially the sacrificial system); and
 - (c) by eschatological monotheism (the hope and promise that one day YHWH would return, would unveil his covenant faithfulness in rescuing his people and renewing all things, and would set up his sovereign rule over the whole world).

The monotheism of Saul of Tarsus generated the problems summarized in (4), and invited the solutions offered in (5). The problem generated by creational monotheism would be addressed by Israel's election; the second-order problem generated by covenantal monotheism would be addressed by eschatology. And my proposal now, in what remains of this chapter, is that Paul the apostle retained these 'solutions' – in other words, that he was still thinking firmly like a second-Temple monotheist – and that he radically modified them in the light of the equally radical modifications he had made within monotheism itself, based on the Messiah and the spirit. His fresh

vision of monotheism, in other words, generated a fresh vision of ‘what was wrong’, but it was not generated from scratch. As he adapted and re-articulated his second-Temple monotheism in the light of Jesus and the spirit, so he adapted and re-articulated, in the same light, his second-Temple monotheistic understanding of what evil was, and what solution might be offered to it, in the same light. The gospel of Jesus the crucified and risen Messiah, and the perceived fact of the divine spirit let loose in the world, transforming lives and communities, enabled him to bring into much sharper focus the understanding of evil, and of the divine solution to it, which was characteristic of mainline second-Temple monotheism.

My proposal, then, is that *Paul’s radical rethinking of creational and covenantal monotheism contained within itself both an intensification of the problem and an equally radical solution*. As the fall of Jerusalem sent the apocalyptists back to the scriptures, and ultimately back to Adam, so the events concerning Jesus did the same for Paul. The unresolved chord reached screaming point with the stretched sinews of the Messiah on the wood of the cross, and the resolution of Easter bade Paul rise to join in an unexpected song. Monotheism, election and eschatology had come together in a new way: the three parts vied, multiplied, and generated a new harmony which, once Paul had heard it, would not let him go. To be sure, this in turn generated a second-order problem, which emerges in one form in Romans 8 (the ‘not yet’ of Christian life in between the resurrection of Jesus and the ultimate renewal of all things) and in another form in Romans 9—11 (the question of unbelieving Israel). Paul addressed both of these unflinchingly in terms of the same theology, that of creational and covenantal monotheism (and hence cultic and eschatological monotheism), which he found in Israel’s scriptures and never for a moment doubted. He trusted that the God-given resolution to the original problem – in other words, Messiah and spirit – was well capable of handling those that remained.

[\(ii\) ‘Plight and Solution’ in Paul’s Theology.](#)

(a) Introduction

If a second-Temple view of the ‘plight’ of the world, of humans and of Israel is the reflex of a basic second-Temple monotheism, as I have argued, we ought to be able to understand Paul’s revised understanding of the ‘plight’ in terms of his revision of that monotheism. This proposal can be expressed in terms of a contribution to the current debate about ‘plight and solution’ in his theology.

The debate in question, like many others, was initiated by Ed Sanders in 1977.³⁷¹ Did Paul come with a ‘problem’ or ‘plight’ to which he discovered that Jesus was the ‘solution’? Or was part of the shock of the revelation on the road to Damascus the fact that, since Israel’s God had apparently provided him with a ‘solution’, there must have been some kind of hitherto unsuspected ‘plight’? Or what? The standard assumption, since Augustine at least, and especially since Luther, was that Paul had been labouring under the problem of a guilty conscience, aware of his own inability to meet the inexorable demands of the law, and unable to find peace with his maker – and that he discovered the crucified Jesus as the answer to all this. Sanders proposed an alternative view: that Paul had actually, by his own account, been a good, blameless and successful Jew (Philippians 3.4–6), that he had seen nothing wrong with Torah, and that the fresh revelation of Jesus on the Damascus Road forced him to conclude that there must after all have been some kind of a ‘problem’ to which Jesus was the ‘solution’. Sanders then uses this as a way of explaining Paul’s apparently bizarre and contradictory statements about the Torah: they were not thought out or logically arranged, but were simply the result of Paul waving his arms around, believing that something must have been wrong with his native Judaism and its law but not having the time or inclination to work out exactly what, and so resorting to a string of odd, disjointed polemical remarks on the subject.

The standard Augustinian approach, in one form or another, is still the ‘default mode’ for many writers on Paul, not least many commentators on Romans, where these issues are sharply focused. Romans has long been read, particularly at a popular level, in terms of ‘sin and salvation’ –

understood in line not only with the protestant systems against which Sanders was reacting, but also with more or less the entire swathe of western theology since the middle ages. This tradition continues.³⁷²

Many, however, have followed Sanders in taking the latter approach.³⁷³ Here as elsewhere Sanders is in fact echoing the position of some Reformed theology; in this case, the account given by Karl Barth and some of his followers.³⁷⁴ Barth reacted sharply against any form of ‘natural theology’, partly because of his rejection of the liberalism of his teachers, and partly because of his opposition to Nazi ideology. He insisted that all knowledge, including knowledge of evil and sin, is given only in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sanders represents a less theologically robust version of this account: Paul discovers ‘salvation’ in Jesus, and as a result rejects all other systems, without really working out why.

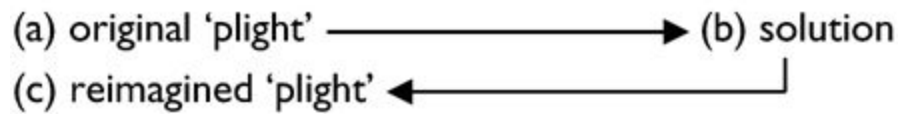
Both the ‘normal’ western view and the view of Sanders and others must, however, be challenged on the basis of the larger account of ‘the problem of evil’ I have sketched above – and on the basis of the Pauline texts themselves. The question of ‘plight and solution’ demands to be reframed within the perspective of second-Temple Jewish monotheism and of Paul’s christological and pneumatological revisions of it. We must, in other words, carry through Sanders’s revolution much further than he did himself. The ideas of personal sin and salvation, and the role of Israel’s Torah in relation to those questions, remain important, indeed obviously vital, in Paul. But instead of approaching them through the framework of medieval and Reformational theories, we must relocate them within the much larger Jewish framework: monotheism versus idolatry, Torah-keeping versus immorality, the social, cultural and political meanings which went with those antitheses, and not least the larger global and even ‘cosmic’ perspective which was glimpsed from time to time within Israel’s scriptures and later traditions and which Paul brought more fully into the open. We must not, in other words, collude with the relatively modern break-up of ‘the problem of evil’ into ‘natural evil’ on the one hand and ‘human sin’ on the other. Nor, in particular, must we go along with the classic western assumption (still evident in the continuing mainstream tradition and in

Sanders's revisionist proposals) that 'salvation' will mean the rescue of humans away from the present world. Insofar as second-Temple Jews reflected on such things, they saw evil of all sorts as an unhappy jumble of disasters at all these levels, and 'salvation' as rescue from *evil* (whether personal, political or cosmic) rather than as rescue from the created *world*. Their monotheism was expressed in the cry for justice and the plea for rescue, two of the great themes of Isaiah 40—55: in other words, for a radical change of affairs *within* the created world. Paul's revised monotheism declared that justice had been done, and rescue provided, in the Messiah and by the spirit. This gave him a much sharper vision of 'the problem', but it did not create it from scratch.

The basic point can be put quite starkly. Paul already had 'a problem'; all devout Jews did, as we have seen. The fact that it was not the same as the 'problem' of the conscience-stricken medieval moralist does not mean it was non-existent. It was the problem generated by creational and covenantal monotheism: why is the world in such a mess, and why is Israel still unredeemed? The revelation of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah meant, for Paul, that the covenant God had offered the solution to these problems – but, in offering the solution, Israel's God had redefined the problems, had revealed that they had all along been far worse than anyone had imagined. Just as the normal Jewish monotheism generated a particular analysis of 'the plight', so Paul's revision of that monotheism generated a revised analysis. There is therefore a strong sense in which his understanding of the problem of the world, of humans, and of Israel was newly revealed through the gospel, even though there is another sense in which that understanding remained at its heart that of second-Temple Judaism. The regular problem of continuity and discontinuity is found here, just as at so many other points of Pauline, and indeed early Christian, theology. This already-existing 'plight', it should be noted, is quite different from, and much larger than, the alternative 'plights' envisaged, in dialogue with Sanders, by Sandmel and others. [375](#)

Paul moved, in other words, from his original understanding of 'the plight' to a 'solution' which revealed the full dimensions of the original

‘plight’:



Obviously, (a) and (c) are not the same; but nor are they entirely different. The reimagined plight at (c) is the radical version of (a), forced upon Paul by the solution (b). Sanders is absolutely correct to point out that what Paul says about the ‘plight’ as he now sees it is a reflex of his grasp of the solution. But he is wrong, I shall argue, *both* to suggest that this reimagined plight (c) was a quite new thing (in other words, denying the existence of (a) at all), *and* to suggest that Paul’s expressions of (c), particularly his sharp words about the Jewish law, are simply random and scattered polemical outbursts.

What then was the reimagined plight? How did Paul’s grasp of ‘the solution’ enable him – or, indeed, compel him – to radicalize the original ‘plight’ which we have set out in the previous section? We can sketch this in three quick moves which we will then substantiate exegetically. The cross, the resurrection and the holy spirit together brought the ‘plight’ suddenly and sharply into focus.

1. The most obvious element of Paul’s revised version of the ‘plight’ follows directly from the fact of a *crucified* Messiah. ‘If “righteousness” comes through the law, then the Messiah died for nothing.’³⁷⁶ That is basic to everything else.
2. Not so obvious, but equally important, was the fact of the *risen* Messiah. Paul’s understanding of the resurrection gave him a much more focused understanding of the creator’s purposes for the whole cosmos – and hence of the problem, the ‘plight’, in which that whole creation had languished.
3. The revelation of the personal presence of Israel’s God in the transforming work of the spirit compelled Paul to a recognition of the depth of the human plight. All humans, Jews included, were hard-hearted, in need of renewal in the innermost human depths.

Each of these will be explored in separate sub-sections below. But it will be helpful, even at this stage, to point to the larger shape of what had happened on the road to Damascus. Saul of Tarsus was there confronted with the fact of the risen Jesus, and with the immediate conclusion that *he* was therefore the Messiah, that *he* had been exalted to the place of glory and authority at God's right hand – and that monotheism itself had therefore to be reconfigured around a man of recent memory who had not delivered Israel from the pagans, had not intensified Israel's own law-observance, had not cleansed and rebuilt the Temple, and had not brought justice and peace to the world after the manner of Isaiah's dream. This was, in its way, as cataclysmic a reversal of expectations for Saul of Tarsus as the fall of Jerusalem would be for the next generation. It compelled, as did that shocking event, a radical rethink, all the way back to Adam. What happened to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus can be put, from one angle, like this: there was revealed to him an 'answer' to a question which was like the questions he had had but much, much more complex. He was provided with a 'solution' to a problem far deeper and darker than the problem he had been addressing. It was like someone trying to figure out how to draw an accurate circle and then, suddenly, being shown how to construct a perfect sphere. Following his Damascus Road vision, Saul of Tarsus was not thinking, 'Well, I've had this problem for a long time, and now I have the solution to it.' Nor was he thinking, as Sanders and others have suggested, 'Well, I didn't know I had a "problem", but if this is a "solution" there must have been a problem of some sort.' He was asking himself (scrolling through his well-remembered scriptures as he did so): what does *this* 'solution' (the resurrection of the crucified Jesus) have to say to *these* 'problems'? Paul was like a man who, on the way to collect a prescribed medication, studies the doctor's note and concludes from the recommended remedy that his illness must be far more serious than he had supposed.

The answers Paul came up with were neither random nor inconsistent. In his statements about the problem of human sin, and especially of the Jewish law, he was not (against Sanders and others) flailing around like someone who suspects there is a wasp in the room but isn't quite sure where it is.^{[377](#)}

Nor was he offering an account of human sin to which all might give unaided mental assent.³⁷⁸ He came to the conclusion that *the fact of the crucified and risen Messiah, and of his place at the heart of Jewish monotheism, went hand in hand with an equally radical revision of ‘the plight’ both of the world and of Israel.*³⁷⁹ His radical revisions of the second-Temple monotheism of divine identity thus played straight back into his radical revisions of the second-Temple understanding of the ‘plight’ of the world and of Israel. Paul did not retain an original ‘plight’ and merely discover that Jesus was the ‘solution’ to it. Nor was he, plightless, confronted with a ‘solution’ for which he felt compelled to cobble together a somewhat random ‘plight’. He already had a ‘plight’. All Jews did, especially those who were zealously devoted to the one God. But the one God had now offered a ‘solution’ which, at first sight, did not seem to address the ‘plight’ at all. Paul therefore rethought the ‘plight’, exactly as he had rethought the ‘monotheism’ which framed it: around Jesus and the spirit.

We can therefore spell out the three categories of ‘revised plight’ as follows.

[\(b\) The ‘Plight’ Revised \(1\): in the Light of the Cross](#)

The crucified Messiah meant that the ‘problem’ must have been far worse than had previously been imagined. Why would the Messiah need to be crucified if the solution to the world’s problems lay in Israel’s vocation to shine the light of the law into the darkness of paganism? Something more had been provided, and must therefore have been needed. This is what underlies not only Paul’s insistence that believing Jews and believing gentiles belong together in a single new family, but also his parallel insistence that all Jews join all gentiles in the dock, charged with the basic fact of sin. And this, I suggest, is why he does what no Jew before him had done (though the point was arguably there in the narrative logic of Genesis 1—12), and traces the problem right back to Adam and Eve. In this respect, the cross functions in relation to Paul’s reconsideration of ‘the plight’ as the

fall of Jerusalem functioned in relation to the similar reconsideration we find in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*. If Jerusalem has fallen, they concluded, the Jewish people themselves must be caught up in the primal human sin along with everyone else. If the Messiah has been crucified, Paul reasoned, it can only be because Israel as a whole shared in the plight of all human beings. The innovatory idea of a primal sin infecting all people, Jews included, was something Paul found in scripture. But he went looking for it because of the revelation of the crucified Messiah.

Another way of approaching the same point is to look at what has happened to Paul's notion of the coming final judgment. Saul of Tarsus undoubtedly believed, on the basis of many scriptural warrants, that Israel's God would one day return in power and glory to judge the world. He may have believed, on the basis of texts like Isaiah 11, that he would perform this action of judging the world in and through the coming Messiah. Paul the apostle, believing that Jesus had been demonstrated to be Messiah through his resurrection, believed that the coming judgment would be 'through the Messiah, Jesus'.³⁸⁰ But there is more to the messianic revision of 'the plight' than simply knowing the name of the coming judge. Because the Messiah was and is the crucified Jesus, the 'problem of evil' goes much deeper than Paul had previously imagined. Specifically, it runs right through Israel itself. If Israel, God's chosen people, could somehow be affirmed as they stood – if, in other words, 'righteousness' could come by means of Torah – then the Messiah would not have needed to die. The problem appears to be Sin: both Sin as a cosmic power which holds all humans captive, and 'sin' as the deadly disease within all human hearts.

This is the force, particularly, of Galatians 2.15–21. The reason why Paul there argues that it will not do to have separate tables for Jewish Messiah-followers and gentile Messiah-followers is that the cross of the Messiah has revealed a problem – and the solution to that problem – which goes deeper than the Jew–gentile division would indicate.

The cross, he explains in 2.17–18, puts the Jew in a terrible dilemma. Either (a) you must leave behind the Torah's distinction of Jew and gentile, by sharing in table-fellowship with *all* your fellow believers, including the

gentiles, or (b) you must rebuild the wall you had torn down, the legal barrier between yourself and the world of ‘Gentile sinners’ – even if these ‘gentile sinners’ are now also ‘in the Messiah’. In the first case, you will find yourself technically labelled a ‘sinner’, for sharing fellowship with uncircumcised gentiles. In the second, you will find Torah accusing you of being a ‘lawbreaker’, because of course you, like all other Jews, have broken the law (including in your earlier sharing table-fellowship with gentiles). Here is the choice: either a ‘sinner’ or a ‘lawbreaker’. Israel’s scriptures themselves, as Paul explains in the next chapter, ‘shut up everything together under the power of sin’ (3.22). There is ‘the problem’, revealed for the first time, in all its depth, *through the gospel*. That is why the divinely granted solution is itself drastic: death and new life. Nothing else will do. The cross of the Messiah says so:

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. ²⁰I am, however, alive – but it isn’t me any longer, it’s the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I don’t set aside God’s grace. If ‘righteousness’ comes through the law, then the Messiah died for nothing. [381](#)

This is as explicit as it gets. The death of the Messiah has revealed something previously unimagined (except perhaps by the prophets, and Deuteronomy!): that the ‘problem’ went deeper than the pre-Christian Pharisee had ever imagined. Simply reinscribing ethnic divisions among the community of Messiah-believers will not do. The only solution to this far deeper problem is to die with the Messiah, to put to death the old identity, and to find, in rising with him, a new identity in which those distinctions are no longer relevant.

‘Salvation’ would therefore now mean, for Paul, not simply ‘the age to come’, with the promise of resurrection (‘rescue from death’) for all those who have died as righteous Jews ahead of that very this-worldly ‘salvation’. Nor would it simply mean deliverance from pagan oppression as part of that package. That vision of the age to come was the hope articulated in the Maccabean literature, and we may be sure it was the vision also which

sustained Saul of Tarsus. But in the light of the Messiah's cross and resurrection a deeper analysis of the problem could be seen, and with it a deeper meaning for 'salvation'. 'Salvation' must now mean 'rescue from the disease of which pagan idolatry-and-immorality are an obvious symptom', in other words, 'rescue from sin'; where 'sin', *hamartia*, is the deadly infection of the whole human race, Israel included. And once that radicalization is glimpsed, it will become clear – as Paul sees, and as we shall explore presently and then particularly in the next chapter – that Torah, though it is God's good and holy law, not only exacerbates the problem, but was actually given in order that, through exacerbating the problem, it would bring it to the place where it could be dealt with once and for all.

The problem with highlighting 'sin' in this way is that it might appear to offer a sigh of relief to the 'old perspective' on Paul. There we are (one can hear certain readers thinking): we were right all along! The problem is sin; the solution is salvation; it's taken a long time to get round the block and back to where we started, but since we're safely home let's not worry any more about these funny 'new perspectives'. But to think like that would be to collude precisely with a diminished, individualized and often essentially Platonic vision of 'salvation', according to which all that has to happen is for 'souls' to be 'saved' out of this wicked world of space, time and matter, rescued from anything (including 'human works') which looks as though they might emphasize that physical world rather than the 'purely spiritual' one. Over against that shrunken, often Marcionite (sometimes indeed dangerously Manichean) worldview stands the whole argument of Romans 3.21—8.39, with its insistence that humans are made for 'glory', and that 'glory' means inheriting the whole creation as the human sphere of responsibility. Paul's redefinition of 'salvation' does indeed radicalize the (from his point of view) somewhat shallow notion of 'sin' we find among many pre-Christian Jewish writings. The effect of this, however, is not to reinscribe a Platonic soteriology of 'saved souls', but to offer the diagnosis of the problem which has lain all along at the heart of the problem of the creator and the creation: that humans, designed to reflect God's glory and

wise sovereignty into the world, have ‘worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed for ever’.³⁸² When humans are ‘saved’, rescued from sin and its effects and restored to their image-bearing, heart-circumcised, mind-transformed vocation, then, according to Paul, *creation itself can and will be rescued* from the bondage to decay which has come about through the human derogation of duty. As for the humans themselves, they will be raised to new life as part of this larger scene, rescued from the death which was the natural entail of that sin.³⁸³ This is a much bigger picture than traditional western soteriology, whether catholic or protestant, liberal or conservative, has usually imagined. It is the picture which, in Israel’s scriptures, has to do with the faithfulness of the creator to his whole world, the faithfulness of the covenant God to the promises he had made not only *to* his people but also *through* his people: in your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Within this larger picture we can understand at last what Paul says about the law. We have already sketched this in chapter 7 above, and will return to it at the heart of our treatment of ‘election’ in chapter 10 below. But for the moment we can highlight the point like this. Within the traditional reading of Paul, the problem of ‘the law’ was that it condemned sin, and indeed sinners; and the answer of ‘the gospel’ was to declare that the Messiah had taken that condemnation upon himself. That, to be sure, is part of what Paul says, but Sanders and others were right to observe that much of what Paul says about the law does not fit that over-simple summary. Sanders, for his part, followed by Räisänen and others, proposed that Paul had not thought out his reasons for rejecting the law, so that his polemic was both random and, in a sense, inconsistent. Against both accounts, Paul’s new vision of ‘the plight’, on the basis of the cross, revealed to him not only that the law could not provide ‘righteousness’ for those under the law (otherwise a crucified Messiah would not have been needed), not only that the law could not equip ‘the Jew’ to be the light of the world (because it could not effect the personal transformation that ‘the Jew’ required just as much as ‘the gentile’), but also that the law, precisely in its work of condemnation, had a strange but important role to play within the newly revealed divine elective

purpose for Israel. This points us to the mysteries of Romans 7 and Romans 9—11, to which we shall return. But it is appropriate to stress at this point that whereas Saul of Tarsus seems to have had no ‘problem of the law’, Paul the apostle saw the law as playing a crucial role *both* in the freshly perceived ‘problem’ of Israel *and* in the solution to that problem. At this point the cross has indeed generated a quite new point of view, though this cannot be stated in terms either of the traditional reading (in which ‘the law’ simply changes from being ‘a good thing to be obeyed’ to being ‘a bad thing now to be abolished’) or of the revisionist readings of Sanders and particularly Räisänen (in which Paul hurls miscellaneous but muddled remarks in the general direction of the law). The new point of view will emerge more clearly in the next chapter.

(c) The ‘Plight’ Revised (2): in the Light of the Resurrection

The second way in which Paul’s existing ‘plight’ was brought into a larger context and a sharper focus was through the resurrection of Jesus. Not only did this demonstrate that Jesus was indeed Israel’s Messiah, despite his shameful execution. Not only did it constitute him as the universal judge at the coming day of judgment. It also pointed to the ultimate nature of the divinely intended future for the whole world, and as such pointed back as well to the deepest level of ‘the plight’ under which not only Israel, not only humans in general, but the whole creation had been suffering.

The ‘new creation’ passage towards the end of Isaiah could still envisage death within that new world.³⁸⁴ A leap beyond that was taken, however, in Isaiah 25.6–9, and Paul homed in on that as a promise which had now come into focus: what the covenant God had done for Jesus he would do not only for all his people but for the whole creation. He would ‘swallow up death for ever’.³⁸⁵ Paul’s vision of the ultimate rescue of the entire created order (rather than a rescue of humans *from* creation), a vision which flowed directly from what he believed about the Messiah, impelled him to an understanding of ‘evil’ as a whole which was more than the sum total of human sins or human deaths. ‘Sin’ and ‘Death’ were themselves

suprahuman forces bent on corrupting and destroying the creator's good world. Only in the light of the stunning and unexpected nature of the Messiah's victory could the beaten foes be recognized for what they were.

This perspective on 'the problem' as Paul perceived it enables us to integrate, rather than to marginalize, Paul's language about 'the powers'.³⁸⁶ The problem is *both* personal (the heart infected by sin, corrupting the mind into idolatry and the person into dehumanized behaviour: see below) *and* cosmic, since the worship of idols allows the demons who masquerade behind them to gain power not rightly theirs. Thus both 'Sin' with a capital S and 'the powers', variously described, and also Death itself, have replaced, in Paul's mind, the wicked, idolatrous pagans as seen from within his pre-Christian Pharisaism. 'Sin' and 'Death' are now 'the enemy', to be defeated in the final battle; indeed, they have already been defeated on the cross, and will be defeated fully and finally at the *parousia*.³⁸⁷ This both/and position will, in our next chapter, enable us to avoid the unfortunate either/or into which certain parts of Pauline studies have recently fallen. For Paul, in the light of cross and resurrection together, the problem of actual human sin, which could be traced back to Adam and Eve, nested within the larger problem of 'Sin' as a suprahuman power, and 'Death' as its equally powerful consequence, and hence within the larger problem of the cosmos as a whole.

This redrawing of the traditional picture has brought us back by a different route to the point we reached at the end of our treatment of Paul's revised monotheism – though it was in fact the inner truth in our starting-point as well. As we saw, for a Jew to pray the *Shema* was to 'take on oneself the yoke of the kingdom'. The victory of the one God over the 'powers', through the Messiah, is as we saw earlier one central element in what is meant by that 'kingdom-theology', as we find it (for instance) in 1 Corinthians 15.20–8. Just as what counts with second-Temple monotheism is not an abstract dogmatic analysis and a corresponding mental assent, but signing on as a loyal worshipper and follower of the one God, so what counts with the revised monotheism is not simply adherence to a creedal

formula but a commitment to be part of the new humanity, part of those already ‘raised with the Messiah’.

This throws the alternative into stark relief. If the one God has already inaugurated his kingdom in and through the Messiah, then the powers of the world are called to account. This applies to any and every power, starting with Sin and Death themselves and working through to all power structures that, as in Romans 8.37–9, might range themselves against the rule of the one God. The revised-monotheistic account of the inauguration of the kingdom of the one God thus insists upon a deeper and broader analysis of ‘the problem’ than even the earlier so-called ‘apocalyptic’ visions had offered. The plight to which the gospel offers the divine solution was the plight of the whole created order, with the specifically human predicament as a vital element within that larger picture but by no means comprising the whole picture in itself.

All this means, at a stroke, that the problem Douglas Campbell has identified in the ‘normal’ readings of Romans 1—3 is a problem for one particular tradition of reading rather than for Romans itself.³⁸⁸ It also means that we can take fully on board the point made by J. L. Martyn and others, providing as it were the apocalyptic and theological depth to the somewhat pragmatic proposal of E. P. Sanders: the ‘apocalypse’, the ‘revelation’ which takes place in the gospel events concerning Jesus, and the gospel proclamation concerning Jesus, includes the unveiling of the ‘problem’ to which the gospel is the ‘solution’.³⁸⁹ But this can be done *without denying for a moment* that this new ‘problem’ is the radicalization of the existing one which a first-century Pharisee would have recognized and agonized over. And it can be done while still affirming the rightness, when appropriately radicalized through the gospel, of the ‘solution’ envisaged by such a first-century Pharisee – in other words, the revelation of the covenant justice of Israel’s God, his faithfulness to the promises to Abraham. It is not a matter (as Douglas Campbell has suggested) of Romans 1.18–25 and the following passage appealing to a ‘foundationalist’ position, an account of ‘the human problem’ to which anybody might come by observation and reason alone, and which could then serve as a platform to persuade people

first to admit that they were sinners and then to see the Christian message as the answer to their problem. That is the thing to which Campbell is fundamentally objecting, though we may question how much an argument of this type was ever a problem in the pre-rationalist world of the first century.

To this extent, the message about Jesus is indeed logically prior to the full exposition of the human plight. To put it in preacher's language, we learn 'what's wrong' at the foot of the cross. But it would be foolish to suggest that that plight, when fully revealed, had nothing to do with the 'plight' as previously envisaged, or that the 'solution', also now fully revealed, had nothing to do with the 'solution' envisaged by a second-Temple Jew, not least a devout Pharisee.³⁹⁰ The whole point is that Jesus, the Messiah, has done what the Messiah had to do – only he has done it in such a way as to make one realize that the half had not been told. Or at least, *heard*: Paul would say that it *had* been told, had been there all along in Moses, the prophets and the Psalms, but that he and his contemporaries had been deaf to what the scriptures had been saying.³⁹¹

[\(d\) The 'Plight' Revised \(3\): in the Light of the Spirit](#)

If Paul's previous understanding of 'the plight' had been radicalized by his understanding of Jesus, specifically his death and resurrection, it also seems to have been radicalized in the light of his understanding of the spirit – particularly the spirit's work in renewing the hearts of God's people. This, of course, was a regular biblical theme. But we may guess that Saul of Tarsus would have been happy to say that the way to the renewal of the heart was the study and practice of Torah. Paul the apostle had discovered otherwise, not least, we may suppose, through watching the work of the spirit among gentiles who had not submitted to Torah, but whose hearts and minds had been renewed so that they were enabled to confess Jesus as lord and believe that the creator God had raised him from the dead, and to love one another across previously insuperable boundaries.³⁹² And, indeed, to

behave in ways previously unimaginable. And, indeed, *not* to behave in ways previously taken for granted.³⁹³

Like the other early Christians, Paul believed that God's holy spirit had been poured out upon those who believed the gospel, transforming their lives from within both with spiritual gifts and with the more slow-growing but long-lasting 'fruit' of which he speaks in Galatians 5.³⁹⁴ In several passages Paul makes it clear that this spirit-given character is in fact the kind of human life to which Israel's law had been pointing all along, but which it had been powerless to bring about. The giving of the spirit was seen by Paul, after all, as one of the central *eschatological* gifts: it was another sign, correlated exactly with Jesus' resurrection, that the new age had dawned at last, and that with it a new transforming power had been unleashed into the world.³⁹⁵ That, then, helped to generate a new glimpse of 'the problem', of which Saul of Tarsus had previously been unaware: Torah, left to itself, *and working on the Adamic human nature of its adherents, i.e. on Israel according to the flesh*, could not give the 'life' that it promised. That life appeared to the devout Jew as a shimmering mirage which retreated as one approached. From this angle, too – also worked out in Romans 7 and 8 – the revelation Paul received on the road to Damascus unfolded to reveal the true plight of Israel. The one God had revealed this 'life' both in the resurrection of Jesus, in the promise of resurrection for all Jesus' people, and in the new moral shaping of their present lives. This was 'what the Torah could not do', because by itself it could not in fact deal with either sin or death.

The presence and power of the spirit thus point back to the same ultimate problem that Paul had glimpsed through the revelation of Jesus himself. Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and others had spoken of the renewal of the heart. When Paul, like the other early Christians, experienced that renewal, and saw others experiencing it, they must have realized how badly it had been needed. Here, too, Paul found the clues in scripture, where Israel had been warned about its own hard-heartedness. But he went looking for those clues, we may surmise, because of the revised monotheism in which the spirit of the one God, the spirit of Jesus, had produced previously

unimagined effects on hearts and minds, not only his own but those of converts from every kind of background. The fact of the outpoured spirit, transforming people's inner thoughts and motivations and enabling them to 'love God' as the *Shema* had commanded – and thus locating this work once more within Jewish-style monotheism – gave Paul an all-important clue as to the nature of the 'disease' to which the gospel of Jesus was, he believed, the 'cure'. The theme of the renewal of the heart is found in Qumran. Clearly anyone who knew Deuteronomy 30, and who believed that the covenant had now been renewed, might be expected to claim heart-renewal, or perhaps heart-circumcision, as a sign of that.³⁹⁶ But the heart-renewal that Paul knew for himself, and saw in some unlikely characters in his congregations ('some of you were like that', he says sharply to the Corinthians after listing several unsavoury lifestyles), moved the question of the heart and its condition from being one of a number of issues to a position of prominence it had not had in second-Temple Judaism.³⁹⁷

All this helps us to see one key aspect of Paul's freshly envisaged 'plight', and how he got there. This has to do particularly with the significance of Paul's perception that the hope of Israel, the 'eschatology', had been inaugurated but not yet fully completed.

One can put it like this. If Death itself is the real enemy, one might have supposed that YHWH would have dealt with it all at once. 'The resurrection' should have happened, not just to the Messiah all by himself, but to all people, and to the whole world. But that would not have allowed for the fulfilment of the divine purpose, which was the new creation of people whose inner transformation would reflect the divine image as always intended, a people through whom the original intention for creation would then be fulfilled. Paul's vision of an *inaugurated* eschatology, in which the chosen people were reshaped through Messiah and spirit, enabled him to see one key dimension of the problem. The creator always intended to accomplish his purpose *through* human beings. But only through 'the end' somehow being brought forward into the present could that aim be fulfilled, could this renewed humanity be generated.

If, then, Paul had come to see the radical need for a renewed ‘people of God’ through whom the divine purpose would be accomplished, this represented a significant modification of his earlier views. In his pre-Christian belief, Israel’s God was indeed going to act one day to restore all things and to rescue his people, and the people who would inherit that ‘age to come’ would be marked out in the present by their possession of, and keeping of, Torah. That, as I have argued elsewhere, is substantially what Paul the apostle looks back on as ‘justification by works’: the marking out in the present, by Torah, of those who would be vindicated in the future. But the cross and resurrection of the Messiah, and the transforming gift of the spirit, launching the creator’s new world and new humanity in advance of the final ‘end’, indicated to Paul that there was a radical problem with this way of looking at things – the same radical problem, indeed, that we have seen all along, namely sin and death. If the Messiah’s death and resurrection really did unveil the age-old plan of the covenant God, revealing in action his world-restoring faithfulness and justice, that ‘justification by works’ was ruled out. For the divine purpose to make sense, the creator God would have to remodel the covenant people itself, though this, too, turned out to be what had always been promised and envisaged in Genesis, Deuteronomy and elsewhere. The problem of ‘sin’, in other words, was not simply that individuals faced the divine wrath. The problem was that Israel, being infected with sin like everybody else, could not carry forward the divine purpose. This is where the heart of Paul’s radically revised view of election, which we shall examine in the next chapter, dovetails with his radically revised view of a monotheistically framed ‘problem of evil’. What is required, and what has been provided in Messiah and spirit, is the ‘justification’ of a new people, in advance of the final day: a transformed covenant people, a remodelled Abraham-family. When the cross reveals to Paul that Israel shares the sin-and-death problem of the whole world, this does not mean that the category of ‘Israel’, of the covenant family, is abolished. The creator, who has fulfilled his promises in the Messiah, now intends by the spirit to take forward his purposes through

this renewed family, a family who, in advance of the final day, have already been declared to be his people, to be ‘in the right’.

When we map this solution-driven reworking of the ‘plight’ on to the picture of second-Temple Judaism we sketched in chapter 2 above, one thing becomes clear. What is now being offered is the ‘solution’ to the problem of *Israel’s ‘exile’*, the ongoing condition from the time of the geographical Babylonian exile to the present. In the classic texts like Isaiah 40—55 and Daniel 9, Israel’s ‘exile’ was the result of Israel’s idolatry and sin: exile was the covenantal punishment envisaged in Deuteronomy 28 and 29. Thus, near the heart of the complex of elements involved in ‘the original plight’, then radicalized and reframed in ‘the reimagined plight’, we find the need for fresh divine action, in faithfulness to the covenant and the ‘justice’ which that involved, to deal with sin and to regenerate the chosen people as a new kind of family altogether. When Paul speaks of ‘justification’, it is this complex problem to which he is offering what he sees as the new solution, shaped by Messiah and spirit. The creator God is accomplishing his age-old purpose in a way previously unimagined: by dealing with sin, not only Israel’s sin but also that of the whole world, and by thus creating a renewed, faithful and now worldwide family.

What happens, then, when we put together these three elements, cross, resurrection and spirit? Paul has revised his previous understanding of the plight of the world, of humans and of Israel in line with his revision of monotheism itself. Standing behind it all was the strong early Christian belief that in Jesus and the holy spirit the covenant God had returned at last, and had acted decisively to judge and save. The sudden brightness of this light cast dark shadows: if *this* was what it looked like when YHWH returned, all sorts of things were called into question. The resurrection of Jesus constituted him as Messiah, but he remained the *crucified* Messiah, and if in the strange purposes of the one God the Messiah, his one and only true ‘son’, had had to die, it could only mean that the plight of Israel was far worse than had been thought. The resurrection itself demonstrated that the real enemy was not ‘the gentiles’, not even the horrible spectre of pagan empire. The real enemy was Death itself, the ultimate anti-creation force,

with Sin – the personified power of evil, doing duty apparently at some points for ‘the satan’ itself – as its henchman. Finally, the experience of the spirit revealed the extent to which hardness of heart and blindness of mind had been endemic up to that point across the whole human race. All these were there in Israel’s scriptures, but so far as we know nobody else in second-Temple Judaism had brought them together in anything like the form we find them in Paul. It looks very much as though it was the gospel itself, both in proclamation and experience, which was the driver in bringing Paul to this fresh understanding of ‘the plight’ from which all humans, and the whole creation, needed to be rescued.

Paul thus came to believe that in and through the death, resurrection and enthronement of Jesus and the outpouring of the spirit *the true nature of the enemy, of ‘the problem’, had itself finally been revealed*. Just as Isaiah, in a moment of sharp clarity, saw that Assyria was not the real and ultimate problem facing Israel, but that Babylon would be, so Saul of Tarsus, as part of what was ‘revealed’ on the road to Damascus in the unveiling of the risen Jesus as Messiah and lord, realized that Rome itself, and paganism in general, was not the real problem.³⁹⁸ The real problem was Sin and Death – enemies which could be tracked, in a way that so far as we know had not been done before then, all the way back to Adam. If Sin and Death had been defeated in the unexpected messianic victory, then they had been the real problem all along. Like *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, Paul was compelled by the pressure of new events to go back more deeply than before.³⁹⁹

Like them, this meant discerning the sin of Adam, and the death that it brought in its train, behind all other human sin, including the now evidently chronic state of Israel itself.⁴⁰⁰ For *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, the Temple had fallen but the Messiah had not yet come; for Paul, the Messiah had come, and had been crucified and raised, but the Temple was still standing. The parallels are as important as the differences. In both cases the events that had happened pointed to a radicalization of ‘the plight’.⁴⁰¹

With that, inevitably and crucially, Paul gained a new vision of ‘salvation’ itself. It was not enough that Israel be rescued from pagan attack. ‘Salvation’ was now revealed as God’s rescue from the ultimate

enemies themselves. The death and resurrection of Jesus transformed Paul's Pharisaic belief in the bodily resurrection of righteous Jews, to share in the coming kingdom of the one God, into a radicalized version of the same hope: the hope for a totally renewed cosmos and for the people of this one God to be given an immortal physicality to live in it.⁴⁰² That is why Romans 8, as the long outworking of 5.12–21, is such a crucial, as well as a climactic, moment in Paul's writing. 'Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor the present, nor the future, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature': this is Paul's equivalent of Isaiah's taunt song against Babylon. He lists, exuberantly, all the forces in the universe that might be ranged against the one God, his people, and his purposes of redemptive new creation. And he declares them all to be impotent against the love of the creator and covenant God, now revealed in the Messiah.

Earlier Jewish writers had seen quite a bit of this, of course. But for Paul the nature and extent of 'the enemy' and 'the problem' were revealed precisely in the act of their overthrow. The full horror of the threatening dragon became apparent only as it lay dead on the floor. The hints had been there already, including the biblical warnings about the corrosive and destructive principalities and powers standing behind outward political enemies and operating through the local and personal 'sin' of individuals. Neither Saul of Tarsus nor Paul the apostle would have supposed one had to choose between the partial analyses offered by Genesis 3, Genesis 6 and Genesis 11: human rebellion, dark cosmic forces and the arrogance of empire all belonged together. A thoughtful and scripturally educated Pharisee could have figured that out already. But for Paul all of these were seen afresh in the light of the gospel. The fungus that had been growing on the visible side of the wall could now be seen as evidence of the damp that had been seeping in from behind. The worrying persistent and ingrained sin of Israel, not merely of the nations, was the tell-tale sign that the principalities and powers of Sin and Death had been at work all along in the covenant people, as well as in the idolatrous wider world.

This is how, as we shall see in a moment, Paul can declare in Romans that the gospel unveils not only God's covenant faithfulness, but also God's

wrath. Paul already believed in God's covenant faithfulness, but had not known what it would look like in practice. Now he did. He had also believed in God's coming wrath, but had not realized its full extent. Now, with the gospel message about Jesus, crucified, raised and enthroned, and with the knowledge of what the newly poured-out spirit was capable of doing, he could see that clearly as well.

This meant, in particular, that Paul now had a clear-eyed vision of how 'the problem' affected Israel, too. With this we can see that his discussions of (what we call) 'the problem of the law' were not, after all, a collection of inconsistent, arm-waving generalities.⁴⁰³ His new vision of 'the problem' was indeed shaped by the gospel. It was not simply a given from his earlier belief. It was certainly not a matter of 'discovering salvation in Christ' and so 'deducing that he must have had a problem', and associating the Jewish law with that problem. Nor, in particular, was it a matter of seeing that the Torah had cursed Jesus (Galatians 3.13 is regularly cited in this connection) and deducing that the one God, in raising Jesus from the dead, had declared the Torah to be at fault – perhaps even demonic – in pronouncing that curse, and that it was therefore to be set aside.⁴⁰⁴ No: Paul saw very clearly that *Israel too was in Adam*, so that the chosenness of God's people, and their commission to bring God's light to the world, had not released them from the grim entail of sin and death. The law, therefore, God's holy, just and good Torah, had come with a purpose: not to attempt to rescue Israel from its Adamic state, *but to draw out the force of sin all the more precisely in Israel*, in order that sin might finally be condemned. That, as I have argued elsewhere, is the whole point of Romans 7.1—8.4.⁴⁰⁵ As we saw in chapter 7, the law plays different roles at different stages of (Paul's vision of) the divine purpose. Once we understand that purpose in the nuanced way Paul actually articulates, there is of course plenty of necessary complexity, but no inconsistency.

This brings us at last to Paul's most thorough statement of 'the problem' to which 'the gospel' is the solution.

[\(iii\) The Problem of Romans 1.18—2.16](#)

The problem posed by the opening main section of Romans, which I take to be 1.18—2.16, can be sharpened to an extremely fine point.⁴⁰⁶ Why does Paul say *gar* at the start of 1.18 (*apokalyptetai gar orgē theou*)? Why not *de*? Why (in English) is there an apparent causal connection, ‘For God’s wrath is revealed’? Should it not be ‘but’? How does the ‘revelation of wrath’ in 1.18 relate to the ‘revelation of righteousness’ in 1.17?

We can discount two standard but trivial answers to this. The first merely cuts the knot, suggesting that Paul used his connectives in a loose or sloppy way, so that *gar* could mean, more or less, *de* (‘but’).⁴⁰⁷ This ignores the fact that again and again when Paul says *gar* (‘for’) he means exactly that, not least when it occurs in a tight sequence as here:

I am eager to preach the gospel in Rome, *for* I am not ashamed of the gospel, *for* it is God’s power for salvation to all who believe ... , *for* God’s righteousness is revealed in it ... , *for* God’s wrath is revealed from heaven, *because* what can be known about God is plain to them, *for* the invisible things of God have been seen ...⁴⁰⁸

The fact that a paragraph marker is normally inserted between verses 17 and 18 should not be allowed to obscure this sequence of thought. Until it is definitively proved otherwise, we should assume that Paul sees a causal connection at each point in this sequence, which one could state by reading the passage in reverse and substituting ‘therefore’ for each ‘for’. The invisible things have been seen, *therefore* what can be known about God is plain, *therefore* God’s wrath is revealed, *therefore* God’s righteousness is revealed, *therefore* the gospel is God’s power for salvation, *therefore* I am not ashamed of the gospel.

That works all right up to a point, but still leaves the same puzzle in the middle. And the puzzle then relocates slightly, within our western tradition of exegesis at least: what exactly is ‘God’s wrath’, anyway, and how is it ‘revealed’? We are not at liberty, though, to say that Paul did not mean what he said, or that he was quoting somebody else with whom he was then going to disagree (see below). That is the exegetical equivalent of the marathon runner who jumps on a bus in the middle of the race to get out of the hard slog and go straight to the finish.

The second standard but trivial answer is that the ‘for’ in verse 18 is a compressed way of saying, ‘and you need this revelation of divine righteousness *because ...*’ In other words, verse 18 is explaining, not how the divine righteousness is revealed, but why that revelation was necessary: ‘the gospel is God’s power for salvation, revealing God’s righteousness from faith to faith; [and you all need this] *because* you are all sinners, under God’s wrath, so that there is no other way for you to be saved.’ This has been more or less the standard reading in western exegesis from at least Luther onwards. It appears to preserve the sense of the *gar*, but does so at the cost of *apokalyptetai*: nothing new is now ‘revealed’, since anyone with half an eye open can see that the human race is in a mess. This reading merely reinscribes the standard ‘plight–solution’ model: ‘Here is the mass of sinful humanity, as we always knew (and as anyone can recognize); nobody can be justified by their own efforts; so here is the gospel which tells you that you don’t have to be, but that you can be justified by faith instead.’ That, I take it, is the reading which Campbell most recently has laboured to overthrow; but it is not one that I have offered myself.⁴⁰⁹ Such a reading fails, as I have argued elsewhere and shall demonstrate in the next chapter, first and foremost at the level of exegesis: this is simply not what Paul actually says. He seems to think that something has been *unveiled*, disclosed, made known in a new, dramatic and unexpected fashion. For the standard western understanding of 1.18–32, there is nothing much new about the sinful state of humankind and the divine response. Paul seems to think there is.

A third, to my mind still unsatisfying, solution was proposed by C. K. Barrett. He suggested that there was indeed a new revelation of God’s wrath, in that in Paul’s day one could observe an increase in human corruption, in the outworking of God’s anger as humans more obviously reaped the rewards of their own ill-doing. This seems to me an improvement at the level of exegesis, but no better in terms of content. For a start, Paul’s polemic against idolatry and its dehumanizing effects was hardly new within second-Temple Judaism.⁴¹⁰ For another thing, I do not think we should accept Dodd’s proposal (as Barrett seemed inclined to do)

that Paul intended the phrase ‘God’s wrath’ to denote the ongoing and immanent process of moral degeneration described in Romans 1.18–32. For Paul, ‘wrath’ is the execution of divine punishment on sinners, indicated in 1.32 itself (‘they know that God has rightly decreed that people who do things like that deserve death’). There may indeed be a sense in which the essentially future verdict casts its shadow ahead of itself, a kind of grisly dark side of the inaugurated eschatology of justification (the verdict of the *end* already announced in the *present*). But, apart from anything else, when Paul says ‘the divine wrath is revealed’, and connects that quite tightly with the revelation of the gospel in 1.16–17, we should resist, unless forced to do otherwise, the suggestion that this ‘revelation’ is something which was taking place simply in the world around.

A fourth, differently unsatisfying, proposal has been put on the table by Ed Sanders himself: that here Paul simply repeats a standard Jewish critique of humankind, and then throws into the mix what amounts to a kind of synagogue sermon (2.1–16) which does not really cohere with what he says elsewhere.⁴¹¹ This is a counsel of despair. Even more so is the dramatic recent proposal of Douglas Campbell: 1.18—3.20 is not Paul’s view at all, but consists in large part of a ‘speech in character’, putting into the mouth of a hypothetical opponent a kind of Jewish, conceivably even a Jewish-Christian point of view *which Paul is then going to refute*. Campbell advances this with something approaching genius: he makes the best case one can imagine, based on rhetorical styles and ploys that (he says) were adopted and discussed in the pagan world of the day.⁴¹² He is, of course, making a larger theological point, cognate with a position we have seen to be associated with Karl Barth (and picked up by commentators like J. L. Martyn): we must beware of anything remotely approaching ‘natural theology’, lest we construct an entire system ‘from below’ and so fall into Arianism or worse.⁴¹³ According to this principle, the fresh revelation offered in Jesus must be allowed not only to restate the terms of older discussions but to sweep them away entirely and set up something quite new in their place. But when the sweeping away includes significant sections of Paul’s own text, we may be entitled to demur. One should, of

course, always be prepared for novelty, to imagine that nobody has seen the point of a particular Pauline passage until our own day (there is no evidence that anyone in the ancient world read Romans as Campbell suggests Paul intended it to be read). But we should only adopt such a drastic solution, which Campbell clearly wants to do for reasons larger than immediate exegetical satisfaction, if exegesis itself cannot come up with anything better.

In fact, it can. The first key point is to note that ‘the wrath’ is indeed a *future* event (not, as C. H. Dodd and A. T. Hanson tried to argue, the process of moral decay within an ordered world, as described in 1.24–31).⁴¹⁴ Everywhere else, where Paul speaks about ‘the wrath of God’, this ‘wrath’ is something that is going to come upon the world, particularly upon idolaters and the like, in the future, in a climactic and decisive moment, not as an ongoing process. It is ‘the wrath to come’ in 1 Thessalonians 1.10, and this essentially future meaning is reflected in the other related texts.⁴¹⁵ The future ‘day’ is itself described in 2.5 as one of ‘revelation’, of ‘apocalypse’, of the *apokalypseōs dikaiokrisias tou theou*, the ‘revelation of God’s righteous judgment’, an echo of both 1.17 and 1.18. It looks at first glance as if 2.5 is meant as a further explanation of the *apokalyptetai* in 1.18, with 2.16 coming in to back it up.

But how does this help? After all, this idea of the future ‘wrath’ of the one God against idolaters was not new in Paul’s day. It was what the Maccabean martyrs called down upon the head of Antiochus Epiphanes. It was what the Wisdom of Solomon envisaged coming upon the cynical and brutal wicked ones. So how can Paul say that it is ‘revealed from heaven’ in some fresh way?

The answer is that for Paul the ‘revelation’, as with the ‘revelation’ or ‘apocalypse’ of God’s righteousness in the previous verse, is part of what has happened with the ‘revelation’ of Jesus the Messiah himself. Just as second-Temple monotheism has been rethought with Jesus in the middle of it, so Paul has also rethought that most immediate corollary of second-Temple monotheism, the promise that the one God will condemn idolatry and evil once and for all and so set the world right at last. And this

rethinking, too, has happened around what Paul believes about the Messiah. Once we see 1.18—2.16 as a whole, we note that the whole passage is framed by the ‘revelation’ which consists of the news, itself part of ‘the gospel’, that God’s judgment will be executed through the Messiah, Jesus (2.16). The coming ‘day’ of 2.5 is *the ‘day’ when God judges human secrets through the Messiah.*⁴¹⁶

At one level this, too, was hardly ‘news’. Ever since Psalm 2 at least, the coming Davidic king had been seen as the one who would execute God’s judgment on the wicked pagans, and perhaps on wicked Israelites or Jews as well. But what Paul says in 1.18—2.16 goes further than this. The fact that it is *the crucified and risen Jesus* who is revealed as the Messiah, the one who embodies and unveils God’s righteousness and the one who will enact God’s wrath against idolaters, necessarily entails a *drastic revision* in the way ‘the wrath’ is now seen, a radical deepening of ‘the problem’ so that it can no longer be seen in terms of ‘the wicked pagans and those Jews who collude with them’, but rather in terms of a deeper, darker human sickness at a level previously imagined only by ... well, people like Jeremiah with his sad words about the deceitfulness of the human heart.⁴¹⁷ And writers like the Deuteronomist who insisted that only drastic divine surgery could cure the disease deep within Israelites themselves.⁴¹⁸ And, of course, people like Jesus of Nazareth, who seems to have thought that uncleanness bubbles up from inside a person rather than merely getting into them via ‘unclean’ food.⁴¹⁹

This is where, as I argued earlier, Paul’s revision of Jewish monotheism in the light of the spirit makes its own contribution to the correlated revision of the ‘problem’ of which that monotheism had been aware. If Israel’s God has sent his Messiah, and if the Messiah has been crucified and raised from the dead, this itself implies a major hermeneutical shift in the way one might now read the ancient promises and warnings. What is ‘revealed’ in the gospel of Jesus, son of David and son of God (1.3–4), is not only the name of the coming judge. It is the depth, and impartial universality, of the judgment. What is ‘revealed’ when the spirit goes to work to transform hearts and minds, including the hearts and minds of surprised non-Jews

(2.25–9), is not only the possibility of a new kind of life. It is the depth, and impartial universality, of the previous disease. All this is implied when Paul declares that the one God will judge the secrets of the hearts through the Messiah.

The rhetorical ‘sting’ which Paul effects in 2.1 thus goes deeper than would otherwise have been the case. Having enticed both serious-minded Jews (think of the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, a near-contemporary of Paul) and serious-minded pagans (think of Seneca, another near-contemporary) into broadly agreeing with him in his devastating critique of pagan behaviour in 1.18–32, he turns the tables: you, too, are behaving in the same way. And in the light of what has been ‘revealed’ in the gospel, he can insist that, in the coming judgment, Jews and gentiles will be on exactly the same footing. The advantages and disadvantages they have had will be taken fully into account (2.12–15). God will show no partiality: there will be no ‘favoured nation clause’.⁴²⁰

This too was not entirely new within second-Temple Judaism, though it may well be true to say that Saul of Tarsus would have been shocked to hear it put like this. ‘They are Israelites, and theirs is the glory, the sonship, the giving of the law ...’ and so on. If he sensed such pain about Israel’s failure when he was already a follower of the crucified Messiah, what would he have said before?⁴²¹ The notion of divine justice was essential within Judaism, but that justice was balanced by the commitment made to Israel by the covenant God. The problem of holding those two together remains to this day.⁴²²

That is why Paul’s developed picture of what we sometimes call ‘the human plight’ goes deeper than anything we find in pre-Christian Judaism. This should not be a surprise. It is part of the ‘newness’ of the gospel that Paul should probe back into the scriptural story of human origins for clues as to what has gone so badly wrong, far more wrong than he had previously thought. Paul, so far as we can tell, was now out on his own, developing an apparently unprecedented theological account of human sinfulness traced back to Adam himself, providing the platform from which he could explain how it was that *Israel, too, was in Adam*, with Torah merely intensifying

that plight. It was not enough to say, with many Jewish thinkers before and after Paul's day, that all humans had an 'evil inclination', a *yetzer hara*, which must be kept in check by the 'good inclination', the *yetzer hatob*.⁴²³ That was just the surface noise, but underneath there lay a much deeper problem, the disease of sin itself. And that disease had to be traced back to its source. Despite some suggestions to the contrary, the line of thought in 1.18–25 has 'Adam' written all over it, even while it also alludes clearly to the primal sin of Israel (the golden calf).⁴²⁴

This theme emerges again and again in the spiral argument of Romans.⁴²⁵ What Paul says in 1.18—2.16 is picked up in 5.12–21 (focused here on 5.20, where the law merely intensifies the plight of the Adamic humanity to whom it is given (i.e. Israel)). The same point is then developed in 7.1–25; it is picked up once more in 9.6–29. Adam and Israel, Adam and Israel ... but in each case the 'revelation' of the deep plight of humankind in general and Israel in particular is answered, just as 1.17 balances 1.18, by a further statement of divine justice and saving purposes.⁴²⁶ Paul does not often elsewhere mention this Adamic radicalization of 'the plight', but when he does it is clear that its exposition in Romans reflects a position he had thought out very carefully.⁴²⁷

The need for 'salvation' (1.16) is thus intensified and radicalized. (Paul, unlike many modern writers, is careful not to say 'salvation' when he means 'justification', and vice versa.) The 'problem' from which one needs to be 'saved' is not simply the problem of pagan idolaters and their wicked ways. Nor is it simply the problem of foreign invasion or oppression, from which one would need to be 'saved'. In Isaiah 40—55, arguably one of Paul's favourite texts, the problem undoubtedly includes, and indeed is focused on, the Babylonian captivity; but the constant reference to the helpless moral and spiritual state of Israel itself, and the nature of the remedy provided (especially in the 'servant' passages) indicates that the ultimate 'plight' lies far deeper. It is the problem which goes down into the depths of the human heart, and in this respect Jews are no different from anyone else. That is why Paul's emphasis on the 'heart' (its wickedness and hardness; the secrets it contains which will come to light) comes out so

strongly in precisely these passages.⁴²⁸ At the level of the ‘heart’, ‘the Jew’ is no different from anybody else.

The problem of ‘sin’, as an infection from which all humans suffer, thus looms larger in Paul (particularly Romans) than in any of his second-Temple contemporaries, for the simple reason that the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth as the crucified Messiah compelled him to this conclusion. The ‘solution’ which the one God had presented, in raising Jesus from the dead, did not correspond to the ‘problem’ of which he was aware. It forced him to radicalize that ‘problem’. Idolatry-and-immorality was not simply a pagan problem to which Jewish Torah-possession and Torah-keeping would provide the answer, either in terms of protecting Jews from catching the infection or, more positively, enabling them to bring the world back to its senses.⁴²⁹ Idolatry-and-immorality, rather, was the gentile symptom of the disease *from which all humans, including Jews, were suffering*. That is what Paul learnt from the fact of the crucified Messiah, now exalted and recognized as the inner identity of the one God.

Romans goes on, of course, into the discussion of the particular question of ‘the Jew’, in 2.17–29. I have discussed that passage in detail elsewhere, and here only need say this.⁴³⁰ For Saul of Tarsus, it was axiomatic that the creator God would address the problem of the world’s sin through Israel. That is what ‘election’ was all about. But Paul the apostle realized, on the basis of the cross and resurrection of the Messiah and the gift of the spirit – which alerted him to scriptural teachings which had all along said the same thing – that Israel itself was in a hopeless condition. What was now needed was the creation of a new people in and through whom the creator God would take forward his purposes. That line of thought, already outlined in 2.17–29, explains why in Romans 3.21—4.25 Paul’s exposition of the ‘solution’ has a vital double focus. The creator God has dealt with the problem of ‘sin’ as outlined in 1.18—2.16. But he has also dealt with the problem of the covenant people, as outlined in 2.17–29 and re-emphasized through the dense statements of 3.1–9 and then 3.10–20. For Paul, these two problems come together through the ‘solution’ which the creator God, in his faithfulness to the covenant, has now unveiled: the faithfulness of the

Messiah. That is the underlying logic which takes Paul from the freshly envisaged ‘plight’ of 1.18—3.20 to the freshly unveiled ‘solution’ of 3.21—4.25.

(iv) Monotheism and the Problem of Evil: Conclusion

I conclude, therefore, that Paul has both rethought his second-Temple Jewish-style monotheism around Jesus and the spirit, and that from within that viewpoint we can see clearly why and how he revised his previous assessment of the ‘plight’, not only of humans in general but of Israel in particular, and also of the whole cosmos. The gospel events concerning Jesus had constituted an ‘apocalypse’, not only of the ‘good news of salvation’, but of the ‘problem’ from which all people, and the whole created order itself, needed to be rescued.

Paul’s robust monotheism allowed fully for the fact of rebellious non-human ‘powers’ luring humans into idolatry and hence into collusion with their anti-creational and anti-human purposes. Sin in the human heart, darkness in the human mind, dehumanized behaviour in the human life: all went together with the rule of dark forces that operated through idols, including empires and their rulers, to thwart the purposes of the one creator God.⁴³¹ And Israel, called to be the light of the world, had itself partaken of the darkness.⁴³² Israel, too, was ‘in Adam’. Once again Ephesians says quite clearly something to which we had been driven by our exegesis of Romans: ‘you gentiles’ were sinful, and subject to the rule of the ‘powers’, and ‘we Jews’ were in the same condition as well:

... you were dead because of your offences and sins! ²That was the road you used to travel, keeping in step with this world’s ‘present age’; in step, too, with the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is, even now, at work among people whose whole lives consist of disobeying God.

³Actually, that’s how all of us used to behave, conditioned by physical desires. We used to do what our flesh and our minds were urging us to do. What was the result? We too were subject to wrath in our natural state, just like everyone else.⁴³³

All this, of course, merely highlights ‘the problem’. Even saying that the Messiah is the ‘solution’, and that this ‘solution’ identifies, clarifies and radicalizes ‘the problem’ as it had been seen before, merely bounces the question back again. *How precisely does the Messiah provide the ‘solution’?* And, not least, how does this newly provided ‘solution’ relate to ‘the solution’ as it had been envisaged within the world of Judaism, particularly Pharisaic Judaism?

This raises, at last, the question of *election*, to which we turn in the next chapter, at the heart of Paul’s freshly constructed but still deeply Jewish theology. In the traditional schema to which Paul was heir, the one God called Israel as his one people, the bearers of the ‘solution’ to the problems of the rest of the world. But if the one God has now been revealed as the one God/one lord, and even as God, lord and spirit; and if, with that tumultuous apocalypse focused on the crucified Messiah, ‘the problem’ of which Jews had long been aware had been redefined, unveiled in all its horrible depth, so that the chosen people themselves were just as much part of that problem as anyone else; what now should be said about ‘election’? What should be said about the way in which, ever since Abraham, the chosen people had supposed that the one God would deal with the problems of the cosmos, of the rebellion of the human race, of the exile from the garden? What would happen to the promises to ‘Abraham and his seed’? What would become of the gift of Torah, and with it the vocation of Israel to be ‘the nation of priests’? What would happen to the great Isaianic vocation, that Israel would be the light of the world?

By now, the answer will not be a surprise. At the heart of Paul’s theology, holding together its many varied features in a single, supple, harmonious whole, we find his passionate conviction that the ancient divine solution to the world’s problems had not been changed. The creator God would indeed save the world through Abraham’s seed. Israel would indeed be the light of the world. But all this, Paul believed, had been fulfilled, *and thereby redefined*, in and around Israel’s Messiah and the holy spirit. What Israel and Torah between them could not do, Israel’s God had now done. He had been faithful to his promises. He had displayed his *tsedaqah*, his

dikaiosynē, as Isaiah 40—55 and Daniel 9 had always said he would. And in doing so he had dealt with the ‘plight’ of Israel, all humankind, and the world at every level, right up to the ultimate problems of Sin and Death themselves.

8. Conclusion

We return to where we began in our examination of Paul’s monotheism. If we know anything about Saul of Tarsus, we know that he prayed the *Shema* several times a day. In doing so, he believed he was ‘taking upon himself the yoke of the kingdom’, committing himself to the sovereignty of the one God not only over Israel but also over the whole world. We have seen that, at the heart of Paul’s fresh thinking about this one God, he reworked the *Shema* by discerning, at its heart, Jesus as lord – and with ‘lord’ deliberately echoing the *kyrios* which in the Septuagint stood for the divine personal name, YHWH, itself. This reworked *Shema* was not a detached ‘theologoumenon’, a miscellaneous quasi-philosophical reflection on the one God. It was the beating heart which energized some of Paul’s most central reflections on what it meant, in the ‘now’ of the gospel, to serve this one God and work for his kingdom. We should therefore assume that this reworking, with Jesus in the middle of it, had become central to the continuing monotheistic prayer life of Paul the apostle.

On this basis we may imagine, admittedly as a guess but one well grounded in things we actually know, that the prayer we find in 1 Corinthians 8.6 was the prayer Paul would have prayed as he waited in a Roman prison for the approach of the executioner. Like Akiba, he would be taking upon himself the yoke of the kingdom, though for him this kingdom had now been made known in and through the crucified and risen Messiah. That would make the praying of this great prayer, in its revised form, all the more appropriate. For Akiba, facing torture and death, the prayer would function as a great ‘nevertheless’. For Paul, it would be a ‘because’. Discerning the crucified Jesus at the heart of the *Shema* meant that Paul had

signed on in the service of a lord who had won his kingdom through his own death at the hands of Rome, and who had promised that his followers would inherit their own glory through similar suffering. ‘No: in all these things we are completely victorious through the one who loved us.’ I imagine him, day by day, praying in the spirit, using the revolutionary new form of the *Shema* in which so much of his ancient tradition of devotion had been woven together with so much of his freshly understood theology:

*all’ hēmin heis theos, ho patēr, ex hou ta panta kai hēmeis eis auton,
kai heis kyrios Iēsous Christos, di’ hou ta panta kai hēmeis di’autou.*

For us there is one God, the father, from whom are all things and we to him;
and one lord, Jesus the Messiah, through whom are all things and we through him.

This is the quintessence of Paul’s revised monotheism. For him to pray this as the soldier approached with the sword (Paul, the citizen, could expect a kinder death than Akiba’s) would be to locate that monotheism exactly where it belonged: bearing witness to the kingship of God and the lordship of the crucified Jesus with his heart, mind, and strength. And, at last, with his life.

¹ On the origins and usefulness (or otherwise) of the term see esp. Macdonald 2003, 2004, with the discussion in Bauckham 2008/9, 62–71; Fredriksen 2007, 35–8; Moberly 2004. For this whole section, cf. *NTPG* 248–60, and above, ch. 2, esp. 179–93. Further bibliography in McGrath and Truex 2004; Hurtado 2010, 964.

² See above, 84, 179f.; and tBer 14b–15a.

³ bBer. 61b. In some later traditions Akiba is seen as a villain, but this view does not seem widespread.

⁴ jBer. 9.14b.

⁵ On bar-Kochba cf. Schäfer 2003; Bloom 2010, ch. 16; Eshel 2010.

⁶ Above, ch. 2, esp. 84f., 179–83. Despite considerable scholarly attention, the point of this monotheism had little to do with, and was in no way compromised by, belief in angels and other intermediate beings (see below on Paul’s christology).

⁷ 1 Macc. 4.8–11, cf. 4.30–3; 7.36–8.

⁸ 2 Macc. 1.24–9. For the link of monotheism with the Temple, see 14.34–6. For the longer prayer of the high priest Simon, in similar terms, cf. 3 Macc. 2.1–21. On all this and more see Bickerman 1979.

⁹ I am assuming that 1 Macc. and 2 Macc., at least, are from the late second or early first century BC.

¹⁰ 2 Macc. 7.28f., 35–8. See above, 179–81.

¹¹ 4 Ez. 6.55–9; the passage immediately prior (6.38–54) consists of a full rehearsal of the story of creation, as in Gen. 1.1–26, climaxing with Adam as the ruler of all things (6.54). The equivalent train of thought is also seen in 3.4–36.

¹² On ‘inheriting the world’ see Rom. 4.13 with notes in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 495f., and Ps. 2.8; and the discussion of Jewish ‘empire’ [in 119–21 above](#).

¹³ e.g. Bar. 2.11–15.

¹⁴ I agree with those who consider this text to be Jewish rather than Christian. It cannot be dated with any precision but appears to be from the centuries immediately either side of the turn of the eras; see Kraemer 1998; Humphrey 2000.

¹⁵ *JosAs* 11.7–11, tr. C. Burchard in Charlesworth 1985, 218f.

¹⁶ *Jdth.* 9.11–14.

¹⁷ Congratulations: 13.17–20. The song of victory (16.1–17) echoes the song of Miriam in Ex. 15.1–18.

¹⁸ *Pss. Sol.* 17.1–4, 21, 45f. (tr. R. B. Wright in Charlesworth 1985, 665–9).

¹⁹ *Pss. Sol.* 18.1, 5, 10 (tr. R. B. Wright in Charlesworth 1985, 669).

²⁰ e.g. *Arist.* 132 (this is compatible with a relativized position in which all peoples in fact worship the same divinity that the Jews invoke, but merely call him by different names such as Zeus and Jove [*Arist.* 16]); Philo *Dec.* 65; *Jos. Ap.* 2.190–92; *Ant.* 3.91. See above, 266–70, 280 and e.g. Hurtado 2005, 111–33.

²¹ See esp. Bauckham 2008/9, *passim*.

²² As in Bultmann 1951–5, vol. 1 part 2: ‘Every assertion about Christ is also an assertion about man and vice versa; and Paul’s christology is simultaneously soteriology. Therefore, Paul’s theology can best be treated as his doctrine of man ...’ (1.191).

²³ Dahl 1977, 178–91. See too e.g. Young and Ford 1987, whose ch. 9 is entitled ‘God and 2 Corinthians’.

²⁴ See Bauckham 2008/9, esp. at this point his chs. 2 and 3.

²⁵ 1 Cor. 10.31f.; [see above, 394f.](#), and [below, 1447–9](#).

²⁶ And as Meeks had suggested it should be asked. Recent studies of Paul’s theology have indeed given some attention to ‘God’ in Paul’s thought, but without highlighting this topic or in this way. Thus Schnelle 2005 [2003], 393f. is right to say, ‘Jewish monotheism is the basis of the Pauline worldview’, but his very brief treatment of Paul’s development of the doctrine hardly allows the necessary perspectives to emerge. Dunn’s brief though always interesting treatment (Dunn 1998, 27–50) likewise skates quickly over the material without delving into the way in which ‘monotheism’ related to the concrete issues of the day. Schreiner 2001, 18–35 provides a moving introduction on the centrality of God within Paul’s thought but without coming close to the topic I am proposing as actually central not only to Paul’s theological thinking but to his worldview.

²⁷ I am here close to the position of Bauckham 2008/9, in line with the position I first outlined in Wright 1986a [‘Constraints’], 206–9, and followed particularly in Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 6.

²⁸ See Rainbow 1991, critiquing Hurtado 1988; but see, much more fully, Hurtado 2003, with the [discussion below](#). See too the critique of the whole category in Fredriksen 2007.

²⁹ Against e.g. Westerholm 2004, 363. Bauckham 2008/9, 99 points out that identifying ‘demons’ as standing behind ‘idols’ was ‘a monotheistic commonplace’ in the period.

³⁰ See *NTPG* 252–9.

³¹ See bHag. 14a; cf. bSanh. 38a. The classic monograph is Segal 1977 (esp. here 47–50). A similar question is posed by *Ezek. Trag.* 68–82a, where Moses dreams of a remarkable scene (presumably derived from Dan. 7) of a man sitting on God’s throne; this vision is then interpreted by Moses’ father-in-law Jethro as referring to Moses himself (82b–89). Hurtado 1988, 57–9 regards this as an example of pre-Christian figures exercising ‘divine agency’; Horbury 1998, 31 sees it, together with other passages ascribing at least royal significance to Moses, as indicating him as a messianic prototype.

³² As Segal suggests, Akiba’s apparent recantation of his ‘two thrones’ position, and the ascribing to him of a more abstract idea, that the two thrones represent two attributes of the one God (justice and grace), is almost certainly a way of sanitizing the tradition of the great man after the failure of the revolt.

³³ Philo might be considered an exception to this, with his proposal (influenced by Stoicism?) concerning a *deuteros theos*, a ‘second god’ (cf. *Quaest. Gen.* 2.62); but we have no evidence that his views were widely discussed at the time.

³⁴ cf. e.g. Pss. 19; 104; and indeed Job 26; 38–41.

³⁵ On types of dualism see *NTPG* 252–6.

³⁶ Again, Philo might be an exception; and cf. too Wis. 9.15, though how far one should press the latter is open to question. The rejection of ‘grumbling’, echoing the exodus narrative, is reflected also in Phil. 2.14–16.

³⁷ Again, one might cite the darker moods of Qumran, or *4 Ezra*, as counter-examples, but in both cases the goodness of creation remains basic. On the rise of gnosticism – and the current debates about everything to do with it, not least the term itself – see, as representatives of a much larger body of literature, e.g. King 2003; Williams 1996.

³⁸ Rightly, Bauckham 2008/9, 217 and elsewhere, against e.g. M. Barker and others.

³⁹ Ps. 33.8f. (with the consequent command to the nations to fear Israel’s God); 147.15, 18 (again with the consequent distinction between Israel, as the people of this creator God, and the surrounding nations); 148.5f. (celebrating the whole of creation and, within that [148.14] the special status of Israel).

⁴⁰ See again e.g. MacDonald 2003; and the recent survey of Fretheim 2007.

⁴¹ On the ‘monotheism’ of ancient Israel see the burgeoning literature surveyed in MacDonald 2003; Bauckham 2008/9, ch. 2. The point that needs to be made, as with similar points about early Christianity, is that we should expect, and not be surprised by, a tension between the actual practice and belief of members of the community and the principles enunciated by the scriptural writers. A variety of practice is actually presupposed by the texts in the Deuteronomic tradition which seek to curb such things; the problem here only arises if the scriptural writings are seen as ‘authoritative’ in their ‘witness to the religious experience’ of the time, as though the ‘religious experience’ was the main thing and the scriptures secondary. That is part of another debate.

⁴² See the discussion in Moberly 2004; Bauckham 2008/9 ch. 2.

⁴³ See the discussion in e.g. Clements 1984.

⁴⁴ *Arist.* 16. For this kind of syncretism see the discussions at 216f., 268f., 275, 624.

⁴⁵ Bauckham 2008/9, 210 n. 67 lists several passages.

⁴⁶ Dan. 3, esp. vv. 28f.; 6, esp. vv. 26f. In between we have the scenes of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation and acknowledgment of the one God (4, esp. vv. 34–7) and Belshazzar's feast, with a similar emphasis (5, esp. vv. 18, 21, 23).

⁴⁷ 2.44f.; 7.13f., 18, 26f.

⁴⁸ Isa. 40.28. The 'justice'/'covenant faithfulness' (*dikaiosynē*) of the one God is both the problem and the answer in the great prayer of Dan. 9; [see above, 119f., 142–8](#).

⁴⁹ For this whole area see now A. T. Wright 2005.

⁵⁰ Zech. 14.9, the climax of a passage in which YHWH defeats all enemies and establishes his kingdom over all the earth (picking up 9.9f.). See esp. Bauckham 2008/9, 96f.

⁵¹ The same is of course true of 'denominationalism' within the imperial world of the western Enlightenment; but that is another story.

⁵² I am not suggesting, by this, the kind of exact analogy imagined by Syme 1939; [see above, ch. 5](#).

⁵³ Rom. 8.28–30.

[54](#) Rom. 8.31–9.

[55](#) Ps. 44.20–2.

[56](#) I owe this point originally, I believe, to Sylvia Keesmaat: see Keesmaat 1999, 128–33.

[57](#) 44.23, cf. 26.

[58](#) Rom. 8.34: The Messiah was raised, *egertheis*; Ps. 44 [LXX 43].24, *exegerthēti*; Rom. 8.34, he is at God's right hand; Ps. 44 [LXX 43].4, God's right hand rescued his people. These echoes go beyond those plotted with pioneering insight by Hays 1989a, 57–63, though the echoes he already heard remain vital for any understanding of Paul's larger purposes.

[59](#) 8.32. The ancient context of this theme has been sensitively studied in Levenson 1993. Unfortunately, he repeats (210–19) several standard misconceptions of Paul.

[60](#) 2 Cor. 4.6.

[61](#) 2 Cor. 4.8–11.

[62](#) cf. too 2 Cor. 6.3–10, where the powerful catalogue of Paul's troubles is sandwiched between the Isaianic affirmation of 'the day of salvation' (6.2, quoting Isa. 49.8) and the appeal for God's holy people, his new Temple, to separate from idols (6.14–7.1, quoting Lev. 26.12; Isa. 52.11; 2 Sam. 7.14, with multiple other echoes of the monotheistic tradition).

[63](#) Phil. 2.14–17.

[64](#) cp. Col. 1.24–29. The cultic overtones here echo Bauckham's phrase, 'cultic monotheism'. For the Maccabean echoes see e.g. 4 *Macc.* 1.11; 6.28f.; 17.20–2.

[65](#) 1 Thess. 1.9f.

[66](#) 1 Thess. 2.11–16. On questions of interpolation in this passage see e.g. Fee 2009, 90–2; and [below, 1152 n. 442](#).

[67](#) Rom. 1.19f.

[68](#) Rom. 9.6.

[69](#) Rom. 11.33–6.

[70](#) 1 Cor. 15.23–8. Note especially the ref. to Ps. 110.1 in v. 25, and to Ps. 8.6 in v. 27.

[71](#) The same verse is quoted in tBer. 35a to indicate the importance of saying a blessing over food, since all belongs to God. According to mTam. 7.4, Ps. 24 was sung by the Levites in the Temple on the first day of every week. For the possible ref. here to Jesus as *kyrios* [see below, 670](#).

[72](#) 1 Cor. 7.1–11; 25–40.

[73](#) e.g. Rom. 12.17; 14.18; 1 Cor. 5.1; 2 Cor. 8.21; Phil. 4.8. On this point see Horrell 2005, 266, 272.

[74](#) Rom. 13.1–7, on which [see 1302–4 below](#).

[75](#) Rom. 1.20–5; nb. the close parallel in Wis. 12.23–7.

[76](#) 1 Cor. 10.14–22 (italics, of course, added). [See below](#) for the echoes of Ps. 24, then quoted explicitly in 10.26.

[77](#) 2 Cor. 4.4; Col. 1.15; [see below](#).

[78](#) Rom. 8.29; Col. 3.10; Eph. 4.24.

[79](#) Ps. 8.6, referring back to Gen. 1.26–8; qu. by Paul in 1 Cor. 15.27; cf. Eph. 1.22.

[80](#) Phil. 3.18–21. Note again the ref. to Ps. 8.6.

[81](#) Rom. 3.29f.

[82](#) On the confluence of the faithfulness, truthfulness and justice of God in Rom. 3 (3.3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 21) [see below, 837–9, 995f.](#); and cf. *Perspectives* 503f.

[83](#) cf. Wright 2002, 500.

⁸⁴ On Abraham see *Perspectives* ch. 33.

⁸⁵ Gal. 3.19f.

⁸⁶ *Climax* ch. 8.

⁸⁷ Gal. 3.27–9.

⁸⁸ See *Climax* ch. 7. The point is very close to that in Rom. 4.15: Torah brings wrath, but no Torah means no transgression.

⁸⁹ See *Perspectives* ch. 31.

⁹⁰ Which, as Levenson 1993 has pointed out, is woven tightly into the Abraham-story in Gen.

⁹¹ cf. 1 Cor. 8.1–3, a similar small-scale rhetorical point, but again within an argument explicitly grounded in Paul's revised monotheism.

⁹² My own early reflections on this theme were helped by Kreitzer 1987. His work is reflected in some of what follows, though I have frequently differed from him, and in particular have brought out what seem to me important themes that he did not highlight.

⁹³ Perhaps the best known of the earlier title-based works is Cullmann 1963 [1957]; see too esp. Moule 1977.

⁹⁴ I have discussed these matters in a different context in Wright 2012a [*HGBK*].

⁹⁵ cf. e.g. Schoeps 1961 [1959]; Maccoby 1986.

⁹⁶ Davies 1980 [1948].

⁹⁷ Though, sadly, the inscriptions on the coffee-mugs that were distributed among the members of the 'Early High Christology Club' (see Capes, DeConick, Bond, et al. 2007, ix) have themselves shown a tendency to fade over time. For the master's work see esp. Hengel 1976; 1983; 1995; 2006.

⁹⁸ Hengel 1974. See, more recently, the powerful and important essays of Meeks 2001 and Martin 2001, exposing the nineteenth-century roots of the constructs 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' themselves.

⁹⁹ The obvious examples of 'pre-Pauline' material treated in this way are Rom. 1.3f.; 3.24–6 (or parts thereof). The exegetical effects of relativizing or setting aside, on the one hand, a solid epistolary introduction and, on the other, a dense climactic statement have been incalculable.

¹⁰⁰ See esp. Hurtado 2003; Bauckham 2008/9; Dunn 1980; Casey 1991; Vermes 1973 and frequently thereafter, including recently e.g. Vermes 2009; 2010.

¹⁰¹ Boyarin 2012. A precursor of this kind of view was O'Neill 1995.

¹⁰² Unless this be read into the question about 'another Jesus' in 2 Cor. 11.4, linked as it is to 'another gospel', with the parallel to the latter in Gal. 1.6–9. But this is highly speculative.

¹⁰³ 1 Cor. 15.11.

¹⁰⁴ e.g. 1 Cor. 8.6; Phil. 2.6–11; Col. 1.15–20, on all of which [see below](#).

¹⁰⁵ Among the flurry of important monographs and collections we note Horbury 1998; Eskola 2001; Stuckenbruck and North 2004; Lee 2005; Longenecker 2005; and the smaller debates between e.g. Hurtado 2005, McGrath 2009 and Dunn 2010. Towering over much of this is the massive and detailed exegetical work of Fee 2007. To engage properly with even these works, let alone the many others not even named here, would require a further book at least the size of the present one. I hope that my proposals in the present chapter will at least indicate where I think such a book might go, and – more important within the present volume, and usually ignored in single-issue monographs – how this vital topic integrates with the other major focal points of Paul's theology.

¹⁰⁶ This is the strong central point of Lee 2005, chs. 4 and 5. For my own treatment of Jesus' self-understanding see *JVG* ch. 13.

¹⁰⁷ This point is variously made by e.g. Moule 1977; Hengel 1983, xi, 178f.

¹⁰⁸ See esp. Kim 1981; and recently Churchill 2010.

¹⁰⁹ cf. RSG ch. 8.

¹¹⁰ A further proposal in relation to a high christology in Paul was advanced by Moule 1977: that Paul's 'in Christ' language pointed to a view in which Jesus had become 'more than merely human'. I am not convinced that this is the best way to understand the phrase, on which [see ch. 10 below](#).

¹¹¹ Hurtado 2003; and see the earlier statement in Hurtado 1988.

¹¹² On the appropriateness of using 'trinitarian' concepts and language in Paul cf. Gorman 2009, 109.

¹¹³ See too the brief statement in Hurtado 1999a. An important set of studies of related themes is found in Newman, Davila and Lewis 1999.

¹¹⁴ See Bousset 1970 [1913].

¹¹⁵ Tilling 2012.

¹¹⁶ Tilling 2012, 256. Passages like Rom. 7.4–6; 2 Cor. 11.2, in which Paul envisages believers being 'married' to the Messiah, relate of course directly to the biblical theme of Israel as the bride of YHWH.

¹¹⁷ Bauckham 2008/9, 3–5, 13–16, 20, 221–32 (subsequent refs. to Bauckham are to this book unless otherwise noted). On pre-Christian divine Messiahship he argues, to my mind convincingly, against the proposals of Horbury 1998.

¹¹⁸ See e.g. Bauckham 1981; 1993, ch. 4 (contrasting e.g. Rev. 5.9–14 with 19.10; 22.8f.).

¹¹⁹ Bauckham 2008/9, 3.

¹²⁰ Bauckham 2008/9, 7 (*italics original*).

¹²¹ Bauckham 2008/9, 8.

¹²² Bauckham, 15. Bauckham notes (16) that the 'son of man' figure in the 'parables of Enoch' constitutes the sole exception to this.

¹²³ Bauckham, 17.

¹²⁴ Bauckham, 19. That last remark alone deserves to be pinned up on the notice-boards of many a faculty of theology or biblical studies. See too 58: 'it was actually not Jewish but Greek philosophical categories which made it difficult to attribute true and full divinity to Jesus.' The Nicene and other creeds were thus a way, not of capitulating to Greek philosophy, but of resisting it, and reasserting, as best they could in the language available to them, the christological monotheism of the New Testament.

¹²⁵ Bauckham, 30.

¹²⁶ Bauckham, 184.

¹²⁷ On the return of YHWH to Zion see *JVG*, 615–24; and below, 1049–53. An important pointer in the direction I am taking here and elsewhere is Adams 2006. Adams relates the 'coming of God' texts to the parousia; I am proposing that they inform and underlie much of early christology and indeed pneumatology as a whole.

¹²⁸ Bauckham 2008/9, 232 draws back from making any proposals as to how the very earliest christology began. It must, he says, 'have been a response to the unique events that brought the early Christian movement into existence'. This needs, he concludes, 'further investigation and reflection', an invitation to which the present chapter, in part, offers the beginnings of a response.

¹²⁹ Lk. 1.68; 7.16; 19.44. In 24.21 the two on the road to Emmaus spoke of hoping that Jesus would be the one 'to redeem Israel'; but in Isa. 41.14; 43.14f.; 44.6, 24 and many other passages YHWH himself is the expected 'redeemer' of his people.

¹³⁰ See e.g. Keesmaat 1999, chs. 5, 6.

¹³¹ See e.g. Num. 14.1–4; Neh. 9.17.

¹³² Gal. 4.7 with 3.26; the echo is of Ex. 4.22f.; cf. Jer. 31.9.

¹³³ On the Messiahship of Jesus in Gal. cf. *Perspectives*, ch. 31.

¹³⁴ On the integration of ‘Messiah’-categories at this point [see below, 690–701](#).

¹³⁵ Rom. 8.15–17.

¹³⁶ Rom. 8.1–2. On this passage see the discussions in Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 10, and 2002 [*Romans*], 573–7.

¹³⁷ Rom. 8.3–4.

¹³⁸ Wis. 9.9–13, 17.

¹³⁹ On the fulfilment of Torah, here and elsewhere, [see below, 1036f](#).

¹⁴⁰ See my earlier statement in Wright 1986a [‘Constraints’], 204–9; Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 6.

¹⁴¹ NRSV mg. offers alternatives (here substituting YHWH for NRSV ‘the Lord’): ‘YHWH our God is one YHWH’ or ‘YHWH is our God, YHWH is one.’ Cf. RV: ‘the Lord our God is one Lord,’ with mg. alternatives (a) ‘the Lord our God, the Lord is one,’ (b) ‘the Lord is our God, the Lord is one’ and (c) ‘the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.’

¹⁴² Dt. 6.4f.

¹⁴³ See the refs. above in n. 100. It is noticeable that neither Fee 1987 nor Barrett 1971b [1957], ad loc., draw attention to the echo of the *Shema*; contrast e.g. Fitzmyer 2008, 342f. (Fitzmyer 343 also helpfully compares Dt. 10.17). See other discussions noted in Bauckham 2008/9, 211 n. 69; and cp. e.g. Hays 1997, 139f.; Waaler 2008; Lincicum 2010, 138–40. Lincicum quotes Lindemann 2000, 188, describing 1 Cor. 8.1–6 as ‘one of the theologically most important texts in the Corpus Paulinum’, a verdict the present chapter endorses and if anything amplifies. The reading of this text which I and others now take is still resisted by e.g. Dunn 2010, 108f. (noting that in Dunn 1980, 180 he had taken the other view!); McGrath 2009, 38–45.

¹⁴⁴ As Dunn now suggests ([see previous note](#)).

¹⁴⁵ Rom. 14.17. See too the highly compressed use of monotheism in the service of the single, united community in Gal. 3.20.

¹⁴⁶ Dt. 6.5. *Psychē* is of course regularly translated ‘soul’; but, as the Akiba incident shows ([above, 619f.](#)), it was understood, translating *nephesh*, to mean ‘life’.

¹⁴⁷ Dunn’s alternative proposal is now that v. 6 was simply formed as a response to ‘gods many and lords many’ in v. 5. The high probability is that it was the other way round: that because Paul was getting ready to quote his revised *Shema* (already alluded to a few verses earlier), he phrased his description of the surrounding pagan religious context as a kind of advance echo.

¹⁴⁸ In my published translation I have expanded the two somewhat dense lines of verse 6 to ‘from whom are all things, and we live to him and for him’ and ‘through whom are all things, and we live through him’. The addition of ‘live’ is an attempt to make the English sound less odd, and the addition of ‘and for him’ is designed to bring out a fuller meaning of *eis auton*: not just ‘motion towards’, but ‘purpose’. See e.g. Thiselton 2000, 636, with God as ‘the goal of our existence’.

¹⁴⁹ This would not mean *replacing* a creational role with soteriology. The commentaries now routinely discuss the proposal of Murphy-O’Connor 1978 to that effect (see e.g. Thiselton 2000, 635f.; Fitzmyer 2008, 343), and just as routinely refute it.

¹⁵⁰ I am reminded of Jonathan Sacks’s observation (Sacks 2011, 41–7) that Hebrew thought, with its right-brain emphasis on right-to-left script and originally without vowels, is open-ended, inviting the reader to inhabit the text afresh, unlike left-to-right languages in which everything needs spelling out by the logical left brain. Without buying completely into an absolutized right-brain/left-brain split

(see Wright 2012b [‘Imagining the Kingdom’], 396–8), let alone an absolutized Hebrew/Greek division, there is nevertheless an important point here about the necessary openness of both the *Shema* and Paul’s reworking of it.

[151](#) On this point see Rowe 2005a, 308f.

[152](#) 1 Cor. 8.11f.

[153](#) 8.13, using the verb *skandalizō* twice, two out of Paul’s four uses (cf. Rom. 14.21 in a similar context; also 2 Cor. 11.29).

[154](#) Rom. 14.17f.

[155](#) Treating chs. 8–10 as a single argument of 73 verses means that it is significantly longer even than ch. 15, with its 58.

[156](#) [See above, 552 n. 62.](#)

[157](#) Paul seems to be understanding the ‘rock’ from which the Israelites drank as a metaphor for the accompanying divine presence. Cf. ‘rock’ as a key title for God: Dt. 32.4, 15, 18, 30f.; cf. Gen. 49.24; 1 Sam. 2.2; 2 Sam. 22.2; 23.3; Pss. 18.2; 62.2; 78.35; Isa. 17.10; 26.4; 30.29; 44.8; Hab. 1.12. Many of these are explicit statements of classic Jewish monotheism, of the unique identity and power of Israel’s God; cf. the helpful discussion in Waaler 2008.

[158](#) Perhaps surprisingly, Hays does not develop this point, either in Hays 1989a or in Hays 1997, 175f.; it might have been grist to his mill both in the exegesis of the passage and in his larger thesis about Paul’s use of scripture. Witherington 1995, 227 sees the irony in quoting a regular Jewish grace now to be said over potentially non-kosher food, but does not see how the whole psalm contributes to other layers of meaning.

[159](#) Ps. 24.3f.

[160](#) 32.21: ‘They made me jealous with what is no god, provoked me with their idols’; on Paul’s ref. here and its significance see Hays 1997, 169f. See too, later in 1 Cor. 10, the strong monotheism of Dt. 32.39, anticipating some of the more striking statements of Isa. 40–55: ‘See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand.’ See too Rom. 10.19, which quotes the next half-verse; see below, 1180. Other refs. to Dt. 32 are found later in Rom.: Rom. 12.19=Dt. 32.35; Rom. 15.10=Dt. 32.43.

[161](#) Ps. 24.5.

[162](#) 1 Cor. 10.16f.

[163](#) Ps. 24.7–10.

[164](#) So Hays 1997, 175f.; see Capes 1992; 2004; and esp. the full recent discussion in Bauckham 2008/9, 186–219; and the exposition of the topic [below, 701–6.](#)

[165](#) Other LXX MSS read ‘I have acquired a possession’, *ektēsamēn* instead of *hēgēsamēn*.

[166](#) Sir. 24.1, 3, 6–10, 23.

[167](#) We should also include Jn. 1.1–18. On Bar. 3 [see above, 151–3.](#)

[168](#) Col. 1.15–20.

[169](#) Full details in *Climax* ch. 5.

[170](#) The commentaries all naturally devote lavish attention to the passage. Among key monographs see e.g. Stettler 2000.

[171](#) I refer to him as ‘Paul’ because I think he wrote it; and I note that if, as in some hypotheses, Colossians is post-Pauline but the poem is pre-Colossians, then Paul himself turns up again as a candidate for authorship of the poem.

[172](#) Burney 1925. A further echo, somewhere between Gen. 1.1 and Prov. 8.22, is Prov. 3.19, where YHWH founded the earth ‘by wisdom’ (*behokmah, tē sophia*). Those who doubt Burney’s thesis can

be represented by Barclay 1997, 67 (followed by e.g. Wilson 2005, 149); in favour, e.g. Bird 2009b, 49f. Barclay's objection, that Paul's readers would not have understood this subtle exegesis of an underlying Hebrew text, is not I think to the point. This would not be the only passage where Paul said more than his first audience would detect (cf. e.g. Rom. 2.29, where his point turns on the fact that 'Judah' in Hebrew means 'praise'). The late lamented historian Thomas Braun, a frequent dining companion of mine in the mid-1970s, was capable of spontaneous multilingual puns and indeed limericks, much enjoyed even by those of us who did not know all the languages involved. Most poets, and indeed writers of prose, regularly allude to things which many readers might miss. Just because some do not heed the summons, that does not mean that wisdom and spirit are not present and at work; we trace but the outskirts of their ways. See the essay on Paul's use of scripture in *Perspectives* ch. 32.

¹⁷³ Käsemann 1964 [1960], 155: apart from what he calls 'Christian interpolations', the poem contains 'the supra-historical and metaphysical drama of the gnostic Redeemer'. This is firmly rejected by e.g. Fossum 1989; see too e.g. Wilson 2005, 125.

¹⁷⁴ Col. 1.12–14.

¹⁷⁵ On 'wisdom-christology' and its problems see further Gathercole 2006b, ch. 8; Macaskill 2007, 144–52.

¹⁷⁶ Col. 2.9f.

¹⁷⁷ 2 Cor. 5.16–19. See the discussion of the key point in e.g. Furnish 1984, 318 (though he rejects an 'incarnational' reading as extraneous to the context, a view which might be challenged in the light of 4.1–6); see too Bieringer 1987, esp. 304–7. I suspect that scholars have resisted discerning 'incarnational' theology in the passage (another example is Thrall 1994, 432–4) partly at least because they have assumed that such ideas only developed in the later patristic period, whereas my argument is that they are part of Paul's reworked Jewish monotheism.

¹⁷⁸ 1.3; 1.12; 2.6; 3.15, 17; 4.2.

¹⁷⁹ See below, 980–4.

¹⁸⁰ Paul refers to the same incident in 1 Cor. 10.7, and arguably elsewhere too, e.g. Rom. 1.23 (cf. Ps. 106.20).

¹⁸¹ LXX *enōpios enōpiō*.

¹⁸² Ex. 33.12–23.

¹⁸³ Ex. 40.34f.

¹⁸⁴ See Num. 14.21, and the various statements of this theme listed [above, 190–3](#).

¹⁸⁵ To which he alludes in Rom. 9.15, quoting Ex. 33.19.

¹⁸⁶ See esp. Newman 1992; I hope to have strengthened his overall argument.

¹⁸⁷ Levin 1983, 152, quoting the director Peter Brook speaking about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

¹⁸⁸ Phil. 2.9–11.

¹⁸⁹ See recently Bauckham 2008/9, 41–5, 197–210. The collection of essays in Martin and Dodd 1998 is important (not least for the background to contemporary exegetical debates) but uneven.

¹⁹⁰ See further *Climax* ch. 4; though several of the angles I here explore were not then visible to me.

¹⁹¹ Isa. 45.20–5; the italicized portion, echoed in Phil. 2.10, is v. 23b.

¹⁹² 46.1—47.15.

¹⁹³ Isa. 42.8; 48.11.

¹⁹⁴ cf. too 55.11.

¹⁹⁵ The last phrase, *leisraēl tiph'ārthi*, rendered in LXX *tō Israēl eis doxasma*, seems to be a way of expressing the promise that YHWH, in his return to Zion, will glorify Israel with his own 'beauty'.

¹⁹⁶ Isa. 52.7–10.

¹⁹⁷ The 'servant' poems have often been identified as 42.1–4 (or 1–9?); 49.1–6 (or 1–13?); 50.4–9; 52.13–53.12. But they do not 'come away clean' from the rest of the text; they are stitched closely into the larger whole (cf. e.g. 41.8; 42.19; 43.10; 44.26; 50.10). A Davidic or messianic 'servant' is spoken of in Ezek. 34.23f. and Zech. 3.8. Full discussion in e.g. Balzer 2001, esp. 124–8; Childs 2001, esp. 323–5; Goldingay and Payne 2006, 40, and ad loc.; briefly, e.g. Collins 2009.

¹⁹⁸ For a proposal about Jesus' own understanding of his vocation in the light of Isaiah 40–55, cf. JVG 588–91, 601–4.

¹⁹⁹ See in particular Isa. 52.13 (my servant *hypsōthēsetai*, 'shall be exalted') with Phil. 2.9 (therefore God *auton hyperypsōsen*, 'highly exalted him'); Bauckham 2008/9, 205f. shows how Paul appears to have the entire larger picture of Isa. 40–66 in mind, with the 'servant' seen as the means by which YHWH rescues his people and reveals his unique creative and rescuing power. The point does not depend on exact verbal echoes (against the objections of e.g. Hooker 1959, 120f.); notoriously, the LXX for 'servant' here is *pais*, which because of its wider meaning of 'child' would have sent Paul's readers in the wrong direction. What counts is the entire flow of thought, with the explicit verbal and thematic echoes functioning as an anchor.

²⁰⁰ See now e.g. Bauckham 2008/9, 199f. As Bauckham points out (199 n. 38), however, it may be that Paul was hinting at the fact that the name 'Jesus' itself *contains* the name YHWH, being a contraction of *YHWH yesha'*, 'YHWH saves', so that the name 'Jesus' could be 'regarded as a new kind of substitute for or even form of the divine name'.

²⁰¹ Jesus' name: Rom. 1.5; 10.13 (see below); 1 Cor. 1.2, 10; 5.4; 6.11; Eph. 1.21; 5.20; Col. 3.17; 2 Thess. 1.12; 3.6. God's name: Rom. 9.17; 15.9; 1 Tim. 3.1; 2 Tim. 2.19; cf. Rom. 2.24. Hence the significance of the early Christian praxis of baptism, prayer, exorcism etc. 'in the name of Jesus'; or indeed suffering 'for his name'.

²⁰² cf. Eph. 1.21.

²⁰³ Below, 701–7.

²⁰⁴ See e.g. Barker 1992 and related works. On the idea of 'another god', explaining biblical passages like the revelation to Abraham in Gen. 18, see also Justin Martyr *Dial.* 50, 56. The phrase *deuteros theos* is found in Philo *Quaest. Gen.* 2.62.

²⁰⁵ Bauckham 2008/9, 191 etc.

²⁰⁶ See Segal 1977.

²⁰⁷ The question of how several impulses combined to produce 'early christology' is explored further below.

²⁰⁸ Phil. 2.5–8.

²⁰⁹ See esp. *Climax* ch. 4. My proposals for the reading of v. 6, especially the controverted *harpagmos*, have been widely accepted in recent commentaries and monographs, though not without demur (e.g. Martin 1997 [1967], lxxv–lxxiv; this is not the place to attempt a reply to Martin's counter-critique of my earlier criticisms of his proposals).

²¹⁰ The 'obedience' of the Messiah comes climactically, as here in 2.8, in Rom. 5.19; it is the category to which Paul has been working up through 'the gift of grace' in 5.15f. and the *dikaiōma* in 5.18.

²¹¹ MT/LXX 8.6–7.

²¹² Gen. 1.26: let us make *anthrōpos* according to our image and likeness (*kath' homoiōsin*), to have dominion over all creatures on earth; Phil. 2.7, the Messiah coming to be *en homoiōmati*

anthrōpōn, ending up having dominion over everything in heaven, on earth and under the earth. The formulation of 2.6b/c, the Messiah's 'not regarding his equality with God as something to exploit', is not an exact echo of Gen. 3.5, 22 ('you shall be like God' ... 'Adam has become like one of us'), but in the light of the 'obedience' theme of 2.8, resonating with Rom. 5.19, I regard this allusion as probable. In addition, cf. the ref. to Ps. 8.7 in 1 Cor. 15.27, within an 'Adam/Messiah' passage which ends up in a very similar position to Phil. 2.10f. (15.24, 28: the Messiah being subject to God the father, so that God may be all in all; Phil. 2.11: every tongue confessing Jesus the Messiah as *kyrios* to the glory of God the father). The human 'glory', in Ps. 8.5 (MT/LXX 8.6) is explained by the God-given 'dominion' humans are supposed to exercise over the rest of creation, which is 'subjected' to them (*panta hypetaxas hypokatō tōn podōn autou*, 8.7 LXX); cf. the train of thought that runs from Rom. 3.23 (humans lost 'the glory of God') to 8.20f. (creation, having been subjected to humans, waiting for them to be glorified so that it can enjoy its consequent freedom from corruption). Discerning something that might be called an 'Adam-christology' in Phil. 2 does not mean either embracing the idea that pre-Christian Jews could think in terms of 'worshipping' a human being as God's image (against e.g. Fletcher-Louis 1999, esp. 115–17), or using it as a way of ruling out 'pre-existence' (against e.g. Dunn 1980; Murphy-O'Connor 1978). Bauckham (2008/9, 41, repeated at 205) seems to accept Dunn's either/or (*either* 'pre-existence' *or* 'Adam'); it is that antithesis that I am challenging. I share Bauckham's concern, to rule out an interpretation which would say that 2.9–11 expresses 'no more than an Adam Christology', but not his antithesis between 'restoring human dominion over other creatures' and 'establishing YHWH's own unique rule over all of creation'. In line with [ch. 7 above](#) I suggest that the latter is accomplished through the former – and that Paul would have seen this as the intention behind Gen. 1.26–8 itself.

²¹³ [See below, 1292–9](#); Oakes 2001; Hellerman 2005; against e.g. Cohick 2011.

²¹⁴ Gen. 37–50, focused here on 41.37–43; Dan. 2.48; 3.30; 5.29. Levenson 1993 observes this theme in relation to Joseph, but Daniel and his companions, not being 'beloved sons', are outside his view.

²¹⁵ 2 Cor. 8.9, on which see e.g. Furnish 1984, 417: 'Paul is not speaking about the manner of Jesus' earthly life, but about his incarnation and death as an act of *grace*' (italics original); similarly Thrall 2000, 532–4, against e.g. Dunn 1980, 121–3.

²¹⁶ [See below, 701–6](#).

[217](#) Newman 1992.

[218](#) This comes to a head, for me, in Hurtado 2003, 71–4, though the same questions emerge at several other points too.

[219](#) cf. RSG ch. 19.

[220](#) See e.g. below, [818f.](#)

[221](#) The one suggestion of a dying Messiah is in the post-70 *4 Ezra* (7.29); this may itself be dependent on a reading of Dan. 9.26, but again there is no evidence that any pre-Christian writer took that passage in this way.

[222](#) For the relevant sayings of Jesus see *JVG*, esp. chs. 11, 12 and 13.

[223](#) 4Q174 10–14.

[224](#) Early Christian citations listed in Nestle-Aland: Mt. 22.44; 26.64; Mk. 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Lk. 20.42f.; 22.69; Ac. 2.34f.; Rom. 8.34; 1 Cor. 15.25; Eph. 1.20; Col. 3.1; Heb. 1.3, 13; 8.1; 10.12.

[225](#) On Daniel in second-Temple understandings see the frequent discussions in [ch. 2 above.](#)

[226](#) Gal. 4.6; Rom. 8.14f., 29.

[227](#) e.g. Lightfoot 1904, 245.

[228](#) As still, for instance, in A. Y. Collins 1999.

[229](#) Hurtado 2003, 22f.

[230](#) Gen. 6.2; cf. Job. 1.6; 2.1; 38.7.

[231](#) Ex. 4.22f. (Israel as God's firstborn son); Jer. 31[LXX 38].9 ('I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn'); Hos. 11.1 ('when Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son'). Cf. too e.g. *Pss. Sol.* 18.4.

[232](#) 2 Sam. 7.14; 1 Chr. 17.13; *Pss.* 2.7, 12; 89.26f. The refs. from 2 Sam. and Ps. 2 are both included in 4Q174 10–13; cf. 4Q246 2.1. Hengel 1976 remains a classic statement of the evidence.

[233](#) See particularly e.g. O'Neill 1980; Horbury 1998; and now Boyarin 2012. It is safe to say that most scholars have yet to be convinced by this proposal. Certainly we do not need to presuppose any such thing for the development of early high christology to be comprehensible.

[234](#) Rom. 5.8–10.

[235](#) Rom. 8.3f.

[236](#) Rom. 8.29.

[237](#) Rom. 8.31–5, 38f. Clearly, Rom. 8 as a whole is structured as (among many other things) a major treatment of Jesus as Messiah/son of God, fulfilling the divine purpose through his death and the sending of the spirit into the hearts of those who now share his 'sonship' as younger siblings (nb. the close parallels between 8.15–17 and Gal. 3.28f.; 4.4–7).

[238](#) Gal. 2.19b–20.

[239](#) Gal. 4.4–7.

[240](#) Isa. 48.16.

[241](#) Isa. 61.1.

[242](#) Jewett 2007, 536f., reviews the debate and, pointing out that actually the language of 'sparing' and 'handing over' is used quite widely in the LXX and the ancient world in general, agrees with the many who deny that the Aqedah is in Paul's mind here. Hurtado 1999b, 231f. disagrees: the allusion is intended, probably 'to bring a powerful emotive force to the statement'. This does not, however, amount to a transfer of theological capital from the Abraham story to the death of Jesus.

[243](#) See the wider discussion in e.g. Levenson 1993.

²⁴⁴ Further details on the debate about possible Pauline use of the Aqedah motif can be found in Jewett, loc. cit.

²⁴⁵ 2 Cor. 3.12—4.6. See above, 677–80, and [below, 1091f.](#)

²⁴⁶ Rom. 1.1–5.

²⁴⁷ Which has often been marginalized in the haste to get on to ‘the righteousness of God’ in 1.16–17 – and in the eagerness to protect Paul from any stress on Jesus’ Davidic Messiahship; as though Paul would introduce so splendid a letter with irrelevant throwaway remarks incorporating formulae he did not even fully agree with (so rightly e.g. Fee 2007, 243). For this point, and for the exegesis, see Wright, *Romans*, 416–9.

²⁴⁸ I say ‘hitherto unsuspected’, because though the gospels portray Jesus trying to explain this in advance to his followers they also insist that the disciples did not understand it: see e.g. Mk. 10.35–45.

²⁴⁹ One still meets the suggestion that *horizein* here indicates the conferring of a new status previously unpossessed: e.g. Skarsaune 2002, 307 n. 12. Jewett 2007, 104 claims that Allen 1970 ‘has shown that *horisthentos* ... in 1:4 is derived from the royal decree language of Ps 2:7 with close analogues in the Aramaic section of Daniel’, and deduces from this that the word here means ‘installed’ in the messianic office. But Allen’s argument, which in any case touches only very briefly on Rom. 1.4, is thin, admitting from the start that the ‘decree’ in LXX Ps. 2.7 is *prostagma*, and speaking of the putative link with Daniel as merely ‘conceivable’.

²⁵⁰ So e.g. Cranfield 1975, 62. Cf. Fitzmyer 1993, 234f., who translates ‘established’, and comments, ‘Before the resurrection Jesus Christ was the Son of God in the weakness of his human existence; as of the resurrection he is the Son of God established in power ...’

²⁵¹ Rom. 8.3.

²⁵² Phil. 2.7f.

²⁵³ Note the important echoes of Ps. 2 in Rom. 8.17: the ‘inheritance’ of the messianic ‘son’ is now the whole world; cp. too 1 Cor. 15.20–8.

²⁵⁴ Rom. 1.7 (and see the opening flourishes of 1.1, 3f., 6 and 9, with their various linkings of God and Jesus); 1 Cor. 1.3; 2 Cor. 1.2; Gal. 1.3 (see too 1.1: Paul’s apostleship is ‘through Jesus the Messiah and God the father who raised him from the dead’); Eph. 1.2; Phil. 1.2; 2 Thess. 1.2; Philem. 3. Col. 1.2 simply has ‘grace to you and peace from God the father’; several mss, including very good ones, have naturally added ‘and the lord Jesus the Messiah’, but the absence of the phrase from many others provides very strong evidence for the shorter reading, being obviously *lectio difficilior*. 1 Thess. 1.1 speaks of ‘the church of the Thessalonians in God the father and the lord Jesus the Messiah’, so does not repeat that phrase after the following ‘grace to you and peace’. 1 Tim. 1.2 and 2 Tim. 1.2 follow the standard pattern, but add ‘mercy’ to ‘grace and peace’; Tit. 1.4 has ‘grace and peace from God the father and the Messiah Jesus, our saviour’, in line with the emphasis on ‘saviour’ and its cognates later in the letter (1.3, 4; 2.10, 11, 13; 3.4, 5, 6).

²⁵⁵ As is well known, in many MSS the LXX does not translate the Hebrew YHWH, but sometimes instead writes either the Hebrew consonants, or Greek letters that are visually similar, or a Greek transliteration (*IAO* or near equivalent). Where, as often, the mss have *kyrios*, this is a translation, not of YHWH, but of *adon*, ‘lord’, which was already, in the second-Temple period, the regularly used reverent periphrasis. Bauckham 2008/9, 190 n. 27 is correct to say that *kyrios* is a substitute, not a translation, for YHWH, but it is surely a *translation* precisely of the Hebrew *substitute*.

²⁵⁶ See esp. Capes 1992; 2004; Bauckham 2008/9, 191–94.

²⁵⁷ Rom. 14.7–12.

²⁵⁸ It is not clear why else Paul has borrowed *zō egō* from Isa. 49.18 as the preface for his quotation of 45.23; see the discussion in Wagner 2002, 336–8.

²⁵⁹ Capes 2004, 129, following Black 1973, 167, against e.g. Cranfield 1975, 1979, 710.

²⁶⁰ From Ps. 2.7–9 etc., as well as obvious passages such as Isa. 11.1–10. In the NT cf. e.g. Ac. 10.42; 17.31; Rom. 2.16; 2 Cor. 5.10.

²⁶¹ Rom. 10.12f.

²⁶² See Rowe 2000; Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 665f.; and [below, 1161–4](#).

²⁶³ EVV Joel 2.32. The passage (2.28–32 = MT 3.1–5) was popular in early eschatological Christian discourse: cf. e.g. Mt. 24.29; Mk. 13.24; Ac. 2.17–21, 39; Rev. 6.12, 17; 8.7; 14.1.

²⁶⁴ e.g. 1 Cor. 1.2 and e.g. Ac. 2.21; 9.14, 21; 22.16; 2 Tim. 2.22; for the scriptural background cf. Gen. 4.26; 1 Chr. 16.8; Pss. 99.6; 105.1; 116.4, 13, 17; Isa. 12.4.

²⁶⁵ Joel 2.27.

²⁶⁶ Rom. 2.25–9; 7.4–6; 8.5–8.

²⁶⁷ Joel 2.31 (LXX 3.4).

²⁶⁸ On all this see Capes 2004, 127f.; and nb. esp. Davis 1996. These Pauline passages are in my judgment the clearest OT YHWH-texts he applies to Jesus; Capes makes a case also for 1 Cor. 1.31; 2.16 (see Bauckham 2008/9, 182); 2 Cor. 10.17. The texts he applies to God are Rom. 4.7f.; 9.27, 29; 11.34; 15.9, 11; 1 Cor. 3.20; 2 Cor. 6.18. One might also suggest that *kyrios* in Rom. 11.11 refers to Jesus, but that is not necessary for the basic point to stand. Bauckham 2008/9, 191–3, has something of a maximal list of scriptural *kyrios*-references to Jesus: in addition to Rom. 10.13 (Joel 2.32); Rom. 14.11; Phil. 2.10f. (Isa. 45.23), already discussed, he lists 1 Cor. 2.15 (*sic*: sc.=2.16) (Isa. 40.13); 1 Cor. 1.31; 2 Cor. 10.17 (Jer. 9.24) (the 1 Cor. ref. seems to me more secure); 1 Cor. 10.22 (Dt. 32.21a); 1 Thess. 3.13 cf. 2 Thess. 1.7 (Zech. 14.5b) (see below); 2 Thess. 1.9 (Isa. 2.10, 19, 21); 2 Thess. 1.7, 12 (Isa. 66.5, 15). The refs. in 2 Thess. 1, where ‘the lord’ in v. 9 is flanked by ‘the lord Jesus’ in v. 7 and ‘the lord Jesus the Messiah’ in v. 12, resonating with their various LXX echoes, seem clear in their application of *kyrios* to Jesus.

²⁶⁹ On this see too Capes 2007, 139–48, against e.g. Dunn 1980, 184–7. Capes also suggests (136–9) that the ‘stone’ in Rom. 9.32f., while echoing a prophecy (Isa. 8.14; 28.16) in which YHWH himself is the ‘stumbling stone’, reapplies that to the Messiah, so that ‘he associates Christ with YHWH and posits him in an eschatological role that scripture reserves for God’ (139). Capes does not, however, explore the theme of YHWH’s return or its relevance here and elsewhere.

²⁷⁰ See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 655–8; and below, 1035, 1172.

²⁷¹ See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 663, citing Cranfield, Fitzmyer and Moo for the former and Käsemann and Dunn for the latter. My present argument significantly strengthens and amplifies the case for the former. Jewett 2007, 625–7, ignores this question and focuses instead on a possible Pauline polemic against zealous Jewish attempts to hasten the coming of the Messiah.

²⁷² See e.g. Smith 1984, 289; Petersen 1995, 148.

²⁷³ 1 Thess. 3.11–13. The allusion in v. 13 is the more striking in that LXX Zech. 14.5 reads *kai hēxei kurios ho theos mou kai pantes hoi hagioi met’ autou*, ‘YHWH my God shall come and all his holy ones with him.’

²⁷⁴ See [below, 1083f](#).

²⁷⁵ Rom. 15.6.

²⁷⁶ So e.g. Dunn 1988b, 528f.

²⁷⁷ Wright 2002, 629–31, with ref. to some earlier literature. See now also Jewett 2007, 567f.

²⁷⁸ Metzger 1973; cf. NIV; NRSV; also UBS (3) and Nestle-Aland (27). See Wright 2002, 630 n. 327; Kammler 2003; and recently Jewett 2007, 567f.

²⁷⁹ Krister Stendahl suggested in his last work (Stendahl 1995, 7, 38) that there was significance in the absence of reference to Jesus in Rom. 9—11 after 10.17 – in other words, that Paul was somehow turning away from Jesus and concentrating only on God. This seems to me very strange. Hultgren 2010, 433 goes further: commenting on the doxology at Rom. 11.33–6, he says that ‘the last time Christ was mentioned in chapters 9 through 11 is at 9:1–5’. This, breathtakingly, ignores 10.4, 6, 7 and 17 (*Christos*), 10.9 (‘lord Jesus’) and 10.12–13 (‘the lord’) – not to mention 10.14, where Paul speaks of ‘calling on him’ and ‘believing in him’. Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah and lord stands explicitly at the very centre of the whole carefully structured argument (10.1–13). [See below, 1161–4, 1175.](#)

²⁸⁰ cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 2.16; 8.6.

²⁸¹ Rev. 5.13 etc.

²⁸² For a recent brief treatment of historical pneumatology see Kärkkäinen 2012. The Pauline material on the spirit is magisterially covered by Fee 1994; the powerful recent treatment of Levison 2009 is more relevant to the role(s) of the spirit in Christian experience than to the understanding of the spirit in relation to monotheism.

²⁸³ It would in principle be good to explore further the second-Temple Jewish context of this theme: cf. e.g. 1QS 9.3–6, where the arrival of the ‘spirit of holiness’ constitutes the community as the true ‘house’ in which atonement is made.

²⁸⁴ 1 Cor. 3.16f. It is true, as many commentators point out, that Paul here uses *naos*, the innermost shrine of a temple, rather than *hieron*, the larger temple precinct as a whole (see e.g. Thiselton 2000, 315f.). But since the English word ‘temple’ suggests in any case a building, rather than a compound containing various buildings including a central shrine as well as some open space, the translation ‘temple’ here is not inappropriate.

²⁸⁵ Fee (1994, 114f.) sees this point, predictably, but perhaps surprisingly does not develop it very far in terms of its implications for an early, high and decidedly Jewish pneumatology. He still speaks as though this were, at least at one level, merely another image which Paul seized upon.

²⁸⁶ 1 Cor. 6.18–20.

²⁸⁷ See again Fee (1994, 136), but again without developing the point I am stressing.

²⁸⁸ Full discussion in e.g. Furnish 1984, 371–85; Thrall 1994, 25–36.

²⁸⁹ 2 Cor. 6.14—7.1. Fee 1994, 336f. rightly sees that this passage is, by strong implication, all about the spirit, even though *pneuma* does not occur until the final verse (and there its apparently more natural meaning is the human spirit).

²⁹⁰ Ex. 29.45f.; Lev. 26.11–13; Num. 5.3; 35.34; Dt. 6.15; 7.21.

²⁹¹ Ezek. 37.27; cf. 34.24, 30; 36.28; 37.23; etc.

²⁹² cf. too Jer. 51.45.

²⁹³ Isa. 52.12; cf. Ex. 13.21f.; 14.19.

²⁹⁴ Isa. 52.4f.

²⁹⁵ 2 Sam. 7.12–14.

²⁹⁶ 2 Sam. 7.8.

²⁹⁷ Eph. 2.14; cf. the theme of ‘access’ in Rom. 5.1–2. Fee 1994, 682, 686 suggests that the temple-theme only emerges because Paul shifts from a political image to that of a household, which then ‘evolves’ into that of the Temple, so that the images ‘fall all over themselves’. Granted that Paul can

and does mix several metaphors together at once, I nevertheless see the temple-theme as more organic to the whole letter than this would indicate.

²⁹⁸ Isa. 52.7, reflected in Eph. 2.17.

²⁹⁹ Eph. 2.19–22.

³⁰⁰ So Fee 1994, 689f.: ‘Here is the ultimate fulfilment of the imagery of God’s presence, begun but lost in the Garden, restored in the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and in the temple in 1 Kings 8.’ Fee does not, however, trace this same theme forwards explicitly in relation to the long post-exilic hope of YHWH’s return; and that is what gives Paul’s formulation its particular force in relation to second-Temple eschatological monotheism.

³⁰¹ Rom. 8.9–11.

³⁰² Jewett 2007, 490 mentions the link with the Shekinah, and various promises both biblical (Ex. 29.45f.) and post-biblical (*T. Lev.* 5.2; *T. Zeb.* 8.2) concerning YHWH’s ‘dwelling’ among, or even ‘in’, his people. But he does not develop this in relation to the promise of YHWH’s return.

³⁰³ Col. 3.16; cf. e.g. Wis. 18.14–16; Jn. 1.1–18.

³⁰⁴ Zimmerli 1978, 17–21.

³⁰⁵ Gal. 4.3–11.

³⁰⁶ For this whole theme, and its similar statement in Rom. 8, I owe a great deal to Sylvia Keesmaat: see Keesmaat 1999, esp. ch. 5.

³⁰⁷ cf. 1.4.

³⁰⁸ Just as in John, where ‘the father who sent me’ is one of the regular ways of speaking about, and more or less defining, Israel’s God.

³⁰⁹ Rom. 8.1–17.

³¹⁰ Rom. 8.22–7.

³¹¹ Many of the details are explored elsewhere in the present volume, and of course in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 596f.

³¹² Note, also, the echoes of Ps. 2 in the mention of the ‘inheritance’ which is the Messiah’s and is now shared with his people.

³¹³ Keesmaat 1999, chs. 2–4.

³¹⁴ Note this periphrasis for God, paralleled in 4.24f.

³¹⁵ cf. e.g. Gen. 41.38; Ex. 31.1–3; 35.31; Num. 11.17, 25; 27.18; Dt. 34.9; Jdg. 3.10; 6.34; 11.29; 13.25; 14.6, 19; 15.14; 1 Sam. 11.5–11; 16.13; Mic. 3.7f.; Isa. 11.2; 42.1; 48.16; 61.1; 63.11; Hag. 2.4f.; Zech. 4.6; 7.12.

³¹⁶ Rom. 8.28–30.

³¹⁷ cf. Rütterswörden 2006 [1994–5], 255–259, 262, 275f., 278.

³¹⁸ Rom. 5.3–5.

³¹⁹ This was a point that the late G. B. Caird stressed to me more than once in conversation.

³²⁰ 1 Cor. 12.4–6. The question of ‘trinitarian’ language here has been debated (details in Thiselton 2000, 933–5), but many exegetes agree that something like this must be said (e.g. Barrett 1971a, 284; Whiteley 1964, 129 refers to a ‘Trinitarian ground plan’ at this point).

³²¹ 1 Cor. 12.11–13. Richardson 1994, 218f. points out how thoroughly theocentric the whole passage is; Martin 1995, 87 stresses that Paul’s emphasis throughout the passage is on unity.

³²² On 2 Cor. 5.21 see Wright 2009 [*Justification*], 135–44 (UK edn.), 158–67 (US edn.) and the essay in *Perspectives* (ch. 5); and see, interestingly, the offhand remarks of Meeks 1983, 186: 2 Cor. 5.21 ‘stands at the climax of Paul’s apology for his missionary career’. [See below, 879–85.](#)

[323](#) On this, see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 9. The passage has of course been extensively studied: see e.g. Hafemann 1995.

[324](#) Jer. 31.33; Ezek. 36.26 (cf. 11.19).

[325](#) Dt. 4.29; 30.2f., 6, 14.

[326](#) 3.6; the closest (and highly revealing) parallels are Rom. 2.27–9; 7.4–6.

[327](#) 2 Cor. 3.7–12. ‘Freedom’ here is *parrhesia*, ‘boldness’, ‘frankness of speech’.

[328](#) 2 Cor. 3.15–18.

[329](#) See above, 677–80.

[330](#) 6.14—7.1 (see above, 369).

[331](#) 2 Cor. 13.13.

[332](#) Eph. 4.4–6.

[333](#) 4.1–3.

[334](#) 4.13–16.

[335](#) 2.19–22. For the ‘new humanity’ see 2.15f.: ‘The point of doing all this was to create, in him, one new human being [*hena kainon anthrōpon*] out of the two, so making peace. God was reconciling both of us to himself in a single body, through the cross, by killing the enmity in him.’

[336](#) So Bruce 1977, ch. 36.

[337](#) Eph. 1.3–14.

[338](#) 1.10; see above, 552.

[339](#) As in Rom. 4.13; for the other Jewish texts see below, 1005, and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 495f.

[340](#) See ch. 5 above, and ch. 12 below.

[341](#) 1.21.

[342](#) 3.9–13.

[343](#) cf. e.g. Boyarin 1994.

[344](#) Eph. 6.10–20.

[345](#) See esp. Wright 2012a [*HGBK*].

[346](#) e.g. Col. 4.11.

[347](#) 1 Cor. 10.20–2.

[348](#) See also the essay on ‘Messiahship in Galatians’ in *Perspectives* ch. 31.

[349](#) 1 Cor. 15.20–8.

[350](#) This question goes back at least to the time of Origen: see e.g. *De Princ.* 3.5.6f., and dominated both the Arian and the Pneumatomachian controversies (cf. *ODCC* s.vv.), with Subordinationism being eventually condemned at the council of Constantinople in 381. That, of course, has functioned as a challenge to many who have suspected that the earliest Christians, including perhaps Paul, were not as ‘orthodox’ as the later Fathers might have wished. Even Hays (1997, 266) suggests that ‘it is impossible to avoid the impression that Paul is operating with what would later come to be called a subordinationist christology,’ granted that ‘the doctrine of the Trinity was not yet formulated in Paul’s day.’ Contrast this with Fitzmyer 2008, 575, who points out that this is the only place where Paul uses the absolute expression ‘the son’ of Jesus, and that this is therefore ‘as close as Paul ever comes to an assertion of the intrinsic relationship of the Son to the Father’, providing ‘one of the NT springboards for the relation of two persons of the Trinity in later Christian theology’. Cf. too Thiselton 2000, 1238: ‘an overreaction to an earlier naïve dogmatics has made us too timid in what we claim for Paul’s respective understandings of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God.’

³⁵¹ In the Heb. ‘sovereign’ (NRSV ‘LORD’) is *adonai*, and ‘YHWH’ has the vowels of *elohim*. The LXX simply has *ho theos*.

³⁵² Isa. 25.6–8. Paul cites the start of v. 8 (about death being swallowed up) at 1 Cor. 15.54.

³⁵³ Of course, the fact that Paul says that ‘the son himself will be placed in proper order under the one who placed everything in order under him’ can be summarized with the word ‘subordination’ without implying the overtones which that word later came to carry. Whether one can support a phrase like ‘ultimate subordination’ (Kreitzer 1987, 158–60) is another question.

³⁵⁴ This is the eleventh ‘Thesis on Feuerbach’ in Marx 1932 [1845]. I have written on the various ‘problems of evil’ in Wright 2006a [*Evil*].

³⁵⁵ For what follows, cf. [ch. 3 above](#).

³⁵⁶ See Arist. *Nic. Eth.* Book 7; for the larger tradition and discussions see e.g. Gosling 1990. Socrates, famously, denied the problem (Plato *Protag.*).

³⁵⁷ See Wright 2006a [*Evil*], ch. 1, and especially Neiman 2002. The revival of ancient Epicureanism has been one of the major features of western modernity: see e.g. Wilson 2008; Greenblatt 2011.

³⁵⁸ On Zoroastrianism (whose putative founder, Zoroaster, is a figure of widely varying legends), see Boyce 1991 [1975]; Choksy 1999. Manicheism, the teaching of the third-century AD Persian teacher Mani, was a form of dualism almost certainly distinct from gnosticism proper: see e.g. Jonas 1963 [1958], 40f. and elsewhere; Fowden 1999, 95; Lieu 1999.

³⁵⁹ Though we may suppose that the redactor of Genesis may have seen it in those terms, offering Abraham as the ‘answer’ to Adam: see below, 783–95.

³⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 11.30.

³⁶¹ e.g. Isa. 65.17–25 (cp. 11.1–10).

³⁶² Isa. 58.3. The prophet provides an answer: you were doing it for the wrong reasons. But even if people were doing it for the right reasons, the problem remained: YHWH still delayed his coming to save and judge.

³⁶³ 4 *Ez.* 6; 2 *Bar.* On the rabbinic suggestion that all Israel’s subsequent sins were derived first from Aaron’s calf and later from those made by Jeroboam, see e.g. bSanh. 102a.

³⁶⁴ Compare the spectrum of Jewish belief about life beyond the grave, which sits alongside the much wider spectrum of pagan views on the subject: cf. *RSG* chs. 2, 3 and 4.

³⁶⁵ See the powerful discussion of Sacks 2011, ch. 12.

³⁶⁶ cf. e.g. Pss. 115.3–8; 135.15–18; Wis. 15.14–17. On idolatry see now Barton 2007; Beale 2008.

³⁶⁷ For the golden calf, cf. Ex. 32.1–35; for Baal-Peor, Num. 25.1–18.

³⁶⁸ On ‘sinning with a high hand’ cf. e.g. Num. 15.30f.; Dt. 17.12 (cp. Heb. 10.26). The Mishnah tractate *Kerithoth* deals with sins of that order, and cases of exceptions; cf. mKer. 1.2; 3.2.

³⁶⁹ On Johanan ben Zakkai see *NTPG* 162f., with refs.

³⁷⁰ For the prevalence of messianic ideas in second-Temple Judaism see Horbury 1998; 2003, against many doubters.

³⁷¹ Sanders 1977, 442f. (‘the solution as preceding the problem’); 474f. Sanders is explicitly reacting against Bultmann and others like him (e.g. Bultmann 1951–5, 1.190, 227), noting that Bornkamm 1971 [1969], 120 registers a similar protest while retaining the normal ‘sin–salvation’ expository outline.

³⁷² See e.g. Hultgren 2010, and many others within mainstream protestant exegesis. A short but shrewd early assessment of the various debates was provided by Thielman 1989.

³⁷³ See now Sanders 2007; 2008b, 327–9, with refs. to his earlier work; cf. too Räisänen 1986 [1983]; 2008, 326f., with modifications and questions. Watson 2004, 426 joins Sanders in seeing a christologically generated ‘contradiction’ in Paul’s presentation of the law. The main challenge to a ‘plight-to-solution’ sequence in Paul has now come from Campbell 2009, who has reacted strongly against the same kind of thing, in the wider protestant tradition, that Sanders is rejecting in Bultmann: in Campbell’s case, against a ‘foundationalist’ attempt first to establish ‘human sin’ and then to offer a remedy. [See below](#) for the exegetical outworkings.

³⁷⁴ Compare Sanders’s ‘positive’ account of the role of Torah within Judaism with the Calvinist view of the Torah as the way of life for a people already redeemed. For Barth cf. Barth 1936—1969, 2.2.92f.: ‘it is only by grace that the lack of grace can be recognized as such’. This is picked up and emphasized by Martyn 1997a, 95, 266, and made thematic within his whole scheme.

³⁷⁵ Sanders 1977, 443 n. 5 quotes Sandmel as suggesting that Paul may have had an ‘underground’ plight which he does not describe: ‘a difficulty with the law as adequate to human need’. I agree with Sanders that Phil. 3 and 2 Cor. 3 seem directly to deny such a thing; but Sandmel’s formulation does not begin to reach the kind of ‘plight’ I am envisaging, the whole state of the world and of Israel in particular. The debate has languished for too long in the area of a detached ‘religion’.

³⁷⁶ Gal. 2.21.

³⁷⁷ Sanders 2008b, 329–33 points out that his view is that Paul was ‘coherent’ but ‘unsystematic’. But the point of his own ‘solution-to-plight’ model was at least in part to explain the apparent ‘contradictions’ in what Paul says about the law; and he himself has argued, on the one hand that Rom. 2.1–16 does not appear to fit with the rest of Paul’s thought (Sanders 1983, 123–35), and on the other that Rom. 7.7–25 gives ‘inconsistent’ and ‘tortured’ explanations (1983, 79–81), and ‘does not express existentially a view which Paul consistently maintains elsewhere’ (1983, 78).

³⁷⁸ See Campbell 2009: Campbell does not think Paul himself was guilty of this, either, but he does think it is what Rom. 1.18—3.20, as it stands, now offers.

³⁷⁹ Keck 1984, as often, has his finger on the point: Paul radicalized the apocalyptists’ problem.

³⁸⁰ Rom. 2.16. This is one of the rare occurrences of ‘through Messiah’; normally when Paul says ‘through’ in relation to Jesus he says ‘through Jesus’. This almost certainly indicates that he is thinking specifically of the coming messianic judgment. (The variant reading ‘through Jesus Messiah’ is well supported but is clearly ‘easier’; see e.g. Fitzmyer 1993, 312; Jewett 2007, 193.)

³⁸¹ Gal. 2.19–21.

³⁸² Rom. 1.25.

³⁸³ Rom. 1.32.

³⁸⁴ Isa. 65.17–25.

³⁸⁵ Isa. 25.8, quoted in 1 Cor. 15.54.

³⁸⁶ Among the many works on this theme those of Wink stand out (Wink 1984; 1986; 1992). Cf. too e.g. Caird 1956; Reid 1993.

³⁸⁷ cf. 1 Cor. 2.6–8; 15.20–8; Col. 2.15.

³⁸⁸ See Campbell 2009, Parts I, II and III.

³⁸⁹ We may, however, permit ourselves gentle amusement at the suggestion (Martyn 1997a, 266) that Karl Barth is to be congratulated for having reached this conclusion *on exegetical grounds*. If ever it was clear that a quasi-exegetical proposal was put forward because of a theological *a priori*, it was precisely there. For Barth, *everything* had to be revealed in and only in Jesus Christ, otherwise a dangerous loophole of potential ‘natural theology’ might be left for the *Deutsche Christen* to exploit.

³⁹⁰ It would also be pastorally foolish to assume that there is no overlap between ‘the plight’ as seen in the light of the gospel and the multifarious felt ‘plights’ of human beings in general; but that

takes us beyond our present task.

³⁹¹ cf. Rom. 10.19–21.

³⁹² Rom. 10.9–11; Col. 1.8.

³⁹³ cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 6.9–11; Gal. 5.16–26; etc.

³⁹⁴ Other Jewish communities, of course, claimed similar things, the obvious example being the community of the Scrolls: cf. e.g. 1QS 3.6; 1QH 8.20; 20.11f.; CD 5.11–13; 7.4). See esp. Levison 1997.

³⁹⁵ cf. Rom. 1.4; Gal. 3.1–5, and many other places.

³⁹⁶ e.g. 1QS 5.5, an echo of e.g. Dt. 30.6 (cf. Rom. 2.29). On the spirit in Qumran cf. e.g. CD 2.12.

³⁹⁷ cf. 1 Cor. 6.11. The theme, arguably, had had this significance for Jesus: see e.g. Mk. 7.1–23; 10.5–9; cf. *JVG* 282–7. The ‘sermon on the mount’ in Mt. 5–7 is of course centrally concerned with the transformation of the heart: see *JVG* 287–92.

³⁹⁸ For Assyria and Babylon cf. Isa. 23.13, on which see Seitz 1993, 168f. See too Isa. 39.1–7, where Hezekiah, relieved to be free from the Assyrian threat, agrees all too readily to an alliance with Babylon, only to have the prophet inform him that Babylon would succeed where Assyria had failed.

³⁹⁹ On Adam in 2 *Bar.* see Murphy 2005, 35f.

⁴⁰⁰ ‘Sin’ and ‘death’ are clearly linked in Gen. 3, but it is not clear that anyone prior to Paul had elevated them into cosmic powers and made their link thematic within a worked-out theology; see Jewett 2007, 374: ‘In contrast to intertestamental discussions of Adam, both death and sin appear to function here as cosmic forces under which all humans are in bondage.’

⁴⁰¹ Perriman 2010 proposes that the imminent fall of Jerusalem preoccupied Paul as well. I am not as averse to this proposal as most exegetes would be (see below, ch. 11), but it must remain largely a matter of speculation.

⁴⁰² 1 Cor. 15.50–7.

⁴⁰³ On the question of ‘inconsistency’, see esp. *Climax* 4–7.

⁴⁰⁴ That imaginative but utterly wrong-headed line of thought has been proposed by many. It stands near the heart of the older protestant analysis of the origins of Paul’s gospel: the law cursed Christ, but God raised him, therefore the law was wrong, therefore ‘Christ is the end of the law’: so, apparently, Stuhlmacher 1986 [1981], 139f., 157f. See too e.g. Burton 1921, 168–72, denying that the ‘curse’ was anything other than the curse pronounced by a ‘legalism’ which Paul then rejected; Esler 1998, 184–94, heading his section ‘Paul’s case against the law’. In fact, Paul’s argument hinges on the belief that the ‘curse’ was proper and God-given (cf. 3.21 and Rom. 7.13, on which see below, 894–7); so, rightly, e.g. Räisänen 1986 [1983], 249.

⁴⁰⁵ Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 549–81; and e.g. 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 10.

⁴⁰⁶ I take Rom. 1.18–2.16 as the first section within the first main part of the letter, 1.18–4.25. On divisions of Rom. see e.g. Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 396–406.

⁴⁰⁷ So e.g. Fitzmyer 1993, 277, citing others who see the particle as ‘expressing contrast’, and some who regard it ‘as a mere transitional particle’. He gives no parallel examples for either of these uses, as indeed, especially in Paul, it would be hard to do. Contrast e.g. Jewett 2007, 151f., who insists that the *gar* be taken ‘with full seriousness’, since 1.18–2.16 explains the reason why ‘salvation’ (1.16) is needed. This does not, however, get to the heart of the link between 1.17 and 1.18.

⁴⁰⁸ 1.15–20. The word ‘for’, especially when repeated, sounds very stilted in today’s spoken English, which is why I have frequently paraphrased it in my own published translation.

⁴⁰⁹ Campbell 2009, Part III (313–466).

⁴¹⁰ See e.g. Wis. 13.1–19; 15.1–19.

[411](#) Sanders 1983, 123–35 ([see above](#)).

[412](#) Campbell 2009, 519–41.

[413](#) See the discussion in *Interpreters*.

[414](#) Dodd 1959 [1932], esp. 47–50; Hanson 1957.

[415](#) The clearest: Rom. 2.5 (twice), 8; 3.5; 5.9; Eph. 5.6/Col. 3.6.

[416](#) *dia Christou* nb.: unusual, but precise for this very point. The coming day for messianic judgment is, significantly, the climax of the Areopagus speech as well (Ac. 17.31). This will be unwelcome news to those who see that passage as an example of Luke’s distortion of Paul, but perhaps the argument should work the other way round.

[417](#) Jer. 17.9.

[418](#) On the resonances of Rom. 2 with Dt., see e.g. Lincicum 2010, 149f.

[419](#) Mk. 7.1–23, etc. The insistence on the judgment of the secrets of the heart indicates, I think, that though Paul undoubtedly shared the normal biblical vision of divine wrath being meted out in (what we would call) ‘this-worldly’ events (see above, 163–75), he was here speaking of something which would go beyond any single such event (against Perriman 2010).

[420](#) On divine impartiality see esp. Bassler 1982, and e.g. Jewett 2007, 209f.

[421](#) Rom. 9.4.

[422](#) See e.g. Kaminsky 2007; and e.g. Thiessen 2011, 142–8.

[423](#) See Marcus 1986a, 17f.

[424](#) cf. e.g. Hooker 1959–60; and cf. too Adams 1997a; further discussion in Jewett 2007, 160–2.

[425](#) The word *hamartia*, sin, together with its various cognates, occur far more in Rom. alone than in all Paul’s other letters put together; and *thanatos*, ‘death’, together with its cognate *thanatoō*, ‘put to death’ and *apothnēskō*, ‘die’, occur as often in Rom. as in all the other letters put together. Clearly ‘sin’ and ‘death’ are focal points in this letter in a way they are not, or not to the same extent, elsewhere.

[426](#) See 5.20b–21; 7.4–6 and 8.1–11; 9.30—10.13.

[427](#) e.g. 1 Cor. 15.21f.; 2 Cor. 11.3.

[428](#) Rom. 1.21, 24; 2.5, 15, 29; cf. 5.5; 6.17; 8.27; 10.6–10; see, differently, 16.18. This appears to be a theme more or less peculiar to Romans, with a single exception: 1 Cor. 4.5 corresponds closely to the various uses in Rom. 2.

[429](#) 2.17–20, on which see article in *Perspectives* ch. 30.

[430](#) See *Perspectives* ch. 30.

[431](#) These are not to be played off against one another. As we see in Qumran and elsewhere, Jewish thinkers were perfectly capable of speaking almost in the same breath both of human wickedness and of suprahuman evil powers at work: cf. e.g. CD 2.14—3.12; 4.13—5.19.

[432](#) This is why Israel, despite its vocation, cannot provide the solution to the problem. That is the point of Rom. 2.17–29 (cf. again *Perspectives* ch. 30).

[433](#) Eph. 2.1–3.

Chapter Ten

THE PEOPLE OF GOD, FRESHLY REWORKED

1. Introduction

We come now to the central chapter of this part of the book, and in a measure to the very heart of our entire topic. As we do so, an initial word about an important word.

The word ‘election’, which we shall use fairly consistently in what follows, has two regular meanings which must be put to one side. First, ‘election’ means ‘choice’; but, apart from that, the sense in which I am using the word has nothing to do with voting systems. There is nothing ‘democratic’ about ‘election’ in the sense I intend; which may be one reason why the doctrine of ‘election’, whether the Jewish doctrine or the Christian one, has been under suspicion in the modern western world. What mattered was not Israel’s choice of the one God, but God’s choice of Israel. As Jesus said to his followers, ‘You did not choose me; I chose you.’¹

Second, ‘election’ in this sense has not very much to do with the technical sense of ‘election’ in the elaborate theological schemes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Notably in Calvin’s theology, but actually also in Luther and most other Reformers, and then particularly in classic formulations such as the Westminster Confession, ‘election’, coupled with ‘predestination’, came to signify God’s eternal choice of some people to salvation, sometimes with and sometimes without the explicit corollary that God has ‘chosen’ all the others for the purpose, which they cannot escape, of damnation.² I think I understand how that theology came to be so expressed, and what those who worked it out and taught it were anxious to avoid (any suggestion that salvation was somehow, in the last analysis, dependent on human will, effort or achievement). But that is not how I, in common with most other writers today on first-century Judaism, and that strange mutation

within it that came to be called ‘Christianity’, shall be using the term ‘election’ itself.³

I use the term ‘election’, rather, to highlight the choice, by the one God, of Abraham’s family, the people historically known as ‘Israel’ and, in Paul’s day, in their smaller post-exilic form, as *hoi Ioudaioi*, ‘the Jews’ or ‘the Judaeans’.⁴ The word ‘election’, as applied to Israel, usually carries a further connotation: not simply the divine choice of this people, but more specifically the divine choice of this people *for a particular purpose*.

A great deal hangs on this point. It is inevitably controversial, and we must advance it step by step. But, to show the intimate coherence between this chapter and its predecessor, let me say this by way of introduction. As we saw, a creational monotheist has a particular kind of ‘problem’; actually, a creational monotheist might well say that it is *the creator God* who has a ‘problem’, namely that the world seems not to be in the condition that its creator might be supposed to have wanted. Here, as we saw, the types of monotheism divide. Unlike Epicureans, Stoics and others, the creational monotheist, believing that the one God made the world and remains intimately and responsibly connected to it, does indeed have a problem: why are things in such bad shape? And for the creational monotheist who believes that the one God chose Israel, and made great, world-changing promises to Israel – well, there the problem is compounded. Why are things as they are *for Israel*? And how are the promises *through Israel for the world* now going to be accomplished?

The analysis of how this strange state of affairs came to be (the philosophical ‘problem of evil’) seems not, for the most part, to have worried the ancient Israelites, though theories were advanced about it from time to time. As Marx saw, the point was not to analyze the world but to change it; and that, it seems, was the purpose of Israel’s ‘election’ in the first place. Asking the question, ‘What would the creator God have done if humans had not sinned?’ is futile; but we can put it the other way round, and say that, in Israel’s scriptures at least, the call of Abraham and the choice of Israel as God’s special people takes place not just *in the context of* universal human sin and wickedness, but somehow *in relation to* that universal human

failure. Israel is called to be *different*; but, in and through that difference, to *make a difference*. Israel is called to a task (in the words of a learned Jewish correspondent, echoing centuries of tradition) of ‘repairing the world in God’s name’.

That is why, in case anyone might be wondering, what we are calling ‘election’ has to do with the rescue of the world, of creation, of humankind: in short, with *salvation*. The choice of Abraham is a *rescuing* choice, the apparent divine answer to the failure of humankind from Adam and Eve through to the Tower of Babel. What sort of ‘rescue’ that might be, and how it might be worked out, is the problem at the heart of this chapter. But it is important to notice that in highlighting monotheism, election and eschatology we are not therefore side-lining, or marginalizing, ‘salvation’ and all that goes with it. Nor are we ‘subsuming soteriology under ecclesiology’, as some have charged me and others with doing. We are, rather, seeking to locate a biblical theology of ‘salvation’ where it seems to belong: as the aim and goal of the divine purpose of election. And part of the point, part of the problem – the problem with our description of ‘election’ itself, but also the problem over which Paul agonized day and night – was the relationship between election as the rescuing choice *for* Israel and election as the rescuing choice *through* Israel. For Paul, that question was finally resolved, as was everything else, in the death and resurrection of the Messiah, to which the present line of thought will lead us at the proper time.

I shall presently argue, in line with chapter 2 above, that Paul assumed a particular version of this view of election, and that whether or not the view he held was widely shared in his day, or was representative of earlier Israelite belief (or is indeed representative of widespread Jewish belief in our own day), it is the one he held, and it is the context in which what he said makes the sense he thought it made. And I shall argue throughout this chapter that, as with monotheism, so with election: Paul radically revised this Jewish belief in the light of Jesus and the spirit. As we watch him doing this we see his best-known (and sometimes most controversial) doctrines unfold in new ways: the meaning of the cross, of ‘justification’ and the law, of ‘Christian ethics’. And as we expound these doctrines within this context

we begin to realize why, in the letters that deal most centrally with these topics, the question of Israel – of Abraham, Moses, the Torah, the covenant promises – looms so large. In much western reading of Paul, the ‘Jewish background’ (how Paul would have snorted at that phrase, as though two millennia of divine call and purpose could be mere ‘background’) has been pushed into, well, the background, doing violence to the letters themselves. Think of the fate of Romans 9—11. Over against that tradition, we dare, by placing soteriological concerns back within their Jewish context, to allow Paul to address them in his own way. His own very Jewish way. And his own radically revised very Jewish way:

For Paul and his circle, however, the unexpected, almost unthinkable claim that the Messiah had died a death cursed by the Law entailed a sharp break in terms of the way in which the people of God would henceforth be constituted and bounded.⁵

Quite so. The redefinition of election around the Messiah. There is more to be said than that, but not less. It is a signpost on the way. That is where we shall be going.

This means that the present chapter is the place where we shall address, and hope to gain fresh clarity on, what are usually seen as the central topics of Pauline theology, particularly the complex of issues which centre upon salvation itself. I have elsewhere given an account of the current debates on these topics, and can here simply summarize to set this chapter in its scholarly context.⁶

We may distinguish seven broad emphases. My own view is that all seven have proper roles to play, and that – though they may now seem to us to be quite different, and even antithetical! – each needs the others if it is to be understood in the way Paul understood it. This sort of thing is common enough when we try to grasp the meaning of words and concepts within the relatively recent past; how much more when we go back to the very different world of a first-century Jew.⁷

Pride of place presumably still belongs to *justification*, if only because for so many years that doctrine, expounded in Romans, Galatians and Philippians 3, has been assumed by many to be the quintessential heart of

Paul. Questions remain, of course, as to what precisely Paul meant by it, how it relates to the larger picture of salvation itself, and how it relates, both theologically and exegetically, to the other six. I hope my treatment here will offer help on all of these.⁸ Since the language of ‘justification’, in itself (arguably) and certainly in the way Paul speaks of it in Romans 2 and 3, brings with it the idea of a law court in which all humans first stand guilty in the dock (Romans 3.19–20) and then, to their astonishment, hear the announcement that they are pronounced ‘in the right’ (Romans 3.21–6), the emphasis on justification is frequently spoken of as *forensic*. We should note, however, that the explicitly ‘forensic’ nature of justification is unique to Romans. If we only had Galatians and Philippians, the only reason for supposing that the language of ‘righteousness’ and ‘justification’ was ‘forensic’ would have to lie in the meaning of the words themselves, which would be problematic.⁹

Discussions of justification are often dovetailed with the second category, frequently called *anthropology*. This is in my view an unfortunate label, since the word regularly refers to a secular academic discipline (the study of human beings, with particular reference to origins, classifications and cultures), whereas its use as a shorthand in the study of Paul has a different focus and flavour. ‘Anthropology’ as a way of getting at the heart of Paul’s soteriology is associated particularly with Rudolf Bultmann, who famously declared that

Every assertion about God is simultaneously an assertion about man and vice versa.

This led at once to the conclusion that

For this reason and in this sense Paul’s theology is, at the same time, anthropology.

Bultmann’s development of the point shows what he means, and introduces his entire scheme:

Every assertion about God speaks of what He does with man and what He demands of him ... The christology of Paul likewise is governed by this point of view. In it, Paul does not speculatively discuss the metaphysical essence of Christ, or his relation to God, or his ‘natures,’ but speaks of him as the one through whom God is working for the salvation of the world and man. Thus, every

assertion about Christ is also an assertion about man and vice versa; and Paul's christology is simultaneously soteriology.

Therefore, Paul's theology can best be treated as his doctrine of man: first, of man prior to the revelation of faith, and second, of man under faith, for in this way the anthropological and soteriological orientation of Paul's theology is brought out.¹⁰

Bultmann thus subsumed the whole of Paul's theology under these two headings: 'Man Prior to Faith' and 'Man Under Faith'. This is not the place to discuss the proposal, except to note how it relates to the other six overall theories. It is frequently combined with justification, so that the latter term denotes the event in which 'a new understanding of one's self takes the place of the old'.¹¹ It is frequently taken in a very individualistic sense: that is, Paul's picture of salvation is about what happens to *this* human being who, convicted of sin, hears the word of grace in the gospel and decides to believe. As such it is often played off against 'incorporative' ideas, and particularly 'salvation-historical' ideas, in which the larger whole of the church on the one hand, or of a continuous history of Israel on the other, is seen as a threat to, or a diminution of, the proper stress on the personal faith of each individual. Bultmann himself was indeed able to speak both of 'the history of salvation' and its being 'oriented toward mankind, and not the individual'.¹² But subsequent exegesis of key passages has found it difficult to hold these things together. 'Apocalyptic' itself, in any meaningful first-century sense, has no place in Bultmann's construction, though the word has been used to denote the in-breaking revelation of the gospel, producing a fairly similar 'before' and 'after' to Bultmann's. 'Transformation' is explicitly ruled out:

No break takes place; no magical or mysterious transformation of man in regard to his substance, the basis of his nature, takes place.¹³

What is being ruled out here, clearly, is any notion of an *inner* transformation; we catch the echoes of the sixteenth-century Reformation, rejecting any idea that 'grace' is tied to, or dependent upon, something which has happened or is happening in 'nature'. As for 'covenant', my final category and my own proposal, Bultmann applies to it the strictures we find

in Ephesians about sexual impurity: it is not even to be named among you.¹⁴ Since the Lutheran existentialist knows that all things Jewish are, for Paul, part of the problem rather than part of the solution, any idea of the covenant belongs, along with the Jewish law, under ‘man prior to faith’.

After justification and anthropology comes the notion of ‘*being in Christ*’. This is sometimes referred to as ‘incorporation’ or ‘participation’, and Albert Schweitzer, perhaps misleadingly, called it ‘mysticism’. Ever since Schweitzer and Wrede the stand-off between ‘incorporation’ and ‘justification’ (or, if you prefer, ‘participatory’ and ‘forensic’ accounts) has formed the main battle-line in debates over Paul.¹⁵ This has echoes of earlier debates between Lutheran and Reformed theologies, with the Lutherans stressing justification, and seeing ‘being in Christ’ as a secondary or subsidiary theme, and the Reformed reversing the sequence, or at least insisting that ‘justification’ only really means what it means when it is seen within the larger ‘in Christ’ picture. (Those who privilege ‘justification’ at this point regularly suspect that to make ‘in Christ’ the major focus is to place ecclesiology over soteriology, or the church over the individual; at this point ‘anthropology’ often comes in as well.) Exegetically, this battle-line has often settled on Romans 1—8, with those who favour ‘justification’ as the Pauline centre highlighting chapters 1—4, and seeing the rest as ‘implications’ or ‘applications’ of the doctrine there expounded, and those who favour ‘being in Christ’ highlighting instead chapters 5—8. In terms of scholarly debates, E. P. Sanders has given fresh impetus to the privileging of ‘incorporative’ ideas in Paul, while leaving the door wide open for fresh research by admitting that the notion itself remains difficult to understand.¹⁶

The fourth obvious category has perhaps the most misleading label of all. Romans does not of course stop at chapter 8; it goes on to chapters 9—11. There, some have declared, is the real heart of what Paul is about. To describe this, they have sometimes used the phrase ‘*salvation history*’, indicating that what matters is, so to speak, ‘what Israel’s God was up to in the story of the chosen people from Abraham to the present’. The now well-known difficulty with this is that the very phrase ‘salvation history’ has been associated, at least by its detractors, with the idea of a steady, progressive,

immanent process or development. This is the kind of thing which classic Protestantism has always rejected (because it sounded too much like the normal picture of the medieval church, an institution simply rumbling on under its own steam and needing to hear the radically new word of God); which Karl Barth and his followers rejected in the 1920s (because they saw how a Hegelian liberalism had allowed German theology to assume that the world was developing in the right way, leading to the disaster of the First World War, and again needing a fresh word); and which the Confessing Church rejected in the 1930s (because the ‘German Christians’ were proposing a ‘salvation history’ in which the German people had been raised up to a position of global pre-eminence, which for Barth and others simply needed the word ‘No!’).¹⁷ But not only does Romans 9—11 belong where it is in Paul’s great letter, linked to the first eight and the last five chapters by a thousand golden threads; the same theme, of the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, of (to put it at its most general) a positive and not merely negative relation between the divine word and work in Israel’s scriptures and the fresh divine word and work in the Messiah, is closely intertwined with the other regular themes in such passages as Galatians 2, 3 and 4, and manifests itself in many other places as well. However much we resist any suggestion that Paul had in mind an immanent process, a smooth crescendo or development, from Abraham all the way to the Messiah and beyond – however much, in fact, we take fully into account the fact that he, like many other second-Temple Jewish writers, seems to have thought as much in terms of a ‘damnation history’ as of a ‘salvation history’! – we cannot conclude a discussion of Paul’s soteriology without fully factoring in Paul’s clear sense, reaffirmed throughout our own previous chapter, that the God now revealed in Messiah and spirit was indeed the one God of Israel, and that the word of God had not failed (Romans 9.6). It is for this reason, and in this sense, that I and others have sometimes used the word ‘covenant’, though since this is often confused with ‘salvation history’, and rejected on grounds similar to those which have caused people to react against such an idea, I prefer here to list it as a separate item (the seventh category, below).

The apparently polar opposite position to ‘salvation history’, defining itself regularly in antithesis to it, is the recent proposal which, following the lead of Käsemann, has used the word ‘*apocalyptic*’. I have discussed this elsewhere.¹⁸ The proper emphasis here is on the freshness of the divine action in the gospel events, the new unveiling of things previously unimagined, the opening of previously blind eyes to truths otherwise invisible. The flagship of this neo-‘apocalyptic’ reading is the commentary on Galatians by J. Louis Martyn, in which certain elements of Galatians 3 and 4 which many exegetes see as Paul’s own beliefs – particularly the positive account of the covenant with Abraham – are ascribed instead to the ‘teachers’ who have infiltrated the Galatian churches and whom Paul is fiercely resisting.¹⁹ Martyn’s proposal still has plenty of questions to answer, not least whether it can give a good account of Romans, and whether indeed the word ‘apocalyptic’ can appropriately be used to describe a standpoint which seems not to be that of any actual second-Temple ‘apocalyptic’ texts. But his strong point stands. Any overall account of Paul must certainly factor in the sense of radical newness which features so regularly in his writings.

The sixth element, which has received more attention in recent years, is that of *transformation* or even *deification*. This obviously coheres with a major theme in eastern orthodox theology, and equally obviously flies in the face of much western, particularly protestant, thought. Some recent writers have nevertheless pointed out that Paul’s language in itself, and in its probable resonances in wider greco-roman culture, must be taken at least to include, and perhaps to foreground, the idea that the divine life itself is transforming believers, shaping them from the inside out according to the pattern of the Messiah.²⁰ This certainly picks up something Paul says from time to time. ‘The Messiah lives in me,’ he declares at the climax of one of his most characteristic paragraphs. But how this then coheres, again both exegetically and theologically, with any of the five emphases listed above has not been so clear.

The seventh and last element, for which I and others have argued, not as an alternative to the rest but as a potentially unifying perspective, is that of

the *covenant*. It is surprising, in fact, that E. P. Sanders did not move in this direction, since he argued strenuously for a ‘covenantal’ reading of rabbinic and other forms of Palestinian Judaism, making the point as he did so that the reason the rabbis do not often use the word ‘covenant’ itself is because it is everywhere presupposed.²¹ The same point could, and in my view should, be made about Paul, and the present book constitutes, among other things, an argument for that. However, to remain with exposition: the point of invoking ‘covenant’ as a controlling theme in Pauline soteriology is to highlight the way in which, in key passages in Galatians and Romans in particular, Paul stresses that what has happened in the gospel events has happened in fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, and has resulted in the formation (or the re-formation) of a people who are bound in a common life as a kind of extension or radical development of the covenantal life of Israel. The word ‘covenant’ is intended, in this way of looking at things, precisely to avoid any kind of simplistic developmental scheme, and to highlight instead, for instance, Paul’s retrieval of the exile-and-restoration theme in Deuteronomy, which is about as far from a smooth or immanent historical progression as it could possibly be. I therefore use the word ‘covenant’ as a shorthand, a convenient label, to propose a way of reading Paul’s key texts through which the other apparently disparate emphases can be brought together. All disciplines, and all accounts of Paul, employ shorthands. It is about as useful to object to ‘covenant’ on the grounds that Paul does not often use *diathēkē* as it would be to object to ‘anthropology’ on the grounds that Paul seldom, in the relevant passages, uses *anthrōpos*.²² Or, indeed, about as useful as to argue for a modern construct called ‘apocalyptic’ on the grounds that Paul sometimes uses the Greek word *apokalypteō*.

Part of the question before us has to do with *balance* between different elements and with the *precise meanings* of Paul’s own key terms. Most exegetes, faced with the question of justification, would agree that Paul taught that believers enjoy (a) a present state of *dikaiosynē*, (b) a future vindication in the final judgment and (c) a gospel-driven and/or spirit-enabled transformation of character. The question is how these relate to each other, which of them (or which combination of them or elements in them) is

properly denoted by the language of ‘justification’ itself, and how some or all of this relates to, and affects one’s view of, the biblical promises and history. Similarly, many exegetes would agree that Paul regarded believers as being *en Christō*; as (in some sense) belonging to the family of Abraham; as enjoying a new moment brought about by the fresh, dramatic act of the events concerning Jesus; as nevertheless standing in some sort of continuity with divine actions and promises from long ago. The question again is how all these relate to one another. Once again we notice that in passages like Galatians 2.19–21 or Philippians 3.2–11 more or less all of these ideas come rushing together. But such passages, precisely because they are so dense, may not necessarily be the best places in which to explore the precise meanings which Paul assigns to the various different concepts involved.

In what follows there will not, of course, be space to engage in much explicit debate with the proponents of these seven positions (and their many sub-variants). I intend, rather, to expound a line of thought from within Paul’s letters themselves and let the themes sort themselves out as I do so. Nevertheless, I hope that the proposal I am making in this chapter, as well as in the closely related section on Israel and its future in chapter 11, will offer a way of drawing together the proper emphases of all seven, while allowing them the space to make their own distinctive contributions.

The seven, after all, do not stand in exact parallel with one another. They are not seven different answers to exactly the same question. That is part of the problem: each of them assumes, in offering an account of Paul’s central soteriological themes, a somewhat different account of the ‘plight’ to be solved and/or of the context Paul was addressing.²³ That is a further reason why (in addition to the internal logic of exploring Paul’s revised monotheism) it was appropriate to offer an account of the ‘plight’ at the end of the previous chapter.

It might seem that by framing my account of Paul’s soteriology in terms of the reworking of the second-Temple doctrine of election I am already tipping the scales in favour of some kind of ‘salvation history’. Some kind, perhaps, but not the sort of thing Käsemann or Martyn were reacting against. Rather, the hypothesis at the heart of this book is that Paul’s thought is best

understood in terms of the revision, around Messiah and spirit, of the fundamental categories and structures of second-Temple Jewish understanding; and that this ‘revision’, precisely because of the drastic nature of the Messiah’s death and resurrection, and the freshly given power of the spirit, is no mere minor adjustment, but a radically new state of affairs, albeit one which had always been promised in Torah, Prophets and Psalms. The radical newness, then, does not alter the fact that Paul’s theology is still a ‘revision’ of Jewish theology, rather than a scheme drawn from elsewhere, as advocates of a non-Jewish Paul have regularly supposed. So, as the framework for my hypothesis, I have taken from the Jewish sources themselves the basic beliefs of monotheism and election, which together generate some form of eschatology. We have already examined Paul’s reworked monotheism. We now turn to ‘election’, in the hope that by doing so we will be able to understand and articulate each of Paul’s emphases in itself, in its exegetical contexts, and in its proper relation to all the others.

[2. Israel and Its Purpose](#)

[\(i\) Adam and Abraham](#)

We need to begin by recapitulating the fundamental shape of a second-Temple understanding of election: that is, of the divine calling of Israel, and the purpose for which that call was made. We have written about all this before, in the first volume and elsewhere.²⁴ But we must summarize again, to sharpen up the point against those who would blunt it or turn it aside altogether. *As far as Paul was concerned, the reason the creator God called Abraham in the first place was to undo the sin of Adam and its effects.* Paul’s basic contention, in the area of election, was that, through the Messiah and the spirit, this God had done what he promised Abraham he would do. It’s as simple as that.

Well, perhaps not quite. For a start, there is the question as to whether that understanding of the divine purpose in calling Abraham will really do. For

another thing, there is the question of the ‘covenant’: is that an appropriate term to use to describe something that Paul affirms, or is it something against which he sets his face? And, for another, we shall be pushing a boulder uphill into a strong wind, since one of the presently prevailing moods of scholarship is all in favour of a supposedly ‘apocalyptic’ reading of Paul in which there is no sense of ‘continuity’ with Abraham at all, but rather instead a radical inbreaking, an ‘invasion’ of the world, an entire overthrowing of existing categories, not least the long narrative of Abraham and his family.²⁵

Yet another problem is as it were the mirror-image of that one. We have to contend with what one can only call a revived anti-Christian polemic in which anything, absolutely anything, that is said by way of a ‘fulfilment’ of Abrahamic promises in and through Jesus of Nazareth is said to constitute, or contribute to, that wicked thing called ‘supersessionism’, the merest mention of which sends shivers through the narrow and brittle spine of postmodern moralism. How can we say what has to be said, by way of proper historical exegesis, in such a climate?

In and through all of this we shall have to explore, in the present chapter, the scriptural frame of reference for some of the key terms Paul uses in this connection, particularly the blessed word *dikaïosynē*, traditionally rendered ‘righteousness’. This alone would make a substantial book.

We begin, then, with the promises to Abraham.²⁶ I make no apology for repeating things I have said before, since even where one would expect a ready awareness of these points they do not seem to be widely known or understood. Indeed, almost every part of the story we must now briefly rehearse is of profound relevance for the understanding of Paul. Readers familiar with Genesis and Exodus may indeed be tempted to skip the next page or two, but I would ask them to slow down and ponder how the story works. It is within this narrative, re-read in the light of Jesus the Messiah, that Paul finds some of his most profound theology.

The first point is a comparatively simple observation with the deepest consequences. Within Genesis itself, there are strong signs that the narrator of the book as we now have it intends both a *parallel*, and a linked *sequence*,

between Adam and Abraham. The call of Abraham is joined both to the creation of Adam and to the fall of Adam: to his creation, as recapitulation; to his fall, as rescue.²⁷ My point here is not only that this is clear in Genesis itself, but that this awareness of Abraham's call, together with elements of his story, was recognized in second-Temple Judaism and on into the rabbinic world; and that if we are to interpret Paul within his own world this implicit narrative must be taken with the uttermost seriousness.

We begin with Genesis, where *the promises to Abraham* directly echo *the commands to Adam*. First, the command to the original humans:

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'²⁸

Then the promise to Abraham:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you ...

I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly ... I will make you exceedingly fruitful ... and I will give to you, and to your seed after you ... all the land of Canaan ...

Because you have done this ... I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore ... and by you shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.²⁹

Then the promise to Isaac:

I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your seed I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and will give to your seed all these lands; and by your seed all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves.

Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake.³⁰

Then the promise to Jacob; first, through the blessing of his father Isaac:

God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham.³¹

Then the blessing of God himself upon Jacob:

I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you ... the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.³²

Then Jacob's words to Joseph:

God Almighty appeared to me ... and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you ... and I will give you this land, to your seed after you.'³³

Then the narrator's comment, towards the end of Genesis and at the start of Exodus:

Thus Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt ... and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly ...
But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.³⁴

The same theme recurs as Moses is interceding for the Israelites after the golden calf incident, in the renewed promises in the 'covenantal' passage in Leviticus, and then again in Deuteronomy.³⁵

Two points need to be drawn out of this material. First, the fact that the *commands* to Adam turn up as *promises* thereafter (with the exception of Jacob in Genesis 35.11, where a new command is issued) say something about the shift of perspective. From now on 'being fruitful and multiplying' will be a gift. Something has happened which means that Adam's descendants cannot simply be told to do this; the creator God will do it himself, and will (according to Genesis 17) do it 'exceedingly'. This promise is highlighted, of course, as again and again 'being fruitful and multiplying' looks like being thwarted by barrenness (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel), by fratricide (Cain and Abel; Esau and Jacob; Joseph and his brothers) and by sheer blundering (Abraham and Sarah in Egypt; Sarah and Hagar; Isaac and Rebecca in Egypt).³⁶ The great climax of this apparent threat to the promises is of course the near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, a scene at once horrible and majestic, full of dark meaning and mystery, a source of terrible fascination and yet hope for readers from the earliest times to our own.³⁷

The point remains: Abraham's fruitfulness, the multiplication of his family, the recapitulation of the Adamic blessing, remains a strange gift, not something that can be presumed upon, always under threat from every angle, yet winning through.³⁸

Second, there is of course the closest correlation between the placing of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and the promise to Abraham and his family about the land of Canaan. To any Israelite or Jewish reader, the connection would be obvious, not least after the exile (when many suppose the book attained its present shape). Adam, given the garden to look after, disobeyed and was expelled. Israel, given the land to look after, disobeyed and was exiled. The return from exile ought thus to be like a return to Eden, a reclaiming of the original promises to Abraham and, behind that, the commands to the human race. That is indeed the overtone of passages such as the following:

And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says YHWH ...

Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

They shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you shall know that I am YHWH.

I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as numerous as they were before.³⁹

If Abraham and his family thus *recapitulate* the role of Adam, they are also the ones in whom the creator God determines to *rescue* the human race from its plight. This has been well brought out in Michael Fishbane's remarks about Adam, Noah and Abraham.⁴⁰ Noah, he writes, is portrayed in Genesis 9.1–9 as 'a new Adam', who 'presides over a restored world, a renewal of creation depicted in the terms and imagery of Gen. 1:26–31'.⁴¹ He points out that the promise given at Noah's birth, that this child will bring comfort because of the curse on the earth, echoes the words of Genesis 3 where God had cursed the ground because of human sin.⁴² There is then a careful balance in the narrative: as there have been ten generations from Adam to

Noah, so there are ten generations from Noah to Abraham, and it is to Abraham that God now makes the promise of 'land, seed and earthly blessing'. 'In this typological context,' comments Fishbane,

it cannot fail to strike one that these three blessings are, in fact, a typological reversal of the primordial curses in Eden: directed against the earth, human generativity, and human labour.⁴³

As Jon Levenson expands the point:

The man without a country will inherit a whole land; the man with a barren wife will have plenteous offspring; and the man who has cut himself off from kith and kin will be pronounced blessed by all the families of the earth.⁴⁴

The link between Adam and Abraham is thus not only *resumptive*, getting the human project back on track after the fall, the curse and the exile from the garden. It is also *redemptive*. God acts to undo the fateful sin in the garden, and he does so not least through the offering of Abraham's beloved son Isaac. Though the multiple resonances of that story echo in many directions through later Jewish as well as Christian thought, there is something about the angel's words to Abraham after his willingness to sacrifice Isaac which implies that a barrier has been broken, that the promise can flow not only to Abraham's family but out into the wider world:

By myself I have sworn, says YHWH: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your seed as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.⁴⁵

This appears to be, in other words, not simply a narrowing of focus, a 'redemption' which consists in Abraham and his family being rescued from the ruin of the world. It is about the rest of the world being blessed as well, because of Abraham – though it is not clear, as we shall see, that this focus was maintained in the subsequent tradition. How, in any case, will it all work out? This introduces a further major theme within Genesis itself: there is the closest of links *between Abraham and the exodus*. First, Abraham and Sarah themselves go down into Egypt, almost immediately after receiving the

initial promises. They go because of a famine, but Pharaoh, discovering how beautiful Sarah is, takes her into his house, only to then give her back to Abraham, and send them both away, when YHWH afflicts his house with great plagues.⁴⁶ Anyone who knows the later story of the exodus itself, and gives the matter a moment's thought, is bound to conclude that Abraham and Sarah are enacting in advance what their descendants three generations later will do: the famine, the sojourn, the plagues, the exodus. This is the context in which we should place the promise, in the all-important covenant chapter (Genesis 15), that Abraham's seed will live as aliens in a foreign land and then, in the fourth generation, come out and inherit the land of Canaan:

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then YHWH said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your seed shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'⁴⁷

As Levenson comments, in this oracle 'YHWH provides Abram with the interpretation of his own life.' Not only has he been living, to this point, in the hope of apparently unlikely descendants,

he has also been proleptically living their life in his. In the prophecy that interrupts the covenant-making ceremony, Abram's experience is shown to have been itself akin to a prophetic sign-act. It is a biographical pre-enactment for the providential design for the whole people of Israel.⁴⁸

That is then the setting for the making of the covenant itself:

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your seed I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.'⁴⁹

And this provides the full meaning of the opening of the chapter, which likewise resonates into much later tradition:

After these things the word of YHWH came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Sovereign YHWH, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no seed, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.' But the word of YHWH came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.' He brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your seed be.' And he believed YHWH; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.⁵⁰

The promise of 'reward'; the promise of numberless 'seed'; the promise backed up by the uncountability of the created heavenly host. That is what Abram 'believed'; and whatever different generations of readers heard and hear in the unprecedented comment that YHWH 'reckoned it to him as righteousness', the rest of the chapter, whose end we have already noted, provides the first and most obvious meaning. The word of promise is confirmed by the making of the *covenant*:

Then he said to him, 'I am YHWH who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.' But he said, 'O Sovereign YHWH, how am I to know that I shall possess it?' He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.' He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.⁵¹

The making of the covenant then comes in two parts: first, this preparation, then, the smoking fire-pot and flaming torch passing between the pieces of the animals. And, in between, the promise of the exodus. Every part of this chapter belongs intimately with every other part. When later generations speak of the promise to Abraham's seed, the promise of the land, the covenant, or the exodus, any one of these four elements can and does evoke all the others.

The covenant is then confirmed, and a fresh sign of it given, two chapters later:

YHWH appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will

make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your seed after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.⁵²

The sign that is then given is of course the sign of circumcision; ‘So’, says this God, ‘my covenant shall be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.’⁵³ And, though Ishmael, born to Hagar in chapter 16, will also be blessed and promised great fruitfulness, it is the child yet to be born to the barren Sarah with whom the covenant purposes are to be taken forward:

Your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his seed after him ... My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.⁵⁴

Whatever the historians may say about the actual origins of the Israelite sense of being the covenant people of the God they knew as YHWH, this great narrative, with all its human interest and suspense, was seen by the Jewish people long before the days of Saul of Tarsus as the foundation charter for the people of Israel, giving them an anchor for their own faith and a spur to their own hope. The covenant with Abraham, the promise of innumerable ‘seed’, the gift of the land and the promise of rescue from slavery – and now the covenant sign of circumcision.

It should be no surprise, then, that the establishment of the covenant with Abraham is recalled when, at the appointed time, the enslaved Israelites cry to their God for help:

Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.⁵⁵

The promise, with some of the details about the present inhabitants of the land, is then rehearsed in more detail:

He said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the

Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.’⁵⁶

Moses then, convinced of his commission despite misgivings and initial setbacks, is sent with a strong word of YHWH’s covenant loyalty:

God also spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am YHWH. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, “I am YHWH, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am YHWH your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am YHWH.”’⁵⁷

And the story then rolls out, exactly as in the miniature version at the end of Genesis 12: the confrontation with Pharaoh, the plagues, the exodus. Only this time the firstborn son who is to be killed is not Isaac, as in Genesis 22, but the firstborn of all Egypt; and Israel is redeemed, spared from the death of the firstborn, by the Passover lamb. The blood of the lamb was to be the sign by which ‘redemption’ (a metaphor from the world of slavery, but here rooted in the actual slavery of Israel in Egypt) was to be effected.⁵⁸ The children of Israel are thus liberated, and begin the long march to their ‘inheritance’, the land promised to Abraham.

On the way, of course, they are given the Torah, and that is another story. And, in particular, they are given the tabernacle, seen later of course as the forerunner of the Jerusalem Temple. But the purpose of rehearsing all this in such detail is to lay the foundation for the further reflection that this story, with these resonances, remained powerfully present within the generations of Judaism leading up to the first century. Each element is important. Abraham and his ‘seed’ are the true humanity, the ones in whom Adam is recapitulated and rescued, the ones to whom the land had been promised, the ones who would cry to YHWH from slavery and exile and for whom the memory of the ancient covenant would remain valid and salvific. Indeed,

just as Genesis and Exodus, taken together, come round in a circle, with the divine presence dwelling in the midst of the people at the end as it had with Adam and Eve in Eden, so the whole Pentateuch as it now stands comes round in a greater circle, as the closing chapters of Deuteronomy, which we looked at in more detail in chapter 2, speak of a final great exile and a final great redemption from that exile. The story of Adam and Eve expelled from Eden, of Abraham going to Egypt and coming back, of Abraham's descendants going to Egypt and coming back, will be acted out once more in the much later generation that will go into exile and then be brought back – precisely as the great act of covenant renewal which follows the awful act of covenant punishment. As we saw in chapter 2, there is evidence in plenty that these texts were being read in just this way by people in the second-Temple period: no doubt not by all, but by plenty. Not least in the circles with which Saul of Tarsus was associated.

Examples, too, abound in the second-Temple period of the link between Adam and Abraham, though here we find, particularly and understandably when the pagan world has been persecuting and trampling on the Jews, a focus on Abraham not as the means of blessing for the world but as the reason why his physical family constitute the true humanity. The following must suffice.⁵⁹ In Ben-Sirach, the high priest in the Temple is like Adam ruling over all creation.⁶⁰ *Jubilees* makes the link not with Abraham but with Jacob, but to the same effect: Jacob and his descendants are the true heirs of Adam.⁶¹ The covering of Adam's nakedness is reflected in Israel's refusal of the gentile habit of naked athletics.⁶² Abraham blesses the creator God because he has made him 'like the one who made everything', and from him there will come 'a righteous planting for eternal generations' and 'a holy seed'.⁶³ The elderly Abraham blesses Jacob with the blessings of his own ancestors, right back to Adam himself, declaring that through this blessing creation itself will be renewed, and invoking over him 'the blessings with which God blessed Noah and Adam'.⁶⁴ The *Testament of Levi* speaks of a coming great priest through whose work creation will be renewed and Israel inherit its blessing:

he shall open the gates of paradise; he shall remove the sword that has threatened since Adam, and he will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life ... Then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will rejoice.⁶⁵

In *1 Enoch*, Adam appears in a dream as a white bull; the patriarchs, too, are white bulls, and after the long and complex story of their descendants there is finally another white bull born: some suppose this to be the Messiah.⁶⁶ In *4 Ezra* we find at last, a generation after Paul was writing, the Jewish tradition reflecting on the long-term effects of Adam's sin; and there the story is told with the key individuals standing out: Adam, Noah, Abraham, David.⁶⁷ The key moment in this narrative of 'Adam to the present' is the point at which, as 'Ezra' complains to the covenant God,

You made an everlasting covenant with him, and promised him that you would never forsake his descendants; and you gave him Isaac, and to Isaac you gave Jacob and Esau ... yet you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them.⁶⁸

Then the connection is made explicitly: Israel is the true seed of Adam himself:

On the sixth day you commanded the earth to bring forth before you cattle, wild animals, and creeping things; and over these you placed Adam, as ruler over all the works that you had made; and from him we have all come, the people whom you have chosen.⁶⁹

This then merely increases the problem of monotheism plus election: how has it all gone so horribly wrong?

All this I have spoken before you, O Lord, because you have said that it was for us that you created this world. As for the other nations that have descended from Adam, you have said that they are nothing, and that they are like spittle, and you have compared their abundance to a drop from a bucket. And now, O Lord, these nations, which are reputed to be as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we your people, whom you have called your firstborn, only-begotten, zealous for you, and most dear, have been given into their hands. If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?⁷⁰

The divine response to the seer's complaint once again makes explicit the *salvific* purpose of the divine call to Abraham, though the salvation in question is now for Abraham's family only:

So I considered my world, and saw that it was lost. I saw that my earth was in peril because of the devices of those who had come into it. And I saw and spared some with great difficulty, and saved for myself one grape out of a cluster, and one plant out of a great forest. So let the multitude perish that has been born in vain, but let my grape and my plant be saved, because with much labour I have perfected them.⁷¹

This vision of the world being made for Israel, of (in other words) Israel as the true humanity, the genuine heirs of Adam, is then narrowed again, to focus more specifically on groups that see themselves as the true heirs of Israel. We should therefore expect to find this theme in works like the Qumran Scrolls, and sure enough, there it is:

For God has chosen them for an everlasting covenant and all the glory of Adam shall be theirs.

God, in his wonderful mysteries, forgave them their sin and pardoned their wickedness; and he built them a sure house in Israel whose like has never existed from former times till now. Those who hold fast to it are destined to live for ever and all the glory of Adam shall be theirs.

Thou wilt cause them to inherit all the glory of Adam, and abundance of days.⁷²

This whole strand of thought – Israel as the true heirs of Adam, Abraham as the one who comes to set things straight – finds its way straight into the thought of the rabbis. It was, they say, on account of Abraham that the world was created in the first place.⁷³ More particularly, Abraham was the one through whom God planned from the outset to put the world right if and when it went wrong. Here we glimpse again the wider perspective which we saw at least hinted at in Genesis itself:

Why is Abraham called a great man? Because he was worthy of being created before the first man. But the Holy One, blessed be he, thought, 'Perhaps something may go wrong, and there will be no one to repair matters. Lo, to begin with I shall create the first Adam, so that if something should go wrong with him, Abraham will be able to come and remedy matters in his stead.'⁷⁴

That remains, to my mind, one of the clearest statements of the link between Adam and Abraham, which was standard in the multiple readings of Genesis across this period. The question of how this link played out – whether, as we said before, the Abrahamic purpose was designed to rescue the whole of the human race, or rather to rescue Abraham's family *from* the rest of the human

race – receives a variety of answers, but the underlying point remains: the promises to Abraham were understood in relation to the problems caused by Adam. Their intention was to get the human project back on track after the disasters of the fall, the flood and the idolatrous Tower. The covenant that YHWH made with Abraham was the way of sealing this intent, binding this God to his promise and Abraham's family to this God, assuring Abraham of the 'seed' that would inherit the promises, the promises which were focused on the land as the new Eden, promises which would be fulfilled by the exodus from Egypt as the great act of redemption. This dense confluence of themes – promise, family, land, exodus – resonated across the centuries and the several varieties of Jewish life and thought, albeit with the question always pressing as to where it would all end up. The covenant, as we shall see, forms the essential and non-negotiable context within which the writings of Paul (especially Romans and Galatians, where Abraham plays such a central role, and Romans and 1 Corinthians 15, where Adam plays such a central role) demand to be read.

(ii) Covenant, Law Court and 'Righteousness'

Before we can get to that point, though, we need to draw some firm conclusions about key terms and themes. When, from now on, I refer to the 'covenant', and describe Paul's theology in those terms, I refer to the theme which, so strongly emphasized in Genesis 15 and 17 and Exodus 2, 3 and 6, draws together Abraham as the divine answer to the problem of Adam, the promises about the 'seed' and the land, and the exodus as the way by which Abraham's family would journey to that inheritance. When, in this context, we see Paul addressing the question of human sin, and, like *4 Ezra*, tracing this problem back all the way to Adam, we should not be surprised if he draws on this same tradition of the divine covenant. I cannot stress too strongly, in view of persistent misunderstandings in some quarters, that, within this confluence of themes, 'covenant' and 'salvation' belong tightly together, the latter as the goal of the former, the former as the means of the latter. To play them off against one another is to indicate that one has not

paid attention to the entire train of thought we have been exploring. And – a related but different point – there is no longer any reason for New Testament scholars to resist, as they often have done over the last century, reading Paul in the light of second-Temple covenant theology. There is no need to flatten out covenantal language into something else, or to take obvious covenantal references as an indication that Paul is here quoting and perhaps neutralizing a formula from an earlier ‘Jewish Christianity’ which (of course!) he himself opposes. These are the flailings of the tail of an older history-of-religions project that has now, to be honest, reached the end of its natural life.⁷⁵

To get back on track, we need to glance at the cluster of words and phrases which, in many biblical contexts, help to hold in place the notion of ‘righteousness’, particularly ‘God’s righteousness’. The biblical terms for various attributes of the divine character and activity overlap considerably, and we would be wrong to play them off against one another. We have mentioned the divine ‘righteousness’ (*tsedaqah/dikaiosynē*); but we often find, in the same passages, ‘judgment’ or ‘justice’ (*mishpat/krisis*); truth/truthfulness (*emunah/alētheia*); steadfast love (*raham* or *hesed/eleos*); and, in slightly different mode, ‘salvation’ (*teshu‘ah/sōtēria*). Both in the Hebrew and in the LXX these seem to intertwine; all together are ways of speaking of the character and even identity of the one God, but with the different attributes called up for the particular nuances required. Thus, we can say that this God’s ‘salvation’ is his rescue-operation; his ‘steadfast love’ is that because of which he will woo his people back again, forgiving their previous wrongs; his ‘truth’ (which can also be expressed as ‘trustworthiness’, *pistis*) is that because of which he will say what he means and do what he says; his ‘justice’ is the characteristic because of which Israel will know that they can rely on him to do what is right; and, above all, his ‘righteousness’ is his *faithfulness to his previous commitments*, particularly of course the covenant. This last, however, needs a more detailed exposition and explanation.

We may therefore attempt, one more time, to set out the way in which the language of ‘righteousness’ – of, that is, Hebrew *tsedaqah* and the LXX *dikaiosynē* – functions in the key texts which Paul’s quotes, allusions and

echoes indicate as his natural mental habitat. We can assume Genesis and Deuteronomy, of course, and here add the Psalms and Isaiah 40—55 in particular. How did these complex and tricky words function?⁷⁶ It is clearly impossible in the present context to explore and explain the large number of biblical references even to ‘righteousness’, let alone all the terms that are correlated with it in the Hebrew Bible or Septuagint. But something at least must be said, if only in summary.⁷⁷ There are four layers of meaning to be noted, which for first-century Jews would almost certainly not be felt as separate: the general meaning, the law court meaning, the covenantal meaning, and the eschatological meaning.

1. The word *tsedaqah/dikaiosynē* and its cognates in the Israelite scriptures seem to have the primary meaning of ‘right behaviour’. But the emphasis is not merely on implicit conformity to a law or abstract standard, though that may be involved as well, but to the question of being in right *relation* with others. This raises problems, because in the discourse of modern Christian piety people have often spoken, not unnaturally, of ‘a relationship with God’, a phrase which can then slide to and fro between (a) the sense of personal intimacy between the believer and God (or Jesus) on the one hand and (b) the *status* which, in traditional presentations of ‘justification by faith’, the believer has in the (implicit) divine law court. One might of course speak carefully about the first as an actual ‘relationship’, such as that between friends, or between parent and child, and about the second in terms of a quasi-legal ‘relation’, where one stands *in relation to God* or to God’s law court; but this kind of careful distinction, not surprisingly, is hard to maintain in practice. The combination of (a) western individualism and (b) a residual sense that ‘justification by faith’ was unknown before the death of Jesus has meant both that the words and meanings have slid to and fro between these two options and also, more particularly, that the context which Paul so frequently evokes, that of the covenant ‘relationship’ between YHWH and Israel, has simply been ignored.

2. The word-group does in fact have specific, though potentially confusing, reference to the *law court*. (I stress, for the avoidance of doubt, that we are talking here about an ancient Israelite law court, in which all

cases were what we would call ‘civil’ cases, there being no ‘director of public prosecutions’.) The judge would be faced with, and would decide between, the plaintiff and the defendant, and the judge’s obligation would be to try the case fairly (i.e. not accept bribes or exercise favouritism), to uphold the law, to punish wrongdoing and to vindicate the innocent, with a special eye on the weak and vulnerable, those who have nobody to plead for them. The action of the judge in thus deciding the case properly is *mishpat/krisis*, ‘judgment’; but when the judge does all these things properly he is *tsaddiq/dikaios*, ‘in the right’. Or, to put it another way, his *tsedaqah/dikaioynē*, ‘righteousness’, has been displayed in his proper discharge of his duties. He must ‘do *tsedaqah* and *mishpat*, *dikaioynē* and *krisis*’; in other words, he must first decide the case properly and then take the appropriate action.

Meanwhile, when the word ‘righteous’ is applied to one of the parties in front of the judge, either the plaintiff or the defendant, it seems capable of two different though subtly related meanings. On the one hand, it can refer to the *moral character* of either plaintiff or defendant; are they ‘righteous’, of good character, having behaved appropriately (in relation to the present lawsuit in particular)? On the other hand, it can refer to the *status* which one or the other will have when the judge has made up his mind and pronounced his verdict: one of the parties will be ‘in the right’ *in terms of the court’s decision*, and the other one will be ‘in the wrong’. The relationship between these two senses of ‘righteous’ and ‘righteousness’ is complex, and nothing much is gained by trying to privilege one over the other, whether by making the ‘moral character’ meaning primary and seeing the ‘status after the verdict’ as reflecting it, or by insisting on the priority of the legal status and understanding the ‘moral character’ reference as indicating the actual character which ought to reflect the court’s decision.

Two famous biblical passages show how this can work. When Judah hears that his daughter-in-law Tamar is pregnant out of wedlock, he assumes the role of judge, commanding her to be burnt. But when Tamar reveals that he is himself the father of her as yet unborn child, he declares, ‘She is more in the right than I,’ *tsodqah mimeni*, literally ‘She [is] righteous other than me,’

which the LXX translates as *dedikaiōtai ē egō*, ‘She has been justified rather than me.’⁷⁸ Though the Hebrew could be taken in various ways, the Greek version makes it clear: Judah is treating this sharp little scene within the long-running soap opera of Jacob’s dysfunctional family as if it were a lawsuit between Tamar and himself, and he is declaring that the imaginary court has found in her favour. She has, in other words, been ‘justified’. No doubt her playing the whore was in itself morally reprehensible after a fashion, though not nearly as much as his in not providing for her in the first place, then using her as a whore and not caring whether he had fathered a child. But that is not the point. He is not saying that Tamar has behaved less badly than he has, or (to put it positively) that she possesses a bit more ‘righteousness’, in terms of ‘morally upright character’, than he does. Nor, I think, is he saying that Tamar has managed to take a step towards repairing the family relationship.⁷⁹ He is saying that she is in the right and he is in the wrong. It is a quasi-legal judgment. The case has been decided.⁸⁰

The second example is, I think, clearer again. David is on the run from Saul. He and his men are hiding in a deep cave, and Saul goes into the front part of the same cave to relieve himself. David, egged on by his men, creeps up from behind as though to kill Saul, but only cuts off the edge of his cloak. After Saul has left, David calls after him and explains what he has done. This time the implicit lawsuit between the two parties becomes explicit:

May YHWH judge between me and you! May YHWH avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you ... May YHWH therefore be judge [*dayin/kritēs*], and give sentence [*shaphat/diakstēs*] between me and you. May he see to it, and plead my cause, and vindicate me against you.⁸¹

Saul responds, accepting the scenario of a lawsuit in which he and David are appearing before the divine tribunal, and acknowledges that David has won the case:

You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.⁸²

Here I think the NRSV lets us down, by implying, despite the explicit law court context, that what is at stake is a comparison between two moral characters (‘*more* righteous than I’). The Hebrew is very similar to that of

Genesis 38: *tsaddiq athah mimeni*, ‘You are *tsaddiq*, rather than me’: in other words, in any suit at law only one party can be ‘in the right’, and on this occasion it will be David, not Saul.⁸³ Of course, the moral character corresponds to the verdict; but here, as with Judah and Tamar, the primary meaning is the *verdict*, and the *status* which results from it.

My point here is that this is how the language of *tsedaqah/dikaiosynē* works within a law court setting. First, the judge’s own *dikaiosynē* is a matter of the way in which he tries and decides the case. Second, the *dikaiosynē* of the two parties at law is a matter of which way the verdict goes – which, if the judge is doing his job properly, ought of course to correspond to their earlier behaviour, measured against the appropriate norms. It is, of course, quite possible for someone who in other respects is a bad character to be innocent of a particular charge, just as it is possible for someone who is actually guilty nevertheless to be acquitted by the court. In both these instances the person in question is still declared *dikaios*, demonstrating clearly that the verdict ‘righteous’, ‘in the right’, is a matter of *the status conferred by the court’s verdict*, rather than overall moral character.

3. The plot thickens when this language is used in relation to how matters stand between YHWH and Israel, because they are bound together by covenant (the face-to-face reality to which the often-used term ‘relation’ or ‘relationship’ refers as through a glass darkly). The general plea of the Psalmist, that the covenant God will hear his case and vindicate him against his wicked enemy,⁸⁴ then becomes the very specific plea of Israel as a nation: that YHWH will sit in judgment over the pagan nations that are oppressing Israel, and will vindicate his covenant people.⁸⁵ This is the scene we find, famously, in Daniel 9. Of course, the situation is complicated, because (as various biblical writers freely acknowledge) the trouble that has come upon Israel is itself the result of the covenant: this is what YHWH always said he would do when his people were unfaithful (especially, of course, in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy). Nevertheless, it is YHWH’s *tsedaqah*, his *dikaiosynē*, that is then appealed to as the reason why he will surely act afresh to save, to liberate, to *vindicate* Israel at last. The classic passage, two chapters on from Daniel 7, is the great prayer

which as we saw earlier gave many second-Temple Jews a clue as to what was happening to them and when it would all end.

The prayer begins precisely by invoking God as the covenant God, and admitting (like Jacob with Tamar) that he is in the right and Israel is in the wrong:

Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled ... Righteousness is on your side, O Lord [*leka adonai hatsedaqah/soi, kyrie, hē dikaiosynē*], but open shame, as at this day, falls on us ... All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you ... Indeed, YHWH our God is right [*tsaddiq/dikaioi*] in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice.⁸⁶

With that clear, Daniel turns to invoke the combination of the divine mercy and ‘righteousness’ as the reason why, despite it all, he must now rescue his people from their exile:

And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and made your name renowned even to this day – we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, *in view of all your righteous acts* [*cecol tsidqotheka/kata tēn dikaiosynēn sou*], let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem ... We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies.⁸⁷

The italicized phrase seems, in the Hebrew, to refer to YHWH’s ‘righteous acts’, as in the NRSV translation. But the LXX has rendered it with *dikaioynē*, and interestingly the Theodotion version, rendering it with *en pasē eleēmosynē sou*, ‘in all your mercy’, keeps the reference to a divine attribute rather than to earlier divine actions.

It is this sense of God’s *dikaioynē*, I suggest – as an attribute revealed in action – that then comes to dominate in those passages in the Psalms and Isaiah where, above all, we naturally look to find the context of Paul’s thought in this area. Modern English translations, seeing the connection between ‘God’s righteousness’ as an attribute of his character (specifically now his faithfulness to his covenant with Israel) and as something which is revealed in particular actions (in Daniel 9, as often, his rescue of his people from Israel), frequently translate *tsedaqah/dikaioynē* as ‘salvation’ or near

equivalent; but this fails to bring out the point to which Isaiah regularly appeals, which is that these are acts done because of YHWH's prior commitment to Israel. As Onesti and Brauch put it:

The concept of righteousness in the Hebrew Bible emphasizes the relational aspect of God and humanity in the context of a covenant ... The Hebrew meaning of justice means more than the classical Greek idea of giving to every one their due. Usually the word suggests Yahweh's saving acts as evidence of God's faithfulness to the covenant. For this meaning of righteousness of God, *dikaiosynē* is not as flexible as the Hebrew word ... An essential component of Israel's religious experience was that Yahweh was not only Lord of Law but also the one who was faithful to it. God was faithful to the covenant. God's righteousness was shown by saving actions in accordance with this covenant relationship ... Righteousness is not primarily an ethical quality; rather it characterizes the character or action of God who deals rightly within a covenant relationship ... The covenant faithfulness of God, the righteousness of God, is shown by Yahweh's saving acts.⁸⁸

The 'covenantal' meaning, especially as applied to YHWH himself and to his people's loyalty to him, thus resonates across many strands of biblical and later Jewish thinking. The righteousness of the covenant God, seen in his everlasting covenant with Abraham, will find expression in his rescue of his people, as part of his universal sovereignty.⁸⁹ Different groups, as we would expect, say things differently from one another. At Qumran the divine faithfulness is naturally interpreted in terms of the sect's own belief that the covenant has been renewed with them while the rest of Israel remains in unrecognized and unconfessed sin.⁹⁰

4. But the covenant is not the last layer of meaning. Here we echo in part the sense of interlocking narratives which we studied in chapter 7. Precisely because Israel's God is the creator of the whole world, he is as we saw responsible for putting that world to rights in the end. He must act as judge, not only for Israel, but for the whole of creation. There is thus a global, or even a cosmic, level to the notion of the divine 'righteousness': the creator will judge the whole world and set things right once and for all, like a judge finally holding the great Assize in which all the unresolved troubles of a community are sorted out at last. This belief, celebrated frequently in the Psalms and informing the great prophets, is repeated in many later Jewish texts.⁹¹ But this is not to be played off against the 'covenantal' meaning. The powerful link of creation and covenant in Genesis itself tells a different

story. It is this link that fostered the hope, through to Paul's day and beyond, that when YHWH did finally judge the whole world Israel would at last be vindicated against her enemies. This eschatological vision, variously expressed both in writings we think of as 'apocalyptic' and in quite different works such as the Wisdom of Solomon, thus draws together all four strands of meaning (right behaviour; law court; covenant; cosmic rectification). God's eschatological judgment will be the ultimate cosmic law court, but it will also be the moment of ultimate covenant vindication.

That explains, at least in part, why the word *dikaïosynē* is so difficult to translate. We simply do not have, in contemporary English (or, I think, German or French), a word or even a single phrase that can sum up the broad ethical and 'relational' sense, add to it the overtones of the law court, give it the extra dimensions of the divine covenant with Israel and set it within a worldview-narrative that looked ahead to a final judgment in which the creator would set all things right at last. If we imagine the notion of 'God's restorative justice' on the one hand, and 'God's covenant faithfulness' on the other, as two points in a triangle, the *tsedaqah elohim* or *dikaïosynē theou* might be found as the third point which links them in a fresh, combined sense. It is because our own phrase 'the righteousness of God', with its background in the medieval notion of the *iustitia dei*, has long since struggled to carry any of those three meanings, and indeed in many quarters has long since given up that struggle altogether, that the western traditions of Pauline exegesis have found his usage so difficult to understand.⁹²

Once we get our heads back into Paul's world of second-Temple Jewish reading of scripture, however, we can not only make sense of this key concept, but also of the related concept of the *tsedaqah* or *dikaïosynē* of God's people. This too is polymorphous, but coherently so. Clearly at one level the word denotes what we rather flatly think of as ethical behaviour. But when we speak of the behaviour of Israel as YHWH's people, 'ethics' is not enough. We are talking about covenant behaviour. Because of Israel's strong belief in an ordered society, ultimately responsible to God as the judge, this moves to and fro, in and out of an implicit law court situation, as we saw with Judah and Tamar and with David and Saul, so that 'righteous'

can sometimes mean ‘morally upright’ and sometimes ‘in the right’ in a legal sense. If the judge has been doing his job properly, the latter would be taken to imply the former. And because many Israelites in the biblical period, and many Jews thereafter, believed in the responsibility of their God to call the whole world to account in the end, all of this was held within an eschatological framework. Different aspects of this complex set of words, and the world of thought which they evoked, naturally come to the fore in different contexts, but the whole web of meaning retains a basic coherence in which law court, covenant and global or cosmic eschatology do not cancel one another out but rather reinforce one another.

We conclude from all this that the appeal to the divine *dikaïosynē* functioned, in Paul’s world, both in terms of *theodicy* – explaining, in a measure, why strange and sad things had happened – and in terms of *soteriology* – appealing for ultimate rescue none the less. ‘God’s covenant faithfulness’ is the attribute of YHWH which provided the grounds for believing that he would do again what he did in Exodus 2, 3 and 6, namely, remember his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and act to liberate his people in whatever ‘new exodus’ they might need. I have written elsewhere about the way in which ‘the righteousness of God’ in key texts from the second-Temple period highlights both (a) the covenant justice because of which God’s people are punished by being sent into exile *and* (b) the covenant faithfulness which can be appealed to as the reason for God’s forgiving them and bringing them back again.⁹³

When we come to Paul’s own favourite texts (such as Isaiah 40—66) with this in mind, we see one passage after another in which the same theme makes arguably the best sense. Here, for a start, is part of the first ‘servant song’:

I am YHWH, I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am YHWH; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth, I tell you of them.⁹⁴

God's 'righteousness' is the reason why he has emphasized his 'teaching', despite Israel's failure;⁹⁵ and in the confrontation between himself and the pagan idols, there can be only one victor:

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together!
Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, YHWH?
There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is no one besides me.
Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.
By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return:
'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'
Only in YHWH, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength;
all who were incensed against him shall come to him and be ashamed.
In YHWH all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory.⁹⁶

Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness;
I bring near my righteousness, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry;
I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.⁹⁷

As a result, the invitation can go out: YHWH's 'righteousness', his faithfulness to what he had promised to Abraham, will now bring worldwide salvation in the form of the promised new creation, the restored Eden:

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek YHWH.
Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.
For YHWH will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places,
and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of YHWH;
joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.
Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation;
for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice (*mishpat*) for a light to the peoples.
I will bring near my righteousness swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples;
the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.
Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats;
but my salvation will be for ever, and my righteousness will never be ended.⁹⁸

When YHWH acts to rescue his people, this will be the manifestation of his own 'righteousness', the faithfulness through which he will establish his

covenant with his people:

YHWH saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.

He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene;
so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him.

He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle ...

And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says
YHWH.

And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says YHWH: my spirit that is upon you, and my
words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth ... from now on and for
ever.⁹⁹

There are of course plenty of places in the same book where the prophet speaks of the 'righteousness' of the people. But these passages, coupled with the many similar references in the Psalms and elsewhere, are the scriptural basis for the claim that when a first-century writer, speaking of God providing salvation in line with his covenant with Abraham, refers to God's *dikaiosynē*, he is speaking (a) of an attribute of God himself and (b) more specifically of the attribute of *covenant faithfulness*. Not just the divine mercy (which would act even on behalf of the undeserving); not just the divine 'salvation' (which would consist simply of YHWH's rescuing of his people, without explanation); not even his 'steadfast love', though that would be closer. The divine *covenant faithfulness* brings all these and more together.

[\(iii\) The Covenant Purpose: Through Israel to the World](#)

It is in these passages from Isaiah that we find restated the theme which, as we saw, seems to have been one likely interpretation of Genesis. Paul at least seems to have taken this theme for granted, though it has remained controversial: that the covenant, YHWH's choice of Israel as his people, was aimed not simply at Israel itself, but at the wider and larger purposes which this God intended to fulfil *through* Israel. Israel is God's *servant*; and the point of having a servant is not that the servant becomes one's best friend, though that may happen too, but in order that, through the work of the

servant, one may *get things done*. And what YHWH wants done, it seems, is for his glory to extend throughout the earth, for all nations to see and hear who he is and what he has done. Hence the famous passages, one of which we have already quoted:

I am YHWH, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind ...¹⁰⁰

The same theme is stated slightly more expansively in the next ‘servant song’:

And now YHWH says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honoured in the sight of YHWH, and my God has become my strength –
he says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’¹⁰¹

It has been commonplace in many discussions of biblical theology to see these passages as expressing the same vocation that appears, on the face of it, to be contained in the Abrahamic promises: through you all nations will bless themselves, or perhaps will pray to be blessed as you are blessed. With these promises, again, it has been common to link the remarkable statement in Exodus, after the escape from Egypt and immediately before the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.¹⁰²

The particular calling of Israel, according to these passages, would seem to be that *through* Israel the creator God will bring his sovereign rule to bear on the world. Israel’s specialness would consist of this nation being ‘holy’, separate from the others, but not merely for its own sake; rather, for the sake of the larger entity, the rest of the world.

It has recently been claimed that to read these texts in this light is to impose on them an essentially ‘Christian’ scheme, forcing them to serve a purpose which is apparently ‘supersessionist’ – since the claim is then made that this vocation, of Israel being a ‘light to the nations’, has been fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. Since I think that is exactly what Paul is talking about, it may be worth saying something briefly about this counter-claim.¹⁰³

First, it will not do to accuse H. H. Rowley of ‘supersessionism’ because of his careful study, two generations ago, of ‘The Biblical Doctrine of Election’.¹⁰⁴ Rowley, after all, was writing for an English theological public for whom ‘election’ had long been a bad word, evoking images of a hard-line ideological Calvinism, which had produced by reaction a kind of Marcionism. We have to remind ourselves that in many protestant theological circles in the middle of the twentieth century the Old Testament was given scarcely a glance, with a few ‘proof texts’ thrown in to stiffen an argument but with scant attention paid to the full sweep of the biblical narrative and its inner theological dynamics. Against that background, where Rowley was substantially rehabilitating a way of understanding theology that allowed Israel’s scriptures to be heard in what was then an unusually full and clear way, it seems harsh to accuse him of some kind of anti-Jewish prejudice.

Second, it has to be said that Joel Kaminsky’s own reconstruction of a doctrine of Israel’s ‘election’ from which all thought of wider purpose has been removed remains unconvincing, both as an account of the texts we have just mentioned and in its own terms. When he borrows from Michael Wyschogrod the idea of a God who, like a parent playing favourites, simply and blatantly prefers one nation above the others, and suggests that this is a sign of just how vivid and believable this God (God?) is, he will I imagine find rather few, including among his fellow Jews, who are prepared to go along with him.¹⁰⁵

Third – a point that could be amplified considerably further – it has to be said that the charge of ‘supersessionism’, so readily flung around these days at anyone who has the temerity to say anything like what Paul was actually saying, needs (to say the least) to be clarified. Let us suggest three versions

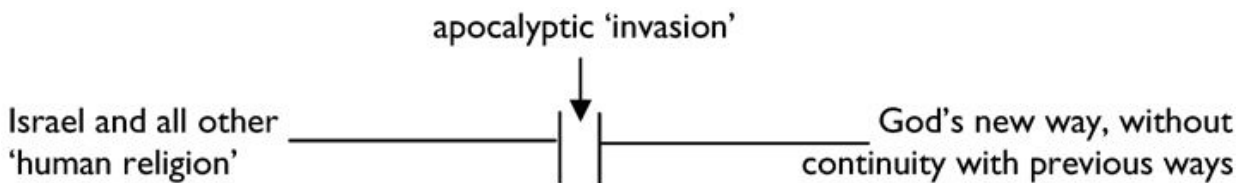
at least: a ‘hard’ supersessionism, a ‘sweeping’ supersessionism and a ‘Jewish’ supersessionism – which last, I shall suggest, does not deserve the name.

First, a ‘hard’ supersessionism. This is what we find in some early Christian writers who, ignoring Paul’s warnings in Romans 11 against gentile arrogance, did appear to teach that Jews were now cast off for ever and that gentile believers had replaced them as the people of God.¹⁰⁶ This could be drawn in the following way:



According to that scheme, Jewish people have no place in the church, so that one has to say that Paul and the others were lucky to make it in before the door slammed shut. I am not aware that anyone in recent times has argued that Paul thought like that, and it seems unlikely that anyone in the western church has dared to suggest anything of this order since the 1950s. But if there really is such a thing as real, no-nonsense ‘supersessionism’, this, I suggest, is what it might look like. My own hunch is that such a view gained ground enormously in the fourth and fifth centuries. Though I would not wish to join in the fashionable cheap-and-cheerful Constantine-bashing, it has to be said that when Christianity became the religion of the empire it faced new challenges and temptations, and did not always rise to the challenges or refuse the temptations. As so often in other areas, however, what has now happened is that the neo-moralism of the late twentieth century, seeing the horrible anti-semitism of Nazi ideology (which was of course essentially pagan, though sometimes borrowing some clothes designed to look ‘Christian’), and noting its apparent continuity with some earlier manifestations of the same poison, has projected the whole thing back to the earliest days. This serves neither historical research nor contemporary ethics. ‘Hard supersessionism’ deserved the severe advance warnings that Paul issued in Romans 11, but it is not normally to be found in contemporary biblical scholarship.

There is, however, a phenomenon which is alive and well today, including in some prestigious places, which we might call ‘sweeping supersessionism’. This is the sweeping claim, in line with a certain style of post-Barthian (and perhaps ‘postliberal’) theology, that what happened in Jesus Christ constituted such a radical inbreaking or ‘invasion’ into the world that it rendered redundant anything and everything that had gone before – particularly anything that looked like ‘religion’, not least ‘covenantal religion’. This view is unlike ‘hard supersessionism’ because it denies that there is any historical continuity at all: it isn’t that ‘Israel’ has ‘turned into the church’, but rather that Israel, and everything else prior to the apocalyptic announcement of the gospel, has been swept aside by the fresh revelation. This approach was associated with some of the great names of a former generation such as Ernst Käsemann, for whom the target of Paul’s polemic was ‘homo religiosus’, by which he meant ‘the hidden Jew in all of us’, instantiated in anything that approached any kind of continuity (let alone ‘covenant’). We may detect here a continuing protestant concern with any kind of ‘catholic’ attempt to turn the church into a *Heilsanstalt*, an institute for dispensing salvation.¹⁰⁷ This post-Käsemann ‘sweeping supersessionism’ (though obviously it has not been called that) has been enthusiastically revived in J. L. Martyn’s commentary on Galatians, and welcomed with open arms by many in the broadly Barthian tradition.¹⁰⁸ This way of looking at things could be drawn in the following manner:



Even drawing it this way could give the wrong impression, as though there were after all some left-to-right continuity in the picture, whereas according to the enthusiastic proponents of the apocalyptic ‘invasion’ the gospel events have swept away the ‘old age’ entirely, so that the ‘new age’ they have ushered in simply operates in a different mode. This carries, so it seems, none of the old propensity of the ‘hard supersessionism’ to say that Jewish

persons are not welcome within the new way. It is just that being Jewish, and adhering to the Jewish hope that God would fulfil his long-awaited promises to Abraham, appears to be exactly the wrong kind of thing. It is what, according to Martyn, Paul's opponents in Galatia had been teaching. And Paul insisted that any such thing – any continuity with Abraham, let alone Moses – had been swept away in the 'apocalypse' of Jesus and his death. The new reality thus 'supersedes' the old. Attempts by Martyn and his followers to resist this conclusion from their teaching simply fail.¹⁰⁹

The third variety ('Jewish supersessionism') is what we find in Qumran.¹¹⁰ This is the claim that the creator God has acted at last, in surprising but prophecy-fulfilling ways, to launch his renewed covenant, to call a new people who are emphatically in continuity with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to pour out his spirit afresh upon them, to enable them to keep Torah in the new way he had always envisaged and to assure them that he and his angels were present with them in their worship (even though they were not in the Jerusalem Temple) and that their united community was to be seen as the real focal point of 'Israel'. Members of the Qumran community were of course all Jews, but most Jews were not members of the community. Other Jews were at liberty to join, by means of (as with most monastic communities) a process of testing and probationary periods. They would have to take upon themselves the special responsibilities of this new community, and live up to them. Members of this community saw the rest of the Jewish world as dangerously compromised, with even the zealous Pharisees being 'speakers of smooth things', and (depending on your theory) some at least of the priestly class totally compromised and corrupt. This picture therefore looks like this:



It is of course not only in Qumran that we find this kind of pattern. We may surmise that many of the smaller Jewish groups and parties at the time of the war of AD 66–70 might have seen themselves in much this way (‘Look! Here is the Messiah! Those who follow him are the true Israel, and all others are renegades!’). That, in sociological jargon, is the classic position of any and every ‘sect’.¹¹¹

Is this position ‘supersessionism’ in any meaningful sense? A case could be made for using that word. But, unlike the two previous models, in both of which there is a definite sense of *replacement* of Israel and everything it stood for with something quite new, there is here a characteristically Jewish note of *fulfilment*. It would be extremely odd if, in a group whose whole existence depended on being the people of a promise-making God, nobody was ever allowed to claim that the promises had been fulfilled, for fear of being called ‘supersessionist’. Was John the Baptist a ‘supersessionist’? Was Jesus? The claim could of course be challenged: *your* idea of ‘fulfilment’ doesn’t fit with *ours*, or the events that *you* claim constitute ‘fulfilment’ don’t look like what *we* expected to see under that heading, and therefore your claim is falsified. But the idea that such a claim could never be made looks as if it is cutting off the branch on which its entire worldview had been sitting. I submit that the oddity of calling Qumran theology ‘supersessionist’, granted the sense which that somewhat sneering term has come to bear, is so great that we should probably think of a different way of describing such a worldview.

My proposal has of course been (in chapter 6 of the present work and elsewhere) that Paul’s revision of the Jewish view of election was more or less of the same type as what we find in Qumran. Call it ‘Jewish supersessionism’ if you like, but recognize the oxymoronic nature of such a phrase. The scandal of Paul’s gospel, after all, was that the events in which he claimed that Israel’s God had been true to what he promised centred on a crucified Messiah. That is the real problem with any and all use of the ‘supersession’ language: either Jesus was and is Israel’s Messiah, or he was not and is not. That question in turn is of course directly linked to the question of the resurrection: either Jesus rose from the dead or he did not.

Trying to use postmodern moralism, with its usual weapon of linguistic smearing, as a way to force Christians today to stop saying that Jesus was Israel's Messiah is bad enough, though that is not our current problem. Trying to use that moralism as a way of forcing first-century historians to deny that Paul thought Jesus was the Messiah, and that the divine promises to Israel had been fulfilled in him, simply will not do.¹¹²

Are we saying, then, that in Paul's view God chose Israel for a purpose he intended to accomplish *through* Israel? Yes. Does this 'instrumentalize' Israel, and the notion of election, as has been suggested? Yes and no. It is a well-known phenomenon in Israel's scriptures that God can use people or nations as 'instruments' in his purpose: Assyria in Isaiah 10, Cyrus in Isaiah 45. But those 'instruments' were ignorant of YHWH and his purposes.¹¹³ Israel was supposed to be aware of them, to be the faithful, obedient servant through whose glad self-offering the purposes of the covenant God might be set forward. That, at least, is one way of reading both the scriptural tradition and such post-biblical reflections as we find on similar themes. And that, I suggest, is the right way to read the crucial passage (often misunderstood) in Paul himself:

¹⁷But supposing you call yourself 'a Jew'. Supposing you rest your hope in the law. Supposing you celebrate the fact that God is your God, ¹⁸and that you know what he wants, and that by the law's instruction you can make appropriate moral distinctions. ¹⁹Supposing you believe yourself to be a guide to the blind, a light to people in darkness, ²⁰a teacher of the foolish, an instructor for children – all because, in the law, you possess the outline of knowledge and truth.¹¹⁴

We commented on this passage already in chapter 6, and here summarize briefly in the light of our fuller exposition elsewhere.¹¹⁵ This passage is not talking about 'the boast of "the Jew"' in the sense that 'the Jew' is supposing him- or herself to be morally superior to the rest of the world and therefore not to be in need of 'salvation'. The passage is talking about 'the boast of "the Jew"' – of, we remind ourselves, Paul himself before his conversion – to be the Isaiah 42 people, the Isaiah 49 people, the light to the gentiles, the one who would open blind eyes, the teacher of babes. Torah gives 'the Jew' the outline of knowledge and truth; it is then the

responsibility of ‘the Jew’ to pass this on to the world, to obey the vocation to bring a balance to the world, to mend the world.¹¹⁶

It is vital to realize that Paul does not deny any of this. This really was and is, he believes, Israel’s vocation. Many first-century Jews might, for all we know, have disagreed. They might have said, ‘Oh, you Pharisees! You’re always supposing you can fulfil those Isaiah-prophecies!’ We have no means of knowing.¹¹⁷ But we can know that Paul really did believe this – and we can guess, accurately I suspect, that this really was how Saul of Tarsus had seen the Jewish vocation. *Abraham’s family are supposed to be the ones through whom Adam’s sin is undone*: that, as we have seen, was woven tightly not only into the fabric of Genesis and Exodus, but also into several strands of Jewish thought in Paul’s period and on to the rabbis beyond. Paul is here facing this claim. Granted the universality of human sin, as highlighted by the ‘apocalypse of the wrath of God’ in the gospel (Romans 1.18—2.16), what is to be done? Step forward the faithful Jew: this is the task of Abraham’s family, to be the people through whom all this would be put right.

And Paul warns that the boast cannot be made good. Romans 2.21–4 has often caused exegetes to puzzle: surely Paul doesn’t think all Jews are adulterers, or all rob temples? No. That would only be the point (if at all) if he was trying to prove that all Jews need to be saved from their sin. He is not. He is demonstrating that the national ‘boast’ of ‘the Jew’, namely that Israel as a whole is charged with putting the world to rights, cannot be made good, because of the glaring errors of some which have resulted, as every Jew knew, in the prophetic denunciations which indicated that the vocation had been stood on its head. Instead of the gentiles looking at Israel and praising Israel’s God, it was working the other way: they were looking at Israel *and blaspheming Israel’s God*.¹¹⁸ That is a severe and serious thing to say, but Paul is not saying it on his own authority. He is quoting Isaiah 52.5, and thereby echoing also Ezekiel 36.20. This does not merely have the effect of saying, ‘There you are; your own prophets have said that your vaunted boast has been turned upside down’. It does something more interesting still. Both passages come in the middle of sequences of thought in which Israel’s

God is not only charging Israel with this fault *but also announcing the remedy*; and the proof that this is how Paul's mind is working at this point is that he at once follows the same line of thought in his extremely important passage 2.25–9.

Take, first, Ezekiel 36. The prophet has already denounced God's people up and down. Now he turns, not for Israel's sake but for the sake of God's own name, to the vision of how YHWH will reveal his salvation and thereby gain glory from the nations. This prophecy stands exactly in the tradition we have described in this chapter so far:

But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that it was said of them, 'These are the people of YHWH, and yet they had to go out of his land.' But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.

Therefore say to the house of Israel ... I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am YHWH, says the Sovereign YHWH, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes (*en tois dikaiōmasin mou poreuēsthe*) and be careful to observe my ordinances (*kai ta krimata mou phylaxēsthe kai poiēsethe*). Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.¹¹⁹

Did Paul have this passage in mind? Most certainly. Observe what follows immediately in Romans 2:

²⁵Circumcision, you see, has real value for people who keep the law (*ean nomon prassēs*). If, however, you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶Meanwhile, if uncircumcised people keep the law's requirements (*ta dikaiōmata tou nomou phylassē*), their uncircumcision will be regarded as circumcision, won't it? ²⁷So people who are by nature uncircumcised, but who fulfil the law (*ton nomon telousa*), will pass judgment on people like you who possess the letter of the law and circumcision but who break the law.

²⁸The 'Jew' isn't the person who appears to be one, you see. Nor is 'circumcision' what it appears to be, a matter of physical flesh. ²⁹The 'Jew' is the one in secret; and 'circumcision' is a matter of the heart, in the spirit rather than the letter. Such a person gets 'praise', not from humans, but from God.¹²⁰

Here are people, in other words, in whom Ezekiel's prophecy of restoration has been coming true! The echoes are clear and produce excellent sense, though that sense was not, we may suppose, welcome to Paul's 'kinsfolk according to the flesh', any more than it would have been to Paul himself before his conversion.^{[121](#)}

So what about the other passage, the actual quotation from Isaiah? Here too the scriptural basis, when explored, yields rich results, this time into the wider flow of thought which continues on into Romans 3:

Now therefore, what am I doing here, says YHWH, seeing that my people are taken away without cause? Their rulers howl, says YHWH, and continually, all day long, my name is despised. Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore on that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news (*hōs euaggelizomenos agatha*), who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'

Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together ... in plain sight they see the return of YHWH to Zion.^{[122](#)}

And the passage goes on, of course, into the fourth servant song, portraying the one who was exalted and lifted up, startling nations and kings, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, the righteous one whose faithful obedience would make many righteous, who bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. This is the passage, in other words, towards which Paul is working now quite rapidly, as he aims very shortly to announce the 'good news' that God's righteousness has been unveiled in the events concerning Jesus the Messiah, and particularly his obedient sacrificial death, all the way through to the closing statement of Romans 4, where Jesus is 'handed over because of our trespasses and raised because of our justification'.^{[123](#)}

Three things stand out for our present purposes about this remarkable double 'echo'. First, Paul's apparent charge against his fellow Jews, picking up the prophetic charge of Isaiah and Ezekiel, is real and fully meant, but it occurs in contexts which are already pregnant with hope. Yes, Israel has got it badly wrong; but this is not the end of the matter. YHWH is even now at work to sort everything out in a great act of redemption. Second, in the

Ezekiel passage we see adumbrated just that ‘new covenant’ language – the spirit, the law in the heart, the fresh keeping of Torah’s requirements – which we find again and again in Paul, not only in this passage.¹²⁴ This is a very strong indication that Ezekiel does indeed stand behind Paul’s words in Romans 2.25–9, even though Paul is there speaking paradoxically of non-Jews who find themselves doing what Ezekiel saw God’s renewed people doing.¹²⁵ Third, the Isaiah passage points dramatically forward to the revelation of God’s ultimate plan of salvation, the personal obedience of the servant through which that worldwide light-to-the-nations plan would after all be put into operation. The failure of God’s people as a whole has not thwarted the divine plan *to save the world through Abraham’s family*, to lighten the nations through Israel. That is exactly what Paul will now proceed to argue.

But before we can get to that point in our own argument we must pause, take stock and summarize some further aspects of this Israel-shaped vocation. Each element now could be developed at length, but it is important to state these very briefly for the moment.

1. Within the framework of the covenant outlined so far, in which Israel was called to be the people through whom the one God would rescue the world, Israel was called to be the *Shema* people, confessing the one God and loving him with heart, mind and life itself.
2. Israel was called to be the people shaped by the creator God’s ‘wisdom’. Again, we looked at this earlier. For many in Paul’s day, this ‘wisdom’ was contained, more or less, in Torah.
3. Israel was called to be the people in whom, therefore, the life held out by Torah would become a reality – both in the sense of the ‘life’ of glad, loving obedience and the ‘life’ promised to Torah-keepers (much as the ‘tree of life’ remained, tantalizingly, in Eden).
4. Israel was the people in whose midst the living God had deigned to dwell, first in the pillar of cloud and fire, then in the wilderness tabernacle, and finally in the Temple in Jerusalem.

5. Israel was to be the people who inherited YHWH's sovereign rule over the world. The promised land was a sign of this, but already by the first century many Jews had glimpsed the possibility, already implicit within the Adam–Abraham nexus, that the land was simply an advance signpost to YHWH's claim over the whole of creation.¹²⁶
6. Israel was to be (according to the Pentateuchal origins and the second-Temple writings already noted) the people who would discover YHWH's faithfulness to the covenant through the pattern of slavery and exodus, of exile and restoration.

God; God's wisdom; God's life; God's presence; God's universal rule; God's faithfulness. At every point the self-aware self-identification of Israel meant that many of Paul's contemporaries were looking for that new day to dawn in which, at last, God's covenant faithfulness would be unveiled in a great act of redemption, of new exodus, of return from exile. According to Deuteronomy 30, that would happen when Israel, much as in Ezekiel 36, was keeping Torah from the heart as a result of God's new act of covenant grace, for the sake of his own name. And, granted the pressures of the first century, pressures both social and political on the one hand and exegetical and theological on the other, we can see that the question faced by Saul of Tarsus and his contemporaries could have been put like this: granted God's covenant with Abraham, and granted the widespread failure of most within Israel to be true to the covenant, to keep Torah properly, and granted the continuing ambiguity of a Temple with a corrupt priesthood and a land ruled over by pagans – granted all this, when is YHWH going to do what he has promised, what will it look like, *and how can we tell in the present time who are the genuine Israel*, the ones who are showing the signs of that new, dawning day? This, as I argued at the end of the previous chapter, was at the heart of the 'plight' of which we might expect an early first-century Pharisee to be aware.

And this, as I suggested there and will now explore, was radically revised around the new, unexpected and indeed shocking revelation which Saul of Tarsus received on the road to Damascus. God's righteousness had been

revealed in the faithful death of Israel's Messiah. This is the very heart of his redefinition of 'election', and also the very heart of his 'gospel'.

3. Israel's Messiah as the Focus of Election

(i) Introduction: Jesus as the Messiah of Israel

(a) Introduction

This is the point at which one of the major moves in my whole argument takes place. *The purpose for which the covenant God had called Israel had been accomplished, Paul believed, through Jesus.* The entire 'theology of election' we have examined in the preceding pages is not set aside. It is brought into fresh focus, rethought, reimagined and reworked around Jesus himself, and particularly around his death, resurrection and enthronement. Christology, in the several senses that word must bear, is the first major lens through which Paul envisages the ancient doctrine of Israel's election.

It is hard to express just how dramatic Paul's view of Jesus actually was. We saw in the previous chapter that he believed that in him Israel's God had returned in person to liberate his people. We are now going to see that he also believed that the divine purpose for Israel itself had been accomplished through him. He was, in other words, the place where the God of Abraham and the people of Abraham met: monotheism and election in person. When we understand Jesus in this double Pauline perspective – and when, subsequently, we also understand the spirit in a similar way – the elements of Pauline soteriology that previously appeared disparate come together in a whole new coherence. With this, we have arrived at the central section of the central chapter of Part III. This is the very heart of Paul's theology. This is where all the birds come in to land.

The fact that Jesus, in Paul's understanding, had fulfilled and accomplished the divine purpose for Israel is encapsulated, I propose, in the notion of *Messiahship*. Paul's theology turns, at its centre, on the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was and is Israel's Messiah, the long-promised one from

the line of David, the one through whom Israel's final battle was to be fought, the Temple was to be cleansed and rebuilt, God's justice and peace were to be established in the world and the ancient promises to Abraham were to be fulfilled. This double claim – that Paul believed Jesus to be the Messiah, and that this was the central hinge of his theology – was massively counter-intuitive to his unbelieving contemporaries, and it has been massively counter-intuitive, for almost exactly the opposite reasons, to the majority of western scholars in the last century or so. Paul's Jewish contemporaries could not believe that Israel's Messiah would be crucified; most modern scholars have not been able to understand why it should matter that the crucified saviour should be Israel's Messiah. Since we cannot get much further in our argument without this point being established, we shall have to explain and justify it before we can proceed.

If this first task – explaining and justifying Paul's messianic belief and its meaning – is a tall order, it diminishes before the second task which this section must address, which is to explain how, according to Paul, the death of Jesus precisely as Israel's Messiah had the effect that I shall argue it did, namely of bringing to its appointed goal the whole purpose of election. This will involve, naturally, a detailed blend of exegesis and thematic exposition, but both the passages and the themes will be approached from what is, in terms of the recent history of Pauline studies, unusual angles. My hope is that this will carry conviction through the sense that it makes of the passages in their larger contexts, and through the coherence of the themes in themselves and with one another.

[\(b\) Jesus as Israel's Messiah](#)

Jesus, then, as Messiah.¹²⁷ The 'minimalist' approach of much modern exegesis has allowed, grudgingly, that Paul may make one or two references to Jesus as Messiah: Romans 9.5 comes to mind, but since the same exegetes do not make that verse in any way loadbearing within Paul's larger structure it appears a meaningless concession.¹²⁸ One might have thought that certain other passages would force their way into even such a short list: Romans 1.3,

for instance, and 15.12, in both of which there is clear reference to Jesus as the Davidic king. (Ah, but, say the detractors, the former is a pre-Pauline formula which Paul quotes in order to move beyond it, and the latter simply a rhetorical flourish. We have ways of making texts silent.) Some have highlighted the scandal of *Christos estaurōmenos* ('Christ crucified') in 1 Corinthians 1.23 as an obvious example, since the scandal for Jews is precisely that of a crucified *Messiah*. Those who remain unwilling to countenance the messianic possibility will declare that the scandal is of hailing a crucified man as one's saviour, not that of suggesting him as *Messiah*. And so on.

I have suggested elsewhere that the widespread and continuing messianic belief in the early church (all four canonical gospels; Revelation; Ignatius of Antioch; the 'brothers of Jesus' who are brought before Domitian on a charge of belonging to a royal family; and so on) indicates clearly enough that the Messiahship of Jesus remained a powerful and important notion right across the first century or so of the new movement.¹²⁹ From this perspective alone it would be very surprising if Paul, soaked in scripture, telling and retelling the story of Israel, and using the word *Christos* extremely frequently to refer to Jesus, had allowed the notion of Messiahship to sink below the level of consciousness.¹³⁰ But that argument, though I believe it does generate an *a priori* case for assuming a messianic reference in his writings, does not take us very far into the detail. The fact of widespread early Christian belief in Jesus' Messiahship is well known among scholars, and it has not resulted in a recognition of the same belief in Paul, except perhaps as an assumption which is then left behind in the fuller development of his theology.¹³¹ Three larger arguments suggest themselves – though, as often, the ultimate demonstration of the case is the sense that it then makes of an enormous amount that will otherwise remain unclear.

First, look at the way Paul deploys 'royal' passages from the Psalms and Isaiah. We see this first in Romans 1.3–4, already cited; if anyone is inclined to respond that this is a mere opening gambit, soon to be abandoned, we should note that the passage demonstrably functions as the major thematic statement at the start of this great and carefully composed letter.¹³² The

echoes here are, uncontroversially, of Psalm 2.7 and 2 Samuel 7.12–14. This is the Davidic ‘Son of God’. He is declared to be so through his resurrection from the dead, echoing the Septuagint in particular of 2 Samuel 7.12: *kai anastēsō to sperma sou*, ‘and I will raise up/resurrect your seed’ is followed in verse 14 by *egō esomai autō eis patera, kai autos estai moi eis huion*, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.’ This promise is then celebrated in another psalm, 89.26–7, where the Davidic king will cry ‘My Father’ to YHWH, and YHWH declares, ‘I will make him my firstborn.’

But it is Psalm 2 that resonates particularly in Romans 1.3–4. The nations are in uproar, the kings and rulers of the earth are in rebellion ‘against YHWH and his anointed’, *kata tou kyriou kai kata tou christou autou* (2.2). God’s response is to laugh at them, and declare that he has established his king on Zion, his holy hill (2.6). The psalm then shifts into the first person, with the king himself declaring: ‘I will tell of YHWH’s decree: YHWH said to me, “You are my son, I have begotten you this day”’ (*huios mou ei su, egō sēmeron gegennēka se*). And the anointed king continues, explaining that YHWH has given him, as his ‘inheritance’, not just the land of Israel (the ‘inheritance’ promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) but the whole world, all the nations: ‘Ask of me,’ said YHWH, ‘and I will give you the nations as your inheritance’ (*dōsō soi ethnē tēn klēronomian sou*), ‘and the uttermost parts of the earth (*ta perata tēs gēs*) as your possession.’ The king is to subdue them firmly, and warn them about the danger of his wrath (2.9–12). All this coheres with the immediate context in Romans, in which, after showing that Jesus has been declared as ‘God’s son’, Paul emphasizes that his own apostleship has the aim of bringing about ‘the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the nations’ (*en pasin tois ethnesin*). At one of the key points in the letter when Paul returns to the theme of his own apostleship, he quotes a psalm which again resonates with Psalm 2 at just this point: ‘their sound has gone out into the whole earth (*eis pasan tēn gēn*), and their words to the ends of the world (*eis ta perata tēs oikoumenēs*).’¹³³ And, as the letter-opening develops, he explains that he is not ashamed to bring this ‘good news’ to Rome itself (he hardly needs to add, to the home of the current World Ruler, the imperial ‘son of God’), going on to explain that,

with the revelation of Jesus as Messiah, the divine wrath has been newly revealed against all human ungodliness and wickedness.¹³⁴

The further context in Romans is also important. The theme of ‘inheritance’ plays a significant part, initially in the development of the promise to Abraham (from ‘the land’ to ‘the world’ in 4.13¹³⁵), and then in the climactic statement in chapter 8: ‘If we’re children, we are also heirs (*klēronomoi*): heirs of God, and *fellow heirs with the Messiah* (*synklēronomoi de Christou*), as long as we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.’¹³⁶ And the ‘inheritance’ in question is unquestionably the whole world, as in Psalm 2 and as in the explosive promise about creation’s renewal in Romans 8.18–24. Interestingly, several of Paul’s uses of the *klēronomos* root occur when he is talking about ‘inheriting God’s kingdom’, which goes closely with the ‘messianic’ theme at least in the basic text of Psalm 2.¹³⁷

Still in Romans, we move to 15.1–13, which is increasingly being seen, not as a rhetorical flourish falling off the back of the letter, but as the carefully designed goal of the entire theological argument. The passage begins with a reference to *ho Christos* as the one who, according to Psalm 68, did not please himself, but took on himself the reproaches of the people.¹³⁸ It continues with *Christos* becoming ‘a servant to the circumcised on behalf of God’s truthfulness, to confirm the promises of the patriarchs, and that the gentiles would glorify God for his mercy’; we shall comment further on this summary narrative presently. There follows the string of four scriptural quotations, the reverse as it were of the *catena* of 3.10–18: Psalms, Torah and finally Prophets declare that gentiles will join in the praises of God’s people. The last quotation – hardly chosen at random – is from Isaiah 11:

There shall be the root of Jesse,
the one who rises up to rule the nations (*ho anistamenos archein ethnōn*);
the nations shall hope in him.¹³⁹

Again, just as in 1.3–4, the resurrection of the Davidic king is the sign that he is to rule the nations. The whole Isaiah passage (11.1–10, with this as its

climax) is one of the great messianic oracles, highlighting the shoot from Jesse's stock as the one equipped with YHWH's spirit in order to bring justice to the nations and peace to the natural world, filling the earth with the quality of 'knowing-YHWH' as the waters cover the sea. We could put the conclusion negatively: if Paul had wanted to turn people's minds away from the idea of a Davidic Messiah whose resurrection established him as the true world ruler, accomplishing the creator's purpose for the whole creation, he went about it in a very strange way indeed.¹⁴⁰

The other obvious passage in which Paul uses clear scriptural 'messianic' texts to speak about Jesus is our old friend 1 Corinthians 15.20–8.¹⁴¹ Here, at the heart of the claim about God's kingdom coming through the intermediate state of the rule of Jesus himself – the notion of *basileia*, 'kingly rule', ought to be enough on its own to say 'Messiah' at this point! – Paul quotes from Psalm 110, which might have a claim to be the best-known 'messianic' text among first-century readers:

²⁴Then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the father, when he has destroyed all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵He has to go on ruling, you see, until 'he has put all his enemies under his feet'.¹⁴²

Paul's whole sequence of thought goes perfectly with the psalm. God instructs 'my lord', the Messiah, to 'sit at my right hand, until I have put all your enemies under your feet'. The Messiah, in other words, is ruling the world while God himself acts, through him, to defeat all his enemies. Paul clearly has the whole psalm in mind, with the king going off to destroy all opposition to his rule (110.5–7), reminiscent of Psalm 2.9–11. The 'enemies' that Paul envisages are not, however, human enemies on a battlefield, but, as we have already seen, the 'last enemies', finally Death itself. Paul then switches back to the echoes of Psalm 2, speaking of the king as 'the son', who will be placed in his proper order under the rule of 'the one who placed everything in order under him'. The goal of the narrative sequence, matching quite closely that in Philippians 2.6–11, is that 'God may be all in all,' with Jesus, the Messiah, as the sovereign one *through* whom that divine reign is established. There should be no doubt whatever that the *narrative role* which

Paul assigns to Jesus in this passage is that of Israel's Messiah. There can be no doubt that the biblical quotations and allusions are to passages commonly used as messianic in early Christianity. When, in that context, Paul refers to Jesus as *Christos* four times in the four opening verses (15.20–3), it takes a peculiar sense of stubbornness to resist the conclusion that he meant, without strain or difficulty, to designate him as 'Messiah'.

The other biblical passage alluded to in this paragraph from 1 Corinthians 15 is Psalm 8.6 (LXX 8.7): 'he has put all things in order under his feet', *panta hypetaxa hypo tous podas autou*.¹⁴³ This obviously echoes the reference, in Psalm 110.1, to things being put 'under his feet', but this is no mere surface allusion. Psalm 8 is the point at which the Psalmist picks up the story of Adam and Eve and celebrates the fact that, in creating human beings, God has given them dominion over all the works of his hands, 'putting all things in subjection under their feet'. Paul's larger argument, begun in 1 Corinthians 15.21–2 and concluded in verses 45–9 (but an important theme through the whole carefully constructed chapter), is that in Jesus God has *addressed and solved the problem of the sin of Adam and its effects*. This, as we have seen, was the purpose of Israel's election, according to a strong strain of thought running from the Pentateuch itself right through to rabbinic Judaism. In other words, the driving force of the whole chapter is that *in Jesus* the creator God has done that for which he called *Israel*. It is now Israel's representative, rather than Israel as a whole, who constitutes the 'true humanity', under whose feet all things are placed in subjection. The role of the Messiah and the role of the Human dovetail perfectly.

That then sends us across to Paul's other well-known use of Psalm 8, which is again in the context of the exaltation of Jesus and his winning the final triumphant victory. Philippians 3.20–1 is rooted in the earlier statement of 2.9–11, as its many verbal echoes indicate.¹⁴⁴ The power which enables Jesus to 'transform our present body' to be 'like his glorious body' is the power 'which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority', *tu dynasthai auton kai hypotaxai autō ta panta*. Again, we note the allusion to Psalm 8, echoing the Adam-christology which is one element (not the only one, but not unimportant) in 2.6–11: Jesus is the one exalted as

the truly image-bearing human being, ruling the whole world on behalf of the father. As the previous verse emphasizes, he is *sōtēr* and *kyrios* (both of course Caesar-titles); and he is *Christos*. Though not so clear as Romans or 1 Corinthians, this passage too speaks in scriptural language about the one through whom the creator God has won the victory, and will implement that victory, over all the powers of the world. If we meet such a person in Jewish expectation, we know who he is. He is the Messiah.

All these themes cluster together in Ephesians 1.20–3:¹⁴⁵ resurrection, sitting ‘at the right hand’, sovereignty over all powers and authority, and everything being placed ‘under his feet’:

²⁰This was the power at work in the Messiah when God raised him from the dead and sat him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹above all rule and authority and power and lordship, and above every name that is invoked, both in the present age and also in the age to come. ²²Yes: God has ‘put all things under his feet’, and has given him to the church as the head over all. ²³The church is his body; it is the fullness of the one who fills all in all.

The point should now be clear. This combination of themes, read within their scriptural context, are sufficient to push us in the direction of saying, ‘The one of whom all this is said is Israel’s Messiah.’

This use of scriptural texts to describe the accomplishment of Jesus, then, constitutes a first strong argument for saying that Paul really does intend ‘Messiah’ when he writes *Christos*. A second theme, subordinate but very interesting, comes in strongly in support. In the Jewish wisdom tradition, ‘wisdom’ was associated especially with the royal house, notably with Solomon, David’s son and successor. When we find Jesus referred to in Colossians 2.3 as ‘the place where you’ll find all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge’, one *prima facie* explanation is that he was and is the Messiah. This reference, introduced by a rather emphatic use of *Christos* at the end of 2.2, should send us back to the ‘wisdom’-poem in chapter 1 to read it again as also a messianic meditation. A further point, linked to this one (but everything is linked once one begins to see the scriptural basis), is that in Jewish tradition the Messiah is among other things the Temple-

builder, and in Paul's view Jesus is the one through whom the new 'Temple' has come about. But of all that, more anon.

More substantially, and developing the sub-argument from the previous point, we should pay close attention to the *narrative line* of several passages in Paul, notably in Galatians but by no means only there, in which Jesus, designated as *ho Christos*, plays the narrative role which in second-Temple Judaism would be taken by the Messiah.¹⁴⁶ Here is the great story of Israel, from Abraham to the present: promises made, thwarted, derailed, brought back on track, searching for fulfilment. Here, at last, is that fulfilment, the moment when, and the one through whom, all has been brought to its appointed destiny, the destiny which means *klēronomia*, the 'inheritance' promised to Abraham and now shared with a worldwide people (3.18, 29; 4.1). And how has this happened? Through the coming of the 'seed' of Abraham, *hos estin Christos*, 'who is Christ' (3.16); through the promise being given to believers 'on the basis of the faith of Jesus Christ', *pistis Iēsou Christou* (leaving aside for the moment the question of how exactly to translate that phrase). All has been fulfilled because as many as were baptized into *Christos* have put on *Christos*; they are all one in *Christos*, and those who belong to *Christos* are Abraham's seed. Who is this *Christos*? In the explanatory passage which follows, he is 'God's son' (4.4), who then shares his sonship with all those who believe, who through the spirit's gift call God 'Abba, father'. They are then not only adopted children: they are 'heirs' once more. Again, I submit that it takes a peculiar kind of resistance to the text (and to its close resonances with the similar passages in Romans), first to deny that here we have a constant reference to the story of Israel from Abraham to the fulfilment of promise, and second to deny that the one who brings Israel's story to that fulfilment, and who is spoken of as *Christos*, is the Messiah. Recognizing this, on the other hand, resolves several of the major exegetical difficulties in the passage, as we shall see.¹⁴⁷

The other obvious passage where the same argument applies is Romans 9.6—10.13. Despite the ongoing controversy over the meaning of this whole passage (on which, see the next chapter), it seems to me that a very strong *prima facie* case can be made for seeing Paul's intention as being to present

a narrative outline of the history of Israel from Abraham to the present time, working through the other patriarchs to Moses and then to the prophets, the exile and ... the Messiah. *Telos gar nomou Christos* in 10.4 (regularly translated 'Christ is the end of the law') is not an abstract statement about 'Christ' and 'the law', but a climactic statement about where the whole line of thought had been going, rooted of course in the organically important 9.5. Torah tells a great narrative, and its goal and conclusion is the Messiah. What follows ought to make this even clearer. In Deuteronomy 30, Moses had written of the strange new way in which the law would be fulfilled when, with the curse of exile at last over, Israel would be renewed. Paul interprets this passage with reference to what has happened in *Christos*, and the response to him that comes in confessing him as lord and believing that the one God raised him from the dead. Here, in other words, we have a long, careful retelling of Israel's story brought to a deliberate conclusion, with the central character at that conclusion designated with the Greek word for 'Messiah'. It is very hard to resist the conclusion, not only that Paul really did believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah, but that this belief played a massively important role in his entire theological understanding. Any resistance which is still offered must face the challenge that it may appear to have prejudged the issue.

Of course, all this will be as nothing to those who are determined on the one hand to regard Paul's use of scripture as ad hoc and informal, a snatching of texts from thin air to lend apparent authority to conclusions reached on other grounds, and those who are equally determined on the other hand to insist that Paul has no narrative theology, in particular no sense of the flow and sweep of Israel's history and its urgent need to find resolution, to see promises fulfilled, hopes at last accomplished.¹⁴⁸ To such persons one might simply say, 'Well, look and see the sense that this makes of everything else.' But there are one or two other arguments which come in here as well.

For a start, there is the linguistic evidence, set out recently by Matthew Novenson, that *Christos* is in fact neither a proper name (with denotation but no necessary connotation) nor a 'title' as such (with connotation but flexible denotation, as when 'the King of Spain' goes on meaning the same thing when one king dies and another succeeds him). It is, rather, an *honorific*, which shares some features of a 'title' but works differently.¹⁴⁹ It is quite extraordinary (to speak very frankly) that the work of W. G. Kramer, published in English in 1966, should have continued to be the reference point for discussions of 'christological titles'.¹⁵⁰ It was always deeply flawed, insensitive to the actual way Paul used the words in question, trying to analyze them as though they were mathematical symbols rather than real words being used in real sentences and arguments. Novenson's work now sets a new standard for discussion of *Christos* in particular, demonstrating that the way it functions linguistically, within the larger world of Greek usage in late antiquity, fits extremely well with royal 'honorifics' and not at all with proper names.

'The Messiah', then, *ho Christos*, is for Paul not simply an individual, Jesus of Nazareth, who happens to have acquired a second proper name through the flattening out of the royal title that other early Christians were eager still to affirm. The royal meaning of *Christos* does not disappear in Paul's writings. It is present, central and foundational. Though sometimes the word *seems* to function more or less as a proper name (any word, repeated often enough, can appear to have its surface indentations worn

smooth), its connotations are never far beneath the surface and often show clearly through. Obvious examples of the same phenomenon are easy to find: the phrase ‘Archbishop of Canterbury’ is often used without any thought of Canterbury as a place, but only with the intention of denoting the present holder of the office; but at a moment’s notice the geographical and cultural reference to Canterbury itself can be retrieved. The obvious first-century example is ‘Augustus’. Octavian, the adopted heir of Julius Caesar, took the *name* ‘Caesar’, was granted the *title* ‘Imperator’, and from 27 BC assumed the *honorific* ‘Augustus’, meaning ‘venerable’ in the sense of ‘holy’, ‘worshipful’. This word, properly speaking, was neither name nor title; hence, ‘honorific’. The word ‘Augustus’ could often be used simply to denote the man; but the echoes and connotations of the *divi filius* were never far away, and regularly evoked.¹⁵¹ Thus, even when *Christos* clearly denotes the man Jesus, invoked as *kyrios* by his first followers, I propose that throughout the first century of the movement at least the word carried echoes and connotations which were always within easy reach. And there is one connotation in particular which I believe offers the solution to one of the most long-standing puzzles in modern Pauline research.

[\(c\) Jesus as Israel’s Incorporative Messiah](#)

The particular point is this (and this is where this exposition of *Christos* as ‘Messiah’ in Paul joins up with the previous exposition of second-Temple views of Israel’s election). In passage after passage in Paul the point being made is that *Jesus, as Messiah, has drawn together the identity and vocation of Israel upon himself*. This, like ‘Messiahship’ itself, remains a controversial and contested point, and we need to be clear what is being said and on what grounds. The question of ‘corporate christology’, encapsulated in phrases like *en Christō* and images like ‘the Messiah’s body’, has been a puzzle for many years, and even those who have made it central have not given accounts of it which have carried conviction among other researchers.¹⁵² The same is true for the many proposals that have been made in articles and monographs.¹⁵³ My own proposal, which like much

else could be spelled out more fully, is that the two ‘unknowns’ are mutually explanatory: the ‘unknown’ solution to the question of *en Christō* goes with the normally ‘unknown’ Pauline feature of Jesus’ Messiahship. To put it plainly: the ‘incorporative’ thought and language which so pervades Paul is best explained in terms of his belief that Jesus was Israel’s Messiah.

Paul, I propose, exploited the notion of ‘Messiahship’ in such a way as to say two things in particular. First, the vocation and destiny of ancient Israel, the people of Abraham, had been brought to its fulfilment in the Messiah, particularly in his death and resurrection. Second, those who believed the gospel, whether Jew or Greek, were likewise to be seen as incorporated into him and thus defined by him, specifically again by his death and resurrection. The full range of Paul’s ‘incorporative’ language can be thoroughly and satisfactorily explained on this hypothesis: that he regarded the people of God and the Messiah of God as so bound up together that what was true of the one was true of the other. And this becomes in turn the vital key to understanding the close and intimate link between ‘incorporation’ and ‘justification’, between ‘participatory’ and ‘forensic’ accounts of Paul’s soteriology – not to mention the themes of salvation history, ‘apocalyptic’ and transformation. That is why it is important to be as clear as possible at this point.

This proposal about incorporative Messiahship is not, of course, new.¹⁵⁴ It has, though, escaped notice, for two obvious reasons, and one perhaps less obvious. First, ‘Messiah’ has been outlawed as a category in Paul; second, scholarly discussion of ‘Christology’ has naturally focused on the question of Jesus’ ‘divinity’ (so much so, in fact, that the word ‘Christ’ has often been taken as a ‘divine’ title, which even in early Christianity it never was). Third, we might suggest, the notion of Israel’s vocation on the one hand, and the notion of a christologically grounded view of ‘the church’ on the other, have not been welcome guests in the liberal protestant houses where much biblical study has taken place. But at this point objections will arise: the real reason for ignoring this kind of proposal, some may say, is the absence of evidence. Where do we find this supposedly Jewish notion of

the unity between the Messiah and his people? And if the answer is ‘Why, in Paul himself’, does this not become dangerously circular?

Not necessarily. It is true that we look in vain, in the messianic or quasi-messianic movements of the last two centuries BC and the first two centuries AD, for anything like the ‘incorporative’ language we find in Paul. Those who wrote the Scrolls believed in a coming Messiah – perhaps even in two of them – but they do not speak of themselves as ‘entering’ this person or of then being found ‘in him’. Those who followed bar-Kochba, including Akiba himself, believed he was the Messiah, but we have no reason to think that they spoke of themselves as being ‘incorporated’ into him. The biblical texts regularly cited in second-Temple messianic speculation (the ‘sceptre’ of Genesis 49, the ‘star’ of Numbers 24 and the obvious passages in the Psalms and Prophets) give shape and colour to that royal hope, and certainly indicate that the coming king will act powerfully on behalf of his people, but they do not include the idea, in whatever form, that the coming Messiah will sum up or incorporate his people in himself.

Looking more widely, we note the older view that ancient peoples in general, and Jews in particular, held a concept of ‘corporate personality’, according to which a fluidity existed between some individuals and groups, and specifically between a ruler and his people. Earlier sweeping proposals on this subject have retreated in the face of sharp critique, though that may simply mean that the theories were unworkable, not that there was no data to be explained.¹⁵⁵ Attention has often been drawn, in Paul himself, to the incorporative phrases ‘in Adam’ and indeed ‘in Abraham’, the former in close parallel to ‘in Christ’ and the latter in fairly close proximity.¹⁵⁶ But even there we seem to be dealing with analogies, not with sources or origins of Paul’s remarkable way of speaking.¹⁵⁷

In order, then, to propose an account of Paul’s ‘incorporative’ phrases in which the key explanatory element is the hypothetical binding together of the Messiah and his people, I am not suggesting that such an idea was already well known or widespread in Paul’s day. Nor am I suggesting that there was a ready-made and widely understood concept of incorporation into which Paul simply had to slot the word ‘Christ’. What I am suggesting

– on analogy with my hypothesis about the origin of ‘high’ christology’ in the previous chapter – is that *the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection compelled Paul in this direction, and caused him to read old texts in new ways.*

It is particularly the resurrection that matters here. A Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus undoubtedly believed passionately in resurrection; but it would be the resurrection of all Israel at the end of time. No Pharisee imagined that one person would be raised from the dead ahead of everyone else.¹⁵⁸ When, therefore, it happened to one person, as Paul believed it had – and when, in particular, it happened to someone who had been executed as a would-be Messiah – it meant at once that *Israel’s God had done for Jesus what it had been supposed he would do for Israel.* Not only therefore did the resurrection demonstrate that Jesus was after all Israel’s Messiah, despite the verdict of the court. The resurrection also declared, for Paul, that the divine purpose for Israel had been fulfilled, uniquely and decisively, in this Messiah, this Jesus. He was, in effect, Israel in person.¹⁵⁹ And it was precisely *as Messiah* that he therefore represented his people.

The origin of ‘incorporative christology’ is therefore close to, and parallel with, the origin of ‘incarnational christology’ which we explored in the previous chapter. Paul’s fresh understanding of Jesus as YHWH in person, returned in glory, drove him back to the scriptures to ferret out texts he knew but had not read that way before. In the same way, his fresh understanding of Jesus as the summing-up of the divine purpose for Israel drove him back to the scriptures, not least to the story of Abraham and, behind that, the story of Adam, and to glimpse in both of them the notion, and in the Abraham story a linguistic way of expressing this notion, that the vocation and/or destiny of people could be bundled up within the vocation and/or destiny of that one person. It is, I think, much easier to believe that Paul came to this view as a result of his belief in Jesus’ resurrection, and then discovered resonances of it in the scriptures, than to suppose that he had always thought in terms of people being ‘in Adam’ or ‘in Abraham’ and then transferred that notion to the Messiah.

Among other biblical contexts for this notion, I have previously explored one which is both more explicit than the ‘Abraham’ passages and also more obviously ‘royal’. It is not, so far as I know, picked up by second-Temple writers (though we must regularly remind ourselves what a small and random sample of work we have from that period, always liable to be pleasantly disrupted by a shepherd boy looking for a goat and finding a scroll). It does, however, offer a clearly ‘incorporative’ idea in which the people of Israel as a whole are somehow ‘in’ the king, ‘in’ David – even when David is dead and gone and the reference is to his grandson.¹⁶⁰ The suggestive background to this is found in the narrative about David and Goliath: why has Saul, head and shoulders above all other Israelites, not himself gone out to fight the Philistine giant? In his place, *representing* the whole nation and fighting its battle all by himself, we find the young David; and his victory is a major step towards his own becoming king, as Saul readily perceives.¹⁶¹ It is within that setting, of David’s kingship, that we find the sudden incorporative usage of being ‘in David’ or ‘in the king’, when, after Absalom’s rebellion, the people of the northern tribes complain to those of the south:

We have ten shares in the king (*bamelek/en tō basilei*), and in David (*bedawid/en tō David*) also we have more than you.¹⁶²

This then leads at once to the rebellion of Sheba son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. Benjamin was of course one of the southern tribes; a rebellion there would be even more disastrous for David’s kingdom than a northern revolt. The slogan used by Sheba again speaks ‘incorporatively’:

We have no portion in David,
no inheritance (*nahlah, klēronomia*) in the son of Jesse!
Everyone to your tents, O Israel!¹⁶³

That rebellion was crushed, and the full kingdom established again under David and then under Solomon. But almost the same phrase was picked up by the northern tribes after Solomon’s son Rehoboam refused to listen to their complaints:

What portion do we have in David?
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.
To your tents, O Israel!
Look now to your own house, O David.¹⁶⁴

The idea of ‘inheritance’ is, as we have seen, important for Paul in connection with the Messiah: those who belong to him share the ‘inheritance’ which YHWH promised him in Psalm 2, namely the whole (renewed) creation. So, as I proposed earlier, while these texts cannot be cited as evidence of ideas prominent in the first century, they do at least suggest a matrix of biblical thought to which Paul might go back in his mind as he struggled to understand the significance of one person, a messianic pretender, being raised from the dead, as he had imagined would happen to the whole people of the one God. In these passages – the Goliath incident, and the rebellions with their slogans – there is a sense that the king represents his people, or alternatively (as with the young David) that the one who successfully fights the nation’s battle all by himself is thereby qualifying himself as king. His fate becomes theirs, his inheritance becomes theirs, his life becomes theirs. To be ‘in the king’, or now, for Paul, ‘in the anointed one’, the Messiah, is to be part of the people over which he rules, but also part of the people who are defined by him, by what has happened to him, by what the one God has promised him. That is how Paul uses the incorporative language of *en Christō* and similar phrases, as we shall now see.

I do not now think (as I once did) that these interesting biblical passages themselves constitute the explanation for his usage. But once the resurrection has raised the question as to why the creator God has done for one person what he was supposed to do for all Israel, and once Paul has recognized, as he surely did very quickly, that this means (a) that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah and (b) that the national destiny has been fulfilled in him, then texts like this may indicate a context, a climate of thought which western individualism finds it hard immediately to grasp, within which Paul’s regular incorporative language would make the sense to him that it manifestly did.

I propose, therefore, that Paul understands Jesus of Nazareth to be, indeed, Israel's Messiah, the king from the house of David, the 'son of God' in this sense (and in other senses, as we have seen, but not to the exclusion of this one). Paul sees Jesus as the one who has been established as Messiah through his resurrection, drawing Israel's history to its strange but long-awaited resolution, fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, inheriting the nations of the world, winning the battle against all the powers of evil and constituting in himself the promise-receiving people, so that all 'in him' might receive those promises, precisely not in themselves but insofar as, being 'in him', they are incorporated into the True Jew, the one in whom Israel's vocation has been fulfilled.

The principal argument in favour of this entire hypothesis is the way in which the elements of Pauline soteriology, normally regarded as disparate and to be played off against one another, come together in a fresh, and remarkably coherent, way when viewed from this angle. It will take the rest of the present chapter to explore this. For the moment, I cite briefly, in advance of detailed discussion later on, the three passages in which it seems to me most obvious; I then offer equally brief reflections on the way in which the key incorporative phrases actually function.

The most obvious passage, to my mind, is Romans 3.1–26. As we shall see, the problem which Paul faces is not simply universal sin, but the failure of Israel to be 'faithful' to the divine vocation (3.2–3). This is resolved dramatically, in the unveiling of the divine righteousness (3.21), through the 'faithfulness' of the Messiah, Jesus. Anticipating the summary of the whole picture in 5.12–21, where the action of the Messiah is described as 'obedience', what we see in 3.22 is the Israel-faithfulness through which the divine purpose of 'redemption' is accomplished: hence, in the telling phrase, *dia tēs apolytrōsis tēs en Christō Iēsou*, 'through the redemption which is in Messiah Jesus'. This single phrase anticipates the entire later exposition of the divine rescuing action that is set out in Romans 5–8, scooping it all up as it were and compressing it into this little ball so that it can play its crucial role in the exposition of justification (3.21–4.25). 'In Messiah', in other words, and by means of the redeeming action

accomplished through his ‘faithfulness’ to the divine Israel-purpose, all those who believe are now declared to be ‘in the right’.

This emerges in several interlocking ways in the entire argument of Galatians 2.15—4.11. I have expounded this elsewhere and can be brief.¹⁶⁵ The argument turns on the distinction between the promises to Abraham, which Paul declares are fulfilled in the Messiah, and the giving of the Torah, which Paul declares has done its God-given job and is now no longer relevant for the definition of God’s people. The single family which had been promised to Abraham can be spoken of simply as *Christos*, as (controversially) in 3.16 but (rather obviously) in 3.26–9. This *Christos* is the ‘son of God’ who shares that sonship with all who, by the spirit, can call God ‘father’ (4.6–7). This has nothing to do (as is sometimes suggested) with the replacement of the old Israel with a new one, and everything to do (as is less frequently noted) with Paul’s belief that Israel as a whole is summed up and redefined in and by *Christos*. That, indeed, is the whole point of the decisive summary in 2.19–20, which again we shall consider later on. Once again, being ‘in the Messiah’ and being ‘justified by faith’ are tightly combined in this passage.

The third obvious passage is Philippians 3.2–11. Paul begins by contrasting the kind of Jew he himself had been with the kind of Jew he considers himself now to be: ‘We’, he declares, ‘are the “circumcision”’ – we who worship God by the spirit, and boast in King Jesus, and refuse to trust in the flesh.’ If you want to know where Israel is, in other words, look to Israel’s Messiah. If you want to see ‘the circumcision’, look to those who belong to Israel’s Messiah. ‘Whatever I had written in on the profit side, I calculated it instead as a loss – because of the Messiah’ (3.7). Paul had been seeking to secure and solidify his place within the Israel that would be vindicated on the last day, but now has discovered that the Messiah himself, having already been vindicated by Israel’s God, is the one and only place where that secure identity is to be found. We miss the force of the passage unless we see that here, just as in Romans 3 or Galatians 3, the Messiah is the place where, and the means by which, Israel’s destiny is realized and membership in Israel, in ‘the circumcision’, is assured. Thus, again just as

in Romans and Galatians, the statement of ‘justification’ (underlined below) nests within the larger statement of ‘being in the Messiah’ (in bold below):

In fact, because of the Messiah I’ve suffered the loss of everything, and I now calculate it as trash, so that my profit may be the Messiah ...

and that I may be discovered in him,

not having my own covenant status (*dikaiosynē*) defined by Torah

but the status (*dikaiosynē*) which comes through the Messiah’s faithfulness:

the covenant status from God (*tēn ek theou dikaiosynēn*) which is given to faith.

This means knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, and knowing the partnership of his sufferings. It means sharing the form and pattern of his death, so that somehow I may arrive at the final resurrection from the dead.¹⁶⁶

It is, in other words, ‘in the Messiah’, in the Israel-in-person, that Paul finds the identity and hope he had formerly sought through his intense observance of Israel’s Torah. The *status* of being ‘justified’, declared to be ‘in the right’ and a member of the people of the one God, is given on the basis of *pistis*, the ‘faith’ of the believer which identifies him or her as part of the family of the ‘faithful’ Messiah (see below). This, though dense, is as clear a summary as anything in Paul of the way in which the divine purpose in election has been fulfilled in Israel’s Messiah.

Within that picture, we may briefly glance at the incorporative phrases which have given so much trouble to exegetes and yet which, once the central principle of Messiah/Israel is grasped, make good and clear sense.¹⁶⁷

Paul, as is well known, sometimes writes *en Christō*, sometimes *eis Christon* and sometimes *syn Christō*; sometimes, also, *dia Christon* or *dia Christou*: ‘in Messiah’, ‘into Messiah’, ‘with Messiah’, ‘through Messiah’.¹⁶⁸ These phrases can go quite closely with the use of the genitive, ‘belonging to the Messiah’, which already gives a strong hint as to how the incorporative language is meant to function. We notice, too, that Paul does not normally write *en Iēsou*, but frequently says *dia Iēsou* (‘in Jesus’; ‘through Jesus’).¹⁶⁹ He does, however, sometimes write *dia Christon* or *dia Christou*, but there too one can regularly see a messianic meaning at work.¹⁷⁰

This is of course a simplified picture, since the phrases in question are frequently longer (*en Christō Iēsou*, for example, or *dia Iēsou Christou*). One might also factor in phrases focused on *kyrios* (*en kyriō*, and the like) and the various uses with pronouns (*en hō*; *en autō*: ‘in whom’; ‘in him’). The suggestion that the variations in case and word order (*Christos Iēsous* as against *Iēsous Christos*, and so on) occur purely for the sake of euphony, or through unthinking variation, is both improbable in itself and unwarranted exegetically.¹⁷¹ Paul in fact is very precise: he never says *eis Christon* (‘into the Messiah’) when he means *en Christō* (‘in the Messiah’), or vice versa. (Nor, by the way, does he confuse ‘being in the Messiah’ with ‘the Messiah being in us’, to which we return later on.) Once we grasp the meaning of Messiahship in his writings, there is no need to flatten out his very precise language, or to chop it or stretch it on the Procrustean bed of our own de-messianized (and often de-Judaized) theological understandings.

Notice how Paul’s key ‘messianic’ phrases function in a fairly literal rendering of Galatians 3.24, 26–9:

The law was our guardian *into Messiah*, so that we might be justified by faith ... For you are all children of God, through faith, *in Messiah*, for as many as were baptized *into the Messiah* have put on the Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no ‘male and female’, for you are all one *in Messiah Jesus*. But if you *belong to Messiah* (*ei de hymeis Christou*), you are Abraham’s seed, heirs in accordance with promise.

And then, in 4.7:

So you are no longer a slave, but a son.

You come (in other words) ‘into Messiah’ in baptism, and as a result you are, you stand, you exist, ‘in Messiah’. That is a basic statement of Christian identity, and it clearly sustains Paul’s statements about justification earlier in the chapter and the passage.

But Paul also speaks, it seems, of a further journey ‘into Messiah’, where ‘Messiah’ clearly denotes not simply the individual person, but the people who find their identity, and crucially their unity, in him. (We saw this in our

first chapter, in the curious but important verse Philemon 6.¹⁷²) To come ‘into Messiah’ in this way is not simply ‘eschatological’ in the sense of the *eventual* goal, as proposed by some.¹⁷³ Rather, it is ‘eschatological’ in the sense that the eschatology has already been inaugurated, and ‘Messiah’ is already a corporate as well as a personal reality. In the Messiah Jesus, God has launched his project of bringing the human race together into a new unity, and those who believe in him are summoned into that *koinōnia tēs pisteōs*, that fellowship of faith, in which their previous differences are transcended.

Thus 2 Corinthians 1.21, in a dense manner of speaking familiar throughout that letter and echoed elsewhere, but sadly obscured by the translations:

The one who establishes us with you *into Messiah*, and has anointed us, is God.

Most translations render *eis Christon* here as ‘in Christ’, but Paul’s point here is precisely that the fissures that have opened up between him and the Corinthian community need repair, and that it is God who will do this, bringing them together ‘into the Messiah’, that is, into the unity which they properly possess ‘in him’ but which is now seen as the goal of a journey.¹⁷⁴ Here, as in Galatians 3.16 and elsewhere,¹⁷⁵ *Christos* denotes ‘the Messiah and his people’, or perhaps better ‘the Messiah as the representative of his people’, the one *in whom* that people are summed up and drawn together, with the main point being the *unity* of that company, and in particular their unity across traditional boundary-lines.¹⁷⁶ In the fascinating verse which condenses the whole thought of Philemon, the *koinōnia* of faith is designed *to generate that actual unity*, across traditional boundaries such as those mentioned in Galatians 3.28, which will find particular focus in the new, unexpected and indeed shocking unity between the master and the runaway slave. In Galatia, the issue was believing gentiles belonging as equal members in Christ’s family alongside believing Jews; in Philemon, the issue is the slave and the free. But the underlying theology is the same. Whoever wrote Ephesians certainly saw things in this light: the aim of God’s gift of

varied ministries is so that, leaving immaturity behind, ‘we may all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of *Christos* ... to grow up in every way into the one who is the head, *Christos*’.¹⁷⁷ In other words, those who through baptism and faith have made the initial journey *eis Christon* are now summoned to work on the further, and very challenging, task of a full unity with all other Messiah-members, a task which Paul can characterize as itself a move *eis Christon*.

All this can be seen on a large scale in Romans, taken as a whole. The ‘bookends’ of the letter, as we noted, are the twin statements about Jesus’ messianic resurrection and worldwide rule (1.3–5; 15.12). And the letter that is framed in this way contains at its heart, in chapters 6—8, the exposition of what it means to come ‘into the Messiah’ at baptism, and so to be ‘in the Messiah’ with all the benefits that thereby accrue. All of this we shall explore further in due course.

[\(d\) Conclusion: Paul and Messiahship](#)

We have now made the case that Paul regarded Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, and that he saw and expressed that belief in terms of the Messiah’s summing up of Israel in himself, thereby launching a new solidarity in which all those ‘in him’ would be characterized by his ‘faithfulness’, expressed in terms of his death and resurrection. This, I shall now suggest, is the key to, and the foundation for, the way in which Paul reworked the Jewish belief in Israel’s election. Within that, it is the key to, and the foundation for, his famous doctrine of justification. The combination of Messiah and Israel provides a way into the very heart of Paul’s soteriological beliefs which draws together the regularly dismembered elements of his thinking and writing into a full and coherent whole.

As a tailpiece to this argument, I return to the sharp statement of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who comes to the question as a linguist and a philosopher rather than as a theologian or ‘New Testament specialist’. In his fascinating comparative study of the letter to the Romans

and the philosophical writings of Walter Benjamin, Agamben launches a stern attack on those who have supposed that the word *Christos* could ever, in a writer like Paul, function as a mere proper name:

Each reading and each new translation of the Pauline text must begin by keeping in mind the fact that *christos* is not a proper name, but is, already in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *mashiah*, ‘the anointed’, that is, the Messiah. Paul has no familiarity with Jesus Christ, only with Jesus Messiah ... A millenary tradition that left the word *christos* untranslated ends by making the term *Messiah* disappear from Paul’s text ... That the term *Christ* consequently never appears in our text [i.e. Agamben’s own book] is not meant to signal any polemic intention nor a Judaizing reading of the Pauline text; rather, it entails an elementary philological scruple that all translators should follow, whether or not they be equipped with an *imprimatur*... One should never forget that it is beyond an author’s power to take a term that is in current use into the linguistic context of his life and make it into a proper name, especially with regard to a fundamental concept, such as that of the Messiah for a Jew.¹⁷⁸

It is a pity that these words had not been pinned on the notice-boards of university faculties and seminaries a long time ago. But let us at least make up for lost time. What does it mean if, in the context of Paul’s view of Israel’s election as God’s people, we suppose that he really did see Jesus, not just as the ‘lord’, as we saw in the previous chapter, but as Israel’s Messiah?

(ii) Jesus as the Faithful Messiah of Israel: Romans 3 and 4

With the changing fashions of theological and exegetical argument, it has been extraordinary to see the energy with which the question of *pistis Christou* (‘the faith[fulness] of Christ’? or ‘faith in Christ’?) has been addressed over the last thirty years. What began as a question, then an initial proposal, has become a substantial industry, generating more debate than one would have believed possible. The debate has now been pressed down and sprinkled together, and is threatening to nest in every tree.¹⁷⁹ As with most topics in the present book, this discussion could easily be a book in itself, and most of that might be footnotes to those who have discussed, in great detail, every argument, every passage, every verse.

Every verse, that is, except one – which I believe to be vital, normally ignored, and actually decisive for what is arguably the most central statement of this particular theme anywhere in Paul.¹⁸⁰ One can often tell whether a particular Pauline line of thought is being followed by the attention that is given, or not given, to crucial turns in the argument, and it is fascinating to see that in some of the central discussions of *pistis Christou* in recent days Romans 3.2 has played virtually no role whatever.¹⁸¹ But it is this verse that sets up both the dense and intricate argument of 3.1–9, which (despite frequent assertions from those who project their own puzzlements onto Paul!) is not at all muddled or confused.¹⁸² In particular, it throws the weight of the larger discussion forward to the crucial statement of 3.22. So as not to keep the reader in suspense, the argument goes like this: the ‘faithfulness’ which was required of Israel, but not provided, has now been provided by Israel’s representative, the Messiah.

We have to begin with that key paragraph, Romans 2.25–9. Once we grasp how that paragraph actually works – that Paul here really does envisage people of any and every background being regarded as ‘circumcision’ and as ‘Jew’ – it is obvious that he then needs to ask the question of 3.1: what is the point of being a Jew? Is there any ‘advantage’ to it? What does one gain by being circumcised? He has stated in 1.16 that the gospel is ‘for the Jew *first* and also, equally, for the Greek’.¹⁸³ He has declared that the divine wrath is revealed, through the gospel which unveils the Messiah as the impartial judge of all, against all humans, again ‘the Jew first and also the Greek’ (2.9, 10). But then – and this is where things start to unravel in traditional readings of the letter – he has agreed that ‘the Jew’ might well say that Israel has been called to be the light of the world (2.17–20). Is not this the answer to the problem?

And we must insist that Paul’s answer is: Yes. Paul does not back off from agreeing with the ‘Jewish’ boast, because it is inscribed into his Bible and his own second-Temple worldview on the basis of nothing less than the unshakable promises of God. As in John’s gospel (‘salvation is of the Jews’¹⁸⁴) so here: God has promised to bless the world, to undo the sin of Adam and its effects, through the call of Abraham, and God will be true to

that promise even if Israel as a whole lets him down. That, more or less, was what Isaiah 52 and Ezekiel 36 were about. Now this is how it appears in Paul:

¹What advantage, then, does the Jew possess? What, indeed, is the point of circumcision? ²A great deal, in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with God's oracles. ³What follows from that? If some of them were unfaithful [to their commission], does their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴Certainly not! Let God be true, and every human being false! As the Bible says, So that you may be found in the right in what you say, and may win the victory when you come to court.¹⁸⁵

The key here, as I have stressed, is verse 2, which is usually ignored or misunderstood. They were *entrusted*, says Paul, with the oracles of the one God. Some commentators have walked right up to the point, glanced in its direction and then passed by on the other side. Others have never come near it in the first place.¹⁸⁶ The word 'entrusted' is always used by Paul in the same sense that it bears in secular Greek: to entrust someone with something is to give them something which they must take care of *and pass on to the appropriate person*. Paul was 'entrusted' with a commission, according to 1 Corinthians 9.17; with the gospel to the uncircumcised, in Galatians 2.7; with the gospel, according to 1 Thessalonians 2.4.¹⁸⁷ In no case did this commission or this gospel relate ultimately to Paul himself; it was given *to* Paul in order that it be given *through* Paul to the people for whom it was intended. This, indeed, may be why Paul speaks, uniquely for him, of 'the oracles'. God's purpose, he believed, was that through Israel the gentile world might hear what, to them, would appear to be 'divine oracles', even though Israel would have known they were more than that.¹⁸⁸ The whole sentence, and the whole drift of the passage ever since 2.17, is not primarily about 'Israel's guilt', but about *God's purpose, through Israel, for the world*.

That is why I have added the words 'to their commission' in verse 3. Paul is not accusing them of 'unbelief', of failure to believe in Jesus as Messiah and lord or in his resurrection. And when he speaks of 'their unfaithfulness' in the second half of verse 3, this sense is still required: does *their failure to*

do what their Abrahamic and Isaianic vocation demanded mean that somehow God himself is now going to prove unfaithful?

This, it should now be apparent, is a kind of second-order version of the well-known problem of divine justice. The normal mode of the problem goes like this: the creator makes promises to Abraham's family; Abraham's family misbehave; how is this God then going to save them without being accused of favouritism? That remains important at another level of the argument, but Paul has for the moment left it behind in favour of a significantly different problem: the creator makes promises *through* Abraham to the world; Abraham's family fail to pass on the 'oracles', in other words, to be the 'light to the nations, the guide to the blind' and so on that they were supposed to be (2.17–20); how is this God then going to keep his promises *through Israel* to the world? If the person responsible for delivering the mail has proved untrustworthy, how can I keep my promises to send you a letter by that same mail system?

The faithfulness of God at the end of verse 3 is then, still, the determination of the covenant God to do what he has promised, even if the people through whom the promised blessings were to be delivered seem to have let him down through their own 'faithlessness'. This becomes clear at the start of the next verse, where *alētheia*, 'truth' or better 'truthfulness', substitutes for *pistis*, 'faithfulness'.¹⁸⁹ This then generates what appears to be a third-order dispute: if Israel's God is going to do what he promised despite the failure of Israel, why should Israel be blamed? – as it will be, according to 2.27, where 'the uncircumcision that fulfils the Torah' will 'judge' circumcised lawbreakers. With this, we are fully into the list of questions to which Paul will return in 9.6–29, though in the present passage they end in a *reductio ad absurdum* in verse 8 (if people think that Paul's argument leads them to say, 'Let's do evil so that good may come,' there is only one thing to say: that people like that, at least, deserve the judgment they get!).

With that, Paul has dealt in a preliminary way with the problem of 2.17–20: yes, Israel really was chosen in order to be the means of blessing for the world, and yes, despite Israel's failure to be faithful to that commission, the

covenant God will be faithful to that promise, *to bless the world through Israel*. But what he has not yet done is to say *how* this God will do that. Paul has, however, set up the problem in such a way that we can see, in principle, what is now required: if the covenant God is going to bless the world through Israel, he needs *a faithful Israelite*. In 3.21–6 Paul argues that this is exactly what has now been provided.

Once we understand *Christos* as the Messiah, Israel's representative, Israel-in-person if you will, the logic works out immaculately. (a) The covenant God promises to rescue and bless the world through Israel. (b) Israel as it stands is faithless to this commission. (c) The covenant God, however, is faithful, and will provide a faithful Israelite, *the 'faithful Israelite'*, the Messiah. It is the tight coherence of this train of thought, rather than any verbal arguments about subjects and objects, prepositions and case-endings on the one hand, or preferential theological positions on the other, that persuaded me many years ago that Romans 3.22 speaks of the Messiah's faithfulness. It persuades me still.

To be sure, a vote for a so-called subjective genitive reading of *pistis Christou* in Romans 3.22 does not give carte blanche to any and every possible interpretation of such a reading. Thus, for instance, I do not think Paul is here speaking of Jesus being 'justified by faith'; it is neither his faith nor his belief that is here spoken of, but his *faithfulness* to the divine plan for Israel.¹⁹⁰ Nor does it mean, in any way, that the human faith by which 'the believer' responds to the gospel of Jesus the Messiah is downplayed or undervalued. Far from it: Romans 3.22, which otherwise would be a tautology, speaks of the divine action being *through* the faithfulness of the Messiah *for the benefit of* all who have faith. The former does not cancel out the latter; it puts it in its proper context. Rather, as we shall see, the point is that the faithfulness (*pistis*) of the Messiah is that which marks him out as the true Israelite, the promise-bearer, the one who accomplishes at last the purpose for which the creator called Israel in the first place. Those who believe the gospel, 'who believe in the one who raised from the dead Jesus our lord' (4.24), are thus appropriately marked out by that badge of *pistis*, their own *pistis*, not as an arbitrary sign, not because it means that

they have had some kind of religious experience and so must have been converted, not because ‘faith’ is a special, meritorious form of interiority which this God decides to reward, but because *pistis*, faithfulness, (a) always was supposed to be the badge of Israel, (b) now has been the badge of Jesus, and so (c) is the appropriate badge – the only badge! – by which Jesus’ followers are to be marked out. To this, too, we shall return.

Before we can reach the pay-off of this argument, we must remind ourselves that as well as dealing with this second-order (though absolutely vital) question about Israel’s vocation, Paul has also yet to address the massive problem of good old-fashioned human sin (to be more precise, idolatry and immorality) spelled out in 1.18—2.16. There are therefore (at least) two questions on the table, and it is confusion between these two that has, in my view, bedevilled the reading of Romans 3.21—4.25.

First, the creator God has made promises to bless the world, and in 2.1–11 Paul has indicated that there is to be a final judgment at which people will be judged impartially on the basis of what they have actually done.¹⁹¹ But as things stand, in the summing up of 3.19–20, it is clear that all humans, Jew and gentile alike, stand in the dock, guilty as charged. Invoking Torah itself (‘we have Torah; that sets us apart’¹⁹²) only seems to make matters worse: through Torah comes the knowledge of sin.¹⁹³

But then, second, the creator God has said nevertheless that he will save the world *through Israel*. That was the force of the covenant, and the God who made it will not set it aside. However, the Jewish boast of thus being ‘the light of the world’ (2.17–24) will not work, because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. The creator faces a double problem: how to save anyone at all, let alone (as promised) people of all sorts; and how to save them *through Israel*. If he cannot do these things, the divine quality which is regularly invoked in the Psalms, in Isaiah and in those great passages such as Daniel 9 – the quality which we call the divine *tsedaqah*, *dikaïosynē*, the ‘faithfulness’ or ‘righteousness’ of Israel’s God – is radically called into question.

How, then, should we read Romans 3.21–2? Clearly, in relation to both of these two questions, which are indeed in the last analysis not two but one.

In relation to the first, the creator must somehow deal with the problem of universal idolatry and immorality, here scrunched together under the general word *hamartia*, missing-the-mark, the failure to be genuinely human. But, in relation to the second, God must somehow deal with that problem *through faithful Israel*. If he does not do the first, then the whole project of creation is a terrible blunder. If he does not do the second, then the call of Israel as the means of rescuing and restoring humankind and the world is itself an equal blunder. How then can he do the latter (fulfilling his promises to Israel), and so do the former (rescuing the world from *hamartia*), without appearing to be guilty of *prosōpolēmpsia*, ‘respect of persons’, which Paul has ruled out in 2.11?

The reason Romans 3.21–31 is so dense is that Paul is, quite properly, answering these two questions together. And the answer to both is the same: *the Messiah, the faithful Israelite, has been faithful to death, and through him the faithful justice of the covenant God is now displayed for all, Jew and gentile alike.*

It is clearly necessary, before reading 3.21–31, to reach a preliminary conclusion about the meaning of *dikaiosynē theou*, often translated ‘the righteousness of God’.¹⁹⁴ I suggest that we are bound, in the light of all that has gone before, in the light of all the biblical texts which Paul is implicitly evoking (which I explored in chapter 2 above), and in the light of the climax and conclusion of Paul’s present argument (4.1–25), to understand *dikaiosynē theou* (a) as God’s own ‘righteousness’ (rather than a status of ‘righteousness’ granted, imputed or otherwise given to humans); (b) as God’s own ‘righteousness’ with the focus, very specifically, on his *covenant faithfulness* in the sense of ‘doing what he promised to Abraham, in Deuteronomy, in the Psalms, and through Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel’; (c) as God’s own ‘righteousness’ in the sense of his faithfulness *to the covenant promise to bless the nations through Israel*. Out beyond this again – though without skipping stages, still less cancelling them out! – there is the sense (d) that the divine faithfulness to the *covenant* is the appointed means of the divine faithfulness to the *creation*. The creational dimension of *dikaiosynē theou* has been made famous in our generation by Ernst Käsemann, and

properly so, in reaction against views which would limit the phrase to individual justification and salvation. But Paul's own faithfulness to the biblical tradition, and more importantly to the notion of the one God and his own faithfulness, means that he cannot and will not bypass, on the way to the eventual rescue of all creation (Romans 8), the divine faithfulness to the covenant with Abraham – as Käsemann had him bypass it.¹⁹⁵

There are various ways of paraphrasing to bring all this out. I here employ the long version: 'the faithful justice of the covenant God'.

This, then, is how I suggest we are bound to read Romans 3.21–2, if we have truly understood Romans 2.17–20 and 3.1–4:

²¹But now, quite apart from the law (though the law and the prophets bore witness to it), God's faithful covenant justice has been displayed. ²²God's faithful covenant justice comes into operation *through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, for the benefit of all who have faith.

This, to repeat, has nothing to do with Jesus' own 'faith' in the sense of his 'religious awareness', his belief in God, his refusal to trust in his own good works, or anything like that. That is to pull the meaning of *pistis* away from where it was in 3.2–4 and off into the realm of normal Christian dogmatics, thus failing to pay attention to what Paul is actually talking about. Just as in other key passages where *God's* saving action is worked out through *the Messiah's* saving action, so here. The point in the present argument is that God's faithful-to-the-covenant action ('the covenant' being, we remind ourselves, the means of dealing with human sin) is also God's faithful-through-the-covenant action, and the 'through-the-covenant' bit refers to the role of Israel, Abraham's people: the role now taken by the Messiah, alone. In this opening summary (densely packed, as often in Paul) of what is about to follow, Paul signals that something has been accomplished, as an action of the creator God through Jesus the Messiah; in other words, an action of the creator God through Israel-in-the-person-of-Jesus-the-Messiah. Through this action, through this Messiah, the blessings always promised to and through Abraham and Israel are now available, as always intended, for the whole world.¹⁹⁶

But why does Paul refer to the act of the Messiah, or rather the act-of-God-through-the-Messiah, as his ‘faithfulness’? Why not his ‘giving of himself to death’ (since it seems clear that he intends to *denote* the crucifixion of Jesus) or some equivalent phrase? What is being *connoted* by referring to Jesus’ death under the rubric of ‘faithfulness’? Does this even make sense?

First, by speaking of the Messiah’s ‘faithfulness’, Paul clearly intends to relate the action (or passion) of the Messiah to the purpose of God to which Israel had been *unfaithful*.¹⁹⁷ This has been our argument all along.

But this points to a second feature: by speaking of the Messiah’s death as an act of ‘faithfulness’ Paul makes it clear that what is accomplished through the Messiah (through the-Messiah-as-Israel-in-person) is the fulfilment of the active will and purpose of the covenant God. It is not, in other words, something done by a human being over against the creator, or to persuade the creator to do something he had not previously had in mind, or any such notion. Rather, the word ‘faithfulness’ denotes a movement *from* the creator God, *through* Israel-in-the-person-of-the-Messiah, *towards* the world.

Third, in other words, this notion of ‘faithfulness’ allows Paul to speak, at the point where in chapter 5 he is summing up where he has got to so far, of the divine *love* seen in the death of the son. For that to make any sense, there has to be a flow from the creator, through the death of Jesus, out towards the sinful world (as well as an intimate connection between the one God and the son, as we saw in the previous chapter).

Fourth, the notion of ‘faithfulness’ connects very closely with that of the Messiah’s ‘obedience’, and here we note the further summary of the argument in 5.12–21. To be sure, at that point (as in Philippians 2.8) Paul chooses the notion of ‘obedience’ not least because of the contrast, explicit in Romans 5 and implicit in Philippians 2, with Adam. But, as has often been remarked, the two are not far apart. The same action is denoted. But in the first case (‘faithfulness’) the focus is on the substance of the commission and the direction of its movement, from the sender of the blessing to the eventual recipients, via the ‘faithful’ intermediary; while in

the second case ('obedience') the focus is simply on the relationship between the initiating sender and the obedient intermediary. But the two are, obviously, joined in the famous phrase 'the obedience of faith', *hypakoē pisteōs*, which Paul uses in 1.5 and 16.26 as the summary of what the gospel will effect in its hearers.¹⁹⁸ In other words, it makes sense, not only because of the turn in the argument at 3.2–3 but also because of the wider resonances, that Paul should refer to the saving action (i.e. the saving death) of Jesus the Messiah as an act of *faithfulness*.

So how does what Paul actually says about the death of Jesus in 3.23–6 reflect this emphasis on that death as Jesus' act of messianic, Israel-representing faithfulness? To begin with, of course, there is the summary statement of human sinfulness in 3.23: all sinned (the aorist tense presumably refers to the sin of Adam, as in 5.12–21) and came short of the divine glory. That is, they failed to be the people through whom, as his image-bearers, the creator would exercise his dominion in the world.¹⁹⁹ But this statement draws down the focus of the chapter no longer onto the *means by which* the saving covenant plan was to be taken forward (i.e. through Israel, and now through the faithful Messiah), but onto *the specific problem* which meant that rescue was required. Sin, *hamartia*, has hardly been mentioned up to this point; 2.12 uses the verb to summarize the general problem already outlined, and 3.9 and 20 draw that to a point. It looks, then, as though the word here is a summary of the larger problem of idolatry and immorality, sketched in 1.18–32, extended to include the supercilious moralist in 2.1–11.²⁰⁰ But this summary mention of the human problem is matched by the summary mention of the divine solution: the word *charis*, 'grace', occurs here for the first time in the letter, indicating that the 'revelation of God's faithful covenant justice' in 3.21 is a free gift, not occasioned or caused by anything within humans.²⁰¹

How then does Romans 3.21–6 articulate the meaning of Jesus' death in the context of this argument? The passage is, of course, notorious in its dense and complex detail, and we must be sure to highlight its main features if we are not to lose sight of the beach while studying the grains of sand.²⁰² There is a hard truth to be learned here as well: those who have

read Romans as embodying one particular and shrunken form of ‘the gospel’ (humans sinned, God sent Jesus, faithful humans are forgiven) have often treated this passage as though it offers Paul’s central statement of ‘the meaning of the cross’, and have done their best to make it conform to the required theological patterns. It looks, however, as though this is a highly compressed statement of the meaning of Jesus’ death, meant to serve the larger argument, which is about the divine covenant faithfulness.

First, then, we note the massive emphasis, throughout the passage, on exactly that theme. So strong is this stress that, in the mid-twentieth-century tradition that wanted to avoid covenantal notions at all costs, parts of this dense passage were dismissed as a pre-Pauline tradition that Paul was quoting and (not always clearly) modifying. This desperate expedient, which would never have been advanced unless the material were deeply unwelcome (in this case for the obvious reasons that existentialist Lutheran theology wanted to have nothing to do with Jewish covenantal theology), ought now to be set aside as an historical curiosity.²⁰³ Paul has said at the start of the paragraph that the events to be related constitute the disclosure of the divine covenant-justice-faithfulness, and this is what we find. As usual in Paul, if we want to understand a dense paragraph, we should look to the end, to see where he at least thinks it all comes out; and in 3.26 we find him saying that all this has taken place ‘to demonstrate [God’s] faithful covenant justice in the present time: that is, that he himself is in the right, and that he declares to be in the right everyone who trusts in the faithfulness of Jesus’.²⁰⁴ That should be clear enough. God made covenant promises, promises to do with the setting-to-rights of the whole world; in Jesus he has been faithful to those promises, so that the creator God is himself ‘justified’,²⁰⁵ that is, shown to be in the right, specifically in that he is ‘justifying’ the one who is described here in terms of Jesus’ own faithfulness. Perhaps the point of the final dense clause, *ton ek pisteōs Iēsou*, literally ‘the one out of the faith[fulness] of/in Jesus’, is precisely to run together the two elements of 3.22, namely Jesus’ own faithfulness as the act whereby redemption is achieved and the faith of the believer which becomes the badge of membership in the Messiah’s people. If this is

correct, we could perhaps paraphrase as ‘everyone who shares in the faithfulness of Jesus’.²⁰⁶ We shall return to ‘justification’ in the next part of the chapter; for the moment, suffice it to note that the faithful act of the Messiah means that God has been faithful to his promises.

Working from the beginning (3.21–3) and the end (3.26) of this short paragraph into the dense statement in 3.24–5, we discover that the faithful death of Jesus (which Paul sees in 5.6–10 as an act of divine *agapē* and in 5.15–19 as the act of the Messiah’s *hypakoē*, ‘obedience’) is more specifically an act of *exodus*. It is a ‘redemption’ (3.24); *apolytrōsis* is used directly in Jewish texts in reference to that great moment when God fulfilled the promises to the patriarchs by his Passover act of rescuing Israel from Egypt.²⁰⁷ And this ‘redemption’, as we saw, is ‘in Messiah Jesus’. This phrase has the effect of fusing together the covenantal and forensic argument of the present paragraph with the ‘incorporative’ exposition of chapters 5–8, rooting them both in the idea that the divine purpose for Israel and through Israel has now been accomplished in the Messiah.

All this goes some way towards contextualizing, if not fully explaining, the sacrificial meaning of verse 25: the *hilastērion* is the place in the tabernacle or Temple where atonement is made through the outpoured sacrificial blood of the victim. Paul seems to be drawing together three things: first, the exodus itself, as the great covenant-fulfilling act of rescue and ‘redemption’; second, more specifically, the Passover lamb, whose blood averted the death of the firstborn; third, the sacrifice offered as a ‘propitiatory’ in the tabernacle or Temple. He stresses the divine *forbearance* in the phrase at the start of verse 26 (*en tē anochē tou theou*): in times past God had overlooked, or ‘passed over’, the sins that had been committed, but now, through this redemptive sacrificial act, he has dealt with them.²⁰⁸

So, to put the question again: how does this complex of exodus motifs and sacrificial ideas stack up as a statement of the Messiah’s Israel-representing *faithfulness*? The answer seems to lie in Paul’s retrieval of certain themes available at the time in which the sacrificial overtones already there in the fourth servant song were being reused in connection

with martyrs whose deaths were thought to be in some sense redemptive.²⁰⁹ Paul's language does not directly echo any of those sources at this point, but his thought seems to run like this: (a) the saving plan for the world which the prophets had seen as Israel's vocation would always involve Israel (or righteous martyrs within Israel) becoming a kind of sacrifice through which not only Israel itself but also the whole world would be rescued from its sinful, rebellious state; (b) this was the sacrifice offered by Jesus, precisely in his capacity as Israel's representative Messiah. This was what it meant, in other words, for him to be 'faithful' to the gracious divine plan, the single plan that lay behind, and was expressed in, the promises to Abraham.

All this depends on the assumption that Paul held in his mind a holistic vision and understanding of the great scriptural books, especially Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and Isaiah, which stand behind, and come to fresh expression within, so much of his thinking. We can only begin to understand the finer points of what he says if we hold them in our minds, as great interlocking wholes, while we are reading him. Many ideas from these books were being expressed in new ways as loyal Jews faced new and dangerous situations in the centuries leading up to Paul's day. But when we put them together we can see at least the outline of a picture which appears to be the one he has in mind: a picture of what Israel's faithfulness, as the means of the 'redemption' in which the covenant faithfulness of the one God would be enacted, might look like. As I put it some years ago:

In Isaiah 40—55 we have a sustained exposition of the righteousness of God, focused more and more tightly on a suffering figure who represents Israel and fulfills YHWH's purpose of being a light to the nations and whose sufferings and death are finally seen in explicitly sacrificial terms. We have, that is, exactly that combination of elements that we have observed, and that are otherwise puzzling in exactly that combination, in Rom 3:21–26. In other words, the sacrificial language of 3:25, used in connection with the violent death of a righteous Jew at the hands of pagans, makes sense within the context of the current martyr stories; but those martyr stories themselves send us back, by various routes, to Isaiah 40—55; and when we get there we find just those themes that we find in Romans 3.²¹⁰

The perspective which all this opens up is the central viewpoint of the present book: *the redefinition, in and around Jesus the Messiah, of the*

Jewish doctrine of election, rooted in the covenant theology of Genesis and Deuteronomy and worked out through Jesus' saving death and resurrection.

This perspective is elaborated by Paul in Romans 3.27—4.25, which for the sake of completeness we must presently summarize. But this is the moment to make clear one of the central claims of this book, perhaps one of the most important in current debate. *The covenantal perspective on election, and its redefinition through Jesus the Messiah, provides the larger category within which 'juridical' and 'participationist' categories can be held together in proper Pauline relation.* The debate (in other words) which has rumbled on ever since the nineteenth century as to whether Paul was 'really' an 'incorporative' thinker who sometimes used 'juridical' language for particular purposes, or vice versa – or whether, as with some extreme proposals, one must choose one set of language and arguments and rule the other out altogether – can be, and must be, resolved by the introduction and exposition of a third, larger, more biblically rooted category. This category, like a massive mountain a mile away from the front door, dominates the view so entirely that many people, glancing out, never even notice it, focusing instead on one or other of the more obvious hills in the foreground. These turn out, in fact, to be spurs of the major mountain, perhaps even consisting of cooled lava left behind when the volcano erupted two thousand years ago.

My central proposal can then be seen to good effect in the way the argument of Romans 3 and 4 plays out. The 'boasting' which is eliminated by the gospel revelation of God's righteousness (3.27) is the 'boasting', not just of the Jewish claim to be morally upright and so not to need 'saving' (or at least not in the same way as gentiles), but rather of the Jewish claim to be the means through which God would rescue the world from its plight. Here again we see a solution-to-plight answer, though rooted as before in Paul's earlier perception of the 'plight', then radicalized through Jesus. Boasting is excluded, declares Paul, not by the *nomos ergōn*, 'the law of works', but *dia nomou pisteōs*, 'through the law of faith[fulness]'.

Paul is not saying, then, that the Jewish claim is ruled out by the Torah through which one might demarcate Israel as the people of God and so

remain for ever as God's servant people. He is saying that it is ruled out because the Messiah's faithfulness, in accomplishing the purpose for which this God called Israel in the first place, has established for all time the central category by which this people are to be marked out, and that category, that badge, is *pistis*. This is 'the Torah of faith': the 'Torah' (i.e. the 'covenant charter', the divinely given means of drawing the boundary around the people) which consists, not of those 'boundary markers' that separate Jews from gentiles (that is the early 'new perspective' insight of James Dunn, and though it has required some modification its basic point still stands²¹¹) but rather of that 'boundary marker' which, because it was the Messiah's own category, says, 'Here are the Messiah's people.' 'For we reckon that a person is justified by *pistis* apart from works of Torah' (3.28): in other words, one is reckoned to be within the justified people, those whom this God has declared 'righteous', 'forgiven', 'members of the covenant', on the basis of *pistis* and that alone. That – the Messiah's faithfulness, in which his people share through their own *pistis* as in (my reading of) 3.26, and also in 4.24–5 – is the basic sign of membership.

If this were not so (3.29 has long been a key point within a broadly 'new perspective' reading) then the one God would appear to be the God of the Jews only, rather than of the gentiles as well. If keeping 'works of Torah' was what counted for ultimate covenant membership, only Jews, the people who possessed Torah, would have been able to belong. But how could that be? By Paul's own account, let alone that of Genesis or Isaiah, the point of an elect people in the first place was so that through them the one God would bless the whole world. Here Paul returns to the most foundational confession of Jewish faith, the *Shema*: since God is one, he is God of gentiles as well as Jews. Monotheism undergirds not only election, but also the christologically redefined election: this God will justify circumcision on the basis of *pistis*, and uncircumcision through *pistis*. Same badge, different route: Jews, already covenant members, need to be freshly ratified, while gentiles, coming in from outside, need to make their entrance.²¹²

This, Paul proposes, is what Torah was about all along. Of course, from the perspective of Saul of Tarsus, and of those who were still in the position

he had once been in, it would have looked as if this whole line of thought overthrew Torah. The claim in Romans 3.31 ('Do we then abolish the law through faith? Certainly not! Rather, we establish the law') is therefore much more than a way of saying, 'I will now proceed to prove my point by some exposition of Genesis.'²¹³ It is a way of saying, as Paul will say again much more fully in chapters 8 and 10, that the faithful death of the Messiah, unveiling as it does the faithful covenant justice of the one God, picks up and fulfils the major themes of the Pentateuch itself, and more. It reads the Pentateuch as unfulfilled prophecy (see chapter 2 above, and chapter 11 below), and says: this is where the story was going all along.

And so back to Abraham.²¹⁴ More than an example of faith, more than an example of justification by faith, Abraham was the one to whom had been made those world-resonating promises, back in Genesis 12, 15, 17 and 22. Paul quotes from Genesis 12 in Galatians 3, and Genesis 22 in Romans 8; here he concentrates on Genesis 15 and 17, which not insignificantly are the main *covenant* chapters. Not to see this is to miss the whole line of thought. Paul has announced that God has in the Messiah unveiled his covenant faithfulness; now he goes back to the covenant itself to prove the point.

Romans 4, in fact, contains one of the key verses that gives the lie to those who say that the *dikaiosynē* language ought not to be interpreted in 'covenantal' terms. In Genesis 17.11, Abraham received circumcision 'as a sign of the covenant', *en sēmiō diathēkēs*. Paul, referring to this passage, speaks of Abraham receiving circumcision 'as a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith', *tēs dikaiosynēs tēs pisteōs*, which he had while still uncircumcised. The covenant had already been established in chapter 15; that was when God had made the promise of countless 'seed', Abraham had believed this promise and God had 'reckoned it to him as righteousness' (Genesis 15.6). Now we see that Paul understands that word 'righteousness' as a way of referring to the status Abraham had in the covenant which God had made with him: in other words, Paul is understanding Genesis 15.6 as a way of introducing the rest of Genesis 15, which describes the making of the covenant and the promise about the Exodus.²¹⁵

That then helps us to see what is going on in the opening paragraph of Romans 4. I still hold firmly to the (revised version of) Richard Hays's brilliant suggestion for the translation of verse 1: 'Have we found Abraham to be our ancestor in a human, fleshly sense?'²¹⁶ The question faced here is: granted the covenant, who then are Abraham's children? The question of Romans 4 is not, 'How can we be justified by faith and have our sins forgiven?' (though forgiveness of sins is an important sub-theme, as in verses 7 and 8). The main question is, 'Who are the children of Abraham? If we have become covenant members, might that mean we have to join Abraham's physical family?' – the question, in other words, of Galatians. Paul demonstrates, point by point, that Abraham's family was always intended to be a worldwide, jew-plus-gentile family, and that this worldwide family is what the covenant God has accomplished through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, giving them the same badge that Abraham himself had, namely *pistis*, and 'faith' of a particular sort: faith in the creator God, the life-giving God (4.17–25).

This reading of the chapter integrates the otherwise difficult verse 4.16–17:

¹⁶That's why it's 'by faith': so that it can be in accordance with grace, and so that the promise can thereby be validated for the entire family – not simply those who are from the law, but those who share the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all, ¹⁷just as the Bible says, 'I have made you the father of many nations.' This happened in the presence of the God in whom he believed, the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist.

This is pretty much the heart of Paul's answer to the opening question (not a parenthesis, as in some translations and commentaries).²¹⁷ The promise must be valid 'for all the family', *panti tō spermāti*, literally 'all the seed'.

What then about the very specific, and often-repeated, promise about the land? It has been universalized. 'The promise to Abraham and his seed *that he would inherit the world*', says Paul in verse 13. Inherit the world? That evokes the royal promise of Psalm 2; but other Jewish texts had already applied it to Abraham, had already seen that the Abrahamic promise, because it concerned the reversal of Genesis 3 and 11, must envisage not

simply one small strip of territory but actually the entire world, of which Abraham's God was after all the creator.²¹⁸

The combination of limitless 'seed' on the one hand and limitless land on the other – that is the 'reward' which God promised Abraham. As an aside, but an interesting one: the mention of 'reward' in 4.4, and the consequent brief discussion about earning or not earning 'rewards' in verse 5, has sometimes been taken as a sign that the chapter is, after all, 'really' about the question of 'justification by faith' in the old sense of 'Do I have to earn my salvation, or is it a free gift?' This misses the point. In Genesis 15, the chapter which Paul is discussing throughout Romans 4, God begins by declaring to Abraham that 'his reward (*misthos*) will be very great.' Abraham, puzzled, asks God what this can mean, since he has no heir. God, in reply, promises him 'seed' as numerous as the stars in the sky, and the whole land of Canaan. That is the 'reward'. Paul, picking up this language from the chapter which is solidly in his head, allows a side-metaphor to develop out of it, which by coincidence happens to overlap with one way of expounding an 'old perspective' view of justification. But that 'old perspective' reading can safely be set aside in favour of Paul's Genesis-based covenantal reading – which, to repeat, includes 'forgiveness' within it, precisely because the covenant was always there in the first place to deal with the sin of Adam, but which does not need to go very far into the fine points of 'earning' as against 'receiving gifts' because, though those questions were indeed of interest to some Jews in the period (and to far more Europeans in the late middle ages), they were certainly not Paul's primary concern.²¹⁹

The redefinition of election around Jesus the Messiah, then, comes to one of its primary focal points in Romans 3.21—4.25, and never more so than when Paul draws the whole of Romans 1—4 into a single closing statement:

²³But it wasn't written for him alone that 'it was calculated to him'. ²⁴It was written for us as well! It will be calculated to us, too, since we believe in the one who raised from the dead Jesus our lord, ²⁵who was handed over because of our trespasses and raised because of our justification.²²⁰

The echoes of Isaiah 53 in this last formulaic statement give us a clue as to what Paul has in mind. The faith of Jesus' followers is always at least, for him, the faith that God raised Jesus from the dead (10.9), here expressed as faith *in* 'the one who raised from the dead Jesus our lord'. Abraham's faith in God the creator, the life-giver, is thus well re-expressed in terms of Christian faith in the raising-Jesus God. Same God, same faith, same justification. But this is no mere parallel, no mere wearing of the same badge. This is about the fulfilment of a two-millennia-old promise, the unveiling of the faithful covenant justice of the God who told Abraham he would give him an Adam-rescuing family, and who has now done exactly that. This is the point at which we finally see, after the dense statement of 3.24–6, how the *dikaiosynē theou* is revealed in the death and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah. This is the theme that draws together the normally divided strands of Paul's soteriology. This is how Paul has reworked, around Jesus the Messiah of Israel, the ancient doctrine of Israel's election. This, he was saying, is how the Messiah's faithfulness revealed, in action, the faithfulness of God.

[\(iii\) Jesus the Faithful Messiah and the Problem of Torah: Galatians 2—4](#)

[\(a\) Introduction](#)

It would be possible, and indeed exciting, to go straight on from the point we have now reached and look at least at Romans 5—8. Part of the overall argument of this book, as I hinted a few pages ago, is that this covenantal perspective, the redefinition of 'election' through the Messiah and the spirit, provides a viewpoint from which the now traditional standoff between 'juridical' categories (Romans 1—4, supposedly) and 'participationist' categories (Romans 5—8, supposedly) can be resolved in a deeply satisfying way, taking full account of the theme which so much exegesis on those lines has ignored, namely the Jewish *covenantal* theme which Paul, like so many of his contemporaries, traced back to Abraham, and interpreted through the lens of Exodus, Deuteronomy, the Psalms and not

least Isaiah. But a little delayed gratification will not go amiss at this point. We must turn aside to see another smouldering bush: in this case, the one called Galatians 2—4.

Here, in fact, all the ‘categories’ of modern analysis are cheerfully jumbled up. If all we had was Galatians rather than Romans, it is unlikely that anyone would have thought to separate out ‘juridical’ images from ‘participationist’ or ‘anthropological’, or for that matter ‘salvation historical’, or ‘apocalyptic’, or ‘covenantal’, or ‘transformative’ in the way they are now routinely handled.²²¹ Here these elements all belong together, not in a muddle (as though seven blindfolded cooks were all trying to add their favourite ingredients to a stew), but in a co-ordinated and coherent line of thought. The same is in fact true in Romans, though the point there is more subtle and will need to be set out later on.

Another advantage in moving to Galatians at this point is that it will enable us to discuss more directly the question of Torah in relation to Paul’s soteriology. This is bound to be central to any account of his redefined view of election, since Torah is of course one of the central elements in the original belief, so that any redefinition must show what has happened to it; and the question of ‘Paul and the law’ has of course been one of the most contentious in the multiple debates for which I hope this chapter, and this book, will provide a fresh angle of vision.²²² As I made clear in chapter 7, I believe that most attempts to address the question of Paul’s view of the Jewish law have failed to connect with the reality of his thought (often, then, accusing him of muddle or worse) because they have failed to see the various interlocking narratives which comprise the structure of his worldview, and the way in which the narrative of Torah belongs within them.

As we turn to Galatians 2—4, we meet the familiar dilemma. It would be possible, and enticing, to write a full commentary on these wonderful, challenging chapters. Those who have studied them intensively will be frustrated by the necessary brevity of what follows. I shall concentrate on the points necessary for the argument, advancing my present case about the way in which Israel’s theology of election is redefined around the Messiah,

and the way in which, within that, Paul deals with the problem of the Jewish law.

[\(b\) Galatians 2.15–21](#)

If I were going to pick one passage to make my present point about the Torah, it might well be Galatians 2.15–21. This is all about redefinition, the radical redefinition that can only be captured in the dramatic picture of someone dying and coming up a new person:

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. ²⁰I am, however, alive – but it isn't me any longer, it's the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²²³

Paul is not here recounting his own 'religious experience' for the sake of it. He is telling the story of what has happened to Israel, the elect people of God – and he is using the rhetorical form of quasi-autobiography, because he will not tell this story in the third person, as though it were someone else's story, as though he could look on from a distance (or from a height!) and merely describe it with a detached objectivity. It matters of course that this was indeed his own story. No doubt the experience Paul had on the Damascus Road and in the few days immediately afterwards may well have *felt* as though he was dying and being reborn. But what we have here is not the transcript of 'experience', as though he was appealing to that (curiously modern) category for some kind of validation. Peter had 'experience' as well; so did Barnabas; so, not least, did James and the people who had come from him in Jerusalem. So, of course, did the Galatians. By itself, 'experience' proves nothing. 'Yes, Paul', they could have said; 'That's what happened to you, but for us it was different.' No: what mattered, for Paul, was the Messiah, and the meaning of his death and resurrection in relation to the category of the elect people of God. ²²⁴

In case anyone who has read thus far happens not to know what Galatians 2 is all about, we had better provide a brief explanation. Paul, writing to

churches in what is now central Turkey (the precise location is not our present concern), is alarmed because word has reached him that his ex-pagan converts have been told, by people scholars have variously called ‘agitators’, ‘teachers’, ‘missionaries’ or even ‘circumcisers’, but whom almost all assume to be Jewish, that the gospel Paul had preached was deficient. Paul’s gospel message had got the Galatians to believe in Jesus, but had not brought them properly and fully into the covenant family.²²⁵ They needed to belong to Abraham’s people, which meant, in accordance with Genesis 17 and the massive weight of subsequent scripture and tradition, that the males among them should be circumcised, and (it seems, though this is not so central) that they should accept other Jewish customs as well. Paul’s authority and credibility have been impugned. His Galatian converts are, it seems, on the point of following the advice they are now getting and becoming full members of the Jewish community, by the males being circumcised.²²⁶

Paul’s strategy in response opens with the scene-setting in the first two chapters, where Paul for various reasons describes his own life and ministry, especially in relation to the Jerusalem apostles. A kind of transition then occurs in 2.11–21, since this account of his meeting with Peter, and his summary of what was said on that occasion, are laid out in such a way as to raise very sharply the central issues which are then discussed in chapters 3 and 4, and applied in chapters 5 and 6. All this can be said irrespective of any analyses of the letter in formal rhetorical terms, helpful though that has been as well.²²⁷

In setting the scene, Paul emphatically declares both his independence from the Jerusalem apostles and the fact that, when they did meet, they agreed on the substance of the gospel and divided their areas of work.²²⁸ But then comes the key point: something happened at Antioch, Paul’s base, which focused attention on what he sees as basically the same issue that is now facing the Galatians. By giving a brief description of what happened, of the line he took in the sharp disagreement with Peter and of the theological rationale behind his position, he hopes both to set the record straight about the Antioch incident itself and to set the stage for the full-

dress argument he is about to present. The strategy is as effective today as it was then. By paying close attention to Galatians 2.11–21 we see the challenge he is facing in the whole letter, and the theology with which he is addressing it. (The further question, as to whether Paul lost the argument with Peter and if so what happened next, would take us too far afield.²²⁹)

The issue at stake in Antioch consisted, quite simply, in the question: were Jewish Messiah-believers allowed to sit and eat at the same table as non-Jewish Messiah-believers?²³⁰ Paul's reconstruction of what happened goes in four stages.

First, the church in Antioch had been used to eating all together. They had made no distinction among Messiah-believers on the basis of their ethnic origin. We may assume, from the sequel, that this was a fairly radical move for Jews who had previously held to some form of the taboo which required them to eat separately from gentiles.²³¹

Second, Peter comes to Antioch and is happy to join in with the practice that has thus become established. Paul appears to regard this as in line with their earlier agreement.

Third, 'certain people come from James', in other words, from Jerusalem. Paul is careful not to say 'James sent certain people', leaving open the question of whether they represented James's actual views. When they arrive, Peter changes his policy – whether because of something they say, or simply because Peter knows what they may think, or imagines what James might well say – and 'separates himself, being afraid of the circumcision people' (2.12).

Fourth, the rest of the Judaeans present (except Paul himself, we understand!), go along with Peter: Paul's word for this is 'co-hypocrites', fellow play-actors (2.13). A note of sorrow enters: 'even Barnabas', who had shared Paul's early missionary work and (according to Acts) had been of great help to him at a difficult time, went along with Peter and the others.²³²

It is important to be fully clear on what the issues were. This was not a matter, as some have absurdly suggested, of people 'learning table manners'.²³³ The question was as central as anything could be: is the

community of Messiah-believers one body or two? Which is the more important division: that between Jews and non-Jews (because Messiah-believing Jews would still be able to eat with non-Messiah-believing Jews), or that between those who believed and those who did not? Was Messiah-faith simply a subset of Judaism, leaving the basic structure untouched, or did it change everything?

One thing was clear to Paul: if the community of Messiah-believers was a two-tier body, this meant that pressure was being put on the gentile believers to convert to Judaism. Whether or not anyone was actually saying this, the fact of table-separation made it clear: there is an inner group and an outer group. Again, we do not know if people were telling the gentile believers that they needed to belong to the inner group (the fully-Jewish group) in order to be ‘saved’; the word ‘salvation’ and its cognates does not occur in Galatians, remarkably enough, and we should be wary of importing it.²³⁴ (Far too many discussions of ‘justification’, which is a central and vital topic in Galatians, assume that ‘salvation’ is more or less the same thing, which for Paul it certainly is not.) More likely, I think, they were left to understand that there was indeed an inner circle of membership in this body, and that it would be very desirable for them to join it; and that this meant becoming fully fledged Jews in the manner of proselytes. The first thing Paul tells us he said to Peter implied this: by doing what he was doing, he was ‘forcing the gentiles to judaize’, in other words, to become Jews. Peter might have responded that he was doing no such thing, but Paul’s point was that Peter was putting the gentile believers in a position where they effectively had no choice.

Paul’s initial counter-argument to Peter’s action is to point up its inconsistency. Peter has been acting in one way, and what he is doing now is going in the opposite direction. (Hence the charge of ‘hypocrisy’.) Up to now, Peter, a Jew, has been ‘living like a gentile’ rather than a Jew (2.14). What does that mean? That Peter had been worshipping idols, attending pagan temples, engaging in drunken orgies? Presumably not. It meant that, up to that point, Peter had been ignoring the normal Jewish taboo according to which Jews and gentiles would not eat together. He was therefore cutting

clean through one major boundary marker in the Jewish way of life. But now he is turning the tables. He is putting apparent moral pressure on the gentile Messiah-believers to 'live like Jews', in other words, to join the company of Torah-keeping Abraham-children, the elect people of God.

And Paul's response to that is: *election has been redefined around the Messiah*. Here is the paradox: the Messiah means what he means precisely within the world of Judaism and its categories, not least its scriptural traditions. Paul is not talking (as some have tried to suggest) about a 'Christian Messiah' as opposed to the 'Jewish Messiah'.²³⁵ No such distinction existed: the point is that he believes Jesus to be Israel's Messiah, and believes in consequence that 'Israel', the elect people, consists of those who (in some sense or other; that is the problem) belong to him. But when it comes to the scriptural traditions within which 'Messiah' means what it means, we meet the irony: one of the greatest scriptural traditions, seen not least in the Prophets, was the tradition of radical *critique from within*, a critique that from Deuteronomy onwards was quite prepared to say that God would remould his elect people, would fulfil his purposes for them, and through them, in surprising and disturbing ways.

Paul was fully aware of those traditions, as well as of the shocking nature of what he was saying. He had, after all, been a more hardline Pharisaic Jew than Peter, Barnabas or even, we assume, James. And he now declares that the prophetic witness has come true. God has indeed redefined his elect people; and he has done so around Israel's Messiah. The 'elect', in other words, consist primarily of the Messiah himself, and secondarily of all those who belong to him. *All*: there is the rub. If you were a first-century Jew, and had come to believe that Jesus was indeed Israel's Messiah, it would be hard to quarrel with the statement that Israel had been redefined around him. But if your worldview was still anchored to the symbols that kept Israel apart from the nations, you would want to quarrel about what 'all' might mean, and how this new body would be marked out.

Paul would be up for the quarrel. He knew the moves. The opening statement says it all:

¹⁵We are Jews by birth, not ‘gentile sinners’. ¹⁶But we know that a person is not declared ‘righteous’ by works of the Jewish law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. [236](#)

At a stroke, Paul has told us what it means to be ‘declared righteous’. It means to have God himself acknowledge that you are a member of ‘Israel’, a ‘Jew’, one of the ‘covenant family’: the ‘righteous’ in that sense. Yes, ‘righteous’ means all sorts of other things as well. But unless it means at least that, and centrally, then verse 16 is a massive non sequitur. ‘We are Jews by birth, not “gentile sinners” ’; to say that, in the setting of a dispute about who you can eat with, and in the context of a statement about people ‘living as Jews’ and ‘living as gentiles’ where what they have been doing is eating together (or not), leaves no elbow room for the phrase ‘declared righteous’ to mean anything else at its primary level. *The whole sentence, in its context, indicates that the question about two ways of ‘being declared righteous’ must be a question about which community, which table-fellowship, you belong to.* Do you, along with your allegiance to Jesus as Messiah, belong to a table-fellowship that is based on the Jewish Torah? If you do, says Paul, you are forgetting your basic identity. What matters is not now Torah, but Messiah. *Justification is all about being declared to be a member of God’s people; and this people is defined in relation to the Messiah himself.*

In particular, what matters is the saving death by which the Messiah fulfilled God’s covenant purpose for his elect people. The terms are set: either Torah, or the Messiah and his faithfulness: and his ‘faithfulness’ here, as becomes clear in 2.20, denotes his faithful, loving, self-giving to death (see below). The Messiah is not, as it were, simply a fixed point around which the people must regroup. The manner of the Messiah’s fulfilment of his task, i.e. his death and resurrection, must form the central characteristic of his people. The cross and resurrection thus provide the fresh shaping of election. If Jesus is indeed Israel’s Messiah, then ‘Israel’ will now be formed according to the pattern of his death and resurrection. That is the point towards which this whole paragraph is working.

The phrase about ‘the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah’ in verse 16a could of course be translated ‘faith in Jesus the Messiah’. I regard the line of thought in Romans 2.17–20, 3.1–4 and 3.22, discussed above, as constituting a strong *prima facie* case for taking it as ‘the Messiah’s faithfulness’, but it is true that the phrase as it stands in its present context could go either way. Some will say that the next line (2.16b) ought to push the interpretation in the direction of ‘our faith in Jesus the Messiah’, since Paul goes on to say, ‘That is why we too believed in the Messiah, Jesus.’²³⁷ But that does not seem to me to end the argument. If I am right about ‘the Messiah’s faithfulness’ in Romans 3, the phrase does not indicate the personal religious affective state of Jesus, but *his faithfulness unto death*. It was a way of *denoting* his saving death and *connoting* the fact that in giving himself up to death he did so as the supreme act of Israel’s covenant faithfulness. This was how the age-old divine saving plan had to be carried out.²³⁸

The emphasis at the end of Galatians 2 on the death of Jesus and its meaning can then be seen as making a loop with this earlier statement. The crucifixion of the Messiah (2.19); his loving self-giving on behalf of his people (2.20); his death, which cannot have been ‘for nothing’ (2.21) – all these connect up with his ‘faithfulness’, stated twice in 2.16 as the means of his people’s ‘justification’. In 2.19 we see what ‘the Messiah’s faithfulness’ actually means: when Paul says ‘I live within the faithfulness of the son of God,’ he explains this at once by adding ‘who loved me and gave himself for me’. This triple statement in verses 19–21 is explicitly set over against ‘the law’, providing exactly the same antithesis which we find in verse 16 (‘a person is not declared “righteous” by works of the Jewish law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah’).²³⁹

Here is the antithesis, stated twice in verses 19–20 and 21:

I died to the law

I live within ‘the faithfulness of the Messiah’
who loved me and gave himself for me

if ‘righteousness’ is through the law

then the Messiah died for nothing

in parallel with, and completing the thought of, verse 16:

one is not 'righteous' by works of the law but through the Messiah's faithfulness

not on the basis of works of the law we might be declared 'righteous'
on the basis of the Messiah's faithfulness

I conclude, in other words, that there are six things are going on here.

First, Paul understands the saving death of the Messiah in terms of his loving self-giving, construed as his great act of covenant faithfulness to Israel's God.²⁴⁰

Second, he understands this action as drawing to its divinely ordained focal point the entire story of the election of Israel (that is why he can say 'the grace of God' in verse 21, as a further way of referring to what has happened on the cross), and *redefining* it around the Messiah, who has at last offered to the covenant God the 'faithfulness' of Israel.

Third, Paul understands that redefinition as the outworking of the Messiah's death and resurrection. The boundaries of Israel are not merely slackened or tightened, a few key adjustments here and there; they are radically redrawn. *The boundaries of God's people now consist of the Messiah and his death and resurrection*, and as a result Israel itself – here referred to by Paul with this deeply poignant autobiographical 'I' – has been put to death and raised to new life. This, we should note in relation to wider debates, has nothing whatever to do with the replacement of Israel by something else (as in the so-called 'apocalyptic' interpretation) but everything to do with the fulfilment of the divine purpose for Israel in and through Israel's own representative Messiah.

Fourth, Paul refers here movingly to his own journey of death and new life, not for its own sake but in order to explain that this is true of all who belong to the Messiah. He now shares, participates, finds himself caught up in, the Messiah's death and resurrection: he is 'crucified with the Messiah', and he now 'lives within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'. This 'participation' in the Messiah is the heart of the passage. It is, I suggest, the *basis for* the status of 'righteousness', and

for the act of ‘justifying’ by which God creates that status.²⁴¹ I do not think, however, that ‘being in Messiah’ and ‘being justified’ are the same thing, as we shall see later.

Fifth, in 2.20a Paul adds a subtly different note. I am, he says, alive, ‘but it isn’t me any longer, it’s the Messiah who lives in me’. This indwelling of the Messiah himself in the believer is reflected in other passages such as Romans 8.9–11, where there is a fluidity between the indwelling Messiah and the spirit (also called ‘the spirit of the Messiah’ and ‘the spirit of the one who raised the Messiah from the dead’). It also anticipates the notion of ‘the Messiah being formed in you’ in 4.19. This, again, is not the same thing as Paul being ‘in the Messiah’; nor, I think, is it the same as ‘being justified’. It is part of the total complex of soteriology, the separate but interwoven strands of which we shall lay out more fully in due course.

Sixth, to the question of ‘How can you tell who belongs to this family?’ Paul has the appropriate answer: if the family is redefined by the Messiah’s *pistis*, then those who themselves have *pistis* are clearly the members of this family. The declaration that this is so, and that the community is defined in this way and no other, is what Paul means by ‘justification’. The basis of that new reality – to repeat – is the Messiah’s death and resurrection as the strange fulfilment of Israel’s vocation and destiny, and the believer’s participation in that death and resurrection.

The two verses in between the opening (2.16) and dramatic closing (2.19–21) of this sequence spell out the consequences in terms of the debate both in Antioch and, by implication, in Galatia.

First (2.17), it might appear that Paul is saying that the Messiah, in forcing loyal Jews to sit and eat with ‘gentile sinners’, is compelling them to become ‘sinners’ themselves. This is similar (not identical) to the charge we met in Romans 3.7–8, and receives similarly short shrift. The Messiah is not an agent of ‘sin’. There must be some other explanation for what is going on.

Second, crucially (2.18), what Peter was doing in Antioch was ‘to build up again the things he tore down’, in other words, to reconstruct the wall of separation between Jewish Christians and gentile Christians. (It is clear, in

other words, that Paul is still thinking of the very specific situation in Antioch and its theological meaning.²⁴²) But if Peter rebuilds the wall that consists, more or less, of Torah and its rules about *amixia*, not associating with gentiles, then the Torah itself will accuse him – of breaking it. ‘I demonstrate that I am a transgressor’, *parabatēn emauton synistanō*: a ‘transgressor’, that is, a breaker of the law, not merely a ‘sinner’ which would be true of pagans as well. The choice Peter faces is clear: either become a ‘sinner’ by eating with gentile Christians, or become a ‘transgressor’ by rebuilding the accusing Torah!²⁴³ But once you grasp the reality of the Messiah’s achievement, then you realize that the community, the elect people, have been redefined by their own Messiah, and by his death and resurrection. The wider fellowship of all those who belong to the Messiah is then not simply a company of ‘sinners’, but of ‘forgiven sinners’. ‘He loved me and gave himself for me’, constituting his people as a people that had died to sin and risen into a new life, his own new life.

That is how the doctrine of election is reconfigured around the Messiah. In a single paragraph, in what was quite possibly his earliest letter, Paul has sketched in outline one of the most dramatic and wide-ranging doctrinal reformulations in the history of Christian thought. It ranks with the redefinition of monotheism in 1 Corinthians 8.6, and has proved equally hard for modern thought to take in. But we should note that this reformulation, like that one, has nothing of dry, abstract dogma about it. Monotheism was about *loving* the creator God, and Paul’s redefinition focused on that as well. Election is about the people *loved by* this God, and specifically by his ‘son’. For Paul that is central to the redefinition too: ‘the son of God loved me and gave himself for me’. Indeed, that mention of ‘love’ ought to have told us, with its echoes of Deuteronomy and elsewhere, that this was all about the divine purpose in election.²⁴⁴ The ancient Jewish doctrine (the covenant God loving and choosing his people) is being dramatically reaffirmed even as it is being dramatically transformed. Because Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, his fate must be seen as the realization and fulfilment of Israel’s destiny and hope. Because he is the *crucified* Messiah, that realization and fulfilment must involve a transformation for

which the only image that will do is dying and rising again. The death of the old identity and the birth of the new one: no wonder Paul knew that ‘the crucified Messiah’ was a ‘scandal’ to his fellow Jews.²⁴⁵ It remains so. Unless we grasp this point, however, we have failed to see the very heart of his thought.

(c) Galatians 3.1—4.11

(α) Introduction

The central argument of the letter to the Galatians (3.1—4.11) is all about the redefinition of ‘election’ around Jesus the Messiah, the topic of our present chapter. We must therefore now examine this section of Galatians as a whole and in some of its parts in particular. Once again, I take as axiomatic (what most commentators have decided to ignore) that when Paul writes *Christos* he intends to *denote* Jesus and to *connote* his status as Israel’s Messiah, the one in whom the destiny and purpose of Israel is fulfilled.²⁴⁶

When we try to gain a perspective on the section as a whole, one of the most noticeable things is the way in which Abraham frames the argument of chapter 3. After the opening challenge (3.1–5), Abraham is introduced, with quotations from Genesis chapters 15, 12 and 18 in quick succession.²⁴⁷ As with Romans 4, Paul seems intent on expounding the meaning of the Abraham story, and on doing so with three things particularly in mind. First, he knows that Genesis 15 is the *covenant* chapter: this is where God establishes his covenant, including the promise about the redeeming event of the exodus. Second, he insists that Abraham was promised a worldwide family: God said that he would bless all the nations ‘in Abraham’.²⁴⁸ Third, he draws particular attention to the fact that the characteristic of this worldwide family, if its members are to be true to their founding charter, is *pistis*: Abraham believed God ... so ‘the people of faith are blessed along with faithful Abraham.’²⁴⁹

That is the opening of the argument, and the closing is similar. Ten verses pass in the latter half of the chapter (3.19–28) without mention of the patriarch, but when we get to the end (3.29) it is clear that he – or rather, his family – has been the subject all along:

²⁷You see, every one of you who has been baptized into the Messiah has put on the Messiah.

²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no ‘male and female’; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus. ²⁹And, if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham’s family (*sperma*, ‘seed’). You stand to inherit the promise (*kat’ epangelian klēronomoi*, ‘heirs according to promise’).²⁵⁰

The question of the whole chapter, then, must be understood as follows: who exactly constitutes the children, the ‘seed’ (*sperma*), of Abraham? The opening of the main argument (3.6–9) declares that the ‘family’ is the *covenant* family, the *worldwide* family of many nations and the family of faith. The closing declares that the ‘family’, the *sperma*, consists of those who belong to the Messiah, who constitute the single family (‘all one’) in him, with no distinctions of ethnic origin, social status or even gender. If that were all that the chapter consisted of, it would be fairly easy to see the point, and to grasp the way in which this statement of election-redefined-around-the-Messiah functioned in relation to 2.15–21, with reference both to the Antioch incident and to the situation in Galatia.

But Paul of course needs to say more. Specifically, within this framework, he needs to say more about the Torah, because it is Torah, the Jewish law, which the ex-pagan converts in Galatia are being encouraged to embrace. This is where our own exposition of the redefinition of election around the Messiah needs to get its teeth into this most chewy of Pauline problems, which has given generations of exegetes indigestion as they have tried to swallow it whole as part of the wrong sort of theological diet.

Paul needs to warn the Galatians of what would be involved were they to embrace Torah. That is what they would be doing if they got circumcised. They may not realize all that such an action would mean, and Paul urgently needs to explain it to them.²⁵¹ His argument takes four stages.

First, he shows that the Torah initially threatened to block the promises to Abraham altogether. The Messiah's death, however, has taken care of that problem (3.10–14).

Second, he insists that the promise to Abraham continues to take precedence over Torah. Just as a will, once made, takes precedence over subsequent alterations, so the initial Abrahamic covenant cannot be affected by the much later addition of the Torah (3.15–18). It is significant that the word for 'will' is *diathēkē*, 'covenant': since Paul is referring to Genesis 15 in this chapter, it is natural to hear that overtone as well. [252](#)

Third, Paul needs to explain the *purpose* of Torah. This purpose was important, God-given, *but essentially negative*. Torah was never, in fact, intended by God to be the means through which the Abrahamic promise would be accomplished (3.19–22). It had a different, equally God-given purpose.

Fourth, and leading up to the final statement about Abraham's single family, Paul must explain how the Torah then relates to what the covenant God has done in the Messiah (3.23–9).

This then opens the way for a different approach to the same questions in 4.1–11, to which we shall come presently.

Paul's overall point, throughout Galatians 3 and 4, is *narrative*, as we saw in chapter 6. Once you understand how the story works, the great covenant story from Abraham to the Messiah, you can see (a) that the Torah was a necessary, God-given thing, with its own proper role within that story, and (b) that the God-given role of Torah has now come to a proper and honourable end – not that there was anything 'wrong' with it, but that it was never designed to be permanent. The latter is what Paul specially needs to stress, but the former point is vital (despite the long and loud chorus of dualistic readers) to avoid any slide towards Marcionism. Granted (b), any attempt to go back to Torah would be an attempt to turn back the divine clock, to sneak back to an earlier act in the play – and thereby to deny that the Messiah had come, that he had completed the divine purpose, that in him the Abrahamic promises had now been fulfilled. It is the same choice that faced Peter: either belong to the redefined elect family, the people of

Abraham, or rebuild the walls of Torah around an essentially Jewish ethnic family – which would imply that the Messiah would not have needed to die (2.21).

Galatians 3 is not, then, an argument hinging on the theological contrast between ‘grace’ and ‘law’, or even the psychological contrast between the struggle to please a legalistic God and the delight of basking in the undeserved pleasure of a gracious one. Those contrasts are indeed present as resonances, and later theologians were not wrong to draw out such implications. But the point at which those extra meanings took over and became central, displacing the actual argument Paul was mounting, was the point at which the exegetes ceased to listen to him and began to listen instead to the echo of their own voices bouncing off parts of his text. What is lost thereby is not inconsequential: the sense of Paul’s concern for the *single family*, in radical, Messiah-based continuity with the people of ancient Abraham and also in radical, crucified-Messiah-based discontinuity with the people formed by Torah. That loss has infected much of the Christian world over many centuries, with dark effects of various kinds, particularly as a concern to stress the appropriate discontinuity has been transformed into an eagerness to deny the appropriate continuity. As historical exegetes, of course, it is not up to us to dictate to Paul what he ought to have said, or indeed to worry about the long-term effects either of understanding him or misunderstanding him, but to track as best we can what he said in fact. And here, in Galatians 3, the point about Torah is not that it engenders or fosters ‘legalism’, as the ‘wrong’ sort of religion (pulling yourself up by your moral bootstraps), but that Torah belongs in a period of history which the Messiah’s faithful death and resurrection have now brought to its appointed goal. To go back to Torah, as the Galatians would do were they to get circumcised, would be like someone who is driving freely down a road going back deliberately to the place where there was a blockage and a consequent traffic jam (3.10–14); like someone refusing a rightful inheritance because a third party had tampered with the will (3.15–18); like an adult going back into the care of a babysitter (3.23–8). We take each in turn.

[\(β\) Galatians 3.10–14](#)

First, the traffic jam. Verses 10–14 are notoriously difficult, but as with the chapter as a whole, so with the parts: look at the opening and closing, discern what Paul at least seems to think he is saying, and see how the middle bit works out.²⁵³ Paul has just said that Abraham is to have a worldwide covenant family, characterized by *pistis* (3.6–9). That is what he says the covenant God has achieved through the Messiah's death: the statement of that event in verse 13 is followed by what appears to be the triumphant conclusion, that 'the blessing of Abraham' (which presumably means 'the blessing God promised to and through Abraham') might come upon the gentiles in the Messiah, Jesus, and that 'we' – which in context must mean 'we Jews', not included in the previous clause – might receive the promise of the spirit, through faith. As in some other passages, this differentiation between gentile believers and Jewish believers is not a differentiation between two different families. Nor is it saying that gentile believers and they alone receive the blessing of Abraham, or that Jewish believers, and they alone, receive the promised spirit. Paul is differentiating between the two different routes by which these two groups came *into* the one, single family: gentiles were brought in from the outside; Jews, already in a sense within the covenant, were renewed as such by the gift of the spirit, whose first evidence is faith. And he is thereby highlighting the things each group particularly needed: gentiles, to inherit the Abrahamic blessing; Jews, to be renewed in covenant membership.²⁵⁴

So the Messiah's death enables the promise to Abraham to be fulfilled: gentiles brought in, Jews renewed. Why was this necessary? Because Torah had stood in the way, causing the traffic jam which prevented 'the blessing of Abraham' flowing smoothly forward from him to this promised worldwide family.²⁵⁵ When the covenant God gave Torah to Abraham's descendants on Mount Sinai, Paul is saying, it did indeed promise life, but it also warned of the divine curse on all who did not obey. Abraham's descendants were the ones through whom the divine promises were

supposed to be flowing to the nations; but now they themselves were under the curse.

Here we are at more or less the same point as in Romans 3.2, only with the difference that Paul has brought Torah into the equation as well. The curses of Deuteronomy, as we saw in chapter 2, were widely regarded in second-Temple Judaism not as a vague warning that from time to time people might disobey and be ‘cursed’, but as a linear, historical prophecy of what was going to happen to Israel, and hence – because it *had* happened, and everybody knew it – as a prophecy whose results were still all around. Israel was under the Deuteronomic curse; yes, some might suppose that the curse had now been lifted through the rebuilt Temple (Ben-Sirach might have said that), or through the work of the Maccabees (many thought that to begin with, but enthusiasm waned), or through the covenant renewal of the ‘Teacher of Righteousness’ (though Qumran understood eschatology as being at most inaugurated, not yet fully realized). Most would have accepted that the curses threatened in the later chapters of Deuteronomy were not yet lifted. Both Philo and Josephus see those closing chapters as constituting a prophecy still looking for fulfilment. To put it more positively, the era of new-covenant blessing promised in Deuteronomy 30 had not yet arrived.²⁵⁶

Paul then looks back at the full sweep of the history of Israel, and hears within it a second voice, declaring that God’s final purpose of constituting a covenant people would never be accomplished through Torah in any case. The prophet Habakkuk announces, in line with what God said to and of Abraham, that covenant membership would be demarcated by faith.²⁵⁷ Some have suggested that already here Paul is detecting echoes of the Messiah’s own faithfulness, and his consequent life (as in 2.20).²⁵⁸ This is possible but not, I think, necessary for his argument to work. Rather, he points out that Torah always envisaged a way of life which was bounded by its own regulations and decrees: the ‘life’ that it promised was a life given to those who would ‘do them’, as Leviticus made clear.²⁵⁹ But the effect of this was to leave Israel, the bearers of the promise, stationary in the traffic jam, unable to move forward with the promise and convey it to the rest of

the world. Torah, by requiring full obedience and by placing the curse on anything less, left no way forward, either for Israel itself or for the promises they were bearing for the nations.

Paul's point in verse 13 is thus not a generalized statement about the effects of the Messiah's death, as has often been imagined. No doubt there are ways in which these profound and resonant words can be reapplied, but our task is to discern Paul's original meaning. The Messiah, he says, has borne the curse *hyper hēmōn*, 'on our behalf': the 'we' here is again *the people of Israel*. The gentiles were not 'under the curse of the law'; the law of Moses did not apply to them, nor was their being cursed by it ever suggested in Deuteronomy, nor was any such curse on non-Israelites ever a problem blocking the way for the Abrahamic promises to flow through to the world. Verse 13 only makes sense if the Messiah somehow *represents* Israel, so that he can appropriately *act on their behalf* and in their place. Exegetes and theologians have often postulated an unnatural and unnecessary either/or between Jesus as 'representative' and Jesus as 'substitute'. Here the matter is quite clear: *because* he is Israel's representative, he can be the appropriate substitute, can take on himself the curse of others, so they do not bear it any more. And the point, once more, is not simply that those who were 'under the curse' are now under it no longer. That is not what verse 14 says. The point is that the promise to Abraham, which had got stuck in the traffic jam of Torah-curse, can now resume its journey down the road towards its destination. The Messiah has dealt with the roadblock, and the promise can reach out to the nations.

The 'curse', then, was not a bad thing foisted on people in general, or Israel in particular, or Jesus above all, by a bad law which was going against the will of the one God. That strange idea has had a long run for its money in Pauline scholarship, frequently indeed being held out as the explanation for the origin of his distinctive theology: (a) as a Pharisee he believed that Torah had cursed the crucified Jesus; (b) on the Damascus Road he discovered that God had vindicated Jesus; (c) he deduced that Torah had been wrong to curse him; (d) he deduced that Torah could not be the good and life-giving thing he had always imagined; (e) he therefore

developed his ‘Torah-free’ gospel.²⁶⁰ But this is not what Paul says, here or anywhere else. Of course, we need the fuller multifocal vision of the other relevant texts as well, not least Romans 7.7—8.4, to make the point; but already here in Galatians 3 it should be clear enough, especially in the light of our earlier analysis of Paul’s narrative world, that such a negative view of Torah is utterly mistaken. Torah, in Paul’s vision, had a specific job to perform within the deeply and necessarily ambiguous vocation of Israel. Israel was called to bear the solution to the larger human problem, but was itself part of, enmeshed within, that same problem. Only when Torah is flattened out into a generalized moral standard, a kind of early version of the Kantian categorical imperative, given as a first attempt to make human beings ‘righteous’ – a picture so far from Paul’s mind as scarcely even to represent a caricature – could any such idea gain currency. The whole point of Galatians 3 is that Torah belongs at the key intermediate stage in the divine purpose. It was shaped to perform the task that was necessary if Abraham’s children, carrying the worldwide promise, were themselves to be narrowed down to a single point, that of their representative Messiah. That in turn was necessary, as Paul makes clear in 3.22, because otherwise it would look as though Israel was somehow – perhaps even through the mere possession of Torah! – automatically rescued from the plight of all humankind.

This is where we should hear, loud and clear, the echoes of 2.19–21: through Torah I died to Torah, so that I might live to God ... because ‘if “righteousness” comes through Torah, then the Messiah died for nothing.’ Paul is claiming that his own story embodies what has in fact happened, through the Messiah’s death and resurrection, to Israel as a whole. Torah’s proper role, he now sees, was not to bring the ‘righteousness’ and life of which it spoke, but to demonstrate that, up to the coming of the Messiah, Israel could not attain that goal, and to ‘shut up everything together under the power of sin’ in order that the promise could be given equally to all believers.²⁶¹ The answer to the problem, in 2.19–21 just as here in 3.10–14, is the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and the death and resurrection, with him, of Israel according to the flesh:

I have been crucified with the Messiah; I am, however, alive – but it isn't me any longer, it's the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The force of all this for the Galatians should be obvious. You Galatians, he is saying: you gentile Messiah-believers – you have only had the chance to belong to the Messiah's family because the Torah, which necessarily and rightly imposed a curse on Abraham's family, standing in the way of the Abrahamic promise ever reaching you, has been dealt with by the Messiah's own death! The thought therefore of you gentile Christians going back and solemnly taking Torah upon yourselves, by becoming circumcised, is ridiculous. Why carefully wend your way back to the traffic jam, in order to sit there, stalled and stationary, with unredeemed Israel?

In my earlier work on this passage I stressed, as I still would, the role of the 'curse' within Israel's Deuteronomic narrative.²⁶² In line with many other second-Temple Jews, Paul seems to have read the closing chapters of Deuteronomy not as a generalized warning about an ahistorical and repeated 'pattern' of (a) obedience leading to blessing, (b) disobedience leading to curse and (c) fresh obedience leading to fresh blessing, but as a linear prophecy of events that would unfold slowly, as a single great narrative, leading to the ultimate 'curse' of exile itself and then to the final redemption indicated in Deuteronomy 30. Paul, like the author of Baruch, like the writer of 4QMMT, like many other Jews of his day, believed that the 'curse' of exile still rested on unredeemed Israel. But he believed that, through the Messiah, Israel's God had broken through to covenant renewal at last, as in Deuteronomy 30. The ultimate demonstration of this is in Romans 10.6–8, which we will study later on. But it makes excellent sense of the present complex paragraph. The Messiah has come to the place and the point of the curse, of exile, bearing that curse on behalf of his people and so making the way through for the God-given worldwide plan, entrusted to Abraham's family, to be put into operation at last.

This points, in my view, to a particular view of verse 14b, already sketched a moment ago. The first half of the verse is unproblematic: getting rid of the 'curse' enables the Abrahamic blessing to flow to the gentiles as

always intended (3.8). But does this leave Jews themselves still under the ‘curse’? No. The Messiah opens the way for them to come into the moment of covenant renewal, the moment which Paul can evoke with a mention of Deuteronomy 30, or of Jeremiah 31, or of Ezekiel 36 or indeed of Joel 2.32.²⁶³ I think it probable, therefore, that the ‘we’ of 3.14b (‘that we might receive the promise of the spirit, through faith’) refers at least primarily to Jews who, by faith, come into the same new-covenant membership into which gentiles are being welcomed. As elsewhere, two different starting-points and two different doorways lead to a single destination.²⁶⁴

(y) Galatians 3.15–18

This brings us to the middle section of the chapter, verses 15–18, which goes very closely with the short section that follows, verses 19–22.²⁶⁵ Here the image shifts: Paul picks up the language of ‘covenant’ from Genesis 15 and 17, and indeed from Exodus and Deuteronomy,²⁶⁶ and exploits the fact that the same word can denote the ‘will’ or ‘testament’ of someone who has died. (Actually, even to speak of two different ‘meanings’ of the word is misleading. As far as Paul is concerned, there is one word, *diathēkē*, and one meaning: the covenanted will of the one who laid it down.)

The argument turns on another tricky word, *sperma*, ‘seed’. *Sperma*, as we have seen, regularly functions as a collective noun, ‘family’, as does its Hebrew original, *zera*.²⁶⁷ It is often, perhaps misleadingly, translated ‘descendants’. The point of verses 15–18 can be expressed quite simply: (a) God promised Abraham a single family, not two families; (b) the law threatens to create two families (as was already visible in Antioch when Peter and the others withdrew from table-fellowship with uncircumcised believers); but (c) the law cannot be allowed to overthrow the original promise and intention. To spell this out: God intended to give Abraham a single family, and, as Paul insists in 3.27–9, where he draws together the threads of the whole chapter, that is what he has done in the Messiah. The Torah must therefore not be absolutized in such a way as would create two families, a Jewish one and a gentile one – and perhaps more, because once

ethnicity becomes a factor in the family identity there would be nothing to prevent further ethnic or geographical division.

Exploiting the different shades of meaning within *diathēkē* enables Paul to introduce in verse 18 the notion of ‘inheritance’, *klēronomia*, to which he will return in the triumphant summary of 3.29 (‘if you belong to the Messiah, you are Abraham’s family; you stand to *inherit* the promise’). This is one of the many links between the present passage and Romans, where in chapters 4 and 8 the ‘inheritance’ is not simply ‘the land’, one piece of territory out of the whole world, but the ‘inheritance’ which will consist of ‘all nations’, the inheritance which all Abraham’s family will share.²⁶⁸

Once again the framework of the short argument of 3.15–18 seems secure, but the details in the middle are normally regarded as problematic. In particular, the singularity of the ‘seed’ has apparently been narrowed down in verse 16 to one person:

It doesn’t say ‘his seeds’, as though referring to several families, but indicates a single family by saying ‘and to your seed’, meaning the Messiah (*hos estin Christos*).

This verse has regularly been invoked as an example of Paul’s extraordinary (and, some have said, ‘rabbinic’) methods of exegesis: he deduces the singularity of person from the singularity of the word *sperma*! How strange is that? (Indeed, the passage has become something of a favourite with people who want to be able to say, ‘Look how strangely the early Christians – and particularly Paul – read the Bible!’²⁶⁹) But in fact it is not at all strange. Paul has not forgotten, as many exegetes have, the *incorporative meaning* of the honorific *Christos*.

Galatians 3, indeed, is perhaps the most obvious passage to make the point (a) that Paul really does mean ‘Messiah’ when he writes *Christos* and (b) that (as we saw earlier in this chapter) the role of the Messiah throughout the passage is precisely incorporative. The argument of Galatians is that the divine purpose in election has found its goal (and hence its redefinition) in the Messiah, so that one cannot go back to Torah in order to confirm or solidify one’s membership in the family. As in Antioch, Torah would once more divide the family into two.

In fact, 3.16 can perhaps best be read as precisely an echo of the Antioch incident, seen in the light of Genesis 13, 17 and 24.²⁷⁰ Peter, lurching back towards James and the others, is re-erecting the barrier of Torah and thus creating a plurality of families. Paul, emphasizing the Messiah and his faithful death, and the identity of the elect people in him, insists on the single family, all eating together. It is only when that context is forgotten (in the rush to have Paul speak about the difference between law-piety and faith-piety, between different sixteenth-century models of justification and assurance) that the focus of what he is actually saying is ignored. Then his key move, the representative and incorporative nature of Messiahship, is lost to view altogether. (It is, after all, still unwelcome to many Protestants, afraid of anything ‘corporate’ lest it drive them towards Rome, or anything ‘political’ lest it reunite their ‘two kingdoms’.)

Put Paul’s argument back together again in its own terms, however, and it works perfectly: (a) the creator and covenant God intended a single family, and promised it to Abraham; (b) he has now created it in the Messiah; (c) Torah would create a plurality; therefore (d) to go back to Torah would be to go against the original intention, now accomplished in the Messiah. Torah, in other words, cannot annul the promise made to Abraham nearly half a millennium earlier (3.17).

The ultimate reason offered in 3.18 stands in close parallel to 2.21:

2.21 If *dikaiosynē* came through Torah
the Messiah died for nothing

3.18 If *klēronomia* came through Torah
it would nullify the promise to Abraham

– which shows, among other things, the extent to which *dikaiosynē* and *klēronomia* themselves stand in parallel for Paul, the former as the covenant *status* and the latter as the covenant *promised inheritance*; and also the parallel between the promise to Abraham and the Messiah’s faithful death, which is after all the double theme of so much of the rest of the chapter.

But if the covenant God always wanted to produce this single family for Abraham, and if Torah got in the way of that intention, why did he give Torah in the first place? That is the natural question Paul now faces.

[\(δ\) Galatians 3.19–22](#)

Anyone following Paul's argument is bound to wonder, at this point, why the Torah was necessary. It seemed, after all, to be blocking the Abrahamic promise, first in its journey to its destination (verses 10–14), and second in its creation of the single 'seed' (verses 15–18). Here, in a passage more or less unrivalled for its density anywhere in his writings, Paul alludes to a point we have already noted in passing, and which emerges more fully in Romans: Abraham's family, the Israelite people, were themselves part of the problem. The fact that he does not say that clearly and explicitly has constituted the real problem of understanding these four verses.²⁷¹ Once we supply that key, the door will open.

As usual, the outer verses of the passage give us the clue. The law, Paul begins (3.19a), was 'added' (in other words, like the codicil to the covenant, as in verse 17) 'because of transgressions'. Some have said that here, as in Romans 5.20, Paul saw the law as being given in order to *increase* transgression, or at least to turn 'sin' in the abstract into the concrete 'transgression', the breaking of a commandment. That is not impossible.²⁷² But he does at least seem to mean this: God intended to produce 'the single seed', but in the meantime Israel, the promise-bearer, the family from whom 'the seed' would come, was itself sinful, and could not be affirmed in that condition. The end of the paragraph (3.22) links up with this beginning: 'scripture shut up everything together under the power of sin, so that the promise ... might be given to those who believe.' Somehow, what Paul says about Torah in 3.19–22 has to do with the fact of Israel's sinfulness. God could not simply proceed to work his larger purposes through Abraham's family as though there was nothing wrong with them. This ties in with the discussion of Habakkuk and Leviticus in 3.11–12. The fact that Torah informed the Israelites, in no uncertain terms, that they were sinful, and were breaking the law itself, *was itself part of the divine purpose*: receiving the promise, and belonging to 'the seed', would never be defined that way, but only on the basis of *pistis*. There may be more to Paul's thought here than this, but there is not less.

Once again Paul adds a reference to the faithfulness of the Messiah, this time anticipating the statement, in 3.24–9, of the Messiah’s achievement and the way in which this constitutes the Abrahamic family. Verses 19a and 22 thus establish a framework for our present short paragraph: Torah was necessary because of Israel’s sin. This brings into more specific focus the divinely appointed remedy, namely (a) the coming of the *sperma* (3.19), that is, the *family* to whom the promises had been made, the family already defined in 3.16 as the Messiah and his people and (b) ‘the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah’ (3.22). These, if not exactly two different ways of saying the same thing, are two pathways which are already converging and which will do so completely by the close of the chapter. The Messiah’s faithfulness both *accomplishes* and *defines* the united and renewed family of Abraham.

The middle verses (3.19b–21) of this little paragraph have frequently led exegetes astray, particularly into thinking that Paul is here denying the divine origin of the law, blaming it instead on angels, perhaps even hinting that these might be wicked or malevolent angels.²⁷³ No such idea is present. The Jewish tradition of angels assisting in the giving of the law never has that intent. Paul is not saying that the law is against the promises. He sees, of course, that some might draw that false conclusion, and he wards it off in his usual fashion (*mē genoito*, verse 21). The problem he has identified, and here summarizes in this ultra-dense fashion, is that although Torah offered life, *it could not give it* – not through its own fault, but through the sinful human nature of the Israel to which it had been given. For Paul, of course, the Messiah has done what the law could not do, though that is not his explicit point in this short paragraph.²⁷⁴

The fact that this brings us right into the centre of a theme which Paul repeats from different angles in two other key passages (Romans 7.7—8.11 and 2 Corinthians 3) should encourage us to think we are on the right lines in this analysis. In Romans he insists that though Torah condemned and killed ‘me’, the fault was not in Torah, nor even in ‘me’ (the Israelite qua Israelite), but in ‘sin’ itself, the Adamic power that was at work within even the chosen people. Torah, therefore, promising life (7.7), could not provide

it, 'being weak through human flesh' (8.3); in other words, it was unable to offer the remedy for the sinful condition of 'the flesh'. That is why, he says, God condemned sin 'in the flesh' – in other words, in the flesh, and the death, of the Messiah. That whole argument, coherent within its own context, maps well onto the present passage, with 2.15–21 in the recent background and 4.1–7 coming up shortly. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul appears to contrast his own ministry with that of Moses, but the real contrast is neither between himself and Moses, nor between gospel and law, but between *the people whom Paul is addressing*, who are 'new covenant' people with Torah now written on their hearts, and *the people Moses was addressing*, whose hearts, he says, were hard. In both cases, Romans and 2 Corinthians, the problem is *the puzzling and continuing sin of the promise-bearing chosen people*. Thus again, as in Galatians 3.22, the (deliberate and intended) effect of giving Torah to sinful Israel was to shut up the nation, along with the rest of humanity, in the prison-house called 'sin'.²⁷⁵

The point of verses 19b–20 is then as follows.²⁷⁶ Paul is still thinking of the single 'seed' as promised to Abraham according to 3.16. But the law, as we saw, would not produce that single 'seed'. Left to itself, it would insist on separating Israel from the gentiles, and so would produce at least a duality, probably a plurality, of 'families'. (Any such 'families' would then have to face the further problem, that Israel would be 'transgressors' while all others would be 'sinners', as in 2.17–18.) But what Paul is primarily concerned with, both in his description of the Antioch incident and in the entire train of thought from 3.16 to 3.29, is the *singularity of the promised family*; and that is what is in view here. The law was given through angels 'at the hand of a mediator', in other words, Moses.²⁷⁷ Moses, however, cannot be the mediator of the single family.²⁷⁸ He is the mediator of a law which separates Jews from gentiles, as James and those who came from him to Antioch were insisting, and as Peter agreed. No, insists Paul: the God of Abraham desires a single family, and that family cannot therefore be constituted by Torah. How do we know that this God desires that single family? *Because God is one*. Just as in Romans 3.30, the singleness of the one God himself undergirds the singleness, the unitary Jew-plus-gentileness

of the family. Monotheism, freshly understood through Messiah and spirit, provides the ground and source for the fresh christological understanding of election.

Paul, of course, has expressed all this very compactly: *ho de mesitēs henos ouk estin, ho de theos heis estin*. Whichever way we read this, Paul's point to the Galatians, and retrospectively to Peter at Antioch, is this: go with Torah, and you are joining a divided family, which is not God's final intention, not what he promised Abraham. Stick with the final, single family – into which you Galatian gentiles have been happily incorporated! – and not only will you not *need* Torah; you *must* not embrace it. To do so would be, at best, to turn back the clock on the divine eschatological purposes, and at worst to spurn and snub the creation of the single family through 'the Messiah's faithfulness'. If covenant membership, or inheriting the Abrahamic promise, could have come through Torah, the Messiah's faithful death would have been unnecessary and pointless. The long, dark, strange divine plan, as set out in Israel's scriptures, involved 'all things' being 'shut up together' under 'sin'. This echoes, not by distant analogy but because this is precisely part of Paul's point, the long, dark strange plan announced to Abraham in Genesis 15 which involved his descendants being enslaved in Egypt until the time appointed, in order that, when the right time finally arrived (see 4.4), the long-awaited promise of 'inheritance' might be given to 'those of faith' (*tois pisteuousin*) on the basis of 'the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah' (*ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou*). That is how Paul lands firmly with both feet at 3.22. And with that he has laid the foundation for the last paragraph of chapter 3, where all the threads of the argument are tied together in a flurry of christological redefinitions of the people of the one God.

[\(ε\) Galatians 3.23–9](#)

Paul tells the story one more time. It is of course a double story. First, something has *happened* in which the divinely promised and providentially ordered narrative has reached its goal. You cannot jump back to an earlier

stage in that narrative without committing folly and worse. That is to tell the story from the standpoint of the perceived continuity between the Abrahamic promises and the messianic fulfilment. But, second, he also tells the story the other way round, from the standpoint of the perceived *discontinuity* between Moses and Torah on the one hand and the Messiah on the other: something *new* has happened: a fresh divine act has broken into the divinely appointed cul-de-sac into which Israel had been forced by Torah. The long years when things seemed only to be getting worse are now over; a new age has overtaken a surprised and unready world. Though I distrust and largely reject these labels, Paul here balances the story of ‘salvation history reaching its climax’ with ‘the announcement of the apocalyptic gospel’, and vice versa.

Look back first, he says, at how things were: before the coming of *pistis*, which he has hypostatized so that it stands for the messianic moment, the great transformation, we (that is, Israelites/Jews) were under lock and key, guarded securely against the day when the eschatological plan would finally be revealed. The Torah was keeping the Jewish people under strict supervision, stopping them drifting away from the divine purposes altogether (as their own history, and its accompanying prophecies, insisted they were prone to do, and as the great prophetic song of Deuteronomy 32 had said they would do). The Torah was in fact like a babysitter, a *paidagōgos*, a role somewhat outside the repertoire of today’s western world, but which we can safely say was not a ‘tutor’ in the sense of a ‘teacher’ or ‘schoolmaster’, as in older translations, but more of a hired hand, who kept his eye on the youngsters, made sure they didn’t get up to mischief and took them to and from school.²⁷⁹ And the point of all this is to say that with the coming of ‘faithfulness’, *pistis*, ‘we’ have grown up: we are no longer under the *paidagōgos*.

Even in that implicit narrative we can see the double nature of what has happened. (a) There is a sense in which a period of time has now at last reached fulfilment. (b) There is also a sense of a long, tedious and frustrating period suddenly being ended by a new event. The family has come of age, and with that coming-of-age it has also acquired its much

wider circle of members: ‘we’ Jews were once under the *paidagōgos* and are now no more, ‘for you are all children of God, through faith, in the Messiah, Jesus’ (3.26).²⁸⁰ Your faith, Paul declares, is the badge which demonstrates that you are ‘in the Messiah’: that is what the succeeding verses will then amplify and undergird.

The point is then becoming clear, and Paul now spells it out and amplifies it up to the decisive final verse 29. *You are all God’s children*: that is the basic point, the point Peter needed to hear, and the point the Galatians particularly need to hear – remembering that ‘sons of God’, the literal translation here, carries a strong echo of Israel, especially at the time of the exodus.²⁸¹ You are *already* God’s children, Abraham’s family: you need no boost to your status. And you are God’s children *in the Messiah*. How do you know this? Because (verse 27) you have *put on the Messiah*, clothed yourselves with him; that is the meaning of baptism, quite possibly with reference to the actual ceremony involving fresh clothes for those who come up out of the ‘death’ in the water to the ‘new life’.²⁸² This then generates a particular practical conclusion, directly relevant both to the Antioch situation and the Galatian challenge: there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free; there is no ‘male and female’;²⁸³ for ‘all of you are one in the Messiah, Jesus.’

One! That was the point of the chapter, from 3.15 right through to 3.29; that was the key element on which so much turned, as it was the key point which Paul was most anxious to convey to Peter at Antioch and to the Galatians in writing this letter. Paul does not, of course, mean that all ethnic, social and gender distinctions cease to have any meaning at all. In many places in his writing he is clear that one must still learn how to behave wisely within these as within other structures.²⁸⁴ But these differences no longer count in terms of being part of Abraham’s family. That is the thrust of what he is saying. And, though he has used plenty of ‘righteousness’ language in the chapter so far, which might have made some think he was expounding a ‘juristic’ frame of thought, the reference in the last few verses of the chapter is solidly ‘participationist’: in the Messiah, baptized into the Messiah, putting on the Messiah, all one in the Messiah,

belonging to the Messiah and therefore Abraham's single 'seed'. At this point what has been meant by 'participationist' theology joins up at once with the 'salvation-historical' perspective, both finding their meaning within a 'covenantal' frame of thought. In Galatians 3, therefore, the various categories into which Paul's thought has been split up come back together in a rich unity – which is pleasing, since rich unity is itself the theme of the chapter.

This does not mean, though, a Galatians-based victory for those who insist that Paul's thought is basically 'participationist' *rather than* 'juristic' – or, for that matter, a victory of 'covenantal' or 'salvation-historical' ideas, in the sense of a smooth 'fulfilment', a steady crescendo from promise to fulfilment, over 'apocalyptic' ideas in the (modern) sense of a radical, unprecedented, unexpected divine irruption into the normal order of things. On the contrary. Taking the 'juristic' and 'participationist' debate first: the juristic categories employed earlier in the chapter still count. They have not been displaced or squeezed out. But the 'participationist' categories themselves are here deployed precisely, if ironically, for the situational and polemical purpose which Wrede and Schweitzer saw as belonging to Paul's 'juristic' terminology, namely the incorporation of gentiles into the single family. In fact, *both 'juristic' and 'participationist' categories have this function, because both are themselves functions of Paul's larger category, which is the covenant between the creator God and Abraham and the single family that has now been created in fulfilment of that covenant.* Turning to the 'covenantal' and 'apocalyptic' debate: the whole point of the chapter is that the one God has done what he promised Abraham he would do, in the original covenant chapters in Genesis. But in order to do that this God has had to smash open the shell of Torah, and with it the 'present evil age' in which those under Torah were trapped, in order to bring about the radical new result we see in the Messiah. The Messiah, after all, is equally at home in covenantal as in apocalyptic Judaism – perhaps for the very good reason that the distinction between those two modern categories is just that, a modern distinction of which first-century Jews were innocent.

Galatians 3, then, is one key expression of Paul's redefinition of election through the Messiah. The opening passage of chapter 4, which in one sense continues the argument and in another sense extends it in a new direction, provides a further angle on the same point.

(7) Galatians 4.1–11

'Let me put it like this': the opening *legō de* of 4.1 indicates that Paul is taking a deep breath and coming back through the same narrative in a way which sharpens up some points and thereby takes his overall argument forward. As we saw earlier, Paul is now talking about the exodus, which of course belongs closely with the previous argument about Abraham and his family; part of the divine promise in Genesis 15 was precisely concerning Abraham's family becoming slaves and then being rescued.²⁸⁵ Here, the 'heir' to the family is enslaved – or as good as: the young son may be on his way to 'inherit' the whole estate. Paul picks up the motif of 'inheritance' in the last verse of chapter 3 and makes it a key term in 4.1, using it then to frame 4.1–7 since it recurs in 4.7 as the decisive conclusion to the present passage. For the moment the young 'heir' is kept under guardians and stewards until the time the father has set for the coming-of-age ceremony; but now the 'heir' turns out to be the entire family of 'sons' who, as in 3.26, consist of all those who belong to the Messiah, here further characterized as those in whom the spirit has come to dwell (4.6–7).

Paul has in mind here *a chronological sequence* in which the coming of the Messiah and the spirit occur at a late stage in a long process. This seems so obvious to me that I find it hard to credit that people would deny it, but deny it they have, on the basis of a supposed 'apocalyptic' viewpoint, which Paul is supposed to have shared, in which there is no preparation, no build-up, but simply a sudden 'invasion' into the present world from outside altogether.²⁸⁶ If this was what Paul had in mind, he has expressed it in a singularly misleading fashion. This is a story which awakens echoes of the exodus, and though of course that great event did involve the sudden irruption of divine judgment and rescue into the ongoing life of Egypt, the

whole story is predicated on the belief that this was what God promised Abraham hundreds of years earlier, and that this promise had now at last come to pass.²⁸⁷ So here: the story involves a young son growing to maturity, and though the moment of coming-of-age arrives as a sudden and new thing, effecting instant and important change, it can hardly be said to be a bolt from the blue.

For Paul, it was in fact a matter of *chronological* fulfilment: ‘when the fullness of time arrived’, *hote de ēlthen to plērōma tou chronou*. Not even *tou kairou*, the particular moment, but *chronou*, the sequence of time which has now gathered to a *plērōma*, a fullness.²⁸⁸ As in *4 Ezra*,

He has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is fulfilled.

the Most High has looked at his times; now they have ended, and his ages have reached completion.²⁸⁹

If anything in Jewish literature is ‘apocalyptic’, it is surely *4 Ezra*.²⁹⁰ This is how one of its greatest expositors explains the idea involved:

The idea of the fixed times is to be found in many apocalypses and in other contexts in Judaism of the age. Thus one can point to all the predictive visions that divide history into a given number of segments ... This idea too makes possible the revelation of the end, which, when it became combined with intense eschatological expectation, had great implications for apocalyptic revelatory understanding ... There is the idea that God controls and determines the length of the world age. This is fixed and can be known or revealed. These times and this age will reach an end; indeed, that end is approaching.²⁹¹

We cannot, then, invoke something called ‘apocalyptic’ to rule out the idea of a continuous flow of history, looking back to Abraham and trusting in the promises God made to him, and eventually reaching a point of ‘fullness’ which, precisely in Jewish apocalyptic, and as evidenced by the lion-vision towards the end of *4 Ezra* 11, would be the moment when the Messiah would appear. The radical newness of this moment does not constitute a denial of all that has gone before. Thus we arrive at Galatians 4.4–5:

⁴But when the fullness of time arrived, God sent out his son, born of a woman, born under the law,
⁵so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

This is both an *exodus*-event, with God remembering the promises and delivering his people ('redeeming slaves' being the classic exodus-motif, resulting in Israel as 'God's son'), and a clear *apocalyptic* event, the sudden unveiling of the long-awaited solution to Israel's problem; and also a clear *messianic* event, with the 'sending' of the 'son'. From all these points of view, this packed little sentence contains all the elements of election-redefinition we have already seen, contained within a narrative which awakens echoes of the first exodus, which as we saw was accomplished by God specifically in fulfilment of the covenant promises to Abraham. QED.

But of course there is more. In the original exodus-event, the Torah, to begin with, played a fairly positive role. Israel journeyed to Mount Sinai and Moses was there given the law. Granted, the first word that the law spoke was one of judgment, since while Moses was up the mountain Aaron was making the golden calf; but Torah was seen thereafter as a good thing in the sense of the positive way of life for the rescued people. Here in Paul, however, the law is part of the enslavement from which the new exodus frees God's people.²⁹² That is at the heart of what Paul wants the Galatians to understand, as he had wanted Peter to understand it in Antioch. For gentile Messiah-believers to take Torah upon themselves would be to embrace the life of slavery, to go back to Egypt.

The irony of this situation (sharply reflected in 4.3, where 'we', the Jewish people, had been 'under the *stoicheia*', the 'elements of the world') comes about because of the strange situation described in 3.19 and 3.22. There was nothing wrong with Torah, nothing inherently enslaving about it. But when the good Torah was given to the Israelites, it was bound to enslave them, because they were sinful. That was all it could do, and it was a good thing that it did it. This irony will not be explained until Romans 7 and 9, to be considered later. For the moment we note the sharp edge of Paul's messianic redefinition of the Jewish doctrine of election: those who

belong to the Messiah are not under Torah. Jewish Messiah-believers have been redeemed from that state; gentile Messiah-believers must not enter it.

The passage continues with the further redefinition in terms of the spirit, to which we shall return (4.6–7). For the moment we simply notice how 4.8–11 then functions.²⁹³ This revelation of the true God in his redemptive work, through Messiah and spirit, tells the Galatians that through these means they have come ‘to know God, or rather to be known by God’. That is where they already are. It would be absurd for them to step back from that glorious position into a world governed once again by the *stoicheia*.

All this brings us at last to the heart of Paul’s life and thought. For Paul, Jesus is Israel’s Messiah; he is the *faithful* Messiah, whose death has accomplished God’s saving plan. We have seen how this work relates to Torah. This prepares us now to examine the central point: that, by his death, Jesus is the Messiah through whom Israel’s God has reconciled the world to himself. There are of course other passages in which this comes to expression, including vital statements such as Galatians 2.19–21 and the shorthand summaries in 1 Corinthians 15.3 and elsewhere.²⁹⁴ But the sustained expositions of the theme in 2 Corinthians and Romans are, on any account, at the centre of it all.

[\(iv\) Jesus as the Messiah through Whom God Has Reconciled the World](#)

[\(a\) 2 Corinthians 5.11—6.2](#)

We turn now to a rather different passage, in which the question of God’s faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant initially appears to play no role. But when we read this passage in the light of Romans and Galatians (as we are surely justified in doing) we can clearly see the larger picture Paul is painting.²⁹⁵ Basically, he is arguing that the one God has accomplished, through Jesus the Messiah, the work of universal reconciliation which had been promised in the prophets, and particularly in Isaiah.²⁹⁶ This link with Isaiah, when studied carefully, indicates that here, too, the divine covenant faithfulness emerges as the central theme. Once again, election – God’s

covenantal purpose to bless the world through Israel – has been accomplished through the Messiah. Paul here develops this in terms of that work now being implemented through his own apostolic work, but it is the Messiah’s underlying achievement, and the consequent redefinition of the Isaianic theme of election, that we must draw out.

As throughout 2 Corinthians 3—6, Paul is explaining the nature of his apostleship over against those who have scoffed at him as a poor public performer, an altogether inferior specimen to the new teachers who arrived in Corinth after he left.²⁹⁷ We pick up the passage where he has just explained the strange nature of his apostleship within the framework of a revised eschatology (5.1–10: see chapter 11 below). All his work is to be seen against the backcloth of God’s shining of the new-creation light in Jesus, the one who was crucified and raised, and the one who, as Messiah, will execute the coming judgment.²⁹⁸ This explains, he says, why it is that his ministry takes the shape and pattern it does. It is all because of the thing he mentioned in Galatians 2: the love of the Messiah:

¹³If we are beside ourselves, you see, it’s for God; and if we are in our right mind, it’s for you.

¹⁴For the Messiah’s love makes us press on. We have come to the conviction that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all in order that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised on their behalf.²⁹⁹

‘One died for all, and therefore all died’: that is about as central a Pauline statement of the meaning of Jesus’ death that we could wish for. And Paul’s point is that this is at the centre, too, of his apostolic ministry: this death, the manner of it, and the love that brought it about, have transformed Paul’s vision of how the one God was going to act in relation to the whole world – have transformed, in other words, his vision of ‘election’, of God’s covenant purposes and his faithfulness to them. Indeed, through the Messiah God has effected the greatest purpose of all: the renewal of creation itself, adumbrated in each person who is now ‘in the Messiah’ (5.17). This is what the Messiah’s ‘love’ has accomplished.

This has happened in a twofold pattern: first, the Messiah’s work; second, the apostolic ministry through which that work is put into operation. Here,

as so often in the New Testament, we have the to-and-fro between the unique *achievement* of the Messiah and its *implementation* in the work of the gospel. (This is the answer to those who puzzle about the differences between Jesus' 'teaching' and Paul's, as though they were two professors teaching similar courses! If the present passage had been read in the way I am expounding it now, the problem would never have arisen.) The two are obviously closely linked, and this double reality lies at the heart of Paul's exposition of his own personal commission. God has acted in the Messiah, uniquely and decisively; Paul's apostolic work derives from this and implements it, and even embodies it. He has already stated this double point once, in verse 15:

- (a) He died for all
- (b) in order that those who live should live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised on their behalf.

He then sets this preliminary statement within the context of 'new creation' (verses 16–17) and the utterly fresh perspective which that provides on everything and everyone. (We note that Paul is still basically talking about 'how we should view people', in order to further his argument about the nature of his own apostolic ministry.) He then restates the double point again and again. Here are the first two, in 5.18 and 5.19 respectively:

- (a) [God] reconciled us to himself through the Messiah
- (b) and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

- (a) God was in the Messiah reconciling the world to himself, not counting their transgressions against them
- (b) and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation.

Paul here inserts an extra verse (20), explaining in more detail how it is that his own ministry is characterized by the fact that God, and the Messiah, are speaking through him. He is an ambassador, who speaks not on his own authority but as the mouthpiece of the monarch he represents. The whole emphasis of the passage thus falls, not so much on the Messiah's death as such, but on *the way in which this reconciling death is then conveyed*

through the apostolic ministry. The antithesis, already moving in a crescendo from verse 18 to verse 19, reaches its climax in verse 21, where the redefinition of election – election in action! – as a result of the Messiah’s death is worked out in apostolic ministry:

- (a) The Messiah did not know sin, but
God made him to be sin on our behalf,
- (b) so that in him we might embody
God’s faithfulness to the covenant.

This reading of 2 Corinthians 5.21 has inevitably proved controversial.³⁰⁰ The verse, after all, has had a venerable history as the main statement of ‘imputed righteousness’, in which, while the believer’s sin is reckoned to the Messiah, ‘his righteousness’ is reckoned to the believer.³⁰¹ But the more the passage is studied in relation to the whole line of thought from 5.11—6.2 (not to mention 2.17—7.1), and the more the reference to Isaiah 49.8 in 6.2 is factored in, the more that traditional meaning seems quite beside the point, and the more the idea of the apostle *embodying* the divine covenant faithfulness emerges as the natural and right meaning. This is in any case strongly implied once one (a) makes the switch from the regular reading of ‘God’s righteousness’ as ‘a righteous status from God’ to the more plausible reading of it as ‘God’s own righteousness’,³⁰² and then (b) adds the point that this divine righteousness, specifically in Isaiah 40—55 from which Paul is about to quote, is not simply to do with the creator’s faithfulness to the creation, but more specifically with the divine *covenant faithfulness*.³⁰³

This strong initial possibility is strengthened by other considerations. In terms of our present argument, we need only say this.

First, one of the most powerful confirmations of this way of reading the text comes in the immediately following verses, 6.1–2. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 49.8, which flows right out of the second ‘servant song’:

- I listened to you when the time was right,
I came to your aid on the day of salvation.

As usual, we should pay attention to the larger context of Paul's scriptural quotations, and when we do so here the effect is dramatic. The very next lines speak of the servant as the agent of God's 'covenant to the people':

I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people,
[LXX has *diathēkēn ethnōn*, 'a covenant of the nations']
to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages ...
Lo, these shall come from far away, and lo, these from the north and from the west,
and these from the land of Syene.³⁰⁴

The two verses preceding Paul's quotation comprise the famous passage in which the servant's mission is extended to include the gentiles:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations [LXX adds: *eis diathēkēn genous*, 'for a covenant of the people'], that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.
Thus says YHWH, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers,
'Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of YHWH, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.'
[LXX *hoti pistos estin ho hagios Israel, kai exelexamēn se.*]³⁰⁵

This is 'election theology': the divine choice of Israel, in order that *through* Israel the covenant God may work his saving purposes for the whole world. Paul's whole point is that this covenant faithfulness of the one God, having been *enacted* in the death of the Messiah, is now being *embodied* in his own representative, ambassadorial, apostolic ministry. 'God is making his appeal through us', as he says in verse 20. In the light of 2 Corinthians 4.7—5.10, this clearly cannot mean only 'through what we say out loud'. It means, 'through our suffering and perplexing apostolic life'.³⁰⁶ The point that Paul wants to get across to the Corinthians is that the strange, apparently inglorious apostolic life he leads is in fact the place where, and the means by which, the divine glory, his reconciling faithfulness, is to be seen. That is why the careful build-up of double statements concludes: 'so that in him we *might come to embody God's faithfulness to the covenant*'. God's covenant

faithfulness is what was revealed in the Messiah's faithful death.³⁰⁷ Now it is freshly embodied precisely in the faithful suffering of the apostle.³⁰⁸

Even if there were not already a strong case for translating *dikaiosynē theou* in its other occurrences (all in Romans) as 'God's faithfulness to his covenant', this contextual and biblical argument would push us hard in the direction of that meaning in 5.21. To put it negatively: the normal reading of the verse, in which, while the believers' sin is 'imputed' to the Messiah, the Messiah's righteousness is 'imputed' to the believer, cannot explain (a) why it is *God's* righteousness that is spoken of, not the Messiah's; (b) why the verb is *genōmetha*, 'become', rather than something to do with 'reckoning', as in Romans 4.3–6; and (c) why Paul would have said something like this as the climax of his long and carefully structured argument about his own ministry and regular 'appeal for reconciliation', rather than, as I am suggesting, something about the theological depth of that apostolic vocation. Even if there were a good argument for reading the idea of 'imputed righteousness' in other passages, there are none, except a (much) later tradition, in the case of this one.³⁰⁹ To the contrary: all the signs are that here, finally picking up the idea of covenant renewal from 2 Corinthians 3.1–6, we have a solid statement of God's fulfilling of his covenant promises through the Messiah. The result is the bringing of 'reconciliation' to the world through his death. This means that the divine purpose in the 'choice', i.e. 'election', of Israel (Isaiah 49.7) has been accomplished through the Messiah and his saving death. Now, in and through the apostolic ministry, the one God is being faithful to his covenant. The apostles not only talk about this faithfulness: they embody it, sharing the messianic sufferings through which it was accomplished in the first place (4.7–18; 6.3–10). That is what it means to say that Paul and his apostolic colleagues actually 'become' God's 'righteousness'. They embody his faithfulness to the covenant. The focus in the passage is the specific question Paul is discussing, namely the nature of his apostleship. But his underlying theological and exegetical point is that *this is what 'election' looks like when it is reworked around the Messiah.*

We should not miss, of course, at this stage in the overall argument of the present chapter, what Paul is saying about the meaning and effect of Jesus' death. His main point – the exposition and explanation of his Messiah-shaped apostolic ministry – only means what it means because underneath it at every point there stands the reconciling death of Jesus:

The Messiah's love makes us press on. We have come to the conviction that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all in order that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised on their behalf.

[God] reconciled us to himself through the Messiah ...

God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah, not counting their transgressions against them ...

The Messiah did not know sin, but God made him to be sin on our behalf ... [310](#)

It is all about the action of God in the death of the Messiah; or, as in Romans 8.35 or Galatians 2.20, about the *love* of the Messiah as the embodiment of the saving, reconciling action of the one God. Paul can say this several different ways, or indeed several times over in pretty much the same way, as in verses 14 and 15; but it all comes back in the end to the climactic statement to which, as so often, Paul builds up step by step. He is alluding, of course, to basic Christian teaching which the Corinthians knew well, as the repeated ‘for us’ demonstrates with its echoes of his summary of the gospel in the earlier letter. [311](#) He is not expounding it afresh, but showing that the teaching they already know is what gives the shape and surprising character to his own vocation. As for the substance, particularly of 5.21a, Craig Keener has put it well:

Presumably the Corinthians were familiar with Paul’s teaching that Christ’s death appeased God’s wrath, hence reconciled humanity to God (Rom 5:9–11). In the becoming sin of one who ‘knew no sin’ (5:21; cf. Rom. 3:20; 7:7), Paul may combine the notion of unblemished sacrifices with the scapegoat that came to represent or embody Israel’s sin (Lev 1:3; 16:21–22). Because Paul is about to quote a servant passage from Isaiah in 6:2, he may also think of the servant whose death would bring Israel ‘peace’ (Is 53:5–6). [312](#)

We note, finally, the characteristically Pauline combinations: the worldwide scope of the gospel with the sharply personal focus; the substitution of saviour for sinner with the insistence that the whole thing is the action of God (rather than a ploy to pacify an otherwise uncaring god); a reconciliation already achieved (verse 19) with a reconciliation which needs to be accepted (verse 20). To highlight either pole of any of these three is to purchase an apparently straightforward ‘Pauline theology’ at the cost of true Pauline depth. At the cost, Paul would have said, of the gospel itself.

(b) Romans 5.6–21

This exposition of the reconciling work of the Messiah in 2 Corinthians 5 sends us back to Romans, to pick up part of the argument where we left off earlier and to explore his other great statement of ‘reconciliation’. Paul’s exposition in Romans 3.21–6 of the death of Jesus as the ‘faithfulness’ through which God’s own covenant faithfulness was revealed, leading to the exposition of the reworked covenant in 3.21—4.25, has brought him in chapter 5 to the point where he can sketch the larger picture and draw preliminary conclusions. The death of the Messiah reveals not only God’s justifying purposes but also, in particular, God’s *love*. This is such a familiar theme in the New Testament that it is easy for expositors to skip over it with a glad recognition of its personal meaning, without reflecting on the way in which the notion of divine love is tied so closely in Israel’s scriptures with the notion of election and covenant.³¹³ For Paul, however, this is arguably central.

Romans 5.6–11 has as good a claim as most passages to express the heart of Paul’s theology. The paragraph is built up step by step, drawing together things already said in chapters 1—4, preparing the way for the compressed summary of the whole plan of salvation in 5.12–21, and pointing forward to the final celebration in 8.31–9. Thus:

⁶This is all based on what the Messiah did: while we were still weak, at that very moment he died on behalf of the ungodly. ⁷It’s a rare thing to find someone who will die on behalf of an upright person – though I suppose someone might be brave enough to die for a good person. ⁸But this is how God demonstrates his own love for us: the Messiah died for us while we were still sinners. ⁹How much more, in that case – since we have been declared to be in the right by his blood – are we going to be saved by him from God’s coming anger! ¹⁰When we were enemies, you see, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son; if that’s so, how much more, having already been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹And that’s not all. We even celebrate [or: ‘boast’: the verb is the same as in 2.17; 3.27] in God, through our lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.³¹⁴

In context, this is explaining (*gar*, verse 6) the previous summary (5.1–5) of where the argument of the letter has now come: being justified by faith, we

have peace with God (5.1), and the result is ‘the hope of the glory of God’ (5.2). With so much going on in verses 1–11, it is easy to lose track of Paul’s main emphasis, but that verse provides the clue: ‘hope’ is where the paragraph is going, and it finally gets there in verses 9 and 10.

But the point is to *ground* this hope utterly and completely in something that has *happened*. The death of the Messiah, understood as the climax of the scriptural narrative of the covenant love of the creator God, is the moment when and the means by which this God has, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5.19, reconciled the world to himself. Here Paul focuses once more on the deeply personal meaning: ‘for the weak’, ‘for the ungodly’, ‘for us sinners’, ‘for enemies’. No possible category is omitted. Nobody can say, reading this paragraph, that they are automatically excluded.

The opening paragraph of the chapter ends with 5.5: ‘hope does not make us ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us.’ Paul does not mention the spirit again until 7.6, and then only as a foretaste of what is to come in chapter 8. Instead, in 5.6–11 he explains the basis of hope, not yet in terms of what God has done and is doing ‘in us’, as in chapter 8, but in terms of what we might call the objective basis for this, what God has done ‘for us’. The repeated *hyper*, ‘on behalf of’, in verses 6, 7 and 8, insists on looking back to what the Messiah has done, or rather, as in verses 8 and 10, what God has done in and through the Messiah. Clearly, Paul is here saying in other terms what he had said in 3.21–6, where God ‘put Jesus forth’ (3.24) to reveal his ‘righteousness’. Here God ‘demonstrates his own love’ ‘through the death of his son’ (5.8, 10, anticipating 8.32). The same reality is viewed through two adjacent windows; or perhaps the same window, once at sunrise and once at sunset.

These verses do not offer a ‘theory about the atonement’ as such. Their *literary* function is to draw a preliminary conclusion from the letter so far, in order then to sketch in 5.12–21 the larger picture which forms the groundwork for ‘the redemption in the Messiah’ in chapters 6–8. Their *rhetorical* function is to invite the hearers to gratitude, celebration and worship. Their *theological* function is to explore various interlocking levels

of meaning within the death of Jesus: its character as a gift of sheer undeserved grace and love; its embodiment of the long-promised rescuing love of Israel's God; its specific focus on the needs of the 'weak' to be given God's power,³¹⁵ of the 'sinners' to be forgiven, and above all of the 'enemies' to be reconciled (verses 6, 8 and 10); its justifying function, through the Messiah's sacrificial death; and thus its role as the ground of hope itself. There is much more that Paul could say, and does say elsewhere, about the meaning of Jesus' death. What he has said here belongs to his overall argument rather than to any abstract theory. But the overall argument is itself pointing to some of the deepest meanings about the Messiah's death. Grasp this, Paul is saying, and you will have *hope*.

This latter point, expressed in verses 9 and 10, is where the *gar* in verse 6 was looking. Why does hope not make us ashamed? Verse 5b, as we saw, looks ahead to the work of the spirit to answer this question, but that presupposes the different answer given in verses 6–11, or rather in verses 9 and 10, which stand on the ground that has been established in verses 6–8. The 'therefore' of verse 9 (*oun*) draws the conclusion from verses 6–8, showing that the phrase 'justified by his blood' is another way, for Paul, of saying or summarizing what he has said in those verses ('the Messiah died for the ungodly, for the sinners'). As in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is speaking of an objective historical accomplishment – not of course in order to obviate the need for people to believe (5.1), to 'be reconciled to God' (2 Corinthians 5.20), but to ground that response in something outside themselves.

This enables him to state, for the first time since the introductory 1.16–17, that all this is leading to *salvation*. The theme appears at last, like the royal flag eventually being run up the flagpole in a city formerly under hostile occupation. Within the whole of Romans there are only three passages which join together 'justification' and 'salvation' (often used as near-synonyms in later Christian discourse, but not usually by Paul). 1.16–17 is the first: the gospel is God's saving power because in it God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith. 5.9–10, our present passage, is the second, building on the 'revelation of God's righteousness' in the death

of Jesus in 3.21–6: we are *justified* by his blood, and will therefore be *saved* from the coming wrath. 10.9–11 is the third, and is every bit as important thematically and structurally as these first two:

If you profess with your mouth that Jesus is lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Why? Because the way to covenant membership [*dikaiosynē*] is by believing with the heart, and the way to salvation is by professing with the mouth. The Bible says, you see, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’

We note another close link between the three: ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel’ in 1.16, ‘hope does not make us ashamed’ in 5.5, and now ‘everyone who believes will not be put to shame’ in 10.11. It looks as though we are at one of the mountain-tops in the letter from which the other great summits can be viewed, along with the pathways which lead between them. And, though the word ‘salvation’ and its cognates do not occur in 8.31–9, that paragraph must surely be counted as another place where these themes meet and merge (see below).

The point of it all, here in chapter 5, is then *salvation*. The word ‘salvation’ stresses as it were the negative pole (‘salvation *from*’) of the future hope: in this case, ‘from God’s coming anger’.³¹⁶ In 5.2 Paul balances this, as in 8.18–30, with the positive pole (saved *for*): in this case, for ‘the glory of God’, which according to 3.23 had been lost through sin. And, having spoken so far of the Messiah’s death ‘on our behalf’, he changes at the end of verse 10: we are saved ‘*in his life*’, *en tē zōē autou*.³¹⁷

The emphasis of the paragraph thus falls on the summary in verse 9, the deeper explanation in verse 10 and the celebration in verse 11. And it is in the deeper explanation that we find, too, the explanation of ‘peace with God’ in 5.1: the ‘enemies’ have now been ‘reconciled’, as in 2 Corinthians 5.18, 19 and 20.³¹⁸ Every way you analyze the plight of the human race, the love of God and the death of the Messiah have proved more than adequate to meet it. The theme of ‘reconciliation’, though verbally rare (and hardly featuring at all in the Hebrew Bible), nevertheless seems to sum up so much of what the prophets had foretold: ‘You will be my people and I will be your God.’³¹⁹ This theme is closely joined in scripture with two others, both

very germane to Romans. First, the dwelling of YHWH with his people; second, the transformation of the heart. Both are here in Romans 5: the ‘access to grace’ in 5.2 is a temple-image, while the ‘love poured out in the hearts’ in 5.5 indicates the transformation promised by the prophets. Both come together in the idea of ‘celebrating in God’ in 5.11. Much of Paul’s ministry is about ‘reconciliation’ between different people and groups. That was what he was doing with Philemon and Onesimus. But all of that is rooted in the ultimate ‘reconciliation’ which God himself has effected in the death of his son. The paragraph thus brings us back to the main theme of our own present chapter. Israel’s doctrine of election, seen now through the prophetic lens of the promises of restoration and renewal, has been reworked by Paul from top to bottom around the Messiah (particularly his death) and the spirit.

The ‘boast’ of 5.11 (the word I have translated as ‘celebrate’ here is cognate with the ‘boast’ of 2.17 and 3.27) might appear, in current western thinking at any rate, to be subject to the same critique that Paul had offered in those earlier passages. The sting of the ‘boast’ here, however, is drawn by two things. First, there is the overall context in which Jew and gentile alike have been reduced to the status of guilty sinners, standing in the dock with nothing to say in their defence (3.19–20). All is therefore of grace; the ‘boast’, as he says elsewhere, is not in oneself but in the lord.³²⁰ Second, there is the suffering which is the necessary badge, indeed the Messiah-shaped badge, of membership in his people (5.3; 8.17–25).

That is not to say that there is not still here a ‘scandal of particularity’. Of course there is. That comes with the territory of monotheism and election.³²¹ The redrawing of both doctrines around Jesus (and the spirit, as we already glimpse in 5.5) retains the shocking character of the original, if anything more so. But here the Pauline vision of the love of God likewise retains its character as the *electing* love, in Paul’s (and, he would have said, Isaiah’s) vision of that election: the love that chooses to act in a particular way through a particular people, and ultimately through that people’s representative, in order that, through this means, the world as a whole might be rescued. This (as we might expect after Romans 4) has all the hallmarks

of the ancient Israelite sense that the creator God called Abraham and his people in order that through them he might rescue all the tribes of Adam.

It is no surprise, then, that the very next sentence goes on to introduce the larger picture. This is where we see at last the full sweep of the narrative from Adam to the Messiah, gazing as though from a great height where all detail has shrunk to a blur (including, sometimes, such trivial syntactical features as subjects, verbs and objects) and only the great, broad lines stand out:

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one human being, and death through sin, and in that way death spread to all humans, in that all sinned ... ¹³Sin was in the world, you see, even in the absence of the law, though sin is not calculated when there is no law. ¹⁴But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over the people who did not sin by breaking a command, as Adam had done – Adam, who was the original prototype of the one who would come.³²²

The reason it looks as though Paul was sidetracked at the end of verse 12 is that he was. He does not finish the sentence he began until he finally returns to the point in verse 18. But (with Paul there is always a ‘but’) the intrusion in verse 13 of the question of the law, bursting in upon the picture of Adam and the Messiah which Paul is constructing, embodies in its *rhetorical* invasiveness the *theological* point Paul is making about the law ‘coming in alongside’ (as he puts it in 5.20).³²³ The puzzle created by the Torah is held within the larger narrative.

Here, in fact, we are back in the same territory as in Galatians 3. The Mosaic law has intruded into the Adam–Messiah picture, just as it did into the Abraham–Messiah picture. There is a reason for this. The Torah, too, is part of the strange doctrine of election which is then being reworked around Jesus the Messiah. Paul’s point, throughout this chapter, is that *the one God has accomplished, through the obedience of the one man Jesus the Messiah, that which he purposed when he called Abraham and made the covenant with him, namely the rescue of the Adam-project*. Romans 5.12–21 is a summary statement of the reworking of election.

Indeed, this God has now done a greater thing even than he promised to Abraham. No longer are the restored people simply going to become

numerous, and occupy their own land. The people who benefit from the Messiah's work will share his rule over the cosmos (5.17). This is how election is reworked around the Messiah:

¹⁵But it isn't 'as the trespass, so also the gift'. For if many died by one person's trespass, how much more has God's grace, and the gift in grace through the one person Jesus the Messiah, abounded to the many. ¹⁶And nor is it 'as through the sin of the one, so also the gift'. For the judgment which followed the one trespass resulted in a negative verdict, but the free gift which followed many trespasses resulted in a positive verdict. ¹⁷For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace, and of the gift of covenant membership, of 'being in the right', reign in life through the one man Jesus the Messiah. [324](#)

Thus *the obedience of the Messiah* is the means by which the purpose of election, the rescuing and restoration of the human race, is accomplished. As we saw, the notion of the Messiah's 'obedience' is Paul's way, here and in Philippians 2.8, of *denoting* Jesus' death and *connoting* the way in which that death was (a) the opposite of Adam's disobedience and (b) more particularly the obedience to the Israel-shaped, election-driven saving plan of the covenant God:

¹⁸So, then, just as, through the trespass of one person, the result was condemnation for all people, even so, through the upright act of one person, the result is justification – life for all people. ¹⁹For just as through the disobedience of one person many received the status of 'sinner', so through the obedience of one person many will receive the status of 'in the right'.

²⁰The law came in alongside, so that the trespass might be filled out to its full extent. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more; ²¹so that, just as sin reigned in death, even so, through God's faithful covenant justice, grace might reign to the life of the age to come, through Jesus the Messiah, our lord. [325](#)

Here might we stay and speak of a story divine and human, all-encompassing and many-sided, full of love and grief and purpose. That is for another occasion. For the moment we simply note the point: as the 'faithfulness' of the Messiah was a way of referring to his death, making it clear that he was therein offering God the 'faithfulness' to which Israel was called but in which Israel failed, so the 'obedience' of the Messiah in this

passage, also obviously referring to his death, is the way of making it clear both that he is being the ‘obedient servant’ and that he is thereby reversing and undoing the effects of Adam’s ‘disobedience’.³²⁶ And the divinely appointed purpose for achieving that end always was the election of, and the covenant with, Abraham and his ‘seed’. God has done, through the Messiah, what he had said he would do in ‘election’.

The role of Torah within this purpose will become apparent in Romans 7. For the moment it is expressed in the dense and cryptic 5.20: ‘the law came in alongside *so that (hina)* the trespass might be filled out to its full extent’! Paul said *hina*, and he meant *hina*: this was the divine purpose. We are here, as we anticipated, not far from the strange statements of Galatians 3.19 and 22. Something seems to have happened in relation to the particular Israel-stage of the divine purpose, something which will give yet more depth to Paul’s view of the obedient death of the Messiah. But again we note: this is simply part of the reworking of ‘election’. The law defined Israel, and filled out Adam’s trespass precisely within Israel. The Messiah has come to that very point, so that ‘grace might increase all the more’ right there.

One final but vital note. Many of Paul’s expositors have supposed that he gave up talking about ‘righteousness’ and so forth in chapter 4, and that in chapters 5—8 he was no longer dealing in ‘juristic’ or ‘forensic’ categories, but now in ‘incorporative’ or ‘participatory’ ones. Here, however, at the climax of chapter 5, we find that Paul’s way of speaking about the work of the one God in the Messiah is not twofold, but single: neither merely ‘juristic’ nor merely ‘participationist’, but essentially *covenantal*, including within that ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘messianic’. The occurrence of *dikaioynē*, here and (as we shall see) elsewhere in Romans 5—8, particularly in the climax of 8.31–9, is not a strange, unnatural hang-over from chapters 1—4. As in Galatians 3 and Philippians 3, the language of the law court belongs intimately, in Paul’s mind, with the language of incorporation into the Messiah and his people. Romans 1—4 and 5—8 are not alternative patterns of redemption. They are a sequential argument, and when Paul wants to show how the sequence works he refers back, in summary form, to the longer arguments already made – just as, in 2.25–9 in particular, but also in

a dense phrase like 3.24 ('through the redemption in Messiah Jesus'), he has anticipated in 1—4 arguments which he will now make more fully. I suggested above that in 3.24 he was as it were scooping up the whole of Romans 5—8 and placing it, as a small nugget, within his argument about the revelation of the divine covenant faithfulness. Here it happens, as it were, the other way around. 'Grace reigned through righteousness to eternal life', or, as I have translated it myself, 'through God's faithful covenant justice, grace might reign to the life of the age to come'. The revelation of the divine righteousness, as in 3.21—4.21, is now placed within the overall statement of the divine purpose from creation to the new age, as in 5.12–21. And all happens 'through Jesus, the Messiah, our lord'. Here once more we see election reworked around the Messiah.

[\(c\) Romans 7.1—8.11](#)

Within the particular argument of Romans, Paul must then develop his central picture of what 'being in the Messiah' actually means. He expounds that in Romans 6, to which we shall return; but our own argument demands that we jump to Romans 7 and 8. After all the things Paul has said, cryptically and curiously, about the Torah, it is time to explain just where the law fitted in to God's purposes.³²⁷

It is not only unfinished business within Romans, of course, that gets picked up and addressed here. Galatians, too, left several stones unturned on this path, to say the least, and there are puzzles elsewhere as well.³²⁸ They, too, are in principle discussed here. In terms of the multiple narratives which form Paul's worldview (chapter 7 above), we are now close to the heart of the 'Israel' narrative, so that we begin to glimpse the way in which the 'Messiah' narrative, in dealing with Israel's particular problem, deals thereby with the problem of Adam which Israel was supposed to solve but which Israel had instead deepened. Before we get lost among the individual trees of Romans 7, then, we remind ourselves which bit of the forest we are investigating. We are looking, not so much for the full analysis of what Paul here says about the Torah, still less for what Paul here says about the

always-contentious ‘I’, but for what he says about the Messiah, and about the way that the divine purpose in election came to fruition, and hence to radical redefinition, through him.

This is already set out, briefly, in 7.4–6, which we could summarize by saying: the purpose which the covenant God had spoken of to Israel in terms of the ‘new covenant’ (Deuteronomy 30; Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36) has now been fulfilled through the Messiah’s death and the gift of the spirit. With that, we find ourselves on the map of other related passages in Romans, particularly 2.25–9 and 10.5–13, which are both needed for the full picture to emerge. But for the moment we look at what Paul says in 7.4 about the transition that has occurred: ‘You died to the law through the body of the Messiah, so that you could belong to someone else.’ This is a further statement of election redefined around the Messiah.

Paul is here developing the image he has sketched in 7.1–3: a married couple, with the husband dying and the wife being free to marry again. But things are somewhat more complex. In Paul’s use of the image, both the death and the remarriage happen to the same person: ‘*you* died to the law ... so that *you* could belong to someone else.’ This is obviously close to what he says in Galatians 2.19–20, where ‘I am crucified with the Messiah ... nevertheless I live’), but it is not at once apparent how that makes Romans 7 more comprehensible. Some have given up, accusing Paul of ‘confusion worse confounded’.³²⁹ But the charge is unwarranted when we read the chapter in the light of what has gone before.

The clue is found in Romans 6, where the ‘old human’ refers back to Adam, the head of a humanity characterized by sin and death.³³⁰ There, in 6.6, the ‘old human’ has died in baptism, ‘so that the bodily solidarity of sin might be abolished, and that we should no longer be enslaved to sin’. That is the picture which Paul has in mind. The ‘marriage’ illustration develops the point of 6.3–14: the death that occurs (the Messiah’s death, shared by the believer through baptism) sets a person free from the ‘old human’, the ‘old Adam’, *to whom one was bound by the law*. Without that death, the law still binds one to Adam, but with the death of the old Adam in baptism the

law no longer has a claim. The law is not the first husband, but the thing which binds ‘you’ to that first husband (Adam).

But the ‘you’ who is bound by the law to Adam is not just anybody. It is, once again, ‘the Jew’. Here we are, for a moment, back in 2.17–20. ‘The Jew’ claims to possess, in Torah, ‘the form of knowledge and truth’. But Torah and prophets themselves, while agreeing with the statement in theory, turn round and accuse ‘the Jew’ of not having kept Torah itself (2.21–27). Thus, too, in 3.20, ‘through the law comes the knowledge of sin.’ Here again we meet the problem which Paul finds at the heart of the doctrine of election. Israel is called by God for a purpose. Israel is given Torah in order to keep that purpose, and the nation, on the right track. Yet all that Torah seems able to do is to declare that Israel has broken it. However true that is – and Paul, as we have seen, has discerned in the gospel of Jesus the Messiah that it is more true than he had previously imagined – it appears to leave the whole divine purpose in election, in the call and commissioning of Israel, in abeyance. We are once again back where we were at the start of chapter 3. What can be done? How can the covenant God be faithful to the promises he has made, promises to work not just *for* Israel but *through* Israel for the world? Those questions have not gone away. We have now dug deep down underneath them, and are arriving at Paul’s understanding of the very heart of the divine purpose in reworking election around Jesus the Messiah. This passage is regularly admitted to be dense and difficult, but it is within these thickets, I submit, that the most important quarry in Pauline theology has been hiding all along.

Paul’s analysis of what has happened comes in three stages, set out in Romans 7.7–12, 7.13–20 and then, in conclusion, 7.21–5. This is not the place for a full commentary. I highlight only the features that seem to me important within the present argument. No doubt there is plenty of room for further exploration at many other levels.³³¹

First, in 7.7–12, Paul tells the story of Israel at Sinai in such a way as to echo the story of Adam in the garden.³³² He explains, in other words, that what happened to Israel when Torah arrived on Mount Sinai was a recapitulation of the primal sin of Adam. The echoes of both events

resonate together here, but the main topic of the passage is the Torah, and the point here is that Torah, though promising life, brought death, because as soon as there was a commandment there was a temptation, which proved irresistible.

The resonances between Eden and Sinai are profound. It is almost as though Torah drew together the two trees: the tree of life, which held out a promise that was not taken up, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which held out a warning that was not heeded. ‘Sin’, which serves here as a way of talking both about ‘the satan’ in the garden and the presence of the sinful tendency (more than the evil *yetzer* but not less) within every human being, deceived ‘me’ and so killed ‘me’.³³³ ‘The commandment which pointed to life turned out, in my case, to bring death.’

Paul insists, as in Galatians 3.19 and 22, that this was not the fault of the Torah itself, of the ‘commandment’. The commandment really did ‘promise life’ (7.10 – the start of a key sequence of thought which comes to an exhilarating climax in 8.11). The law and the ‘commandment’ are ‘holy, upright and good’ (7.12). This is not just a knee-jerk reaction, the old Pharisee unwilling to think of Torah as other than utterly good. It remained the apostle’s settled conviction.

So where did the problem lie? The problem was with what we may call the Adamic nature of Israel: the problem, in other words, within ‘me’. That is the answer Paul gives to the next question, in verse 13: ‘Was it that good thing, then, that brought death to me?’ Was Torah, however good it appears to be, really responsible for ‘my’ death? The answer, in 7.14–20, is that the person who lives under Torah is, as a matter of objective theological reality (by no means necessarily of psychological self-awareness) constantly in two minds. The vocation of the devout Jew is to delight in Torah: Psalm 19 and Psalm 119 sum up this delight, even excitement, and Paul will not say a word against it. But the very Torah in which Israel rightly, properly and vocationally delights also bears witness that Israel is part of the problem as well as part of the solution. *Israel, too, is in Adam.*³³⁴ That is the problem to which Paul will allude in 8.3: the Torah was ‘weak because of human flesh’, in other words, because of Israel’s ‘flesh’, that identity with the

whole human race which Israel inevitably shared but which would inevitably mean that Israel, as it stood, could not become the people Torah would otherwise have made them. It is not a matter, in Käsemann's unfortunate expression, of 'the hidden Jew in all of us'. The problem is the hidden 'Adam' in the Jew.³³⁵

At the head of the dense analysis of the plight of Israel under Torah, however, there stands the all-important verse 7.13.³³⁶ Here, notably, there are two *hina*-clauses, two indications of the divine purpose in giving the law:

Was it that good thing, then, that brought death to me? Certainly not! On the contrary; it was sin, *in order that* it might appear as sin, working through the good thing and producing death in me. This was *in order that* sin might become very sinful indeed, through the commandment.

The problem under which Israel suffers (in Pauline retrospect) is not, then, simply a difficulty to be got over. It is not that Torah is frustratingly difficult to keep. It is, rather, that Torah was given as *part of the divine purpose in election*; but the purpose, it seems, included a necessarily negative element. This is what was anticipated in Galatians 3.19, where he says that the law was given 'because of transgressions', and 3.22, where he says that scripture 'shut up everything under the power of sin', which Paul echoes in the present letter in 11.32. It was, in particular, what Paul had hinted in the cryptic line in Romans 5.20: Torah intruded into the Adam–Messiah sequence *in order to* 'increase the trespass'. The double *hina* in 7.13 is, in other words, not out on its own. With Christian hindsight, Paul is offering a consistent account of Torah which indicates that it had a particular *and negative* role to play within the overall purpose of election.³³⁷ And, to insist on the point, which will come to full expression in Romans 9—11, this particular and negative role was itself divinely intended.

The divine purpose was, it seems, *to allow sin to do its worst in Israel itself, precisely through the Torah*. This is not (in case there should be any doubt) a matter of the creator 'causing' sin. It is a matter of his responding to the fact of sin in the world by deciding to lure it on to one place, to cause it to be focused on one point, *in order that* (there it is again) it can be dealt

with right there. This, in fact, is where 5.20–1 already pointed, though with such dense brevity that the point might be missed. As often, we have to appeal to a fuller statement to understand a compressed formulation.

How does this, so to speak, ‘work’? And what has this to do with the messianically redefined election?

‘Sin’ here, as is often remarked, is far more than the sum total of all human wrongdoing, of idolatry and immorality. Sin is the dark power which has corrupted humankind and God’s good creation, the power which is actually the same as ‘the satan’ but which Paul, by speaking of it as a subpersonal force, can portray as something that can grow and swell, become more fully its true self, show itself up in its rightful colours. Why would God want to allow such a thing? Here we are in fact near the heart of the doctrine of election, seen with Paul’s christological hindsight which has made him rethink both ‘plight’ and ‘solution’ in what appears a dizzying spiral of reflection on the Messiah’s death. The double *hina*, ‘in order that’, in 7.13 picks up the *hina* of 5.20 and spells it out: the divine purpose is that, through Torah, ‘sin’ might swell to its full size, *in order then to be dealt with once and for all*. And the place where that swelling was to happen, to Paul’s horror in retrospect, was precisely the elect people, Israel: the Israel that clung to Torah because it was after all the God-given law, holy and just and good. It is as though Paul is envisaging the covenant God playing a trick on ‘sin’ (and also, as a secondary result, playing a trick on Israel itself, as Jeremiah almost said): by giving Israel the Torah, ‘sin’ seizes its opportunity, and displays – in the people of God, no less! – just what havoc it can wreak. Without realizing that it is being led into a trap, ‘sin’ has a field day, ‘producing in “me” all kinds of covetousness’ (7.8). But the trap has been set. This is the divine plan for dealing with ‘sin’; this is what, for Paul, ‘election’ really meant. The intention was to bring ‘sin’ to one spot, where it could be judged and condemned.³³⁸

The precise ways in which ‘sin’ grew to its full height in Israel Paul does not here spell out. We might hazard a guess that it might have something to do with his own sense of the enormity of opposing and persecuting the *ekklēsia tou theou*, the Messiah in and among his people.³³⁹ It may simply

have something to do with the particular inappropriateness of the people to whom so much had been given nevertheless behaving in the way the rest of the world was doing, as in Romans 2. But the point, in any case, seems to be more one of theological reality than any particular sin ('sin' here is anyway a power that takes over human life rather than particular wrong action); and again in any case Paul is clear that 'it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.' That makes little sense in terms of personal responsibility. Hippolytus's famous escape clause, that it was the tongue that swore while the mind remained unsworn, is not what Paul is trying to say.³⁴⁰ Rather, Paul's point is that Israel's vocation in election was never to be the automatically 'good' chosen people, always obedient and consciously and deliberately faithful. Strangely, since the creator God both called Israel to be the means of rescuing humankind (knowing, with the golden calf incident, with Deuteronomy 32, and with the great prophetic denunciations, that Israel was a nation of rebels) and since this God gave Israel the holy, just and good Torah (that affirmation of Torah's goodness is itself a striking affirmation both of Jewish-style monotheism and of Jewish-style election), it must be the case that the one God intended this Torah for a purpose, beyond that of merely stopping Israel going to the bad in the time between Sinai and the coming of the Messiah. Now, at one of the most profound moments anywhere in his writing, Paul sketches what that purpose was. Israel was called in order to be the place where sin would grow to full height, so that it might at last be fully and properly condemned. If sin was to be defeated, this was how it had to happen.

So how was sin to be condemned? Answer, once again: in Israel's representative Messiah. This is where election-including-Torah is redefined dramatically around the crucifixion. The line of thought that runs from 3.20 ('what you get through the law is the knowledge of sin') to 5.20 ('the law came in alongside, so that the trespass might be filled out to its full extent') and then on to 7.13 ('It was sin ... in order that it might appear as sin ... in order that sin might become very sinful indeed, through the commandment') finds its proper conclusion in Romans 8.3:

³For God has done what the law (being weak because of human flesh) was incapable of doing. God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin-offering; and, right there in the flesh, he condemned sin.

This is near the heart of Paul's 'atonement-theology' – which is another way of saying that it is near the heart of his redefinition of election. Certainly this brief statement contains more elements of that abstract entity, 'atonement', than any other passage in Paul. Strangely, it does not look exactly like any of the things currently on the open market under the title of 'Paul's atonement-theology'. What exactly is he saying? Six things at least, I reckon, each of which could be expanded considerably but must be stated briefly here for the sake of clarity.

This is a theology of *representation*, but in a more subtle way than that notion is often expressed. 'The son of God' denotes Jesus, of course, and connotes, simultaneously, his messianic status and his 'divinity' in the sense we studied in the previous chapter. As Messiah, he represents Israel, which in turn represents the whole human race. That is how 'election' works in Paul's redefinition.

It is also a theology of *substitution*, but not quite of the usual kind. The Messiah's death is the means by which sin is condemned, and this explains why, two verses earlier, Paul can say that there is 'no condemnation for those in the Messiah'. Paul does not, however, say what many preachers do, that 'God condemned Jesus.' He says, rather, that 'God condemned sin *in the flesh* of his son.' That makes a considerable difference.

It is also a theology of *sacrifice*, but again not of the usual kind. The sacrifice in question is the sin-offering, which in Leviticus and Numbers was designed precisely to deal with sins that were unwitting (I didn't know it was wrong and/or I didn't realize I was doing it) or, more importantly, unwilling (I knew I shouldn't do it and I meant not to do it but I somehow did it anyway). The opposite of those is 'sinning with a high hand', i.e. knowingly and deliberately; no sacrifice can be offered for that, and the only result is condemnation. But, as I argued a long time ago, the point of the sin-offering in the present context is that it is the specific sacrifice to

deal with precisely the problem that Paul has analyzed in Romans 7: ‘I don’t do the good thing I want to do, but I end up doing the evil thing I don’t want to do.’³⁴¹

It is also, particularly and obviously, a theology of *judicial punishment* or *condemnation*. As I said a moment ago, the fact that ‘sin’ is ‘condemned’ in the flesh of God’s son means that ‘there is now no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah.’ The condemnation has clearly been transferred: no *katakrima* for those in the Messiah, because the one God *katekrinen* sin in the Messiah’s flesh.³⁴² But the punishment, here at least, is not so much the punishment that ‘I’ deserved, but the punishment that ‘sin’ deserved. Part of the whole point of chapter 7 was to distance the ‘I’ from ‘sin’, and to make it clear that it was the latter that was at fault and needed to be condemned.

It is a theology of *Israel’s purpose*, of ‘election’ in other words, but not in the way one might imagine. Here we are near the heart of Paul’s revision of election in and around the Messiah. This is not a way of taking ‘election’ away from Israel – far from it: it is the horrifying realization, in the light of the fact of the crucified Messiah, that Israel was called to be the place where ‘sin’ would be ‘condemned in the flesh’ – and that the Messiah has taken that role on to himself, individually. It is only when theologies of election miss out this central point that they go bad and accuse one another of take-over bids. This fulfilment is of a different order.

It is also, finally, a theology of *divine victory*. The force and power of ‘sin’ have been ruining the good creation, and this moment is the moment of triumph, corresponding to the crossing of the Red Sea or, indeed, to Judith’s cutting off Holofernes’s head. This, again, both is and isn’t quite like the normal *Christus Victor* atonement-theologies. Paul comes close to that kind of thing in a couple of other passages,³⁴³ but here the note of victory is as it were hidden behind, but only just behind, the fact of sin’s condemnation. We should not, because it is hidden, downplay this element in Romans 8. In chapters 5, 6 and 7, ‘sin’ has been increasingly present and troubling, and the fact that it is now judicially condemned has the force of the victory we know from the book of Revelation: ‘The accuser of our comrades has been thrown down!’³⁴⁴ When Paul speaks of being ‘more

than conquerors' at the end of the chapter (8.37), he is not making a new point. He is drawing out the significance of what he had said in the opening verses of the chapter.³⁴⁵

I stress: all this is precisely election-theology, reworked and rethought around the Messiah. It is about the covenant purpose which the one God had for Israel, as Paul now saw it, and the way in which this had been fulfilled, and thereby reshaped, in and through Jesus as Israel's representative. This is how, in Paul's mind and heart, the strange vocation of Israel, shaped by the one God not least through the giving of Torah, has worked out. Israel itself was to be the place where 'sin', the great deceit, the great infection of the human race, was to be overthrown, condemned, defeated. This purpose, Paul declares, has now been accomplished in the Messiah.

This means that we must hold firmly in our minds a conviction which remained central for Paul: that this divine purpose, though he (Paul) had rethought it around the Messiah, was the purpose the one God had had in mind all along, from the beginning, in calling Israel, and particularly in giving the Torah. Torah had, all along, been the divinely appointed means of tricking 'sin', luring it to come and do its worst so that it might be condemned at that point, much as 'the rulers of this age' had been tricked into crucifying the lord of glory and so signing their own death-warrants.³⁴⁶ Here we see again the plight-solution-plight spiral which we studied towards the close of the previous chapter. The revelation of a crucified Messiah has caused Paul to reflect, from all that he knew of Israel's traditions, on how Israel's God had done all things in such a way as to lead up to this point, but in a way which nobody before had imagined. When, therefore, we speak of 'election reworked', we must not imagine that Paul was merely playing games with the original doctrine, using it as a convenient peg on which to hang his own quite different ideas. He believed that, with Jesus being revealed as Israel's Messiah, the true, original 'doctrine of election', the great Fact at the heart of Israel's national life, had at last been unveiled.

Consider once more. Paul knew that there was a ‘problem of evil’ before Jesus ever emerged into the public eye. But Paul had perhaps hoped that strenuous Torah-keeping, resulting maybe in more suffering of the kind undergone by the Maccabees, would see off the problem. He knew that the gentiles were wicked idolaters, and that their idolatry let loose forces of evil in the world that could do terrible damage. But he had perhaps hoped that one day the Messiah would come and smash them all with a rod of iron, dashing them into pieces like a potter’s vessel. He had been aware that Israel itself (and he himself) was prone to sin. But he had presumably believed that the sacrificial system, not least the sin-offering, would deal with that problem.

What he had not envisaged, what so far as we can tell nobody had ever imagined, was that all these dreams and hopes would come true not just *through* the Messiah himself, as the agent of divine judgment and redemption, as the bringer of the new exodus, but *in the flesh of* the Messiah himself, the ‘son of God’ in the three senses we have seen (Messiah; Israel’s representative; the one who shares the inner being of the one God). Paul had certainly not envisaged that the shameful death of ‘God’s son’ would be the reason why he, Paul, would write a letter to Rome, the home of a different ‘son of God’ and a different ‘good news’, to say that he, Paul, was not ashamed of the ‘good news’ of the son of David whose resurrection had marked him out as son of God in power. There is indeed a line that runs straight from Romans 1.3–4 to Romans 8.3–4, taking in at a gulp on the way the huge argument of 3.21—4.25. It is the line which declares that here, in the apocalyptic gospel events, the God-given covenant purpose for Israel has come true at last. Paul’s argument is this – and it stands here at the heart of his greatest letter: that the one God, in his supreme act of faithfulness, and through the faithfulness of the Messiah, had unveiled the inner meaning that had been present in the election of Israel from the beginning.

Once again we must take note of what has happened through our approaching Paul’s soteriology in this way. The decisive statement in Romans 8.1–4 is nothing if not *forensic*. In 8.1 and 8.3 the cognate words

katakrima and *katekrinen* send us back at once to the great Assize of 2.1–16, and that is quite deliberate. And yet Romans 8 is supposed to be the very heart of Paul’s ‘incorporative’ christology and soteriology – as indeed it is. Likewise, we should not be surprised – as we would be if we listened to the siren call of those who want to split Romans 1–8 into two incompatible sections! – at the fact that Paul very carefully uses *dikaiosynē* and one of its key cognates in 8.1–11, despite the fact that in the normal divisions of the letter he had stopped using that language by the end of chapter 4, or at most the start of chapter 5. But this, too, is quite deliberate. To say it once more: *the division between ‘juristic’ and ‘participationist’ analyses of Paul’s soteriology is based on a failure to understand his underlying ‘covenantal’ thought.* When he says that the ‘right and proper verdict’ of the law is now fulfilled ‘in us, as we live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit’ (8.4), we should hear the *dikaiōma* in question as the mirror-image of the *dikaiōma* spoken of in 1.32, the ‘decree’ that ‘those who do such things deserve to die.’³⁴⁷ After all, Romans is at one level about death and life; and here in 8.1–11 ‘life’ is one of the main themes, the ‘life’ that the law promised (7.10) but could not give (8.3). Instead, ‘the law of the spirit of life’ (8.2) results in ‘life and peace’ (8.6), and will ‘give life’ to the mortal bodies of those who are ‘in the Messiah’ and indwelt by the spirit.³⁴⁸

And the key verse in all this, which has puzzled generations of commentators, is 8.10: the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life ‘because of *dikaiosynē*’.³⁴⁹ ‘Because of righteousness’, say older translations, as well they might; but what does this mean? It means, I suggest, that once again Paul has scooped up an entire train of thought from elsewhere in the letter and has placed it, in this highly condensed form, at the heart of the present argument. Here there should be no doubt: *dikaiosynē* refers to the verdict ‘righteous’ issued in the present over all those who believe, issued because of the Messiah’s faithfulness, his self-giving to death. In this single line Paul has taken the whole argument of 3.21–4.25, as indeed he already did in 5.6–11, and is drawing the consequences, as he already promised in 1.16–17.³⁵⁰ Just as Romans 3.24

indicated that ‘being in Christ’ belonged at the heart of the exposition of justification, so Romans 8.10 indicates that ‘righteousness’ – the status which results from the verdict of the divine court, the polar opposite of ‘condemnation’ as in 8.1, the status which carries with it the notion of ‘covenant membership’ as in Romans 4³⁵¹ – belongs at the heart of the exposition of ‘being in Christ’.

There is therefore now no contradiction between ‘justification’ and ‘being in Christ’, between law court language and incorporative language; for the law of the covenant, the election reworked around the Messiah, has rescued Paul’s theology from the sterile antitheses of later inappropriate categories. What the older schemes could not solve, because the place of Torah in Paul seemed so opaque, has been resolved by paying attention both to the multi-layered narrative structure of his thought in general and to the covenantal narrative of Israel in particular. Once we place at the centre Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, and then as Israel’s *representative* Messiah, and see in him both the *katakrima* and the *dikaiōma*, mercy and truth will meet together, and even ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘salvation history’ may kiss each other. And, as we shall see, the notion of the spirit’s indwelling will then give life and coherence to the whole mortal body of Pauline soteriology.

[\(v\) Jesus the Messiah through Whom God’s Love Holds His People Secure: Romans 8.31–9](#)

All this comes to a fresh expression, not simply a restatement of what has gone before (though it contains that too), in the last great paragraph of Romans 8. Here it is clear that when Paul speaks of God’s ‘love’ he really is thinking in the Deuteronomic categories of ‘election’. ‘Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect (*kata eklektōn theou*)?’ he asks, rhetorically; and he answers his own question with a messianic interpretation of three passages: Genesis 22, Isaiah 50 and Psalm 44. But it isn’t only a ‘messianic’ interpretation. It is also a people-of-God-in-the-Messiah interpretation. It is about ‘us’, who, as in 8.17–21, share in the ‘sufferings of the Messiah’ so that ‘we’ can also share his glory.³⁵²

The interpretation of these three primary biblical passages (Law, Prophets and Writings) goes again to the very heart of Paul's reworking of election *around Jesus the Messiah*. We cannot stress too strongly that this is not a 'transfer' of 'election' from the community of ethnic Israel to someone else (e.g. a gentile 'church'). It is the focus of election on Jesus precisely as Israel's Messiah. If people (obviously, in Paul's day, Jews who did not believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah) wanted to object to what Paul was doing, it was with his identification of Jesus as Messiah that they would have to quarrel, and did in fact quarrel. In our own day, a similar objection has hidden behind an apparently political complaint: 'the church' has supplanted 'Israel'. No doubt 'the church' has often been guilty of thinking just like that, and one contemporary trend in 'New Testament scholarship', namely the fad for a so-called 'apocalyptic' which has taken leave of its Jewish roots, decided that God has ignored the historical back-story of Israel and spoken of a completely new thing arriving in Jesus, is the most obvious current candidate. But Paul will have none of that. As far as he is concerned, the resurrection of Jesus (here at 8.34) is the anchor. Jesus is the Messiah; therefore all the Jewish traditions of 'election' must be refocused on him, reworked through him. This raises enormous problems – precisely the ones Paul himself raises in the next chapter, and part of what is going on in Romans 8, paradoxically, is setting up those problems – but it also provides a different answer to those usually supposed.³⁵³

Here again, just as in 8.1–11, we find no contradiction between 'being in Christ' ('incorporative' or 'participatory' language) and the ideas of 'condemnation' and 'justification' ('forensic'). Romans 8.31–9 is the dramatic and appropriate conclusion as much to Romans 1–4 as to Romans 5–8. Paul's reference to Israel's God 'giving up' his son in 8.32 reminds us of 4.24–5 (and as we shall presently see Paul may be thinking of Abraham here, as well as there). His claim that the one God is the 'justifier', challenging anyone now to 'condemn', looks back through 8.1–4 all the way to 2.1–16 and to 3.21–6 in that light. His focus on the incarnate love which sustains those 'in Christ' through all sufferings echoes 5.1–11.

The whole paragraph is about what it means to be ‘in Christ’; but the whole paragraph only makes the sense it does because justification lies at its heart.

The Jewish traditions of election had their basis, of course, deep in scripture. Among those traditions, one that loomed large, giving historical root and validation to all subsequent ones, was Abraham’s ‘offering’ of his ‘only son’ Isaac – or rather, his readiness to offer him, with a ram being killed at the last minute instead.³⁵⁴ Many writers have traced the powerful and moving way in which this ancient story, full of psychological terror but also pregnant with covenantal meaning – loyalty pledged, obedience offered, promises reaffirmed – continued to resonate through the later ‘moments’ in Israel’s story. Passover, the death of the lamb in place of the firstborn, was the most obvious.³⁵⁵

The story is dense enough for a three-hour opera, but is told in a mere nineteen verses. Here is the main narrative:

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love (LXX *ton huion sou agapēton, hon ēgapēsas*; the LXX thus uses *agapētos* to represent *yehideka*, “your one and only”), and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.’ So Abraham rose early in the morning ...

Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘Father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ Abraham said, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of YHWH called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me’ (*ouk epheisō tou huiou sou tou agapētou di’eme*; again the LXX *agapētos* translates *yehideka*, ‘your one and only’). And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place, ‘YHWH will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of YHWH it shall be provided.’

The angel of YHWH called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, ‘By myself I have sworn, says YHWH: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son (*tou huiou sou tou agapētou*, again translating *yehideka*), I will indeed bless you, and I will make your seed as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.’³⁵⁶

Out of the thousand things one might say about this narrative, we confine ourselves to two. First, we are inevitably struck, and can only conclude that the narrator intends us to be struck, by the internal repetitions: Abraham's threefold 'Here I am', for sure, but particularly 'your son, your only son, the one you love', with the Hebrew word *yahad* repeated: 'the one', the singular son, the special and beloved one. This, of course, provided endlessly fertile soil for later Jewish elaboration and exploration of various kinds.³⁵⁷ Such exploration returned again and again to the question of Abraham's 'seed', the people descended from Isaac and Jacob, and the way in which this family was sustained by the apparent validity of Abraham's 'sacrifice', and Isaac's willingness to be 'bound' (which took on more prominence in the tradition; granted that the sacrifice was in fact aborted at the last minute, the willingness of both father and son to go through with it became the key theological element). *This story became, in fact, both the narrational fountain-head and the theological substructure of Israel's election*, and guaranteed that at the heart of that notion of the people's chosenness there would be the strange and challenging notion of divine provision, a provision that went beyond and indeed counter to human expectation. God would bless the world through Abraham's 'seed', but from the beginning this seed, and this blessing, were to be seen as a gift of grace, an unexpected 'provision', not something that could be clung to or taken for granted. That, it need hardly be said, is a point which has resonated with multiple meanings in the history of the Jewish people through many centuries.

Second, it is precisely this story to which Paul goes back, through the clear allusion of Romans 8.32. He gives it the meaning one might almost have expected to emerge in chapter 4 and which, we might conclude, has been deliberately held back for this climactic moment. It is striking that in his exposition of Abraham's faith in Romans 4 Paul neither mentions nor alludes to Genesis 22 (unless the mention of Jesus and his death and resurrection in 4.24–5 be reckoned such an allusion; but if it is, it is already subversive). In the same way, it is striking that here in chapter 8 it is of course the covenant God himself who 'does not spare his only son'. Instead

of Abraham, God; instead of Isaac, Jesus; *and, instead of a death averted, a death embraced*. There is here, quite obviously, a major *relativization* as well as a major recalling of that most crucial moment in Jewish election-theology. The ‘offering of the beloved son’ that stands at the narrational fountain-head for the newly revealed doctrine of election, giving it its particular theological shape, is not, after all, Abraham’s offering of Isaac, but that immeasurably greater offering, towards which the Aqedah of Genesis 22 was simply the most striking and moving of long-range signposts.³⁵⁸

We can hardly stress too strongly a point already made but in need of repetition. The reason Paul could make this major move, still *within* second-Temple Judaism, was not in order to legitimate ‘the church’; not because he saw Jesus as ‘the church’s Messiah’ or ‘the Messiah of Christian belief’; but precisely because he believed that Jesus was *Israel’s* Messiah, the Messiah of Jewish expectation. Nor can we emphasize too strongly that the reason Paul regarded Jesus as Messiah was not because of polemical intentions in relation to his own idiosyncratic plan to include gentiles without them being circumcised (include them in what? we might ask), but because, and only because, he believed that Israel’s God had raised this crucified would-be Messiah from the dead and that therefore (as in Romans 1.3–4) his messianic claim had been demonstrated beyond question.³⁵⁹ The insistence upon gentile inclusion without circumcision, and on the view that all those ‘in the Messiah’ now constituted ‘God’s elect’ (8.33), followed from that belief. ‘If righteousness came through the law, the Messiah died for nothing.’ It did not generate it.

If Paul has here provided a fresh reading of Genesis 22, he has done the same, in verses 33 and 34, with Isaiah 50.³⁶⁰ His re-reading of this crucial prophetic passage represents a huge step, but one that is fully comprehensible once the basic structure of his belief is grasped. We recall that Paul frequently refers to his own ministry in terms of Isaiah 49. He seems not to have thought of the prophetic texts atomistically, as isolated fragments, but to have seen them – certainly these central chapters in Isaiah – as a seamless whole, more or less a continuous narrative.³⁶¹

As far as we can tell, there were two main ways of reading the ‘servant songs’ in the Judaism of Paul’s day. There was a ‘messianic’ reading; but, in this reading, the Messiah did not suffer, but rather inflicted suffering on the enemies of the covenant God (i.e. the gentiles), much as in Psalm 2 and the lines of thought that derive from it. There was a ‘suffering’ reading, for which the best early evidence is the martyr-theology in the book of Daniel; but this ‘suffering’ was not that of the Messiah. These two, I have argued elsewhere, had already been combined.³⁶² Paul here picks up the second reading in particular, where the ‘servant’ is construed as the people who, though suffering, are trusting Israel’s God for deliverance in a great forensic judgment scene. But he does so because, first and foremost, this people has been constituted as the Messiah’s people, who share his sufferings in order to share his glory and inheritance (8.17–18).

The echo of Isaiah 50 in Romans 8 not only locates the suffering community on the map of the divine promise to Israel. It enables Paul to tie this promise closely to the story of Abraham to which he has just alluded: ‘Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,’ declares the prophet in the section immediately following:

Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.³⁶³

This in turn points forward, as does the echo of Genesis 22, not only to the massive question which Paul must address in Romans 9, but to the means by which he will answer it. ‘Those who pursue righteousness’, or not as the case may be, are the subject all through (as in 9.30). The way by which they are to understand the strange divine purposes in their history is through a fresh understanding of Abraham and Sarah (9.6–9). Isaiah 51 emphasizes again, in line with chapters 42 and 49, that the saving work for which the servant is called, and in which he is vindicated, extends to the nations far away (51.4–6).

This brings us back to Psalm 44 (LXX 43), quoted in verse 36. We have discussed this before in connection with monotheism itself.³⁶⁴ Once again

Paul is claiming that texts which speak about the people of God, about their allegiance to the God of the covenant and about their consequent suffering are properly to be understood in relation to those who belong to Jesus the Messiah.³⁶⁵ This time, as in Galatians 2.20, he uses the language of ‘love’ in relation to the Messiah himself, modifying or contextualizing that in the final verse (8.39) so that it becomes ‘the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord’. This notion of ‘love’ does not just, as it were, indicate a strong emotion on the part of the covenant God, an emotion which leads him both to generous self-giving and to unbreakable commitment no matter what may come in the way. It has to do with the divine covenant with Israel, sustained by the divine *hesed*, as celebrated again and again in scripture. Paul’s reference here to God’s love in the Messiah thus marks the Messiah and his people as the *covenant* people, the *elect*, as explicitly in verse 33.³⁶⁶ This in turn links verses 35–9 closely to the Aqedah allusion in verse 32, because, as we saw, in the original Hebrew, and even more in the Septuagint, the stress there lies on Isaac as the ‘beloved’ son. Paul does not use that word here for the Messiah in relation to God, choosing instead to refer to him as *ho idios huios*, ‘God’s own son’, his only and special son. The ‘love’ in the story now extends to all the Messiah’s people: what has passed between father and son in the terrible self-giving of the cross now forms a unit from which covenant love reaches out to embrace that larger company. ‘Who shall separate us from the Messiah’s love? ... Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord.’

The electing love of God in the Messiah is thus a *victorious* love, overcoming every force or power that might stand in its way, and enabling the objects of that love themselves to be ‘completely victorious’ (*hypernikōmen*, 8.37). As in 1 Corinthians 15.20–8, with which Romans 8 already has so much in common, Paul sees the present time as one in which the Messiah is winning the victory which will be complete when death itself is defeated, and God is ‘all in all’. At every point in this celebratory conclusion to the argument of chapters 5–8, itself perhaps the most carefully constructed of any passage in his writings, he has made it clear

that the Jewish category of 'God's elect' has been redefined: first and foremost, in and as the Messiah himself, and second, and derivatively, to refer to the Messiah's people. Election is reworked, at every point, around the Messiah, and specifically around his death and resurrection.

We may sum up where we have got to so far. It should be clear that Paul has consciously redrawn his picture of God's elect around Jesus of Nazareth, and that he has done so on the basis of his resurrection from the dead, which marked him out as Messiah. This in turn has enabled him to understand the crucifixion of Jesus as the event which, however paradoxically or unexpectedly, has actually accomplished the goal for which Israel had been chosen in the first place, namely that of dealing with the large-scale problem of evil. From this perspective we can see a flurry of other themes coming together, in all of which it appears that Paul was exploring, and expressing in fresh ways, the notion that in Jesus the Messiah the divine plan for Israel was coming to a fulfilment which was both the original divine intention and also far beyond anything Israel had previously imagined.

[\(vi\) The Messiah, the Hope of Israel, and the Torah: Conclusion](#)

We have already seen that for Paul Jesus embodied and expressed the faithful love of the covenant God for his people. We have seen that he thought *both* of Jesus *and* of himself in terms of the 'servant'-vocation highlighted in the central section of Isaiah.³⁶⁷ We also saw, in the previous chapter, that Paul drew heavily on the Jewish 'wisdom' traditions to understand the truth about Jesus. This, though at one level an expression of rethought monotheism, is also an expression of reworked election, since it was precisely in Israel that 'wisdom', through the medium of Torah, was supposed to have come to dwell.³⁶⁸ As in some of the same traditions, this meant that Jesus had to be seen as the place where the creator God had come to make his abode: Jesus was, in other words, the true Temple, the heart of the life of Israel:

¹⁹For in him all the Fullness was glad to dwell

²⁰and through him to reconcile all to himself,
making peace through the blood of his cross,

through him – yes, things on the earth, and also the things in the heavens.³⁶⁹

⁹In him, you see, all the full measure of divinity has taken up bodily residence.³⁷⁰

This is what stands behind and underneath the notion explored at more length above, that Jesus somehow was able to *embody* the faithful love of the creator God, so that his death could be an *expression* of that love, indeed, its classic and defining expression (Romans 5.8–9). And this in turn means that Jesus, completely in line with the hope of Israel, was to be seen as the genuine human being, the ‘true Adam’, the ultimate image-bearer, doing for Adam what Adam could not do for himself, reversing the ‘fall’ and reinscribing the notion that image-bearing humans were to be set in authority over God’s creation.³⁷¹ When he receives the ‘inheritance’ which is his as Messiah, in the parallel passages of Romans 8.17 and Galatians 3.29 and 4.1, 7, this is also *both* the ‘inheritance’ which was promised to Abraham *and* (since Abraham’s task was to reverse the problem of Adam and so to get the ‘true humanity’ project back on track) the ‘inheritance’ of Adam himself. Jesus as Messiah thus inherits all that God had promised to Israel in the person of the king, that is, sovereignty over the world. With that, Jesus stands, for Paul, where Adam stood in Genesis 1.26–8.

But it was, for Paul, the death of Jesus which ultimately accomplished that bringing together of the whole world. This is seen in passages we have studied such as Galatians 2.15–21, where Jesus’ death is the principal reason why Jewish believers and gentile believers belong at the same table; 3.10–14, where Jesus’ death opens the way for the Abrahamic blessing to flow to the nations; and Romans 3.21–31, where the faithful, redeeming, sacrificial death of Jesus is the means whereby Jew and gentile come together in faith. But the same thing is also clear in passages we have not studied, such as Ephesians 2.14–18, where the death of Jesus has broken down the dividing wall between the two great divisions of humanity, reconciling both to the one God in a single body and announcing peace.

All this means, in particular, that Jesus was, for Paul, the place where the highly paradoxical Torah itself came to full expression. One cannot think of Israel's election without thinking of Torah. One should not think of Paul's reworking of election around the Messiah without seeing that in this move the Torah is not set aside as an early, second-rate and now irrelevant attempt at solving the human problem, but is rather reaffirmed, with great paradox, and within a radically new context. Yes: the Torah was not the means of the 'revelation of God's righteousness' which came in the gospel; but nevertheless 'the law and the prophets bear witness to it' (Romans 3.21), and 'the law of faith' does not abolish the law, but rather establishes it (3.31). This does not merely mean that Paul can find scriptural proof-texts for the gospel. That is not the way he thought. Rather, it seems to mean that the Torah itself, seen precisely as Israel's charter of election, as the narrative of the divine purpose, came to definitive and conclusive fresh expression in Israel's representative Messiah – *both* in his death *and* in his resurrection. His whole life, with those moments as its defining climax, constituted for Paul his 'obedience', his 'faithfulness'. And, though Torah could not be the means of unveiling the divine righteousness, Torah nevertheless bore witness to the obedient faithfulness through which that unveiling took place.

What exactly does this mean? One might point to the striking formulae, in Paul and elsewhere, which highlight the sinlessness of Jesus.³⁷² That remains a remarkable enough thing to say about any human being who had lived a public life in very recent memory. But the idea of Torah coming to fresh expression in Jesus is considerably deeper than simply the early Christian belief that Jesus had lived without sin.

First, there is the *Shema* itself, a classic summary of Torah. We have seen that, for Paul, this came to full expression in Jesus; in him, according to 1 Corinthians 8.6, the *Shema* was fulfilled in a new and definitive way.

Second, in Romans 7.1—8.11, focused on the climactic 8.3–4, we have seen that *what the Torah could not do* the covenant God did by the sending of the son and the sending of the spirit. In particular, the death of the son brought to its head that condemnation of 'sin' which was necessary for its

power to be broken. Torah had led ‘sin’ into the trap, the Israel-shaped trap (Romans 5.20), getting it to do its worst right there, in Israel ... so that in Israel, or rather in Israel *in the person of the representative Messiah*, it could be condemned. That, as we shall see, is one of the vital moves which will help us understand Romans 9—11. But the point for the moment is that in the Messiah we see Israel’s Torah coming to full, if again unexpected, expression. When he accomplishes his strange task, his bearing in the flesh of the divine condemnation of sin, Torah looks on with gladness. He has dealt with the sin-in-the-flesh which prevented its life-giving intention from coming to fruition.

This then plays out dramatically in Paul’s fresh reading of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10. There, as we shall see, confessing Jesus as lord, and believing that he is raised from the dead, is counted as the equivalent of that Torah-observance to which Israel was called as the new covenant sign. And there Jesus as ‘lord’ is lord *of all*, Jew and gentile alike. This too, Paul would claim, is part of the significance of his representation of Israel, his summing up in himself of Israel’s vocation as the elect people of the covenant God. Of course, this means at the same time that the Torah’s role of keeping Jews separate from gentiles has been abolished, set aside.³⁷³ But even there the note of fulfilment must not be missed, because even at that point Torah was (according to Paul) serving the *divine* purpose, working as a *paidagōgos* to keep Israel safe until the time of maturity. The very abolition of that particular role is itself part of the fulfilment.

Within Paul’s mature thought, then, Jesus appears unambiguously as the man who served the creator and covenant God with utter, faithful obedience, obedience unto death; the faithful obedience which Israel should have offered but did not. Jesus appears as the man who then receives, on the third day, the resurrection as the sign that he was indeed ‘God’s son’, the anointed king, Israel’s representative, the world’s true lord: in other words, the Messiah. And if Jesus is the place where Torah is strangely fulfilled, where Israel is strangely embodied, this is because, overshadowing even that great claim, he was the place where the faithfulness of the covenant God had been ultimately embodied as well. Monotheism freshly understood

is the hidden secret behind election freshly reworked. And if the divine faithfulness has been embodied in the Israel-faithfulness of the Messiah, we should not be surprised if, ever after, the people who belong to the Messiah are thus to be defined in turn as Messiah-faithful people: *hoi ek pisteōs Christou*, ‘those of the faithfulness of the Messiah’. That, in turn, is the key to one of Paul’s most famous, and misunderstood, doctrines.

At the centre of it all, with the sharpest paradox, there stands the cross. The cross is, for Paul, the sign of the centre: the centre for Israel, the centre for humankind. It is the middle of everywhere, the definite line which refocuses edge-lured minds, the axis of everything. This could, of course, be seen, and has often been seen, as a mere human claim, one empire drawing its line *here* while another draws its line *there*. But we should be in no doubt as to why Paul believed that the creator God had drawn it here, in the sign of a crossbar bisected by a vertical. The cross was, after all, the ‘death of choice’ for Romans to inflict on rebel subjects, for the greatest empire the world had ever known to stamp its authority on anyone who got in the way, particularly on anyone who spoke of, or seemed to be embodying, an alternative empire, a different *kind* of empire. For Paul, that was exactly Jesus’ crime. He represented and embodied the kingdom which was Israel’s dream: the kingdom of the creator God, through whose victory death itself would be defeated, so that with that defeat all the powers of the world might be called to account. Thus

None of the rulers of this present age knew about this wisdom. If they had, you see, they wouldn’t have crucified the lord of glory.³⁷⁴

He stripped the rulers and authorities of their armour, and displayed them contemptuously to public view, celebrating his triumph over them in him.³⁷⁵

God’s wisdom, in all its rich variety, was to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places – through the church! This was God’s eternal purpose, and he’s accomplished it in the Messiah, Jesus our lord.³⁷⁶

The cross stands, for Paul, as the arrow which marks the central point of ‘the faithfulness of God’. It is the point from which the enthroned Messiah

can look to east and west, to north and south, and like Abraham gaze upon all the lands of his inheritance. Their rulers have now been defeated through his death, and they and their people can be summoned to ‘faithful obedience, for the sake of his name’.³⁷⁷ It is through his ‘giving himself for our sins’ that he has ‘delivered us from the present evil age’: every syllable of that double statement must be given full weight if we are to understand how it is that the Messiah has accomplished the purpose for which the covenant God called Israel in the first place.³⁷⁸

Here, then, is Paul’s vision of how the Messiah, particularly in his death and resurrection, had redefined around himself the very grammar of election, looking all the way back to Abraham. The patriarch believed, and was declared for ever ‘in the right’. His seed would be enslaved within a land not theirs; God’s faithfulness would guarantee both Passover and promise: inheritance, and blessing for the world. They waited. Psalms and prophets sang of peace, a covenant of justice. And, instead: exile; hope lost; the rise of bestial empires. Then, when the times and tears had overflowed, God sent his only son, the strangest king, to be for Israel what they could not be: obedient; faithful; Passover in person. He was the seed, the servant and the son; the chosen; the beloved; the victory won.

[4. Election Reworked around the Spirit: the Messiah’s Justified People](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

I shall now approach what is arguably Paul’s most famous doctrine, and for many theologians the centre of his thought. I shall come at it from an angle that most will find unfamiliar. I believe that this way in, despite its apparent novelty, offers a direct route to its very heart. I propose that we envisage Paul’s soteriology, including but going wider than his ‘doctrine of justification’, in terms once more of his reworking of the Jewish doctrine of election, dependent on the christological understanding we have just

studied, but this time particularly in the light of the spirit. If the election of Israel was the solemn and unbreakable divine promise to save the world through Abraham's seed, Paul sees that promise as *accomplished* in the Messiah and *applied* through the spirit. And 'justification' is something that happens, as it were, right in the middle of that work. Those who have just read the previous chapter will perhaps realize that the fresh vision of 'justification' which I am proposing stands squarely on the foundations of Paul's fresh vision of 'monotheism'.

In terms of the history of Pauline interpretation, this proposal aims to accomplish four important things. First, it enables us to show, in terms of the structure of the argument as well as its detailed content, that the stand-off between 'juridical' and 'participationist' themes in Paul can be resolved once and for all by the appeal to the more basic Jewish category of God's plan *for* Israel and *through* Israel: that is, through a fresh appreciation and appropriation of the language of 'election' and particularly 'covenant', the larger category within which the language of the law court and the language of incorporation nest comfortably side by side. Second, and consequent upon this, it locates 'justification' solidly within Paul's vision of the Messiah as Israel's representative; that is, in traditional dogmatic language, it places 'justification' within the 'in Christ' complex – but *without* thereby relativizing it or implying that it plays only a minor function, as in the tradition which has followed Wrede and Schweitzer all the way to Sanders and now Campbell. Third, it will enable us to differentiate between the many different aspects of Paul's thought about how the people-of-God-in-the-Messiah are rescued from sin and death, and about who and what they now really are, without dividing these different aspects or playing them off against one another. Fourth, in and through all of this we can insist both (a) that Paul's vision of justification and salvation remains rooted in the promises given to Abraham and his 'seed' (in other words, he does not sweep these to one side in favour of mere novelty; he remains a deeply and utterly Jewish theologian) and (b) that this vision does not supplant ethnic Israel in favour of 'the church', but rather sees ethnic Israel and its election summed up gloriously in Israel's own Messiah and his death and

resurrection, generating an 'Israel' which is then defined, once more, through and in relation to him precisely as Israel's Messiah. This will satisfy neither the ardent 'sweeping supersessionist', for whom nothing short of a new act without historical antecedent will do, nor the ardent 'anti-supersessionist' for whom nothing will do short of a denial that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. Paul will not please either party, and neither shall we. We shall aim merely to satisfy the criteria of historical and theological investigation by demonstrating the deep structural and exegetical coherence of his thought at this, one of its most contested points.

It is important to note, before going any further, that the word 'justification' has itself had a chequered career over the course of many centuries of debate. As the major historian of the doctrine has noted, the word has long since ceased to mean, in ecclesial debates, what it meant for Paul himself – which is confusing, since the debates have gone on referring to Paul as though he was in fact talking about what they want to talk about. It is as though the greengrocer treated you to a long discussion of how onions are grown, and how best to cook with them, when what you had asked was how much he would charge for three of them.³⁷⁹

The range of the word 'justification' has sometimes been expanded to the point where it has been used to denote the whole of soteriology, starting with the mysterious grace of the creator God and going all the way through to final salvation. 'Justification' has then regularly been confused with 'salvation' (a problem exacerbated by many translations that have muddled up the words for 'righteousness' and 'salvation', not least in Isaiah 40—55).³⁸⁰

This has had a dangerous double effect. On the one hand, when people have seen how the different elements of Paul's soteriology are all interconnected they have sometimes used the word 'justification' as though it covered all of them. They have then highlighted one or other of those elements as if it were itself the heart of 'justification' rather than a vital part of 'salvation', irrespective of the actual meaning of the word itself and its very specific job in its contexts. On the other hand, it has been possible for people who see the sharp and focused job the word actually performs to

suppose that this precise meaning can then be isolated, put on a pedestal and used to relativize, or even to warn against, all the other interconnected elements of what Paul actually says. The first expands the word to cover too much data. The second shrinks the data to fit the actual word.

Thus, in the first category, we have the famous discussion of Hans Küng, in which, by expanding ‘justification’ to mean more or less ‘how people get saved’, he discovers that, at that level of generality, he agrees with Karl Barth.³⁸¹ More recently, we have had proposals that the actual *meaning* of ‘justification’ itself can be focused on the inner transforming work of the spirit.³⁸² In the second category, we have the fierce reaffirmation of a strict protestant emphasis, in which ‘justification’ denotes simply the divine declaration pronounced over faith, through which ‘the righteousness of Christ’ is imputed to the believer, and in which any attempt to add anything else – ‘transformation’, ‘being in Christ’, ‘ecclesiology’, ‘ethics’, whatever – is deemed to be a dangerous dilution of divine prerogative, leading people to rely, for their sense of identity and assurance, on something about themselves rather than solely on the sovereign grace of the one God.³⁸³

Over against both of these positions, and mindful of the impossibility in a book of this size of debating with more than a limited selection of conversation partners, I wish to argue for a third option. I agree with the first viewpoint that Paul’s language of ‘justification’ is closely, carefully and consistently integrated with all other aspects of his soteriology. But I agree with the second that the word ‘justification’ itself retains a very particular and clear-cut meaning which cannot be expanded to cover those other aspects. Is it possible to hold these two things together?

Only if we include all three of Paul’s basic elements. Too often discussion has been confined to two: (a) the grace of the one God and (b) the work of the Messiah. These are obviously vital, but for Paul they are intimately connected with (c): the work of the spirit. As we have seen, this forms a key part of his redefinition of monotheism itself, and what he says about justification, as with the larger category of election itself, grows directly out of that. The holy spirit is, in fact, the usually forgotten element in justification, and I am convinced that only when we come at the doctrine

from this angle (taking as read all that has already been said about the one God and the Messiah) can we gain the full Pauline picture.³⁸⁴

(ii) Election Redefined: Gospel and Spirit

The obvious place to begin is with ‘the gospel’. Paul defines himself as a gospel-person: his chosen self-designation, at the start of his most carefully thought-out letter, is that of someone ‘set apart for God’s gospel’. He can state the content of his ‘gospel’ in a variety of ways, always focused on something the creator God has done, in fulfilment of promise, in and through Jesus of Nazareth, Israel’s Messiah:

¹Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, about the good news which I announced to you. You received this good news, and you’re standing firm on it, ²and you are saved through it, if you hold fast the message I announced to you – unless it was for nothing that you believed! ³What I handed on to you at the beginning, you see, was what I received, namely this: ‘The Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Bible; ⁴he was buried; he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Bible; ⁵he was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve; ⁶then he was seen by over five hundred brothers and sisters at once, most of whom are still with us, though some fell asleep; ⁷then he was seen by James, then by all the apostles; ⁸and, last of all, as to one ripped from the womb, he appeared even to me.’³⁸⁵

¹Paul, a slave of King Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for God’s good news, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the sacred writings – ³the good news about his son, who was descended from David’s seed in terms of flesh, ⁴and who was marked out powerfully as God’s son in terms of the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead: Jesus, the Messiah, our lord! ⁵Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about believing obedience among all the nations for the sake of his name. ⁶That includes you, too, who are called by Jesus the Messiah.³⁸⁶

Two significantly different definitions, but with a single ultimate content: prophetic promise, God’s action in the Messiah and his death and resurrection, and the resulting summons to believing obedience.

We can track each element of this a little further. The prophetic promise is what we should expect from the word ‘gospel’ itself, since its obvious

biblical background is found in one of Paul's favourite texts, the central section of Isaiah. There, the 'good news' is that the covenant God has fulfilled his ancient promises and is now rescuing his people from the slavery caused by their own sin, defeating the pagan empire that has held them captive and sending them home to their promised land – and, in so doing, is *revealing himself*, his sovereign kingship, his righteousness, his salvation and above all his glory. And all this happens through the work of the 'servant'. The second time we meet 'the one who tells good news' is immediately before the final poem in which the suffering and death of the 'servant' effects forgiveness and liberation for God's people.³⁸⁷

The other obvious context for 'gospel' in Paul was the world where Caesar reigned supreme. In that world, Caesar's birth, his accession and his rule itself were spoken of as 'good news' – as indeed they were, in a fairly limited sense, for those who had suffered the chaos of civil war and all that went with it. By Paul's day that threat had receded for the moment; the notion of 'good news' was no doubt received with the usual measure of detachment and cynicism which accompanies the self-glorifying of empires.³⁸⁸

But when Paul spoke of 'gospel' he thereby denoted a message which, in fulfilment of the scriptural prophecies and in implicit confrontation with the newer imperial realities, declared the 'good news' of God's kingdom in and through the life, messianic achievement and supremely the death and resurrection of Jesus. This gospel message far transcended the individualistic message of 'how to be saved' which the word 'gospel' has come to denote in much contemporary western Christian expression. It remained intensely personal in its radical application, but only because it was first cosmic and global in scope: the world had a new lord, the Jewish Messiah, raised from the dead. That is why, as we saw, for Paul 'the gospel' even included the news of the just divine judgment against all human wickedness. In a world of moral and social chaos, 'judgment' is good news, as the Psalms insisted repeatedly.³⁸⁹ Now, for Paul, the 'good news' of Jesus told a story which (a) stretched backwards to Abraham and the prophets, (b) looked on to an eschaton in which the creator God would be

all in all, (c) focused on the crucial events to do with Jesus as Messiah and (d) challenged its hearers to respond with *hypakoē pisteōs*, ‘faithful obedience’.³⁹⁰

This brief discussion of Paul’s gospel thus indicates that, for him, ‘the gospel’, also translatable as ‘the good news’, was the *power* of the creator God. It is tempting to say, ‘the gospel *carried* this divine power,’ or ‘the gospel *conveyed* this power.’ Paul simply says it *is* this power:

¹⁴I am under obligation to barbarians as well as to Greeks, you see; both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁶I’m not ashamed of the good news; it is God’s power, bringing salvation to everyone who believes – to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek. ¹⁷This is because God’s covenant justice is unveiled in it, from faithfulness to faithfulness. As it says in the Bible, ‘the just shall live by faith’.³⁹¹

It is important to note that ‘the gospel’ here in Romans 1.16 does not mean ‘how to be saved’. Nor does it mean ‘how to be justified’, as in some popular readings of verse 17. The logic of the sentences indicates without any doubt that ‘the gospel’ here *must refer back* to what he has already said in 1.3–4: that, the statement about Jesus, is the *content* of the gospel, and what is described here in 1.16–17 is its *effect*. In the original there is a clear sequence marked out by the repeated *gar*, ‘for’: ‘I am eager to preach the gospel to you in Rome, *for* I am not ashamed of the gospel, *for* it is God’s power to salvation, *for* God’s *dikaiosynē* is revealed in it.’ Turning these ‘for’ clauses the other way around, into ‘therefore’s, we read: God’s *dikaiosynē* is revealed in the gospel, *therefore* it is God’s power to salvation, *therefore* I am not ashamed of it, *therefore* I am eager to preach it to you in Rome. Either way the result is the same. ‘The gospel’ is not itself ‘how to be saved’ or ‘how to be justified’. ‘The gospel’ is God’s good news, promised long ago, about his dying and rising son, the Messiah, the lord of the world. *When this message is announced, things happen*: (a) the creator God is shown to be ‘in the right’ in that he has kept his promises, (b) people of all sorts, Jew and Greek alike, receive ‘salvation’ as a result of the divine power, (c) Paul is not ashamed (as he might have been, announcing a message which he knew to be folly to Greeks and a scandal to Jews) and (d)

he is the more eager to preach the same message anywhere and everywhere, not least right under Caesar's nose in Rome.

But how then does this 'power' function? Paul is in no doubt: when he tells the story of Jesus as the long-promised crucified and risen Messiah of Israel, and announces that he is now the world's true lord, *God's spirit is at work*. Gospel and spirit go tightly together in his theology. Paul does not envisage a sequence of events in which first he tells people about Jesus, then they decide whether or not they are going to believe his message, and only then does the spirit descend upon those who have already believed. For Paul, belief itself is something which is effected on the one hand through the spirit and on the other through the word of the gospel – which he can also summarize as 'the word of the cross', especially when he wants to rub his hearers' noses in the shocking reality of that shameful event.³⁹²

This ought not to be controversial, because some of the central passages where Paul says more or less exactly this are straightforward and clear. The faith which believes the gospel is the faith which believes that Jesus rose from the dead, and that he is now the world's true lord: that is what Paul says in Romans 10.6–13, which is full of resonances with 1.15–17. But 'nobody can say "Jesus is lord" except by the holy spirit': that is a basic criterion which he sets out for the muddled Corinthians at the beginning of his discussion of spiritual gifts.³⁹³ This should alert us to the fact that, although he does not mention the spirit expressly in Romans 10, at the crucial point in his argument he quotes from Joel 2.32 ('all who call on the lord's name will be rescued'), which is the continuation of the great promise that in the last days the covenant God promises to 'pour out his spirit upon all flesh'.³⁹⁴ I and others have argued elsewhere that we must understand the same work of the spirit here as Paul alludes to elsewhere.³⁹⁵

In particular, we might notice the 'new covenant' passages such as Romans 2.25–9, 2 Corinthians 3 and Romans 7.4–6. It should be clear from these, and especially from Romans 8.9–11 where Paul insists that anyone who does not possess the spirit of the Messiah does not belong to him, that the gift of the spirit is not a *further* gift, out beyond initial Christian experience or even initial Christian faith, but is rather the life-giving energy

by which someone is enabled, in the first place, to believe that the one God raised Jesus and to confess that Jesus is lord.

This is the import of one of the most striking Pauline affirmations of God's reworking of 'election' through powerful word and spirit:

⁴Dear family, beloved by God, we know that God has chosen you; ⁵because our gospel didn't come to you in word only, but in power, and in the holy spirit, and in great assurance. [396](#)

'We know that God has chosen you': this, in Greek, is *eidotes tēn eklogēn hymōn*, 'knowing your election'. We could have deduced as much from the title 'beloved by God', but this confirms it. Here we have an explicit statement of 'election reworked': the notion of 'election' is of course rooted in the scriptures, but Paul is cheerfully restating it in relation to those who have heard and received the gospel. And the sign of that *eklogē*, that 'election' – of a small bunch of pagans in a busy seaport in northern Greece! – is that 'the gospel' has not simply come to them in an empty 'word', but in power, in the spirit and with 'great assurance', *plērophoria pollē*. The word *plērophoria* already means 'full conviction'; adding *pollē* might seem over-egging the pudding, but the result is as much conviction as a sentence can possibly carry, 'full and complete conviction', 'total assurance'. Whatever it was that the spirit was doing, it worked.

Paul describes his 'gospel' a few verses later in a different but related way. The Thessalonians, he says,

turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who delivers us from the coming fury. [397](#)

That is a thumbnail sketch, from another angle, of the same message we find in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 15. The elements are the same: the God of creation and covenant; the son of God whom he raised from the dead; the coming day of judgment; the assurance of deliverance.

The second Thessalonian letter offers a similar compact expression of what Paul thought happened when people believed the gospel. Here, after having sketched the terrible fate awaiting those who refuse to love and

believe the truth, Paul refers once more to what happened to the Thessalonians when he preached the gospel to them:

¹³But we always owe God a debt of gratitude for you, my family beloved by the lord, because God chose you as the first fruits of his work of salvation, through sanctification by the spirit and belief of the truth. ¹⁴To this he called you through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our lord Jesus the Messiah.³⁹⁸

‘The gospel’, then, is the instrument through which the covenant God ‘calls’; and when Paul says ‘call’ he means an effective, powerful summons.³⁹⁹ The spirit is the driving force behind this; belief of the truth is the first consequence, as one key element in being ‘set apart’ by the spirit for the divine purposes. Ultimate glory is the goal; redefined election is the overall picture. This short statement actually anticipates the great summary in Romans 8.28–30 (chosen, called, glorified).

Paul, clearly, does not have a single formula for speaking of how the gospel does its work. He says something slightly different each time he mentions the point, giving us the sense that this is something he has observed again and again and which he can describe in a variety of ways. Returning to 1 Thessalonians, we find him putting it like this:

¹³So, therefore, we thank God constantly that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of a mere human being but – as it really is! – the word of God which is at work in you believers.⁴⁰⁰

God’s word *at work*: the Greek is *energeō*, something of a favourite with Paul. God ‘works’ through Peter’s gospel ministry to the circumcised, and through Paul’s to the uncircumcised.⁴⁰¹ God ‘worked’ in the Messiah in raising him from the dead, and that same power is at work in his people.⁴⁰² God is ‘at work’ in your midst, he says to the Philippians, to will and to work for his good pleasure.⁴⁰³ Whatever variety of Christian gift is being exercised, whatever ministry is going ahead, it is the same God who ‘works’ all of them in everyone.⁴⁰⁴ And, in a particularly telling passage for our present theme, this God ‘works’ powerful deeds in the midst of the Galatians, as he did in the initial arrival of the gospel itself:

²There's just one thing I want to know from you. Did you receive the spirit by doing the works of Torah, or by the message which produced faith (*ex akoēs pisteōs*)? ³You are so witless: you began with the spirit, and now you're ending with the flesh? ⁴Did you really suffer so much for nothing – if indeed it is going to be for nothing? ⁵The one who gives you the spirit and performs powerful deeds among you – does he do this through your performance of Torah, or through the message which produced faith (*ex akoēs pisteōs*)?⁴⁰⁵

This can be read (and translated) in such a way as to make it sound as though one *first* hears and believes and only *then*, as a kind of reward, is granted the spirit. But this, I am convinced, is wrong. The key repeated phrase, *ex akoēs pisteōs*, could certainly mean, by itself, 'through the hearing of faith', that is, through the 'hearing' which is a hearing-and-believing.⁴⁰⁶ One might even translate it 'through hearing and believing' – which could (though not necessarily) be taken to mean that the sequence is: first, hearing; second, believing; third, receiving the spirit. But the word *akoē* in Greek, while it can mean 'hearing', either the faculty of hearing or the act of hearing, or even the organ of hearing, i.e. the ear, can also mean 'the thing which is heard', in the sense of a report, a rumour, a message, an account. This is the sense in which *ex akoēs pisteōs* is more regularly, and I believe rightly, taken.⁴⁰⁷ The message itself is the thing which does the work – and the work here is the work precisely of the spirit.

The second key word here, *pisteōs*, 'of faith', could then have at least two meanings and be taken in at least two senses, depending on how the genitive is read. *Pistis* can mean 'faith' or 'faithfulness', and the genitive by itself is sufficiently flexible to mean either 'which concerns' or 'which produces'. We thus have:

1. The message which concerns faith: i.e. a message about faith itself. This is unlikely: Paul announces the Messiah. Faith is what results from that announcement, not the content of the announcement itself.
2. The message which *produces* faith. This is quite likely. Certainly Romans 1.15–17 and the passages above from the Thessalonian letters assume that the gospel message evokes faith.

3. The message which concerns *faithfulness*. This is quite possible: as we have seen, one way of Paul's telling the story of Jesus was precisely to do with his death as the great act of faithfulness. It is quite likely, as we saw, that Paul was referring to the Messiah's faithful death in Galatians 2.16–21.
4. The message *which produces* faithfulness. This is possible, but less likely. Paul does believe that gospel-believers are called to be 'faithful'. That is probably the meaning of *pistis* in Galatians 5.22. But the main thing here seems to be that the Galatians, like Abraham, *believed* the good news when it was spoken to them.

The likely options, then are (2) and (3), and for our present purposes it does not much matter which we choose. The point, either way, is that the agency through which the spirit has worked in their lives is the *message* through which the covenant God has worked – the message which, indeed, may well have been couched in terms of the Messiah's faithfulness, and certainly resulted in the production of 'faith' in the hearers. As we shall see, that nexus, across what seems to us a quite substantial gap between two different meanings of *pistis* – a gap which may have seemed much smaller to Paul! – is part of the point: when the gospel is announced, the spirit works *through* the message that is proclaimed. The result, one way or another, is 'faith'. That is what Paul is talking about for at least half of Galatians. At the start of the vital chapter (Galatians 3) in which the whole point is precisely the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham concerning his family, and the reshaping of that family not around Moses but around the Messiah, Paul sees the work of the spirit, through the gospel, as foundational. This is, for him, what the reworked election looks like in practice.

If the work of the spirit, producing the reshaped family, is thus one of the immediate and necessary correlates of Paul's gospel, we should expect to see in his writings statements about that family which reflect this view. One of the most dense and powerful, and decisive for understanding several other debates and especially for framing his doctrine of justification itself,

is Romans 2.25–9, especially the final verse. Here, in the middle of what is normally but misleadingly thought of simply as a demonstration of universal sinfulness, Paul sketches the spirit-shaped version of ‘election’ which continues to resonate throughout much of the letter:

Circumcision, you see, has real value for people who keep the law. If, however, you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. Meanwhile, if uncircumcised people keep the law’s requirements, their uncircumcision will be regarded as circumcision, won’t it? So people who are by nature uncircumcised, but who fulfil the law, will pass judgment on people like you who possess the letter of the law and circumcision but who break the law.

The ‘Jew’ isn’t the person who appears to be one, you see. Nor is ‘circumcision’ what it appears to be, a matter of physical flesh. The ‘Jew’ is the one in secret; and ‘circumcision’ is a matter of the heart, in the spirit rather than the letter. Such a person gets ‘praise’, not from humans, but from God.

This is as clear a statement of election-reworked-by-the-spirit as any we find in Paul. Following on from the dismissal of the ‘boast’ of ‘the Jew’ in 2.17–24,⁴⁰⁸ Paul is here anticipating his later arguments in order to show, at the present moment in the letter, that the covenant God is not going to be restricted in his purposes by the failure of ‘the Jew’. The covenant God has not given up on the category of ‘circumcision’, on the idea of there being an elect people; he has merely redefined it, as in Philippians 3.3. Nor is the idea of such a redefined circumcision a hypothetical category which Paul will later declare to be null and void.⁴⁰⁹ The ‘poetic sequence’ of Romans, that is, the way things are laid out in the letter itself, by no means corresponds, as generations have misleadingly supposed, to the implicit ‘referential sequence’, the *ordo salutis* beloved of dogmaticians, in which Romans 1.18—3.20 is *only* about ‘demonstrating that all are sinful’, 3.21—4.25 *only* about ‘justification by faith’ and 5—8 *only* about ‘being in Christ’ (or whatever). That is not how Paul writes.⁴¹⁰ He is once again ‘borrowing’ from his fuller expositions – in this case, Romans 8 and Romans 10 – in order, briefly but powerfully, to show what, in his view, ‘circumcision’, and even ‘Jew’ itself, now mean. Other Jewish writers, notably Philo, had discussed the question of circumcision and its meaning, but Paul, though not here shifting from strictly Jewish and indeed biblical arguments (in

other words, not moving into a Platonic mode of thought), is nevertheless far more radical than Philo or any other contemporary Jew had been.⁴¹¹

We note four things in particular about this revised election. First, these people who are now to be called ‘circumcision’ actually ‘keep the law’s requirements’ (2.26); they ‘fulfil the law’ (2.27). Paul has not yet, of course, explained in Romans how such a thing can be.⁴¹² For the moment the idea of uncircumcised people keeping the commandments sounds like an oxymoron, much as 1 Corinthians 7.19.⁴¹³ He clearly has in mind a different sort of law-fulfilment, to which he will refer again obliquely in 3.27 and 8.5–8, and again, still more obliquely, in 9.31–2, before suddenly explaining what he means in 10.5–13, and then going on to a wider application in 13.8–10. How this works out we shall see in due course. But for the moment we can say that the proposal that there might be a category of people to be called ‘circumcision’, who in some sense keep the law, and yet who are not themselves circumcised Jews, is indeed a drastic reworking of election. And, though Paul does not mention Jesus in this short section (of course, Paul would say Jesus was presupposed), he does mention the spirit as the agent by which election has been reworked.

Second, remarkably, Paul claims that these ‘uncircumcised lawkeepers’ will *judge* the ‘circumcised lawbreakers’. The idea of the elect people sitting in judgment, which we find again in 1 Corinthians 6.2, goes back to Daniel 7.22.⁴¹⁴ It is, very specifically, part of the idea of the chosen people. Now this, too, is reworked, and in a shocking way: instead of the Jews judging the nations of the world, Paul envisages these uncircumcised lawkeepers as judging those Jewish lawbreakers. (We should I think assume that ‘lawbreakers’ here is also a redefined category.) It is hard to overstate just how powerful this point of redefined election actually is.

Third, Paul draws a contrast between ‘Jew’ and ‘Jew’: the outward one and the ‘secret’ one. This anticipates, among other things, his distinction of ‘Israel’ and ‘Israel’ in 9.6. To show exactly what he means, he takes the word ‘Jew’ itself, which in its Hebrew form means ‘praise’, and declares that the ‘Jew in secret’ gets ‘praise’ – in other words, receives this noble appellation – from the covenant God rather than from humans.⁴¹⁵ The

emphasis on the ‘secret’ echoes 2.16, which speaks of the coming judgment of the secrets of the heart; and the echo is confirmed by the reference here to the ‘circumcision of the heart’. This finally tells us what the passage is all about. Heart-circumcision is what the Torah itself had declared would be necessary if Israel was to be brought back from exile, released from the covenantal curse and enabled to be the true people of the covenant God. This reference to Deuteronomy 30.6, and to prophetic texts most likely dependent on it,⁴¹⁶ goes with a string of texts which speak of the restored covenant in terms of the renewed heart.⁴¹⁷ We should be in no doubt that this is what Paul has in mind here.⁴¹⁸ This is ‘election reworked’, but exactly in line with what the prophets had promised.

Finally, he makes the contrast which occurs again in an explicit ‘new covenant’ context in 2 Corinthians 3.6, again right after speaking of the work of the spirit in the heart. The ‘Jew’, the ‘circumcised person’, of whom he speaks – despite some translations, he does not add the adjectives ‘renewed’, or ‘true’, with either of these – has this status ‘in the spirit not the letter’ (*en pneumati ou grammati*). This contrast has passed into such frequent proverbial use in contemporary English (‘the spirit of the law’ versus ‘the letter of the law’) that it is important to step back from that meaning, and its regular use as a kind of liberalizing excuse for ignoring what the law actually says, and examine Paul’s point afresh. He has already spoken of the circumcised person as having the *gramma*, the ‘letter’, of the law (2.27). This in context must refer to ancestral possession of the Mosaic code (as in 2.19–20). Here in 2.29, as in 2 Corinthians 3.6, the same meaning forces itself upon us.⁴¹⁹ Nor is the contrast of ‘letter and spirit’ simply a question of hermeneutical method, as some have suggested with reference to 2 Corinthians 3; or, if it is, it is a ‘hermeneutical method’ of a drastic sort, namely the principle that the people who not only understand Torah but also ‘keep’ and ‘fulfil’ it (Romans 2.26, 27) are people who have undergone a radical transformation of the heart.⁴²⁰ Paul would no doubt have said that the obedience which flows from the renewed heart does indeed constitute a fresh hermeneutical activity. He is here referring to the Mosaic law, and saying that in the renewed election, the new covenant, the

spirit will accomplish ‘what the law could not do’. He is, of course, referring to the divine spirit, promised by the prophets, and now, he believes, poured out upon a people consisting not only of believing gentiles (as we might have imagined from this passage alone) but also, of course, of believing Jews.⁴²¹

One cannot stress too strongly that none of this implies a ‘critique of Judaism’. As in 2.17–20, Paul is not saying there is anything wrong with being Jewish, or that Jewish religion is inherently bad (or, with Martyn and others, that all ‘religion’ is bad, with Judaism forming the immediate example!⁴²²). Rather, as Keck stresses, ‘Paul’s argument is actually an expression of Judaism’s conviction about God’s impartiality’.⁴²³ One could go further: Romans 2.25–9 is a careful thinking through of what precisely is meant by the warnings and promises stated clearly in Judaism’s own scriptures. It is a following through of the eschatological narrative of scripture itself, as Romans 10.1–13 will make clear.⁴²⁴

These five verses at the end of Romans 2, then, form a dense but classic statement of reworked election. As I have indicated, Paul will return to this theme again and again. Its statement here, in advance of any explanation of justification itself, indicates well enough that within at least the rhetorical strategy of Romans he has no intention of allowing the build-up of forensic metaphors in chapter 3 to stand by itself. What he has to say about (a) the unveiling of the divine righteousness and (b) the pronouncement of a righteous status for all who believe (with (a) being the *ground* of (b), not the same thing), takes place, as 3.24 itself declares, as one key moment *within* the creation of the family of the renewed covenant.

The paragraph at the close of chapter 2 continues to resonate throughout the letter. Those with ears to hear will continue to detect echoes in passages such as 3.27–31; 4.11–12; 4.16–17; 7.4–6 (where, in verse 6, the spirit/letter antithesis is repeated, as though to remind readers to have 2.25–9 in mind throughout what follows, all the way into chapter 8); 8.1–11; 8.27; and indeed 8.31–9 itself. Then, in chapters 9–11, we find the same only more so. The discussion of ‘Israel and Israel’ in 9.6; the shocking inclusion of gentiles in 9.24–6; the gentiles ‘obtaining *dikaïosynē*’ while Israel does not

‘attain to the law’ in 9.30–3; and, above all, the strange spirit-driven fulfilment of the law in terms of the covenant renewal promised in Deuteronomy 30 (10.4–13); all these speak of the reworked election in ways which echo 2.25–9. Some of them explicitly speak of justification; others do not. But the way in which these themes resonate across the letter indicates beyond any doubt that in this letter at least Paul explicitly locates his exposition of justification within his understanding of the way in which, by the spirit, the ancient biblical notion of election itself has been definitively reworked.

(iii) Faith, Justification and the People of God

(a) The Shape of Justification

My case, here and elsewhere, is that the language of ‘justification’ – the various Pauline uses of the *dikaïos* root – have their Pauline home within the redefinition of election, the subject of the present chapter. That is, they take for granted the belief (a) that Israel was chosen, with a purpose, by the creator God; (b) that this purpose had to do with the creator’s ultimate plan to set the whole creation to rights; and (c) that this purpose was to be taken forward through the setting to rights of human beings. That complex of thought, which I have explained in some detail already in chapter 7, then comes to birth in what for us may appear a complex framework of thought, though for Paul it will all have fitted together so well that it appeared simple and could be encapsulated in short, pithy summaries.

How is one to display an argument like this to best advantage? As with all major Pauline topics, we face the choice of either working through all the relevant passages and then drawing conclusions, or setting out a working hypothesis and then showing how the key passages reflect it. For present purposes I choose the latter course.⁴²⁵ There is also a choice (to say the least) of conversation partners, where the demands of space impose their own rather severe limitations.⁴²⁶

Here then is my proposal. Paul's redefinition of election on the basis of the work of the Messiah and around the work of the spirit can be seen in relation to a complex but clear sequence of ideas. In other words, one can only understand Paul's 'justification by faith' as the leading edge of *this* narrative, *this* sequence of thought. The doctrine itself – properly, justification by grace through faith in the present time on the basis of the work of the Messiah – comes as the crucial seventh and final element in this sequence. The first six, which are necessary for the full impact of that final move to be felt, are presented here in brief, having been discussed earlier in the present book. This admittedly rather dense summary looks back to the summary of 'righteousness' language in Judaism (section 2 (ii) above), and shows how Paul now transforms it in the light of Messiah and spirit. It offers (a) an explanatory narrative for the many things Paul says about justification and (b) a range of technical terms which, though somewhat clunky, may be useful shorthands for discussion.

So to the detail. I include in **bold type** some technical terms that will be useful in subsequent discussions.

1. *God the creator intends at the last to remake the creation*, righting all wrongs and filling the world with his own presence. This is the 'end' or 'goal', the 'eschaton', towards which God is working. This is 'eschatology': perhaps specifically '**creational eschatology**', distinct from (say) a 'gnostic' eschatology which would look for a future in which the created order was abandoned rather than rectified.⁴²⁷ We shall study this further in the next chapter. Paul's overarching statement of hope is seen most fully in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15. Once that larger picture is grasped it can be glimpsed in many other passages, such as Philippians 3.20–1. The creator's intention to do this, and his 'justice' in putting things right, is what stands behind the medieval idea of a 'iustitia distributiva' by which the one God rewards the good and punishes evil.

2. *For this to happen, humans themselves have to be ‘put right’.* The main problem standing in the way both of the original purpose of creation and (now) of its renewal and restoration is the failure of humankind to act as God’s image-bearers in the world. God must therefore put humans to rights in order to put the world to rights. (One might call this focus ‘**anthropological eschatology**’.) This problem is due to human idolatry, and to the consequent fracturing of human behaviour, which means that humans have failed to bring the creator’s fruitful ordering to bear on the world. (This complex of idolatry and dehumanizing behaviour is what Paul calls ‘Sin’, which can refer to (a) the specific acts which embody such behaviour, (b) the state in which those who behave that way are living, and/or (c) the dark power that appears to drive them in that direction.⁴²⁸) Paul’s statement of the problem of sin and evil is classically found, of course, in Romans 1.18—2.16, and summarized again in 3.9–20.⁴²⁹ It is drawn on in the statements about Adamic humanity in Romans 5, and in many other passages such as Ephesians 2.1–3 and the various descriptions of pagan humanity scattered throughout the letters.⁴³⁰ I argued in chapter 9 that Paul had grasped a wider and deeper vision of this problem through his redefinition of monotheism by means of Messiah and spirit. It was this problem which generated the specifically Pauline, and then Christian, view of ‘salvation’. It is important to note, as I have done on many occasions before, that despite popular Christian parlance ‘justification’ and ‘salvation’ are emphatically not the same thing, and to confuse them is to make careful exegesis, not to mention theology, ultimately impossible.⁴³¹ It would be easy to skip straight from here to the ‘forensic eschatology’ of point 4 below, but to do that would short-circuit the underlying biblical narrative to which Paul, at least, pays close attention. The next move, therefore, has to do with the covenant people.

3. *God’s way of accomplishing this is through the covenant.* God’s purpose of rectifying the world, setting it to rights, following the

failure of humans and the corruption of the world, was focused on the call to Abraham and his 'seed'.⁴³² As we have seen already, from Paul's perspective the covenant which the creator God established with Abraham was the chosen means of dealing with 'sin' in order to implement 'creational eschatology': hence the promise to Abraham that he would have a worldwide family, which is where Paul picks matters up in Galatians 3 and Romans 4.⁴³³ This was the necessary move in setting the whole creation to rights. Once Israel's God had made those promises, the scriptures insisted that he would be faithful to them, doing what he had promised not only *for* Israel but *through* Israel. This, in other words, is '**covenantal eschatology**'. To add 'covenant' to 'setting right' is specifically not, as it has often been portrayed, a matter of adding a 'horizontal' dimension to a 'vertical' one. This is to miss the point entirely, which is that the creator God *called* Abraham to be the means of *rescuing* humans and the world: a doubly 'vertical' theme, if you like.⁴³⁴

This divine faithfulness to the covenant, spelled out in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in terms of both punishing the covenant people for sin and subsequent merciful restoration, is spoken of in several key passages in terms of the *righteousness* of the one God (*tsedaqah elohim, dikaiosynē theou*). This was seen as the divine characteristic because of which the creator would do what he had promised.⁴³⁵ The theme of 'covenant' and 'covenant faithfulness' is the full biblical setting for what has often been spoken of as the 'relational' aspect of the notion of *tsedaqah/dikaiosynē*. By itself, the word 'relational' is vague, suggesting that 'justification' is about 'someone's relationship with God'. That, in a very general sense, is not untrue, but to substitute 'relation' for 'covenant' is to take a large step away from historical moorings.⁴³⁶

Paul's own covenantal eschatology is the radical development of a basic second-Temple Jewish line of thought which Pharisees and some others might be expected to hold.⁴³⁷ Most Jews of the period were not, it seems, asking themselves how they might escape from a

post-mortem judgment and arrive safely in some kind of otherworldly bliss. They were not, that is, concerned about the questions with which the word ‘justification’ has come to be associated in today’s western world.⁴³⁸ Many first-century Jews were, however, principally concerned about the question of how and when the one God would come in power to rule the world, rescuing his people and establishing his ‘kingdom’, the long-awaited ‘age to come’. Within that, many were concerned about their own membership in that coming ‘age’. Many of them, as we saw in chapter 2, were living out of some version of the narrative which combined Deuteronomy 27—32 and Daniel 9: they had a sense, in other words, that after long years of ‘curse’ and ‘exile’ there would come a great new moment of ‘covenant renewal’, of rescue and redemption. Many of them, then, might have put the question like this: (a) Israel’s God will bring about his new world, raising his people from the dead to share in it; (b) clearly, not all Jews will have a share in this new world;⁴³⁹ so (c) how can we tell, *in the present time*, who will be among that newly constituted, resurrected and reigning eschatological people? That is the precise context in which questions about ‘works’ might arise – though, since ‘justification’ is not a major topic in second-Temple Judaism, this is rare, with Qumran providing (in 4QMMT) the only solid example (see below). Saul of Tarsus would probably have answered that question by speaking of the law-based covenant status outlined in Philippians 3.5–6 and hinted at in Romans 9.31 and 10.2–3. Serious, ‘zealous’ Torah-keeping in the present time would mark out in advance those who, in the age to come, would be raised from the dead and have a share in judging and ruling within the reign of the one God. ‘Marked out’ would of course be literally true in the case of circumcision. This, together with the other ethnic badges such as food-laws and sabbath-keeping, and behind these the entire way of life focused on Torah and Temple, formed a nexus of ‘works of Torah’ through

which one might tell in advance who would be declared to be *tsaddiqim/dikaioi*, ‘righteous’, ‘covenant members’, in the future.

There is, however, not much evidence that pre-Christian Jews spoke of that kind of ‘advance marking out’ in terms of ‘justification’. This already presents us with an apparent oddity: might it be the case that not only Paul’s particular view of justification, but also the idea of *any* ‘doctrine of justification’, let alone its apparent central importance, is itself a Christian innovation, like some of the others we have seen? Did Paul introduce the category out of nothing? Why then would he speak, looking back at his former self, of ‘justification by works of the law’? Was that whole idea a Christian back-projection? Here we are once more, clearly, faced with the question of ‘plight and solution’. And, again, the answer is more subtle than a simple either/or will allow.

The clearest pre-Christian statement of something like ‘justification’ is in Column C of 4QMMT.⁴⁴⁰ There, those who keep particular ‘works of Torah’ in the present time will have ‘righteousness’ reckoned to them. Such people, in other words, *will be reckoned to be part of the covenant family now, in the present*, against the day when the new age arrives and all will be revealed. That question, of the *advance* signs of *future* vindication, was thus already on the table in second-Temple Judaism. I see no sign that it was central, but it was present and thinkable – especially among sectarian groups who wanted to assure themselves that, despite their present marginal status, they would in fact be seen as the true covenant people once the new age arrived. One might even suggest that, with Qumran at least, some kind of inaugurated eschatology was present: now that the Teacher of Righteousness had led the way, the new covenant had been secretly launched. Belong to *this* group *now*, marked out by *these* signs and symbols, they might have said, and you will be among those to be vindicated when the moment comes. We have no reason to suppose that hard-line Pharisees like Saul of Tarsus held a similar secretly inaugurated eschatology, but the same line of thought

would still be relevant. If you clarify and intensify Torah-keeping in *this* way ('zeal'), you will certainly inherit the age to come. You may even help to bring it about.

That model (the signs in the present which tell, already, who will inherit the coming age) remains in Paul. His doctrine of 'justification' has a similar *shape*. But the *content* has shifted dramatically in four ways, each as a result of Messiah and spirit.

First, eschatology has been inaugurated in a new and dramatic way. Paul believed that *the new age had already arrived* with the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the gift of the spirit. The moment for which Pharisees and Essenes were hoping had already come about. The question of who would be vindicated, and who would be ruling and judging, in the future, had been answered: it was the Messiah himself. He was the king; he would rule; he would judge. He was, that is, the vindicated-Israel-in-person. We should be clear that Paul's Jesus-shaped 'but now' represents a radical novelty. Other groups (notably the Essenes) may have held some kind of inaugurated eschatology. But nobody else claimed that a representative Israel-in-person figure had been raised from the dead.

Second, the Messiah's death was not incidental (a mere step on the way, as it were, to vindication). The fact, and especially the manner, of his death indicated that the covenant God would not affirm Israel as it stood. The strange covenantal story of judgment, curse and ultimately exile had reached its height. With the hindsight of the resurrection, the cross meant (as we saw in chapter 9) that the 'problem' had been far worse than anyone had imagined. Israel as a whole shared fully in the plight of the world. No longer, therefore, could one look ahead to the age to come and envisage some zealous Jews already being well qualified to share in its life, in the coming divine reign. The only way into the age to come would be by dying and rising again.

Third, the outpouring of the spirit indicated to Paul that the promises of Deuteronomy 30, and the echoing promises of Jeremiah and

Ezekiel, had been fulfilled. The Messiah had been vindicated; but he was not alone. Somehow, he would share his status and role with his people.⁴⁴¹ There was now already a circumcised-heart people, in whose common life and individual transformation a strange new form of ‘lawkeeping’, both related and unrelated to the Pharisaic keeping of Torah, had now appeared. This offered a kind of parallel to the Pharisaic hope of a present zealous keeping of Torah through which one might be marked out in the present with a ‘righteousness’, a covenant status, that would be vindicated in the future. But the new kind of life was of an utterly different kind, not least in that it was a fresh and free gift from the covenant God himself.⁴⁴² In particular, the first and most characteristic sign of this people, which became its badge, had nothing to do with the ‘works of Torah’ which marked out the Jew from the pagan (or with the sectarian ‘works of Torah’ which marked out one sect from another, as in 4QMMT). Its badge was the Messiah-badge, namely *pistis*. This is the explanation (which the structure of the present chapter is designed to set forward) of why *pistis* is the single badge by which the single Abraham-family, ‘justified sinners’, are recognized. *Pistis* is, in other words, the Israel-characteristic which, according to Romans 3.2 and 3.22, was lacking in Israel itself and provided by the Messiah. *Pistis* is therefore the appropriate sign that a human being is a Messiah-person, ‘in the Messiah’, ‘belonging to the Messiah’: part of the covenant people, one of those about whom the covenant God himself declares, in advance of the final declaration which will consist in resurrection itself, that this person is *dikaïos*, part of Abraham’s single, sin-forgiven covenant family. Within this *pistis* we must therefore include all that Paul includes: cross-and-resurrection-shaped belief, trust and faithfulness.

Fourth, therefore, and most radically, the circumcised-heart people, marked out by *pistis*, was a company that included Jews and gentiles alike. Nor was this simply a generous if surprising extension. It was the whole point all along. The Messiah would be lord of the whole

world, and Paul has glimpsed how that broad vision and hope is put into detailed practice by the actual working of gospel and spirit.

This actual working involved the application of the Messiah's death and resurrection to the whole people. If the Messiah had died and been raised, this was to be the paradigm for the people as a whole. Israel (and any and all Jews) would have to die in order to be raised; and in that death they would bid farewell to the God-given markers of ethnic identity which had rightly sustained them up to that point. For the same reason they would therefore welcome, as equals within the Messiah's strange new family, all those gentiles who had made the same death-and-life journey and who, like them, were marked out by the badge of *pistis* itself. This is more or less exactly what Paul means when he speaks of the gospel bringing salvation 'to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek'.⁴⁴³

These four points compel a further important reflection. Much as with the idea of 'resurrection' in second-Temple Judaism and early Christianity, *something that was previously peripheral has now become central*.⁴⁴⁴ This parallel is not accidental. 'Justification' was not a hot topic in first-century Judaism. It became so in Paul's work and thought for the reasons set out a moment ago (1: inaugurated eschatology through Messiah and spirit; 2: radical redefinition of the 'plight'; 3: the new work of the spirit; 4: redrawing of the symbolic world to include believing Jews and gentiles on equal terms). All this means that attempts to address the question of what pre-Christian Jews thought about 'justification' are regularly flawed. First, to ask what pre-Christian Jews thought about 'how to be saved' is not quite the same question. Second, when such Jews *did* talk about something like what Paul was talking about their discussions were not loadbearing in the same way that his became.

This fourfold revision and radicalization of what we may somewhat anachronistically refer to as a second-Temple view of 'justification' means that we can now propose, as a possible new theory within the history of that doctrine, a hypothesis about how Paul came to

develop it in the way he did.⁴⁴⁵ He began, as a Pharisee, in the line of zealous Jews indicated in passages such as 1 Maccabees 2. He believed that those who were zealous for Torah would, like Phinehas, have ‘righteousness reckoned to them’, that is, that they would be marked out in the present as true covenant members in advance of the coming new age. But the fact of the crucified and risen Messiah, and the gift of the spirit, indicated that the new age had already been inaugurated in the present, and with an unexpected character. And part of that character was the recognition that the new age could be brought about only if the creator God dealt, more radically than had been imagined, with what now appeared as the full and awful plight of the human race, Israel itself included.

How could that be done? Ancient Israelite culture indicated an obvious answer: the divine law court. The one God would sit in judgment. That was how human judges restored and ‘rectified’ human communities. The divine judge would do that as well. But this raises another obvious question: supposing all are guilty? What will the judge do then? Ancient Israel and second-Temple Judaism would answer: this God is in covenant with Abraham, and Abraham’s seed will be spared. Did not the Psalms regularly cry out to the covenant God for vindication against oppressive enemies, casting Israel in the role of plaintiff in the divine law court and the pagans in the role of guilty defendants? The covenant would be the answer to the forensic problem. But Paul has apparently ruled out that option. All are guilty, and the divine judge is impartial.⁴⁴⁶

Then comes the radically new answer. If the Messiah’s death has indicated that the problem was deeper than previously imagined, the Messiah’s death will unveil the deeper solution as well. The divine covenant faithfulness is revealed in the gospel. The covenant is indeed the answer to the forensic problem – but it is the covenant as fulfilled in the faithful obedience of the Messiah and the outpouring of the spirit. The radicalization of the ‘plight’ which we studied earlier, itself the result of Paul’s reflection on the Messiah’s death,

went hand in hand with the radicalization of the ‘solution’. *In the language of ‘righteousness’ and ‘justification’, already implicit in the covenantal train of thought, Paul found the perfect vehicle to explain how the covenant God, through the Messiah and the spirit, had dealt with the deeper problem of human sin, including Jewish sin.*

Here, exactly as with his revision of monotheism, Paul the apostle was compelled by the gospel events to search the scriptures afresh, to ferret out passages and themes which might not have been central in second-Temple reflection but which now pressed themselves upon him. To expound this theme *he did not need to add a different kind of discourse to that of the ‘covenant’*. The covenant had already been expressed in the language of the law court. And, as he radicalized the ‘covenantal’ meaning of the righteousness of both the one God and his people, that meaning opened up to reveal its ‘forensic’ depths. This third point (covenantal eschatology), routinely omitted from discussions of the fourth one (forensic eschatology), is in fact its proper explanatory framework. I shall suggest presently that, though both of them are regularly implied in Paul’s mentions of justification, the covenantal meaning is far more prominent in Galatians and Philippians, while, following an interesting and often unremarked anticipation of forensic language in 1 Corinthians, the two come together in a complex but coherent unity in Romans.⁴⁴⁷

4. *This is how the creator God will put humans to rights.* The covenant will be the means of sorting out the problem of universal human idolatry and sin. Because of the failure of humans and the corruption of creation, when the creator puts things to rights, ‘rectifies’ the situation, he will be acting in the way a human judge acts when re-establishing ‘justice’ in a community. The case will be tried. The verdict will be reached, announced and implemented. In human courts in ancient Israel, this means declaring one party ‘in the wrong’ and the other party ‘in the right’.⁴⁴⁸ Already we note an important

point: the idea of the one God as ‘judge’ grows directly out of the ancient Israelite perception of this God as ‘creator’. This particular God has a *responsibility* to sort out the mess in his creation, to call it to account, to set everything right. He also has the *power* and authority to do so in a way that no other being has. Thus the ‘law court’ or ‘forensic’ imagery, in Israel’s scriptures and on through to Paul, is not simply one miscellaneous metaphor among others. Nor is it a particularly ‘legalistic’ way of thinking as opposed to some other (e.g. ‘relational’).⁴⁴⁹ It does not mean that one can *only* think of this God acting in ‘legal’ or ‘law court’ (i.e. ‘forensic’) terms – just as the fact that other ways of thinking (such as ‘reconciliation’, or ‘love’ itself) are equally appropriate does not mean that one can then dispense with the ‘legal’ idea of everything being ‘put right’ or ‘rectified’ at last. Such language expresses one important and non-negotiable facet of the whole, even while dovetailing comfortably with other aspects of the wider purpose already mentioned. ‘Law court’ language expresses, in a non-transferable way, something vital and central about the determination of the creator God to put all things right at last. One cannot, of course, make the law court the only matrix of understanding, even for ‘justification’. We need covenant, eschatology, participation and much besides. Equally, though, one cannot marginalize ‘forensic’ language and hope to escape scot-free.

It is therefore proper and natural, within ancient Judaism, to speak of the creator’s rectifying work in metaphors drawn from the ‘forensic’ or ‘law court’ setting. God, as the righteous judge, will set all things right, and will thereby display his own ‘righteousness’ in that (forensic) sense. We might call this ‘**forensic eschatology**’. As we have already stressed, the ‘righteousness’ of a judge, seen from the biblical point of view, consists in trying the case fairly and impartially, being true to the law, punishing wickedness, and vindicating those in the right, with special reference to the helpless (orphans, widows and the poor). Paul’s forensic eschatology,

envisaging the creator as a judge acting justly ('the righteousness of God') to set creation to rights and to do so impartially, is again seen most fully in Romans, this time in 2.1–16. This God will judge the secrets of human hearts 'through Jesus the Messiah, according to my gospel' (2.16).⁴⁵⁰ But it is not only in Romans. The theme of the final judgment at which God will judge righteously recurs again and again. We shall develop this, too, in the sixth point below, and more fully in the next chapter.⁴⁵¹

We thus find, in Paul, '**covenantal and forensic eschatology**', and, with that, a further depth in the phrase 'the righteousness of God'.⁴⁵² This God will not only act in fidelity to the covenant; when he does so, that will be the means by which he will *put all things right, like a judge finally settling a case*. The *forensic* meaning of the divine righteousness thus originated in the *covenantal* context in the first place (Israel's belief in the ultimate justice of the one God; Israel's appeal to that ultimate justice as the source of rescue and vindication), and belongs closely with it. If, of course, the covenantal narrative is confronted with the problem that the covenant people, like everyone else, are sinful and guilty before the divine tribunal, the forensic setting will not only make that clear but also offer the appropriate model for displaying the divine solution. Part of the reason why Romans 1.18—4.25, and especially 3.21–31, are as dense and complex as they are is because *both* of these things, covenant and law court, are being discussed together.⁴⁵³

5. *All these themes point forward to the decisive divine judgment on the last day, in other words, to '**final eschatology**'.*⁴⁵⁴ Paul in many passages reaffirms the basic Jewish belief, summing up all the previous four points: (1) there will come a day when the creator will finally call the whole world to account and 'rectify' it at last; (2) this will include the final 'rectification' of human beings, in other words, their reconstitution *as* fully human beings, through the resurrection, so that they will share the creator's rule in the new world; (3) this

will be the ultimate fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant, the moment when the creator and covenant God blesses the whole world through Abraham's 'seed', fully, finally and for ever; (4) the resurrection, i.e. the rescue from death itself and the ultimate reconstitution of image-bearing humans, is to be seen as their ultimate *vindication* in the legal, forensic sense. All this will come about because the creator God, who is also the covenant God, will at the last demonstrate his *faithfulness* to the covenant *and hence also* to the creation. To pull these apart – and with them some key passages in Paul's letters – is to place dogma ahead of historical exegesis.

Within the larger picture which Paul offers in Romans, this *forensic verdict* which is also the ultimate *covenantal declaration* is the verdict that will be issued publicly, finally, impartially and righteously, on the last day.⁴⁵⁵ Paul sees this as part of the renewal of all things, the establishment of the new heavens and new earth. The future verdict will consist, according to Paul, of the gift of 'life': the *dikaiōma* that meant 'death' is matched by the *dikaiōma* that meant 'life'.⁴⁵⁶ That is why Romans 8 then develops exactly this theme: these people will be raised bodily from the dead to share in the glory of the Messiah (Romans 8.17–30). Once again we note the dovetailing of forensic and covenantal ideas. The 'verdict' here, and in 8.33–4, is certainly 'forensic', but the idea of the two verdicts of 'life' and 'death' is certainly 'covenantal', as in Deuteronomy 30.15–20 and elsewhere. And once again the whole thing is 'incorporative'. The place where the verdict 'no condemnation' is issued is precisely 'in Messiah Jesus'.⁴⁵⁷

This *final justification* is referred to decisively much earlier in the letter, in Romans 2.12–13, which itself summarizes the larger statement in 2.5–11. These clear and sharp statements are by no means to be set aside, as is the habit of some, on the grounds either that they set up categories which Paul will then show to be empty (an odd way of laying the foundation for so carefully crafted a letter) or

that Paul is here simply quoting a Jewish perspective which he does not himself share. Here is the full statement in 2.4–11:

Don't you know that God's kindness is meant to bring you to repentance? ⁵But by your hard, unrepentant heart you are building up a store of anger for yourself on the day of anger, the day when God's just judgment will be unveiled – ⁶the God who will 'repay everyone according to their works'. ⁷When people patiently do what is good, and so pursue the quest for glory and honour and immortality, God will give them the life of the age to come. ⁸But when people act out of selfish desire, and do not obey the truth, but instead obey injustice, there will be anger and fury. ⁹There will be trouble and distress for every single person who does what is wicked, the Jew first and also, equally, the Greek – ¹⁰and there will be glory, honour and peace for everyone who does what is good, the Jew first and also, equally, the Greek. ¹¹God, you see, shows no partiality.

The impartiality and 'just judgment' of God: these are essential elements in God's own *dikaiosynē*, his 'righteousness', in the classic biblical terms of judiciary responsibility.⁴⁵⁸ This careful statement of a 'forensic' eschatology then contextualizes the following statement (2.12–13) of God's final 'justification':

¹²Everyone who sinned outside the law, you see, will be judged outside the law – and those who sinned from within the law will be judged by means of the law. ¹³After all, it isn't those who *hear* the law who are in the right before God. It's those who *do* the law who will be declared to be in the right!

Hoi poiētai nomou dikaiōthēsetai – 'those who do the law will be justified': those words have struck terror into the hearts of unsuspecting Protestants. Some have expressed surprise that such words should be found in the New Testament, let alone in a letter by Paul.⁴⁵⁹ That, of course, is why some theories have done their best to muzzle or neutralize them.⁴⁶⁰ But there are plenty of signs elsewhere in the letters that Paul means exactly what he says. The question then is: what does he mean by 'doing the law', and what, in this instance, does he mean by 'will be justified'?

Paul will come back again and again to the question of ‘doing the law’ throughout Romans, with the particular climax to that build-up of thought coming in 10.6–11. To this we shall return. But we must stress here, because it is vital for the logic of this fifth point and the ultimate seventh one, that Paul is here talking about a *future* and *final* ‘justification’, which the context makes clear will take place on the last day, the day of final judgment. Paul here envisages the final scene of present world history as a great law court setting in which God the creator, the just and impartial judge, will sum up the complete lives of all human beings and declare that some are ‘in the right’ and others not.

This just judgment (*dikaiokrisia*, 2.5) will be on the basis of the totality of the life that has been led. God will ‘repay to each according to their works’. Paul never for a moment undermines this biblical and traditional saying, widespread across the thought of ancient Israel.⁴⁶¹ It is itself part of the ‘righteousness of God’, the ‘just judgment’ in which the creator will be seen to have acted ‘impartially’ (Romans 2.11).⁴⁶² This is the same picture that we find in the other briefer references such as 2 Corinthians 5.10, to which we shall return in reviewing Paul’s eschatology in the next chapter.

The point which must then be noticed is the all-important difference between the *future* verdict and the *present* one – and the reason why this difference occurs, and the consequences which follow from it. To get at this we need a brief digression into the overall logic of Romans 1—8.

Many factors have contributed to obscuring the link between future and present justification in Romans. First, there has been a tendency (already mentioned) to set chapter 2 aside altogether, or otherwise neutralise its force, perhaps by insisting that the *only* thing Paul is doing there is working towards the conclusion of 3.19–20, that all humans are guilty, and that he must not be allowed to hint at anything else on the way to that point. Second, more specifically, there has been a tendency, which has become thematic in the whole

scholarly discipline of reading Paul, to treat the language of ‘justification’ as though it belonged in a quite different seam of thought from Paul’s language about being ‘in Christ’, so that, as we have seen, ‘forensic’ and ‘participationist’ strands of thought have been deemed incompatible and so played off against one another, perhaps in the interest of, or at least picking up rhetorical energy from, an implicit and essentially modern privileging of ‘individual salvation’ over ‘ecclesiology’. This has meant that when Paul speaks of ‘judgment’ or ‘condemnation’, or indeed ‘justification’ and ‘righteousness’, in passages that have been deemed to be ‘participatory’, he is not taken seriously.⁴⁶³ Third, as a result, there has been a tendency to split off Romans 1—4 from 5—8, and both from chapters 9—11, not to mention 12—16: to allow the undoubted transitions in the *argument* of the letter to be translated into differences of *theology*. But only when the contribution of each section to the overall whole is taken into account can we understand the particular place of each within the letter, never mind within Paul’s wider theology.

All this has meant that when Paul returns to the language of condemnation and justification in Romans 8 the connection with chapter 2 is often ignored. Yet there it is: Paul’s argument obviously goes through different phases, but it is nevertheless a single argument running seamlessly from chapter 1 all the way to chapter 8 (never mind the further seamless thought that runs into 9—11 and indeed right through to 16). The famous opening of chapter 8, *ouden ara nyn katakrima tois en Christō Iēsou* (there is therefore now no *katakrima*, no ‘condemnation’, for those in the Messiah Jesus), ought to send the reader’s mind straight back to the *krima* of 2.2, which was then picked up in 5.16 and 5.18 (the *katakrima* which came on all humanity following Adam’s transgression). The declaration in chapter 8 that this condemnation has been taken away, since it has been borne, exhausted, in the ‘condemnation’ of sin itself in the Messiah’s flesh (8.3), ought to evoke the sense that a problem

introduced several chapters earlier has finally been resolved. God ‘condemned’ sin in the flesh (8.3): the *katekrinen* here is linked closely to the *katakrima* in 8.1, and thence to 5.16, 18 and back to 2.1–11.⁴⁶⁴

That is why the answer in 8.34 to *tis ho katakrinōn*, ‘Who is there who will condemn?’, is (by obvious implication), ‘Nobody’. That is the rhetorical equivalent of the formal, logical conclusion in 8.1. This whole train of thought, coming out finally in chapter 8, answers closely to the set of questions in chapter 2. Only when the two are split off from one another, through the spurious and shallow division of Romans on the basis of two supposedly different types of thought or systems of soteriology, can this point be missed. *In Romans 8 we return to the future verdict, and discover that, because of the Messiah* (point 6 below), *it corresponds to the present one issued on the basis of faith* (point 7 below).

By the same token, the future verdict (which will consist, in concrete terms, of the resurrection of all the Messiah’s people, and hence the divine ‘declaration’ about them, as about the Messiah himself in 1.4, ‘this really is my son’) will be in accordance with the *dikaiōma tou nomou*, the ‘just requirement of the law’.⁴⁶⁵ The two terms *katakrima* and *dikaiōma* are opposites, corresponding to *krithēsontai* and *dikaiōthēsontai* in 2.12–13: on the one hand, the negative verdict and the consequent punishment (corresponding to the warnings in 2.8–9), and on the other the positive verdict and the consequent resurrection life (corresponding to the promises in 2.7 and 10). This *dikaiōma* will be ‘fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit’; this in turn corresponds closely with what is said in 2.25–9 about ‘the uncircumcision that keeps the just requirements of the law’ (*hē akrobustia ta dikaiōmata tou nomou phyllassē*), which can also be spoken of as the ‘naturally uncircumcised that completes the law’ (*hē ek physeōs akrobustia ton nomon telousa*).

When looking ahead with Pauline eyes at this final verdict it is impossible – though many have tried – to omit the work of the spirit. This whole section of our present chapter, in fact, is designed to highlight the fact that Paul’s doctrine of justification depends strongly upon the spirit just as much as on the Messiah: here, at the heart of the redefinition of election, it is essential. Paul has already hinted at this in 2.25–9, and it comes out into the open first in 5.5 and 7.4–6 and then, at length, in chapter 8. The tendency in some quarters to downplay the role of the spirit, as though one could understand any part of Christian theology without it, has been disastrous. It is the spirit, after all, whose work indicates that Christian living is not a zero-sum game, so that *either* ‘God does it all’ *or* ‘we do it all’. That false notion is always raised whenever anyone draws attention to Paul’s strong words about a *final* justification on the basis of the whole life, with the constant implication that unless one simply says ‘God does it all’ we are forfeiting assurance, or even salvation itself. We shall come back to this in point 7 below.

The particular thing to notice here is that, at the final judgment, the ‘work of the law’ which will not only cause certain people to be vindicated (2.13) but actually to take part in the ‘judging’ of others (2.27) is the result of the work of the spirit (2.29). This, as we shall see, forms the crucial link with the initial work of the gospel. As Paul says in Philippians, in a passage not sufficiently pondered by those who try to reconstruct his justification-theology: the one who began a good work in you will thoroughly complete it by the day of Messiah Jesus.⁴⁶⁶ That is why, in Romans 8.10, he can declare that, though the body is dead because of sin, ‘the spirit is life *because of righteousness*.’ This leads directly to the spirit-driven resurrection of all those whom the spirit indwells. In other words, those who are ‘in the Messiah’, who are the same people as ‘those in whom the Messiah’s spirit dwells’ (though the two phrases do not mean the same thing), already possess the status of *dikaioynē*,

‘righteousness’; and the resurrection will reaffirm that status. Thus, as the language of ‘condemnation’ comes back at last in chapter 8, so too does the language of ‘righteousness’ and ‘justification’: ‘It is God who justifies (*theos ho dikaiōn*); who will condemn?’⁴⁶⁷ The whole of Romans 8 is every bit as much about ‘justification’ as it is about ‘incorporation’ or the work of the spirit.

This explains the point of 8.12–17, echoing (as I suggested) the declaration of 1.4. As Easter declared that Jesus had all along been ‘God’s son’, so even now the spirit bears witness with the believers’ spirits that they are ‘God’s children’. The resurrection itself will say the same thing, in the language of event rather than word. That is why Paul speaks of believers ‘awaiting our *adoption*, the redemption of our bodies’ (8.23). That is why, too, the Messiah is seen as the ‘firstborn among many siblings’ (8.29). Indeed, though the theme of ‘adoption’ is comparatively rare in Paul, when we find it, here and in Galatians 4, it emerges as central. One might see it as a key, Messiah-shaped focal point of covenantal theology – which would be why Paul mentions the notion again in listing the privileges of Israel in Romans 9.4–5.⁴⁶⁸

All this only makes sense if we allow the striking vision of final judgment in Romans 2 to have its full effect. Take that away, and one of the greatest chapters in Paul (Romans 8) becomes a scatter of general reflections about the spirit, Christian behaviour and cosmic eschatology. These are, in fact, vital and carefully integrated features within a much larger, but still theologically coherent, overall discourse.

Paul’s vision in Romans 1–8, then, has as its framework the all-important narrative about *a future judgment according to the fullness of the life that has been led*, emphasizing the fact that those ‘in Christ’ will face ‘no condemnation’ on that final day (2.1–16; 8.1–11, 31–9). The reason Paul gives for this is, as so often, the cross and the spirit (8.3–4): in the Messiah, and by the spirit, the life in question will have been the life of spirit-led obedience, adoption,

suffering, prayer and ultimately glory (8.5–8, 12–17, 18–27, 28–30). *This is not something other than ‘Paul’s doctrine of justification’*. It is its outer, eschatological framework. We know bits of this larger, final-eschatology story from other letters – Philippians, already quoted; 1 Corinthians 4.1–5 and 15.20–8, of course; hardly at all in Galatians, though there is one tell-tale reference to a future ‘justification’.⁴⁶⁹ But here in Romans it is spelled out most fully, and most tightly integrated. And, to repeat a vital point about the character of Paul’s theology, that integration makes nonsense of all schemes that depend on regarding Romans 1–4 and 5–8 as representing two different types of thought or systems of soteriology. That division results from failing to notice Paul’s larger controlling category, namely, the covenant promises made by God to Abraham to deal with the problem of the world’s sin and its consequences. Those, Paul insists, are the promises to which the covenant God has been true in the Messiah. The *faithfulness* of this God is the underlying theme of Romans 1–8 ... as it is also the problem, and then the solution, throughout Romans 9–11.

This digression into the inner logic of Romans, particularly the close ties between the much-loved chapter 8 and the usually ignored chapter 2, has brought us to the point where we can at last appreciate what comes, logically and theologically, in between the two. The point about Christian eschatology is that in the Messiah the hoped-for ‘end’ has already appeared ‘in the present time’. Eschatology has been *inaugurated*. It is because of the Messiah’s unexpected death and resurrection, bursting in upon the present time from the promised future, that the verdict to be announced on the last day can itself be anticipated in the present. Once we have grasped the first five points in this sequence, in other words, we are ready first for the sixth (the Messiah), and then at last for the seventh (the ‘justification in the present’).

6. *The events concerning Jesus the Messiah are the revelation, in unique and decisive action, of the divine righteousness.* Everything depends – literally, logically, personally and above all theologically – upon this. The long-awaited *future* event has come forward into the *present* in the Messiah (as expounded, in relation to the Messiah himself, in chapter 9 above). This means that the one God has displayed his *dikaïosynē* in both senses (covenant faithfulness and forensic justice, tightly interwoven, and together working for the rectification of the whole creation) in the events concerning Jesus. He has condemned sin in his flesh, and has vindicated Jesus himself in his resurrection, marking him out as Israel’s Messiah and hence as the bearer of the Israel-shaped covenant purpose. This God has thereby fulfilled his Israel-plan in the Messiah, whose death and resurrection are the *instruments* of this purpose and the first *instantiation* of it (in the sense that Jesus’ death *is* the condemnation of sin and that his resurrection *is* the beginning of the new creation). He has decisively launched the creator’s project of putting the world itself to rights.

The critical move here is to affirm, with Paul in Romans 3.22, that the Messiah has been ‘faithful’ to that covenant plan, the plan through which Abraham’s seed would bless the world. His ‘faithfulness’, also expressed as his ‘obedience’, is the sign that Israel’s role in the divine purpose has devolved onto him. And of course, for Paul, what this means in concrete terms is his death on the cross. The Messiah himself, in some versions of this narrative, is referred to as *ho dikaïos*, ‘the righteous one’.⁴⁷⁰ Whether or not we press that point, we see here the main thrust of Romans 1.3–4, and we understand more fully why Paul has used *that* opening precisely for *that* letter. The resurrection is the divine declaration that Jesus really was, all along, ‘son of God’, in all the senses we explored in the previous chapter. To that extent, the resurrection of Jesus was itself a *judicial* declaration: over against the verdict of the courts of Caiaphas and Pilate, condemning Jesus as a blasphemous pseudo-

Messiah, the resurrection declared that he was ‘in the right’.⁴⁷¹ And if he was in the right, he really was Messiah; the resurrection was a *covenantal* declaration. *He really was Israel’s representative*. The ‘end’, the ‘goal’, the ‘eschaton’, has thus already arrived proleptically in the present, and with it the announcement of *where the new covenant people of the one God, the forgiven-humans, are to be found and recognized*.

These events concerning Jesus, and the announcement of them as ‘good news’, therefore provide a sudden, bright glimpse of the fact that this God is ‘in the right’ in relation both to the covenant with Israel and to the problem of human sin and cosmic corruption. This vision is what Paul refers to in Romans 1.17 and 3.21 as the unveiling of the divine righteousness.⁴⁷² One might refer to all this in terms of ‘**inaugurated forensic and covenantal eschatology**’.

This inauguration, then, has taken place in the Messiah. Just as the wilderness tabernacle was as it were a micro-Eden, a miniature new world, so the resurrection of Jesus is to be seen as the sharply focused rectification, putting-right, of the whole created order. The divine verdict *against* the power of sin on the cross (Romans 8.3) results in the divine verdict *in favour of* creation in the resurrection. As we saw earlier, the Messiah is thus the revelation-in-action of the divine faithfulness in the full, combined sense. In him the intended ‘goal’ has come forward into the present. In his physical body he is the living presence of the creator and covenant God (Colossians 1.19–20; 2.9). His dying flesh has borne the weight of sin’s condemnation (Romans 8.3); his resurrection embodies the start, and the means, of the whole new creation (1 Corinthians 15.23). He is therefore the true ‘seed’ of Abraham (Galatians 3.16, 19, 29).

The entire Jew-plus-gentile family, now designated as ‘Abraham’s seed’, has that title because they are ‘in him’ and ‘belong to him’ (Galatians 3.26–9); and the badge of that belonging is of course *pistis*, the ‘faith’ which believes that the one God raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 4.24–5; 10.9). That ‘faith’ itself is not, as some

might suppose, either an arbitrary standard or a kind of religious characteristic which the creator happens to approve. The *cognitive content* of the faith (believing that Jesus was raised) corresponds to the *character* of the faith as the first sign of new life (see 7 below), and grasps above all, in the light of the resurrection through which the cross is seen not as a shameful defeat but as a glorious victory, that the *faithful death* of the Messiah was the ultimate act of divine judgment on sin, in other words, the covenantal act through which humans are rescued from sin and death and Abraham's blessing flows out to the world.

This is why Paul can describe the divine action of 'justifying' as being 'through the redemption which is *in Messiah Jesus*' (Romans 3.24). Once we join up the *forensic* eschatology with the theme of the *covenant*, there is no longer a problem about integrating any of it with Paul's regular *incorporative* theme. Were it not such an ugly tongue-twister, one might be tempted to refer to Paul's 'inaugurated/incorporative forensic/covenantal eschatology', or his 'inaugurated-eschatological forensic-covenantal incorporation'. Perhaps it would be easier in German. Or perhaps we should just say, as Paul himself does, 'justified in the Messiah' – remembering all that is now built into that dense phrase.

Because, and only because, the Messiah has died and been raised, fulfilling the creator's covenantal purpose and thereby revealing his 'righteousness', in all senses, before the world, the bursting of the creator's future purpose into the present time is matched exactly by the declaration, in the present and in advance, of the verdict of the last day (point 5 above). Now at last we can understand Paul's great theme of justification by grace, through faith, *in the present time*.

7. When Paul speaks about people being 'justified' in the present, he is *drawing on the framework of eschatological, forensic, participatory and covenantal thought* I have sketched above. He does so in order to insist, from a variety of angles because of the different arguments

he is mounting, that ***in the present time*** the covenant God declares ‘in the right’, ‘within the covenant’, all those who hear, believe and obey ‘the gospel’ of Jesus the Messiah.⁴⁷³ The future verdict (point 5) is thus brought forward into the *present*, because of the utter grace of the one God seen in the ‘faithful’ death of the Messiah (point 6) and then at work, as we shall now see, through the spirit in the gospel.

Several things need explaining here: seven of them, in fact, nested within this seventh point itself.

(i) First, as we indicated above, the verb *dikaioō* is *declarative*. When the judge in an ordinary Hebrew law court finds in favour of a person, that person is thereby deemed to be ‘in the right’ (Hebrew *tsaddiq*; Greek *dikaios*). Though this word can also (confusingly to us) denote the person’s character or behaviour, in virtue of which the decision has been made, the meaning of *dikaios* within the law court setting is not ‘righteous’ in the sense of ‘this person is well-behaved and so deserves to win the case,’ but rather ‘this person has received the court’s favourable verdict.’⁴⁷⁴ The declaration, in other words, is not a ‘recognition’ of ‘what is already the case’, nor the creation of a new character, but rather the *creation of a new status*. Up to that point, within the courtroom metaphor, prisoners in the dock have the status, in terms of the court (and thus of the wider society which the court represents), of being under accusation. Now, after the declaration, they have a new standing in the community. The court has found in their favour; they are ‘in the clear’, ‘in the right’. They can walk away with head held high. Their *status* has, in that sense, been ‘rectified’, though to speak thus might easily cause confusion here, suggesting that after all the notion of ‘personal transformation’ might be smuggled in to the very precise meaning of ‘justification’. What has happened, rather, is that the social standing of the person within the community has been ‘put right’, sorted out, re-established. The Greek word for this new status is *dikaioσynē*. This is what it means for ‘righteousness’ to be either ‘reckoned’ or ‘accounted’ to

someone. They possess 'righteousness' as a result of the judge's *declaration*.⁴⁷⁵ Up to the moment when the judge says, 'I find this person *dikaios*,' it makes no difference how upright and innocent the person in question may be; until the declaration at the end of the case, they do not possess that status *in the forensic context and sense*. Here Vanhoozer is particularly helpful: 'Never mind imputed righteousness,' he says; 'the first thing to clarify is what, for lack of a better term, we may call *locuted* righteousness.'⁴⁷⁶ He quotes Thiselton, probably the sharpest mind on such matters in biblical studies for a century or more: 'It is not a descriptive locution, but an illocutionary speech-act of declaration and verdict.' The judge's declaration works on the analogy of other speech-acts which *create* a new status or situation: 'You're fired'; 'I pronounce that they are husband and wife'; 'I declare the meeting adjourned.'⁴⁷⁷ The declaration creates and constitutes a new situation, a new status.⁴⁷⁸

We stress again: this is a *declaration*, not a *description*. It does not *denote or describe a character*; it *confers a status*. In that sense, it *creates* the status it confers. Up to that point, the person concerned cannot be spoken of as 'righteous', but now they can be and indeed must be.⁴⁷⁹ Thus the *status* of being 'in the right', reckoned 'righteous', is actually *created by*, and is *the result of*, the judge's declaration. That is what it means to say that the status of 'now being in the right', *dikaiosynē*, has been *reckoned* to the person concerned.

At this point it ought to be clear beyond any further cavil that this 'status', which the person has as a result of the declaration of the judge, cannot be the same as the 'righteousness' of the judge himself.⁴⁸⁰ The judge's own 'righteousness' consists in hearing the case fairly according to the law, remaining impartial, supporting widows and orphans, punishing evil and upholding the good. To say that *this* 'righteousness' is somehow accounted to, or accredited to, the vindicated defendant makes no sense: it would mean saying that such a person is deemed to have tried the case fairly, and so forth, which is obviously not the point. Likewise, the meaning of

‘righteousness’ as applied to the vindicated defendant (or, indeed, a vindicated plaintiff) is that the person has been declared to be in the right – which is not what is being said when one speaks of the ‘righteousness’ of the judge. This confusion goes back to the medieval ontologizing of *iustitia* as a kind of quality, or even a substance, which one person might possess in sufficient quantity for it to be shared, or passed to and fro, among others. This mistake has been perpetuated, in more recent times, by the proper and understandable desire to affirm the security of the believer’s status by speaking of ‘the righteousness of God’, or even, as Paul never does, ‘the righteousness of Christ’, as being like a capacious cloak which the believer can put on.⁴⁸¹ Paul, however, has other ways of achieving the latter aim, as we shall see.

The fact that being thus ‘accounted righteous’ has to do with a *forensic status* rather than with any kind of recognition of an earlier-formed character, or promise of subsequent character-transformation (such as might be implied here by the language of ‘rectification’), can be seen if we consider the case of a miscarriage of justice. In a court case it is of course to be hoped that the judge’s declaration will correspond to earlier reality: that the person now given the *new* status of ‘righteous’ in this *forensic* sense will in fact have been ‘righteous’ in the sense of ‘having good character’, and specifically in terms of being innocent of the charges in the particular case. But in the case of a miscarriage of justice, where a guilty person may have been acquitted, the verdict ‘in the right’ still means that the person concerned has the status of *dikaiosynē*. The person concerned might actually be a notorious and wicked character, not well-behaved at all. They might in fact be guilty of the crime in question, and might have obtained the verdict by luck, bribery or juridical incompetence. The fact remains: when the court finds in their favour, they are ‘declared to be in the right’.

This kind of miscarriage of justice is, of course, what Paul at first seems to be indicating when he says that all those who believe the

gospel are *dikaios* – despite the fact that a moment before they had been standing guilty in the dock with nothing to say in their defence.⁴⁸² This is where it looks as if the one God is doing precisely what scripture says a judge must never do – indeed, what this God himself says he will not do! – namely, acquit the guilty.⁴⁸³ This paradox is of course what centuries of protestant thought in particular have gloried in above all, namely the ‘justification of the ungodly’, the free and gracious divine act which overrides all questions of desert, merit, qualification or lack thereof, and which gratuitously confers the status ‘righteous’ on those who have done nothing to deserve it.⁴⁸⁴

The first thing to get clear, then, is that the word ‘justification’, within its forensic sense, refers very precisely to *the declaration of the righteous God that certain people are now ‘in the right’, despite everything that might appear to the contrary.*

It is all too easy, when thinking through this whole initial line of thought, to suppose that Paul is *only* talking about human sin and justification. But, as we have seen at length already, he employs the same language, at the same time, to address the issue of Abraham’s eschatological family, and the question of whether Jews are automatically in it, and whether gentiles, coming in, need to take on full Torah-observance, particularly circumcision. Having discovered more precisely how the ‘forensic’ language works, then, how does it apply to these ‘covenantal’ questions? The question of the divine ‘righteousness’ was, after all, raised most acutely in the first century not as an abstract question about how the creator would deal with sin, but as a covenantal question about how and when the covenant God would fulfil his promises and rescue his people.⁴⁸⁵

When we think of the ‘declaration’ of the covenant God, in the light of all that has been said so far, it should be clear that for Paul this declaration was made, foundationally, when Jesus was raised from the dead. This event was to be interpreted as the declaration that Jesus really was Israel’s Messiah, and that Israel was being

reconstituted in and around him. The divine covenantal declaration about the Messiah is then brought forward, through the preaching of the gospel and the work of the spirit, and repeated in the case of believers. What the one God said of Jesus at Easter – the covenantal declaration as well as the announcement of Jesus’ ‘vindication’ in a forensic sense – is now said ‘upon faith’, *epi tē pistei*. We must explore this further below.

In Paul’s theology all this means two tightly interconnected realities, both of which he urgently wants to stress. First, all those over whom that declaration is made are *permanently* ‘in the right’. The status of *dikaiosynē* is not temporary. It truly anticipates the verdict which will be issued on the final day. This is why ‘justification’ is the heart of what later generations would rightly see as Christian *assurance*. Properly speaking, ‘justification’ is not ‘how someone becomes a Christian’, but ‘how someone who becomes a Christian through believing the gospel and being baptized can be sure they will receive the verdict “righteous” on the last day’. The judge has already pronounced it, and his word will stand. Second, this declaration, and this status of *dikaiosynē*, applies equally and on the same basis to *all* who believe the gospel, Jew and gentile alike, fulfilling the covenant promise of Abraham’s worldwide family. It is in other words the basis, the only basis, for full church membership – because, by their very character, the declaration and the *pistis* over which it is made both look back to the Messiah himself who constitutes in himself the renewed people of the creator and covenant God. The second point is the main theme of Galatians, though with echoes of the first; both together, fully interwoven and interlocking, provide the main theme of Romans. Paul would, I think, have said that the second point reinforces the first: it is by being accepted as a member of the single family that people are strengthened in their assurance. This is part of the meaning of *agapē*.

This leads us directly to the second sub-point.

(ii) The second thing that needs explaining is that this present verdict is utterly dependent, for Paul, on the *past work* of the Messiah (point 6 above). His faithfulness to death (also spoken of as his ‘obedience’) is the moment when Israel’s appointed task, of rescuing humankind and the world, is at last accomplished. The promised future burst into the present in the cross and resurrection, revealing the ultimate judgment and covenant faithfulness of the one God, precisely *through* his ‘faithfulness’, for the benefit of all believers (Romans 3.21–2). Paul has a dozen or more ways of talking about the cross as a single, past achievement. All that he says about present status, forgiveness, covenant membership and everything else depends on this. *The present declaration ‘in the right’, ‘covenant member’, depends on the past achievement of the Messiah’s saving death.*

We have already stressed this point earlier both in the present section and in the whole chapter. It remains to note, however, that in many discussions words like ‘ground’ and ‘basis’ appear (as in ‘the cross is the ground of justification’ or ‘on the basis of faith’).⁴⁸⁶ These words, with their implicit building metaphor, should not be absolutized and then made the subject of inquisition. What counts is the *historical narrative* in which the actual work of the Messiah opens up the new world over which the word ‘forgiveness’ is written, the new multi-ethnic family promised in the Abrahamic covenant. A firm grasp of biblical eschatology means that a nervous grasp on non-eschatological terminology can be relaxed. In particular, as we saw above, this second point should not be ontologized into any idea of the Messiah’s own ‘righteousness’, or his ‘obedience to the law’.⁴⁸⁷

(iii) The people declared to be ‘in the right’ are the people who are *incorporated into the Messiah*. Present justification is utterly dependent on the past achievement of the cross, but the Messiah is not merely a figure of history whose achievement has created a new possibility. The Messiah is the one ‘in whom’ his people are what

they are. The verdict, then, is announced ‘*in the Messiah*’.⁴⁸⁸ One can see the link, perhaps, by saying that the verdict which the living God announced when he raised Jesus from the dead (‘he really is my son’, as in Romans 1.4) becomes the verdict the same God announces over all who are incorporated into the Messiah. What is said of the Messiah is rightly said of those who are ‘in him’. That is why ‘adoption’ in Romans 8 or Galatians 4 is simply a way of exploring the meaning of ‘justification’, rather than a separate category.⁴⁸⁹

It is striking that in each of his major expositions of justification Paul says, almost in one case as an aside, that justification is something that happens ‘in the Messiah’:

They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is *in the Messiah*, Jesus.

If, in seeking to be declared ‘righteous’ *in the Messiah*, we ourselves are found to be ‘sinners’ ...

... that I may gain the Messiah, and be found *in him*, not having a ‘righteousness’ of my own which is out of the law but that which is through the faith[fulness] of the Messiah, the righteousness from God which is upon faith.⁴⁹⁰

In other words, the Messiah’s death constitutes the past event which enables justification to take place, and the Messiah’s present incorporative life is the context within which it makes sense for the one God to make the same declaration over people *now* that he made over the Messiah himself in the resurrection. The verdict pronounced over the Messiah’s *pistis* is now pronounced over the *pistis* of those who are ‘in him’. The Messiah died to sin, once for all; this person is ‘in the Messiah’; therefore this person is deemed, reckoned, accounted to have ‘died to sin’. That is exactly what Paul says in Romans 6, but it is not a new point; it is simply a restatement in other terms of what he had said in chapter 3. Indeed, if we see 3.24 (‘redemption in the Messiah’) as an advance shorthand summary, chapter 6 is not even really ‘in other terms’. It is drawing out what was already hinted at. Thus *the present declaration ‘in the right’*,

rooted in the Messiah's death, is pronounced over all who are 'in the Messiah'.

This is *not*, however, a matter of the Messiah possessing in himself the status of 'righteous', and this 'righteousness of the Messiah' somehow being 'imputed' to the believer.⁴⁹¹ I understand the almost inevitable pressure towards some such reading, granted the medieval context to which the Reformers were responding, and the pastoral needs which such an idea of 'imputed righteousness' is believed to address. But it is not Pauline. (a) Paul never speaks of the Messiah having 'righteousness'. In the one place (1 Corinthians 1.30) where he comes closest, he also speaks of him having 'become for us God's wisdom – and righteousness, sanctification and redemption as well'. So if we were to speak of an 'imputed righteousness' we should add those others in as well, which would create a whole new set of doctrinal puzzles. (b) The second half of the apparent 'exchange' of 2 Corinthians 5.21 is not about 'the Messiah's righteousness', but about 'God's righteousness'; and it is not about 'imputation', but about Paul and those who share his apostolic ministry 'becoming', that is, 'coming to embody', that divine 'righteousness' as ministers of the new covenant.⁴⁹² (c) When Paul does speak of things that are true of the Messiah being 'reckoned' to those who are 'in him', the focus is not on 'righteousness', but on death and resurrection (Romans 6.11). That is actually a much stronger basis for the pastoral application which those who teach 'imputed righteousness' are rightly anxious to safeguard. Those who belong to the Messiah stand on resurrection ground.⁴⁹³

As we have seen, the sign that one is 'in the Messiah' is twofold: baptism and faith. The former we shall come to presently; the latter needs attention at this point. We can set aside the older views that 'faith' is an 'easier' kind of 'work', something people will be able to do having failed the harder test of keeping the law; or that 'faith', as opposed to 'legalism', is the kind of religious attitude that the creator had wanted all along, the kind he therefore rewarded when he found

it in Abraham. Faith, in Paul's sense, is the Messiah-badge, because it was his *faithfulness* in the sense of his *faithfulness to the covenant*, his *obedience unto death*, that accomplished the divine purpose; and also because it is the belief that the one God raised him from the dead.⁴⁹⁴ The word 'faith' functions like the word 'view' in the sentence 'Do you have a view from your room?': it is defined in relation to its object. The 'view' from the room is not something you possess. It consists precisely in being able to see the distant scene. The 'faith' in Paul's sense is not valued for a 'quality' it possesses in itself. It is defined entirely by, and in terms of, its object. It is what it is because it looks away from itself, and looks towards, and leans all its weight upon, the single act of the one God in the Messiah. It then becomes, as with Abraham, the sign of truly human life, giving glory to the powerful creator and believing that he does what he promises.⁴⁹⁵ And it becomes, in particular, the sign of the new covenant, the true 'doing of the law'.⁴⁹⁶

(iv) All this comes true in personal reality *because of the work of the spirit*.⁴⁹⁷ This point alone justifies the placing of this entire discussion under the head of 'election redefined through the spirit'. The place of the spirit in all this is often either misunderstood or not even grasped, but it is fundamental for Paul. The spirit works, through the proclamation of the good news of the Messiah, to generate faith in humans and to constitute all those who believe as the single forgiven family promised to Abraham.⁴⁹⁸ Nobody, says Paul, can say 'Jesus is lord' except by the spirit; and, as he elsewhere explains, 'Jesus is lord' is the most basic Christian confession, the outward and verbal sign of the inward belief in Jesus' resurrection.⁴⁹⁹ 'The gospel came to you in power, in the holy spirit, and with full conviction,' he says to the Thessalonians; 'it was, after all, not a human word, but the divine word which was at work in you believers.'⁵⁰⁰ In explaining to the Philippians that their suffering is itself a gift of God, he brackets this along with the earlier gift of

faith, and this resonates with the statement a few paragraphs earlier that ‘the one who began a good work in you will thoroughly complete it.’⁵⁰¹ Faith, it seems, is the beginning of the ‘good work’ begun as a sheer gift. ‘You have been saved by grace, through faith,’ he explains in the circular we call ‘Ephesians’; and ‘this doesn’t happen on your own initiative; it’s God’s gift.’⁵⁰² This raises other questions for us, and indeed for Paul himself: why, for instance, do some believe and others not?⁵⁰³ That has pushed some towards Jacobus Arminius, saying that ‘faith’ as it were comes from the human side, with justification and the gift of the spirit consequent upon it. It has pushed others towards a kind of Barthian position (whether or not Barth would have held such a thing), saying that ‘justification’ itself happens before all time, or at least in the one-off events of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and certainly prior to anything ‘happening’ in the believer. The former delays divine action until the human initiative has taken place; the latter insists on divine initiative to the point where human response is hardly necessary. But if we stick with Paul there can be no doubt that he saw the work of the spirit, through the proclamation of the crucified and risen Jesus as lord, as the effective and immediate cause of people coming to believe that the one God had indeed raised Jesus from the dead. And that was, of course, the *pistis* which Paul described as relating directly to the divine verdict in the present.⁵⁰⁴ Election, redefined around the Messiah through the resurrection, is then opened up by the spirit to include all those who are ‘in the Messiah’. *The faith because of which the one God declares those in the Messiah to be ‘in the right’ is itself the work of the spirit through the proclamation of the gospel.*

We should note, in the light of what we have said earlier, that when Paul speaks of the work of the gospel he is saying things which he might just as well have said of the spirit. That which God has done once for all in the Messiah is put into effect in the lives of communities and persons through the spirit-energized announcement

of the messianic achievement. Thus, though the spirit is not mentioned as such in Romans 3 and 4, Galatians 2, or Philippians 3, the other places where the spirit is brought into the picture make it clear that Paul is presupposing it elsewhere also. One cannot, in writing dense theology, say everything one might in principle have said on every occasion – though the pressure to do so, lest someone accuse you of missing something out, can become acute.

Does this mean that ‘justification’ is dependent upon, or subsequent to, ‘regeneration’? I am sometimes accused of saying this, though since ‘regeneration’ is not a term that occurs in any of Paul’s discussions of justification it is not a way of speaking I would favour.⁵⁰⁵ ‘Regeneration’ is primarily a Johannine concept, and we should be wary of superimposing it on Paul’s careful language and categories. The fear, of course, is that ‘justification’ would after all depend on ‘something in me’ – the beginnings, some might say, of ‘subsequent ethical transformation’, taking us back to the earliest Reformation debates.⁵⁰⁶ Well: if the alternative is to say that ‘justification’ is the divine declaration made in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is then simply enjoyed in faith, we would be on the way to a universalism which, however popular in some circles, would not be favoured by my ultra-Reformed critics. Nor, more to the point, would it make sense in the light of Romans 2.1–11.⁵⁰⁷ We need, rather, to make a distinction.

It is true that the spirit who, through the gospel, inspires the first whisper of faith is the same spirit who then goes to work so that the person who has believed ‘does the work of the law’ in the way spoken of in Romans 2, 3, 8 and 10.⁵⁰⁸ To that extent, as Paul insists in Philippians 1.6, ‘the one who began a good work in you will thoroughly complete it by the day of Messiah Jesus.’ There is continuity; and the spirit, Paul would insist, remains sovereign throughout. But the point is that the first sign of the spirit’s work through the gospel is different in *character* from all that subsequent development. The first sign, the bare confession that Jesus is lord, the

first sense in the heart that the creator God raised him from the dead, is precisely as we have seen a looking *away* from oneself and an utter trusting in the divine action in the Messiah. To turn that utter self-abandoning trust into a possession – like someone trying to ‘possess’ the view from their room – would be instantly to falsify it. The faith because of which one is declared ‘righteous’ consists simply of the helpless trust in what the one God has done in Jesus. Everything that comes later, the hard moral work of producing ‘the fruit of the spirit’, the putting to death of the deeds of the body and so forth – all that has a very different character from this initial utterly astonished and utterly humble spirit-inspired, gospel-driven confession that the crucified and risen Jesus is lord.

The later moral work matters. But the verdict *dikaios*, ‘righteous’, ‘forgiven’, ‘covenant member’, which is issued, as Paul says, ‘upon that faith’ (Philippians 3.9) – this verdict is not dependent upon that subsequent work. This is where we must sharply distinguish the *meaning* of ‘justification’ from the *concomitant fact* not only of personal renewal but even of *theōsis* (see below). ‘Justification’ does not denote those things. It is the initial verdict of God. Indeed, it is only the person who has heard that initial verdict, and understood what it really means, who can then go to work, still of course entirely in the power of the spirit, to do the things which Paul describes in Romans 8, Galatians 5 and elsewhere. [509](#)

The character of this initial faith, inspired by the work of the spirit, because of which the verdict *dikaios* is issued in the present time, means that ‘assurance’ – of membership in the single family, of the favourable verdict at the final assize – really does depend on something ‘outside oneself’, namely the unique and unrepeatable death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. Christian faith is precisely the glad and grateful grasping of that death as ‘for me’. The proposal in some theology to ontologize this by speaking of a ‘*iustitia aliena*’, an ‘alien righteousness’, that is, a ‘righteousness’ which is and remains ‘someone else’s’ as opposed to ‘my own’, is a

valiant attempt to say again what Paul says in Philippians 3.9: ‘not having my own *dikaiosynē* defined by Torah, but the *dikaiosynē* from God which is given to faith’. But the crucial mistake here – which a focus on the reshaping of election through the spirit helps us to avoid – is to separate what Paul explicitly joins in Philippians 1.6 and elsewhere. The confusion comes, I think, not least through the talk of ‘regeneration’ which has intruded into the conversation at the point where Paul speaks of the ‘call’ (what some theologians call the ‘effectual call’).⁵¹⁰ The point about the ‘call’ is that it is not ‘an invitation to enjoy a new kind of religious experience’. It is a sovereign summons to acknowledge the risen Jesus as lord. It, like the ‘faith’ which it inspires, is all about Jesus, not about oneself. And what Paul elsewhere says even about all subsequent Christian life and work applies to the ultimate degree to the faith which responds to the call: ‘yet not I, but the Messiah who lives in me’; ‘it wasn’t me, but God’s grace which was with me’; ‘struggling with all the energy which is powerfully at work in me’.⁵¹¹ To speak in this way is not to court, as people sometimes sneeringly say, ‘synergism’ within a zero-sum understanding of Christian living (God does this bit, I do that bit, so we co-operate).⁵¹² Leaving aside the fact that Paul himself uses the very word in a positive sense in 2 Corinthians 6.1 (‘as we work together [with God]’, *synergountes*), we must stress that a confluence between the divine life and the human life is precisely what the gospel brings about. But for that we need to move to our next category.

(v) The fifth basic point requires care and caution. What about *transformation*? The old protestant–catholic debates about justification often focused on the question of whether justification preceded or followed any change or transformation in the individual. Protestants regularly insisted that it preceded any such change, making it clear that justification was an act of utter, unmerited grace, not simply responding to a prior act of the individual. Catholics regularly saw ‘justification’ as being an *infusion* of ‘grace’ as a

character-transforming power.⁵¹³ Debates aside, however, it is clear, as we have seen, that for Paul (a) ‘justification’, the declaration of ‘righteous’ over a person, is made *epi tē pistei*, ‘upon faith’, as in Philippians 3.9; (b) the ‘faith’ in question is, specifically, the belief that the one God raised Jesus from the dead, and that he is therefore Messiah and lord, as in Romans 10.9–10; (c) this faith itself arises from the work of the spirit through the gospel, as in Romans 10.13–15; (d) the work of the spirit can also be spoken of as having the initial result of the believer crying ‘Abba, father’, signalling adoption (Romans 8.15; Galatians 4.6). Clearly any attempt at an oversimplification, omitting the work of the spirit from the picture, will not do – however ‘normal’ such an omission has been in western theology.

But it is this same spirit which then, according to Paul, brings about the *final* resurrection (Romans 8.9–11); and the spirit is spoken of in that same passage as ‘the spirit of the Messiah’, or even just ‘the Messiah’ himself.⁵¹⁴ The same passage also emphasizes that the gift of this indwelling Messiah-spirit is basic to all Christian existence: ‘anyone who doesn’t have the spirit of the Messiah doesn’t belong to him’ (8.9b). This is closely cognate with the famous statement in Galatians 2.20: ‘It isn’t me any longer, it’s the Messiah who lives in me.’ When we put all this together, it is clear that, for Paul, the work of the spirit is basic to all Christian existence; that the spirit effects both the Abba-response of the adopted child to the one God and the *pistis* whose content is the resurrection of the crucified Messiah; and that the declaration *dikaios*, ‘in the right’, is therefore bestowed on those who are both ‘in the Messiah’ *and indwelt by the Messiah’s spirit, by the Messiah himself*. Everything else Paul says about the spirit, not least in the adjacent passages in Romans 8, leaves us in no doubt that it is the same spirit that produces the radically transformed life which Paul insists must characterize the Messiah’s people. And all this is well explained, of course, by what we saw in chapter 9: that Messiah and spirit together have provided, for Paul, the fresh

meaning of Israel's one God himself. The complex simplicity of nascent trinitarian monotheism undergirds the simple complexity of Pauline soteriology.

This is where some have said that therefore the word 'justification' actually *denotes* the inner transformation which is effected by this indwelling.⁵¹⁵ My negative response to this is not driven by any knee-jerk desire to maintain my protestant credentials. Those have long since been taken from me, whether rightly or wrongly; perhaps that, too, will be sorted out on the last day.⁵¹⁶ No: my response to the proposal to identify 'justification' with the spirit's transformation is that this is not what the word means, either in itself or in its contexts. 'Justification' denotes the divine *declaration*. This word, 'in the right', is pronounced as an act of utter grace on the basis of the Messiah's death.⁵¹⁷ The people over whom this declaration is pronounced are those who believe the gospel message about Jesus; and this faith is the first sign of the work of the spirit. That is why Paul declares, as though to sum up the entire argument of Romans 5—8, that 'the one who began a good work in you will thoroughly complete it by the day of Messiah Jesus' (Philippians 1.6). That provides the key distinction. 'Justification' does not take place on the basis of any developed character-change. Nor does the word even *denote* the first beginnings of that, the work of the spirit by which someone calls the one God 'Abba' and believes in the risen Jesus. The word *denotes* the sovereign declaration of the covenant God. Nor do the adjective 'righteous' and the abstract noun 'righteousness' *denote* anything about the change of heart whose first flutterings produce that faith. They *denote* the 'standing' which the believer has from that moment on, on the basis of the divine declaration, as a full, forgiven member of the single people of the covenant God. And it is because of the spirit, working in this way, that Paul can argue throughout Romans 5—8 that the future verdict announced over the entire life (Romans 2.1–16; 8.1, 31–9) will correspond to the present verdict that has been issued over nothing

but *pistis* (3.21—4.25). That is the point of the advance summary of 5—8 in 5.1–5. Thus the spirit’s work is vital; the inner transformation by the indwelling of the Messiah himself is vital; but *neither of those is what the word ‘justification’ means, or what the word ‘righteousness’ refers to.*⁵¹⁸

This tricky and somewhat tortuous discussion might not have been necessary if more attention had been paid to Romans 2.25–9. That is where, within the actual argument of Romans, Paul has already sketched out (before we get anywhere near 3.21–31, the formal exposition of justification in the present) what is involved in belonging to the people of the renewed covenant. There is such a thing as heart-circumcision, as Deuteronomy had said. And this results in a new form of ‘keeping the law’ – whether or not the person concerned is a circumcised Jew.

As it stands this is teasing and provocative: what can this ‘law-keeping’ consist of? Only in Romans 10 does it finally become clear: it consists of confessing Jesus as lord, and believing that the one God raised him from the dead. But we should allow Paul to state his own terms, not least the ones he formulates in, it seems, a deliberately paradoxical way. When he speaks of people being justified by grace in the Messiah (3.24) and through *pistis* (3.25), and then goes on to speak of the *nomos pisteōs*, the ‘law of faith’ (3.27), those who have read 2.25–9 ought already to catch on to what he is saying. When they reach 10.1–13 they should nod in recognition: this was what it was all about. Once the multiple misunderstandings of various ecclesial traditions have been put to one side, Paul is after all not so unclear. What he says in one place cryptically, he regularly explains more fully later on.⁵¹⁹

‘Transformation’, then, is emphatically part of the Pauline vision, the full picture both of ‘covenant membership’ and of ‘salvation’. The indwelling of the Messiah-spirit is a basic, not a secondary or subsequent, element in all Christian existence. But the powerful work of the spirit, in and through the proclamation of the gospel, is

not the same thing as ‘justification’. ‘Justification’ is the declaration of the one God, on the basis of the death of Jesus: *this really is my adopted child, a member of Abraham’s covenant family, whose sins are forgiven*. And that declaration, in the present, anticipates exactly the final verdict which can also be described as ‘adoption’ (all this language, of course, reflects Israel’s ‘adoption’ as ‘God’s son’ at the exodus⁵²⁰): ‘we who have the first fruits of the spirit’s life within us are groaning within ourselves, as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our body’ (Romans 8.23). Whichever way you look at justification, whichever Pauline context you line up beside it, it always retains this character: the ultimate future brought forward into the present, and the two joined by the link of the spirit.

What then has happened to the *ordo salutis*, the hypothetical ‘order of events in the process of salvation’? This is not, as we have said, something which Paul addresses head on, though the partial summary in Romans 8.28–30 points in that direction. It is the fruit of later attempts to construct a single scheme out of his various statements. But his answer would, I think, be fairly clear. We must remember, of course, that what to the theologian may appear as separate and consecutive ‘moments’ are likely to appear, to the new convert or indeed to the evangelist who is preaching the gospel, as a confusing jumble, just as the moment of falling in love, which a psychiatrist or even physiologist might explain in terms of minutely analyzed separate stages, most likely is not experienced in that way at the time. But we may at least try, even though the stages do not sound as exciting as the reality.

First, the spirit works through the proclamation of the gospel.⁵²¹ This powerful work of the spirit upon the human heart is what Paul labels the ‘call’. Second – though as I say it may not feel like a subsequent event – the person answers the ‘call’ by ‘confessing with the lips that Jesus is lord and believing in the heart that God raised him from the dead’. This is the faith like Abraham’s, because of which, third, the one God declares, covenantally, that this person is a

member of the family, and forensically, that this person is ‘in the right’, that their sins are forgiven. The word for *both* of these ‘declarations’ – which are of course not two but one – is ‘justification’; the present and inalienable status resulting from both of them is ‘righteousness’. That status is the basis both for assurance of final salvation and for assurance of membership in the single family; and the single family is the company of those with whom, according to Romans 5.17, the sovereign God will share his rule over the world. ‘Those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified’ (Romans 8.30).

Turning this sequential model round and looking at it from another angle, we discern that all of this happens through, in and for the Messiah: ‘Those he foreknew, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family’ (8.29). That is why, among other things, the intermediate state between initial justification and the final verdict is to be marked, again as in Romans 8, by the Messiah-shaped cruciform life of holiness and suffering, by the spirit’s transforming work, including the famous ‘groaning’ in prayer (8.26–7). None of these larger issues, even though they contextualize what Paul means by ‘present justification’, are the same thing. Justification is the divine declaration, creating the new status of ‘righteous’, ‘adopted child’, because of which the believer can move forward in the Christian pilgrimage. At every stage it utterly presupposes the one-off decisive work of the Messiah; at every stage it utterly requires the work of the spirit. This is the beating heart of redefined election.

(vi) The divine declaration issued over faith – ‘in the right’ in terms of the law court, ‘adoption as sons and daughters’ in terms of the covenant family – is the basis of unity ‘in the Messiah’ across traditional barriers. In other words, the declaration ‘righteous’ made by the one God is also, inescapably and centrally, the declaration that

all those so designated constitute the Messiah's people, 'the Jew' of Romans 2.29, 'the circumcision' of Philippians 3.3.

This is further clarified, importantly for present debates, by recalling that 'the Jew', 'the circumcision', is basically, for Paul, the Messiah himself, and only secondarily those who belong to him. But the point of justification on the basis of Messiah-faith rather than on works of the law is now clear: this justification, precisely by 'justifying the ungodly', brings into this single Messiah-family a great company from every nation. The verdict *dikaios* issued in justification declares that the Messiah's people form *the single worldwide family*. One could put it even more strongly. The reason the divine declaration 'righteous' is issued, on the basis of the Messiah's death and 'for the benefit of all believers', is to constitute that single family, whatever its moral or ethnic background, as the worldwide company which the covenant God had always promised to Abraham. This is how Jew and gentile are joined together 'in the Messiah'. This is how the Messiah's people are to share his work, indeed his rule (5.17), in all the world. They are 'saved' for a purpose; and they are 'justified' in the present so that they may be assured that they are already a full part of that saved-for-a-purpose family.

This is where the 'covenantal' meaning of justification reasserts itself within the 'forensic' framework in which the future verdict is anticipated in the present. This is where, in other words, the third point above (the covenantal meaning) is revealed as the other side of the coin of the fourth point (the forensic meaning). In terms of 'how people get saved from sin and final judgment', one might say that the fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant in the Messiah is the way by which the forensic verdict, future and present, is reached. In terms, however, of Paul's actual arguments, first in Galatians and then also in Romans, we will shortly suggest that it works the other way round. The underlying point of Paul's arguments in both letters is covenantal: this is how Jews and gentiles belong, in the Messiah, in the single family. And for that to happen the verdict 'condemnation'

must have been replaced by the verdict ‘righteous’. In other words, to oversimplify just a little: if we ask the sixteenth-century ‘forensic’ question, ‘How can I find a gracious God?’, the answer is ‘through the covenantal work of Messiah and spirit’. But if we ask Paul’s question, ‘How can believing Jews and gentiles form one body in the Messiah?’, the answer is ‘through the announcement, in the present, that all who believe in the gospel are *dikaioi*, that the future verdict “no condemnation” has been brought forward, through the faithfulness of the Messiah, for the benefit of all who have faith’. This is Paul’s inaugurated eschatology in full covenantal and forensic balance.

The creation of the single family in place of the divided peoples of the world – with the Jew/gentile split being the most obvious division for a Pharisee! – was in fact the central message that Paul wanted to get across to the muddled Galatians. It was the starting-point for what he wanted to say to the church in Rome. Paul could use it as the springboard for what he wanted to say in Philippians 3. And it is ‘justification’ – the divine declaration on the basis of Messiah-faith – that alone can constitute such a family. Once we have worked through the first five preliminary points, we ought to realize that this sixth one is where it has all been going. *Those who are declared or accounted ‘righteous’ on the basis of Messiah-faith constitute the single covenant family which the one God has faithfully given to Abraham.* The vocation of ‘the Jew’ in Romans 2.17 has devolved onto the Messiah himself.

But the community of the Messiah’s people cannot be defined by Israel’s law and the ‘works’ which it requires. The two reasons for this join together, as we see in Galatians 2.16–18. On the one hand, everyone ‘in the law’ has in fact broken the law. On the other hand, the effect of Israel’s law is to divide the human race into two. The justification of the ungodly, by the fresh act of divine grace, is not only the divine means of forgiving sinners. It is also, for the same reason and as part of the same act, the divine means of creating the

single Abraham-family. Indeed, it is *because* of the forensic verdict that the covenantal declaration can take place: the one God ‘justifies the ungodly’, bringing them into the one family. The fact that the one God has done this is the main reason why Paul sees the gospel of Jesus as the announcement that this one God has been ‘faithful’. At this point we realize precisely that ‘the righteousness of God’ itself is not just *forensic* but *covenantal*, and that these are not two but one. And here we understand at last the full and urgent significance, within his historical and ecclesial context, of Paul’s doctrine of justification. It is central, not marginal; polemical, yes, but not *merely* polemical.⁵²²

This sixth point, then, shares with the whole scheme a stress on *inaugurated eschatology*. Paul holds before the Roman church (15.7–13) the vision of a single community united in worship of the one God. That is the ultimate goal, which is properly anticipated in the present by the declaration that all who believe the gospel share equal membership in Abraham’s family. Just as the life of the age to come is to be seen in advance in the personal and bodily behaviour of believers,⁵²³ so the church as a whole, in its present life, must *anticipate* the ultimate unity on the basis of what has *already* been announced in the present verdict ‘*dikaioi*’. Believing Jews and believing gentiles already have *dikaiosynē* reckoned to them, and their present *koinōnia* must reflect that fact. That is the point of the whole letter to Galatia, and within Romans the specific point of 14.1—15.13. The verdict of the future has been brought forward into the present, redefining election around Messiah and spirit. Those caught up in this work of the gospel must live already as the single family for whom Messiah-faith, generated by the spirit, is the only badge of membership.

(vii) There remains the seventh point, and it will come as a surprise to some – but not to those who know Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Colossians. The actual event *in the present* which

corresponds in advance to the actual event (resurrection) on the last day is *baptism*.[524](#)

Baptism *does*, outwardly and visibly (as the sacramental textbooks say), what justification *says*. Justification is the declaration made by the one God himself; baptism makes that divine word tangible and visible. Baptism, like justification, points back firmly to the death and resurrection of Jesus as the ground and means of the single divine saving action. Baptism, like justification, is inextricably linked with the work of the spirit through whom the whole church, now incorporating new believers, confess that Jesus is lord, affirm that the one God raised him from the dead and commit themselves to living under that lordship and trusting themselves entirely to his saving accomplishment.⁵²⁵ Baptism, like justification, brings people from every background into the single family whose incorporative name is *Christos*, providing the basis for their common life.⁵²⁶ In justification, the covenant God ‘reckons’ that all who believe are ‘righteous’; in baptism, Paul tells the Romans to ‘reckon’ that what is true of the Messiah is true of them – specifically, his death to sin and his coming alive to the one God.⁵²⁷ Justification provides the solid platform, the new status of ‘righteousness’ as a pure gift, on which the entire edifice of Christian living is constructed; baptism reminds the whole church, and tells the new candidates, that they stand on resurrection ground. Justification brings the future *verdict* into the present; baptism brings the future *resurrection* into the present – and the future ‘verdict’ is of course the ‘forensic’ dimension precisely of that future resurrection.⁵²⁸ Both ensure, when properly understood, that the entire Christian life is known to be ‘in the Messiah’, planted and rooted in his death and resurrection, and enabled by the spirit. Both are subject to the same problems: an over-concentration on the ‘objectivity’ and the ‘*extra nos*’ of justification can lead to a carelessness about actual faith, never mind actual moral life, and an over-concentration on the ‘objectivity’ of baptism can lead to a similar casual or careless approach to actual Christian obligations. Paul addresses the first of these in Romans 6 itself, and the second in 1 Corinthians 10.

In exegetical terms, Romans 6 belongs intimately with Romans 3 and 4, as the combination of the same themes in Galatians 3 indicates. Once again, the argument of Romans 6—8 does not offer a different kind of soteriological thought to that of chapters 1—4; they are part of a single, though complex, train of thought. Baptism is as it were the *public celebration of justification by faith*, the active and visible summoning up of the exodus-events which were themselves freshly encoded in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the constitution of the believing community as the exodus-people who have firmly and decisively left Egypt behind and are being led by the spirit to their inheritance. It emphasizes, as does justification, the emphatic ‘now’ of Christian faith and life and the equally emphatic ‘not yet’, and holds them in proper balance. Here, in Romans 6, is the true Pauline ‘imputation’: ‘calculate yourselves as being dead to sin, and alive to God in the Messiah, Jesus.’⁵²⁹ Though Paul does not mention baptism in Galatians 2, those who know Romans 6 will have no difficulty detecting the baptismal resonances of 2.19–20. We have quoted it more than once before, but it bears repetition:

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. I am, however, alive – but it isn’t me any longer, it’s the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

That is the statement of the larger reality within which ‘justification’ nests. All these things have to happen, and do happen, when someone ‘becomes a Christian’. ‘Justification’ is the declaration *that* those to whom they happen, those who now find themselves ‘in the Messiah’, with his death and resurrection ‘reckoned’ to them, are the single, sin-forgiven family promised by the covenant God to Abraham. And baptism is the action which turns that declaration into visible, concrete, symbolic praxis. Those who are baptized, in the ceremony that confesses Jesus as the crucified and risen lord, are therefore as it were in themselves small working

models of inaugurated eschatology. They are also, in Paul's mind, designed to be agents of that same inaugurated eschatology in the world; but that is a further point to be explored later.

And, talking of small working models, we have now completed this sevenfold working model of what I take Paul's teaching on 'justification' to be all about. It is therefore almost time to turn to the relevant texts to see how it all works out in specific contexts.

Before we plunge into these passages more fully, though, a couple of reflections suggest themselves about where we have now arrived.

The notion of justification was at best marginal to the second-Temple belief in election. It was not needed, except (as in Qumran, and perhaps the *Psalms of Solomon*) when different groups began to think of themselves as in some sense the true remnant, the real 'Israel'.⁵³⁰ With Paul, as we have seen, justification comes right into the centre, not despite but because of the fact that it is necessarily polemical. This observation enables us to see the ways in which this redefinition of election stands in very close parallel to the redefinition of monotheism we observed in the previous chapter. As we saw, in Paul the creational and covenantal monotheism characteristic of a devout first-century Pharisee is reconfigured around Messiah and spirit. Within that, we can trace the origin of christology through the themes of YHWH's return to Zion; through the resurrection and enthronement of the Messiah; and through the evidentiary work of the spirit. Now it appears that justification itself is built on more or less identical foundations. Justification depends on the fresh revelation in action ('apocalypse!') of the covenant God. Justification is unveiled through the resurrection of the Messiah, indicating that he and his people are the new covenant people, and that his death has defeated the ultimate enemy. Justification is effected through the work of the spirit, active in the preaching of the gospel to bring about the faith which joins up with the first two points, calling the one God 'father' and hailing the Messiah as the risen lord. We should not be surprised that in Paul monotheism and election join up. The faith that says 'Jesus is lord' and 'the covenant God raised him from the dead' is simultaneously (a)

acclaiming this revised monotheism in the power of the spirit and (b) displaying the badge which says, 'Justified'.

This redefinition of 'election', initially around the Messiah (as earlier in this chapter) and now through the work of the gospel and the spirit, is the main theme of Romans 3 and 4, Galatians 2, 3 and 4 and Philippians 3.2–11.⁵³¹ Without pretending to offer the complete millimetre-by-millimetre exegesis that one might ideally want, we may suggest that the following reading of these key passages will provide a coherent and satisfying account, not least of the verses and phrases which are sometimes thought to point in other directions. Despite some of my critics, I persist in the claim that the best argument is always the sense that is made of whole passages in Paul rather than isolated sayings.⁵³²

As already in this chapter, I defer a consideration of Romans 9—11. Though it obviously has to do with the redefinition of election, its tight argument makes it difficult to extract individual themes. Its eschatological orientation makes it natural to tackle it in chapter 11 below.

So, though I am now inevitably going over ground already traversed elsewhere, I do so with one or two fresh aims in mind.

In particular, I am intending now to test my tentative hypothesis about the origin and development of Paul's view of justification. In Galatians and Philippians one can read the 'justification' language almost entirely in terms of 'covenant' and its redefinition, whereas in Romans that meaning is interwoven with the 'law court' imagery. My developmental proposal, then, is that since the only sort of 'justification' of which we are aware in second-Temple Judaism had to do with the redefinition of covenant membership, there is a possibility that Paul, having used the language in that primary sense in Galatians, went on from there to explore and develop its potential forensic meanings as a second layer. This then ties in with our exposition of 'plight and solution': Paul did not, we suppose, begin with the question of 'How can I be justified?' in a modern western sense, but came to his mature view, with all the varied elements fully integrated, initially through the sharp controversy in Galatia and then through various other pressures. At the same time, it is clear that already by the time he writes 1 Corinthians 4

he has firmly in mind, and running off the tip of his tongue, ideas and phrases which he will incorporate into Romans 2, which as we have seen is a key passage, a lynch-pin of much of this thought.

But we must proceed in order. The main aim now is to show, through brief consecutive exposition, how the sevenfold doctrine of justification is presented in these passages and how the seven themes of Paul's soteriology, by which we mean 'forensic', 'participatory' and above all 'covenantal' eschatology, with their apocalyptic, anthropological, salvation-historical and transformational meanings all resonating, cohere and nest within one another throughout. And if all these sevens make the present exposition sound like something out of Revelation, that may after all not be inappropriate. Paul does after all announce the doctrine in terms of the *apokalypsis* of the divine righteousness.

[\(b\) Galatians 2.15—4.11](#)

We must now explore the way in which, in the central argument of Galatians, the election of Israel is redefined not only around the Messiah but also around the spirit. The gospel, as we saw, works through the spirit to produce 'faith'. That 'faith' becomes *the* boundary marker of Abraham's family, trumping all other contenders, particularly the traditions of table-fellowship and circumcision that would keep Jews and gentiles apart even within the Messiah's baptized and believing people.

The reason Paul was talking about 'faith' in Galatians is because it was, for him, the key answer to the question raised by the Antioch incident on the one hand and the Galatian problem on the other. The question at Antioch (2.10–14) concerned table-fellowship: were believing Jews to eat with believing gentiles or not? Peter, by his behaviour, was turning this round, in a way which anticipated the problem in Galatia: were (male) gentile believers to be required to join the inner circle of God's people, of Abraham's family? In other words, were they to 'judaize', to get circumcised? In both cases, Paul's answer was expressed in terms of *justification*, of *faith* and particularly of *Jesus* himself and his death – and

with, as we noted, baptism either explicitly or implicitly part of the mix. But the context indicates well enough that these themes are to do with *membership in the people of Israel's God*; in other words, they were 'covenantal'.⁵³³

In Antioch, 'those who came from James' believed that the answer to the question about table-fellowship had to do with the basic Jewish identity-marker of circumcision. To Paul's horror, Peter and Barnabas, who had previously been happy to eat with gentiles, went along with the new arrivals. For those from Jerusalem, circumcision was the badge of the covenant, the key marker of the elect people. Paul, however, regarded circumcision as irrelevant for Jesus' followers and their identity, because election itself had been redrawn around Jesus himself. In its place there was another marker, which equally well drew a line in the sand, but drew it at quite a different place: Messiah-faith.⁵³⁴

'We are Jews by birth, not "gentile sinners". But we know that a person is not declared "righteous" by works of the Jewish law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah.'⁵³⁵ With these words (2.16a), Paul states the working principle to which he held, fiercely, in Antioch, in the controversy in Galatia, in the Jerusalem Conference (whenever it was held) and, so far as we can tell, throughout his ministry.⁵³⁶ We saw in the earlier part of this chapter that this principle was rooted, not in a piece of missiological pragmatism (we must somehow get gentiles to join in, but we'll have to make it easy for them), nor in a sense of laxity towards Jewish traditions (as though Paul was typical of Diaspora assimilation⁵³⁷), but in the fact of the crucified Messiah, the one upon whom Israel's destiny and identity had devolved and who, through his crucifixion, had put to death all human 'identities' in order to bring them through into a new existence corresponding to his own risen life. What we now notice is that it is the *pistis Iēsou Christou*, the faithfulness (i.e. the faithfulness-unto-death) of Jesus the Messiah, which then constitutes the appropriate badge of the community that finds itself redefined around him in turn. In response to 'the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah', Paul declares (2.16b) that 'this is why we too believed in the Messiah, Jesus; so that we might be declared

“righteous” on the basis of the Messiah’s faithfulness, and not on the basis of works of the Jewish law.’

It is of course possible to translate this occurrence of *ek pisteōs Christou* as ‘on the basis of faith in the Messiah’. Actually (to the chagrin, no doubt, of the hard-liners either way) I do not see that much hinges on this here. The point still stands, that it is the *faithful death* of Jesus that reconstitutes the people of God, and it is *the faith of believers* which therefore appropriately marks them out as members of that people. And, though I do think that *pistis Christou* really does mean ‘the Messiah’s own faithfulness’ here in 2.16 and elsewhere (in 3.22, for instance), the point of *pistis* for much of Galatians is that this is the badge worn by the Messiah’s community. Such people are thus *defined as people of ‘faith’* – not in the modern sense of ‘faith’ as ‘religious belief’ (most people in the ancient world, like most today, had some kind of ‘religious belief’!), but very specifically the ‘faith’ that confesses Jesus as lord and believes that the one God raised him from the dead.⁵³⁸ Once again, this ‘faith’ is for Paul much closer to ‘the Messiah’s “faithfulness” to the divine Israel-purpose’ than the split between ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ in western theology (and modern English usage) would indicate. The actual content of both is, after all, the death (and resurrection) of the Messiah himself.

For Paul, the community is defined by the Jesus-shaped Messiah-faith which has been produced by the spirit, at work through the gospel. This is the primary thing Paul wants to say in Galatians: that *all those who have this ‘faith’ belong in the same, single community, eating at the same, single table*. We recall our earlier expositions of Galatians 2, 3 and 4: this is the heart of it. *And this is, more or less, what Paul means by ‘justification by faith’*. ‘We are’, he says to Peter, ‘Jews by birth, not “gentile sinners”, but we know that one is justified ...’ (2.15–16). In other words, ‘We belong by birth to *this* community, not *that* one, but we know that *the question of belonging to the people whom the covenant God is declaring to be his own ...*’

The phrase ‘we know that one is justified’ (16a) is thus to be understood in close correlation to the ‘Jews or gentiles’ which immediately precedes it

(15b), rather than being thought of as a different or new point. As we have seen, it is still possible to do what earlier generations did: to ignore the context of the Antioch-incident, where the contentious issue of table-fellowship is front and centre, and to insist that from verse 16 onwards Paul is talking, in the abstract, about ‘how people get justified’ (or even, though as we have seen Galatians never mentions this topic, ‘how people get saved’).⁵³⁹ But the case for reading the whole paragraph, through to the end of the chapter, as precisely Paul’s commentary on the Antioch table-fellowship controversy, closely cognate as it was with the problem in Galatia, is overwhelming. In other words, ‘so that we might be justified’ in Galatians 2.16 does not simply mean ‘so that we might attain a righteous standing before God’, though that is obviously part of the core meaning of the term. Rather, it *must* mean, in order for the sentence to work in its context, ‘so that we might be declared to be *members of God’s single family*’. Words mean what they mean within their sentences and contexts, and *dikaiōthōmen* here must refer to God’s declaration that all believers are part of his family. Without this, the passage makes no sense. The sentence-structure in the Greek of verses 15 and 16 emphasizes this, since the main verb is right at the end, so that these two clauses stand close together and provide the joint subject. Taken literally it reads: ‘We Jews by birth and not gentile sinners but knowing that one is not justified ... even we believed into Messiah Jesus ...’⁵⁴⁰ In other words, to repeat, ‘even we believed’ goes with ‘Jews and not gentiles’, and the ‘but’ indicates that the ‘knowing that one is not justified ...’ introduces a modification of the Jew/gentile question rather than a new point.

The negative proof of this, as in Romans 3.20, is the echo of Psalm 143.2: ‘by works of the law no creature will be declared “righteous”.’ The Psalm reference is indeed an echo, not an exact quotation, and is slightly more distant than the similar echo in Romans: ‘in your sight’, says the psalm, ‘shall no living creature (*pas zōn*) be justified.’⁵⁴¹ In Romans Paul backs this up by pointing out that ‘through the law comes the knowledge of sin.’ Though he does not say this explicitly here, the following passage seems to bear it out, all the way to Galatians 3.22 (where ‘scripture’, i.e.

Torah and the rest, ‘shuts up everything under sin’). In fact, the reference to gentile *hamartōloi* (sinners) in 2.15, and the way in which that is picked up in verse 17, indicates that the question of ‘sin’, particularly the ‘sin’ of which gentiles are assumed to be automatically guilty and in which Jews might be in danger of sharing, is very present to his mind. But the point is not ‘So there you are: you’re all sinners’; but ‘Because of sin, you face more of a problem than you realize about your own covenant membership.’ Certainly in Galatians, where the ‘sin’ root (*hamartia*) occurs only in this passage and two other places, one of them the letter’s opening formula, it is clear that *Paul’s whole argument is about membership in the single family, sharing the same table-fellowship, not primarily about the way in which sins are dealt with and the sinner rescued from them.*⁵⁴² He presupposes the ‘anthropological’ point (that all, Jews included, are sinners), but his point is not ‘This is how sinners get saved’ but ‘This is how people are marked out as members of the covenant family.’ The ‘forensic’ and ‘anthropological’ hints are held within the ‘covenantal’ meaning.

The point of 2.16, then, is this. If the Messiah’s faithful death and resurrection have redefined the people of God, that definition is worked out, marked out, among that people in terms of *pistis*: ‘... a person is not declared “righteous” by works of the Jewish law, *but through the faithfulness (dia pisteōs) of Jesus the Messiah ... That is why we too believed in the Messiah (eis Christon Iēsoun episteusamen): so that we might be declared “righteous” on the basis of the Messiah’s faithfulness (ek pisteōs Christou), and not on the basis of works of the Jewish law.*’ Neither the noun (*pistis*) nor the verb (*pisteuein*) occurs again in Galatians 2 after these three references in verse 16, but that solid statement hangs over, and interprets, the rest of the chapter. If ‘I’ have thus been redefined through ‘my’ sharing in the Messiah’s faithful death and resurrection, the correlative badge which demonstrates this sharing, and hence this new identity, is clearly *pistis*. That was the point to be made in Antioch, and is the point to be made to the Galatians: all those *who believe*, who show thereby that they are remade according to the Messiah’s *faithful* death and resurrection, belong together at the same table. The unity of the Messiah’s people,

especially in their table-fellowship, thus flows as a non-negotiable imperative from the gospel itself.

Before the sharp intake of breath from certain quarters has subsided, let me repeat at once: the question of eating at the same table, or not, has nothing to do with ‘table manners’ in some genteel but theologically trivial sense, as is sometimes sneeringly suggested. It has everything to do with the formation and maintenance of a people who know themselves precisely to be, in Paul’s introductory words, the people who have been ‘rescued from the present evil age’ by the Messiah’s ‘giving himself for their sins’.⁵⁴³ Paul echoes that formula at the heart of his powerful appeal at the end of chapter 2: the son of God ‘loved me and gave himself for me’.⁵⁴⁴ But that cannot be taken as reinscribing the false distinction according to which Paul can only be referring to one of the two: *either* membership in the single family with the single table, *or* forgiveness of sins; *either* ‘ecclesiology’ *or* ‘anthropology’. The point of Paul’s whole theology – of, we might say, the theology of Genesis and the Psalms, of Exodus and Deuteronomy and Isaiah, and his retrieval of them through the lens of the gospel – was that *through* God’s people the one God would provide the solution to the larger human plight. And that would be also the solution for God’s people themselves, since they too shared in the plight.

There is very little reference to this plight in Galatians: almost no mention of ‘sin’, no mention at all of ‘death’.⁵⁴⁵ That, no doubt, is why there is no mention either of ‘salvation’ – a salutary warning to those who regularly confuse ‘salvation’ with ‘justification’, or indeed Romans (where ‘salvation’ is a main theme) with Galatians.⁵⁴⁶ Paul no doubt believes that the Galatian Messiah-people have been ‘saved’. That is after all the meaning of 1.4, where he uses the comparatively rare word *exaireō*, ‘to deliver’ or ‘rescue’.⁵⁴⁷ It is just that this is not the subject of the letter. The letter is about *the definition of the community* as the people who are already declared to be in the right, declared to be part of God’s single family, the true children of Abraham. That definition assumes that the sins of such people have been dealt with, but that is not Paul’s theme. His theme is the fact that this people has been demarcated by *pistis*. And the way he speaks

of this demarcation is through the language of ‘justification’. Here, in what may be Paul’s earliest letter, and certainly his earliest extant exposition of ‘justification’, there should be no doubt: the primary meaning is ‘covenantal’, containing with it hints of ‘anthropology’ and of ‘forensic’ meanings but not reducible to those terms. As we have already seen, Paul effortlessly integrates this with the ‘incorporative’ theme (‘seeking to be justified in the Messiah’, verse 17) and also that of ‘transformation’ (‘I am, however, alive – but it isn’t me any longer, it’s the Messiah who lives in me’, verse 20). But these do not tell us the meaning of ‘justification’ itself. They tell us how the other members of the cluster of soteriological themes relate to the one which is here central: the definition of all who share this *pistis* as members of the same covenantal family, on the basis of the death of the now risen Messiah.

This then leads naturally into the great central argument of Galatians 3.1—4.11. Here the redefinition of God’s people around the Messiah, which we have already established, is played out explicitly in terms of the demarcation of those who belong to the Messiah, and who are therefore to be regarded as the redefined ‘elect’, in two closely correlated ways. They are marked out by the spirit, and by faith.

The explicit place of the spirit at various points in the argument of chapters 3 and 4 brings to light what, I suggested earlier, is implicit also in Galatians 2: it is the spirit’s work, through the preaching of the gospel, which generates the ‘faith’ which is then the sign of the redefined election. That is the underlying theme of this whole section of my argument.

The opening flourish in 3.1–5 focuses on the Galatians’ receiving of the spirit.⁵⁴⁸ At first sight, to modern eyes – including those of most commentators – this is basically ‘an appeal to experience’. They ‘received the spirit’, presumably with powerful manifestations (verse 5), without any need for circumcision, so why would they need it now? This presupposes a somewhat modern view of ‘religious experience’, which may or may not have been so relevant to Paul and his converts; more importantly, it ignores the strong link between the spirit, as received initially in Galatia, and the promise to Abraham. This becomes explicit in 3.14. The spirit is the

foretaste and guarantee of the ‘inheritance’, one of the main themes of Genesis 15, the chapter Paul expounds through the rest of Galatians 3. It looks as though he is not simply saying, ‘You had an initial and exciting spiritual experience without getting circumcised, so why not carry on in that way?’,⁵⁴⁹ but more particularly, ‘You already received the guarantee of your Abrahamic inheritance without getting circumcised, so why would you need a different kind of guarantee now?’ This proposal is underscored by the link between 3.1–5 and what follows, indicated by the *kathōs* in 3.6.⁵⁵⁰ But how does this link actually work?

The original promise concerned the *land*. In Romans, though not in Galatians, Paul explains how he now sees this: the promise, he says, concerned not one country but the whole world.⁵⁵¹ He places considerable emphasis on the theme of ‘inheritance’ at the end of chapter 3 (3.29), and returns to it after explaining the same points from a different angle in 4.1–7. This time he is more explicit about the link between spirit and inheritance: it is because of the spirit’s work, enabling believers to call the one God ‘Abba, father’, that they know they are ‘heirs’. It looks as though, despite the dense and allusive style, Paul at least supposes that by speaking of receiving the spirit in 3.1–5 he is not simply ‘appealing to religious experience’ but is already saying, ‘So – you really *are* already Abraham’s heirs, through the faith-inducing message!’⁵⁵² Galatians 3.1–5 is therefore plausibly to be read as a further redefinition of the Abrahamic covenant, and hence of the whole notion of election, by means of the spirit.

The redefinition of election is indeed the message he wants to get across in 3.6–9, where the conclusion is drawn at once from the quotation of Genesis 15.6:

Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.’ So you know that it’s people of faith who are children of Abraham.⁵⁵³

This, in regular Pauline fashion, is then at once expanded and explained:

⁸The Bible foresaw that God would justify the nations by faith, so it announced the gospel to Abraham in advance, when it declared that ‘the nations will be blessed in you’. ⁹So you see: the

people of faith are blessed along with faithful Abraham.⁵⁵⁴

This is, in a sense, the main point of the chapter, but Paul knows that he has a lot of work to do to back up this preliminary conclusion against those who insist that the Torah is the way to inherit the Abrahamic promises. We have already examined the next paragraphs from the point of view of the Messiah's achievement; we now revisit them from the point of view of the spirit.

Galatians 3.10–14 once more sets Torah over against this faith-family, showing that Torah effectively shuts up the Abrahamic promises and (as in Romans 4.14–15) prevents them getting out to the wider world.⁵⁵⁵ Verse 11 echoes 2.16: nobody is justified in the law. This now points forward to the answer cryptically revealed in Habakkuk 2.4; there is an opening for people to be 'justified', but it is a different one, corresponding to the point already made from Genesis 15. At this time of crisis, the true people of God will be recognized by their *pistis*. Paul backs this up with Leviticus 18: Torah insists on obedience as the way to 'life' (as it was bound to do, for paradoxical reasons which Paul, and we, will explore later). But where this obedience has not been forthcoming the Abrahamic promises are blocked. It looks as though Jews will not inherit the promises, because of their failure to keep Torah, and gentiles, because Torah excludes them anyway. The Messiah's curse-bearing death then releases 'us' from the law's curse, so that the blessing of Abraham might after all flow out to the nations, and – this is the point for our present purposes – 'so that we might receive the promise of the spirit, through faith'. Here is the redefinition of election, writ clear, cognate both with Romans 2.25–9 and with Romans 4.9–17: the covenant is renewed through the divine spirit, and Jews who want now to belong to Abraham's renewed family must be spirit-people and faith-people. Once more, as in 2.15–21, what Paul says *presupposes* that there was a problem (the curse of the Torah) which has now been dealt with. But the *main line of thought* is the question of how the worldwide-family promises made to Abraham are to reach their destination. Paul himself refers to this in the next verse in terms of a *diathēkē*. Granted our whole

exposition so far we should not be shy about calling his present line of thought ‘covenantal’, though a case for ‘salvation-historical’ might be made as well (as long as we issue the now routine health warning against supposing that this means steady development or ‘progress’). The balance of the two clauses in 3.14 may reflect a sense of two different things required by two different groups: the gentiles need ‘the blessing of Abraham’ to flow outward to them, while the Jews need to be renewed in their covenant membership by receiving the spirit. Alternatively, the ‘we’ in the second half may mean ‘we all, believing Jews and believing gentiles alike’.⁵⁵⁶ Either way, the two are closely linked. God *promised* to *bless* the nations through Abraham, which Paul elsewhere interprets in terms of his ‘inheriting the world’: now, with the ‘blessing’ flowing out at last, the ‘promise’ is being proleptically fulfilled in the gift of the spirit to believers of all nationalities. This is how (Paul is implying) any Jew who wants to inherit the Abrahamic promises must do so.⁵⁵⁷

The next two paragraphs have been studied in other connections, but we note here that the section ends in verse 22 with another evocation of the same point: scripture concluded everything under sin, ‘so that the promise ... should be given to those who believe’. The promise itself comes through the ‘single seed’, the Messiah, and his faithfulness. ‘Those who believe’ are therefore those who wear the badge which marks them out as Messiah-people, as *faithful*-Messiah-people. And the whole context, with 3.14b at its centre, strongly suggests that Paul would cheerfully have unpacked this in terms of the work of the spirit, as in 3.1–5 and 4.4–7.

The two paragraphs that follow (3.23–9 and 4.1–7) are then, I suggest, to be read in close parallel. The *legō de* in 4.1 (‘This is what I mean’ or ‘Let me put it like this’) suggests that Paul is coming back over the same territory from another angle, not making a substantially different theological point. This emerges in the link between (a) the emphatic ‘you are all sons of God’ in 3.26, which explains why believers are no longer ‘under the *paidagōgos*’, and (b) the maturity of the ‘son’, after a period of subservience, in 4.1–7. We should, then, allow the two paragraphs to interpret one another; and we should note particularly that throughout these

two paragraphs Paul is using material, and forms of theological expression, which correspond *both* to what we find in Romans 1—4 *and* to what we find in Romans 5—8. We have here, in other words, a fusion of the so-called ‘juridical’ and the so-called ‘participationist’ modes of thought. They come together precisely in the classic Pauline redefinition of election; in other words, within the framework of *covenant*, of the *apocalyptic unveiling* of the long-awaited arrival of the saving purpose which Israel’s God had always promised and intended, and particularly here the *incorporative* significance of people coming to be ‘in the Messiah’. Again, the fact that Paul does not mention the spirit in 3.23–9 should not blind us to its implicit presence, which becomes explicit in the climax of 4.6–7.

Thus in 3.23–9 we have, beyond any doubt, the redefinition of Abraham’s family – in other words, of election; and this is effected, as we have already seen, around Israel’s Messiah himself. The way the family is redefined around the Messiah is clearly through *pistis*, which Paul hypostatizes, giving it a character and a history – hardly a ‘salvation history’ in any normal sense, since most of the time is spent in slavery:

Before this faithfulness (*pistis*) arrived, we were kept under guard by the law, in close confinement until the coming faithfulness should be revealed. Thus the law was like a babysitter for us, looking after us until the coming of the Messiah, so that we might be given covenant membership (*hina dikaiōthōmen*) on the basis of faithfulness (*ek pisteōs*). But now that faithfulness has come, we are no longer under the rule of the babysitter. For you are all children of God, through faith, in the Messiah, Jesus. [558](#)

This is obviously a tendentious translation – but then all translations of a passage like this must make some fairly sharp assumptions. I offer it partly because I think Paul intends the closest possible link between (a) the Messiah and his achievement and (b) the notion of ‘faithfulness’, and partly because it is important to jolt ourselves out of familiar, but now it seems misleading, assumptions. The final phrase in particular is by no means easy: you are all God’s children *dia tēs pisteōs en Christō Iēsou* could mean ‘through faith in the Messiah, Jesus’, or ‘through the faithfulness which is in the Messiah Jesus’; or, taking the two elements in parallel rather than in sequence, ‘you are all God’s children (a) through faith and (b) in the

Messiah, Jesus.’ Nothing much for our present argument hinges on settling this exactly, though the more I have lived with this text the more I think the third solution is the right one.⁵⁵⁹ Whichever way we look at it, the point is that ‘in the Messiah’ the badge of the community is clearly *pistis*.

To stress the point once more: it is noticeable that here Paul moves seamlessly between what are sometimes regarded, particularly in expositions of Romans, as different modes of thought or types of soteriology. The mention of people being ‘in the Messiah’, correlated exactly with faith, law and justification in verses 23–5, is then explained with reference to the baptismal ‘entry into Messiah’ and ‘putting on the Messiah’, resulting in the common life in which ‘you are all one in the Messiah’ (3.27, 28). This leads into the conclusion of the chapter: those who are thus the Messiah’s people (note the way the genitive *Christou* has the same function as the ‘in’ references) are Abraham’s *sperma*, the single promised ‘seed’, and share his inheritance. This incorporative (one might almost say ‘ecclesiological’, and certainly ‘covenantal’) conclusion all stands under the rubric of ‘through faith’ in 3.26: all that is said about baptism and the single family presupposes *pistis*. For a further explanation of what this ‘faith’ is and how it comes about, we turn to 4.1–7. This is where we see the full sequence, and discover that it is indeed the spirit that has been the operating principle all along, the one through whom – or perhaps we should say through whose implementation of the messianic achievement – ‘election’ is redefined.

As we have seen, 4.1–7 is a retold exodus-narrative. The ‘son’, presently enslaved, is ‘redeemed’ by the act of the covenant God, and given the presence of this God as the guide for the journey to the ‘inheritance’. It is the spirit that functions as the divine presence on that journey, enabling the ‘heirs’ of 3.29 to attain their ‘inheritance’ in 4.7. The spirit, as in Romans 8.15, enables this redeemed people to say ‘Abba, father’, thus confirming with this ‘faith’ the redefinition of the exodus-family, the ones who know themselves to be ‘God’s children’.⁵⁶⁰ It is perhaps unusual for this ‘confession’ of the divine fatherhood, with the Aramaic word ‘Abba’, to be seen by Pauline scholars as the expression of ‘faith’, but I think this is again

because of the unwarranted disjunction that has been made between ‘juristic’ and ‘participationist’ terminology, backed up by an unwillingness on the part of some who favour ‘juristic’ models to allow any mention of the spirit, let alone of a theme like ‘adoption’, into the tight definition of ‘justification by faith’. It seems to me however that here, and in the equivalent passage in Romans 8, we have precisely an expression of ‘faith’.

If, after all, Paul’s redefined monotheism consists of the ‘one God, the father, and one lord Jesus the Messiah’ of 1 Corinthians 8.6, it would be strange to say that ‘faith’ consisted of confessing Jesus as the risen Messiah and lord and not at all confessing this God as father. In fact, as 4.8–11 indicates, Paul is thinking very much of this redefined monotheism, and of the way in which it stands robustly over against all forms of paganism – including, disturbingly, what Paul seems to be indicating is a Jewish version of paganism, the concentration on ‘days, months, seasons and years’ which would put gentile converts back under the rule of the *stoicheia* from which they had so recently escaped. Thus it seems to me that in 4.1–7 (a) Paul is indicating what precisely the ‘faith’ is of which he has been speaking up to this point; (b) he is stressing that it is brought about (as in 3.14) by the work of the spirit; and (c) he is insisting that this is the sign of membership, the Jew-and-gentile-alike membership, in the new-exodus people of the one God, the covenant family promised to Abraham. Here we have, once more, election redefined through the spirit. And here we have, once more, a rich combination of covenantal, participatory, transformative and salvation-historical motifs, held within a larger argument in which the anthropological and forensic notes, though not strongly present, may be lurking in the background.

[\(c\) 1 Corinthians](#)

At the start of Paul’s exposition of his own apostolic calling, the positive side of his negative warnings about the dangers of personality cults, we find him speaking in terms of a final, eschatological law court. This is the first

time he has been explicit about this kind of thing, and the passage strongly anticipates some key features of Romans:

This is how we should be thought of: as servants of the Messiah, and household managers for God's mysteries. And this is what follows: the main requirement for a manager is to be trustworthy (*pistos*). Having said that, I regard it as a matter of minimal concern to think that I should be interrogated (*anakrithō*) by you, or indeed by any human court. I don't even interrogate (*anakrinō*) myself. I don't actually know of anything that stands against me, but that isn't what vindicates me (*oude en toutō dedikaiōmai*); it's the lord who interrogates me (*ho anakrinōn me*).⁵⁶¹

Paul seems to envisage the possibility of being tried by some kind of assembly. The repeated word *anakrinō* can, but need not, have hostile intent, and 'interrogate' seems to catch that ambiguity. Though he will later say that 'the saints', who will one day be judging angels, ought to be able to try ordinary human cases here and now (a fascinating point to which we shall return presently), he does not envisage that they will actually be the ones holding him to account; and in any case he is here balancing the 'now' of 6.1–5 with a firm 'not yet'. Apostles, as household managers, are answerable to their *kyrios*, and his judgment will be reserved for the last day. But then he goes on:

So don't pass judgment on anything (*mē pro kairou ti krinete*) before the time when the lord comes! He will bring to light the secrets of darkness, and will lay bare the intentions of the heart. Then everyone will receive praise – from God.⁵⁶²

This is the same picture of final judgment that we find in Romans 2.16 and 2.29. The secrets of all hearts will be exposed, and 'praise' will come, not from humans but from the one God.⁵⁶³

This close similarity between 1 Corinthians 4 and Romans 2, both in theme and in language, reminds us of something we should in any case guess: that Paul, like all travelling speakers (and many writers), often says very similar things on different occasions, sometimes several years apart. But my point in flagging up this passage, which is not of course dealing directly with 'justification' in any of the senses we have been studying, is that it shows two things which are very relevant to the sevenfold sketch we drew of how Paul's doctrine of justification 'works'.

First, it demonstrates how comfortable Paul is with this regular picture of a *future* law court, in which Jesus the ‘lord’ will be the judge and the one God will be giving the ‘praise’ that will then be due. Second, it shows that he is used (as it were) to thinking back from that point, to envisaging a possible anticipation, in the present time, of the verdict that will be issued in the future. Here Paul is telling the Corinthians that when it comes to assessing the performance of apostles, the final judgment will be the thing; they should not try to pre-empt it or bring the verdict forwards. He uses for ‘interrogation’ a verb which is cognate with the various ‘judging’ verbs in Romans 2, and speaks more explicitly of ‘judging’ in verse 5. When he speaks of being ‘vindicated’ he uses the *dikaioō* root which we now know so well. And the criterion according to which he will be judged is his *pistis* (verse 2), in the sense of his ‘faithfulness to his commission’, much as with Israel in Romans 3.2.⁵⁶⁴ And the whole discussion, all the more considering that Paul is not here talking about soteriology at all, demonstrates solidly that we are right to take Romans 2 as referring to a *final* judgment whose verdict might indeed be anticipated in the present time. This way of thinking is clearly one with which Paul is very comfortable.

This is not the first time in the letter Paul has spoken about a coming final judgment. In the previous chapter he writes of the judgment that awaits all who work to build up the church. There is coming a ‘day’ in which ‘the fire will test what sort of work everyone has done.’⁵⁶⁵ We shall look at this further in the next chapter. But in the two following chapters he speaks of ways in which that future judgment can and should be brought forward into the present time within the life of the church. Faced with flagrant scandal, the church must do *in the present* among its own membership what the one God will do *in the future* in relation to the rest of the world:

Why should I worry about judging people outside? It’s the people *inside* you should judge, isn’t it? God judges the people outside. ‘Drive out the wicked person from your company.’⁵⁶⁶

Paul, indeed, has already passed sentence on the offender, from the other side of the Aegean Sea:

Let me tell you what I've already done. I may be away from you physically, but I'm present in the spirit; and I've already passed judgment, as though I was there with you, on the person who has behaved in this way.⁵⁶⁷

The internal discipline of the church is therefore a kind of anticipated eschatology, lodged between the verdict that has *already* been pronounced by Paul and the verdict that will come on the last day. All this has a very familiar shape to those who have grasped how Paul's doctrine of justification actually works. Just as the verdict 'righteous' comes forward into the present from the last day, being pronounced within history in the Messiah's death and resurrection and in the divine pronouncement over faith, so the discipline Paul envisages is a way of bringing final condemnation forward into the present, implementing the verdict he has already pronounced himself from a distance, *so that the person concerned, having been 'judged' here, may be 'saved' later:*

You must hand over such a person to the satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the lord Jesus.⁵⁶⁸

Whatever precisely Paul means by this – and commentators are, not surprisingly, divided on the matter – our present point has to do with the inaugurated eschatology of judgment: the verdict of the future is enacted in the present.

A very similar idea, again not always noticed in discussions of Paul's idea of eschatological judgment and vindication, is found in the discussion of behaviour at the eucharist in chapter 11:

You see, if you eat and drink without recognizing the body, you eat and drink judgment on yourself. That's why several of you are weak and sick, and some have died. But if we learned how to judge ourselves, we would not incur judgment. But when we are judged by the lord, we are punished, so that we won't be condemned along with the world.⁵⁶⁹

Again, our present purpose is not to comment on Paul's views about what actually happened in such cases. The point is that for the Messiah's people the *future* verdict, in this case 'judgment', is brought forward into the present, in order that it may be finished.⁵⁷⁰ We are given to understand that

when the future condemnation arrives in the present in the form of discipline, whether imposed by the church itself, as Paul envisages in chapter 5, or in the form of divine punishment as here, this does not affect the basic status of believers, who have already been assured of their justification (6.11). Indeed, this is the way in which any future condemnation that might have seemed appropriate is dealt with here and now precisely in order to maintain that future verdict intact.⁵⁷¹

The other passage in which the idea of future judgment is brought forward into the present is 1 Corinthians 6.1–6. Paul assumes – and suggests that the Corinthians ought to know this as well – that in the judgment on the last day, which he elsewhere speaks of as exercised by God himself, or by Jesus as lord, the Messiah’s people will share in that work. Faced with the prospect of lawsuits between believers, Paul reacts in horror:

Don’t you know that God’s people will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you really incompetent to try smaller matters? Don’t you know that we shall be judging angels? Why not then also matters to do with ordinary life?⁵⁷²

Both halves of this – Christians sharing in a future judgment even of angels, and the conclusion that they ought therefore to be able to ‘judge’ ordinary cases in the present as well – may seem extraordinary to us. The first, however, is well established in Jewish tradition, going back at least to Daniel 7, and is picked up elsewhere in early Christianity.⁵⁷³ The second is the direct, if startling, corollary of Paul’s sense that the ‘end’, specifically the ‘judgment’, has already broken into the present in the Messiah and the spirit. That is my sole point at this stage: to show that, even when he is not discussing ‘justification’ as such, his mind regularly and easily works on the basis that the coming day of judgment has already arrived in the present in the Messiah, and is to be implemented and applied in the community in the power of the spirit. That is the basis on which he declares that what will be true about the future must become true in the present life of the church. The behaviours whose practitioners ‘will not inherit the kingdom’ in the future must not be allowed within the church; conversely, the coming

resurrection means one's body must be a place where God is glorified in the present.⁵⁷⁴

There are two other passages in the Corinthians correspondence which are of particular significance for the redefinition of election. We have already looked at 2 Corinthians 5.21. We must now turn our attention to one of the most remarkable expositions of the role of the spirit in this redefinition: 2 Corinthians 3.

(d) 2 Corinthians 3

Paul's purpose in 2 Corinthians 3 is to explain that his style of apostleship is the real thing, not a shabby and second-best alternative. His argument hinges on his explanation that the scriptural promises of the 'new covenant' have come true in them by the spirit in whose power he, Paul, has been ministering as an apostle. *Election redefined*, in other words, *by and around the spirit*: the Messiah's people constitute the community of God's long-promised covenant renewal.

This is hardly controversial – though scholars who have wanted to segregate Paul from 'covenantal' ideas have had to suggest that he was, as it were, playing away from home at this point, responding to opponents rather than taking a line he would have chosen left to himself.⁵⁷⁵ That suggestion hardly fits with the fact that he uses similar imagery in a couple of other places (Romans 2.25–9; 7.4–6) where such a possibility seems much less likely. This whole seam of thought appears to be part of his central thought, not bolted on from the outside for an occasional polemical flourish.

The first clear sign that Paul is expounding the biblical idea of the 'new covenant' in 2 Corinthians 3 comes in verse 3, where he echoes Ezekiel's repeated prophecy of a change of heart for God's people, removing the heart of stone from their flesh and giving them a heart of flesh:⁵⁷⁶

It's quite plain that you are a letter from the Messiah, with us as the messengers – a letter not written with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on the tablets of beating hearts.

In the two relevant passages Ezekiel also speaks of giving the people ‘a new heart and a new spirit’.⁵⁷⁷ He contrasts the previous stony-hearted condition of God’s people and the new condition in which, equipped with a new heart and a new spirit, they will be able to keep the Torah from the heart.

Paul develops this picture in an implicit dialogue with the description of the original giving of the law on Mount Sinai, telescoping together the ‘tables of stone’ in Exodus⁵⁷⁸ with the ‘stony hearts’ of Ezekiel. The ministry he has exercised in Corinth, he suggests, has fulfilled the prophetic promises by producing this new kind of ‘letter’, written with the spirit of the living God on the ‘tablets’ of fleshly, beating hearts.⁵⁷⁹ And they, the Corinthians, are the living proof of this fulfilment: You are a letter from the Messiah, with us as the messengers.

The echoes of Ezekiel enable us to see what Paul is saying underneath the compressed double reference. Paul’s hearers – the muddled and recalcitrant Corinthians! – have had their hearts transformed in accordance with the prophecy. The living God has, by his spirit, taken the ‘heart of stone’ out of their flesh, and given them a heart of flesh; and, as part of the same operation, he has written the ‘letter from the Messiah’ on those hearts. At this point other echoes, more distant but still clearly audible, emerge: those of Jeremiah 31. Before we get to verse 6, where the reference is clear, we can discern in verse 3 that Paul is already thinking of the relevant passage:

The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know YHWH’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says YHWH; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.⁵⁸⁰

The echo in 2 Corinthians 3.3 is made through the idea of ‘writing on the heart’. For Jeremiah what is written is the Torah; for Paul it is the ‘letter from the Messiah’; but the point is the same. The living God, by his spirit, has done the new thing that has transformed this community into being a people who know him. This is then the ground of Paul’s confidence in

verses 4 and 5: this God has ‘qualified’ him for this work, so that he does not need ‘qualifications’ of any other sort from any other source. (That, it seems, was the question that had been raised by the Corinthians themselves.) Thus Paul can come out and say it. He and his apostolic colleagues (Timothy is named as co-sender of the letter in 1.1) are ‘stewards of a new covenant’, *diakonoι kainēs diathēkēs*, ‘not of the letter but of the spirit’. Their gospel ministry has had the effect, through the spirit, of bringing about the ‘new covenant’ spoken of by Jeremiah: in other words, of redefining election.

The phrase ‘letter and spirit’ has of course sent all kinds of hares bounding across the landscape of scholarship in modern times. A particular impetus was given to this when the Romantic movement made a superficially similar distinction between ‘letter and spirit’ in terms of outward form and inward feeling:

Mentally the Romantic prefers feeling to thought, more specifically, emotion to calculation, imagination to literal common sense, intuition to intellect ... Non-philosophical Romanticism disdains ordinary rationality as a practical makeshift for the earth-bound, yielding only a truncated, superficial, and distorted picture of the world as it really is. The directly intuitive, even mystical, apprehension of the world which we owe to poets and other such creative geniuses does not stand in need of any reasoned support or articulation.⁵⁸¹

Many have read Paul in that light, and have therefore inevitably misread him, since Paul, being born some time before Schelling or Coleridge, had not had the benefit of Romantic philosophy. Paul’s distinction is quite different, as also from today’s colloquial phrases ‘the letter of the law’ and ‘the spirit of the law’, where ‘the spirit of the law’ means, basically, that one can disobey what the law actually says because one is in tune with a different and higher principle.⁵⁸² Even though Paul’s phrase is at least partially responsible for that common way of speaking, it is not what he is talking about.

He is talking about the difference between *the Mosaic law*, which, being engraved on stone tablets, is unable to change the hearts of the hearers, and *the holy spirit*, unleashed through the preaching of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, transforming the hearts of the hearers so that they are

now different people. The result is threefold. First, according to the echo of Ezekiel, their hearts are *cleansed* as well as renewed. Second, according to the Jeremiah echo, they have a new *knowledge* of the covenant God. Third, according to the multiple echoes of Exodus, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, taken together, they have a new possibility of *obedience*. Paul's reference here to the 'spirit' is not, as in Romanticism, an appeal to a higher principle to get one off the hook of actual boring obedience. It is his way of explaining the new, integrated humanness, reflecting the divine image (3.18), which he believes is created through the gospel and the spirit and which results in a new type of community.

It is ironic that Paul should be saying these things to the very people who have cast doubt upon his apostolic legitimacy. His point is precisely that those who are indwelt by the spirit find themselves gazing at 'the same reflection' when they are looking at one another with unveiled face.⁵⁸³ But this is an all-or-nothing appeal, and he does not shrink from it.

His basic claim could not be clearer. The spirit has redefined 'election', the covenant status of the people of God. The covenant is not now a matter of possessing or hearing the Mosaic law. It is a matter of the transformation of the heart, wrought by the spirit.

We should not miss (though many have) the background context in Exodus in particular.⁵⁸⁴ We have explored this in the previous chapter and need only refer to it briefly here. Paul is appealing to the story of what happened after the making of the golden calf. Moses had been up the mountain, receiving not only the tablets of Torah but the instructions for making the tabernacle in which Israel's God was to dwell in the midst of his people. Their high-handed idolatry led to the threat that the divine presence would not, after all, go with them; they would have to make do with an angel. Moses then engages in serious, bargaining prayer: Israel is after all God's people, and it is his reputation that is at stake in all this. God relents: 'My presence shall go with you.'⁵⁸⁵ That is the point at which the covenant God reveals his glory (though not his face) to Moses, after which two things (in particular) happen: Moses' face shines and has to be veiled so as not to frighten the people,⁵⁸⁶ and the tabernacle is after all constructed, with the

divine presence in cloud and glory coming to dwell there to lead the people to their inheritance.⁵⁸⁷ There is of course an ambiguity at this point: the divine presence comes to dwell in the tabernacle, to lead the people on their journey, but the tabernacle remains outside the camp. Paul's echo implies a considerable contrast. The Shekinah dwelt in the tabernacle, separated from the people. Now, the divine spirit has come to dwell within the renewed people themselves.

Paul, reflecting on this narrative, is saying just as much about the fulfilment of the tabernacle promise as he is about the fulfilment of Torah. As we saw in the previous chapter, those who gaze with unveiled face at the glory of the lord (2 Corinthians 3.18) are those who find in their hearts 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah' (4.6). They themselves are the new tabernacle or Temple, as Paul indicates in 6.16–18. The promise that Israel's God would accompany his people to their inheritance, renewed after Moses' prayer, has become the reality that he will dwell *within* them. That is the effect of joining together Exodus, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, rethinking that combination in the light of the spirit. This is a central moment in Paul's spirit-focused redefinition of election.⁵⁸⁸

We should note that though 2 Corinthians 3 is clearly *covenantal* and *transformational*, it is not for that reason any less *juridical*. Paul describes his new-covenant ministry as the *diakonia* of *dikaïosynē*, contrasting this with the *diakonia* of *katakrisis*, judgment (3.9). This has the regular *anthropological* result, the movement from death to life (3.6). There is little explicit sign of *participationist* language here (though there is plenty in the surrounding chapters), but we may also trace the presence of a *salvation-historical* perspective from the puzzling hard-heartedness of ancient Israel, through the prophecies of renewal, to the work of the Messiah and Paul's consequent ministry; and also of an *apocalyptic* element in the fresh unveiling of the divine glory both in the face of Jesus (4.6) and in the opening of eyes and ears through the gospel (3.16–18). Once more the elements that are sometimes played off against one another in analyzing Paul are found together here in a seamless whole.

(e) Philippians 3.2–11

1 Corinthians 4 has provided an interlude, away from discussions of salvation or of covenant membership. With Philippians we are back on more familiar territory. Here, however, it is easier than in Galatians to see that Paul's argument is *solely* about 'covenant membership' and its redefinition through *pistis*. There is nothing here explicitly about 'salvation': no mention of sin, of the curse of the Torah, of the effect of the Messiah's death (except in relation to sharing his sufferings).⁵⁸⁹ Clearly the same ultimate end is in view, since the goal of the pilgrimage Paul here describes is resurrection, which is of course the 'deliverance' from the 'last enemy'. But the emphasis of the passage is precisely not 'so that is how I shall be "saved"', but 'so that is how I will be demonstrated to be truly within the covenant people'. Resurrection here functions to round off the argument which begins with the claim in 3.2: 'We are the "circumcision".'⁵⁹⁰ This is not a claim about 'how I earned my salvation' or 'how I realized I did not have to earn my salvation'. It is a claim about *membership in God's people*. And the claim is then advanced in two ways: first, by reference to the Messiah, and his crucifixion and resurrection; second, by the personal link to the Messiah, summed up in the *pistis* which we know from elsewhere he saw as the work of the spirit.⁵⁹¹ On the passage as a whole, Dunn seems to me correct: this passage has been neglected, and could be 'a major resource for moving the debate [on Paul and the law] beyond the impasse in which it was in danger of becoming stuck'.⁵⁹²

There are, of course, some scholars who would prefer it if Paul had never said what we find in Philippians 3.2–11.⁵⁹³ This is where the apostle offers a sharp contrast between the privileges and status he enjoyed in his former life and the status he now possesses in the Messiah. Attempts are regularly made to say that any accurate summary of this passage is necessarily 'supersessionist'. Dunn makes the point which should hardly have been necessary:

The coming of Jesus Messiah, and of the Spirit into the hearts of those who believe in this Jesus, had fulfilled Israel's hope for the age to come. *It is fulfilled hope* that he had in mind, *not*

*superseded hope.*⁵⁹⁴

This is exactly right, though I fear it will not satisfy all the doubters and critics. If Paul really did believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah – and the paragraph, not to mention the rest of Paul's writing, makes no sense unless we see that belief at its heart – then it is impossible to imagine him, or any second-Temple Jew in a comparable position, supposing that this Messiah could have his followers while 'Israel' could carry on as though nothing had happened. That, indeed, would be the route to the true 'supersessionism': the idea that Jesus had started a new movement discontinuous with Israel's history from Abraham to the present.⁵⁹⁵ To claim, instead, that this history is affirmed, validated *and now fulfilled*, however surprisingly, by the arrival of Israel's Messiah – to call this 'supersessionism' is a cynical misuse of words. Was Akiba 'supersessionist' when he hailed bar-Kochba as Messiah and summoned Israel to rally to the flag? Paul is indicating a messianic identity and way of life which he sees as genuine worship of the God of Israel – only without circumcision and other Torah-badges.⁵⁹⁶ That is the paradox which characterizes Paul at every point.

But the main point for our purpose is to show *how* election has thus been redefined in relation to Paul (as a chief exemplar, as in Galatians 2.16–21): in other words, how he describes what constitutes membership in this messianically redefined covenant people. Here we find, as in Galatians 3.23—4.7, a close integration of the various strands of thought which are sometimes thought to belong to different theological or soteriological 'systems' or categories: the 'covenantal' categories of 'circumcision' and 'righteousness in the law'; the 'incorporative' categories of being 'in the Messiah'; the 'forensic' language of 'righteousness' itself; the 'anthropological' language of leaving behind an identity 'according to the flesh'; the 'transformational' language of sharing the Messiah's sufferings in the hope of sharing his resurrection.⁵⁹⁷ And all is set within the implicit narrative that what Israel had hoped for had now been, and was now being, accomplished: in other words, some kind of salvation history; and this, as

usual, is balanced by the strong sense that something has happened to break open any kind of mere continuous historical development or evolution and reveal a quite new divine gift which rendered worthless all that had gone before ('apocalyptic', perhaps). All of these and more have their part to play, together with another note which is not struck so clearly elsewhere: the personal *knowledge* of the Messiah, expressing an intimacy of relationship which belongs with passages like 1.21–3 earlier in the letter.⁵⁹⁸ One might align that with 'transformation', and it undoubtedly includes that, but seems if anything to go further again.

All these come together in a tight-packed statement of who Paul now is, and who by implication all the Messiah's people now are. Paul uses the singular 'I' in verses 4–11, but he does so to give sharp focus to the larger claim advanced by the plural 'we' in verse 3. (As in Galatians 2 and Romans 7, we may suppose that Paul uses the 'I' not least because he does not wish, in describing his kinsfolk according to the flesh, to say 'they'.)

We saw in an earlier chapter how sharp Paul's redefinition of election really was:

²Watch out for the dogs! Watch out for the 'bad works' people! Watch out for the 'incision' party, that is, the mutilators! ³We are the 'circumcision', you see – we who worship God by the spirit, and boast in the Messiah, Jesus, and refuse to trust in the flesh.⁵⁹⁹

'We are 'the circumcision''': not 'the true circumcision', but simply 'the circumcision', much like 'the Jew' (not 'the true Jew') in Romans 2.29. And those who insist on physical circumcision, thereby 'trusting in the flesh' – well, they are 'the "incision" party', the people who like to make cuts and mutilations in their flesh. Along with Galatians 5.12, this is perhaps the fiercest thing Paul ever says about people who stand where he himself once stood. But the explanation, though couched in more measured terms, carries the same stark contrast:

⁴Mind you, I've got good reason to trust in the flesh. If anyone else thinks they have reason to trust in the flesh, I've got more. ⁵Circumcised? On the eighth day. Race? Israelite. Tribe?

Benjamin. Descent? Hebrew through and through. Torah-observance? A Pharisee. ⁶Zealous? I persecuted the church! Official status (*dikaioynē*) under the law? Blameless.

⁷Does that sound as though my account was well in credit? Well, maybe; but whatever I had written in on the profit side, I calculated it instead as a loss – because of the Messiah. ⁸Yes, I know that’s weird, but there’s more: I calculate everything as a loss, because knowing Jesus the Messiah as my lord is worth far more than everything else put together! In fact, because of the Messiah I’ve suffered the loss of everything, and I now calculate it as trash, so that my profit may be the Messiah, ⁹and that I may be discovered in him, not having my own covenant status defined by Torah (*mē echōn emēn dikaioynēn tēn ek nomou*), but the status which comes through the Messiah’s faithfulness (*alla tēn dia pisteōs Christou*): the covenant status from God (*tēn ek theou dikaioynēn*) which is given to faith (*epi tē pistei*). ¹⁰This means knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, and knowing the partnership of his sufferings. It means sharing the form and pattern of his death, ¹¹so that somehow I may arrive at the final resurrection from the dead. [600](#)

Throughout this whole passage, the question at issue is not ‘How might I earn God’s favour?’, but ‘What are the signs that I am a member of God’s people?’ [601](#) And, as in Galatians 2, the answer is twofold, negative and positive. First, the signs in question are not the signs that mark out Israel according to the flesh. Second, the signs in question are the signs that show that one is a Messiah-person, a spirit-and-faith person.

Begin at the end (3.11). The hope of Israel, at least as seen by a zealous Pharisee, was the resurrection of the dead. That hope has now been reaffirmed in the Messiah. But the means to this final, and typically zealous-Jewish, goal is not the observance of Torah, as he might once have said, but rather the sharing in the Messiah’s death and resurrection. Here, just as in Galatians 2.19–20, it is those central, ‘faithful’ events which set the pattern for membership in the covenant family. There, Paul looked *back* to a death he had *already* died and a new life he *already* lived; here, he looks at a death he *continues to die* through the sufferings which he understands as the messianic sufferings in which he is privileged to share, and a future life to which he looks *forward* (though ‘knowing the power of his resurrection’ in verse 10 is the present anticipation of that life). This pattern of present suffering and future resurrection is, of course, typical of one strand in second-Temple Judaism, not least that represented by the Maccabean martyr-stories. [602](#)

The line of thought that ends with resurrection begins with a ‘reckoning’ which follows the pattern of some of the dominical parables. Like the treasure in the field, or the great pearl, ‘knowing Jesus the Messiah as my lord is worth far more than everything else put together’ (3.8). This ‘knowing’, a noun not used in this sense in Romans, corresponds to the ‘knowing’ of 1 Corinthians 8.1–7 and also Galatians 4.9. In both cases the ‘knowing’ which humans do is quickly turned around: what matters is God’s ‘knowing’ of you!⁶⁰³ But there is none the less a ‘knowing’ which the follower of the Messiah has, a ‘knowing of God’ as the one who is now both ‘father’ and ‘lord’ (1 Corinthians 8.6) and as the one who sent the son and sent the spirit of the son (Galatians 4.4–7). This ‘knowledge of God’ seems to derive, not indeed as some used to think from ‘gnosticism’, but from the ancient Israelite sense of ‘knowing God’ or ‘knowing YHWH’.⁶⁰⁴ Paul here picks up this language ‘and fills it with a specifically Christian content and with a peculiarly personal intensity’.⁶⁰⁵ In Galatians this ‘knowing’ is correlated with ‘faith’ in the way that 3.23–9 is balanced by 4.1–11. In 1 Corinthians 8 the discussion hinges on ‘knowing’ rather than ‘faith’ (*pistis* and its cognates are rare throughout 1 Corinthians), though ‘faith’ is the key term in the parallel discussion in Romans 14. But here in Philippians the close link of ‘faith’ and ‘knowing’ seems clear from the join between verses 9 and 10. The genitive construction (*tou gnōnai auton*) at the start of verse 10 serves actually to *define* the ‘faith’ which receives the divine gift of the status of ‘righteous’ at the end of verse 9.

The central point, then, is in the main emphasis of 3.9: ‘that I may be discovered in him’, in other words, ‘that I may prove to be in him’ (*[hina] heurethō en autō*).⁶⁰⁶ As in Romans 3.24 (the redemption which is ‘in the Messiah, Jesus’) and as in Galatians 2.17 (seeking to be justified *in the Messiah*) and 3.26 (you are all sons of God ‘in the Messiah, Jesus’), so here the *location* logically precedes the *status*. Those who are in this ‘place’, namely ‘in the Messiah’, are credited with the status which, as in Galatians 2.15–21, refers to membership in the covenant people. This is of course the subject of the whole paragraph, as introduced by 3.4–6: the attempt to get round the emphasis on national or ethnic status in the first six of Paul’s

categories, and to allow the seventh, interpreted in a ‘reformational’ sense, to trump them all, simply will not do.⁶⁰⁷ The listing of circumcision, race, tribe, descent, sect (i.e. Pharisee) and zeal are none of them about ‘moral achievement’.⁶⁰⁸ Together they strongly suggest that his claim to have been ‘blameless’ in relation to ‘righteousness under the law’ was not about ‘amassing merits and achievements’, either.⁶⁰⁹ It was a matter of *demonstrating*, through Torah-practice, one’s covenant membership as per the previous six categories. Nor was Paul here claiming a lifetime of sinless perfection, but rather a status kept ‘without blame’ by the usual Jewish method of repentance and sacrifice.⁶¹⁰ All this was a matter of *covenant status*, possessed already in virtue of birth and exemplified in terms of Torah-keeping. That is the meaning of the *dikaiosynē*, ‘righteousness’, of which he speaks in verse 6. The whole point is to highlight Paul’s supreme status as a member of the covenant people in excellent standing.

The point he then makes – the turning-point of the passage, corresponding to and based upon the christological turning-point indicated in Philippians 2.6–7, is that the covenant people has been redefined in, through and around the Messiah himself. His ‘obedient’ death (2.8), which Paul elsewhere describes as his ‘faithfulness’ to the divine plan, now indicates where covenant membership is to be found and the means by which one may be assured of it.⁶¹¹ To belong to God’s freshly defined people, one must be ‘in him’, wearing the badge of *pistis* which was the sign of his own solo accomplishment of Israel’s vocation (‘faithfulness’). Being ‘in the Messiah’, as clearly here as anywhere in Paul, is the new way of saying ‘in Israel’. Not to draw that conclusion would be to deny that he really was the Messiah, which for Paul would mean denying that he had been raised from the dead.

Once again the wider context determines the meaning of the key terms. The *dikaiosynē ek nomou* (3.9) which Paul had once possessed was ‘the covenant status defined by Torah’, which he set out in 3.4–6. In that passage Paul was not, as I just said, describing the often-imagined Jewish quest for moral achievement, but the much-evidenced Pharisaic quest for secure covenant status. That solidifies the meaning of ‘righteousness’, *dikaiosynē*,

here as elsewhere. The language is indeed ‘relational’; but the ‘relation’ in question is that of the *covenant*, and that, as we have seen, always dovetailed, as far as Paul was concerned, with the ‘forensic’ context.⁶¹² The ‘righteousness’ is the status of the *tsaddiq*, the ‘righteous’ person who, like Abraham or Phinehas, is a true covenant member. Paul is clear that he still needs to have this ‘covenant status’. He has not swept away the ‘Israel’-categories, like those who, clinging to the word ‘apocalyptic’, want him to have nothing to do with Abraham, with the covenant or with the whole story of Israel. His fresh vision of the one God, and the people of this one God, has not in the least abolished the category of ‘Israel’, as some would like to suppose (and as some have accused me of saying). But the point is that *election has been redefined in the Messiah*; and the covenant status Paul knows he still needs is found ‘in him’ and only in him, through his ‘faithfulness’, his ‘obedience unto death’ as in 2.8. Not for the only time, the present passage echoes 2.6–11 quite closely.⁶¹³ That, indeed, is part of the point: the ‘him’ in 3.9, ‘in whom’ Paul desires to be ‘found’, is of course the ‘lord Jesus Messiah’ of 2.6–11, which is why those who are ‘in him’ are to share the fellowship of his sufferings in the hope of resurrection. Once again the compressed ‘doctrine of justification’ here, which is in the present context explicitly about covenant membership rather than ‘salvation from sin’, is focused on the Messiah himself. He *is* the ‘covenant location’; and ‘righteousness’ is the ‘covenant status’ declared by Israel’s God over everyone who is ‘in’ that location – because of course, if they are ‘there’, his death and resurrection are ‘reckoned’ to them, as in Romans 6.2–11. ‘Participation in the Messiah’ and ‘the forensic declaration “in the right” ’ are both part of a single whole. And that single whole is covenant membership, and its redefinition through Messiah and spirit.⁶¹⁴

The status Paul therefore possesses is ‘the righteous status which is from God’, *hē ek theou dikaiosynē*. This is now given to, or bestowed upon, faith.⁶¹⁵ Despite older attempts to make this phrase equivalent to the *dikaiosynē theou* itself (‘God’s righteousness’), as though the latter phrase referred to the righteous status of the covenant member rather than the righteousness of the covenant God himself, the unique *ek*, ‘from’, gives the

game away.⁶¹⁶ The *dikaiosynē* here is precisely not God's own righteousness, as in Romans 3.21 and elsewhere. It is the status which is *from God to* those who 'believe', and who thereby wear the Messiah-badge on the basis of the Messiah's own faithfulness.⁶¹⁷ As for the *pistis* upon which this status of *dikaiosynē* is declared, we should assume that here as elsewhere in Paul it is the work of the spirit through the gospel. That is certainly implied in 1.6 ('the one who began a good work in you will thoroughly complete it by the day of the Messiah Jesus'), and is expressed more explicitly in 3.3 when Paul gives, as one of the signs of new-covenant membership, 'we who worship by the spirit of God'. That spirit-led worship, as in Galatians 4.7, is part of what Paul means by *pistis*. And all this contributes to Paul's stark claim, echoing the redefinition in Romans 2.29: 'we are the circumcision.' This belongs, as we have seen, with Paul's regular notion of covenant renewal, of the spirit-driven transformation of the heart.

Philippians 3 thus coheres completely with Galatians and with Romans in its theological understanding and the language in which it expresses it. As Caird saw a generation ago, Paul has neatly expressed the past, present and future tenses of what it means to be a Messiah-person: the righteous status already given 'in the Messiah'; the present sharing of his sufferings; the future resurrection.⁶¹⁸ Like Galatians 3 in particular, this passage draws together into a single line of thought (covenantal and ecclesial) the elements of 'juridical' and 'participationist' theology which are sometimes wrongly played off against one another. It assumes, ultimately, a soteriology which climaxes in resurrection. But the point here is not to say, 'This is how one is saved,' but 'This is how one is known as a covenant member.' The central category which holds everything together is neither 'juridical' nor 'participationist', though both are emphatically central. It is not 'salvation-historical' or 'apocalyptic' as such, though again both are implied. It is not 'anthropological' or 'transformational', though we can see both of those standing behind and beneath Paul's actual argument. The argument itself is about the ancient Jewish doctrine of election: in other words, of the covenant status of the people of God. This, Paul believes, has now been

redefined in terms of the Messiah himself, and then in terms of the *pistis* which, along with the ‘fellowship of his sufferings’, is the badge Paul elsewhere, and here in 3.3, associates with the gospel-work of the spirit. This is what ‘justification by faith’ is all about.

It is almost time to turn to Romans itself. But before we get there we have one more short visit to pay. Though Colossians does not speak about ‘justification’ in so many words, it does warn about a particular danger which, as I have argued elsewhere, may well be in effect the same danger against which Paul is warning in Philippians 3.

[\(f\) Colossians 2](#)

Was there a ‘heresy’ in Colosse, and if so what was it? Most scholars have thought there was, though it has proved curiously elusive.⁶¹⁹ I have in the past taken the view, following Morna Hooker, that there was in fact no particular present and pressing threat, and that Paul’s warnings in Colossians 2 were more generalized, warding off potential threats rather than addressing specific local difficulties. And the potential threat I think he had in mind, here as in Philippians 3, was related to the actual threat posed in Galatia: that those who had come into the Messiah’s family would be attracted by the synagogue.⁶²⁰ I do not think the Colossian church was facing a crisis of Galatian proportions, but Paul would be well aware that throughout Asia Minor the same problems might well occur. If I am even half right, this means that, even though Colossians 2 mentions neither justification nor the spirit, it must nevertheless be included within an overall discussion of Paul’s messianic redefinition of election.

The main emphases of Colossians 2, I suggest, belong with, and only with, a coded description of the world of the synagogue. After the initial warning in verse 8, to which we shall return, Paul has three basic points to make.

First, those who belong to the king, the Messiah, are fulfilled in him, that is, in the one in whom ‘all the full measure of divinity has taken up bodily residence’ (verse 9). That, as we saw in the previous chapter, is temple-

language. Jesus is the true Temple, and those who belong to him somehow share in that identity. Second, the Colossian Christians have already been ‘circumcised’ – but it is a new sort of ‘circumcision’, which involves not cutting off the foreskin but putting off ‘the body of flesh’, the old solidarity of ‘fleshly’ identity. This has happened in baptism, in which they have died and been raised with the Messiah (verses 11–12). Third, the Torah, which had formerly stood against them because of their being ‘gentiles’, has nothing more to say against them, since God has dealt with that whole problem through the Messiah’s cross (verses 14–15). Once we cut through the complex language, these are the three things he wants to get across, and they are striking indeed: Temple, circumcision, Torah. This can only be a veiled warning against the attractions of the Jewish way of life.

The specific warnings which follow have the same basic DNA. Questions of food and drink, or specific holy days including sabbaths, are much more likely to be part of a Jewish system than anything else (verses 16–19). Specific regulations about what may and may not be touched, tasted or even handled occur in many religious and social cultures and customs, but verses 20–3 go well with the general tenor of Diaspora Judaism, as many of the commentators already referred to have explored. And the echoes of Galatians and Romans at many points (e.g. the lining up in verse 8 of the *stoicheia* with the ‘traditions’ that might be enticing them, and the dying and rising in baptism) indicate further that we are in the right area.

How then would the warning work? Why does Paul identify his target as ‘philosophy and hollow trickery?’ As is often noted, both Philo and Josephus use the word ‘philosophy’ to identify the Jewish way of life, and as we saw in chapters 3 and 4 above it was if anything a more natural word to use than ‘religion’, since Jews, like Paul’s communities, did few of the things that ‘religions’ normally did.⁶²¹ The case I have made before, and repeat here, is that Paul is doing again what he began to do in Galatians. He is describing the life of the synagogue as if it were, in effect, a form of paganism, enslaved to the *stoicheia* and to the kind of dietary and calendrical observances that went with that, and describing the Messiah’s people by contrast as those who had escaped that slavery through their

sharing in his death and resurrection. There is, to be sure, a good deal of technical detail, particularly in verses 16–19, which may relate to particular phenomena and teaching prevalent in the Jewish circles of Asia Minor at the time. Certainly there is no way back to the eager ‘gnostic’ hypotheses of earlier days.⁶²² If Paul had been warning against more specifically pagan influences, there are several things in the world of Asia Minor which we might expect him to mention, but which he does not. A general warning against the lure of the synagogue, with sidelong glances at some kinds of devotional and ascetic practices now somewhat opaque to us, is the best guess. This then would constitute a further example of ‘election redefined around the Messiah’.

The key point here, apart from the focus of the basic argument on Temple, circumcision and Torah, is buried in verse 8. We have seen elsewhere that Paul, as part of his redefinition of election, is capable of using or even coining puns to make his point. Thus he speaks of the *Ioudaios* whose ‘praise’ (for which the Hebrew is ‘Judah’) is from God rather than humans (Romans 2.29); of the *katatomē* whose claim to be the *peritomē* is upstaged by the Messiah and his people (Philippians 3.2–3). It is not therefore farfetched to suggest that he does something similar here.⁶²³ My proposal is that he has here used a very rare word for a very precise purpose. ‘Watch out,’ he says, ‘that nobody uses philosophy ... *to take you captive*.’ The word he uses for ‘take captive’ is *sylagōgein*, here in the present participle *sylagōgōn*; it is the only occurrence of the word in all early Christian literature, and indeed one of only three surviving occurrences of the word from across the many centuries of ancient Greek.⁶²⁴ Paul had other words available to him if he wanted to say ‘take prisoner’ or ‘enslave’.⁶²⁵ Why would he choose such an unusual term here?

My proposal is to treat the word as an ironic pun on the Greek word *synagōgē*, ‘synagogue’. There is no verbal form of this word, but it would not be difficult to imagine one. Nor would it be difficult to see how the two words would resemble one another. ‘Watch out,’ he might be saying, ‘that there isn’t anybody there who might “en-synagogue” you’: *blepete mē tis hymas estai ho synagōgōn*, as opposed to *blepete mē tis hymas estai ho*

sylagōgōn. Paul's letters were of course designed to be read out loud, and phonetically the two are extremely close. So close, in fact, are the liquid 'l' sound and the nasal 'n' sound that grammarians regularly lump liquids and nasals together. They share elements of morphological behaviour, and under certain circumstances can easily be swapped.⁶²⁶

That is perhaps the most important thing to remember. But visually something similar happens as well. Written in small Greek letters, you only have to turn a lambda upside down to create a nu with a tail: from λ to ν. Written in block capitals, as are all our early manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, the 'n' and the 'l' are even closer: ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΩΝ as against ΣΥΛΑΓΩΓΩΝ, the capital N adding the final vertical stroke to the capital Λ. But, granted the setting and the intention of oral performance, it is the phonetic proximity that counts first.

It is of course impossible to prove that this was in Paul's mind. That is how it is with this kind of hypothesis. The proposal has the merit, though, that it fits tightly with a tight reading of Colossians 2; that it resonates with Paul's verbal trickery at two closely cognate moments in other letters; and that it gives to the whole passage a sense of allusive irony which seems to me to belong at this point. Serious scholars who would never dream of word-play in theological discourse may of course object, but I think it cannot be lightly dismissed.⁶²⁷ Paul is consciously remoulding the entire notion of election around the Messiah, and he is well aware of the extraordinary theological task he is undertaking. We should not be surprised if in the process he attempts also some mildly extraordinary verbal tasks, in order to embody, as well as to express, the revolution he sees taking place.

With all this, we turn at last to Romans.

(g) Romans 3.21—4.25

Romans 3.21—4.25, one of the great passages in this, the greatest of all letters, is founded on the same belief that Paul announced proleptically in 1.16–17: that in 'the gospel', that is, the message about Jesus the Messiah and his death and resurrection as the fulfilment of God's scriptural

promises, ‘God’s righteousness’ is revealed.⁶²⁸ Though the spirit is not mentioned in this passage, Paul draws on several themes which he elsewhere, both in this letter and in Galatians, associates closely with the spirit’s work. This is the beginning of the single argument which, reaching its height in chapter 8, provides Paul’s most thorough exposition of the spirit-driven reworked election.

However Irish it may seem, the proper place to begin a discussion of Romans 3.21 and onwards is with Romans 3.20. Here Paul refers to Psalm 143.2 [LXX 142.2]. Though not a direct quotation, it is close enough for a strong echo: ‘in your sight shall no living creature be justified,’ *ou dikaiōthēsetai enōpion sou pas zōn*. At the front of this, Paul has added *ex ergōn nomou*, ‘by works of the law’; he has substituted *sarx*, ‘flesh’, for *zōn*, ‘living creature’; and, because he is speaking in the third person rather than the second, has substituted *autou* for *sou*: ‘by works of the law shall no flesh be justified in *his* sight.’ He has rubbed in the point of his addition about the law by adding, at the end, ‘through the law, you see, comes the knowledge of sin’ – an idea to which he will return, particularly in chapter 7. (That ought to function as an advance sign – one of many – that Romans 1—8 is not the stitching together of two different types of theology, but a single coherent flowing argument. Once we grasp that, we see that it is true also of Romans 1—11 ... but of that more anon.)

As has often been pointed out, this echo of Psalm 143.2 massively undergirds the assumption that the underlying subject is God’s own ‘righteousness’.⁶²⁹ The psalm opens with an invocation:

Hear my prayer, YHWH;
give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness (*en tē alētheia sou*);
answer me in your righteousness (*en tē dikaiosynē sou*).⁶³⁰

This fits closely with Romans 3.3–7, where God’s faithfulness (*pistis*), his truthfulness (*alētheia*), his righteousness (*dikaiosynē*), his judgment (*epei pōs krinei ho theos ton kosmon*), his truthfulness (*alētheia*) again and his glory (*doxa*) are all introduced in quick succession. The subject of the passage is the one God himself, and the way in which these various divine

attributes or characteristics, apparently called in question, will in fact be vindicated. By invoking the opening of Psalm 143, Paul is continuing this train of thought: the Psalmist is appealing from this position of helplessness ('in your sight shall no one living be justified') to God's truthfulness and righteousness as the divine characteristics because of which the one God will nevertheless come to his aid. He is thereby standing on exactly the same ground as the great prayers of Daniel 9, Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9.⁶³¹ The helplessness of God's people causes them to cast themselves on the truth and righteousness of God. That is the underlying logic of Romans 3.20, solidly supported in the passage that now follows.

It is important to see 3.21—4.25 as a whole. What we call chapter 4 is not merely a 'proof from scripture' of 3.21—31. It consists of a sustained and quite detailed exposition of Genesis 15, the chapter in which God makes the covenant to which, Paul is arguing, he has now been faithful.⁶³² When we remind ourselves what, in second-Temple Jewish thought, was seen as the *purpose* of the Abrahamic covenant, namely the undoing of the sin of Adam and the reversal of its effects, we realize that this is precisely what, here and in chapters 5—8, Paul says has been achieved through Jesus the Messiah. All this builds up intense pressure for us to accept the normal biblical and post-biblical reading of the phrase 'God's righteousness'. The phrase does not denote a human status which Israel's God gives, grants, imparts or imputes ('a righteousness *from* God' as in Philippians 3.9), or a human characteristic which 'counts' with God ('a righteousness which avails before God').⁶³³ Nor does it denote the saving *power* of the one God, as Käsemann and others argued in a last-ditch attempt to prevent Paul from affirming Israel's covenant theology.⁶³⁴ It retains its primary scriptural meaning, which is that of God's *covenant faithfulness*. This includes, and indeed focuses on, God's *faithful justice*, his determination to put the world to rights through putting humans to rights, and within that his faithfulness to the promises made in the Torah, promises to Abraham in Genesis about a worldwide family and promises to Israel in Deuteronomy about the curse of exile that would follow rebellion and the restoration which, consequent upon the circumcised heart, would reverse the disaster.⁶³⁵ That, Paul

declares throughout this section and indeed in the whole letter, is what Israel's God has done in the Messiah and what he is now doing, through the gospel and through faith, for the benefit of all who believe – an operation (gospel and faith) which elsewhere he describes as being the powerful work of the spirit.

This results in the dramatic reworking of 'election', in this case of the standard 'election' categories (a) *hoi dikairoi* and (b) 'seed of Abraham', in terms of *pistis*. As with the Messiah himself, so with his people: this revelation of God's faithful covenant justice is 'for the benefit of all believers' (3.22), because the Messiah's redemptive sacrifice unveils God's *dikaioynē* as being the quality because of which he justifies *ton ek pisteōs Iēsou* (3.26). That latter phrase is a kind of portmanteau expression which echoes, and conveys in miniature, the two meanings expressed more fully in 3.22: (a) Jesus' messianic faithfulness (the Israel-faithfulness which, according to 3.2, Israel had not offered),⁶³⁶ and (b) the faith of believers. Paul envisages a new corporate reality, a new social community, coming into being through the gospel, a reality in which all previous systems of privilege, boasting, honour and shame are done away with.⁶³⁷ And all this happens precisely *in the present time*: it is 'now' (3.21), as in the emphatic declaration of 2 Corinthians 6.2; it is *en tō nyn kairō*, right here in the present moment of opportunity (3.26). It is not (that is to say) away in the future, on the last day. The verdict of the last day stands in the background of Romans 3, having been articulated quite fully in chapter 2. But, as in a different context in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul envisages this verdict being heard here and now, because it has been brought forward into the present. The Messiah has embodied and instantiated God's promised eschatological condemnation of sin and launching of the new creation, and all those who 'have faith' of this sort (further defined in 4.24–5) share, in the present, in the divine verdict which was announced in his resurrection (as in 1.4).

Thus – a point of considerable importance in the larger debates about the shape and nature of Paul's theology – the nexus between the Messiah's faithfulness and the *pistis* of believers indicates that, just as in Galatians 3 and Philippians 3 (see above), what we loosely think of as 'justification' is

very closely joined in Paul's mind with the incorporation of believers into the messianic reality of Jesus' death and resurrection.⁶³⁸ Knowing how Paul writes, we might anticipate that he will express all this in a tight, dense phrase; and here it is. 'Through the redemption which is in Messiah Jesus' (3.24). It will take all of chapters 5—8 to unpack what that actually means, but Paul here brings the whole of that subsequent section into play within the specific argument about the manifestation of the divine faithfulness in the present time.

For the moment, however, we must focus on what he says here, in verses 25 and 26, about the effect of Jesus' death.⁶³⁹ Actually, the words 'death', 'die' and so on do not occur here, and nor do 'cross' or 'crucify'. The one word which specifically refers to the events of Jesus' execution is 'blood', indicating already that Paul is thinking in sacrificial terms. But we should be in no doubt: the central way in which Paul sees 'the righteousness of God' unveiled is in Jesus' death, as described in this dense and crowded little passage.⁶⁴⁰ And it is Jesus' sacrificial death, of course, which accomplishes justification, as Paul says in the summary statement at 5.9.

The present passage is dense because Paul is saying (at least) three things at once, and combining as he does so allusions to, and echoes of, several different though related biblical and post-biblical themes. The framework, emphasized in the remarkable repetition of 'righteousness' in verses 25 and 26, is the unveiling of God's covenant faithfulness, whose meaning becomes more fully apparent in chapter 4: this is how God has accomplished what he promised to Abraham, namely, that the world described in 1.18—2.16 would be put right at last, would be rescued – through the call of Israel (as in 2.17–20) to be the light that would shine in the darkness. The complexity comes not least from this point: that whereas in most biblical and post-biblical thought the divine covenant faithfulness was appealed to in favour of what God might do *for* Israel, here the point is what God always planned to do *through* Israel, and has now done *through the faithfulness of the Messiah*, the 'faithfulness' which led to and climaxed in his self-giving to death. Paul is thus taking themes to do with the establishment and renewal of the covenant *with* Israel and using them,

completely consistently with his vision of the covenant purpose *through* Israel, to explain what the covenant God, who is also the creator God, has now done for all people, Jew and gentile alike. This is all part of his redefinition of election.

When we find a concentration of language such as we do here, with the unveiling of God's righteousness mentioned no fewer than five times in five verses (and two uses of the cognate verb), the obvious thing to do is to look for a biblical passage with a similar concentration of the same theme; and the obvious candidate is Isaiah 40—55. Nothing there approaches this average of once per verse, but the words *tsedeq* and its cognates occur thirty times in these sixteen chapters, thus possessing a good claim to be one of the section's major themes.⁶⁴¹ And of course the figure which appears within that whole section, like a tune emerging in the middle of a complex tone poem, only to be paused, reprised, developed and at last brought to a triumphant climax, is the servant. He is both Israel and one who stands over against Israel; he will not only restore the people of Israel from their exile but will be a light to the nations.⁶⁴² His obedience leads to a shameful and shocking death, shocking partly because of its shamefulness, partly because of its vicarious character⁶⁴³ and partly because, uniquely in Israel's scriptures, it constitutes a human sacrifice.⁶⁴⁴ What almost happened to Isaac actually happened to the servant. He is 'the righteous one' who will 'make the many righteous' and will 'bear their iniquities'.⁶⁴⁵ Within the larger flow of the section, the servant's successful mission accomplishes the renewal of the covenant (chapter 54) and of creation itself (chapter 55), with the open invitation going out to 'everyone who thirsts' to share in the covenant originally made with David.⁶⁴⁶

All this resonates with Paul's thought at many points, but perhaps nowhere so powerfully as in this section of Romans. There is much more that could be said, but this is enough, I think, to warrant the firm conclusion that when Paul describes the death of Jesus in sacrificial language, emphasizing in every line that this is how the divine righteousness has been revealed, he is deliberately setting up a complex chain of allusion and echo in which Isaiah 40—55 in general, the figure of the servant in particular and

the fourth servant song climactically, are central and loadbearing. Whatever else Paul thinks ‘justification’ is about, it is certainly about the fulfilment of the divine covenant plan for, and through, Israel. Attempts to avoid this conclusion are simply missing the point.

This highlights once more the theme we saw earlier: the *faithfulness* of the Servant-Messiah as the quality through which all this has been accomplished. It is because of this faithful act that the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled, bringing the ‘ungodly’ into the single covenant family, as in chapter 4 and as is summed up in 5.6–11.⁶⁴⁷

This essentially *covenantal* reading of Isaiah 40—55 and Romans 3.21–6 contains within itself the *forensic* or *law court* imagery we have already seen to be prominent in the passage. Paul has built up in the earlier sections a great barrage of accusation, resulting in all humankind standing defenceless in the dock, a situation summed up in Adamic terms in 3.23: all sinned, and fell short of God’s glory. This is a greater ‘exile’ even than that addressed by Isaiah, but because of the wider vocation already envisaged in Isaiah 49 Paul finds himself justified in extending the effect of the servant’s death as the means of dealing with this entire load of human sin. The ‘righteousness’ of God which was called into question by the failure of Israel to be ‘faithful’ to the divine commission (3.2–3) has been put into effect through the faithfulness of the Messiah. Up to that point, God’s ‘kindness and forbearance’ (2.4) meant that sin had not been punished as it deserved. Now God is seen to be simultaneously ‘in the right’ himself, principally in terms of his faithfulness to the covenant and secondarily, within that, in terms of the implicit lawcourt scene, and ‘putting right’, that is, ‘justifying’, *ton ek pisteōs Iēsou*, ‘the one from the faithfulness of Jesus’, the ‘Jesus-faith’ people. The divine act of dealing with sin through the sacrificial death of the faithful sin-bearing servant is central to the passage; which means that the *forensic* account of sin, punishment and atonement is to be located within, and only understood in relation to, the wider *covenantal* theme.

The same is true in relation to the ‘faith’ which is the badge of membership in Abraham’s single family, as chapter 4 will make clear.

Jesus' *pistis* evokes the *pistis* of all those who believe the gospel, and this *pistis* thereby becomes the appropriate badge both of their membership in the covenant family and of their sharing in the results of his 'faithful' sin-bearing vocation. 'Justification by faith' is not *only* 'forensic' or *only* 'covenantal'. It is the one because it is the other; and Paul might well have been frustrated at the thought that we, like someone whose spectacles are out of focus, persisted in talking about two things when he, thinking biblically, could only see one.

Paul seems thus to have taken what up to then might have been read as a statement of how YHWH's election of Israel itself would be confirmed, and has transformed it, in line with what he perceived as its true intention, into a statement of how YHWH's election of Abraham's whole family would be accomplished. That is characteristic of his whole hermeneutic, as well as his whole theology.

The Messiah's redemptive death, thus applied to believers, then unveils the redefinition of election:

²⁷So what happens to boasting? It is ruled out! Through what sort of law? The law of works? No: through the law of faith! ²⁸We calculate, you see, that a person is declared to be in the right on the basis of faith, apart from works of the law.

The 'boasting' of 'the Jew' (as in 2.17; that is the obvious reference which explains this sudden question) is ruled out. This 'boasting', as we saw, was not simply the boast which said, 'We are automatically morally superior, because we are God's chosen people and we possess the law.' It was, more specifically, the 'boasting' which said, 'We are *the solution to the problem of humankind* because, as God's chosen and law-possessing people, we are the guide to the blind, the light to those in darkness, and so forth.'⁶⁴⁸ This boast has been ruled out, in Paul's argument so far, because, while Israel was in fact unfaithful to that commission, the Messiah has been faithful to it. He has accomplished that 'solution' which shimmered like a mirage in the aspirations of Israel but melted away as one came closer. All of this Paul has telescoped together in another typically terse phrase. What has ruled out 'boasting' is not 'the law of works' – it is not simply, in other words, that

Israel has failed to keep up to the standard Torah demanded. Rather, the faithfulness of the Messiah, and the faith of his people, *is what the law required all along as the means of taking forward the divine purposes*. Hence the almost impossibly dense (though characteristically Pauline) phrase: ‘through the law of faith’, *dia nomou pisteōs*. Paul will not explain how this apparent oxymoron works until 9.30—10.13. But we do well not to dissolve its oddity ahead of that time by supposing that *nomos* here does not mean Torah.⁶⁴⁹ The boasting of Israel (‘we are the solution to the problem’) is excluded because Israel’s God has done, through the Messiah, what Israel could not do.⁶⁵⁰

This is then explained (*gar*, 3.28) as follows: We reckon (the word is mathematical: we calculate) that a person is ‘justified by faith’ apart from works of the law. In other words, granted the whole argument so far: the covenant God now declares, in the present time, that the presence of *pistis* is the (messianic) sign of covenant membership; is the sign that someone is part of Abraham’s family; is the sign that their sins are dealt with by the sacrificial redemption effected through the Messiah (3.24–6). All this must happen ‘without works of the law’, for the reason stated in verses 29 and 30 (whose opening *ē*, ‘or’, indicates the intimacy of the logical connection): if it were not so, this God would be God of the Jews only, whereas *Shema*-based monotheism itself declares, in the teeth of so much second-Temple election-theology (not to mention some Jewish writing in our own day!), that this God is actually the God of gentiles also.⁶⁵¹ Election is therefore redefined, not just around the Messiah and his faithful death, but around the Messiah’s faithful people.

This new people is composed, not only of gentiles, of course,⁶⁵² but of Jews and gentiles alike who display this *pistis*, the badge of membership. This is the same badge, whether one’s covenant status is thereby renewed (the circumcised being justified *ek pisteōs*) or initiated (the uncircumcised being justified *dia tēs pisteōs*). Paul’s claim, which is to be made good as the argument progresses, and particularly in 7.1—8.11 and 9.30—10.13, is that this radical reworking of election is not the abolition of Torah, but what Torah intended all along (3.31).

The whole of Romans 4 then follows, not as a ‘proof from scripture’ of a ‘doctrine’, nor as an early example of an ‘experience’ of a person of faith, nor as a mere polemical aside against hypothetical opponents who have brought Abraham into the argument even though Paul himself would not have done so.⁶⁵³ Romans 4, rather, is Paul’s exposition, in line with Galatians 3 but going further, of the covenant made in Genesis 15.⁶⁵⁴

More specifically, Romans 4 spells out the way in which this covenant with Abraham is now being fulfilled. The Messiah’s faithful death and resurrection is basic (4.24–5), and its result is the calling into being, as a kind of resurrection from the dead on the one hand and a creation out of nothing on the other (4.17), of a single Jew-plus-gentile family marked out by the *pistis* which reflects Abraham’s own. The language of ‘justification’ in 4.25, summing up the whole chapter and indeed the various sections of the letter (from 3.21, from 1.18, and indeed from the very beginning) that here reach a preliminary climax, is emphatically both *forensic* and *covenantal*. Jewett sees this point well, albeit through the lens of the ‘honour/shame’ question which dominates his commentary:

When converts accept the gospel in faith, they are ‘reckoned’ to be right before God and are placed in a community in which honor is dispensed according to a new principle of equality ... This ‘our’ [as in ‘our justification’ in 4.25] encompasses both the Jewish and the Gentile believers for whom the gospel’s power is effective for righteousness ... They are all heirs of Abraham’s promise, sharing his faith that God is the one who ‘who (*sic*) gives life to the dead and calls that which does not exist into existence’ .⁶⁵⁵

In other words – in the categories which Jewett does not use, but to which his exposition points throughout – election has been redefined. Abraham’s family has been redrawn not only around the Messiah but to include all those who, through the spirit-driven work of the gospel (compare 1.16), believe in this life-giving God.

Romans 4, then, is through and through *covenantal*; hardly at all *soteriological*, though of course the whole point of Abraham’s calling was to be the means of rescuing the world from its plight. That summary sentence, in good Pauline fashion, reduces a much longer argument to shorthand.⁶⁵⁶ To spell it out just a bit more: Paul takes us back to Genesis 15, where we read that God promised Abraham a ‘reward’ (15.1). Abraham questioned how he could inherit this ‘reward’, since he had no child; the ‘reward’, we are given to understand, would consist of a family, and a land for them to live in. God then promised him ‘seed’ like the stars in heaven (15.5); Abraham believed God, ‘and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’ (15.6). This faith was not, then, simply about believing that this God could do the impossible. Nor was it simply (though this is closer to the mark) a matter of believing that this God would give life to the dead and call into existence that which did not exist. It was a matter of Abraham’s ‘reward’, which I take (in Genesis 15.1 and here in Romans 4.4) to be a reference to his ‘inheritance’, on the one hand, and his limitless ‘seed’ on the other. This is what was promised, and this is what, through the creation of the family characterized by *pistis*, Abraham has now received on the basis of the work of the Messiah. That is, after all, what Romans 4 is all about, as we shall see in a moment.

This way of reading the chapter resolves the problem about the apparently difficult opening question.⁶⁵⁷ The chapter is about *Abraham’s*

family, about the question of the ‘inheritance’ which the covenant God had promised him – in other words, about the subject-matter of Genesis 15, and particularly about the promise which Abraham believed and to which, Paul is arguing in this continuation of his exposition of the *dikaiosynē theou*, his God has been faithful.

Here, then, is verse 1: ‘What shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?’ In other words, if we have come to be part of the family of God, as in the radical revision of election in 3.27–31, does this mean (as the Galatian converts had supposed) that one had to become part of the *physical*, ‘fleshly’ family of Abraham? This question is then backed up by a counterfactual statement (4.2): If Abraham had been ‘justified by works’, he would have *kauchēma*, a ‘boast’ – but (Paul quickly adds) ‘not before God’. (That ‘before God’ is going to be important all the way through, coming back at last in the conclusion of the main argument in verse 17.) The point here is that even though ‘the Jew’ in 2.17 has had that ‘boast’ removed, perhaps Abraham might be able to ‘boast’ that he was, in himself, the one through whom God’s answer to Adam’s problem had been provided.⁶⁵⁸ No, says Paul: it was just that Abraham believed the promise God made to him. Hence the reference to the ‘reward’: this has nothing to do with ‘a reward for meritorious action’, in some abstract system of ‘making yourself good enough for God’, but is a clear reference to Genesis 15.1: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’⁶⁵⁹ The point of verse 4 (‘Now when someone “works”, the “reward” they get is not calculated on the basis of generosity, but on the basis of what they are owed’) is not to highlight the position of the putative Pelagian, but to stress that Abraham’s ‘reward’, the inheritance he was promised and the seed who would inherit it, was not something God was forced to give him because Abraham had deserved it. Rather, as in verse 5, Abraham simply believed God; and, says Paul, when someone ‘believes in the one who declares the ungodly to be in the right’, then they have done nothing to earn the status of being ‘world-inheritor’ (4.13). Rather, ‘that person’s faith is calculated in their favour, putting them in the right.’

It has been normal, in the exegetical tradition, to say that by referring here to God ‘justifying the ungodly’, Paul is referring to God’s justifying of Abraham himself. He was (it is said) a convert from paganism, who had come to believe in the one God (though that in itself hardly makes him ‘ungodly’). He was not even circumcised at that point. But this is not what Paul is talking about. Paul is saying that, when God promised Abraham this massive family, that he would be ‘the father of many nations’ (Genesis 17.5, quoted in 4.17), this required of Abraham the faith that God would indeed ‘justify the ungodly’ – not himself and his physical family, who were in that sense ‘godly’, but the nations outside, who were by definition not ‘godly’. That then refocuses the question, not on ‘how Abraham got justified’, as though by an inner analysis of his moral condition or lack thereof, but on ‘how Abraham believed that God would give him this extraordinary family’, which is after all what the chapter is about.

Look at it this way. God told Abraham what his ‘reward’ would be: he would inherit the world, and be the father of many nations (4.13, 17). If he was to believe this, Abraham would have to believe that God would ‘justify the ungodly’: that he would, in other words, bring into his family gentiles who at present seemed totally outside it. That reading of 4.5 coheres exactly with the reading just given of 4.1, looking back also to 3.27–30. It also looks on to the quote from the psalm which follows: David declares the divine blessing on people whose transgressions are forgiven, on the one to whom the true God does not reckon sin. (It also goes closely with Galatians 3.8, where the promise that all nations would be blessed in Abraham is interpreted by Paul as ‘scripture foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles by faith’.)

This ‘blessing’, according to verses 9–12, comes on the uncircumcised. Paul is not here talking about Abraham needing to be forgiven for his sins, but about the fact that, in order to fulfil his promise to Abraham, the covenant God was going to forgive the ‘sins’ of the ‘gentile sinners’ (see Galatians 2.15) who would be brought into the family if the promise to Abraham was going to hold. That then keeps the focus of 4.9–11 firmly on the fact that, even at the moment of receiving the covenant sign of

circumcision, Abraham was becoming the model for others who would come into the family through their uncircumcision, having ‘righteousness’ reckoned to them as well. Verse 12 then completes the picture, just in case anyone should suppose that covenant membership was now going to be for gentiles only: the circumcised, too, are Abraham’s children, *provided that they copy what Abraham did* (i.e. believe God’s promise) when uncircumcised.⁶⁶⁰

This radical redefinition of election – which Paul does not intend as a redefinition of Genesis 15 itself, but as a true and proper reading, however much against his own earlier tradition – comes back at last to the ‘reward’, that is, the ‘inheritance’ which God promised Abraham. In Genesis, of course, the ‘inheritance’ is the promised land. Here, as in some earlier Jewish tradition and indeed arguably in the line of thought indicated by Genesis itself (in the Abraham/Adam nexus), it is the whole world, the *kosmos*.⁶⁶¹ And it is Abraham’s worldwide ‘seed’, the *sperma*, who will inherit it: ‘the promise to Abraham and his *sperma* that they should inherit the *kosmos*’. That is how Paul is reading Genesis 15. Here, picking up the point of 3.21 (‘apart from Torah’) and 3.28 (‘apart from works of Torah’) and echoing the longer argument of Galatians 3, he declares that this world-inheriting promise *cannot come about through the mediation of Torah*. The all-important distinction is not between ‘people who make a moral effort and achieve moral standing’ and ‘people who do not’, but between Jews (*hoi ek nomou*, ‘those of the law’) and *pan to sperma* (4.16), ‘the whole seed’.⁶⁶²

Exactly as in Galatians 3, then, the *single seed* and the *worldwide inheritance* dominate the picture. If Torah were to take over, the promise would be snuffed out, and Abraham’s ‘faith’ itself would be emptied of significance: not just in that he would appear to have believed in vain, but in that the *specific* faith he had – belief that the covenant God would call gentiles to be part of his family, i.e. belief that this God would ‘justify the ungodly’, and belief that this enormous ‘family’ would ‘inherit the world’ – would be unfounded. If his God were to decree, instead, that inheritance and membership in his ‘seed’ would be through the medium of Torah, this

could not happen. As in Galatians 3.22, Torah shut everything up under sin; here Paul says that it ‘works wrath’. Left to itself, Torah would then mean the end of the promise, the end of the multi-ethnic seed, the end of the worldwide inheritance. But – tantalizingly anticipating 6.14 and 7.4–6 – ‘where there is no law, there is no transgression.’ And that in turn points on to 8.12–25, where the ‘worldwide inheritance’ is the redeemed cosmos which the Messiah will share with his people.⁶⁶³ Once again the ‘normal’ lines of division between Romans 1—4 and Romans 5—8 prove illusory. It is the same argument all through. The covenant with Abraham, here expounded at length, provides the best vantage point from which to see all the varieties of forensic, incorporative, anthropological, salvation-historical, apocalyptic and transformational categories of Paul’s soteriology in their proper light and perspective.

Verses 16 and 17 can now come into their own. ‘Normal’ readings of Romans 4 leave them somewhat stranded, a convoluted ramble about Abraham’s seed and God’s promise.⁶⁶⁴ They are instead, as they stand, the quintessence of the whole thing, even though as often with Paul’s quintessences they are boiled quite dry: *dia touto ek pisteos hina kata charin eis to einai bebaian tēn epaggelian panti tō spermati ...*, literally ‘therefore by faith so that according to grace so that the promise might be valid for the whole seed’. It was not, in other words, Abraham who put everything right for the world, reversing Adam’s sin; it was the one God. Otherwise, if it had been by anything other than ‘faith’, it would no longer have been by God’s grace, and gentiles could not have come in to take up their promised membership as part of ‘the whole seed’. And, by contrast to what would have happened if 4.13–15 had gone the other way – if, in other words, the Torah had indeed been the medium by which the Abrahamic promises had had to be carried forwards – the ‘whole seed’ would now consist not only of the ‘seed’ who were ‘from the law’, in other words, the Jewish element in Abraham’s family, but also (the ‘seed’, understood) who were ‘out of the faith of Abraham’.

Abraham is thus ‘the father of us all’: the stone that some exegetical builders have refused is in fact the climax, the head of the corner, the

answer to the question of 4.1. We do not have to regard Abraham as ‘our forefather according to the flesh’, Paul is concluding, because he is the father of us *all*, Jew and gentile alike, in accordance with the promise of Genesis 17.5 which made him ‘the father of many nations’.⁶⁶⁵ This is so important that Paul, unusually, repeats it in the next verse: he hoped against hope that he would become ‘the father of many nations’. That repetition says it all: this is what the chapter is all about, the way by which election is redefined. This is the way the one God always intended to work (and this is what Abraham always believed that he would do) in order to include gentiles in his ‘seed’. What this always meant, and still means for Paul, is something about the character of the one God himself. That, indeed, is what the whole discussion is about. The character of ‘faith’ alters depending on what sort of God one believes in. In 4.5 it was ‘the God who justifies the ungodly’; here it is also ‘the God who gives life to the dead and calls the non-existent into existence’. In 4.24–5 it will be ‘the one who raised from the dead Jesus our lord, who was handed over because of our trespasses and raised because of our justification’. The same God, of course, viewed from three complementary angles.

This shows that the *all’ou pros theon* of 4.2 has had its full effect. Did Abraham have a ‘boast’? Not before the one God! Abraham was not, in himself, the means by which the problem of the world was to be resolved, because the character of the God in whom he believed was the character of ‘ungodly-justifying’, of grace, of raising the dead. And this in turn answers, fully and finally, the opening question: have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh? No: he is ‘the father of many nations’. Membership in the family the covenant God had promised him was always ‘by faith, so that it might be by grace’. That is the outworking of Paul’s radical revision of the second-Temple Jewish doctrine of election, based on the fact of Israel’s Messiah and now worked out through consideration of the people who, by faith in the God who raised Jesus from the dead, have come to belong to Abraham’s family.

With that, the main argument of the chapter is done, and Paul can move into the exposition, which is more regularly understood, of how all those

who believe ‘in him who raised from the dead Jesus our lord’ share the faith of Abraham (4.18–25). This passage also includes, as again is commonly noted, the explicit reversal of the description of human degeneration in 1.18–25, and the consequent fruitfulness (despite earlier barrenness) of the primal couple in God’s family.⁶⁶⁶ The strands of Genesis 15 are thus tied together. The whole seed; the whole inheritance; guaranteed through the Messiah, as himself the gift of the one God,⁶⁶⁷ to all those who share (by the spirit, Paul might have said) the faith of Abraham. Election redefined.

This brings us at last to one of the most celebrated passages – but also one of the most misunderstood – anywhere in Paul’s writings.

[\(h\) Romans 5—8](#)

As we shall do with Romans 9—11 in the next chapter, I want to begin this brief discussion of Romans 5—8 in the middle. Often swamped by the major debates going on to left and right, Romans 7.4–6 connects closely with the themes of spirit-driven redefinition of election which we have seen elsewhere, not least in Romans 2.25–9 and 2 Corinthians 3. In both of those, especially the former, we discovered a breathtaking redefinition of election, parallel to Philippians 3.2–11 and in direct intentional continuity with the promises of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah:

The ‘Jew’ isn’t the person who appears to be one, you see. Nor is ‘circumcision’ what it appears to be, a matter of physical flesh.²⁹ The ‘Jew’ is the one in secret; and ‘circumcision’ is a matter of the heart, in the Spirit rather than the letter. Such a person gets ‘praise’, not from humans, but from God.⁶⁶⁸

We note again: not ‘the true Jew’, or ‘the real Jew’: simply ‘the Jew’. Paul’s warrant for this remarkable claim is found in Israel’s scriptures themselves. The promise of the circumcision of the heart is part of the vital ‘new covenant’ and ‘return from exile’ passage in Deuteronomy 30, and was drawn on elsewhere, particularly by Jeremiah. This was not, then, a new idea thought up by Paul as a way of distancing himself from his Jewish context. It was the belief expounded by the Jewish sacred texts themselves,

picked up by Paul to explain what he believed had happened, on the basis of the Messiah's work, through the spirit of the Messiah. As with the Israel's Messiah himself, the spirit is not some alien force, but rather the fresh (though long-promised) manifestation of the one God of Jewish monotheism.

This notion of covenant renewal through the spirit, adumbrated in Romans 2 and picked up here in Romans 7 (and developed in Romans 8) gives us a clear hint of the main point to be made in this sub-section (which cannot, of course, provide anything like a full commentary on this major section). By the end of Romans 4 Paul has developed his argument that all who believe the gospel are the true, forgiven family of Abraham, no matter whether they are Jews or gentiles. This is the manifestation, in the present time, of the 'righteousness', the covenant faithfulness and justice, of Israel's God, the creator. But Paul had set up this discussion of justification by sketching quite an elaborate and detailed scenario of the *final* judgment in chapter 2. How will the verdict issued in the present correspond to the verdict on the last day? What are the assurances that the present verdict will not be overturned, leading to false hope? And, since the promise to which the one God has now been faithful in Jesus the Messiah involved not only Abraham's Jew-plus-gentile family but also their inheritance of the *world*, how – how on earth, we might say – will this be accomplished? Perhaps the most vital thing to grasp here is that Romans 5—8 is not expounding a different set of questions and answers, or using a different type of theology ('participationist' or 'mystical', say, as opposed to 'forensic') from what we found in chapters 1—4. As we saw in our earlier brief account of the 'doctrine' itself, there are hints all the way through 5—8 that Paul is still thinking of 'righteousness' and its cognates. The dramatic concluding statement in 8.1, and its outworking in 8.31–9, confirms that he has been moving slowly but surely towards answering the questions left open at the end of chapter 4. (He has also, of course, set up the questions which must then be addressed in chapters 9—11, but we shall come to that later.) And, as should by now be expected, my argument here is that in Romans 5—8 as well the underlying framework of his thought is *covenantal*, in the senses

already explained, holding together not only ‘forensic’ and ‘incorporative’ ideas but also our other old friends, ‘anthropological’, ‘salvation-historical’, ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘transformational’. Indeed, it is the tumbling together of all these strands in these spectacular chapters that gives them their particular vibrant energy.

I begin, then, with the opening of Romans 7, where the ‘new covenant’ theme already noted in 2.25–9 comes to the fore. In 7.1–6, following the ‘marriage illustration’ which has given commentators so much unnecessary trouble,⁶⁶⁹ Paul offers a compressed summary of what has happened to those who, formerly having been ‘in the law’ (in other words, Jews or proselytes), have now had their lives transformed through the death and resurrection of the Messiah. To that extent, this passage is quite a close parallel to Galatians 2.19–20, and should be interpreted in that light.

We need to begin by clarifying one or two things about 7.1–3:

Surely you know, my dear family – I am, after all, talking to people who know the law! – that the law rules a person as long as that person is alive? The law binds a married woman to her husband during his lifetime; but if he dies, she is free from the law as regards her husband. So, then, she will be called an adulteress if she goes with another man while her husband is alive; but if the husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress if she goes with another man.

The first point to get clear is that ‘the law’ is not the ‘first husband’. It is the legality that binds husband and wife together. Second, Paul is still expounding the line of thought that has come out of chapters 5 (particularly 5.12–21) and 6 (particularly 6.6), which means that ‘the first husband’ is best taken as ‘Adam’, or as the ‘old human’ (6.6). Third, therefore, it is natural for Paul to switch to and fro, when talking about the person who has ‘died’, between a third party (‘the old human’ in 6.6; the ‘former husband’ in 7.2–3) and the first person (‘we’) or second person (‘you’). The shift between ‘we’ and ‘you’ is equally visible in chapter 6, where ‘we’ died with the Messiah (6.2), ‘we’ were baptized into his death (6.3), ‘we’ were buried with him (6.4) and where ‘you’ must reckon yourselves dead to sin (6.11). So here in chapter 7 ‘you, too, died to the law through the body of the Messiah’ (7.4a) so that ‘we’ could bear fruit for God (7.4b and similarly in 7.5–6). In other words, the ‘old husband’ is indeed the ‘old human’, the

‘old Adam’ – but, exactly as in chapter 6, this is not some character other than ‘you’. The ‘you’ personalizes and gives rhetorical force and direction to the earlier more general exposition. And from all that has been said so far, both in chapter 2 and in the opening sections of the present chapter, it ought to be clear: if the Adam-problem is being addressed, this will be *through the covenant*. Only, as we now know from Romans 2, 3 and 4, the covenant family ‘according to the flesh’ is incapable of providing the solution. Has Paul then abandoned the covenant? No: his whole thesis is that the covenant God has been faithful by *renewing* it, just as he promised he would.

Now that that little matter is cleared up – if we follow Paul’s train of thought through the previous chapters it becomes relatively straightforward – we can focus on the spirit-driven redefinition of election that is contained in a nutshell in 7.4–6. ‘In the same way’, says Paul,

you too died to the law through the body of the Messiah, so that you could belong to someone else – to the one who was raised from the dead, in fact – so that we could bear fruit for God. ⁵For when we were living a mortal human life, the passions of sins which were through the law were at work in our limbs and organs, causing us to bear fruit for death. ⁶But now we have been cut loose from the law; we have died to the thing in which we were held tightly. The aim is that we should now be enslaved in the new life of the spirit, not in the old life of the letter.

The ‘you’ consists now, it seems, of two people: one who died and the other who now has a new life. This ‘you’ has come to this new state through the Messiah, who died and was raised from the dead. The first half of this is very close to Galatians 2.19 (‘through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah’), but the second half is developed further. In Galatians 2.20 Paul says, ‘I am, however, alive – but it isn’t me any longer, it’s the Messiah who lives in me.’ In the present passage this is expanded: he speaks both of the spirit and of the renewed humanity. ‘Bearing fruit’, as in 7.4b, may be an allusion to Genesis 1.28 (in the light of the still-echoing story of Adam from chapter 5 and on into 7.7–12).⁶⁷⁰ Whereas previously the Adamic humanity was producing fruit for death, with Torah being used by sin as its base of operations (7.8), the death

of the Messiah has set ‘us’ free from the old humanity and from the Torah which enslaved ‘us’ to it, and the aim is now that ‘the new life of the spirit’ should replace ‘the old life of the letter’. To all this, with its many analogies to other passages, Paul adds another theme, which in his Jewish context could only mean one thing. Those who belong to the Messiah are now, he suggests, *married* to him, in a fruitbearing relationship. The obvious echoes are of the relationship of YHWH with his people, a theme which comes into prominence precisely in the context of the ‘divorce’ of exile and the ‘remarriage’ of return.⁶⁷¹ Unless we are to say that Paul did not intend such resonances, we should assume that the whole passage is about the renewal of the covenant – through the Messiah, the ‘new husband’, the last Adam.

This passage, closely cognate with 2 Corinthians 3 and Romans 2.25–9, is thus a further example of Paul’s reworking of election in the light of the spirit. It does not in itself give voice to ‘juristic’ or ‘apocalyptic’ themes, but as we shall see the surrounding passages supply them in good measure. It is emphatically *covenantal*, and obviously *participationist* and *transformational*. It has a salvation-historical dimension (the move from old covenant to new), and obvious anthropological content (from the passions of the flesh to the new life in the spirit). It has the same character of inaugurated eschatology that we have seen in the doctrine of justification itself, which is hardly surprising considering that Paul has not, after all, stopped talking about it when he reached the end of chapter 4. It sums up a great deal that has already been said in Romans 5 and 6, and it points on towards what is to come in Romans 8 in particular. It functions, then, as an appropriate gateway into the larger unit at whose centre it falls.

Romans 5—8 is structured with tight rhetorical skill. It is far and away the most formally presented and carefully elaborated of any such sustained passage in Paul; it is impossible to think of it as a random train of thought, dictated off the top of the apostolic head, pausing here and there on a whim to change direction or answer detached ‘objections’. This tight structural control is evident not least in the way in which the opening and closing (5.1–11; 8.18–30 and 31–9) highlight the same themes. It looks as though

Paul has deliberately stated them up front, as is often his way, and then argued through to them at a deeper level.

Equally, it is important to stress that this section belongs exactly where it is in the argument of the letter as a whole. Like the second movement in a symphony, it has its own complete and careful integrity, but it also picks up themes and energy from the opening movement and carries them forward towards the third and fourth. From the opening ‘therefore’ in 5.1 to the concluding flourish with all its resonances with Romans 2, the section offers itself as a *further development of*, not an *alternative theological structure to*, chapters 1—4. Equally, in its retelling of the exodus-story in a new mode, the section highlights themes which point forward (see below). Romans 5—8 describes what Israel’s God has done in and through Israel’s Messiah, and this necessarily sets up both the question of 9—11 and the further, though organically related, question of 12—16, particularly its heart, 14.1—15.13.

Romans 5—8, in other words, means what it means in relation both to 1—4 and 9—11 and, indeed, 12—16. It is not possible here, of course, to trace or comment on all the dozens of links, but it is vital to recognize that they are there. Without this, it would be easy to imagine that one could lift chapters 5—8 out of Romans whole and entire, using the passage to construct a ‘Pauline soteriology’ or some such thing which would be free from the ‘juristic’ language of chapters 1—4 and the ‘Israel’-dimension of chapters 9—11, and free instead to exhibit an unsullied version of ‘participationist’ thought. But this, though often attempted by implication and sometimes by bold direct frontal assault, is disastrous both exegetically and theologically.⁶⁷²

Consider, for a start, how most if not all of the elements of *both 1—4 and 5—8 and 9—11* are found, not separated out, but stitched tightly together, in both Galatians 2, 3 and 4 and Philippians 3. (We have made the same point above from the other side of the fence, as it were, but it is important to remind ourselves of it here as well.) Granted, there are many elements of Romans 5—8 which are not echoed in those passages. That is inevitable. But we have the supposedly separate main themes (justification, being-in-

Christ, baptism, the question of Abraham's family) as part of the same discourse, supporting and interacting with one another, not as disparate elements floating uneasily on top of one another like oil and water. Unless we are to say that between writing Galatians and Philippians on the one hand and Romans on the other Paul had a sudden realization that he was combining different schemes of thought, which he then proceeded to separate out, we will naturally conclude that the rhetorical demands of his presentation in Romans have caused him to highlight certain features at certain times but without having now come to regard them as radically different or even incompatible.⁶⁷³ All through all these passages he is concerned with the radical redrawing, around the Messiah and the spirit, of Israel's scripture-based covenant theology. Within that project, these various themes can be presented in several different ways, but always in full compatibility with one another.

In particular, when we come to Romans 5—8 with the question in mind, How did Paul rethink the election of Israel around the Messiah and the spirit?, we cannot but notice that many of the themes he explores in these chapters are precisely the themes which he then lists as a summary of the privileges of Israel in 9.4–5:

⁴They are Israelites; the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises all belong to them. ⁵The patriarchs are their ancestors; and it is from them, according to the flesh, that the Messiah has come – who is God over all, blessed for ever, Amen!

'Sonship' is obviously a major theme of 8.12–17; 'glory', of 8.17–30. 'The covenants' are more controversial, but I am inclined to say that this is seen in Romans 4 on the one hand (Abraham) and Romans 7 on the other (Sinai). The giving of the law likewise looks back to Romans 7 and various earlier references. 'Worship' is what the human race refused to give to the creator in 1.18–23 and what Abraham gave instead in 4.18–21, but the word more naturally refers to temple-worship, and I believe that reference is more subtle, hinting both at the life of prayer of God's people (as in the 'Abba'-prayer of 8.15) and, not least, at the temple-theme in chapter 8.⁶⁷⁴ 'The promises' takes us back to Romans 4, as does the reference to 'the

patriarchs’, at least to one of them. The Messiah himself is one of the main themes of 5—8 as a whole, whose every section ends with a refrain, like a great bell: *through our lord Jesus the Messiah; in the Messiah Jesus*. The achievement of Jesus, who is the Messiah, and the incorporative life of the Messiah, who is Jesus, are central to both form and content.⁶⁷⁵ When Paul writes Romans 9.4–5 he cannot be unaware that he is listing privileges which he has just set out with great care as now being ascribed to the Messiah himself and, in and through him, to all those who belong to him. That is why the agony of 9.1–5 is what it is. But that means that he is aware that ‘election’, in the way he would have thought of it as Saul of Tarsus, is not just redefined around the Messiah. It is also redefined by the spirit, in, for and around all those who belong to the Messiah.

These, however, are just pointers to the deeper material in chapters 5—8. Our quest here is first to see how justification itself ‘works’, particularly in relation to the spirit (and these chapters are vital for understanding that), and second to see how the regularly separated elements of Paul’s thought, especially ‘juridical’ and ‘participationist’ on the one hand, ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘salvation history’ on the other, and also ‘transformation’ and ‘anthropology’, are held together within an essentially *covenantal* framework.

First, we note the distinct marks of covenant renewal. In this section Paul develops, little by little at first and then dramatically, his view that the spirit enables all those who are justified by faith to live as the biblical people of God. For a start, they are enabled to *love* the one God from the heart. This is controversial in terms of 5.5,⁶⁷⁶ but not in terms of 8.28. As we saw in the previous chapter, the latter passage resonates with the *Shema* which, already hinted at in 3.30, may be thought to stand behind even such notions as ‘the obedience of faith’. In the faith and love which the spirit generates, this worldwide people of the creator God offer to him the worship which was most centrally characteristic of Israel. Paul may even be hinting in 8.26–7 at the ‘prayer of the heart’, the habitual and eventually subconscious praying of a prayer such as the *Shema* which forms the innermost life of the one who thus prays. When, in the next breath, he refers to ‘those who love

God’, we should take this as a sign that the prayer inspired by the spirit, and heard by ‘the one who searches the hearts’, may well be the *Shema* itself, perhaps in its messianic reworking.⁶⁷⁷

But loving the one true God, though central, is by no means the only sign in these chapters of Paul’s spirit-centred redefinition of election. The hint of new covenant theology in 7.6 (a hint confirmed, as we saw above, by the parallel in 2 Corinthians 3) explodes into life in chapter 8, where the ‘law of the spirit of life in the Messiah Jesus’ liberates those ‘in the Messiah’ from sin and death and enables them to have the ‘mind’ which is ‘life and peace’ – a pairing of abstracts which is interestingly reminiscent of biblical covenant language.⁶⁷⁸ Here, in particular, we find themes familiar from second-Temple Judaism: new exodus, suffering, inheritance, the fulfilled law, the rebuilt Temple, the call to holiness, the new creation. In fact, ‘new exodus’ is such an all-embracing theme that the best way of expounding Paul’s redefinition of election in the present chapters is to let that narrative take us through, and to note the other themes as they occur.

The ‘new exodus’ theme, like so much else in Romans and Galatians, is rooted in the divine promise made to Abraham. The covenant promises in Genesis 15 were focused on the *seed* and the *inheritance*; the patriarch was told that the seed would obtain the inheritance by first being enslaved and then being rescued and brought home to their promised land. This Passover-sequence – liberation from slavery by coming through the Red Sea, arriving on Sinai and being given the Torah (with all the resulting problems) and finally being led by the presence of YHWH himself in the pillar of cloud and fire until they arrived in the land – this sequence is now recapitulated, majestically (but to most commentators invisibly) in chapters 6–8.⁶⁷⁹ Once the stage is set – the promises to Abraham now fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah (chapter 4) and the whole Adam-to-Messiah sequence revealed (5.12–21) – then the story can begin.

First, the crossing of the Red Sea. In chapter 6, the old-Adam people who were enslaved to sin are liberated through the water of baptism, in which the Messiah’s ‘death to sin’ and ‘coming alive to God’ is ‘reckoned’ to them. As the Messiah’s people they are therefore the new-exodus people,

the freed former slaves, who have to learn new habits of heart and body commensurate with their freedom (6.12–23). The old ways are ‘unfruitful’ (6.21); the new ways have their *telos*, their ‘goal’, in ‘eternal life’, the life of the age to come, which Paul will eventually describe more fully in chapter 8. With this, we are very close, though in different ways, both to Galatians 3.23–9 and to Galatians 4.1–7.

The freed slaves then arrive at Mount Sinai, and that is the next stop in Paul’s narrative. Here in Romans 7, with such considerable and sophisticated artistry that it has remained opaque to most modern commentators, he weaves together the story of Israel at Sinai with the story of Adam in the garden – a classic rabbinic-style move, allowing two great scriptural narratives to interpret one another and to generate a third. In 7.7–12 the ‘commandment which was unto life’, that is, the Torah itself (which really did promise ‘life’⁶⁸⁰), stands in parallel with the forbidden tree in the garden and, mysteriously, with the tree of life that remained untouched. Israel is lured by sin into breaking the commandment, just as Adam and Eve were lured by the serpent into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

Apart from the law, sin is dead. ⁹I was once alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life ¹⁰and I died. The commandment which pointed to life turned out, in my case, to bring death. ¹¹For sin grabbed its opportunity through the commandment. It deceived me, and, through it, killed me.⁶⁸¹

This is the story of Israel under Torah, exactly as in 5.20: ‘the law came in alongside, so that the trespass might be filled out to its full extent.’ The arrival of Torah precipitates Israel into recapitulating the sin of Adam. Grasping this, and its range of implications, is at the heart of grasping Romans in general and the question of redefined election in particular.

The story of Israel’s ‘fall’ might, after all, seem remote and scarcely interesting to gentile Christians in Rome. I sometimes wonder whether such imagined uncomprehending listeners are really the coded presence of modern western scholars and preachers who are hoping that Paul will, in his every sentence, say something readily accessible to the deeply non-Jewish

concerns of our own day. But what is of most concern to Paul, speaking as he says ‘to those who know the law’ (7.1), is to tell the story of Israel *because it is the story of the world’s redemption*. ‘Those who know the law’ might mean Jewish Christians, but might well mean gentile Christians who had been proselytes or God-fearers; Paul, in any case, is articulating a narrative which far outstrips any small-scale concerns of this or that group. To tell the story of Israel is not to focus attention back on a matter that interested another group at another time. Paul might have put it like this: if you want to know how you will arrive at ‘eternal life’, the promised inheritance, you have to learn that ‘salvation is of the Jews’, and you have to understand how the story of Israel actually works, even though to begin with it may appear (to gentiles!) remote or irrelevant. One cannot, in other words, appreciate the fruit which grows in Romans 8 unless one has understood the roots – the very Jewish roots – in Romans 7.

The chapter focuses on verse 13, which as we saw has the all-important double *hina*, reflecting the *hina* in 5.20.⁶⁸² This is the divine purpose: that sin be drawn onto this one place, onto Israel, so that it can be dealt with conclusively by the covenant God himself in the person, in the flesh, of Israel’s Messiah, the son of this very God (8.3). Here is the significance of the story of Israel, which will be at once picked up in chapter 9: Israel’s vocation is to be the bearer of this terrible destiny, a destiny meant not for Israel as a nation but for Israel’s Messiah, in other words, for Israel’s God himself in the person of his son. The potential tragedy, though, is never far away, and will come if Israel, so keen on being the bearer of this destiny, insists on keeping it for itself rather than allowing the son to take it instead ... and then if those who claim to follow that son decide to make that position of Israel permanent. That is what chapters 9—11 are all about, and without this understanding of chapter 7 they will be incomprehensible, as indeed they have often appeared. The point of Israel’s election was not ‘for the creator God to have a favourite people’ but *for the sin of Adam to be dealt with*. Election itself, and Torah as the gift which sealed election, was designed – this is Paul’s point – to draw sin onto that one place so that it could be successfully condemned right there. Paul has, as we saw, redefined

election around Israel's crucified Messiah. Now he redefines it around the people who, in the spirit, discover themselves to be the Messiah's people.

But the story which arrives at that point in Romans 8 has one more twist in its tail. Adam's descendants began with the murderer Cain, regarded by the rabbis as the classic example of a man with a 'double heart', *leb wa-leb*, the man who was told that sin was crouching at the door, desiring him, but that he must master it.⁶⁸³ The double heart of Cain is reflected closely in Paul's account of the 'divided self' – if that is what it is – in 7.14–20. This passage is not primarily a description of general human moral incompetence, though it has plenty of resonances at that level. It is certainly not an account of Paul's own pre-conversion unsuccessful struggles with moral obedience: what use would a one-dimensional autobiography be in such a sustained piece of theological writing? One counter-example, one person who could say that they had not experienced such a struggle, would undermine the whole argument. Nor is it at all an attempt to discuss, and perhaps to upstage, the Stoic question of 'self-mastery', though no doubt those familiar with that discourse would hear echoes as well. Nor is it (the favoured interpretation of the older existentialist theology) an account of the 'meta-sin' of supposed Jewish 'legalism', where the gift of the law lured Israel into trying to keep it and thereby to establish a works-righteousness before the one God.⁶⁸⁴ Had that been the case, Paul should not have written, 'I can will what is right, but I cannot do it,' but rather, 'I can do what is right, but I ought not to will it.' Nor, despite many advocates, is Romans 7.13–20 a description of the normal life of the Christian, wanting to be holy and failing.⁶⁸⁵ Even though I once read the passage in this way, I read it thus no longer.⁶⁸⁶

That is not to say that echoes of all these other discourses cannot be heard here. That, indeed, is part of Paul's skill in writing as he does. But his much deeper purpose is to describe, from the inside (through the rhetorical 'I', rather than by way of pointing the finger from a safe distance), *the plight of Israel under Torah*, seen indeed with Christian hindsight but looking back upon a journey which was the necessary journey of the people

of God, the deep, dark roots of the tree which has now borne the fruit of life.

The point is that Israel, given Torah, genuinely and rightly delights in that Torah. ‘The Jew’ – and here we are safe in saying that Paul knows first hand what he is talking about, even though ‘autobiography’ is not the point – really does love Torah: two of the greatest poems in scripture, perhaps in all the world, are the psalms we call 19 and 119, the latter celebrating Torah from every possible angle, the former balancing it with the power and glory of the sun itself. That is what Torah is like. Not to recognize that is to take a large step towards Marcion, or indeed towards the gnosticism that would scorn the created order as well. But the people of the creator God, though rightly delighting in Torah, find that there is a radical mismatch between Torah and the ‘fleshly’ existence of Israel itself. *The problem, once again, is that Israel too is ‘in Adam’.* The life of Israel under Torah thus becomes like the life of Adam’s descendants, only more sharply focused – *but with salvific intent*: Israel’s plight, clinging to Torah for dear life but thereby finding it to be the means of condemnation, has one end only in view. The end in question is condemnation, but the condemnation in question is *the condemnation of ‘sin’ itself.*

This is why Paul cannot and will not describe this plight in terms of ‘they’, but only of ‘I’. The ‘plight’ does not mean that it was a bad thing to be a Jew, or a stupid thing to love and cherish Torah. (Notice how we are here in similar territory to the start of chapter 3.) It means that this was a good and God-given vocation which was cognate with, and the absolutely necessary prelude for, the good and God-given sending of the son, Israel’s representative, to fulfil all righteousness, to complete the unfinished agenda, to be the embodied self-revelation of the covenant God, appearing ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin-offering’, to take upon himself, in his flesh, the condemnation which was waiting to fall, not indeed upon Israel, certainly not upon Torah (which was only doing its God-appointed job), but upon sin itself. The force of 7.13–20 comes in the statement which Paul repeats in verses 17 and 20: it is no longer ‘I’ that do it, but ‘sin’. There is nothing wrong with being Israel; nothing wrong with Torah. What

is wrong is 'sin'. And that is what is to be dealt with. The struggles described in 7.13–25 are the necessary vocation of the people who bear the Abrahamic promise forward, through the strange, dark time of Torah (just as in Galatians 3), to the point where 'the obedience of the one man' will establish 'the many' as 'righteous', so that where sin abounded through the strange gift of Torah, grace might also super-abound (5.20–1). This is not a 'salvation history' of a smooth development, an evolutionary process. This is a long and difficult story filled with agony and puzzlement, and yet being seen *as* the single story of the chosen people – in the light of the fresh, shocking revelation of the son and his crucifixion and resurrection.

The summary conclusion of chapter 7 (note the language of verse 21, which is that of drawing the conclusion of a calculation) is then all about the law, the Torah. The attempt to turn *nomos* into a general 'principle' at this point constitutes a failure to read the text, a folly which results in futility.⁶⁸⁷ The whole chapter has been a close and careful account of what happens when Torah arrives in Israel and when Israel then lives with it. To say that the conclusion has nothing to do with the main subject of the previous discussion is like rearranging the final movement of Mozart's 'Jupiter' symphony for a rock band.

The problem is, of course, that at this point it is not simply the 'I' that appears to be divided (though, as we have seen, the 'I' is not actually divided, but ends up in verses 17 and 20 on the right side of the equation, with 'sin' on the wrong side). It is Torah itself:

This, then, is what I find about the Torah: when I want to do what is right, evil lies close at hand!

²²I delight in God's Torah, you see, according to my inmost self; ²³but I see another 'Torah' in my limbs and organs, fighting a battle against the Torah of my mind, and taking me as a prisoner in the Torah of sin which is in my limbs and organs.⁶⁸⁸

There is no point trying to soften this. Paul knows what he is doing and fully intends the dramatic effect. Torah woos 'me' into the love of God; Torah imprisons 'me' in my sin. Is this not what he said already in Galatians 3.22? Torah shut up all things under sin, even while holding out, in the *Shema* and elsewhere, the most wonderful promise of life and love.

That is the calling of Israel prior to the coming of the Messiah: to be the people in whom this agony, which is also the agony of Adam, created in the divine image but now dead because of sin, is experienced and clung to against the day when, in the Messiah, it will be resolved once and for all.

The final word of chapter 7 sets up the scene for just such a resolution:

²⁴What a miserable person I am! Who is going to rescue me from the body of this death? ²⁵Thank God – through Jesus our Messiah and lord! So then, left to my own self I am enslaved to God’s law with my mind, but to sin’s law with my human flesh.⁶⁸⁹

‘Left to myself’: *autos egō*, the phrase Paul will use at the start of chapter 9 when he is describing his own agony precisely over his ‘kinsfolk according to the flesh’ (9.3). Indeed, chapter 9 is incomprehensible without chapter 7, just as chapter 7 is incomprehensible without 2.17—3.9 and such previous hints as 5.20 – and just as chapter 7 itself has raised massive questions to which only a discussion such as that in chapters 9—11 can serve as at least a preliminary answer. The carefully co-ordinated complexity of Romans has to be followed through in depth for it to yield its secrets. Here we have the conclusion of chapter 7, which rightly finds expression in the form of a lament. The problem is not Torah; the problem is not the vocation to be Torah-people; the problem is the Adamic humanity, ‘the body of this death’, corresponding to the ‘body of sin’ in 6.6. What is required is what Paul has already hinted at in 7.4–6, which indeed sums up the whole of 7.7—8.11 in advance. *Here is the story of the covenant people, redefined around the Messiah and now around the spirit*: election redefined. Through Jesus, the Messiah and lord, the problem of Adamic humanity has been dealt with. Israel, the unwilling and uncomprehending captive within this Adamic humanity, can now discover that its beloved Torah was itself acting as jailor and judge – a task for which the covenant God had given it in the first place!⁶⁹⁰ But Israel can then, through Messiah and spirit, find release, and discover that the life promised by Torah is available at last.

At that moment, exactly consonant with the whole thrust of 3.21—4.25, the Israel that has lived under Torah and found it bringing only condemnation (3.19–20; 4.15; 5.20) is transformed into the people

promised to Abraham by the covenant God. The natural branches of the tree have been joined by a great company from outside, together forming a plant which grows out of the pain borne for so long by Israel and now concentrated on, and exhausted in, the Messiah himself. Thus, by the spirit, the creation of the new-covenant people has taken place in a great act of Torah-fulfilment and election-redefinition:

¹So, therefore, there is no condemnation for those in the Messiah, Jesus! ²Why not? Because the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus, released you from the law of sin and death.

³For God has done what the law (being weak because of human flesh) was incapable of doing. God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin-offering; and, right there in the flesh, he condemned sin. ⁴This was in order that the right and proper verdict of the law could be fulfilled in us, as we live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. [691](#)

We have already spoken of the Messiah's role in this explosive moment. The point now is the redefinition of election in and through the spirit, for the whole renewed people of God, both those who spent long generations in the theological *thlipsis* of 7.13–25 and those who, coming in from outside, look on with awe and gratitude at the Israel that bore the 'messianic woes' all the way up to the Messiah's own coming. Now at last the law's God-given intention, translated into the work of the spirit, is going to be fulfilled: the *dikaiōma tou nomou* in 8.4, the 'right and proper verdict of the Torah', will be accomplished when the 'dead body' of 7.24 is raised to life by the spirit, because the indwelling spirit has replaced the indwelling 'sin' of 7.17, 18, 20:

¹⁰But if the Messiah is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of covenant justice. ¹¹So, then, if the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you, the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, too, through his spirit who lives within you. [692](#)

It is just as Paul said in Philippians 3.7–11. The resurrection from the dead, the ultimate hope of Israel, the gateway to the 'life of the coming age', is the prospect for those who through the spirit constitute the renewed (though still suffering) 'elect', the transformed and now worldwide people of the

one God. The spirit is doing ‘what the Torah could not do, because it was weak through the flesh’; that is, giving the life it promised (7.10) but could not deliver because of the Adamic humanity of its original recipients. This is exactly the same point as we find, within the different epistolary contexts, in Galatians 3 and 2 Corinthians 3. The point is that the death of the son of God has dealt with that Adamic humanity, so that now, by the spirit, all who are part of the Messiah’s people (all this still depends upon the incorporative vision of baptism-into-Messiah in Romans 6) will share the bodily resurrection for which the earlier ‘resurrection’ which takes place in baptism itself is the advance signpost.

The tell-tale sign that the spirit is at work is found in verses 5–9. The mind that is focused on the flesh will die, but the mind that is focused on the spirit will have life and peace. All this depends once more on *status*: flesh or spirit? Paul is clear: those who are in the Messiah, indwelt by the spirit, are not defined in terms of *sarx*: ‘you are not in the flesh, you are in the spirit, if indeed God’s spirit lives within you.’⁶⁹³ This does not mean, of course, that they have ceased to live a normal human ‘bodily’ life; merely that the *sarx*, which for Paul is always a negative term, always pulling down towards decay and death, towards the old creation which is subject to futility, is no longer the defining factor. Instead, the ‘life’ that the law had held out is given at last: there is a direct line from 7.10 (‘the commandment which pointed to life’) to 8.1 (‘the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus’) and on to 8.6 (‘focus [the mind] on the spirit, and you’ll have life and peace’) and thence, via 8.10 (‘the spirit is life because of covenant justice’) to the climactic 8.11 (‘the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, too, through his spirit who lives within you’).

Here, then, is the Sinai-element in the story of the ‘new exodus’. Telling this story at all, in relation to the whole people of God in the Messiah, is itself, for Paul, a massive act of redefining election: *we*, the Messiah’s people, are the ones in whom Israel’s greatest narrative has come true in the new way we always hoped for. We are, in ourselves, the new tabernacle (see below), and even Torah itself is now coming alongside to cheer us on the

homeward road. This is the very centre of Paul's redefinition of election around the spirit. The multiple echoes of Romans 2.25–9 in 8.1–11 make the point graphically: where the spirit has done and is doing all this, we are to recognize 'the Jew', 'the circumcision'. The lament of 9.1–5 strongly confirms this analysis. Had the redefinition been less clear, the lament would have been less necessary.

But before we proceed we need to notice one other factor which has sneaked up on us almost unawares. If this renewed people, the Messiah's people, are the people in whom Torah is at last able to do what it always intended, this people is also *the new tabernacle*. We noticed this theme in chapter 6, when discussing the worldview-symbols of Paul's *ekklēsia*. We developed it in chapter 9, to argue for an early, high, Jewish pneumatology. We return to it now once more in relation to the transfer, to the whole people of God in the Messiah and by the spirit, of the idea that the living God has determined to dwell among and within his people.

At this point a whole new theme opens up, which until recently would have been thought impossible for Paul, but which, in the light of the redefined election by the spirit, is not only possible but vital. If the spirit of the living God dwells within his people, constituting them as the renewed tabernacle (or the new Temple; but at this point Paul is still clearly working with the exodus narrative, where it is the wilderness tabernacle that matters), then the work of this transforming spirit can and must be spoken of in terms, ultimately, of *theōsis*, 'divinization'.⁶⁹⁴

Again, the shock waves. Protestants are not supposed to talk about *theōsis*; they leave that to Catholics, and especially to the Orthodox. But what if Paul himself was pushing in that direction? Is that not what is at stake in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 – that the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Messiah has shone 'in our hearts', so that we recognize in one another the living presence of the living God, by the spirit? Did that not constitute God's people not merely as those in whose midst the living God had deigned to dwell, but those in whose *hearts* this had happened? And, if so, what has this done to 'justification'?

But is not *theōsis* what we find now, in Romans 8? Consider:

you're people of the spirit (if indeed God's spirit lives within you [*oikei en hymin*]; note that anyone who doesn't have the spirit of the Messiah doesn't belong to him). ¹⁰But if the Messiah is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of covenant justice.

¹¹So, then, if the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you [*oikei en hymin*], the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, too, through his spirit who lives within you [*dia tou enoikountos autou pneumatos en hymin*].

We are here at a very similar point to 1 Corinthians 3.16, where the indwelling of the spirit of God (*oikei en hymin*) constitutes God's people as the Temple; and also close to 2 Corinthians 6.16, where God's people, as the Temple, fulfil the promise of the Torah itself, that this God would 'dwell within' his people (*enoikēsō en autois*) and go about among them.⁶⁹⁵ The mention of the Messiah's dwelling in them by the spirit brings in the obvious allusion to Colossians 1.27, 'The Messiah in you, the hope of glory', to which we shall return in the next chapter, and, with it, to Ephesians 3.17, where the Messiah will 'dwell (*katoikēsai*) in your hearts through faith'. In Colossians, of course, the Messiah is himself the one in whom all the divine fullness was pleased to dwell (*katoikēsai*). And with that we are tapping into a large biblical frame of reference, focused more or less equally on the wilderness tabernacle, constructed after the debacle with the golden calf but nevertheless providing the movable home for Israel's God for the next few hundred years, and on the Temple in Jerusalem, where according to the Psalms and the Deuteronomic narrative the one God had deigned to 'dwell'.⁶⁹⁶

It might be thought that the hints about the spirit, or the Messiah, 'indwelling' God's people in Romans 8.9–11 was quite a slender basis on which to propose a Pauline theology of 'new Temple' and, thereby, of the *theōsis* of God's people. But Paul himself builds on this foundation in verses 14–17, which explain the moral challenge of living by the spirit, not the flesh, in terms of the journey of the people of God, the journey that will lead to the 'inheritance':

¹²So then, my dear family, we are in debt – but not to human flesh, to live our life in that way. ¹³If you live in accordance with the flesh, you will die; but if, by the spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴All who are led by the spirit of God, you see, are God's children. ¹⁵You didn't receive a spirit of slavery, did you, to go back again into a state of fear? But you received the spirit of sonship, in whom we call out 'Abba, father!' ¹⁶When that happens, it is the spirit itself giving supporting witness to what our own spirit is saying, that we are God's children. ¹⁷And if we're children, we are also heirs (*klēronomos*, cognate with *klēronomia*, 'inheritance'): heirs of God, and fellow heirs with the Messiah, as long as we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

The challenge here is cast in terms of the continuing exodus-narrative: you are on the road to your 'inheritance', your promised land, the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham (4.13); so don't even think of going back to Egypt! 'You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to go back into a state of fear': as in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is echoing the story of the wilderness wanderings in order to urge the Messiah's people to learn from the mistakes of that generation. In particular, they must recognize that the one they call 'father', in the spirit-inspired expression of faith by which they call out 'Abba', [697](#) has adopted them as his 'children', fulfilling the exodus-story in this respect also: Israel is my son, my firstborn. [698](#)

That statement should be gently modified; the adoption is at one remove. As always, Paul is clear that election is redefined *first* in Israel's Messiah. He is the 'firstborn among many siblings' (8.29). But here the status of 'God's children', derived from his, is reaffirmed and the consequences drawn: if children, then inheritors, inheritors of God and co-inheritors with the Messiah. The 'inheritance' is now clear, from its first hint in Romans 4.13 to its full expression in 8.18–25: it is the whole world. That is what God promised Abraham, according to Paul. It is what God promised the Messiah, in the foundational messianic Psalm 2. It is now what God intends to share with all his people: that is what it means to be 'heirs of God, and fellow-heirs with the Messiah'. We are here very close to Galatians 3.21—4.7, and with the same import: election redefined, first around the Messiah, now around the work of the spirit.

But the idea of being 'led' by the spirit, on this journey through the wilderness to the 'promised land', indicates that the implicit temple-theme of 8.9–11 is being followed through in terms of *the guiding presence of God himself* in the wilderness tabernacle, in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by

night. ‘All who are led by the spirit are the children of God’: the ‘leading’ of God in the wilderness is now fulfilled in the ‘leading’ of the indwelling spirit.⁶⁹⁹ And this means that, for Paul, the indwelling spirit is taking the place, within the church as a whole and within each of the Messiah’s people, of that fiery, cloudy pillar, the living and dangerous presence of God himself. We might have deduced all this already from 2 Corinthians 3, but here we have it at the heart of the great story, the exodus-narrative itself replayed through Messiah and spirit all the way to new creation.

The natural consequence, of course, is once again *theōsis*, divinization. But it is, as has recently been stressed, a *cruciform* ‘divinization’, involving the constant life of putting to death the flesh and coming alive to the spirit.⁷⁰⁰ That has been the point ever since chapter 6, and it is reaffirmed here and in the other cognate passages. In particular, we think of Philippians 3.9–11, where the sufferings of the Messiah are the means of ‘sharing’, or ‘being conformed to’, his death, and are thus also the pathway to the resurrection; and 2 Corinthians 3, leading as it does straight into the description of cruciform apostleship in chapters 4—6.⁷⁰¹ The similar train of thought in the present passage indicates that we are in the same territory: if we suffer with him, we shall be glorified with him (8.17). This then opens up the ‘new creation’ passage in 8.18–25, where the present sufferings and groanings of God’s people are mapped onto the larger picture of the groanings of the whole creation, waiting for God’s new world to be born. All this recalls so many aspects of second-Temple Jewish identity and aspiration that there should be no doubt what is going on. Paul is retelling Israel’s narrative (including the theme of being the true humanity through whom the world is to be brought back into the creator’s design) around Jesus and the spirit.

That, after the further brief mention of the spirit’s work in the heart, producing the true *Shema*, the love of God, leads Paul into the hammer-blow conclusion of 8.29, in which everything that might be said about Israel is now said about the people of the one God in the Messiah and the spirit:

²⁸We know, in fact, that God works all things together for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹Those he foreknew, you see, he also marked out in advance to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family. ³⁰And those he marked out in advance, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. [702](#)

It will be obvious to anyone who knows Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms (to look no further!) that these great affirmations are drawn directly from the larger and longer narrative of the covenant people. They constitute, in the first instance, a massive claim about the Messiah: upon him has now devolved the identity of the covenant people of the one God. They then constitute, following from this, an equally massive claim about those who are indwelt by the spirit: they are ‘in the Messiah’, and as such they are to be seen as the single family promised by the one God to Abraham, however much they may at present look like a somewhat strange and motley crew, having come in from gentiles as well as Jews.

Election is redefined. Around the Messiah; through the spirit.

And all this means that Romans 5—8 has indeed developed the earlier theme of ‘justification’ to its proper conclusion. The verdict issued in the present over *pistis* will indeed correspond to the verdict of the last day. The same inaugurated eschatology undergirds the whole scheme. Indeed, without Romans 5—8 the inaugurated eschatology of 1—4 has not been fully explained. (That is why an exposition that fails to treat chapters 5—8 as part of ‘justification’ ends up also marginalizing chapter 2.) The *katakrima* of which Paul warns in 2.1–11 has disappeared for those ‘in the Messiah’, because the ‘condemnation’ which ‘sin’ required has been meted out in the Messiah’s death (8.3). This demands, of course, that we read the dense statements about the cross in 3.24–6, 4.25, 5.6–11, 7.4–6 and 8.3 as all interrelated, drawing on an implicit fuller understanding although only saying, on each occasion, what is required by that specific argument.

It is justification, indeed, that occupies Paul almost to the end of the section. When the question is raised in 8.34, ‘Who is to condemn?’, the answer is, by implication, ‘Nobody’, because ‘it is God who justifies,’ by

means of the Messiah's death, resurrection and now heavenly intercession (8.33–4). When we allow Paul to develop the 'forensic' language in his own way and at his own pace, we see that he himself dovetails it completely – just as in Galatians 3 or Philippians 3, but at far greater length! – with his 'incorporative' language, as indeed he indicated in 3.24 ('justified ... through the redemption which is in the Messiah'). Both are held within the overall exposition of an essentially covenantal theology.

The two statements 'We are justified by *pistis*' and 'There is no condemnation for those who are in the Messiah' are thus functionally equivalent. Each means what it means in close relation to the other. To attempt to separate them, and to treat Romans 1–4 and 5–8 as though they were expositions of different kinds of soteriology, is to transform the rhetorical strategy of this particular letter into a theological dichotomy.

Within this, the other elements make themselves at home. Anthropology, transformation, and our old friends 'apocalyptic' and 'salvation history': there is plenty of each in Romans 5–8. Once again, when we hold them within the covenantal theme, they lose the angular character that has made some play them off against one another.

The covenantal theme that undergirds all of these, and which finally re-emerges into the open, bringing the music back into the major key, is the language of love. The obvious background for this is the relationship of YHWH to his people as described in Israel's scriptures.⁷⁰³ Paul states the theme in advance in 5.1–11, and then, after exploring it from all the angles of the intervening material, returns to it as he draws the whole section to its rhetorical climax. This passage itself picks up the long biblical tradition of trusting the covenant God through thick and thin and combines it with the messianic theme expounded throughout the chapter so far:

Who shall separate us from the Messiah's love? Suffering, or hardship or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As the Bible says, 'Because of you we are being killed all day long; we are regarded as sheep destined for slaughter.' No: in all these things we are completely victorious through the one who loved us. I am persuaded, you see, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor the present, nor the future, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord.⁷⁰⁴

The unbreakable covenant love of YHWH for his people, arguably the most central expression of Israel's election, has been focused on, and revealed in, the son. And this unbreakable love is the secure resting-place of all those who, by the spirit, are 'in the Messiah'.

This is not something other than 'justification by faith'. This is what justification looks like in solid reality: battered, but believing; suffering, yet sustained by the spirit; dying, but knowing that death itself has been defeated. The *pistis Christou* of 3.22 is the *agapē Christou* of 8.35, and the answering *pistis* of the believer has become, as in 8.28, the answering *agapē* which, by the spirit, keeps the *Shema*. At this point Paul's reworking of both monotheism and election come together in typical Jewish expression: a celebration of divine love, a trust in divine victory. God himself, and his covenantal faithfulness, are unveiled in the Messiah and unleashed through the spirit, within the eschatological horizon of the whole new creation.

There is of course one more section of Romans which has a direct bearing on 'justification', namely 9.30—10.13. Since we shall deal with this section more fully in the next chapter we here put it to one side, though in several important senses it completes the picture, being the clearest exposition to be found anywhere in Paul of his belief that Messiah-faith was the sure sign of covenant renewal, and that both justification and salvation were to be seen in those terms and no others.⁷⁰⁵

(i) Conclusion: Justification in Christ, by Grace, through Faith, in the Present Time

We have now studied the large-scale themes of Paul's redefinition of election, and shown that those themes, drawn together in and around the Messiah, are then replayed in and through the Messiah's people, who, through the work of the spirit, bear the primary and distinguishing badge of *pistis*. Once this larger picture is in place, we notice other smaller-scale but tell-tale markers of the same phenomenon, markers which by themselves might only raise an eyebrow, but which when located on the main map

serve as genuine signposts to what Paul has in mind. We may simply note these as we move towards the summing-up of this chapter.

Two obvious verbal clues come in Paul's regular address to his churches. First, they are 'called'. We have seen this in its full setting in Romans 8.28; but Paul also refers to Messiah-people as 'the called' in various passages – not to mention the cognate 'called out', in other words, *ekklēsia*. There is the opening greeting of Romans itself, where he addresses the church as 'you also, called of Jesus the Messiah (*klētoi Iēsou Christou*)'. This is repeated in the next verse with a different connotation which we shall address in a moment.⁷⁰⁶ A similar greeting in 1 Corinthians is followed later in the first chapter by the use of 'the called' as a way of referring to the Messiah's people, deputizing as it were for the more normal 'believers': 'to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks'.⁷⁰⁷ The cognate noun, 'call', is used in the same sense in various passages.⁷⁰⁸ The verb itself, in this sense, is more frequent again.⁷⁰⁹ The resonances with the ancient 'call' of Israel, particularly in Isaiah 40—55, make this both powerful and poignant,⁷¹⁰ and set up in particular the discussion of Romans 9—11, where the divine 'call' is one of the central themes.⁷¹¹

The natural twin theme here is that God's people are called to be *holy*. Paul can of course draw this out in his various passages of ethical exhortation. But what is quite telling is the way he can refer to the Messiah-people as *hagioi*, 'holy ones' or 'saints', as a kind of title. In the greeting in Romans this is coupled with another Israel-title, 'God's beloved, called to be saints',⁷¹² and in various later references in the letter it is simply a way of saying 'God's people'.⁷¹³ The Corinthians, too, are 'called as saints', *klētoi hagioi*, not (I think) in the sense that they are, as it were, called to be saints eventually but have a long way to go before that word can truly be used of them, but rather that, having been 'called', they *are* 'saints', set-apart-for-God people, whether or not they behave like it.⁷¹⁴ The same pattern is repeated in other greetings,⁷¹⁵ as well as in other casual references to the Messiah-people.⁷¹⁶

These small signposts, I repeat, point to the larger reality which we have studied. It is time now to sum this up, and to make some necessary distinctions between the different aspects of this redefined election. In particular, we must clarify as sharply as we can the central point: how does Paul's doctrine of 'justification by faith in the present time' relate to this larger whole of election redefined?

I have argued throughout this chapter that the ancient Israelite, and second-Temple Jewish, sense of what it meant to be the chosen people of the creator God was transformed in Paul's understanding. He saw it as having been reworked around Jesus, Israel's Messiah, and particularly by his crucifixion and resurrection; and, in consequence, it was further reshaped around the Messiah's spirit, who through the powerful gospel message 'called' people of every background and type to belong to the single family which the one God had promised to Abraham. I have argued, in particular, that to understand 'justification by faith' it is necessary to see that the 'faith' in question is not a particular way of being religious (a 'trusting' way, say, as opposed to a 'hard-working' way), but is rather the way of being 'faithful' to the divine call and gospel which echoes, and re-encapsulates, the 'faithfulness' of the Messiah himself, which was in turn the representative 'faithfulness' of Israel (Romans 3.22 with 3.2). All this shows, I believe, that for Paul the whole business of 'justification' was tied tightly together with his larger theology, though playing a particular role of its own. Now that we have surveyed nearly the whole of the Pauline evidence on the subject of redefined election, it is time to look at the role of 'justification' more precisely.

As we saw, Paul makes a clear distinction between the future 'justification', the verdict which will be issued on the last day on the basis of the totality of the life led (which in the case of the Messiah's people will be a life generated and sustained by the spirit), and the present justification which is the verdict announced on the basis of nothing but Messiah-faith. Once we locate both of these events, as Paul does again and again, within the larger picture of the work of gospel and spirit, and once we see as clearly as Paul did that all that is said of the Messiah's people is said

precisely because they *are* ‘the Messiah’s people’, and can be spoken of as being ‘in him’, it ought to be clear that there is a threefold sequence, each part of which is importantly related to the others though playing significantly different roles. This threefold summary is an attempt, in the light of the intervening exegesis, to say again in even shorter form what was set out above in seven somewhat longer points. We note again, for the avoidance of doubt, that Paul sees all these three points as utterly dependent on the basic gospel events of the Messiah’s death and resurrection, the events in which Israel’s God dealt with sin and launched his new creation. As Paul puts it in Galatians 2.17, the basic position which the Messiah’s followers trust they occupy is ‘to be justified in the Messiah’, *dikaiōthēnai in Christō*.

1. There is the powerful work of the spirit through the gospel, which ‘calls’ people to faith. It is on this basis alone that people are declared to be ‘in the right’, the correlate of which is that they are, again on that basis alone, full members of the family, the people of Abraham, the people of the Messiah. *This is justification by grace through faith in the present*. Because of the Messiah’s death and resurrection, the ancient people of God has been transformed and its doors thrown wide open to people of all sorts and conditions, and the gospel message of Jesus’ scripture-fulfilling death and resurrection does its work of summoning people to the ‘obedience of faith’. The two events which Paul sees as tightly joined together, baptism ‘into the Messiah’ on the one hand and the emergence of faith on the other (calling God ‘Abba’; believing that he raised Jesus from the dead; confessing Jesus as lord), are the necessary *and sufficient* evidence that the spirit has been at work through the gospel, that this person has died and risen with the Messiah, that this person has the Messiah’s death and resurrection ‘reckoned’ or ‘imputed’ to them (Romans 6.11) and that this person has passed beyond the sphere where ‘sin reigns in death’ (Romans 5.21) and so is quit of any obligation to ‘sin’ as a power or a sphere. In terms of the argument of

Galatians 2, 3 and 4, such a person is every bit as much a full member of the family, every bit as qualified to share table-fellowship with every other member, as the most senior apostle. (Paul has some wry words about seniority among apostles, but that is another story.⁷¹⁷) In terms of the argument of Romans 3 and 4, such a person is a full and proper part of the family *which the one God promised to Abraham in the first place*, though of course nobody had seen it like this until after the coming of the Messiah. In the case of such a person, the entail of sin which had run from Adam through the whole human race, bringing with it the threat of wrath and ultimate death, has been turned away. The logic of justification by grace through faith thus comes full circle: from (a) the faithful death and resurrection of the Messiah, as the rescuing act in which the one God fulfilled his ancient promises by sheer grace, through (b) the declaration that those who (through gospel and spirit) come to believe are the Messiah-people, the faith-people, the forgiven people, the Abraham-people and back again (c) to the Messiah himself as the one 'through whom are all things'. That is the initial, present, dramatically new divine gift in the gospel of Jesus the Messiah.

2. There is the unbreakable promise that, by the same spirit, all the people thus described will in the end be raised from the dead to share the 'inheritance' of the Messiah, the worldwide inheritance promised to Abraham. 'The one who began a good work in you will thoroughly complete it by the day of the Messiah Jesus.'⁷¹⁸ It is the spirit who will raise these people from the dead, the spirit who indwells all those who belong to the Messiah (Romans 8.9). So, among the advance signs that this will happen, we note that the same spirit enables these people to put to death the deeds of the body, to walk 'not according to the flesh but according to the spirit'.⁷¹⁹ This is how Paul has finally explained the otherwise unusual description of the people in Romans 2.7 who 'patiently do what is good, and so pursue the quest for glory and honour and immortality', and who will be given 'the life of the age to come', *zōē aiōnios*.⁷²⁰ These are the

people who ‘do what is good’ and so receive ‘glory, honour and peace’ (2.10); they are the people who ‘do the law’ and so ‘will be declared to be in the right’. As we saw earlier, the anxious protestant principle of never allowing anyone to ‘do’ anything which appears to contribute to any sort of justification has pushed exegetes into declaring that these solemn statements are either strange irrelevancies or, at most, the setting up of categories which Paul will then declare to be empty. But the close correlation of these statements in 2.7–10 with the similar ones in 2.25–9 (coupled with the fact that Romans 1.18—2.16 is a rather different sort of passage from what that older exegesis had imagined) means that we should read them as referring in advance to Messiah-believing people, Jews and gentiles alike (2.10). They are then more fully described in the ‘new covenant’ language of 2.25–9 (where the focus is on Messiah-believing *gentiles*, but the point is the same), and more fully again in chapters 5—8 and especially 8.4–17. There is after all no reason, except exegetical tradition, why the rhetorical flow of Paul’s argument in Romans should follow the chronological flow of an *ordo salutis*, though the assumption that this is the case has been so firmly planted in the exegetical and theological traditions that it may be hard to uproot it.

3. Between (1) the beginning of the work of the spirit and (2) its triumphant conclusion, Paul envisages a spirit-led life which does not in any way contribute to initial justification, *or to the consequent assurance of final justification which that initial justification brings*, but transforms the life of the person who has already come to faith. This transformation enables such a person to ‘live by the spirit and not fulfil the desires of the flesh’ (Galatians 5.16); or, in the language of Romans 8, to have the ‘mind of the spirit’, the *phronēma tou pneumatos*, rather than the ‘mind of the flesh’, the *phronēma tēs sarkos*. Such people will then ‘put to death the deeds of the body’; from a study of Paul’s own congregations we may conclude that he knew as well as we do that this does not happen automatically or

easily.⁷²¹ It is too shallow to call this ‘ethics’, since it goes way beyond either a deontological framework (discovering the ‘rules’ and trying to keep them) or a utilitarian/consequentialist framework (figuring out and implementing the greatest happiness of the greatest number) which the word ‘ethics’ regularly refers to. It obviously works quite differently from existentialism, which reduces ethics to ‘authenticity’; and to emotivism, which reduces ethics to personal predilection or prejudice.⁷²² It is better to speak, at this point, of the transformation of character which is such a regular Pauline theme:

We also celebrate in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patience,⁴ patience produces a well-formed character, and a character like that produces hope.

⁵Hope, in its turn, does not make us ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us.⁷²³

¹So, my dear family, this is my appeal to you by the mercies of God: offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Worship like this brings your mind into line with God’s. ²What’s more, don’t let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God’s will is, what is good, acceptable and complete.⁷²⁴

I have written about all this elsewhere.⁷²⁵ For the present purpose, the point is made sufficiently that, when we factor the spirit into the reworking of the Jewish doctrine of election, we can see *both* the centrality and uniqueness of present justification by faith *and* its relation to the two other ‘moments’, the ultimate future justification and the life of transformed character.

This is important in relation to current debates. Some have tried to insist that ‘justification by grace through faith’ is so all-encompassing that it must have nothing to do with the final judgment according to works.⁷²⁶ Paul’s statements about the latter must then be set aside or at least neutralized. Others have tried to suggest that Paul’s whole soteriology is contained in Romans 5—8, where a ‘participatory’ framework *rather than a ‘juristic’ one* is offered, and that we must therefore exclude the ‘juristic’ from consideration.⁷²⁷ Others again have tried to subsume the specifically ‘juristic’ note – justification as the verdict in the divine law court, ahead of

the production of any ‘works’ of any sort whatever – within the larger context of the transformation of character, whether conceived in terms of virtue-ethics or of ‘*theōsis*’, or, in a measure, both.⁷²⁸ I agree that transformation is important, and I have tried to show how I think it is *related to* justification by grace through faith. But it is not the same thing. One cannot suddenly expand Paul’s very precise *dikaiosynē* terminology to cover a much larger range of soteriological material, however much the church, forgetting its roots in Jewish covenantal theology, moved in that direction. A child, knowing that a Disneyworld vacation was in the offing, might wrongly imagine that the entire trip, including a coast-to-coast drive, was all in a sense taking place in ‘Disneyworld’, mistaking the part for the whole. That, I think, is what has happened here, though of course one would not want to suggest that the resulting theories had a certain Mickey-Mouse flavour to them. Thus, even though Romans 3.21–31 is part of the same flow of argument as Romans 5—8, and Galatians 2.15–21 is part of the same flow of argument as Galatians 4—6, and even though these two larger arguments do develop a view of the spirit’s work in the transformation of character which can properly be seen both as virtue and as *theōsis*, this does not take away from the fact that when Paul speaks of *initial justification by faith* he means it as a very particular, specific claim. What then does this initial justification mean? It means that, ahead of any transformation of character other than the bare, initial *pistis* which by definition looks helplessly away from itself and gratefully towards the saving work of the Messiah, this person is welcomed into the sin-forgiven family, with the badge of membership being that confession of faith and nothing else. The inaugurated-eschatological assurance which this welcome provides is thus both *forensic* (the verdict of ‘not guilty’ in the present will be repeated in the future) and *covenantal* (full membership in Abraham’s family is granted at once and will be reaffirmed in the resurrection). The two dimensions join up in practical ecclesiology: the mutual welcome which Paul urges in Romans 14 and 15 is the concrete, bodily form which ‘forgiveness’ is supposed to take in the present time.

Once we take into account the overall covenantal framework, then, we see why initial justification is so important. It is not just because of the need for ‘assurance’, in the terms of classic protestant theology, though that remains important. It is because of the need to be clear that *all* such believers belong to Abraham’s single family. Paul never forgot the battles in Antioch and Galatia.

This argument has brought us, step by slow step, to more or less the same point that Paul reached at the end of Romans 8, or indeed the middle of Galatians 4. This naturally projects us forward into the question of ‘Israel according to the flesh’, which might be thought to be the heart of his reworking of ‘election’. However, quite apart from the already cumbersome length of the present chapter, what Paul says about Israel, particularly in Romans 9—11, belongs properly with his eschatology. We must therefore defer the question to the next chapter. For the moment there is one more pressing matter to address, albeit briefly.

[\(j\) What Then about Torah?](#)

Kindling the flames of an old debate may be a risky thing to do, but it cannot be helped. We spoke about Paul’s view of Israel’s law in chapter 7, in discussing the complex and interlocking narratives in which his worldview came to expression. Now, in the light of this discussion of election, we must revisit the question. I have suggested at several points that what Paul believed about the Torah was a function of what he believed Israel’s God had purposed to do in and through his people, and had now accomplished in the Messiah and the spirit. We are now in a position to draw these threads together. Fortunately, we do not have to retrace our exegetical steps: enough has been said about the key passages. Likewise, to annotate these points in relation to the thousands of debates about ‘Paul and the law’ which have raged this way and that over generations would be cumbersome and in any case unnecessary.⁷²⁹ Unlike most expositors, I have chosen to locate this discussion within the wider question of ‘election’, which means attempting to understand the *narrative roles* of Torah within

the complex stories Paul is telling (above, chapter 7). The main question in recent debate has been, Is what Paul says about the Jewish law consistent and coherent, and if so, how do we explain its various parts? To suppose the only real question to be whether Paul thought the law was a good thing or a bad thing is to guarantee that one will not understand half of the relevant passages. At this stage, the best thing to do will be simply to set out, in a series of propositions, the ways in which Torah functions within Paul's view of the divine covenantal purpose. The supporting exegetical arguments for these propositions are all contained in either the present chapter or chapter 7.

1. Easily the most important place to start is with Paul's ringing affirmation that Torah was and remained *the God-given law, holy and just and good*. Nothing he says about those functions of Torah which some have labelled 'negative' detract from this. The mention of angels assisting in the giving of Torah, or of its being given through a 'mediator', in no way suggest that Torah is less than fully God-given and God-intended.⁷³⁰ What is more, Paul saw Torah not simply as a set of commands, but as a *narrative*: the story of creation and covenant, of Adam and Abraham, focused particularly on Exodus and finally articulated in the covenantal warnings and promises at the end of Deuteronomy. All this Paul fully affirmed as divine in origin, positive in intent, and fulfilled (albeit in unexpected ways) through the gospel.
2. Inside this affirmation, however, not undermining it but explaining it, is Paul's sense of *the specific purpose for which Torah was given to Israel*. Of course, if one starts (as many do) with the assumption that the obvious reason for giving Israel the law must have been to enable the people to keep it perfectly and so be 'saved' by their moral efforts, then the purpose that Paul articulates will indeed appear 'negative'. However, for Paul this was a *necessary* 'negativity'; indeed, a *God-given* negativity. 'It was added because of transgressions,' he says; 'scripture concluded all things under sin';

‘the law came in alongside, so that the trespass might be filled out’; the law was given so *that* sin might appear as sin, and so *that* it might become ‘exceedingly sinful’ through the commandment.⁷³¹ This appears, too, in his comment that the people to whom Torah was given were themselves hard-hearted.⁷³² The problem Moses faced was not that Torah was a bad thing, but that it necessarily and rightly pronounced condemnation on its hearers. Neither Torah nor Israel’s God himself could collude with hard-hearted stubbornness and its consequent behaviour. There may be some systems in which lawgivers tone down the ideal standards to fit people’s capabilities, but Israel’s Torah was not like that. That is why it already contained provision for sin in terms of repentance and the sacrificial system; which is why, as we saw, someone like Paul could say of his former self what Luke says of Zechariah and Elizabeth: ‘blameless’.⁷³³ But this did not mean that the law would then cease to condemn Israel as a whole; or that, when it did so, it was acting outside the will of the God who had given it.

3. This ‘negative’ purpose had a double function, related directly to what Paul saw as *the divinely intended purpose of there being a covenant people, and hence a law*, in the first place. The plan was never simply to create and perfect a pure people. It was that, through Abraham’s family, the creator would *rescue* the rest of the world. This would be accomplished, specifically, by the work of Torah in drawing ‘sin’ onto one place, in order that it might be condemned there. This train of thought, expounded in Romans 7 and 8 and reaching its peak at Romans 8.3, is what Paul is hinting at in those other ‘negative’ remarks. Second, however, it was necessary to keep Israel as it were under lock and key – or, to use Paul’s own metaphor, under the rule of the *paidagōgos* – until the Messiah’s arrival. But from Paul’s perspective there was no chance that anyone, however devout, would in fact keep Torah perfectly: ‘through the law comes the knowledge of sin.’⁷³⁴ From one point of view this might be taken as a further demarcation of Israel: through the law comes the

knowledge of *the sin which those pagans out there are committing*. To that extent, the law did indeed function as a fence around Israel. But for Paul ‘through the law comes the knowledge of sin’ meant, more particularly, that those who embraced Torah for themselves – i.e. the Jewish people – were themselves under the covenantal curse which Torah pronounced on those who broke it. Moses himself, at the climax of Torah in Deuteronomy, had warned that this curse would unfailingly fall on Israel itself.⁷³⁵ ‘Whatever Torah says, it speaks to those who are under Torah’ – in other words, to Israel.⁷³⁶

4. However, these different overlapping and interlocking functions meant that devout Jews like Saul of Tarsus were bound to treat Torah not as a puzzling vocation but *as a badge of privilege*. Torah set Israel apart from the world: very well, Israel was to be for ever the set-apart people. The signs of this set-apartness were well known both to Jews and to non-Jews in the first century: the specific ‘works of Torah’ which consisted of circumcision, sabbath and the food laws, together with a geographical focus on Jerusalem and its Temple and a widely assumed (though no doubt often flouted) endogamy. It was assumed that Torah as a whole was to be kept, and would maintain the separation between Israel and the nations; but these were the ‘works’ which would stand out in particular as having that function.⁷³⁷ Paul the apostle put these different functions of the law together, and concluded that Torah declared that the devout Jew (his own former self) had in fact broken it – at the very moment when he was rightly clinging to it. Or, to put it another way, the law functioned as the marriage-document to bind Israel, not after all to YHWH as one might suppose, but to Adam. Saul of Tarsus would have said that zealous Torah-keeping in the present would indicate who from among the covenant people would be vindicated in the future by being raised from the dead. No, says Paul the apostle: that is ‘a covenant status of my own [i.e. of ethnic Israel], based on Torah’.⁷³⁸ However much one ‘pursues Torah’, or a ‘righteousness’ based on it, one will never in fact ‘fulfil Torah’. Anyone who makes

such an attempt will therefore ‘stumble’.⁷³⁹ However, because of (2) above, even this stumble will turn out in retrospect to have been part of Torah’s purpose. Paul expresses these paradoxes by speaking of a ‘double Torah’: the one in which the loyal Jew delights, and the one which is at work in his or her Adamic humanity to breed sin and death.⁷⁴⁰

5. Within these paradoxes and puzzles, Paul discerned *the strange vocation of Israel*: Torah was a narrative – and he believed that it had devolved onto Israel’s single representative, the Messiah. That is why Paul declares both that the Messiah died under the law’s curse, and that the Messiah was the *telos*, the goal, of the law.⁷⁴¹ The former was not, as many have supposed, a way of saying that the law had overreached itself, and had then been proved wrong when Jesus was vindicated in the resurrection. It was, rather, a way of saying that the necessary and appropriate curse of the covenant had fallen on the Messiah as Israel’s representative. He had borne in himself the result of Israel’s failure, so that the blessing promised not just *to* Abraham but *through* Abraham could now flow to the gentiles. The God-given law had to do what it did, but once that had been done, and the curse exhausted in Jesus’ representative death, the entire Mosaic dispensation would be seen as a long bracket within the story of Abraham’s people. The law, it seems, had a God-given but time-limited purpose. Once that purpose had been fulfilled it was no longer relevant as the marker of the covenant people. One of the basic mistakes of modern scholarship has been to flatten this eschatological *narrative* into an abstract scheme in which the law must be either a bad thing now happily pushed out of the way (as many within an older Lutheranism supposed) or a good thing now fulfilled and vindicated (the basic ‘Reformed’ view). The only way to understand Paul is to transpose these questions into the more many-sided Israel-and-Messiah narrative that he tells and retells. Within that, all the apparent ‘negativity’ about the law in Galatians is fully taken care of, without moving, as many have done, towards the

basically Marcionite position of suggesting that not only the law but the Abraham story itself was something Paul would happily get rid of. To understand the 'curse of the law' one must understand the Deuteronomic framework within which it made the sense it did.

6. *Exile would be replaced by restoration.* Torah said it would happen, and despite its earlier negative role Torah would still have a part to play when the great day came. Exile was where the Israel-narrative had got to, Paul believed; but in Deuteronomy (and Isaiah, and Daniel, and many others) exile would be followed by restoration. Paul believed that this restoration had now happened in the Messiah. When Jews and gentiles alike found themselves called by the gospel to believe in Jesus as the risen lord, Paul was clear that *this very belief was the true fulfilment of Torah itself*. As we shall see in the next chapter, he draws in Romans 10 on Deuteronomy 30 to make the claim that when someone confesses Jesus as lord and believes that the one God raised him from the dead they are in fact doing what Torah itself, looking forward to the return from exile and the renewal of the covenant, had always promised would happen. This is what Paul is referring to when, cryptically, he speaks of Torah in terms of 'the law of faith'. ⁷⁴²
7. Social, indeed ecclesial, consequences follow at once. *All those who believe are now demarcated as the true Torah-keeping people*, in other words, the people of the renewed covenant. Torah, as now redefined around Messiah and spirit, retains its community-shaping and community-defining function. This then produces new paradoxes: neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters, since what matters is 'keeping God's commandments'! ⁷⁴³ But, with this new-covenant redefinition, we find the characteristically Pauline rejection of any attempt to go on defining the covenant community by 'works of Torah' in the earlier sense (4 above). Once again, there are two reasons. First, if Torah-works such as circumcision and food laws defined the new-covenant people, that would perpetuate the Jew/gentile division which has now been overcome in the Messiah

and spirit. ‘The law of commandments and ordinances’ functioned like a wall to keep the pagans out, but it is now demolished.⁷⁴⁴ Second, even within the apparent safety of an Israel living within the ‘fence’ of Torah, there was no way through to the new covenant. Torah merely brought wrath, by revealing the Adamic sin which had not been dealt with.⁷⁴⁵

8. This leads to Paul’s remarkable developed statements about the way in which *Messiah-people do in fact keep Torah*. They ‘fulfil its decrees’.⁷⁴⁶ Torah is actually upheld through Messiah-faith.⁷⁴⁷ Again and again Paul speaks of the work of the spirit as enabling people to fulfil Torah in a way previously impossible.⁷⁴⁸ This appears to go beyond the ‘faith’ spoken of in point (6) above, and into the transformation not only of the heart but of the entire life.
9. Once this is grasped, and within this context, we can understand how Paul can develop the point to include *a fuller range of ethical behaviour as a new form of Torah-keeping*. The spirit produces *agapē*, and this *agapē* is the fulfilling of Torah – though we note with interest that certain aspects which would have maintained Jew/gentile separation, such as the sabbath, are never mentioned in this connection.⁷⁴⁹
10. Now at last it becomes apparent what Paul means by the fulfilment of the *dikaiōma* of the law in Romans 8.1–11: *Torah’s aim, to give life, is fulfilled in the resurrection*. Paul had already spoken of the Torah being ‘unto life’.⁷⁵⁰ Now, by the spirit, not only is the principle of life implanted in the hearts of believers; the ultimate fulfilment is assured. And that is not just a miscellaneous, however glorious, future hope. It is specifically and uniquely *the hope of Israel*. That is exactly the point both of Philippians 3.2–11 and Romans 8.1–11. When Paul speaks of the spirit indwelling believers and giving them new bodily life, he is saying that what Torah had promised is now at last to be accomplished. ‘Do this,’ says Torah, ‘and you will live’; Paul, radically redefining ‘Do this’ around Messiah and spirit, looks ahead and sees that what Torah could not

do, through no fault of its own, Israel's God has done in the Messiah and will do for all his people. The promise of Torah, the hope of Israel, was 'life'. It was, in fact, nothing other than resurrection.

5. Conclusion: Election Redefined

There is no need for a lengthy conclusion. All that remains is to point outwards, from the detailed discussions we have had, to the larger world of Pauline questions to which this chapter contributes.

First, and perhaps most important, there should be no question that Paul remained a deeply *Jewish* thinker. However much his 'kinsfolk according to the flesh' might have gnashed their teeth at his conclusions, his entire argument was that Israel's one God had been faithful to his word. He had done what he said he would do – even though this had only become clear with the dramatic and unexpected unveiling-in-action of his covenant purposes in the Messiah and the spirit. At every point Paul was at pains, not merely to 'illustrate' his argument with scriptural quotations (as though he were a mere proof-texter), but to argue precisely that the covenant God had done what scripture had all along predicted.

What we have seen, in fact, is a redefined Jewish perspective, which is neither that of a simplistic 'salvation history' nor that of a simplistic 'apocalyptic'. As we shall see more fully in the next chapter, the narrative of Israel was anything but a smooth and evolving 'history of God's mighty acts'. If anything, it was a history of divine judgment, of Israel being cut down to a remnant, of the covenant people apparently being led up a blind alley. That, of course, has been the strength of the anti-'salvation history' movement in recent times. The labels 'salvation history' and 'apocalyptic' are in reality two inadequate, half-broken signposts to a larger, richer reality than either had imagined. That is the reality which, I have suggested, is better described with (mutually defining) words such as 'messianic' and 'covenantal' – provided those are seen as heuristic devices to signal what

Paul is saying, not Trojan horses in which other types of thought might be smuggled in.

If we manage to get beyond the false stand-off between ‘salvation history’ and ‘apocalyptic’, and also between ‘participatory’ and ‘juristic’, we should also manage, with this analysis, to transcend the low-grade either/or that has been taking place between ‘old’ and ‘new’ perspectives. I have no interest in perpetuating such a squabble. I trust that the present chapter, and indeed the whole book thus far, has presented an analysis of Paul in which a thick historical description of his social and cultural context, and the positioning of his communities within that context, can be fully and richly integrated with a thick theological description of what he had to say on the key contested topics, not least salvation, justification and the law. The attempt by some ‘old perspective’ writers to suggest that some of us who have been labelled as ‘new perspective’ thinkers have given up on ideas such as sin, salvation, atonement and so on ought now to be seen for what it is. Equally, the attempt by some to use elements of a ‘new perspective’ analysis to avoid theology ought likewise to be renounced. *Of course* Paul was dealing with actual communities in which the pressure to decide questions of table-fellowship, of *adiaphora* in food and drink, of the necessity or otherwise of circumcision, was intense; and of course it is trivial to think of such things as irrelevant ‘works-righteousness’ in an older protestant sense. But *of course* Paul was dealing with the biggest issues in the world: the question of creator and cosmos, of humans and their idols, of sin and death and of ultimate rescue from both of them, of Israel and the nations and, at the centre, of Jesus and his cross and resurrection, and of the gift of the spirit. And *of course* all these things joined up, since the theology itself pointed again and again to the intention of the creator God to live in and among his people, so that their common life was no mere accident, an incidental function of their pragmatic desire to meet up for worship from time to time, but the rich redefinition of nothing less than Israel’s central symbol, the Temple. Part II of the present book thus integrates fully with Part III, the worldview-analysis with the redefined theology. Not only do they belong closely together in the sense simply of sitting side by side and

keeping one another company. By this stage of the argument we see more clearly, I think, that *this* worldview needs something like *this* theology to sustain it. The combination of the two presents a sketch of Paul's world of practice and belief in which the false antitheses regularly found in analyses of Paul may perhaps be eliminated.

In particular, we have shown in this chapter the rich integration of 'juridical' with 'participationist' language and thought. As with the other great divides that have bedevilled the discipline, we have argued that the two coexist perfectly coherently in Paul and, once more, should not be played off against one another. The 'juridical' language – the running law-court metaphor of Romans 3, the language of 'justice', 'justification' and so on – is not just 'one metaphor among many', because in Israel's scriptures, certainly the way Paul read them, the obligation of the one God to 'judge' the world was absolute. The alternative would be chaos come again. The creator must, in the end, put all things right. 'Juridical' language is not a mere pragmatic offshoot of something more fundamental, introduced solely (as Wrede thought, with Schweitzer at this point largely agreeing) for the sake of pressing the point about gentile inclusion. It is basic and non-negotiable. Nor can the language of the law court be reduced to the rationalistic parody in which unbelievers are bludgeoned into accepting a strange pseudo-intellectual logic which leads them to some kind of conversion.⁷⁵¹ Paul's juridical language is simply not like that. Equally, Paul again and again makes it clear that 'justification' is something that happens because of the messianic events of Jesus' death and resurrection, and through the spirit-driven means of gospel, faith and baptism by which people come to be 'in the Messiah'. Schweitzer's basic instinct was right – he was, after all, heir to the Calvinist tradition as well as several others – when he said that the language of 'justification' belonged ultimately within the language of 'being in Christ'. Where he was misleading was first in labelling the latter reality 'mysticism', and second in using his true insight about (a) the nesting of 'juridical' language within 'participationist', and (b) the function of justification within Paul's arguments for gentile inclusion, to suggest that 'justification' was a mere polemical tool for use in key debates.

Once again, we need better categories. I hope the present chapter has helped to provide them. We shall revisit this discussion towards the conclusion of this book.

For the moment, however, we may say this on one of the most important topics of all. I hope to have laid to rest the extraordinary and persistent notion both that Paul used the word *Christos* as a mere proper name and that the notion of Jesus' Messiahship plays no particular role within the apostle's theology. I would actually put it the other way round: the failure of many generations of scholars even to glimpse the rich messianic meaning which pervades so much of Paul's writing is a measure of how inadequate such readings have been, and helps to explain why so many other issues have remained puzzling and unresolved. There are big questions waiting in the wings at this point, of course, not least the question of politics: if Jesus is Messiah, does this mean that Paul is committed to some version of the Jewish political dream? Paul's answer comes in passages like Philippians 2.6–11, 1 Corinthians 15.20–8 and Romans 8. For Paul, Jesus as Messiah is the world's true lord. That is what ancient Israel's expectation of the coming king always stated. Paul celebrates that belief unreservedly: it has been fulfilled, he believes, in Jesus. Jesus' shameful death on the cross has radically redefined the very notions of power, empire, kingdom and lordship; but his resurrection has radically reaffirmed them all, albeit in this radically redefined form. Perhaps, after all, that is at the root of the rejection of resurrection in so much liberal protestant theology: Easter would blow the lid off the Enlightenment settlement in which the church looked after 'spirituality' while allowing the politicians and imperialists to run the world.⁷⁵² That position will be implicitly undermined in chapter 12 below.

But the question of christology, seen in this chapter as part of the redefinition of the ancient Jewish doctrine of *election*, must ultimately join up with the question of christology in the previous chapter, where it is part of the redefinition of ancient Jewish *monotheism*. Confusion has often reigned in Pauline scholarship when these two have been squashed together, for instance in the attempts to demonstrate the historical derivation of early Christian worship of Jesus in terms of exalted (pre-Christian) ideas about a

Messiah, or in the proposal that Paul's incorporative christology is itself a sign of a belief in Jesus' 'divinity'. As I suggested in chapter 9, I do not believe that the earliest Christians had started with ideas about exalted human (or angelic) figures, or even abstractions like 'wisdom', and, attaching them to Jesus under the impulse of remarkable 'experiences', had built up to a picture of his 'divinity'. They were starting, I argued, with promises that Israel's God had made concerning the things he was intending to come and do in person, and they were telling those stories once more in the shocked belief that Israel's God had done what he promised – in and as Jesus of Nazareth. They were not telling stories about humans and discovering that they could reach up to the one God. They were telling stories about the one God in the dazed, awed belief that they were now telling these same stories about a human being.

That remains true even if any sense of an 'incorporative Messiah' were to be bracketed out of the picture. But once we add that element into the mix, as we have done in the present chapter, we find ourselves returning to the theme which played a central role in chapter 9. The Temple in Jerusalem, and behind that the tabernacle in the wilderness, drew together monotheism and election: the God who deigned to dwell with his people, and to be known in terms of that dwelling, provided, in himself and his presence, the ultimate definition of his people. If he was 'the God who dwells in Jerusalem', Israel was the people who structured their life around the call to worship him there. In Israel's scriptures, these elements were joined in the person and work of the king, who would build or cleanse the Temple and lead the people in worship. We have no clear evidence that any pre-Christian Jews had tied all these strands together in such a way, though some features of this picture are visible at Qumran. But for Paul, as he drew out the significance of what all the earliest Christians believed about Jesus' messianic life, death and resurrection, the categories of monotheism and election themselves came together and generated a new combined picture in which the Temple itself came into fresh prominence. The promise that one day YHWH would return to the Temple, rescuing his people and bringing justice to the world, turned into the announcement that he had indeed

returned, *in and as his people's representative*. He was himself, in some sense, the one who built the Temple and the one who would dwell in it. And the Temple he built was not made of timber and stone, but of flesh and blood. Here the major themes of Paul's thought meet and merge: Israel's God, coming back to rescue his people and the world and to dwell with them for ever; Israel itself, God's people, redefined around the Messiah and spirit who were themselves the means and mode of that dwelling.

Perhaps the closest Paul comes to saying all this is that remarkable catena of quotations which suddenly bursts out as he reflects on the church's vocation to be God's Temple:

We are the temple of the living God, you see, just as God said:

I will live among them and walk about with them;
I will be their God, and they will be my people.
So come out from the midst of them,
and separate yourselves, says the Lord;
no unclean thing must you touch.
Then I will receive you gladly,
and I will be to you as a father,
and you will be to me as sons and daughters,
says the Lord, the Almighty.⁷⁵³

The final promise takes what the covenant God said to David about his royal son, in connection with David's plan to build the Temple, and turns it into a promise for, and about, all his people. The living presence of the one God is promised to the Messiah's people, as part of the kaleidoscopic array of promises which, in context, speak not only of Temple-building but of resurrection, of divine victory and divine kingdom.

But, since all of these are precisely elements of the future hope both of ancient Israel and of second-Temple Judaism, we must now turn to the final chapter of Part III. Monotheism has been rethought around Messiah and spirit. Election has been similarly reworked. There remains eschatology.

¹ Jn. 15.16.

² For a classic statement of the C16 and C17 doctrine, cf. e.g. chapter 3 of the Westminster Confession: clause 3 reads, 'By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death' (Free

Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1970, 29). For Calvin's mature position see Calvin 1961 [1552], and *Institutes* (Calvin 1960 [1559]), 3.21. The Reformers were picking up similar themes in Augustine (e.g. *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*) and Aquinas (*ST* 1a, qu. 23). The treatment of election in Barth 1936–69, 2.2 ch. 7 (including an important summary of the history of the doctrine, ib. 12–24) is a majestic but in my view flawed attempt to unite this doctrine from Christian tradition with the first-century Jewish and Pauline meaning of 'election'.

³ For a brief summary of how 'election' is used in discussion of second-Temple Jewish ideas, see e.g. Gathercole 2010. I note that Roetzel 2003, ch. 6 is entitled 'The Grammar of Election'; Roetzel and I disagree about many things in the subject-matter, but not on the appropriateness of the word in relation to Paul's theological understanding of God's people.

⁴ That word in Greek seems to carry geographical connotations (the inhabitants of 'Judaea') as well as ethnic (members of the tribe of Judah – though 'the Jews' of this period included Benjaminites, such as Saul of Tarsus himself, and Levites, as well as members of the tribe of Judah), and there were of course substantial Jewish communities in a Diaspora stretching from Babylon in the east to Italy, France and even Spain in the west. Among recent discussion see e.g. Mason 2007; Schwartz 2007; Barclay 2011, e.g. 9f. n. 19; Thiessen 2011, 149 n. 2.

⁵ Meeks 1983, 168.

⁶ See *Interpreters*.

⁷ cf. the remarks of Lewis 1960 [1942], 16, on the difficulty of understanding Milton's concept of 'solemnity': 'It has been split up, or dissociated, by recent developments, so that we now have to represent it by piecing together what seem to us quite unconnected ideas, but are really fragments of that old unity.'

⁸ See my own exposition of Paul's doctrine in Wright 2009 [*Justification*], as well as the treatments of key passages in Wright 2002 [*Romans*].

⁹ As is well known, the Greek root *dikaios* can go two ways in English: either into 'just, justice, justify, justification' or into 'righteous, righteousness'. Neither of these English clusters carries the same range of overtones as the Greek, particularly when we recognize that Paul's Greek is itself carrying overtones from the LXX and hence from underlying Hebrew expressions. The attempt of Sanders to use only the latter ('to righteous') and of Westerholm to coin barbarisms from the Greek ('dikaiosify', 'dikaiosness', etc.) have, understandably, not caught on. Martyn's use of 'rectify', perhaps closer to the German *Recht* and *Rechtfertigung*, carries its own multiple overtones, and is itself part of Martyn's attempt to get rid of 'forensic' meanings in favour of (so-called) 'apocalyptic' or 'cosmic' ones. See below.

¹⁰ Bultmann 1951–5, 1.191. Refs. in the notes immediately following are to this work.

¹¹ Bultmann 1.269. The whole passage is interesting in terms of Bultmann's anticipation, through his theories of gnostic myths and his rejection of a 'Greek-idealistic' picture, of first Käsemann's and then Martyn's embrace of 'apocalyptic' over against a supposed 'salvation history'.

¹² Bultmann 1.269.

¹³ Bultmann, 1.268f. This is a revealing passage in terms of Bultmann's need to affirm some kind of continuity in order to avoid the idea of transformation while ruling out 'a continuity of development as understood within the Greek-idealistic picture of man'. The protestant nervousness about 'mysticism' peeps out in contemporary writings, too: see e.g. Schreiner 2010, 172 n. 86, commenting that Longenecker uses the word 'mystical' 'but does not mean by it the removal of one's personality'.

¹⁴ Eph. 5.3.

¹⁵ See Neill and Wright 1988 [1964] 403–5.

¹⁶ Sanders 1977, 549; [see the discussion below, 825–35](#).

¹⁷ A classic recent statement of the 'No!' is given in Käsemann's rejection of Stendahl's reading of Paul (Käsemann 1971 [1969], ch. 3 (cf. too e.g. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 264). See my discussion in *Perspectives*, ch. 1 (= Wright 1978). It remains an open question whether Käsemann really understood what Stendahl was saying; whether, indeed, he even grasped the quite subtle position of Cullmann 1967 [1965], which was in some ways the more obvious target.

¹⁸ [See index, s.v. 'apocalyptic'](#); e.g. [40f.](#), [61](#); and the discussion in *Interpreters*.

¹⁹ Martyn 1997a; see too de Boer 2011. Martyn himself depended heavily on de Boer 1988 (written under Martyn's supervision); see too e.g. de Boer 1989 and other works listed in de Boer 2011, xxiii.

²⁰ So e.g. Gorman 2009; Blackwell 2011; Litwa 2012.

²¹ Sanders 1977, 236f., 420f. A major recent work on 'covenant' is that of Hahn 2009: at 19–21 Hahn summarizes recent work on 'covenant' themes in Paul, which reveal how confused the present discussion has been.

²² e.g. in Gal. the only potentially significant use is at 2.16.

²³ Each of them also assumes a ‘placing’ of Paul in terms of what is still thought of as the ‘history of religion’: those who think of Paul as a very Jewish thinker tend to go for ‘participation’ and/or ‘salvation history’, or some variation on them, while those who suppose that his gospel effected a break with his native Judaism tend to go for ‘justification’, ‘anthropology’ and/or ‘apocalyptic’, or some variation on them. This has been very misleading. See again Neill and Wright 1988 [1964], 403–30; above, e.g. 140–2; and the treatment in *Interpreters*.

²⁴ Not least Wright 1991 [*Climax*] 21–6 and *NTPG* 262–8.

²⁵ See above, in connection with ‘apocalyptic’; and see *Interpreters*.

²⁶ I refer to the patriarch as ‘Abraham’ throughout rather than swapping to and fro between ‘Abram’ (his name prior to Gen. 17.5) and the fuller form. On Paul and Abraham see *Perspectives* ch. 33.

²⁷ It is remarkable that Levenson 1993, who has the sharpest eye for verbal and thematic links elsewhere in Gen., only comments on one part of this. The only commentator I know who highlights the key links is Cassuto 1961–4, 2.124f.; 1961, 39f.

²⁸ Gen. 1.28.

²⁹ Gen. 12.2f.; 17.2, 6, 8; 22.16–18.

³⁰ Gen. 26.3f.; 26.24.

³¹ Gen. 28.3f.

³² Gen. 35.11f.

³³ Gen. 48.3f.

³⁴ Gen. 47.27; Ex. 1.7.

³⁵ Ex. 32.13; Lev. 26.9; Dt. 1.10f.; 7.13f.; 8.1; and cf. the echoes in 28.4, 63; 30.5, 16.

³⁶ Levenson 1993, 91 suggests a parallel between the sin in the garden (Eve ‘took the fruit and gave it to her husband’, Gen. 3.6) and Sarah’s giving of Hagar to Abraham (‘she took her maid and gave her to her husband’, Gen. 16.3).

³⁷ On all this, see esp. Levenson 1993; Moberly 2009.

³⁸ Levenson 1993, 93f. draws out further resonances: as Eve’s birth-pangs are ‘greatly increased’ (Gen. 3.16), so paradoxically God will ‘greatly increase’ Hagar’s descendants (16.10); and both passages look on to the explosive scene of Gen. 22.

³⁹ Jer. 3.16; 23.3; Ezek. 36.11; Zech. 10.8. For other resonances of ‘Eden restored’ in the prophets see *NTPG* 264.

⁴⁰ Fishbane 1988, 372; though Fishbane simply offers this, ahistorically as it were, as an example of ‘typologies of a biographical nature’, not as the launching of a major theme which will resonate through subsequent biblical theology.

⁴¹ Fishbane 1988, 372.

⁴² Gen. 5.29 with 3.17.

⁴³ Fishbane 1988, 372f. One must sadly comment that this point has, actually, failed to strike a great many modern western readers of Genesis, but one is grateful for those whose ears have been open to such echoes.

⁴⁴ Levenson 1993, 84.

⁴⁵ Gen. 22.16–18; see Levenson 1993, 140f.

⁴⁶ Gen. 12.10–20.

⁴⁷ Gen. 15.12–16.

⁴⁸ Levenson 1993, 88.

⁴⁹ Gen. 15.17–21.

⁵⁰ Gen. 15.1–6.

⁵¹ Gen. 15.7–11.

⁵² Gen. 17.1–8.

⁵³ 17.11, 13. The word ‘covenant’ occurs no fewer than eight times in 17.1–14.

⁵⁴ Gen. 17.19, 21.

⁵⁵ Ex. 2.23–5.

⁵⁶ Ex. 3.6–8; cf. too 3.16f.

⁵⁷ Ex. 6.2–8.

⁵⁸ Ex. 12.12f., 23–7.

⁵⁹ Here the work of Scroggs 1966 is still important; though Scroggs consistently screens out the links with Abraham, jumping straight from Adam to Sinai. For subsequent studies see e.g. Levison 1988; 2010, the latter with recent bibliography.

⁶⁰ On Sir. see Hayward 1991.

⁶¹ *Jub.* 2.23; presumably this is to avoid the problems raised by Ishmael and Esau.

⁶² *Jub.* 3.30f.

⁶³ *Jub.* 16.26.

⁶⁴ *Jub.* 19.24f.; 22.13.

⁶⁵ *T. Lev.* 18.10–14.

⁶⁶ *1 En.* 90.37; see discussion [in ch. 2 \(above, 122f.\)](#).

⁶⁷ *4 Ez.* 3.5, 10f., 13–15, 23, 26.

⁶⁸ 3.15, 20.

⁶⁹ 6.53f.

⁷⁰ *4 Ez.* 6.55–9. For the idea of the world being made for Israel see too 7.11; 8.44; 9.13.

⁷¹ *4 Ez.* 9.20–2; a similar complaint is found in *2 Bar.* 14.17–19. It appears that the original ‘some’ who are spared are Noah and his family, but the ‘grape’ and the ‘plant’ are clearly Abraham and his family: for the image, see e.g. Ps. 80.8–19; Isa. 5.1–7, etc. Further discussion of these passages can be found in Hooker 1967, 49–56.

⁷² *1QS* 4.23; *CD* 3.20; *1QH* 4 (formerly 17).15 (tr. Vermes). See, similarly, *1QLit. Pr.* 2.3–6; *4QpPs37* 3.1f.; on these, see the note in *Climax* 24 n. 30.

⁷³ *Gen. Rabb.* 12.9; Neusner 1985, 129 comments that this is a ‘familiar point’.

⁷⁴ *Gen. Rabb.* 14.6. The discourse goes on to liken Abraham to the midpoint of a roof, supporting the weight of the sloping beams either side; and to a virtuous woman who has been brought into a house in disarray in order to teach the occupants proper conduct.

⁷⁵ See *Interpreters*. I have in mind, for instance, the anguished attempts to protect Paul from ‘covenantal’ thinking in e.g. Rom. 3.24–6 (see e.g. Käsemann 1980 [1973] ad loc.).

⁷⁶ Older studies such as those of Schrenk 1964 [1935] and Seebass and Brown 1978 [1971] are helpful as an initial survey, but still oriented more towards previous, more dogmatic debates than to Paul’s second-Temple context. Onesti and Brauch 1993 bring matters a bit more up to date.

⁷⁷ See too Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 398–401.

⁷⁸ Gen. 38.26.

⁷⁹ So e.g. Grieb 2006, 60.

⁸⁰ Seifrid 2001, is thus correct to challenge NIV ‘She is more righteous than I,’ and to conclude that ‘the narrative depicts justice in a concrete form, as a matter of competing claims between two parties,’ though Seifrid’s linkage of this to community norms (according to which Tamar was actually legitimated) seems to me to blur the essential point. See Skinner 1910, 454f.: ‘lead her out’ (38.24) is ‘a forensic term’, meaning that the scene is to be understood as an informal law court, so that the key sentence is ‘she is in the right as against me.’ Skinner refers to Kautzsch 1910, para. 133b (430 n. 2): ‘*tsādaq min* expresses not a comparison, but only a relation existing between one person and another,’ citing Job 4.17; 32.2.

⁸¹ 1 Sam. 24.12–15 [MT/LXX 24.13–16].

⁸² 1 Sam. 24.17 [MT/LXX 24.18].

⁸³ The LXX, however, seems this time to have taken it the other way: *dikaios su hyper eme*.

⁸⁴ e.g. Ps. 26.1.

⁸⁵ e.g. Ps. 74.1–11, 18–23.

⁸⁶ Dan. 9.4–5, 7, 11, 14. The same basic point is made in e.g. *4 Macc.* 4.21: the Syrian persecution is to be understood as God’s ‘righteous’ chastising of his faithless people.

⁸⁷ Dan. 9.15–16, 18.

⁸⁸ Onesti and Brauch 1993, 828f.

⁸⁹ e.g. *Jub.* 22.15; *Bar.* 5.9; *Pss. Sol.* 8.32; *T. Naph.* 8.3; *2 Macc.* 1.24–9.

⁹⁰ cf. e.g. 1QS 1.21–5: Israel as a whole has sinned, ignoring God’s righteous deeds, but the community will confess its own sins as part of claiming the covenant blessing for themselves.

⁹¹ e.g. *1 En.* 62.3; *4 Ez.* 7.33–5; 9.13. Josephus reflects this belief: e.g. *War* 7.323; *Ant.* 2.108; 11.55.

⁹² It is this that calls into question Carson’s polemic (Carson 2004, 50–2) against some contemporary interpretations. To suggest that linking the *dik-* words with ‘covenant’ means ‘leaving out’ ‘justice/righteousness’ is puzzling nonsense; his implication, that this is what ‘Käsemann’s heritage’ is trying to do, is very strange, since (a) Käsemann was relentlessly opposed to ‘covenantal’ ideas in Paul, and (b) Käsemann was certainly not a ‘new perspective’ proponent. Carson’s ‘stinger in the tail’, that ‘covenantal’ ideas mean that *dikaiosynē* ‘is one big step removed from the cross’ – a suggestion he seems to attach to me, though without any supporting evidence – shows that he simply has not listened to what is being said. The cross is at the very heart of Paul’s covenantal and forensic theology.

⁹³ For Dan. 9; Ezra 9 etc. see Wright 2009 (*Justification*) ch. 3; and also ch. 2 above, 142–51. Perhaps the most important modern treatment is that of Williams 1980. For intertestamental texts cf. e.g. *T. Dan.* 5.7–13; *1 En.* 95.7; 1QS 11.12; 1QH 4.37; 1QM 18.8.

⁹⁴ Isa. 42.6–9.

⁹⁵ 42.21.

⁹⁶ 45.21–5.

⁹⁷ 46.12–13. NRSV has misleadingly translated *tsedaqah* as ‘deliverance’ rather than ‘righteousness’ in these instances.

⁹⁸ 51.1–6; again, NRSV renders *tsedaqah* in vv. 5 and 6 as ‘deliverance’. See too, similarly, 56.1.

⁹⁹ 59.15–21.

¹⁰⁰ Isa. 42.6f. NRSV mg. comments on the phrase ‘a covenant to the people’: ‘Meaning of Heb uncertain’. That may be because of the singular ‘people’ where we might have expected ‘peoples’, but the text is scarcely unclear, and the following clause ‘a light to the nations’ gives the most natural sense, as in the next passage below.

¹⁰¹ Isa. 49.5f.

¹⁰² Ex. 19.4–6.

¹⁰³ See particularly Kaminsky 2007.

¹⁰⁴ Rowley 1964 [1950].

¹⁰⁵ See Kaminsky 17, 67f., citing Wyschogrod 1983, 64f.: ‘Because a father is not an impartial judge but a loving parent and because a human father is a human being with his own personality, it is inevitable that he will find himself more compatible with some of his children than others and, to speak very plainly, love some more than others.’ Kaminsky, summarizing this (67), states that ‘If God’s love is like human love in any way whatsoever, then it is unlikely that God has an identical love for all nations and all individuals.’ He uses the Joseph story to suggest that the non-chosen brothers are required to ‘mature enough to accept life’s unfairness’, whereupon they may receive some benefit handed on from those who, unlike them, have been chosen. There is much one could say about this, as indeed about Kaminsky’s whole thesis. For the moment we simply note that, as Bassler 1982 has made clear, the ancient Jewish idea that the one God in fact has ‘no favourites’, though clearly emphasized by Paul (Rom. 2.11; 3.29f.), was certainly not a Christian innovation. Compare e.g. *Jub.* 5.16; 33.18; *2 Bar.* 44.4; the idea goes back, among other places, to Dt. 10.17; 2 Chr. 19.7. In all of these it is strongly affirmed precisely that Israel’s God is an ‘impartial judge’ as well as many other things.

¹⁰⁶ This is regularly taken to be the implication of e.g. *Barn.* 4.7; 9.4; 14.1–5.

¹⁰⁷ For Käsemann’s discussion of Israel as *homo religiosus* see e.g. Käsemann 1969 [1965], 183–7 (186: ‘Israel has exemplary significance for [Paul]; in and with Israel he strikes at the hidden Jew in all of us, at the man who validates rights and demands over against God on the basis of God’s past dealings with him and to this extent is serving not God but an illusion.’ See too e.g. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 302.

¹⁰⁸ At least, in the tradition of Barth’s great Romans commentary. Whether the later Barth, e.g. the Barth of CD 4.1, would have approved is another question. There is an oddity here: among the roll-call of those eager to sign up to Martyn’s version of Käsemann’s ‘apocalyptic’ theory is Harink 2003, whose fourth chapter accuses the present writer, at length, of ‘supersessionism’, and thereby opens the door for other similarly misguided charges (e.g. W. S. Campbell 2008). This is not the moment for refutation; merely for noting the irony.

¹⁰⁹ Martyn recognizes a problem here and tries to ward it off (e.g. Martyn 1997b, 204–8). But his basic ‘polarity’ between ‘religion’ and ‘apocalyptic’ (1997b, 78f., in an essay partly repeated in his 1997a, 35–41) inevitably drives him in this direction, since for him (in good Barth/Käsemann fashion) ‘religion is the human being’s superstitious effort to come to know and to influence God, rather than the faith that is elicited by God’s invasive grace’ (1997b, 79) – and this, for Martyn, is

what is at stake in Paul's opposition to the Galatian 'teachers', who are of course offering a form of Judaism. Saying that this is not an attack on Judaism because the issue at stake is internal to the church (80), or because there were no Jews in the Galatian cities (82), is mere prevarication: Martyn admits 'that the letter does contain an *implication* with regard to Judaism' (80, his italics), and if Judaism remains a 'religion' then the critique remains. Anyway, the case for a South Galatian destination is now overwhelming (see e.g. Mitchell 1993b, 3f.), and there were plenty of Jews there.

¹¹⁰ See Levenson 1993, x: 'Nowhere does Christianity betray its indebtedness to Judaism more than in its supersessionism.' In other words, Judaism has always contained a narrative pattern in which a late-born son supplants older brothers, or a new movement (such as Qumran) claims to represent or embody the true people of God. One could even regard the Mishnah as 'supersessionist', since it sketches a way of being Jewish which many Jews of earlier generations would neither have recognized nor approved.

¹¹¹ Studies of 'sectarianism' have proliferated in recent years, in relation to the ancient world in general and Judaism and early Christianity in particular. A helpful study is that of Elliott 1995, who lists (81–4) no fewer than twenty-one characteristics of the 'sect'. The word 'sect' is of course almost always etic, and frequently polemically so; those in such groups regard themselves, almost by definition, as the true inheritors of the original parent body. See, more broadly, the work of Philip Esler: e.g. Esler 1994, esp. chs. 1, 4 and 5.

¹¹² It is noticeable that Harink 2003, ch. 4, never even mentions, let alone discusses, the passages in which Paul says exactly this (e.g. Rom. 2.25–9; 2 Cor. 1.20; Gal. 2.19f.; Phil. 3.2–11).

¹¹³ At least, that is what YHWH says in Isa. 45.4; but in 45.3 the purpose is stated as 'so that you may know that it is I, YHWH, the God of Israel, who call you by your name'. Presumably the point is that when YHWH calls Cyrus he is ignorant, but ought not to remain so.

¹¹⁴ Rom. 2.17–20.

¹¹⁵ See *Perspectives*, ch. 30.

¹¹⁶ Kaminsky 2007, 147–57 seems to me to make very heavy weather of denying that texts like Isa. 40–55 speak of a divine vocation to Israel to be the light of the world. Isa. 49.6 could hardly be clearer. This has nothing to do with 'imperialism' (151) or with an 'instrumentalising' of Israel that would undermine the relationship of love between YHWH and his people (156). Nor does this then 'dissolve [Israel's] uniqueness by extending their elect status to everyone in the world' (154); it is exactly the thrust of Paul's thinking, not least in Romans, that the single divine plan remains 'to the Jew first and also, equally, to the Greek' (Rom. 1.16). Kaminsky pleads that we should 'understand the Hebrew Bible's theological language in its own terms' (158). I agree.

¹¹⁷ On the question of whether any, or many, Jews of Paul's day did undertake missionary work, see e.g. McKnight 1991; Bird 2010.

¹¹⁸ Rom. 2.24.

¹¹⁹ Ezek. 36.20–8.

¹²⁰ Rom. 2.25–9: see below, e.g. 814, 836f., 921–3, 958, 1432, 1642. As we saw at n. 112 above, this passage, one of the most important for Paul's redefinition of election, is never mentioned by Harink 2003 in his over-eager attack on what he sees as 'supersessionism'.

¹²¹ W. S. Campbell 2008, 104 suggests that 'the Jew' in vv. 28 and 29 is 'a real Jew in the sense of being both circumcised and living in the faith of Abraham'. The fact that these people seem to be the same as those described as 'uncircumcised' in vv. 26f. does seem to cause problems for such a proposal.

¹²² Isa. 52.5–8.

¹²³ Rom. 4.25; for the echoes of Isa. 53 see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 503f.

¹²⁴ cf. e.g. Rom. 8.5–8; 10.5–13; 2 Cor. 3.1–6; Gal. 5.16–26.

¹²⁵ cf. Rom. 9.30: gentiles, who were not pursuing ‘righteousness’, have received ‘righteousness’.

¹²⁶ This emerges in Paul at Rom. 4.13, but the idea is much older, being rooted in passages like Ps. 72.8–11, as developed in e.g. Sir. 44.21; *Jub.* 19.21; 2 *Bar.* 14.13.

¹²⁷ See the preliminary statements in e.g. Wright 1991 [*Climax*] 41–9, and *Perspectives* ch. 31. It is noticeable that some scholars who have studied Paul’s communities with a less heavy-handed theological agenda have had no difficulty in seeing Jesus as ‘Messiah’ in Paul: e.g. Meeks 1983. The whole topic has now been revitalized and set on a new footing by the work of Novenson 2012. Among earlier statements pointing in the right direction: Dahl 1992, 391f. (referring also to his earlier essays now in the overlapping volumes Dahl 1974 and 1991). Charlesworth 1992b shows how much Paul has been ignored when it comes to Messiahship: the massive volume, entitled *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, devotes only a few pages, and no main article, to Paul. This view is reflected, too, in Chester 2007; though Chester agrees that Paul does believe Jesus to be Messiah, and links this with some elements of his teaching, he finds that Paul’s ‘main focus is not on Jesus as messiah; nor do messianic categories play a prominent part in his theology’ (109). [See further below.](#)

¹²⁸ See e.g. Hengel 1992, 444: ‘It is disputed whether “Christos” here [i.e. 1 Cor. 15.3f.] is still a messianic title, or – as otherwise almost always in Paul – used as a proper name’ (citing Hengel 1983, 65–77, 179–88). The fact that Hengel goes on to affirm the messianic significance of the early confession in 1 Cor. 15 scarcely diminishes his overall dismissal of the term; he uses the long-familiar *religionsgeschichtlich* argument that people outside Judaism would not have understood the meaning of Messiahship. Despite Chester’s rebuke (2007, 118) I stick to my view (*RSG* 555) that Hengel regards as an illusion the messianic significance that I have discerned in Paul. To be sure, Hengel does see some messianic significance, but he dismisses at the root all the possibilities I was exploring. See e.g. Hengel 1983, 65–77; 1995, 1–7; e.g. 1983, 67: ‘in his letters [Paul] has no occasion to give reasons for this obvious insight [that *Christos* means “Messiah”] or to develop it’; 68, citing Kramer 1966 to the effect that ‘all the statements in the letters make good sense even to those who only know that Christ is a surname for Jesus’; and 69, again citing Kramer to the effect that even when ‘Christ’ with the article is found, ‘in no case can we discover an appropriate reason for the determination’ (one might suggest that this was because Kramer was looking hard in the wrong direction); 72, ‘that it is precisely as a “proper name” that “Christos” expresses the uniqueness of Jesus as “eschatological bringer of salvation” ’; 76, ‘It makes little sense to seek to discover in Paul the use of the name as a title’; 1995, 4 n. 5: in Rom. 9.5 it ‘almost improves the sense’ to suppose that the article indicates a titular usage, but ‘since Paul nowhere else uses the word as a title it is better to render it here as the name’.

¹²⁹ Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 42, with refs. This is contrary to the widespread assumption (e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 438f.) that the title *Christos* ‘soon became simply a name for Jesus’, and that insofar as gentile churches gave it any meaning it would be the general one of ‘anointed’ and hence ‘nearness to God’. Though he does say that, even as a name, it ‘always has the overtones of its original titular significance’, he neither spells out what that might be nor allows it any active role in Paul’s theology.

¹³⁰ *Christos* occurs around 270 times in the seven ‘main’ letters, over 70 times in Eph., Col., and 2 Thess., and over 30 in the Pastorals. It is this that causes John Collins, one of today’s leading experts in second-Temple Judaism, to declare that ‘if this is not ample testimony that Paul regarded Jesus as messiah, then words have no meaning’ (Collins 2010 [1995], 2). He also cites Rom. 1.3f. in support, and refers to Collins and Collins 2008, 101–22. Compare the measured scorn of Agamben 2006, 14–18 (quoted below at 835) for those who treat *christos* as a proper name – including the practice, in the

Nestle-Aland Greek Testament, of printing *Christos* when deemed a proper name (e.g. Gal. 3.24–9) and *christos* when deemed a title (e.g. Mt. 16.16). (The explanation of this, given e.g. in NA 25, 63*, has been dropped in later edns., but the practice continues.)

¹³¹ e.g. Chester 2007, 120f. As will appear from the previous chapter, I agree with Chester that Paul speaks of Jesus as ‘extraordinarily exalted, indeed divine’; but this proper emphasis, which I have located within an understanding of Paul’s revised monotheism, does not relativize or eliminate the full and vital messianic significance which I am here locating within an understanding of Paul’s revised election-theology.

¹³² See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 418; and RSG 242–5 and elsewhere (*pace* Chester 2007, 111 who finds the point ‘unconvincing’, perhaps because he would not grant the larger exegetical framework within which it does in fact make convincing sense). See now e.g. Kirk 2008, 37–9.

¹³³ Rom. 10.18, qu. Ps. 19 [LXX 18].5.

¹³⁴ Rom. 1.18; 2.16. All this, together with Rom. 8.17f., makes it bizarre for Chester to claim (2007, 114) that Ps. 2, Isa. 11, etc. are ‘precisely the texts that Paul does *not* use’ (ital. orig.), and that they are ‘conspicuous by their absence’.

¹³⁵ See above, 622, 730.

¹³⁶ 8.17.

¹³⁷ 1 Cor. 6.9, 10; 15.50; Gal. 5.21; Eph. 5.5.

¹³⁸ Rom. 15.3, qu. Ps. 69.9 [LXX 68.8].

¹³⁹ Rom. 15.12, qu. Isa. 11.10.

¹⁴⁰ The passage which follows (15.14–21), describing Paul’s missionary work to date, is likewise replete with messianic reference, indicating that the *Christos* has been named and proclaimed around the world to bring the nations into obedience to him, in fulfilment of the fourth ‘servant song’ (Isa. 52.15: ‘that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate’: see Wagner 2002, 329–36). Jewett 2007, 916 points out that this offers ‘an effective reprise of 1:1–15 and the earlier use of Isa 52 in 10:15–17.’

¹⁴¹ Chester 2007, 111 agrees that this is ‘messianic’ (though he says at 112 that this passage, and others like it, ‘can be read without an understanding of *Christos* as messiah, yet still make complete sense’). But he shows how completely he misses the point when he adds (111) that in 1 Cor. 15 Paul is ‘moving the messianic expectation to a transcendent level, away from any specific realization on earth’, citing the (to my mind very unconvincing) comments of MacRae 1987, 171f.

¹⁴² 1 Cor. 15.24f., qu. Ps. 110.1.

¹⁴³ LXX *panta hypetaxas hypokatō tōn podōn autou*.

¹⁴⁴ cf. e.g. Fee 1995, 381–4; Bockmuehl 1998, 236; among older literature, see esp. Hooker 1971.

¹⁴⁵ On Eph. see above, 56–61.

¹⁴⁶ See *Perspectives* ch. 31.

¹⁴⁷ Contrast Sanders 2008b, 328 n. 8: ‘God sent Christ to save the whole world without regard to the prior election of Israel.’ That is truly extraordinary – especially from one so attuned to themes in second-Temple Judaism; if I am right, Paul sees the mission of God-in-Christ precisely as the *fulfilment* of the prior election of Israel.

¹⁴⁸ See the essay on Paul’s use of scripture in *Perspectives* ch. 32.

¹⁴⁹ Novenson 2012.

¹⁵⁰ It is still the first ref. in e.g. Hengel 1992, 445 n. 66.

¹⁵¹ See Novenson 2012, 93–7. In the Church of England the word ‘venerable’ is officially attached to archdeacons, which makes its use as the translation of *augustus* (or its Greek equivalent *sebastos*)

complicated, not to say comic. We might come closer with the papal phrase ‘his Holiness’, or even the splendid phrase used for the (Orthodox) Ecumenical Patriarch: ‘his All-Holiness’.

¹⁵² e.g. Schweitzer; Sanders. Dunn 1998, 393 suggests reasons for the decline in popularity of Schweitzer’s ‘mysticism’ (the psychological critique and the rise of existentialism after the First World War). Dunn seems to assume, wrongly in my view, that what Schweitzer meant by ‘mysticism’ was the same as what e.g. Catholic theologians and spiritual directors meant by it; and one could comment that totalitarianism, with the individual subject to a collectivist State, was equally a product of the First World War. The real reason for Schweitzer’s unpopularity was his implicit high, sacramental ecclesiology, conflicting with the liberal protestant paradigm which still carries weight among scholars.

¹⁵³ Moule 1977, ch. 2, provides quite a full summary to that point: on Paul cf. esp. 54–63; on ‘body of Christ’, 69–89. Moule offers no major new hypothesis as to why Paul wrote in this way, and ultimately regards the material as evidence that Paul thought of Jesus as more than an individual human figure (62, 65) – in other words, that the ‘incorporative’ language is ultimately evidence for, and to be seen as part of, at least an implicitly ‘divine’ view of Jesus. From the previous chapter it will be clear that I have no problem with this conclusion, but I do not think that the *en Christō* and ‘body of Christ’ language is best explained in that way. An important subsequent survey is that of Wedderburn 1985: [see below](#).

¹⁵⁴ See Dahl 1941, 227, insisting that the messianic reference lies at the heart of the concept of the ‘body of Christ’: it is ‘in and with Christ that the messianic community appears’. The presupposition for this incorporative language is thus found ‘in dem jüdischen Gedanken von der Einheit zwischen Messias und messianischer Gemeinde’, ‘in the Jewish conception of the unity between the Messiah and the messianic community’ (my tr.). Dahl cites Schmidt 1919, 217–23; Rawlinson 1931, 275ff. (*sic*: actually, Rawlinson 1930, 225ff.). The key passage in Rawlinson is 232: Jesus ‘stands absolutely alone as the true seed of Abraham ... it is only by being gathered to Him, in the new Israel, that anyone else can inherit the promises.’ The phrase ‘new Israel’ is, as I shall argue, going too far; at most, Paul might have said ‘renewed Israel’. Rawlinson goes on (235): ‘To be “in Christ” and to belong to the New Israel are from henceforth the same thing. The New Israel, according to the New Testament thought, is “in Christ” as the Jews were in Abraham, or as mankind was in Adam. The Messiah, the Christ, is at once an individual person – Jesus of Nazareth – and He is more: He is, as the representative and (as it were) the constitutive Person of the New Israel, potentially inclusive.’ This seems to me on target, but as yet insufficiently grounded.

¹⁵⁵ Wedderburn 1985, 97 n. 52 cites Porter 1965 and Rogerson 1970, and cautiously suggests that, once exaggerated claims are scaled back, there remain certain phenomena which the phrase ‘corporate personality’ was trying, perhaps unhelpfully, to explain. Among older works those of Hooke 1958 (esp. 204–35) and Johnson 1967 remain significant.

¹⁵⁶ ‘In Adam’: 1 Cor. 15.22; ‘in Abraham’, or at least ‘in you’ as applied to Abraham: Gal. 3.8 (quoting Gen. 12.3 and/or 18.18), followed by a statement of people of faith being blessed ‘with faithful Abraham’, echoing Paul’s combined use of ‘in Christ’ and ‘with Christ’ (e.g. Rom. 6.4–8, 11; Gal. 2.19f.). It is not, however, strictly true, as Wedderburn 1985, 88 suggests, that Gal. 3.8, 14 supplies ‘a use of *en* with a person’s name’; it is *en* with a pronoun. See too, however, ‘in Isaac’ in Gen. 21.12, quoted in Rom. 9.7 (noted by Wedderburn 94 n. 26).

¹⁵⁷ So Wedderburn 1985, 91.

¹⁵⁸ The possible exception – Herod’s reported remark about Jesus being a resurrected John the Baptist (Mk. 6.14–16) – is discussed in Wright 2003 (*RSG*), 412 and elsewhere. The more normal view is displayed in Mk. 9.10, where the disciples are puzzled at Jesus’ suggestion of one resurrection ahead of all others (cf. *RSG* 414f.). When the Pharisees in Ac. 23.9 are trying to

exonerate Paul, they suggest that his experience of meeting the living Jesus might be a case of a ‘spirit’ or ‘angel’ appearing to him: in other words, of an apparition of a recently dead, and still dead, person, such as the praying church assumed Peter to be in Ac. 12.15. They did not imagine for a moment that someone might actually have been bodily raised from the dead. See RSG 133f.

¹⁵⁹ A parallel to this line of thought was offered by Robinson 1952, 58: when Saul of Tarsus heard the risen Jesus saying, ‘Why are you persecuting me?’ (Ac. 9.4; 21.7; 26.14), he concluded that there was some sort of identity between Jesus and the persecuted church. This is no doubt relevant, but I do not think it can function as a complete explanation for Paul’s incorporative belief and expressions.

¹⁶⁰ cf. *Climax* 46f.

¹⁶¹ 1 Sam. 17; for the enmity, 1 Sam. 18.6–9. The whole incident follows closely upon Samuel’s secret anointing of David (16.13).

¹⁶² 2 Sam. 19.43 [MT 19.44]; the LXX (2 Kgs. 19.44) adds, in between these two clauses, *kai prōtotokos egō ē sou*, ‘and I, not you, am the firstborn’. For the idea of ‘shares’ in the kingdom cp. 1 Kgs. 11.30f.

¹⁶³ 2 Sam. 20.1. I have altered NRSV to reflect the Heb. and LXX more closely in this and the following citation.

¹⁶⁴ 1 Kgs. 12.16.

¹⁶⁵ See *Perspectives* ch. 31.

¹⁶⁶ Phil. 3.8b–11.

¹⁶⁷ I here amplify and develop the short treatment in *Climax* 44–6. The topic remains ripe for more detailed investigation.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Through Messiah’ can, of course, go either way: when translating *dia* with the genitive it would mean ‘through’ as in ‘by means of’, and with the accusative it would mean ‘through’ as in ‘because of’.

¹⁶⁹ The one occurrence of *en tō Iēsou*, ‘in Jesus’, is explained by its special context (Eph. 4.21). In Gal. 3.14 Vaticanus has *en Iēsou Christō* where almost all other mss have *en Christō Iēsou*.

¹⁷⁰ cf. e.g. Rom. 2.16, where the divine judgment will be exercised *dia Christou Iēsou*, ‘through Messiah Jesus’, reflecting the standard Jewish belief in the Messiah as the agent of eventual judgment, stemming from passages like Pss. 2.9–11; 110.1–2, 5–6 and Isa. 11.3–5, and articulated in e.g. *Pss. Sol.* 17.21–32; 18.7f. (cf. too e.g. Ac. 17.31).

¹⁷¹ e.g. Kramer 1966, 84–90, 133–50 and elsewhere.

¹⁷² [Above, 16–18.](#)

¹⁷³ e.g. Stuhlmacher 1975, 33. That, no doubt, stands in the background, though I am not sure that Paul ever actually uses *Christos* in that way.

¹⁷⁴ Among recent commentators, Thrall 1994, 2000, 151–9 sees the problem of the unexpected *eis Christon* clearly, and suggests that rather than the normal baptismal meaning of entry ‘into Christ’ it may here have an eschatological reference, picking up and condensing 1 Cor. 1.8f., where the same verb (*bebaiōō*) is used of the present security of God’s people against the coming Day, and God’s faithfulness is immediately spoken of as calling his people into the *koinōnia* of Jesus the Messiah (Thrall, 159). See too Furnish 1984, 137: all of them together are being incorporated ‘into the body of Christ’, which can scarcely mean baptism, that having already happened, but rather the building up of that body to be what it should be. If I am right, Paul’s meaning both in 2 Cor. 1.21 and here in Philem. 6 is situated as it were half way between the more normal baptismal reference of *eis Christon* and this eschatological one: God’s purpose in the present is the unity, in Christ, of all his people, and the journey to that unity is properly described as a journey *eis Christon*, ‘into Messiah’. If, of course, we add Ephesians 4.12, 13 and 15 into the argument (see below), this all becomes much clearer, but

that raises further questions – and indeed some may see it as a weakness to offer an account of 2 Cor. and Philem. which coheres so well with Eph! 2 Cor. 11.3, the other obvious non-baptismal use of the phrase, is different again, denoting the single-minded devotion ‘to the Messiah’ which ought to characterize his people.

¹⁷⁵ On Gal. 3.16 cf. *Climax* ch. 8.

¹⁷⁶ Wall 1993, 200 sees that proper weight must be given to the *eis* in Philem. 6, but does not see how this relates to the question of unity, limiting it rather to Philemon’s own spiritual maturity. Ryan 2005, 224 is typical of many: Paul’s writing *eis Christon* when he appears to us to mean *en Christō* is purely ‘stylistic variation’ (see too Harris 1991, 252f.). Dunn 1996, 320 describes the phrase in Philem. 6 as ‘awkward’ and, after listing one or two unsatisfactory options, says that nevertheless ‘its basic force is clear: all that is spoken of in the rest of the verse has its validity and effectiveness because of their relation to Christ, or perhaps more specifically, by “bringing us into (closer) relation to Christ”’, citing Harris 1991, 253 for the first and Moule 1957, 142 and others for the second. This, I believe, is *not* the ‘basic force’ of *eis Christon*, here or elsewhere: *Christos* designates, as in Galatians 3, the single ‘messianic family’ in which radical differences are overcome. [See further above, 16–19.](#)

¹⁷⁷ Eph. 4.13–15.

¹⁷⁸ Agamben 2006, 15–17 (see also above, 559). He cites Huby 1957 [1940] as an example of the mistake he has in mind, but he could have chosen perhaps two-thirds of present-day western NT scholars, and at least three-quarters of those writing in most of the C20.

¹⁷⁹ See now the introduction to the second edition of Hays’s groundbreaking work (Hays 2002 [1983], xxi–lii); and the full and highly annotated collection of essays in Bird and Sprinkle 2009. The debate between Hays and Dunn (in Hays 2002 [1983], 249–97) is now a classic statement of two main opposing positions. An important older discussion, referring to previous treatments, is that of Hanson 1974, 39–51.

¹⁸⁰ On what follows see more fully (in addition to Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 452f.) the relevant article in *Perspectives* (ch. 30).

¹⁸¹ It hardly features in the index to Bird and Sprinkle 2009. Even Hays 2002 [1983] seems not to discuss it. Dunn 1998, 384f. claims that the ‘flow of argument’ in the key passages supports the ‘objective’ reading of *pistis Christou*, but it is precisely the flow of argument in Rom. 3 that provides the strongest case for the ‘subjective’ reading, at least in 3.22.

¹⁸² See the classic statement of Dodd 1959 [1932], 71: ‘The argument of the epistle would go much better if this whole section were omitted.’ Schreiner 2001, 215 suggests that the ‘objective genitive’ interpretation – which he supports across the board – ‘makes the best sense of the flow of thought in Romans 3:21–4:12 and Galatians 2:16–3:9’. That remains to be seen. The foundation of my case is that the ‘subjective genitive’ makes far and away the best sense of Rom. 3.1–31, with the focus on 3.2 and 3.22.

¹⁸³ See Cranfield 1975, 1979, 91: the phrase *te prōton kai* in 1.16 indicates a ‘basic equality’ but an ‘undeniable priority’.

¹⁸⁴ Jn. 4.22. This of course depends on what we mean by ‘salvation’: see Loewe 1981.

¹⁸⁵ Rom. 3.1–4.

¹⁸⁶ Some (e.g. Dunn 1988a, 131) see the close connection of the various *pist-* roots here, but not the point: Dunn sees this as ‘a play on the concept of *pistis*’ but says that ‘its scope is not clear’ – even though he then goes on to say that the ‘oracles’ are ‘given to the Jews to hold in trust for others’.

¹⁸⁷ See too 1 Tim. 1.11.

¹⁸⁸ See particularly Williams 1980, 267f., building on Manson 1962a, 1962b; see too Stowers 1994, 166f. Another commentator who comes close to this sense is Cranfield (1.179). But even he seems to draw back from the clear statement to which he had seemed to be building up: ‘The Jews have been given God’s authentic self-revelation in trust to treasure it and to attest and declare it to all mankind ... They alone have been the recipients on behalf of mankind of God’s message to mankind.’ In the note (179 n. 3) he stresses the difference between ‘entrust’ and ‘give’, but then seems not to know how to apply it: ‘They have been given [the oracles] not to do what they like with them but to conduct themselves towards them according to the will of Him who has entrusted them to them, and to Him they will have to give account.’ It looks as though Cranfield has his finger on the right point but is then determined to make this fit, somehow, with an overview of the passage which implies that it is still really all about ‘the guilt of the Jews’ rather than ‘God’s project *through* the Jews’. Jewett 2007, 243 says that ‘Paul has not lost track of his argument about the failure of all humans despite the impression made on many commentators’; but it is Jewett, like most others, who has lost the track, since the argument here is about the failure of Israel to be faithful to its commission, to be the light of the world, not (at this point) the failure of all humans.

¹⁸⁹ In English, ‘truth’ and ‘trust’ are verbally cognate as well as overlapping in meaning. For Paul, the words *pistis*, ‘faithfulness’ or ‘trustworthiness’, and *alētheia*, ‘truth’ or ‘truthfulness’, possess a considerable overlap of meaning even though they are not etymologically related.

¹⁹⁰ Against e.g. Hanson 1974, 45–51, who argues that ‘Christ lived by faith’, and indeed was justified by faith, refusing to live by the law.

¹⁹¹ It is a desperate exegetical expedient to suggest that Paul does not really mean what he has said here, or that the possibility of some ‘doing good’, as in 2.7, 10 is a ‘hypothetical category’ which he will then declare to be null and void. A list of those who take this view is given in Schreiner 1998, 114f.; he himself considers this position, but eventually rejects it.

¹⁹² Ps. 147.20.

¹⁹³ 3.20; this is of course spelled out in far more detail in 7.7–25.

¹⁹⁴ This is clearly not the place to enter into lengthy discussions of the debate. Jewett 2007, 141f. has a helpful summary, though omitting the covenantal resonance which is arguably one of the primary senses. Other helpful (though by no means unanimous) summaries include Stowers 1994, 195–203; Moo 1996, 70–5; Witherington 2004, 52–4; Keener 2009, 27–9. The older summary of German debate by Brauch 1977 remains useful to understand the presuppositions and background story behind some more recent interpretations.

¹⁹⁵ See Käsemann 1969 [1965], ch. 7; and of course 1980 [1973], 24–30.

¹⁹⁶ To the argument sometimes advanced, that the Greek Fathers, who after all spoke Paul’s language as natives, did not pick up this meaning, I would want to ask the counter-question: were they aware of the Jewish and covenantal argument Paul is mounting? If not, it is not surprising that this outflowing of that theme escaped them as well. In fact, as Ian Wallis has convincingly shown (Wallis 1995), many of the early Fathers did indeed see ‘Jesus’ faith’ as in some sense both paradigmatic and causative for Christian faith: see Hays 2002 [1983], xlvii–lii.

¹⁹⁷ See Hays 2002 [1983], xxx–xxxii.

¹⁹⁸ On the textual problems of 16.25–7 see recently Jewett 2007, 997–1011, arguing strongly for interpolation. Among many who argue for its originality cf. e.g. Moo 1996, 936–41; Marshall 1999.

¹⁹⁹ On the idea of the ‘image’ as reflecting the divine stewardship and rule over the world see e.g. Middleton 2005.

²⁰⁰ The further question, of ‘sin’ as a *power*, emerges – not as an alternative analysis but as a probing of extra depths within the present one – in chs. 5–8.

²⁰¹ On ‘gift’ in Paul and his wider context see Barclay and Gathercole 2006, and a forthcoming volume from Barclay.

²⁰² See further the complementary account [below, 995–1007](#), as part of the discussion of justification.

²⁰³ Though it in fact continues unabated: see Jewett 2007, 269–71, referring to several predecessors and theories, especially in the schools represented by Bultmann and Käsemann. It is of course perfectly possible that Paul is here quoting traditional material, as one might do in a sermon or a lecture – or even a footnote! – when wanting to produce an easy commerce of the old and the new, to add dignity and resonance to a paragraph. This is scarcely proved by unique vocabulary; Rom. is Paul’s longest letter, and it would be surprising if he did not say some things here which he has not elsewhere (there are in any case unique words in most of the letters). The underlying point is the attempt (as with the dismissal of Rom. 1.3–4 as a mere traditional introduction without relevance for the rest of the letter) to distance Paul from supposedly ‘Jewish Christian’ concerns such as covenant, Messiahship and so on. This belongs, ultimately, with the ideologically driven and now historically discredited programme of F. C. Baur.

²⁰⁴ The translation of v. 26 remains tricky. Should the ‘and’ be read as additional (so that there are two statements being made, one about the divine justice in and of itself and one about the justification of Jesus-faith people), or exegetical (so that there is one statement being made, explaining the divine justice *in terms of* the justification of believers), or what? For the options, see Jewett 2007, 292f.; the latter seems preferable, though the sense still requires further explanation.

²⁰⁵ As in 3.5, quoting Ps. 51.4 [LXX 50.6].

²⁰⁶ Jewett 2007, 293 opts for ‘faith in Jesus’.

²⁰⁷ The noun *apolytrōsis* is not used in this sense in the LXX, but the cognate verb *lytroō* frequently is: cf. e.g. Ex. 6.6; 15.13; Dt. 7.8; 13.5 [6]; 15.15; 21.8; 24.18.

²⁰⁸ For the details, and for fuller argument, see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 472–7.

²⁰⁹ See again *Romans* 474–7.

²¹⁰ Wright 2002 [*Romans*] 475. The idea of the divine covenant faithfulness is central to Isa. 40–55 as a whole, both when the idea is explicitly mentioned (e.g. 46.13; 51.5f., 8) and when it is not, since the entire section, like Dan. 9, has to do with the divine faithfulness because of which Israel will be released from the exile which is the result of its sin.

²¹¹ See esp. Dunn 2008 [2005], chs. 3, 8, 17, 19 (originally published in 1985, 1992, 1998 and 2002 respectively).

²¹² So *Romans* 483.

²¹³ This has been a regular ‘minimalist’ reading of 3.31 – and indeed of ch. 4: see e.g. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 105: ‘The statement makes sense only as a transition to ch. 4,’ and ch. 4 is then headed ‘Scriptural Proof from the Story of Abraham’.

²¹⁴ See *Perspectives* ch. 33.

²¹⁵ See too Ps. 106.31, where Phinehas’s zealous action was ‘reckoned to him as righteousness from generation to generation for ever’, the Psalmist’s summary of Num. 25.12f. (cp. Sir. 45.24; 1 Macc. 2.54): ‘I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.’ This clearly indicates an ongoing covenantal relationship: so, rightly, e.g. Watson 2004, 177. On the idea of ‘covenant of peace’ cf. Isa. 54.10; Mal. 2.4f.

²¹⁶ nb. this represents a significant modification to Hays’s original proposal (Hays 1985; reprinted in Hays 2005, 61–84; see Wright 2002 [*Romans*] 489f.); Hays has accepted my modification, which avoids most of the problems subsequent writers have seen in his suggestion (more details

Perspectives, 579–84). Most commentators have, I think, not understood why Hays’s proposal was on the right lines, and have not noticed this modification in it: see the puzzled dismissal in e.g. Jewett 2007, 307f.

²¹⁷ Details, again, in *Perspectives*, 579–84.

²¹⁸ See below, 1005 n. 661 for other second-Temple references to this theme.

²¹⁹ See *Perspectives*, 558f., 584–8, 591f.

²²⁰ 4.23–5.

²²¹ True, Martyn 1997a manages to do this for ‘apocalyptic’; but only by dint, as I shall show, of ascribing to Paul’s opponents some key elements of Paul’s own beliefs. For one kind of ‘covenantal’ reading of Gal. 3 cf. Hahn 2009, 238–73. I broadly agree with much of Hahn’s reading, though I am not yet convinced that the Aqedah lies behind 3.13f. and 3.15–18.

²²² See e.g. Sanders’s account of the Jewish belief in election (Sanders 1977, 87–101).

²²³ Gal. 2.19–20.

²²⁴ See e.g. Schreiner 2010, 170: ‘“I” is used representatively.’ I disagree with Schreiner, however, in his suggestion that ‘dying to the law’ applies by implication to all believers, i.e. to gentiles as well as Jews. Gentiles were not ‘under the law’ in the way that Jews were: see below, 1034.

²²⁵ We note a well-known but still often ignored point: the word ‘judaizers’ is inappropriate to denote these rival teachers, because it properly refers to gentiles who are trying to become Jewish. As Paul says to Peter in Gal. 2.14, ‘How can you compel gentiles to judaize?’ See Mason 2007.

²²⁶ On the various reconstructions of the situation in Galatia, see the very different accounts in e.g. Schreiner 2010, 31–52; de Boer 2011, 50–61; Hardin 2008 (who is different again); and the salutary remarks of Barclay 1987.

²²⁷ Betz 1979 started the ball rolling in this direction, though by no means all have adopted his conclusions. See further esp. Witherington 1998, 25–36.

²²⁸ Independence: 1.11–24; agreement: 2.1–10.

²²⁹ See e.g. Dunn 1990, 129–82; Dunn 1993, 129–31, concluding that Paul lost the argument at Antioch (i.e. that Peter did not give way), and that this view is now ‘common’. Nothing in my present argument depends on this one way or another.

²³⁰ Paul says ‘eating with gentiles’ in 2.12, but the rest of the argument makes it clear that he means gentile *believers*, not ordinary pagans. In 1 Cor. 10.27 he cheerfully allows believers to accept meal invitations from unbelievers. This may mean that the meals in question in Gal. 2 were specifically Christian fellowship-gatherings, presumably including eucharistic meals.

²³¹ On the vexed question of *amixia* (‘not mixing [with gentiles]’) see above, 93f.

²³² cf. Ac. 9.27; 13.1–3, 42–52; 14.1–20.

²³³ To view such suggestions, one might google ‘new perspective’ and ‘table manners’.

²³⁴ But cf. Ac. 15.1, where in a similar situation the hard-liners in Jerusalem were saying that unless gentile converts were circumcised they could not be ‘saved’.

²³⁵ See Novenson 2014 (forthcoming), ch. 2.

²³⁶ Gal. 2.15f.

²³⁷ We should note the different phraseology: ‘We too believed,’ he says literally, ‘into Messiah Jesus.’ This strongly implies the ‘entry’ into the solidarity of the Messiah which is spelled out in 3.25–9 (see esp. 3.26).

²³⁸ In here adopting ‘the faithfulness of the Messiah’ as the correct understanding, I do not wish, as with de Boer 2011, to read all subsequent references to ‘faith’ as denoting Jesus’ death (de Boer does allow for a reference to human faith at e.g. 192, 239). It would be unfortunate if that (extreme?)

position were to push exegetes back towards the ‘objective genitive’ interpretation (faith *in* Jesus) in 2.16, 3.22 and other key passages.

²³⁹ As Michael Gorman has expressed it to me: the relationship Saul of Tarsus had with Torah was one of possession; the relation Paul the apostle has with the Messiah is one of participation.

²⁴⁰ Gorman 2009, ch. 2 argues that this is to be seen as the Messiah’s quintessential act of covenant faithfulness, in which the ideas of loyalty to God, obedience to God and love of God are merged into one. These are indeed all present, though whether this supports Gorman’s analysis of how Paul’s soteriology works here remains to be seen.

²⁴¹ As in Phil. 3.9 ([see above](#)): ‘to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, but that which is through the faithfulness of the Messiah’.

²⁴² It is striking that in v. 18 Paul shifts from ‘we’ to ‘I’. I do not think this means that v. 18 no longer refers to Peter; the ‘I’ is for rhetorical effect, and v. 18 is offered as an explanation (*gar*) of v. 17. See Schreiner 2010, 169: ‘Paul continues to address Peter, but he refers to himself as a representative of the Jewish people.’

²⁴³ For the distinction between ‘sin’ and ‘transgression’, see Rom. 5.12–14. What would the ‘transgression’ be in this case? Hays 2000, 242 suggests two options: (a) rebuilding the Jew/gentile wall would transgress the gospel imperative; (b) rebuilding the wall would imply that his single-community work to date had in fact been a transgression. Hays cautiously prefers the latter; I suggest it is more likely that Paul means, in line with 2.16c (‘by works of the law shall no flesh be justified’) and 3.10f., 22, that for Peter to return to the divided world of Torah would be to return to a world where all were in fact condemned (see also, of course, Rom. 3.19f.; 4.15; 5.20; 7.7–25).

²⁴⁴ Dt. 4.37; 7.8; 10.15; Isa. 43.4; 63.9; Jer. 31.3; Hos. 11.1; Mal. 1.2. This theme is explicitly linked with the exodus in the Dt. refs. and also in Hos.

²⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 1.23; Gal. 5.11. On the historical and sociological context of this ‘scandal’, see Barclay 2011, esp. chs. 6 and 7.

²⁴⁶ See *Perspectives* ch. 31.

²⁴⁷ It may be that we should see Abraham in 3.1–5 as well, since the reception of the spirit (3.2, 3, 5) is connected closely with the Abrahamic promise in 3.14 and with the (Abrahamic) notion of ‘inheritance’ in 4.6f. See the important work of Morales 2010. On Abraham in Galatians see *Perspectives* ch. 33.

²⁴⁸ 3.8, quoting Gen. 12.3 and 18.8.

²⁴⁹ 3.9.

²⁵⁰ 3.27–9.

²⁵¹ de Boer 2011, 154, 164, refers to my previous work as though I were somehow claiming that Paul was seeing continuity between the Mosaic Torah and the newly created community in the Messiah. I am not sure how this misunderstanding has occurred. My argument has always been that Paul sees the gospel as fulfilling, not the Mosaic covenant, but the Abrahamic one, which always (so Paul argues) envisaged a single family characterized by faith, both elements of which would be impossible under an absolutized Mosaic Torah.

²⁵² So, rightly, e.g. Schreiner 2010, 226f.: [see further below, 868 and esp. n. 266](#).

²⁵³ On this passage, see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 7. See now, among the plethora of commentaries and articles, Wilson 2007.

²⁵⁴ [See more fully below](#). On covenant renewal and the spirit see e.g. Rom. 2.25–9; 3.28–30; 7.4–6; 10.6–13; 2 Cor. 3.1–6; Eph. 2.11–22.

²⁵⁵ There is perhaps an echo here of the attempts by zealous Judaeans – including his own former self, which would show that this is not a random or wild accusation – to ‘prevent us speaking to the

gentiles so that they may be saved' (1 Thess. 2.16a). On this, see Barclay 2011, 170–7.

²⁵⁶ See above ch. 2, and esp. 124–6, 143–63.

²⁵⁷ Hab. 2.4 in 3.11; and cf. Rom. 1.17c. Paul's interpretation of the Hab. verse has generated a good deal of discussion: see e.g. Watts 1999; Yeung 2002, 196–25; Watson 2004, 112–63.

²⁵⁸ See Hays 2000, 259; Hays 2005, 119–42.

²⁵⁹ Lev. 18.5, also quoted at Rom. 10.5, on which see below, 1171–3 (and cp. the interesting discussion of Barth *CD* 2.2.245). Gal. 3.11 remains difficult, but three points stand out. (a) Paul is echoing 2.16 (cf. Rom. 3.19f.) and 2.21: Torah, and works of Torah, cannot justify. (b) From this he draws the conclusion: *because* nobody is justified in Torah, *it is obvious that* the just will live by faith (reading *dēlon hoti* as a single phrase, with a comma after *theō* (see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 149; and now Schreiner 2010, 211f., with other refs.). (c) Torah cannot be aligned with this *pistis* because it necessarily and rightly (see 3.22) insists on performed obedience, herding Israel as it were into the prison of disobedience (Rom. 11.32) which is the place of the curse. This is admittedly dense, but nobody expects Gal. 3 to be simple.

²⁶⁰ A good example is de Boer 2011, 213f., who suggests that the curse is pronounced 'by the law', not 'by God' (his italics), and that 'Christ has triumphed over the law's curse, putting an end to its malevolent effects on human life.' Hays 2000, 260f. describes such a line of thought as 'highly speculative', but this is too generous: it is plain wrong.

²⁶¹ 3.22; again, cf. Rom. 11.32.

²⁶² See again ch. 2 above, and Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 7.

²⁶³ e.g. Rom. 2.25–9 (Dt. 30.6; Jer. 31.33; cf. Rom. 10.6–8 with Dt. 30.12f.); Rom. 10.13 (Joel 2.32 [LXX 3.5]); 2 Cor. 3.3 (Jer. 31.33; Ezek. 36.26); the list could be considerably extended.

²⁶⁴ For the view that 3.14b refers to Jews and gentiles equally see e.g. Hays 2000, 262. For the two different starting-points leading to the same destination compare Rom. 3.30.

²⁶⁵ See Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 8.

²⁶⁶ Most of the Gen. refs. are in ch. 17; the word *diathēkē* is sprinkled through Ex., with occasional refs. in Lev. and Num., and then is strongly emphasized in Dt., particularly in Dt. 29. I regard it as not just improbable but impossible that Paul, in a chapter framed by Genesis and focused on Deuteronomy in vv. 10–14, would in vv. 15–18 use the word *diathēkē* without intending reference to 'the covenant'.

²⁶⁷ I intend 'family' here in a diachronic, not merely synchronic, sense, i.e. corresponding at least as much to 'family tree' as to 'family gathering'. For the interpretation here see, in addition to *Climax* ch. 8, the essay on 'Messiahship in Galatians' in *Perspectives* ch. 31.

²⁶⁸ See also 4.1–7. In Rom. 8.17–26 it is clear that Paul hears, in the language of 'inheritance', a strong echo of the foundational messianic Ps. 2, whose v. 8 promises that God will give the Messiah 'the nations for your inheritance' (*dōsō soi ethnē tēn klēronomian sou*) and the ends of the earth as his possession.

²⁶⁹ A gentle version of this can be found in Dunn 2009 [1987], 109f., 173. Barton 2011 [1988], 29 regards Gal. 3.16 as a 'stock example' of the way the NT mistreats the OT.

²⁷⁰ 'And to your seed': Gen. 13.15; 17.8; 24.7.

²⁷¹ Just as in many rabbinic discussions, the key point today's reader needs is omitted; one of the joys of Danby's edition of the Mishnah (Danby 1933) are the footnotes supplying the missing punch-lines. Pauline commentary sometimes needs to do the same, and this is a classic example.

²⁷² Hays 2000, 266f. discusses no fewer than five alternatives, homing in on Paul's seeing the law being given either to *identify* sin or to *restrain* it. Martyn's conclusion that the law was given to produce transgressions (1997, 354) may be closer to the truth than Hays supposes, and closer to the

divine intention than Martyn supposes. Cf. Rom. 5.20; 7.13–20; 9.30–3 (see below, e.g. 894–900; 1176–81).

²⁷³ The suggestion that the Torah came from anywhere other than Israel's God (e.g. Martyn 1997a, 354, 364–70) is firmly resisted by Hays 2000, 267. De Boer 2011, 226, however, says that the question [of 3.19a] 'already presupposes that God did *not* give the law' (his italics), though he then modifies this radically: 'certainly not as a life-giving instrument of justification'. He rejects any suggestion that, at least for Paul in Galatians, the covenant God might have had other reasons for giving the law. The idea of a non-divine origin of the law is sometimes linked to the mention of angels in 3.19c, lining these up with malevolent heavenly beings in Gen. 6, via traditions in the Enoch literature and elsewhere (despite the tradition of good angels being involved in the divine giving of Torah: e.g. Dt. 33.2 [LXX]; Ps. 68.17 [LXX 67.18]; *Jub.* 1.27–9; Ac. 7.38, 53; Heb. 2.2; other texts in Martyn 1997a, 357 n. 208).

²⁷⁴ cf. the sequence of thought that runs from Rom. 7.10 ('the commandment which was unto life') to 8.2, 6, 10 and 11: Messiah and spirit together bring about the 'life' which the law could not. [See below.](#)

²⁷⁵ 3.22; cf. Rom. 11.32.

²⁷⁶ For the details, see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 8.

²⁷⁷ Rightly e.g. Schreiner 2010, 242, against many other speculations.

²⁷⁸ Reading *ho de* in 3.20 as the subject, resumptive of *mesitou* at the end of v. 19, and *mesitēs* in 3.20 as the complement: 'he, however, is not the mediator of "the one".' The thought is not very different if we read *ho de mesitēs* as the subject and leave the complement to be assumed: 'the mediator, however, is not [the mediator] of "the one".' See *Climax*, 169f.

²⁷⁹ On *paidagōgos* see the helpful excursus in Witherington 1998, 262–7. Other refs. in Hays 2000, 269.

²⁸⁰ There is more or less a consensus among commentators that 'through faith' and 'in Messiah' are separate phrases, each of which qualify 'you are all children of God' (in other words, that Paul is not saying 'through faith in the Messiah'): see e.g. Hays 2000, 271; Schreiner 2010, 256. De Boer 2011, 245 suggests that this is an 'awkward juxtaposition' leading to a 'redundancy', but this seems overly harsh, and his suggestion that Paul is here quoting a baptismal formula, though quite possible, remains uncertain.

²⁸¹ See Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 43f.; cf. e.g. Ex. 4.22f.; Dt. 14.1f.; Hos. 11.1; Sir. 36.17; *3 Macc.* 6.28; *4 Ez.* 6.58.

²⁸² For the 'through death to life' motif, cf. of course 2.19–20. On early Christian baptismal practices, cf. e.g. Taylor 2006.

²⁸³ As Witherington 1998, 27f. points out, one of the effects of the Galatian Christians adopting Jewish identity-badges would be to make women second-class citizens, since only males would bear the covenant sign of circumcision.

²⁸⁴ e.g. 1 Cor. 7; 11.2–16; Eph. 5.21–33; Col. 3.18f. To charge him with inconsistency at this point is to muddle up different kinds of questions.

²⁸⁵ See esp. Keesmaat 1999, with [the discussion above, 656f.](#)

²⁸⁶ See esp. Martyn 1997a, 388, changing 'when the time had fully come' to 'at a time selected by [God]', and unravelling the controlling metaphor of the chapter, in which the 'father' has long ago set a time for the young 'heir' to reach maturity, by suggesting that 'God *invaded* the partially foreign territory of the cosmos' (italics original). In order to sustain this strange reading, Martyn sets up a straw man: 'Paul does not think of a gradual maturation, but rather of a punctiliar liberation' (389). I know of no exegete advocating the idea of a 'gradual maturation'.

[287](#) Ex. 2.23–5 with Gen. 15.13–16.

[288](#) de Boer 2011, who does not discern any reference to the exodus in this passage, first suggests that ‘fullness’ really means, in a sense, ‘end’, and then makes ‘the fullness of time’ mean its opposite, namely ‘a clean break with the past’ (262). The obvious fact that Paul is indeed talking about a new period of time is not, as de Boer assumes, antithetical to the idea of a long previous period under divine control. So far from being an ‘optional feature’ of apocalyptic eschatology, the idea of a protracted time of suffering and waiting (not, to be sure, of ‘gradual maturation’) is built into most second-Temple thinking (see the frequent discussions [in ch. 2 above](#), and [immediately below](#)).

[289](#) 4 Ez. 4.36f.; 11.44.

[290](#) Nor can this point be escaped by the (to my mind) dubious move (de Boer 1989) of suggesting that 4 *Ezra* is a different type of apocalyptic from what we find in Paul, corresponding more to the views of his opponents.

[291](#) Stone 1990, 98, 352. In his commentary at 3.9 (1990, 69) he lists the other passages which indicate a view of fixed times: 4.27, 33–4; 5.49; 6.5f.; 7.74; 13.58; 14.9; 2 *Ap. Bar.* 21.8. The expression ‘in its time’, referring in 3.9 to the Flood, is paralleled at 8.41, 43; 10.16; 11.20; 14.32. We could cite, from a work which is not usually thought of as ‘apocalyptic’, the same notion in Tob. 14.5, ‘when the times of fulfilment shall come’, which in LXX BA reads *heōs plērōthōsin kairoi tou aiōnos*, and in S reads *hou an plērōthē ho chronos tōn kairōn*. There should be no doubt that Paul, writing Gal. 4.4, belongs in the widely known world represented by both these second-Temple texts.

[292](#) This is, of course, the point which Martyn and others are trying to bring out by their denial of any continuity, though that denial effectively throws the Abrahamic baby out with the Mosaic bathwater. See e.g. Martyn 1997a, 306 (‘Paul marches clean off the Abrahamic map’), 343–5.

[293](#) [See above, 656–8.](#)

[294](#) e.g. Rom. 14.8f.; Col. 2.14f.; 1 Thess. 4.14; 5.10; and the profound meditations on the cross in e.g. Phil. 2.6–8; Col. 1.19f.

[295](#) As I hinted in the Preface, though we must of course treat each letter on its own terms, it is normal in the study of any writer or indeed artist to allow chronologically adjacent works to illuminate one another.

[296](#) A full study of Paul’s use of Isa. in this passage is now provided by Gignilliat 2007.

[297](#) Almost all now agree that Paul’s apostleship is the main topic of this whole section. Hafemann 2000a, 235, 241 gives headings of ‘Paul’s Motivation for Ministry’ and ‘The Consequences of Paul’s Ministry’ for 5.11–15 and 5.16–6.2 respectively; Keener 2005, 181 heads 5.11–6.10 ‘Persevering Ambassadors of Reconciliation’.

[298](#) 4.5f.; 5.10.

[299](#) 2 Cor. 5.13–15.

[300](#) For my original exposition, see the essay in *Perspectives* (ch. 5; original: 1993); cp. Wright 2009 [*Justification*], 135–44 (US edn., 158–67). See the reaction in e.g. Schreiner 2001, 201 (‘a strange and completely implausible interpretation’; cf. too Bird 2007, 84, ‘simply bizarre’); but Schreiner and Bird appear only to have seen the very brief summary in Wright 1997 [*What St Paul*], 104f., not the fuller statements. See too Keener 2005, 187: ‘they [ministers of the new covenant] are “God’s righteousness” not as “the justified” but as agents of the message of God being reconciled with the world’; Hays 2005, 148: ‘our vocation is to embody the message of reconciliation by *becoming* the righteousness of God ... a visible manifestation of God’s reconciling covenant love in the world’ (italics original). The idea is developed in a radical and political direction by Grieb 2006, who (though seeing the difficulties of doing so) wants to extend the ‘we’ of 5.21 to the whole church (65); see too Gorman 2009, 87f. My sense that the ‘we’ is specifically apostolic comes from the

entire context and argument. A similar case to mine, but avoiding explicit ‘covenantal’ reference, has been argued independently by Hooker 2008.

³⁰¹ That reading depends, of course, on a slide from ‘God’s righteousness’ to ‘the Messiah’s righteousness’, for which, notwithstanding 1 Cor. 1.30, there is no justification here. To make this point is hardly ‘pedantic’ (Bird 2007, 83, against Gundry).

³⁰² This is the argument of Käsemann against Bultmann: see e.g. Käsemann 1969 [1965], ch. 7, based not least on Stuhlmacher 1966. Barrett 1973, 180f. recognizes that Käsemann’s view of *dikaiosynē theou* might point to a fresh interpretation of the present verse (as indeed it does: see Käsemann 1969, 181, and see further Hooker 2008, 370f.), but resists it.

³⁰³ Furnish 1984, 340, says that within ‘apocalyptic Judaism’ the phrase ‘is to be associated primarily with the power by which God establishes the covenant and maintains his faithfulness to it’; this is more or less right as a summary of the second-Temple meaning, but not as a summary of the position of Käsemann and Stuhlmacher, whom he cites, and who are in fact anxious precisely to bypass ‘covenantal’ meanings. Even though Furnish 338–59 treats 5.20f. as part of a new section running on to 6.1–10, he does not see that the Isa. quote in 6.2 lends strong support to a ‘covenantal’ reading of 5.21b.

³⁰⁴ Isa. 49.8b, 12. The servant as a ‘covenant of the nations’ is also found in 42.6. For the *diathēkē* theme in Isa. 40–66 cf. also 54.10; 55.3; 56.4, 6; 59.21; 61.8. The specific ‘servant’ and ‘covenant’ references occur within the larger context of the Isaianic promise of ‘new creation’, as here in 2 Cor. 5.17: see esp. e.g. Beale 1989; Kim 1997.

³⁰⁵ Isa. 49.6f. Despite his careful probing of the Isa. text, Wilk 1998, 96–101, never sees its implication for 5.21b, remaining content to see *dikaiosynē* there as ‘abstract for concrete’, i.e. meaning ‘justification’ (98). That ignores both the echoes of Isaiah and the precision of Paul’s language, here as elsewhere.

³⁰⁶ This is why 5.20b (‘We implore people on the Messiah’s behalf to be reconciled to God’) is to be taken as a general statement, not, as with most translations, a sudden appeal to the Corinthians themselves to be reconciled, either to God or to Paul; that makes no sense in the context, and anyway depends on unwarrantedly adding ‘you’ as the object of ‘implore’ (against e.g. Furnish 1984, 339; Keener 2005, 186f., who thinks that Paul here and elsewhere is in fact urging the Corinthians to be reconciled, citing 6.1 and 13.5; but these do not make the same point as 5.20).

³⁰⁷ Rom. 3.21–6.

³⁰⁸ 2 Cor. 4.7–15; note the emphasis on faithfulness in 4.13. Gignilliat 2007, 104f. notes the possibility of this reading, but, like Hafemann 2000a, 248, is content to reaffirm the traditional reading, suggesting (as does Grieb 2006, 65) that my account does not do justice to the antithesis in 5.21. My problem is that the traditional reading itself does not do justice to the way in which that antithesis picks up and amplifies the two previous antitheses of 5.18 and 5.19; nor does it do justice either to Paul’s own theme throughout the passage (his own apostolic ministry as the carrying forward of the accomplishment of the Messiah) or to his careful rooting of this in the specifically ‘covenantal’ and ‘servant’ passage from Isaiah.

³⁰⁹ None of this has any bearing on my reading of 2 Cor. 5.21a, in which the Messiah was ‘made to be sin for us’, and where something like the traditional ‘imputation’ (‘our’ sins being ‘imputed’ to the Messiah) is still appropriate; [see below, 897–902, 963](#).

³¹⁰ 2 Cor. 5.14f., 18, 19, 21.

³¹¹ Note the sequence: ‘for all’, ‘for all’, ‘for them’ and finally ‘for us’ (vv. 14, 15a, 15b, 21); cf. ‘he died for our sins’ in 1 Cor. 15.3.

³¹² Keener 2005, 187. For the sacrificial notions Keener refers also to Dunn 1998, 217–9.

³¹³ See above, [860 n. 244](#).

³¹⁴ Rom. 5.6–11.

³¹⁵ This is not said here, but 1.16 speaks of the gospel's 'power to salvation' in the context of ideas very similar to those in this paragraph.

³¹⁶ cf. 1 Thess. 1.10. Within the structure of Romans this is the real answer to the problem of 1.18—2.16.

³¹⁷ The word *en* can also be translated 'by', as in *KNT*; but it could also be looking ahead to the incorporative meanings in chs. 6—8.

³¹⁸ This is in fact the only other passage where this root occurs in the whole NT, with the trivial exception of 1 Cor. 7.11 and the highly significant exception of Rom. 11.15, on which [see below, 1198–1200](#).

³¹⁹ e.g. Ex. 29.45; Jer. 24.7; Ezek. 36.28; and frequently.

³²⁰ 1 Cor. 1.31.

³²¹ See Levenson 2012, 27f.

³²² Rom. 5.12–14.

³²³ Ironically, the notion of 'invasion', so important in Martyn's account of the divine action in Christ, appears in Paul in terms of the divine giving of Torah, bursting in upon the larger sequence from Adam to the Messiah. This is only resolved in Rom. 7—8 and 9—10 ([see below](#)).

³²⁴ Rom. 5.15–17.

³²⁵ Rom. 5.18–21.

³²⁶ The word *hypakoē* is more or less absent from the LXX. However, the notion of 'obedience' is regularly expressed in Israel's scriptures through the root *shema*, regularly translated with *akouō* or, as an abstract noun, *akoē*. See Rütterswörden 2006 [1994–5].

³²⁷ This was a point well made by Robinson 1979, 79f., citing 3.20, 31; 4.15; 5.13, 20; 6.14; and then 7.5f. He might have added 3.21 ('apart from the law').

³²⁸ e.g. 1 Cor. 15.56 ('The "sting" of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law') – which, without Rom. 7, would be completely incomprehensible. Cf. the negative statements about the law in e.g. Eph. 2.15; Phil. 3.9; Col. 2.14f.; and, in a measure, the argument of 2 Cor. 3.

³²⁹ Dodd 1959 [1932], 120. See the proper correction to this in e.g. Keck 2005, 175–7.

³³⁰ Dunn 1988a, 360f., says 'the imagery of 6:18–22 is still strongly in Paul's mind', which is true; but the theology of 6.3–14 is underneath that again, and also underneath the present passage.

³³¹ See the fuller discussion in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 562–72, and behind that in *Climax* ch. 10. I assume the division of the chapter (7.7–12; 7.13–20; 7.21–5), according to the very careful structuring of the argument (with e.g. Jewett 2007; against e.g. Fitzmyer 1993 and Byrne 1996, who like many, including the NA text, suggest a paragraph break after v. 13). I also assume (see *Romans* 551–4) that the 'I' of Rom. 7 is not a form of psychological autobiography (which would in any case, though no doubt interesting, offer little help in a theological argument, since others might respond that their 'experience' was different), but rather a rhetorical device to enable Paul, as in Gal. 2.17–21, to speak of Israel without speaking in the apparently distancing third person. I assume that he is thereby speaking of Israel in terms of the kind of Jew he once was, offering in retrospect a theological, rather than a psychological, analysis of the situation of those who are given the law (7.7–12) and who delight in it (7.13–20) but who, with the benefit of hindsight, he believes to have been clinging the more tightly to their own death-warrant. Perhaps one could say that he uses the *language* of psychology, after a fashion, to express what he now believes to have been *theologically* true of all those, himself included, who lived 'under Torah'.

³³² See e.g. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 197: ‘vv. 7–13 look primarily to people under the Torah ... and Adam is portrayed as their prototype.’

³³³ On the *yetzer ha-ra*‘, the ‘evil inclination’, seen by some rabbis in balance with the ‘good inclination’, the *yetzer ha-tob*, see e.g. Strack and Billerbeck 1926–61, 4.466–83; Marcus 1986a. The proposal of Davies 1980 [1948], 27 that in Rom. 7 ‘Paul reflects and possibly actually has in mind the rabbinic doctrine of the Two Impulses’ has not met with subsequent favour: see e.g. Dunn 1988a, 391.

³³⁴ I argued in *Climax* ch. 12 that there were also echoes of Cain (Gen. 4.1–16) in Rom. 7.13–20.

³³⁵ See above, 807f.

³³⁶ Part of Paul’s reason for casting this argument in the form of anguished autobiographical analysis, I believe, is his intention to parody the similar statements in pagan moralists from Aristotle onwards, and thereby *both* to address that felt plight *and*, more specifically, to indicate to the devout Jew – to his former self! – that all Torah could actually do was to raise one to the level of the puzzled pagan moralist. See *Romans*, 553f.

³³⁷ One should at this point compare Rom. 2.17–20 and 9.30–10.13, but to do so here would take us too far off course. See below, 1165–81.

³³⁸ This, by the way, is the Pauline truth at the heart of all those agonized existentialist analyses which, seeing that Rom. 7 was more than autobiography but not seeing its ‘Israel’-dimension and its restatement of election, had unwittingly locked away the theological tools they needed to probe to the heart of the present passage. See, classically, Kümmel 1974 [1929], followed particularly and influentially by Bultmann’s famous essay of 1932 (= Bultmann 1960, 173–85 or Bultmann 1967, 53–62; cf. too the sharp summary in Bultmann 1951–5, 1.266f.). The problem with these analyses, seen purely as exegesis, was the proposal that the ‘I’ of the passage could in fact keep the law, but was wrong to try – the very opposite of what Paul says (see rightly e.g. Schreiner 1998, 373). For the possible if distant prophetic echo, cf. Jer. 20.7.

³³⁹ cf. 1 Cor. 15.9; cp. 1 Tim. 1.15; and cf. 1 Thess. 2.16 again. Jewett 2007, 440–5, 449, who in Jewett 1971 had followed a line similar to Kümmel and Bultmann, has now explored the possibility that Paul refers both to Jewish zealotry (of his own pre-conversion sort) and pagan competition for honour.

³⁴⁰ Eurip. *Hippol.* 612.

³⁴¹ On all this, see *Climax* ch. 11; on ‘sinning with a high hand’ see e.g. Num. 15.30; cf. Dt. 17.12, and e.g. mKer. 1.2; 2.6; 3.2. Bryan 2000, 142 suggests that from Sinai onwards Israel knew what the law said, so that all subsequent sin was ‘sinning with a high hand’. Had this been so it is strange to find the distinction in Torah itself, as Bryan himself (100–2) indicates.

³⁴² Jewett 2007, 484 is right to say that *katekrinen* is ‘the point of emphasis’ in the sentence, but it is strange that he does not then draw out the link with 8.1, and indeed the tight line of thought that looks back to 2.1–11 and on to 8.31–9: see below. Contrast e.g. Moo 1996, 477.

³⁴³ 1 Cor. 2.8; Col. 2.13–15.

³⁴⁴ Rev. 12.10.

³⁴⁵ See the echoes of 8.1–4 in 8.32–4.

³⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 2.8.

³⁴⁷ I therefore do not think that the *dikaiōma* in 8.4 refers to a kind of inner law keeping, as described in 8.5–8 (as most commentators: see e.g. Jewett 2007, 485), but rather to the ‘just decree’ which, on the analogy of 1.32, and with 2.7, 10, 13b in mind, might be expressed by saying, ‘Those who do such things deserve to live.’ When the actual commands of Torah are referred to, it is normally in the plural, *dikaiōmata*, as in e.g. Dt. 30.16, echoed in Rom. 2.26.

³⁴⁸ On the significance of ‘life’ here, see e.g. Kirk 2008, esp. 125–31.

³⁴⁹ Jewett 2007, 492 cites Lietzmann 1971, to the effect that the word-parallelism here is stricter than the thought itself (‘as often in Paul’, adds Lietzmann). Moo 1996, 492 sees the link with e.g. 5.21 but does not develop it.

³⁵⁰ I earlier suggested (2002 [*Romans*], 584) that *dikaioynē* here referred to the divine righteousness, but this seems to me now far less likely. Cranfield 1975, 390 assimilates *dikaioynē* here, as do some translations, to ‘justification’, but this, though undoubtedly expressing a truth (against e.g. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 224, who insists that the word here must refer to spirit-led Christian behaviour; see too Keck 2005, 204), is not what Paul says. On the vexed question of ‘spirit’ (human, or divine?) I still think (against Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 202) that Paul is here speaking of the divine spirit, making the close link with 8.2 in particular (so, powerfully, e.g. Schreiner 1998, 414f., following e.g. Fee 1994, 550f.).

³⁵¹ Compare the antitheses in 2.12f.: some will be ‘condemned’, others ‘justified’. For ‘covenant membership’ here see again *Climax*, 202.

³⁵² See Hays 1989a, 57–63.

³⁵³ Hays 1989a, 61: ‘What Paul has done, in a word, is to interpret the fate of Israel christologically.’ This I believe to be spot on in terms of Rom. 11.21, which Hays is there expounding; and the point here is that this interpretation grows directly out of Rom. 8 and elsewhere, where the *election* of Israel is interpreted christologically.

³⁵⁴ Isaac was of course Abraham’s second son, but Sarah’s only one; part of the strange darkness in the story is caused by the problem of Ishmael in the preceding chapters.

³⁵⁵ Levenson 1993 is now a classic treatment; see now Ripley 2010, with bibliog.

³⁵⁶ Gen. 22.1–3, 7–18.

³⁵⁷ See, for a start, Ginzberg 1937 [1909], 1.279–86; and the developments outlined in Ripley 2010. The rich rabbinic developments of the theme, including some kind of ‘atonement’ significance, are evidently post-Christian (so e.g. Davies and Chilton 1978; Segal 1984), but fresh retellings of the story feature frequently in the second-Temple period (e.g. *Jub.* 17, 18; 4Q225; and various passages in Philo, Josephus, Ps.-Philo and *4 Macc.* noted in Ripley). Though Paul was probably not replying to a nascent Aqedah-based ‘atonement’ theology, then, there is no need to deny that he may have had the passage, and perhaps some contemporary Jewish interpretations, in mind (Fitzmyer 1993, 531f. is right to question a reference to the developed rabbinic tradition).

³⁵⁸ For other ways of reading the Aqedah as echoed in the present passage (or, indeed, ways of denying such echoes), see the discussion in Jewett 2007, 536–8.

³⁵⁹ Against Levenson 1993, ch. 15, esp. 209–13.

³⁶⁰ See Wilk 1998, 280–4; against e.g. Jewett 2007, 541, who thinks the Isaianic echo is ‘rather distant’ and ‘quite faint’.

³⁶¹ Paul seems to cling particularly to the sense that, whereas the servant might say that his work was ‘in vain’ (Isa. 49.4), the fresh commission would come, to restore the tribes of Israel and to be the light to the nations (49.6). See e.g. Gal 2.2; 4.11; 1 Cor. 15.58; 2 Cor. 6.2; Phil. 2.16; 1 Thess. 3.5; cp. too Isa. 65.23. On Isa. in Gal. see Ciampa 1998; in 2 Cor. 6, see Gignilliat 2007.

³⁶² See *JVG* ch. 12, esp. 588–91.

³⁶³ Isa. 51.1f.

³⁶⁴ See above, 634–6.

³⁶⁵ Jewett 2007, 548 suggests that the citation only makes sense if some in Rome had been questioning whether the sufferings of Paul and other Jewish Christians indicated that they were not true disciples. That is not impossible, but I suggest that the larger context of the psalm as a whole,

and its earlier echo in 8.28 (see again above, 634–6), indicates that Paul, in addition to providing a citation from the ‘writings’ to go with Torah and prophets (vv. 32 and 34), was placing the whole early Christian movement on the map of the true people of the one God, praying this psalm of suffering and hope. See too the suggestive comments of Hays 1989a, 57–63, linking this psalm to Gen. 22 and noting its slightly fainter echoes of Isa. 53 (which, though far off from Ps. 44, is brought near by the reference to the ‘servant’ in 8.34).

³⁶⁶ *kata eklektōn theou*; one of the rare occurrences of the term in Paul, but the reality is everywhere. Here it is quite clear that ‘God’s elect’, which in Judaism would unambiguously have meant ethnic Israel or some purified subset thereof, refers, equally unambiguously, to those who are ‘in the Messiah’.

³⁶⁷ See Hays 1989a, 63.

³⁶⁸ Sir. 24 etc. [See above, 654–90](#).

³⁶⁹ Col. 1.19f.

³⁷⁰ Col. 2.9.

³⁷¹ Rom. 5.14–21; 8.29; 1 Cor. 15.20–8; Phil. 3.20f.

³⁷² 2 Cor. 5.21a; cf. Jn. 7.18; 8.46; Heb. 4.15; 7.26; 1 Pet. 2.22.

³⁷³ Gal. 2.15–21; 3.10–14, 15–22; Eph. 2.14–18; Col. 2.13–15.

³⁷⁴ 1 Cor. 2.8.

³⁷⁵ Col. 2.15.

³⁷⁶ Eph. 3.10–11.

[377](#) Gen. 13.14; cf. 28.14; Ps. 2.8; Rom. 8.17; 1.5.

[378](#) Gal. 1.4 (against Martyn 1997a, 88–91, who divides the verse into two and has Paul only really approving the first half).

[379](#) See McGrath 1986, 1.2f., discussed in Wright 2009 [*Justification*], 59f. (US edn., 79f.). Cf. my earlier treatments in e.g. Wright 1980 ('Justification', reprinted in *Perspectives* ch. 2).

[380](#) It is startling to find so careful an exegete as Schreiner (1998, 68 n. 12) saying that he does not distinguish as sharply as some between 'righteousness' and 'salvation'.

[381](#) Küng 1964 [1957].

[382](#) e.g. Gorman 2009, ch. 2; e.g. 55, speaking of 'justification' and 'reconciliation' as being 'synonymous'. See below. Gorman brings together 'co-crucifixion', 'transformation' and much more, which does indeed reflect the complex Pauline interplay of ideas; but I question whether Paul uses the word 'justification' and its cognates to *denote* this larger complex.

[383](#) See particularly e.g. Piper 2002; 2007 (to which I respond in *Justification*); among many others, e.g. Waters 2004. Two symposia setting out a variety of views are Husbands and Trier 2004 and McCormack 2006b; my own essay in the latter vol. is reprinted in *Perspectives* ch. 18. A massive work bent upon reaffirming a traditional protestant viewpoint over against the so-called 'new perspective' is Carson, O'Brien and Seifrid 2001–4.

[384](#) On all this, see the helpful and provocative work of Vanhoozer 2011, and my response in the same vol.

[385](#) 1 Cor. 15.1–8.

[386](#) Rom. 1.1–6. Bird 2007, 69 rightly notes that neither of these 'gospel summaries' mentions justification, and quotes Luther in support: 'The gospel is a story about Christ, God's and David's Son, who died and was raised and is established as lord. This is the gospel in a nutshell' (*LW* 35.118). Would that all Luther's would-be followers had paid attention.

[387](#) Isa. 52.7, pointing to 52.13–53.12; cf. 40.9; 41.27; 61.1; see too 60.6.

[388](#) Details in [ch. 5 above](#). For the question of different modes of written resistance to empires, see e.g. Scott 1990, with Portier-Young 2011, Part I.

[389](#) e.g. Pss. 67.4; 96.10–13; 98.7–9.

[390](#) e.g. Rom. 1.5; 16.26.

[391](#) Rom. 1.14, 16–17.

[392](#) 1 Cor. 1.18–2.5.

[393](#) 1 Cor. 12.3.

[394](#) Joel 2.28.

[395](#) See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 666; and e.g. Schreiner 1998, 562. It is surprising to find that Fee 1994 has no mention of Rom. 10.13.

[396](#) 1 Thess. 1.4f.

[397](#) 1 Thess. 1.9f.

[398](#) 2 Thess. 2.13f.

[399](#) For the sense of 'call' here see the summary statement in Kruse 1993, with earlier bibliog.

[400](#) 1 Thess. 2.13.

[401](#) Gal. 2.8; cf. Col. 1.29.

[402](#) Eph. 1.20; cf. 3.20.

[403](#) Phil. 2.13.

[404](#) 1 Cor. 12.6.

[405](#) Gal. 3.2–5.

[406](#) See the helpful outline of options in Hays 2000, 251f. (and see more fully Hays 2002 [1983], 124–32); de Boer 2011, 174f.; both emphasize the objectivity of the proclamation rather than the human act of hearing and believing. On the other side, see e.g. Williams 1989; Dunn 1993, 154.

[407](#) So BDAG 36.

[408](#) See the article in *Perspectives* ch. 30.

[409](#) cf. e.g. Watson 2004, 352f.; though Watson rightly sees that ‘the distinctively Christian terminology in 2.27–9 is a difficulty’ for this view. A fatal difficulty, in my opinion. Bell 2005, 190–6 argues unconvincingly that 2.27–9 describes non-Christians; the fact that 1.18–3.20 as a whole is arguing that ‘all have sinned’ does not mean that Paul cannot include within that argument hints of other themes.

[410](#) For the distinction between ‘poetic’ and ‘referential’ sequences, see Petersen 1985, 47–9, discussed in *NTPG* 403f. Confusion here has generated perplexity among interpreters who have supposed that Paul should not have spoken so soon in the letter about people actually fulfilling the law; but that is to treat the *poetic* sequence as if it were *referential* (see discussion in Moo 1996, 176). The fact that Paul is using clever rhetoric here, as throughout Rom. 2 and 3, does not however mean that ‘we should not ... drag “gospel” into all this’ (Bryan 2000, 96). The parallels in Phil. 3, 2 Cor. 3 and Rom. 7.6 indicate that the present passage belongs tightly within his central and gospel-based theology. This is not to ‘christianize’ his argument ‘too early’ (Byrne 1996, 104); that, too, confuses ‘poetic’ and ‘referential’. The present passage is *both* an ‘inner-Jewish’ discussion (the implied dialogue of 2.17–29) *and* a key move within the larger, developing argument of the letter.

[411](#) So, rightly, Barclay 2011, ch. 3 (orig. 1998), against e.g. Boyarin 1994. It is quite possible that Paul is aware of ‘circumcision’ and ‘uncircumcision’ as terms which would be heard polemically in Rome (so e.g. Marcus 1989), but this has not, I think, shaped his actual argument.

[412](#) That is presumably why Käsemann (1980 [1973], 73) resists the idea that v. 26 already refers to gentile Christians, only allowing this in v. 29 (75) (note Käsemann’s antipathy towards any kind of ‘law-fulfilment’, as at 76f.); but this is unnecessarily restrained. Paul regularly introduces a topic obliquely, bringing it step by step towards full clarity. Moo 1996, 171 points cautiously in the right direction.

[413](#) See above, [361](#), [513](#); and below, [1036](#), [1434–43](#).

[414](#) cf. too e.g. Wis. 3.8; 4.16; *Jub.* 24.29; 1QS 8.6; and, in the NT, Mt. 11.20–4; 19.28; Rev. 20.4.

[415](#) So e.g. Dunn 1988a, 123; Fitzmyer 1993, 323, and many others. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 77 dismisses this idea, which he says comes from an ‘initially English tradition’, on the grounds that a Roman audience would not have understood it. That is unproveable, and anyway beside the point. Even ‘purposeful communicators’ (Barclay 2011, 71, agreeing with Käsemann) may use word-play that not all hearers will understand. The attempt of Käsemann (77) to suggest that this passage resonates, not with a Jewish context, but with the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius 4.19.2; 12.11 is a fine example of Schweitzer’s point about people getting water from far away in leaky buckets when there was a flowing stream right beside them.

[416](#) cf. too Dt. 10.16; Lev. 26.41; Jer. 4.4; 9.25f.; Ezek. 44.7, 9. The theme of heart-circumcision (or lack thereof) is echoed in the NT (Ac. 7.51) and in other second-Temple writings, e.g. 1QS 5.5; 1QH 2.18; 1QpHab 11.13; 4Q177 185; *Jub.* 1.23; *Od. Sol.* 11.1–3; Philo *Spec.* 1.305. *Migr. Abr.* 92, sometimes cited here, makes a different point.

[417](#) Jer. 31.33; 32.39f.; Ezek. 11.19; 36.26–8; the Ezek. refs. also speak of the transforming gift of the spirit.

⁴¹⁸ His implicit antithesis not only between ‘spirit’ and ‘letter’ ([see below](#)) but between ‘spirit’ in v. 29 and ‘flesh’ in v. 28 likewise belongs closely with his regular antithesis, stated already in relation to Jesus himself in 1.3–4 and developed in e.g. 8.5–8. For a full line-up of regular antithesis, cf. Gal. 4.21–31.

⁴¹⁹ cf. BDAG 205f., with classical parallels both for the sense of *gramma* as a book and for the contrast between (a) a ‘living’ law and (b) a ‘dead’ one which becomes a mere *gramma*.

⁴²⁰ See Fitzmyer 1993, 323 on patristic understandings of the phrase.

⁴²¹ Fitzmyer 1993, 323 strangely suggests that ‘the real Jew’ in mind here is ‘an Israelite with a circumcised heart’. Unless Fitzmyer is using ‘Israelite’ itself in an extended sense, this seems an unwarranted restriction: the rhetorical strategy of the whole paragraph depends on the subject being gentiles throughout. Cp. e.g. Rom. 4.11f.

⁴²² Or, with Jewett, that 2.17–24 is addressing ‘the bigot’.

⁴²³ Keck 2005, 88.

⁴²⁴ This note of eschatology is what is missing from Barclay’s account (2011, ch. 3). His suggestion (79) that Paul has stretched biblical language here in a way that ‘threatens to subvert the historical continuity of the Jewish tradition’ seems to me to miss Paul’s point, which is that scripture itself points forward to a radical transformation *within* that historical continuity. Israel’s God always promised in scripture that he would act in a radical new way; Paul is saying that this has now happened. Apocalypse and salvation history (to use the jargon) are here mutually defined.

⁴²⁵ Of course, either method takes its place on the larger hermeneutical spiral of many years of reflection, recorded in part in *Perspectives* and in commentaries etc.; the move from historical exegesis to thematic analysis and back again is never-ending. I am naturally aware of the major ongoing discussions of ‘justification’ as a topic in historical and systematic theology, and what follows will inevitably have considerable relevance to those debates (since most of the debaters hold a high view of scripture in which what Paul actually says is supposed to be decisive and determinative!). However, it will of course not be possible to engage with details. For an important recent symposium see McCormack 2006b.

⁴²⁶ For much of my career I have been in implicit and sometimes explicit debate with Jimmy Dunn, and in the present section we may refer esp. to Dunn 1998, 335–89. Since we are often lumped together under the broad and now unhelpful label of ‘new perspective’, it is worth noting that despite much two-way traffic of thought our disagreements loom at least as large, in my mind at least, as our agreements. Among recent German treatments I take Schnelle 2005 [2003], 454–72 as representative. Since we have mentioned the ‘new perspective’, it is worth recalling, as people often do not, that an early advocate of some relevant lines of thought was George Howard: see e.g. Howard 1967 and 1969; and perhaps especially Howard 1970 and 1979.

⁴²⁷ I use the word ‘rectified’, which has featured in some recent accounts of justification, in its normal English sense of ‘put to rights’, ‘sorted out’, ‘repaired’, ‘set back as it should be’. It carries an implicit judicial overtone, which is why the final divine act is seen as ‘judgment’ (Ps. 96.10–13, etc.); but the emphasis in the word falls on the eventual state of restoration, with the implication of affirming the goodness of the original thing, not so much on the judicial decision by which that end is achieved. I do not, however, find that ‘rectify’ and ‘rectification’ are sufficient to cover all the elements in Paul’s larger picture – unlike e.g. Martyn 1997a; Harink 2003 (on which see McCormack 2006a).

⁴²⁸ The problem of evil non-human forces (‘powers’), which Paul sees as defeated in the Messiah’s death (Col. 2.15), is to be understood within this larger picture: [see above, e.g. 632, 740, 752–71](#).

⁴²⁹ I have argued above, and at more length in *Perspectives* ch. 30, that 2.17—3.8 have a different purpose, relating not to the sinfulness of Israel in itself but to Israel’s failure to be ‘faithful’ to the vocation to be the light of the world.

⁴³⁰ e.g. 1 Cor. 5, 6; Gal. 5; Eph. 4.17—5.20; Phil. 3.18f.; Col. 3.5—11; 1 Thess. 4.4—6.

⁴³¹ Even Sanders sometimes lapses at this point: e.g. Sanders 1977, 451f., 545. I am at a loss to know why so careful a scholar as O’Brien should suppose I have confused the two (O’Brien 2004, 288). Clearly the final event when the one God creates a new world and raises the dead will constitute *both* the ultimate ‘rescue’ of his people from death, i.e. ‘salvation’, *and* the ultimate verdict in their favour (‘justification’, as in Rom. 2.13; Gal. 5.5). Clearly, too, Paul can speak of present ‘salvation’ just as he can of present ‘justification’ (e.g. Rom. 8.24). Both terms, then, can *denote* the same event or fact. But they *connote* quite different things: the one, rescue, as from a danger or plight; the other, vindication, as in a law court. I note, as I have elsewhere, that both ‘justification’ and ‘salvation’ are major themes of Rom., but that ‘salvation’ is absent from Gal.: food for thought.

⁴³² For this whole section see esp. [ch. 2 above](#), and also [section 2 of the present chapter](#). It is noteworthy that Schreiner 2010, 390–2, summarizing ‘justification’ as it relates to Galatians, manages not to mention Abraham. Contrast e.g. Gathercole 2006a, stressing the importance of understanding righteousness in covenantal terms.

⁴³³ On these passages, and on the confluence there of ‘righteousness’ and ‘covenant membership’ (which is not a ‘problem’, as suggested by e.g. Bird 2007, 74), see ‘Paul and the Patriarch’ in *Perspectives* ch. 33. One writer who has offered suggestive ways of holding together Pauline strands that others separate is Bruce Longenecker: see e.g. Longenecker 1998.

⁴³⁴ e.g., surprisingly, Bird 2007, 1, 19, 113, 153. The covenant is not simply about ‘ecclesiology’ (O’Brien 2004, 289f.). See too Moo 2004, 187, 216. I am not at all saying, as some have supposed, that ‘the whole world is in Israel’; rather, Israel is the creator’s means of rescuing and blessing the whole world (see Vanhoozer 2011, 244, quoting Horton).

⁴³⁵ The obvious examples are in Isa. 40—55 and Dan. 9; see ch. 2 above. The basis for it all – the ‘covenant’ with its warnings and promises, to which YHWH will be ‘faithful’ – is found in passages like Lev. 26.1–45; Dt. 7.12—8.20; 11.26–8; 26.16—28.68. The attempt to split up ‘covenant’ and ‘righteousness’ (e.g. Schreiner 2001, 199, relying on Seifrid 2000) fails not least because of Paul’s central use of Gen. 15 where the two are inextricably intertwined.

⁴³⁶ See Dunn 1993, 134. Many studies of the relevant words look back to Ziesler 1972 which, though flawed in some ways, sets out the material helpfully.

⁴³⁷ [See ch. 2 above](#).

⁴³⁸ This is of course the source of many confusions: when people say, ‘What did Paul say about “justification”?’ they usually mean, ‘What did he say on the topic of how people are converted, “saved” and assured of a safe passage to “heaven”?’ These questions, when properly reframed, are of course important, but they are not exactly what Paul means by the word ‘justification’ itself. All this means that much of Carson, O’Brien and Seifrid 2001 is simply beside the point, despite the high quality of many of the essays.

⁴³⁹ See mSanh. 10.1–4, where the opening statement that ‘all Israel has a share in the age to come’ is at once qualified with substantial lists of those excluded.

⁴⁴⁰ See *Perspectives* ch. 21. Gathercole 2004, 238 n. 38 shares my reservations about Dunn’s handling of this topic (Dunn 2008 [2005], ch. 14 (orig. 1997)).

⁴⁴¹ This is the only explanation for passages like Rom. 5.17; 1 Cor. 6.2.

⁴⁴² Phil. 3.7–11.

⁴⁴³ Rom. 1.16.

⁴⁴⁴ cf. RSG 477, 681.

⁴⁴⁵ For a survey of theories on this subject see Schnelle 2005 [2003], 465–7.

⁴⁴⁶ Rom. 3.19f.; 2.9–11.

⁴⁴⁷ Bird 2007, 153 suggests that Gal. is more accommodating for a ‘new perspective’ reading, and Rom. for a ‘reformed’ reading. I find this more than a little bizarre; the *only* thing that might be said for it is that Gal. does indeed concentrate on the question of ‘who belongs to Abraham’s family’, and, unlike Rom., never mentions ‘salvation’, while Rom. puts the whole picture together in a fresh way.

⁴⁴⁸ In ancient Israel there was no ‘director of public prosecutions’, so all cases were a matter of one person (the plaintiff) against the other (the defendant). Clearly, either might be found ‘in the right’: if this was the defendant, the declaration would be an ‘acquittal’, but if the decision went in favour of the plaintiff it would simply mean that his case had been upheld.

⁴⁴⁹ One must not confuse ‘law court’ ideas with ‘relational’ ones. As we have seen, the notion of ‘relational’ is a fuzzy way of talking about the covenant. Law court and covenant belong together but not in the sense that the ‘relational’ language of the latter intrudes upon the ‘law court’ metaphor. As soon as we think of the ‘relationship’ between the defendant and the judge it is clear that the ‘forensic’ image no longer works.

⁴⁵⁰ It is the combination of covenant faithfulness with forensic righteousness (especially impartiality) that makes the thesis of Kaminsky 2007 (that the creator God simply does have a ‘favourite nation clause’) so implausible in terms of Israel’s scriptures themselves.

⁴⁵¹ e.g. Rom. 14.10–12; 2 Cor. 5.10; etc.

⁴⁵² McCormack 2004, 113–7 stresses the importance of the covenant as the context for justification; but my sense is that ‘covenant’ here has a different meaning from that which I am proposing. The result is that he wants to include ‘transformation’ within justification itself, which as I argue below is not true to Paul (see also e.g. 117, where McCormack summarizes Calvin: ‘God’s declaration in justification is revelation, and revelation transforms the whole person’). Vanhoozer 2011, 251 is I think closer to the mark. Fee 1995, 322 n. 35 emphasizes ‘God’s covenant loyalty to his people, and thus his and their relationship based on the new covenant’, which seems to me exactly right, but he then gently plays this off against ‘forensic’ meanings. I think they are mutually interpenetrating and mutually interpretative.

⁴⁵³ The caricature of my and other views offered by Carson 2004, 50–2 – with, as usual, minimal reference to my actual writings – is simply a way of not attending to what is being said.

⁴⁵⁴ On all this see esp. Yinger 1999; and, behind that, the important article of Snodgrass 1986.

⁴⁵⁵ Often forgotten in this connection is 1 Cor. 4.1–5 (see below); 4.5 in particular is very close to Rom. 2.16 and 2.29. An Anglican theologian is wryly amused to see a polemic against this Pauline emphasis, in its expression by a C17 archbishop, in Collins 2004, 180.

⁴⁵⁶ cf. Rom. 1.32; 5.18 (*dikaiōsis zōēs*); 7.10; 8.4, 9–11. [See above, e.g. 900f.](#)

⁴⁵⁷ Rom. 8.1, 2.

⁴⁵⁸ cf. e.g. Ex. 23.2f., 6–9; Lev. 19.15; Dt. 16.18–20; 24.17; 27.19; Ps. 82.2; Prov. 18.5; Eccl. 5.8; Isa. 10.2; Am. 5.12. For the judge ‘declaring one in the right and the other in the wrong’ cf. e.g. Dt. 25.1; for God doing this, 1 Kgs. 8.32.

⁴⁵⁹ Eisenbaum 2009, 237 reports that on one occasion ‘the student reader thought she had a typo in her Bible because she did not believe that Paul could say that the doers of the law would be justified’.

⁴⁶⁰ cf. e.g. O’Brien 2004, 268, quoting Avemarie 2000, 274 to the effect that the promise of life in Rom. 2 ‘is never fulfilled because “all are under sin” ’ as in 3.9. Avemarie insists (*ib.*) that the whole of 1.18–3.20 is to be seen as ‘*remota gratia*’: a classic case of allowing the big picture to trump the tell-tale details. The whole question is helpfully laid out in Bird 2007, ch. 7.

⁴⁶¹ Job 34.11; Ps. 62.12 [LXX13]; Prov. 24.12; cf. too Isa. 59.18; Jer. 17.10; 21.14; 32.19; Ezek. 18.30; 33.20; Sir. 11.26; 16.12–14; 35.24; 51.30; 4 Ez. 7.35.

⁴⁶² See the discussion in e.g. Bassler 1982.

⁴⁶³ e.g. at Rom. 6.13, 16, 18, 19, 20; 8.10 (all *dikaiosynē*); 8.30 (twice), 33 (*dikaioō*); 8.4 (*dikaiōma*).

⁴⁶⁴ cf. *krinō*, (2.1 (twice), 3); *katakrinō* (2.1); *krima* (2.2, 3); *dikaiokrisia* (2.5); the double *krithēsontai* and *dikaiōthēsontai* (2.13), and the final *krinei* of 2.16. Cf. too the warning of 2.27. It is this entire train of thought to which Paul is referring back in 8.1, 34.

⁴⁶⁵ I take *nomos* here, as normally in Paul, to refer to the Torah itself: [see below](#).

⁴⁶⁶ Phil. 1.6.

⁴⁶⁷ Rom. 8.33.

⁴⁶⁸ The only instances of *hyiothesia* in Paul are Rom. 8.15, 23; 9.4; Gal. 4.5; Eph. 1.5. The study of Byrne 1979 is still valuable.

⁴⁶⁹ 5.5: we are waiting eagerly, by the spirit and by faith, for the hope of righteousness (*hēmeis pneumatī ek pisteōs elpida dikaiōsynēs apekdechometha*). Here ‘righteousness’ is a *future* reality, and the role of the spirit in the patient waiting for it echoes Rom. 8 exactly, even verbally (cf. Rom. 8.19, 23, 25).

⁴⁷⁰ See the various positions represented by e.g. Hays 2005 [1989b], 119–42; Schreiner 1998, 74; Watts 1999.

⁴⁷¹ This presumably stands behind the otherwise surprising 1 Tim. 3.16, *edikaiōthē en pneumatī*.

⁴⁷² It may be asked whether there is a distinction between *apokalyptetai* in 1.17 and *pephanerōtai* in 3.21. The present tense of the first seems to focus on what happens, and goes on happening, whenever Paul announces the gospel and someone comes to faith, while the perfect tense of the latter focuses on what *has* happened, a past event with continuing meaning and effect, in the events concerning Jesus (so e.g. Cranfield 1975, 202). Whether there is also a subtle shading of the verbal meaning (‘revealed’, with the emphasis on something not previously seen now being disclosed, and ‘made manifest’, with the emphasis on something previously only faintly glimpsed being now spread out for all to see) is more debatable: Cranfield suggests that *apokalypteo* and *phaneroō* are at this period more or less synonymous. I venture the possibility that *apokalypteō* highlights the sudden dawning of faith when a person is grasped by the truth of the gospel, while here at least *phaneroō* may indicate the visible spreading out of the truth of the divine righteousness before all peoples (cf. 3.27–30).

⁴⁷³ For ‘obeying the gospel’ see Rom. 10.16; 2 Thess. 1.8. This is cognate of course with *hypakoē pisteōs* in Rom. 1.5 and elsewhere. A similarly comprehensive description of the different aspects of justification, but importantly without the covenantal dimension, is provided by Schnelle 2005 [2003], 470.

⁴⁷⁴ This is clearly expressed by e.g. Caird 1976, 138.

⁴⁷⁵ See the earlier discussion of Gen. 38.26; 1 Sam. 24.17.

⁴⁷⁶ Vanhoozer 2011, 248 (*italics original*).

⁴⁷⁷ Thiselton 2000, 455f.; his 455–8 constitute an extremely important statement on how the whole language-system of justification works, a statement which deserves to be brought out of its hiding one-third of the way through a book even larger than the present one. He builds on the work of Searle 1969 and Austin 1975, and here cites and discusses Wolterstorff 1995, 75–94 and others. Vanhoozer also cites, helpfully, Searle 1979, 26.

⁴⁷⁸ I am not clear that this *declarative* sense is fully grasped in Käsemann’s statement (1980 [1973], 112f.) that God ‘makes the ungodly person a new creature’ and in that sense ‘really makes him

righteous'. The word 'righteous' is too slippery in English at least, and I suspect *gerecht* in German may be too: this is bound to appear as though 'righteous' means 'in principle a morally upright person', which corresponds to the Tridentine view that one might have expected Käsemann to reject. See too, rightly, Schreiner 2001, 205 (correcting his earlier position in Schreiner 1998); and see the discussion in Bird 2007, 12–14. This highlights the danger with using 'rectify' for 'justify': it can easily imply that something has happened in justification which will not actually happen until final 'justification', i.e. until the resurrection.

⁴⁷⁹ Schreiner 2010, 155 seems to me to misunderstand this, suggesting that judges do not, themselves, 'make' anyone 'righteous'. If 'righteousness' here is *the status conferred by the judge's decision* then, in that sense only, 'making someone righteous' is precisely what the judge does at the end of the trial. McCormack 2004, 107 likewise thinks that 'the human judge can only *describe* what he hopes to be the real state of affairs' (italics original) so that 'the human judge's judgment is in no sense effective; it does not create the reality it depicts. It seeks only to conform to an already given reality.' But he then, unlike Schreiner, contrasts this with the divine verdict: 'God's verdict differs in that it creates the reality it declares ... so a judicial act for God is never merely judicial; it is itself transformative.' This is (a) a false antithesis: both the human judge and the divine judge do indeed *create* the new *status*; (b) a false inference: McCormack (much like Gorman 2009, 101) is confusing the transformation of *status* with the transformation of *character*, which, though inseparable in fact, is not what is denoted by the language of 'justification' itself. The danger with making a word do something outside its job-description is that the job it was supposed to do gets neglected.

⁴⁸⁰ Contra e.g. Schreiner 2001, 201, who, though seeing the importance of the divine judge, then slides into vague and essentially unbiblical formulations. Vanhoozer 2011, 258 tries to resist the point by saying that 'the Reformers were talking about the *status* of *Christ's* covenant faithfulness' (italics original). To this I reply (a) that the Reformers were not usually talking about the covenant at all, at least not in the sense that I have been using that term; (b) that many of their successors have been allergic to covenantal ideas; (c) more importantly, both the Reformers and their successors regularly elided the idea of 'Christ's righteousness' with that of 'God's righteousness', wrongly interpreting the latter as 'the righteous status' of God's people, and taking references to the divine righteousness (e.g. Rom. 3.21), read in that sense, as references to the former, thus missing the point Paul was actually making and elevating something he was not saying to the status of a central doctrine.

⁴⁸¹ The much-loved Isa. 61.10, often cited in this connection (cf. Job 29.14; Bar. 5.2), does not refer to the righteousness of the covenant God himself, but, as with Phil. 3.9 (see below), to the righteous status (i.e. here that of covenant membership) which is the gift of the covenant God.

⁴⁸² Rom. 3.19f.: the law court metaphor is apparent throughout.

⁴⁸³ cf. e.g. Ex. 23.2, 6, 7 [*ou dikaiōseis ton asebē heneken dōrōn*]; Lev. 19.15; Dt. 1.17; 10.17; 16.18–20; 24.17; 27.19; 2 Chr. 19.6f.; Ps. 82.2; Prov. 17.15; 18.5; 24.23f.; 28.21; Eccl. 5.8; Isa. 5.23 [*hoi dikaiountes ton asebē heneken dōrōn*]; 10.2; Jer. 5.28; Am. 5.12; Mal. 2.9. Passages which include a reference to the judgment of the one God himself include Ex. 23.7; Dt. 1.17; 10.17; 2 Chr. 19.6f.

⁴⁸⁴ See particularly Käsemann 1980 [1973], 112f.; Jewett 2007, 314f. Jewett stresses, against various commentators, that 'faith' is not itself a surreptitious form of 'religious qualification'.

⁴⁸⁵ See B. W. Longenecker 1990.

⁴⁸⁶ See O'Brien 2004, 292f.

⁴⁸⁷ I understand the reasons for the drift in this direction (the 'active obedience of Christ', as in some strains of Calvinist and indeed Anglican theology). Even Vanhoozer's gracious advocacy (2011, 250f.) cannot overturn the fact that Paul never puts it like this, and that he arrives by quite other means at the goal towards which this formulation is aiming. Yes: the faithful are accounted

righteous ‘in the Messiah’; but this is not because the Messiah possesses something called ‘righteousness’, earned by his own personal covenantal lawkeeping, which he can share with or ‘impute’ to his people, but because the Messiah *is* the covenant-people-in-person, demonstrated as such by his being raised from the dead. Since I regard the word ‘righteousness’ as having ‘covenant membership/faithfulness’ as one of its Pauline meanings, one could then say that, since those who are ‘in the Messiah’ have his ‘covenant membership/faithfulness’ reckoned to them, this counts as a form of ‘imputed righteousness’; but again Paul never says that, and this is not at all what the advocates of ‘imputation’ are thinking of.

⁴⁸⁸ So, rightly, e.g. Hays 2002 [1983], xxix–xxiii. This point goes back to Calvin, and is one of the most important in the present debate (joining together ‘incorporative’ and ‘forensic’ languages, as Paul himself does). McCormack 2004, 110 seems to me wrong to make the idea merely functional, speaking of a ‘conformity of my life to [Christ’s] life of obedience ... a union of wills’. He is anxious to avoid a ‘Greek ontology of pure being’ according to which the idea of ‘union with Christ’ would mean ‘a substantial participation in the being of Christ’ (112); but might there not be – as Schweitzer thought – precisely a *Hebrew* concept of such participation?

⁴⁸⁹ This is the point which, going back within the protestant tradition at least to Calvin, is rightly stressed by Vanhoozer 2011. I had thought I had emphasized it in earlier writings, but in case I had not made it sufficiently clear I am glad to do so now. On ‘adoption’ see now the important study of Burke 2006.

⁴⁹⁰ Rom. 3.24; Gal. 2.17; Phil. 3.8f.; all translated fairly literally.

⁴⁹¹ Among the voluminous recent discussions see the helpful historical note in McGowan 2006, 153f.; and see Bird 2007, ch. 4. Gundry 2004 is in my view correct to contest the classic notion of ‘imputation’, though his own way of putting things creates to my mind almost as many problems again.

⁴⁹² See above, 874–85.

⁴⁹³ For a more extended discussion, see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 533–41. Rom. 5–8 is Paul’s ‘argument for assurance’; and at its heart we find crucial passages such as 8.5–8, 12–17.

⁴⁹⁴ Rom. 4.24f.; 10.9.

⁴⁹⁵ Rom. 4.18–22, reversing 1.18–26.

⁴⁹⁶ Rom. 10.5–11.

⁴⁹⁷ Bird 2007, 173 says that this effectively shifts the material cause of future justification from christology to pneumatology. I deny the disjunction: the spirit is in any case the Messiah’s own spirit, and everything the spirit does is done by applying the work of the Messiah, which remains foundational.

⁴⁹⁸ Jewett 2007, 315: ‘The Spirit was understood to evoke positive responses to the gospel, making persons know in the depth of their despair and dishonor that together they could call God “Abba” and live as honored “children of God”.’ One might want to integrate Jewett’s sociological ‘despair and dishonor’ back into the more usual theological analysis, but his point about the sovereign faith-evoking work of the spirit is well taken. So too e.g. McCormack 2004, 108: ‘Paul understands faith to be a gift of God wrought by his grace in the human heart.’ Quite so (against e.g. Schreiner 2001, 194, 208 who suggests that the gift of the spirit is consequent upon justification). Historically, this brings us to the questions often considered under the Latin tag of *ordo salutis*, the attempt to line up chronologically the various elements which take someone from the unregenerate state of sin to the ultimate state of salvation (see e.g. McGowan 2006). Paul does not discuss these questions, though some have seen Rom. 8.29f. as a hint in that direction.

⁴⁹⁹ 1 Cor. 12.3; Rom. 10.9f. Here too the spirit is present just behind the argument, through the quotation from Joel 2.32 in Rom. 10.13: [see below, e.g. 1077, 1164–6, 1249](#).

⁵⁰⁰ 1 Thess. 1.5; 2.13.

⁵⁰¹ Phil. 1.29; 1.6.

⁵⁰² Eph. 2.8.

⁵⁰³ cf. e.g. Rom. 10.14–21.

⁵⁰⁴ cf. again Rom. 10.9; cf. 4.24f.

⁵⁰⁵ See e.g. Bird 2007, 103f., 184.

⁵⁰⁶ cf. e.g. O'Brien 2004, 292.

⁵⁰⁷ This kind of universalism is implicit in the theology of 'rectification' offered by Martyn and de Boer: if God has 'rectified' the world, the presence or absence of explicit faith becomes irrelevant.

⁵⁰⁸ [See below, 746](#) and elsewhere.

⁵⁰⁹ That answers O'Brien 2004, 292, who suggests that the 'net effect' of seeing faith as the result of the spirit's work would be 'to undermine the basis of assurance'. The Paul of Phil. 1.6 would disagree.

⁵¹⁰ Rom. 8.29; Gal. 1.15; etc.

⁵¹¹ Gal. 2.20; 1 Cor. 15.10; Col. 1.29. Cf. again Eph. 2.8: 'This doesn't happen on your own initiative; it's God's gift.'

⁵¹² Bird 2007, 174 stresses that the statements of assurance in Rom. 5.1 and 8.1 look back to the work of Jesus. So they do; but they are both explained, in the latter case at length, by the work of the spirit.

⁵¹³ For an updated and eirenic – but to my mind inconclusive – continuation of this conversation see Reumann, Fitzmyer and Quinn 1982; and see the suggestive article of Lane 2006. Part of the trouble here, to be sure, is that the word 'grace' is easily misunderstood: for Paul it is a shorthand way of speaking of the gracious and utterly merciful act of the one God, but one can easily (but wrongly) suppose that it refers to a kind of spiritual or supernatural substance. Bird 2007, 67 n. 33 helpfully skewers the false antithesis between the 'imputation' and 'infusion' of 'righteousness'.

⁵¹⁴ Gorman 2009, 4 is perhaps misleading to speak of an 'easy interchange' here; the passage is complex, and Paul's language is precise throughout.

⁵¹⁵ Gorman 2009, 2, 40, 44. Oddly, at the same time Gorman seems to omit other key dimensions of justification, such as the place of Abraham or the Pauline emphasis on the coming together of Jew and gentile (e.g. 53).

⁵¹⁶ I may perhaps invoke, on my own account, 1 Cor. 4.5.

⁵¹⁷ Seifrid 2004, 149, misunderstanding this point, accuses me of saying that justification 'is construed as a pronouncement upon a human quality'. In the same passage he accuses John Piper of 'standing outside a Reformational framework' (149) and of advocating something 'nearly Tridentine' (150). Let the reader judge – or perhaps, in view of 1 Cor. 4, refrain from doing so.

⁵¹⁸ Schreiner 2001, 192 explains how he had previously supposed that 'righteousness' could be both forensic and transformational and how he was persuaded out of that view. Unfortunately the change did not lead him to embrace a covenantal meaning, which would not have undermined the 'forensic' one but rather enhanced it. Gorman 2009, 54f. is right to say that 'the judicial image must be understood within a wider covenantal, relational, participatory and transformative framework' (and, we might add, 'apocalyptic' and 'salvation-historical' as well, to make the party more or less complete); but to understand something within a framework is not the same as understanding the meaning of the word itself. The hands on my clock must be understood within the framework of the

whole mechanism, and of my need to know the time; but the hands are not the same thing as the pendulum, or indeed as my daily schedule.

[519](#) On Paul's view of the law see further [below, 1032–8](#).

[520](#) Ex. 4.22.

[521](#) Paul, of course, reaches back behind this 'first', to the ancient Hebrew notion of the divine foreknowledge and plan (Rom. 8.28f.), but he never spells out how he understands these.

[522](#) Bird 2007, 30 is wrong, then, to lump my view along with those of Wrede, Schweitzer and others; see too Schreiner 2001, 192–4.

[523](#) As, for instance, in Rom. 6.1–14; 12.1–2; 13.11–14; 1 Thess. 5.1–11.

[524](#) See Schnelle 2005 [2003], 465. On baptism [see above, 417–27](#); and e.g. Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 533–6.

[525](#) 1 Cor. 12.1–3, 12–13.

[526](#) Gal. 3.27, in the context of 3.26–9.

[527](#) Rom. 6.11 with 4.3–5, 10f., 23f.; cf. Gal. 2.19f.

[528](#) Despite an older view which insisted that 'present resurrection' was found only in Eph. and Col., it is in fact quite clear in Rom. 6: 'you' must 'reckon yourselves' to be 'alive to God' (6.11). This is not an invitation to imagine something which is not true. Rather, it is (a) the direct meaning of 6.5, 8 and (b) the necessary prelude to 6.12–14: the baptized are to yield themselves to God *hōsei ek nekrōn zōntas*, 'as those alive from the dead'. Unless there is a sense in which they are already raised, this is mere fantasy. See further e.g. Catchpole 2004; Gorman 2009, 74–6; and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 538; 2003 [*RSG*], 251–4.

[529](#) Rom. 6.11.

[530](#) It is noteworthy that the *Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Collins and Harlow 2010), while naturally having an article on 'election', has none on 'justification'.

[531](#) I have recently tried to set this out afresh (see Wright 2009 [*Justification*] chs. 5, 6 and 7). What follows now reflects both continuity with, and development beyond, what was said there.

[532](#) It is noticeable that throughout Bultmann's account of Paul in his *Theology*, the actual arguments of whole passages are very rarely mentioned.

[533](#) It is remarkable that Schreiner 2010, 150–76, manages to expound Gal. 2.15–21 without discussing the question Paul and Peter were actually facing, treating the entire passage instead as being only about how sinners come to be 'in the right'. This is clearly vital, but not to the exclusion of the question of the status of believing gentiles, which continues to be the subject of ch. 3.

[534](#) This scarcely means that Paul, faced with the rival 'missionaries', was being 'equally cliquish and coercive' (so Eastman 2006, 313). This assumes, first, that Paul is objecting to his opponents because they were teaching the wrong sort of religion while he was teaching the right sort, whereas in fact he was announcing eschatological fulfilment. (Eastman 2010, 370, following Martyn 1997a, 41, tries to get off the hook of making Paul anti-Jewish by suggesting, despite the whole argument of Gal. including such passages as 1.13, 2.15 and the whole Abraham-argument, that 'there is no Jewish horizon in Galatians'; but this is absurd.) Second, it assumes that his criterion for the right sort of religion was some kind of modern 'inclusive' relativism, whereas his criterion for eschatological fulfilment was the crucified Messiah himself. His objection to the missionaries in 4.17 was not that they were being 'exclusive' or 'cliquish' or even 'coercive' per se, but that they were defining the people of God in terms of Torah rather than in terms of the (crucified) Messiah, as in 2.15–21. Paul's ways of dealing with threats to that identity, in the Corinthian correspondence as well as Gal., would scarcely meet the stern and inflexible demands of today's liberal relativism. On Eastman see also Dunne 2013.

[535](#) On the ‘but’ here, as a translation of *ean mē*, see Hays 2000, 237 in dialogue with e.g. R. N. Longenecker 1990, 83f.; Dunn 1993, 137f. Hays has recently pointed out to me that *ei mē* in Rev. 21.27 strongly supports the reading ‘not ... but ...’, as opposed to the reading ‘not ... except in the case of ...’. We might also compare e.g. 1 Cor. 14.6.

[536](#) Though cf. Campbell 2011.

[537](#) Watson 1986 argued for pragmatism, but in the second edn. (Watson 2007 [1986]) has modified this considerably. Barclay 1996, ch. 13 sees Paul as an anomalous Diaspora Jew; cf. above, 400, 445.

[538](#) Nor, by the way, does this ‘faith’ consist in ‘believing true doctrine’ – in believing, for instance, the ‘right’ things about ‘justification by faith’ itself. That is, I think, a problem within some neo-Reformed writers. I have addressed this question elsewhere (e.g. Wright 1997 [*What St Paul*, UK edn.] 159).

[539](#) [See n. 533 above](#), referring to Schreiner as one example among several.

[540](#) See Hays 2000, 236f.

[541](#) Paul, adding ‘by works of the law’ (as in Romans), has omitted ‘in your sight’, and (again as in Romans) has substituted ‘all flesh’ (*pasa sarx*) for ‘all that lives’. The complexities this introduces are not our present concern: cf. Hays 2000, 240f.

[542](#) The other uses are 1.4; 3.22 ([see below](#)). To the argument that e.g. Gal. 3.10–14 is about how people are delivered from sin, I answer that yes, there is an implicit deliverance there, but the point of the passage is still about how ‘the blessing of Abraham’ comes upon the gentiles and the promised spirit is outpoured. Dealing with sin is the means whereby the larger divine purpose is accomplished; Paul presupposes (and occasionally refers to) the former in order here to expound the latter.

[543](#) 1.4.

[544](#) 2.20.

[545](#) Sin: 1.4 (the formula already quoted); 2.17 (in the context of the discussion about ‘gentile sinners’); 3.22 (‘scripture shut up everything under sin’ – with ‘sin’ here being a power that enslaves rather than a deed of wrongdoing). Contrast the literally dozens of references to ‘sin’ in Romans, especially chs. 6 and 7.

[546](#) de Boer 2011, 28 n. 38, notes that Gal. does not use the language of ‘salvation’, but says he is using it as a ‘convenient shorthand’, despite his own warning (2) against importing ideas from one letter to another.

[547](#) The fact that this phrase is unique in Paul does not necessarily mean he is quoting a formula (see de Boer 2011, 29f.). Even if he is, that certainly does not mean that he is quoting it in order to disagree with it. He is talking about being snatched out of ‘the present evil age’, for which this verb is appropriate, rather than being ‘saved’, rescued, from sin and death. The former alludes to a situation out of which one is rescued; the latter, to the enemies from whose threat one is delivered. The two are obviously close, denoting the same event but giving it a different shade or nuance.

[548](#) de Boer 2011, 166f. proposes that receiving the spirit is the major theme of the whole section, though he has to assume its presence behind Paul’s references to ‘the promise’. Since he does not want to attach this too closely to a positive reading of Abraham, this seems to me to cause various problems, though there is no space to take this further here.

[549](#) Witherington 1998, 199 speaks of an ‘appeal to the supernatural work of God’ as a familiar greco-roman argument. This may be so but the link with the Abrahamic promise is in my view at least equally strong. R. N. Longenecker 1990, 101f. criticizes Barrett 1947, 2 for speaking of this as a ‘pragmatic argument’, and says that this comes from not seeing any continuity of argument between this passage and the rest of the letter. This is undoubtedly a frequent problem, but Longenecker himself does not appear to note the specific link with Abraham.

⁵⁵⁰ The *kathōs* should not be reduced to a shorthand for *kathōs gegraptai*, ‘as it is written’, as though it is merely a formula introducing a quotation (with e.g. Witherington 1998, 213; against e.g. R. N. Longenecker 1990, 112 who takes Abraham simply as an ‘example’ here; cf. too Martyn 1997a, 296f.; de Boer 2011, 189). Dunn 1993, 160 takes it as a quotation-formula, but stresses the ‘implicit equation of “receiving the Spirit” and “being reckoned righteous”’, seeing the two as ‘different ways of describing the opening up of a positive relationship with God’. Once one translates that back into covenantal language it makes what seems to me the right point.

⁵⁵¹ Rom. 4.13; [see above, 849](#); and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 495f.

⁵⁵² This conclusion is strengthened by passages like 2 Cor. 1.22; 5.5; Eph. 1.14 in which the spirit is the *arrabōn*, the ‘down-payment’, of what is to come (in Eph. this is explicitly the ‘inheritance’, coming at the end of the prayer which is itself a quasi-exodus narrative). Dunn 1993, 153 emphasizes both the vital and personal nature of the spirit-experience (i.e. this is not just a ‘logical deduction’!) and also the fact that Paul saw receiving the spirit as a fulfilment of OT prophecy of the ‘eschatological hope of Israel’ (Isa. 32.15; Ezek. 37.4–14; Joel 2.28f., picked up in second-Temple writings e.g. 1QS 4.18–21). See too Williams 1997, 85: the spirit was the sign of incorporation ‘into the deity’s end-time people’.

⁵⁵³ 3.6f.

⁵⁵⁴ 3.8f.

⁵⁵⁵ More details [above, 863–7](#).

⁵⁵⁶ See the different positions in e.g. Hays 2000, 262 (the second clause refers to all believers) and Witherington 1998, 240 (only to Jewish believers, though of course not denying that gentiles too receive the spirit). Hays says that ‘the experience of the Spirit is interpreted as the fulfilment of what Scripture has promised: the blessing of all nations.’ Martyn 1997a, 322–4, predictably tries to keep plenty of clear blue water between Abraham and the fulfilment of promise.

⁵⁵⁷ The link of the promised spirit with the promise to Abraham is denied by e.g. Kwon 2004, 108–11. Schreiner 2010, 218 n. 100 argues, against this, that the Abrahamic promise can have more than one aspect; I am suggesting that Paul sees the spirit as the foretaste of ‘inheriting the world’. De Boer more or less identifies the two clauses in 3.14 (2011, 195), and states (197 n. 283) that Paul ‘ignores the promises made to Abraham concerning a multitude of physical descendants who would inherit the land’. I do not think it is Paul who is ignoring these promises.

⁵⁵⁸ 3.23–6.

⁵⁵⁹ Hays 2000, 271. Dunn 1993, 202 states that ‘Christ Jesus’ has ‘replaced ethnic Israel as the social context of this sonship’.

⁵⁶⁰ Ex. 4.22 (cf. Hos. 1.10; 11.1; Sir. 36.17; 3 *Macc.* 6.28; *Jub.* 1.23–5; 4 *Ez.* 6.55–9; *Pss. Sol.* 17.26f.).

⁵⁶¹ 1 Cor. 4.1–4. The Corinthians seem to have been ‘assessing’ Paul for his rhetorical skills (so Witherington 1995, 137f.; Hays 1997, 66).

⁵⁶² 1 Cor. 4.5.

⁵⁶³ Thiselton 2000, 341f. defends this link with Rom. and Gal. against e.g. R. F. Collins 1999, 173 who considers it a different point. See too Fitzmyer, [cited below](#).

⁵⁶⁴ Fitzmyer 2008, 213 says this is not about ‘justification’ in the usual sense, ‘because it is not a matter of *pistis*’. But that, according to Paul in v. 2, is exactly what it is. Paul’s ‘doctrines’ do not live in a world detached from all his other concerns.

⁵⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 3.13.

⁵⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 5.12f.

⁵⁶⁷ 5.3.

[568](#) 1 Cor. 5.5. See the discussion in e.g. Witherington 1995, 158; Thiselton 2000, 397–400.

[569](#) 1 Cor. 11.29–32. The older article of Moule 1964 is still valuable. The ‘punishment’ is clearly intended to have a positive role: see Thiselton 2000, 898 and e.g. Hays 1997, 202: ‘Where the church exercises such disciplinary discernment, God’s judgment is averted; where the church fails to exercise discernment, God’s judgment intervenes to prevent them falling under final condemnation.’

[570](#) Or, with Sampley 2002, 936, it might be seen simply as a ‘wake-up call’.

[571](#) For a similar train of thought cf. e.g. Ps. 94.12f.; Heb. 12.3–11.

[572](#) 1 Cor. 6.2f.

[573](#) Dan. 7.22, 27; cf. Wis. 3.8; Sir. 4.15; 1 QpHab 5.4; 1 En. 1.9; 95.3; 104.2; *Test. Abr.* 1—4; cf. Mt. 19.28; Lk. 22.30; Rev. 2.26; 20.4, etc. Rosner 1990 suggests that this theme may echo Moses’ appointment of assistant judges in Ex. 18.13–27.

[574](#) 5.12f.; 6.1–4, 9f., 13f.

[575](#) See the discussion in Thrall 1994, 2000, 236–9.

[576](#) Ezek. 11.19; 36.26. On the complex interweaving of biblical passages throughout this chapter see Hays 1989a, ch. 4.

[577](#) In 11.19 the MT has *leb echad*, ‘one heart’, but some mss read *hdsh*, ‘new’, as in 18.31; 36.26.

[578](#) Ex. 31.18; 32.15; Dt. 9.10f.

[579](#) In my own translation I have rendered *sarkinais* at the end of the verse as ‘beating’ rather than ‘fleshly’, to make it clear that, unlike *sarkikos*, the word *sarkinos* carries no pejorative overtones: the point is the conformity between ‘the living God’ and the living (as opposed to stony) hearts.

[580](#) Jer. 31.31–4.

[581](#) Quinton 1995.

[582](#) Paul is not, then, referring simply to a ‘hermeneutical principle’, that by the spirit one can now interpret Torah differently; [see below](#).

[583](#) See Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 9.

[584](#) On this, as on much else, I am indebted to Scott Hafemann (though without endorsing all his conclusions): see, on this point, Hafemann 1995, 225–31.

[585](#) Exod. 33.14.

[586](#) Exod. 34.29–35.

[587](#) Exod. 40.34–8.

[588](#) On 2 Cor. [cf. also above, 874–85](#), esp. on the controversial 5.21.

[589](#) Against e.g. Cook 2011, 358, who supposes that Paul is attacking opponents who contend that ‘observing the law will bring salvation from the bondage to sin.’ Cook says, dramatically, that Phil. 3.2 ‘essentially summarizes the core of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians’.

[590](#) The claim is obviously cognate with Rom. 2.29, which as we saw goes with passages like 2 Cor. 3.3–6, and implicitly invokes the entire biblical and Jewish picture of ‘heart-circumcision’, as in e.g. Dt. 10.16; 30.6; Jer. 4.4; 9.25f.; Ezek. 44.7, 9; *Jub.* 1.23; 1QpHab 11.13; 1QS 5.5; 1QH 10 (=2).18; 23 (=18).20; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1.305; so e.g. Cousar 2009, 69.

[591](#) As we see in 3.2: ‘we worship by the spirit of God’ (which I now believe to be the right reading, despite my own translation: see e.g. Caird 1976, 134; Metzger 1994 [1971], 547).

[592](#) Dunn 2008 [2005], 469 n. 2. Dunn’s own chapter (ib., 469–90) is I think substantially on target, though at certain points I think he could have gone further (see below). Refs. to Dunn in what follows are to this chapter.

[593](#) Harink 2003, though strongly critical of my reading of this passage (157f.), offers no alternative. The brief account in W. S. Campbell 2008, 149f. repeats Harink’s bizarre charges against

the present writer (it is at least a refreshing novelty to be accused of holding ‘a modern liberal form of individualism’, the very opposite of what some of my critics think I believe). This marginalizing of Phil. 3.2–11 is cognate with the fact that, as mentioned above, neither writer discusses Rom. 2.25–9, apart from a couple of sentences in Campbell 2008, 104 which do not address the heart of the matter.

⁵⁹⁴ Dunn 2008 [2005], 473 (my italics). I am not sure, though, that O’Brien 1991, 358, cited by Dunn, provides an example of ‘supersessionism’ in pointing out that the definite article in ‘the circumcision’ makes an exclusive claim. He is actually saying, I think, much the same thing as Dunn.

⁵⁹⁵ Which is, of course, what we find by implication in the work of Martyn 1997a; 1997b, and others: see *Interpreters*.

⁵⁹⁶ See Bockmuehl 1998, 192.

⁵⁹⁷ cp. Rom. 8.17. The present passage joins together the themes which Gorman 2009 explores, though he does not use it particularly to develop his theory of transformational justification.

⁵⁹⁸ Note also the unique ‘my lord’ in 3.8: see e.g. O’Brien 1991, 388.

⁵⁹⁹ Phil. 3.2f. [See above, 362f.](#)

⁶⁰⁰ Phil. 3.4–11.

⁶⁰¹ Rightly, Dunn 2008 [2005], 473.

⁶⁰² cf. RSG 150–3.

⁶⁰³ 1 Cor. 8.1–3; Gal. 4.9.

⁶⁰⁴ Isa. 11.9; Jer. 9.24. On ‘knowing God’ in Paul cf. e.g. Rom. 11.33; 2 Cor. 2.14; 4.6; 10.5; and cf. esp. 1 Cor. 13.12.

⁶⁰⁵ Caird 1976, 137, comparing Gal. 2.20; 6.14.

⁶⁰⁶ Fowl 2005, 154 points out that Paul here shifts from being the subject of the narrative to being part of a story in which the Messiah is the subject.

⁶⁰⁷ As e.g. Seifrid 1992, 173f.

⁶⁰⁸ Against e.g. O’Brien 1991, 384, 394. O’Brien is responding to Sanders 1983, 43–5, but as he notes Sanders may not have made the best case that could be made for a ‘non-legalistic’ reading. Hooker 2000, 526 points out that NIV’s ‘legalistic righteousness’ is unwarranted. See too Dunn 2008 [2005], 476 n. 28.

⁶⁰⁹ Against Bockmuehl 1998, 201–5. I do not think Bockmuehl has explained in his commentary, even at 188 where he seems to approach the question, how this repeated emphasis fits together with his fine exposition of Jewish nationalist ‘zeal’ (194–201). Despite what he says at 201, it is not clear from vv. 5–6 that we are dealing with ‘a human quality of uprightness in relation to the requirements of the Torah’. 4QMMT, which he cites, does not help his case, as I have shown in my essay on the text (now in *Perspectives* ch. 21). In my view Dunn 2008 [2005], 480 concedes too much at this point. Philippians 3.4–6 seems to me a classic statement of the Pharisaic position which I set out [in chapter 2 above \(179–93\)](#) and which forms the backdrop for so much Pauline thinking.

⁶¹⁰ See, rightly, Seifrid 1992, 174; Dunn 2008 [2005], 479f.

⁶¹¹ On the Messiah’s ‘faithfulness’, see above, esp. 836–51. On the present passage, see e.g. O’Brien 1991, 398f. (in favour of the reading here adopted); Fee 1995, 325f. (against it). Reumann 2008, 495f. comes down heavily in favour of the traditional objective genitive reading (once one has deciphered his telegraphic style); but then he has always tended to play safe and adopt traditional Lutheran readings. Hooker 2000, 528 appears to suggest that the Messiah’s faithfulness actually constitutes the ‘righteousness’ promised by Israel’s God to one who would be faithful. This might produce a new version of ‘imputed righteousness’, though she does not develop that idea.

⁶¹² This slices through the muddling debates, going back in recent times to e.g. Ziesler 1972 (cf. e.g. O'Brien 1991, 396), as to the meaning of *dikaïosynē* in 3.9. There is no need to suggest that the first use is 'moral' and the second 'forensic'. Both are 'covenantal' – which is interpreted forensically (on the analogy of the 'status' in the law court) and is closely connected to (though not identified with) a clutch of connected concepts including participation and transformation. Dunn 2008 [2005], 483f. speaks in terms of 'relationship with God', and of the law being a less 'immediate' means of this than faith. This threatens to collapse the discussion back into a comparison of different 'types of religion', from which a covenantal eschatology would free it completely. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 24, 27 shows how slippery the category of 'relationship' can be.

⁶¹³ I was first alerted to this by Hooker 1971, 355–7, but the point is now regularly made in many commentaries, e.g. the very helpful Bockmuehl 1998, 206; Dunn 2008 [2005], 487 n. 69, with other refs.; and Hooker herself again, half a lifetime later (2000, 527).

⁶¹⁴ Dunn 2008 [2005], 487f. stresses the coming together of 'forensic' and 'participationist' categories, but not the underlying and unifying covenantal theme.

⁶¹⁵ There is no verb for 'given to' or 'bestowed upon'; these are my attempts to flesh out *epi tē pistei*.

⁶¹⁶ With e.g. O'Brien 1991, 397f., against a line from at least Bultmann onwards. It is curious to find Schreiner (2001, 200) among the Bultmannites on this question; curiously still for one of his theological positions to accuse those who differ of 'reading Paul far too technically' (see his own proper warnings [206] about the danger when a word 'bleeds into other terms'). To be sure, Phil. 3 is covering very similar ground to Rom. 3.21–31 or 10.2–4, but Paul, here as ever, is sure-footed and says very precisely what he means. Tyndale's maxim, of never altering a syllable of God's word, comes to mind. Nor is it clear that saying the divine righteousness is a 'gift' actually belongs within the 'forensic' category where Schreiner tries to put it: what is 'forensic' about a 'gift'?

⁶¹⁷ Fowl 2005, 154 seems to me uncharacteristically confused at this point.

⁶¹⁸ Caird 1976, 138f.

⁶¹⁹ Among recent discussions cf. Arnold 1995; Dunn 1996, 23–35 (and see Dunn 1995); Sumney 1999, 192–208; Wilson 2005, 35–58; Witherington 2007, 107–11; Moo 2008, 46–60; Bird 2009b, 15–26.

⁶²⁰ Hooker 1973; my own view was first published in Wright 1986b, 23–30, 100–28, now followed and developed by Dunn in particular (see previous note). I drew attention to this again in Wright 2005a [*Fresh Perspectives*], 117 (despite the warning in e.g. Aletti 1993, 18). There is no space here to engage in a large and lively debate; sufficient to note the possibility that Col. 2 should be considered in connection with our present theme.

⁶²¹ cf. Philo *De Somn.* 2.127; *Leg.* 156, 245; *De Mut. Nom.* 223; *Omn. Prob. Lib.* 88; *Jos. Ap.* 2.47; *War* 2.119; *Ant.* 18.11. Cf. too *4 Macc.* 1.1; 5.10, 22; 7.7–9.

⁶²² See esp. Wilson 2005, 49, 57: 'the Colossian "heresy" is beyond question not yet a developed Gnosticism ... On the other hand it is significant that the most recent proposals [about the "heresy"] all in some way look back to Judaism ...'

⁶²³ Against e.g. Witherington 2007, 154. The passage in Phil. 3.2 also begins with *blepete*, 'watch out'.

⁶²⁴ BDAG 955 and LSJ 1671 give only two other uses: the AD C3 novelist Heliodorus (10.35) and the obscure C5 public speaker Aristaenetos (2.22).

⁶²⁵ He uses *doulagōgeō* in 1 Cor. 9.27; *aichmalōtizō* in Rom. 7.23; 2 Cor. 10.5; cf. 2 Tim. 3.6.

⁶²⁶ cf. Moulton and Turner 1906–63, 2.103, para. 42. I am grateful to Jamie Davies for his linguistic expertise on this point.

⁶²⁷ e.g. Moo 2008, 185; contrast the more positive note in Bird 2009b, 75. Dunn 1996, 147 simply records the proposal without comment, though it would cohere well with his own position.

⁶²⁸ [See above](#) on the difference between 1.17 (*apokalyptetai*) and 3.21 (*pephanerōtai*). On the divine righteousness [see above, 480, 801–4, 841, 928, 991; and below, 1003, 1054–6, etc.](#)

⁶²⁹ See Williams 1980; Hays 2005, 50–60, and elsewhere.

⁶³⁰ Ps. 143.1 [LXX 142.1]. *Alētheia* here corresponds to *emunah*, and *dikaiosynē* as usual to *tsedaqah*.

⁶³¹ [See above, 119f.](#)

⁶³² See more fully ‘Paul and the Patriarch’: *Perspectives* ch. 33.

⁶³³ The first is properly a ‘genitive of origin’, the second an ‘objective genitive’ (which requires that *dikaiosynē* is seen as implying an active verb, a quality which ‘does something’, ‘which prevails with God’). These are often muddled in discussion. See the diagram in Wright 1997 [*What St Paul*], 101.

⁶³⁴ Käsemann 1980 [1973], *passim* (esp. 23–30), and Käsemann 1969 [1965], ch. 7. The presupposition is expressed in Jewett 2007, 319: to mention the covenant ‘would retain the premise of Israel’s preeminent position as Yahweh’s sole covenant partner’. Paul’s exposition, in Romans and elsewhere, of covenant *renewal* shows how misleading this is; and the balance of 1.16 (‘to the Jew first, and also equally to the Greek’) indicates well enough how Paul understood the matter.

⁶³⁵ For the older German debates, see Brauch 1977. See further the major review in Williams 1980. Jewett 2007, 272–5 offers a curious mixture: in Rom. 3.21 he reads *dikaiosynē theou* as a subjective genitive, referring to ‘God’s saving activity’, rooting this in the OT but without reference to the covenant (272f.); then on 3.22 he says one should assume ‘that an objective genitive is employed here *as in the preceding verse*’ (my italics), referring to a ‘righteousness deriving from God’ which is ‘imparted to all’ who have faith. When he goes on to speak of people having ‘access to the righteousness of God’ (278) we seem to have left the biblical and Jewish base behind altogether.

⁶³⁶ On *pistis Christou* here see Jewett 2007, 277.

⁶³⁷ This is the proper emphasis of Jewett 2007; though Jewett then plays this off against the ‘forensic’ meaning of justification, to ‘avoid a legalistic theory of salvation’ (298) – a somewhat bizarre way of saying he wants to avoid the normal theories in which ‘legalism’ is seen as the problem, not the solution.

⁶³⁸ This also explains, in reverse as it were, the continuance of ‘justification’ language in the more obviously ‘incorporative’ section of the letter, chs. 6–8. [See also e.g. 891, 900–3, 1011–13, 1024f.](#)

⁶³⁹ [See above, 843–6.](#) The present account, as part of the theme of *justification*, is closely complementary to the earlier one, as part of the theme of the Messiah’s *faithfulness*.

⁶⁴⁰ I take it for granted that whether or not Paul was quoting, or even adapting, a formula, he used these words because they expressed exactly what he wanted to say.

⁶⁴¹ cf. *tsaddiq*, adjective: 41.26; 45.21; 49.24; 53.11; *tsdq*, verb: 43.9, 26; 45.25; 50.8; 53.11; *tsedeq*, noun: 41.2, 10; 42.6, 21; 45.8, 13, 19; 51.1, 5, 7; *tsedaqah*, noun: 45.8, 23, 24; 46.12, 13; 48.1, 18; 51.6, 8; 54.14, 17: thirty occurrences of the root, several of them clustered here and there.

⁶⁴² 49.5–7; note the link between 49.7 and 52.15.

⁶⁴³ ‘Wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed ... YHWH has laid on him the iniquity of us all.’

⁶⁴⁴ Isa. 53.10: ‘when you make his life an offering for sin’, an ‘*asham* in Heb., LXX *peri hamartias*, the regular translation of ‘sin offering’.

⁶⁴⁵ Isa. 53.11

[646](#) Isa. 55.3.

[647](#) [See above, 960f.](#)

[648](#) See *Perspectives* ch. 30.

[649](#) Jewett 2007, 297 suggests that ‘the Jewish concept of law is thus rendered ambivalent,’ and points to the development, in chs. 4, 7 and 8, of ‘an interpretation of the law that excludes boasting’. He might have included 2.25–9 and 10.1–13, too. Jewett is in my view wrong then to suggest (303) that at least in 3.31 Paul is thinking of ‘law in general’ rather than the Jewish law.

[650](#) cf. 8.3: the one God has done what Torah could not do, by sending the Messiah and the spirit.

[651](#) On Kaminsky 2007 see above, 806.

[652](#) That would be the proposal of a hard-edged ‘supersessionism’ (see above, 806f.), of which some are still accused. Jewett 2007, 330 is wrong to say that Moo 1996, 278f. and Schreiner 1998, 231 ‘believe that Paul eliminates Jews from Abraham’s promise’: they say what Jewett himself says, that Paul ‘includes Jewish as well as Gentile believers’.

[653](#) I refer to the patriarch as ‘Abraham’ throughout to avoid confusion, although of course he is ‘Abram’ until Gen. 17.

[654](#) Carson 2004, 51 n. 15 cites Seifrid 2001, 424 to the effect that in the Hebrew Bible the terms *berith* and *tsedeq* (*sic*: sc. *tsedaqah*) ‘almost never occur in close proximity’. He does not see that Gen. 15, one of Paul’s favourite texts, is precisely one of the places where they come together; or that in Rom. 4.11 Paul substitutes *dikaïosynē* for the LXX’s *diathēkē*. For fuller refutation of Seifrid on this point see e.g. Bird 2007, 36–9. Jewett 2007 manages to make it right through the chapter with only one mention of ‘covenant’, and that a negative one ([see above](#)).

[655](#) Jewett 2007, 343.

[656](#) See *Perspectives* ch. 33.

[657](#) See the discussion in *Perspectives* 579–84.

[658](#) Note, again: this ‘boast’ is not about ‘Look how morally virtuous I am; I don’t need saving,’ but about ‘I can be the one through whom God rescues the world.’

[659](#) Against e.g. Gathercole (and cf. Seifrid, who notices the reference but not the point). For the notion of ‘shield’, *magēn*, see Dt. 33.29, where Israel is ‘a people saved by YHWH, the shield of your help’, resulting in victory over enemies.

[660](#) This corresponds, therefore, to 11.23: *ean mē epimenōsin tē apistia*. [See below, 1161, 1213, 1215, 1221f., 1230f., 1238, 1245 and 1253.](#)

[661](#) On ‘inheriting the world’ in Judaism cf. e.g. *Jub.* 17.3; 22.14; 32.19; *Sir.* 44.21; *1 En.* 5.7; *4 Ez.* 7.59. See esp. [above, ch. 2](#), and esp. Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 495f. This promise has not been ‘spiritualized’, and to describe it as ‘a-territorial’ (Dunn 1988a, 213, following Davies 1974, 179), while correct in ruling out ‘a more nationalistic understanding’, could undermine Dunn’s proper emphasis (*ib.*) on ‘the restoration of God’s created order, of man to his Adamic status as steward of the rest of God’s creation’. See further Hester 1968.

[662](#) It is remarkable that Jewett 2007, 312 reverts here to the question of ‘whether righteousness can be earned by pious works’.

[663](#) As Jewett rightly sees (2007, 325f.).

[664](#) e.g. NRSV, which places parentheses around ‘for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”’, and then links to the remainder of v. 17 with a dash. This drastic punctuation, typical of many, is a way of admitting that the line of thought has not been understood. See further *Perspectives* 579.

⁶⁶⁵ Sir. 44.19–21 is an important part of the context here, both positively and negatively: Abraham was the ‘great father of many nations’, who kept the law of the Most High and entered into covenant with him, and proved faithful when tested (the Aqedah, in other words). God then promised him a countless family, to whom he would give ‘an inheritance from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth’ – in other words, the Davidic promise of Ps. 72.8 (cf. 89.25) (see too the echo of Gen. 12.3 LXX in Ps. 72.13). Paul sets aside Abraham’s lawkeeping, and (as we have seen) transfers the Aqedah from Abraham and Isaac to God and Jesus; but he retains the covenant (though for Paul this was made on God’s initiative, not Abraham’s), and the worldwide scope of the promise.

⁶⁶⁶ See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 500; and e.g. Adams 1997a.

⁶⁶⁷ nb. the ‘divine passive’ *paredothē*, ‘he was given up,’ at 4.25.

⁶⁶⁸ Rom. 2.28f. [See above, e.g. 362, 539, 812–4, 836f., 921–3, 958; and below, 1432, 1462.](#)

⁶⁶⁹ See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 558f.

⁶⁷⁰ Though Paul’s word, *karpophoreō*, is almost unknown in the LXX and certainly does not occur in Gen. 1. On the possible resonances of the word see Jewett 2007, 435.

⁶⁷¹ cf. e.g. Isa. 50.1 with 54.5–8; Hos. 1—2, esp. e.g. 2.16–19. Hos. 2.1, 23 is quoted by Paul in a similar context in Rom. 9.25f.

⁶⁷² For a discussion of the recent proposal of Campbell 2009, see *Interpreters*.

⁶⁷³ This means that I am precisely not forfeiting the combination, within a larger view of Paul’s soteriology, of ‘participation’ and ‘justification’ in Romans, as Gorman suggests (2009, 102f.); merely indicating how they make their particular points in particular passages.

⁶⁷⁴ cf. too Phil. 3.3 (‘we worship by the spirit of God’): [see above, 985 n. 591.](#)

⁶⁷⁵ 5.11, 21; 6.11, 23; 7.25a (and cf. 7.4–6); 8.11, 17, 29 and supremely 39. The Messiah is also, of course, discussed at length in several of these paragraphs.

⁶⁷⁶ See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 517.

⁶⁷⁷ [Above, 661–70.](#)

⁶⁷⁸ e.g. Mal. 2.5; cf. too the ‘covenant of peace’ in Num. 25.12; Isa. 54.10; Ezek. 34.25; 37.26; Sir. 45.24. Many of these passages from the prophets are in contexts which are echoed strongly in Rom. 8.

⁶⁷⁹ For this theme see ‘New Exodus’ in *Perspectives* ch. 11.

⁶⁸⁰ cp. Gal. 3.21; cf. Lev. 18.5 etc.

⁶⁸¹ Rom. 7.8b–11.

⁶⁸² [Above, 890f., 895–7.](#)

⁶⁸³ On this see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 12.

⁶⁸⁴ This was, famously, the line taken by Kümmel, Bultmann and others: see Wright 2002 [*Romans*] 554. Jewett 2007, 468 takes a similar view: ‘the frustration consisted not in the ability to perform the zealous deeds he felt were justified, but in the inability of such deeds, motivated by a sinful system of competition for honor, to achieve the good.’ In other words, where Rom. 7 appears to be saying that the ‘I’ cannot do the ‘good thing’ it wants to do, Jewett (updating the existentialist line in a socio-cultural direction) suggests that the ‘I’ can do the zealous Torah-deeds it wants but that they do not achieve the ultimate resultant ‘good’. This interpretation remains ingenious but unwarranted. The idea of a meta-sin, connected with Israel’s abuse of the law, is however found in Rom. 9.30–10.3, and the net result is not too far from Jewett’s proposal: zealous Jews abusing Torah as a charter of national privilege. [See below, 1161–95.](#)

⁶⁸⁵ The best known exponents of this viewpoint are Cranfield 1975, 340–70 and Dunn 1988a, 374–412. The Achilles heel of all such proposals is the direct contradiction between 7.14, where the ‘I’ is

‘carnal, sold under sin’, and the strong statements of chapter 6 which indicate that this is precisely not the Christian’s status.

[686](#) The first version of my paper on *peri hamartias* in Rom. 8.3 (in *Studia Biblica* 1978, vol. 3, ed. E. A. Livingstone; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 453–9) included a final note agreeing with Cranfield (and also Dunn 1975b). By the time the publication appeared I had already changed my mind to the position now expounded in Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 10 and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 561–72. When the original paper was revised for *Climax* (ch. 11) the ending, like the ‘old Adam’ in 6.6 or the ‘former husband’ in 7.1–4, was done away with.

[687](#) See the discussion in Jewett 2007, 469.

[688](#) 7.21–3.

[689](#) 7.24f.

[690](#) This is the force of Gal. 3.22; Rom. 9.30–3; and in the present sequence Rom. 5.20; 7.13. The line of thought reaches its own climax in Rom. 11.32. See below (on Paul and the law).

[691](#) 8.1–4.

[692](#) 8.10f. The parallel and hence contrast between the two ‘indwellings’ of chs. 7 and 8 has not been sufficiently remarked. On the questions of whether the ‘spirit’ here is the divine or human spirit, and the relation of ‘covenant justice’ (*dikaiosynē*) to the earlier uses of the word in the letter, see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 584. I have, in the intervening decade, changed my mind on *dikaiosynē* here: I now think it refers to the believer’s status, though of course the divine covenant faithfulness is always to be seen standing behind that again. ‘The spirit is life because of righteousness’ could be seen as a summary of 5.1–5.

[693](#) Rom. 8.9; cf. Gal. 2.19f.

[694](#) Or indeed ‘Christosis’, as in the title of Blackwell 2011.

[695](#) 2 Cor. 6.16, quoting a conflation of Ezek. 37.27 (*estai hē kataskēnōsis mou en autois*) and Lev. 26.11 (*kei emperipatēsō en hymin*). Thrall 1994, 477 suggests that Paul’s opening word *enoikēsō* ‘is the equivalent of Ezekiel’s *kataskēnōsis*’ and perhaps also an echo of 1 Cor. 3.16. She points out that the whole of 2 Cor. 6.16 is redolent with ‘covenant’ language: ‘Paul sees these scriptural promises fulfilled in the community he has founded as the messenger of the new covenant.’

[696](#) e.g. 1 Kgs. 8.27 (one of many); and e.g. Pss. 132.8, 13f.; 135.21, etc.

[697](#) [See above, on Gal. 4.6.](#)

[698](#) Ex. 4.22.

[699](#) See Keesmaat 1999, 66–74 and frequently.

[700](#) So e.g. Gorman 2001, 2009.

[701](#) See Fee 1994, 869; Renwick 1991; and, on Eph 2.30, Fee 686–90; on 4.30, Fee 712–4.

[702](#) 8.28–30.

[703](#) ‘Through him who loved us’ (8.37), being in the aorist, refers back to the crucifixion itself, as in e.g. Gal. 2.19f.: see e.g. Cranfield 1975, 1979, 441; Jewett 2007, 549. The theme which re-emerges here is of course that stated already in 5.6–11. On the love of YHWH for his people, as a model for the relationship between Messiah and believers, see Tilling 2012.

[704](#) 8.35–9.

[705](#) [See below, 1165–81.](#)

[706](#) Rom. 1.6f.

[707](#) 1 Cor. 1.2, 24.

[708](#) 1 Cor. 1.26; 7.20; Eph. 1.18; 4.1, 4; perhaps also Phil. 3.14 (though in a somewhat different sense); 2 Thess. 1.11; 2 Tim. 1.9.

[709](#) 1 Cor. 1.9; nine times in 1 Cor. 7.15–24, where ‘to be called’ is Paul’s shorthand for ‘hearing and believing the gospel and becoming a member of the Messiah’s people’; Gal. 1.6, 15; 5.8, 13; Eph. 4.1, 4; Col. 1.12; 3.15; 1 Thess. 2.12; 4.7; 5.24; 2 Thess. 2.14. Cf. too 1 Tim. 6.12; 2 Tim. 1.9.

[710](#) e.g. Isa. 42.6; 43.22; 48.12; 49.1; 51.2 (the ‘call’ of Abraham). Most uses of *kaleō* in the LXX are of the actual naming of people, which may also be significant particularly in Rom. 9–11.

[711](#) 9.7, 12, 24, 25, 26; 11.29.

[712](#) Rom. 1.7.

[713](#) Rom. 8.27; 12.13; 15.25, 26, 31; 16.15.

[714](#) 1 Cor. 1.2; cf. 6.1, 2, where ‘the saints’ is a clear ref. to Dan. 7.18, 22 and 27, and ascribes to the Christian community in Corinth the eschatological role ascribed in [first-century readings of] Dan. to the righteous within Israel; cf. 1 Cor. 14.33; 16.1, 15.

[715](#) 2 Cor. 1.1; Eph. 1.1; Phil. 1.1; Col. 1.2.

[716](#) 2 Cor. 8.4; 9.1, 12; 13.12; Eph. 1.15, 18; 2.19 (where the *hagioi* are specifically the people of Israel to whom gentile believers are now joined in fellowship; but, despite the refs. in Rom. 15 and 2 Cor. 8 and 9 to the ‘saints’ in Jerusalem, it is certainly not the case that Paul reserves this title either for Jewish believers or for believers in Jerusalem); Eph. 3.5, 8, 18; 4.12; 5.3; 6.18; Phil. 4.21, 22; Col. 1.4, 12, 26; 3.12 (a remarkable cluster of redrawn-election motifs: ‘as God’s chosen, holy and beloved’, *hōs eklektoi tou theou, hagioi kai ēgapēmēnoi*); 1 Thess. 3.13 (though there the ‘saints’ are those that have died; cf. 2 Thess. 1.10); 5.27; 1 Tim. 5.10.

[717](#) Gal. 2.6, 9.

[718](#) Phil. 1.6.

[719](#) Rom. 8.4–8, 12–14.

[720](#) Normally (but confusingly, because of its Platonic resonances) translated ‘eternal life’. [See above, 163f., and below, 1060.](#)

[721](#) Rom. 8.13; Col. 3.5, 9.

[722](#) On the superficial similarity between an emotivism that stresses ‘doing what comes naturally’ and a Pauline emphasis on acting out of the transformed heart and mind, see Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn* (UK); *After You Believe* (US)], chs. 5, 6.

[723](#) Rom. 5.3–5.

[724](#) Rom. 12.1–2.

[725](#) Wright 2010 ([as n. 722 above](#)).

[726](#) The main charge against me on the part of e.g. Piper 2007 is that, by insisting on the *final* ‘justification’ in the language of Rom. 2, I am bringing back ‘human works’ into the equation and so making ‘assurance’ depend on ‘performance’, rather than on the supposed ‘imputed righteousness of Christ’.

[727](#) So Campbell 2009.

[728](#) See Gorman 2009.

[729](#) In recent decades, one may cite the notable discussions of Dunn 1998, 128–59, 625–9 (while questioning whether the placement of the initial section, within the overall category of ‘Humankind under Indictment’, was likely to do it full justice); Schnelle 2005 [2003], 506–21 (within the section headed ‘Anthropology: The Struggle for the Self’). The main treatment in Schreiner 2001 is a chapter headed ‘Dishonoring God: the Violation of God’s Law’ (103–25), though references to the law are scattered throughout the book. Major treatments in the 1980s include Sanders 1983 and Räisänen 1986 [1983], both arguing for serious Pauline inconsistency (on which see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 1; and, on key exegetical questions, chs. 7–12). Further back again, Ridderbos 1975 [1966] offers a

main treatment of the law as part of ‘The Life in Sin’ (91–158), though he has a later section on the ‘third use of the law’ (278–88); Cranfield 1979, 845–62 remains a masterpiece of Reformed exegesis, though still in my view insufficient to explain the full contours of the Pauline landscape. Thielman 1994 offers a mediating position. The key section in Wolter 2011 (351–8), though short, explores the question from a variety of angles.

[730](#) Gal. 3.19f.

[731](#) Gal. 3.21, 22; Rom. 5.20; 7.13.

[732](#) 2 Cor. 3.14.

[733](#) Phil. 3.6; Lk. 1.6.

[734](#) Rom. 3.20.

[735](#) Dt. 28.45–68; 29.19–29; 32.4–42.

[736](#) Rom. 3.19. Attempts to make *nomos* in passages like this refer to a ‘general’ law applying to all humankind must be seen as a failure in the light of Paul’s many specific discussions of Israel’s law itself, not least in Rom. 7 (cf. e.g. Jewett 2007, 303). The question of whether or not *nomos* has the definite article is not to the point: Greek articles do not work the same way that English ones do.

[737](#) As we saw, in 4QMMT the ‘works of Torah’ that were advocated were designed to mark out one group *within* second-Temple Judaism from other Jews who did things differently.

[738](#) Phil. 3.9.

[739](#) Rom. 9.30–3.

[740](#) Rom. 7.13–25.

[741](#) Gal. 3.13; Rom. 10.4.

[742](#) Rom. 3.27.

[743](#) 1 Cor. 7.19; cf. Rom. 2.27: ‘the uncircumcision that fulfils the law’.

[744](#) Eph. 2.14f.

[745](#) Rom. 4.15 with 7.7–25; cp. Gal. 2.17f. Holding these two things together (Torah as separating Jew and gentile; Torah as condemning its possessors for failure to keep it) is vital to avoid reducing ‘works of Torah’ simply to the outward symbols, however important they are. I would like to think that this move would reduce the gap between myself and e.g. Gathercole 2006a, 237–40.

[746](#) Rom. 2.26f., looking back to 2.7, 13, etc.

[747](#) Rom. 3.31.

[748](#) Rom. 8.5–8. On the way all this works out see further [e.g. below, 1433f.](#)

[749](#) Rom. 13.8–10; Gal. 5.14; cf. 5.23.

[750](#) Rom. 7.10; cf. Gal. 3.21.

[751](#) As Campbell 2009 suggests.

[752](#) cf. RSG chs. 18f.

[753](#) 2 Cor. 6.16–18, quoting or echoing Lev. 26.11f.; Ezek. 37.27; Isa. 52.11; Ezek. 20.34, 41; 2 Sam. 7.14.

Chapter Eleven

GOD'S FUTURE FOR THE WORLD, FRESHLY IMAGINED

1. Introduction

Many ancient Jews clung on to a hope which had specific content and shape. Rooted in scripture, this was a hope not just for an individual future after death, but for a restoration and renewal of the whole nation, and perhaps even for the entire created order.¹ Such Jews were distinguished from their pagan neighbours, however, not simply by the precise content of this hope, but by the fact that they had any large-scale hope at all. To be sure, some elements of Jewish hope for a life beyond the grave have antecedents, and then parallels, not least among the peoples further east, though our evidence for ancient Babylonian and Persian eschatology is by no means as full as we would like, and certainly not sufficient to mount a detailed comparative study. Egypt, too, had a particular tradition of future hope, though this seems to have been simply for a significant life in the world of the dead, not for the renewal of present national fortunes, let alone of the world.² But the peoples of Greece and Rome, and the lands into which the culture of the former and the empire of the latter had made such powerful inroads, were, by comparison with the Jewish people, 'without hope'. That is Paul's blunt verdict.³ If there was a 'golden age', it was in the distant past, not in the future. It would be very odd for a Dictionary of Judaism not to have a substantial entry on 'Hope', even if, after the scholarly custom for preferring five syllables to one, such an entry might be called 'Eschatology'. There is no such entry in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.⁴

The verdict 'without hope' might at first seem harsh. Did not many hope for a blissful life beyond the grave, whether in the Elysian fields, conversing with fellow-philosophers, or at least for a reincarnation in which

a better fate might await them than they had previously enjoyed? Well, yes, they did.⁵ But the judgment remains. There is nothing in the literature of Greece or Rome that remotely corresponds to what we find – to look only at the most obvious of passages – in Isaiah and the Psalms:

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of YHWH shall rest on him ... He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth ... The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them ... They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea.⁶

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it.

Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of YHWH, for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.⁷

A world set free both from human injustice and from ‘natural’ violence; a world in which oceans and mountains themselves will rejoice at a new fulfilment; a world in which all peoples will celebrate the fact that everything has been set right at last. That is the ancient Israelite vision, variously re-expressed in Jewish texts across the second-Temple period.⁸ This is not simply a hope *beyond* the world. It is a hope *for* the world. The difference is all-important, and is rooted, as those two extracts and many others indicate, in the ancient Israelite and Jewish belief that the true God, Israel’s God, was the *creator* of earth as well as heaven. Sooner or later he would put all things right, and there would be – you can feel it in those texts – a cosmic sigh of relief. That, we hear from lambs and wolves alike, is what we’ve been waiting for. About these things we have already spoken in detail, in the present volume and elsewhere.⁹

There is one element within this Jewish hope which I did not even mention when writing *The New Testament and the People of God* twenty years ago. This element then made an appearance, to my own surprise and the alarm of some of my friends, when I struggled in *Jesus and the Victory of God* to express Jesus’ own self-understanding, and found my way to a

theme which I, and most others, had more or less ignored in our probing of first-century eschatology: the return of YHWH to Zion.¹⁰ Since then this theme, set in its proper ancient context of the Jewish hope for a ‘new exodus’, has been explored by various writers, and has now made its way back to where it belongs, as a central element in the understanding not only of first-century Jews but also the early Christians.¹¹ When Mark introduces John the Baptist with two verses, one from Malachi and the other from Isaiah, it was easy until recently to ignore the fact that both were speaking, not of the arrival of a ‘Messiah’ (and of a ‘forerunner’ to prepare the way for such a figure) but of the arrival of YHWH himself.¹² This is quite rightly having a revolutionary effect on gospel christology, where, in place of the older view that the synoptics had a ‘low’ christology and John a ‘high’ one, the truth is dawning that Mark, Matthew and Luke have just as ‘high’ a christology as John, only expressed in a way for which earlier generations of scholars were unprepared.¹³ The dynamic vision of God in ancient Jewish traditions – the idea of a God who had abandoned the Temple at one point but had promised to return to it later – does not seem to have impinged much on scholarship until recently. This, too, is another way in which the ancient Jewish vision stands out sharply from the greco-roman world. The gods and goddesses there, no doubt, often seemed to behave in puzzling ways. But the idea of a larger *narrative* in which a particular god would do something so drastic as first abandoning his chosen earthly residence and then promising to return to it at last was unknown. Even in the darkest days of Athens’ humiliation at the end of the fifth century, one does not hear that Athene had abandoned the city but would return in triumph at some future date.

As we have seen before, however, it is at this point – the idea of a larger narrative – that Israel in any case stood out as distinct from the rest of the world.¹⁴ Israel’s ancient scriptures told a story which stretched out its arms to encompass the distant past and the ultimate future. Telling that story, and finding appropriate ways of living within it, were the natural outflowing of Israel’s creational monotheism: the world which the one God has made, though puzzling and often tragic, still belongs to this God, and part of the

task of the people who give their allegiance to this God is precisely to tell and retell the story, whether as prayer or lament, as history or prophecy.¹⁵ Telling that story, and living in it, was therefore a central and inalienable part of what it meant for Israel to be the covenant people of this one creator God.

Israel's eschatology thus grew from within the very heart of monotheism and election.¹⁶ If there is one God, responsible for the world; and if this God has called Israel to be his people; then there must be a future for the world in which this God will set everything right, restoring and renewing creation – and this future must fulfil the promises made to Israel in particular. Since we have seen in the two previous chapters that Paul had rethought his own Jewish monotheism, and the doctrine of election, around Jesus the Messiah on the one hand and the spirit on the other, we should expect that he will have done the same with ancient Jewish eschatology. And this is exactly what we find. The present chapter will thus do in relation to 'hope' what the previous two did in relation to Paul's vision of the one God and the people of that one God.¹⁷

Discussions of Paul's eschatology have traditionally concentrated on three topics in particular. What exactly did Paul hope for? What were the sources for this hope, and how did Paul modify or depart from them? Did his eschatology develop during the course of his brief letter-writing career?¹⁸ The first question subdivides, raising once more the question of 'apocalyptic' and 'eschatology': what sort of eschatology did Paul hold, and to what extent was that in continuity and discontinuity with what had gone before? In particular, did he believe that the world of space, time and matter was shortly going to come to an end, or did he, like many writers in the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic, use that kind of imagery to describe a dramatic transformation that would happen (presumably by a fresh divine action) *within* the present order? And, to bring things to a particular focus, how did the 'now' and the 'not yet' relate to one another in his thought?¹⁹

When this kind of question has been raised in relation to Jesus and the gospels, it has been possible for scholars to simplify matters by insisting either that Jesus only spoke about a kingdom which was about to appear

(but had not yet done so) or that he only spoke about a kingdom which was already present.²⁰ With Paul that option is closed. Both are found even in the seven letters now generally agreed to be from his pen. We do not have the option to excise either his ‘now’ or his ‘not yet’ passages.

All these questions, I have come to think, are best addressed from within the matrix of first-century Jewish hope. As with monotheism and election, so with eschatology: Paul’s complete vision of what lay in the future, and of how that hope had already been ‘inaugurated’ in the present, can be comprehended in terms of the modification of Jewish eschatological beliefs by means of (a) Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah and (b) the gift of the spirit. Of course, there is a sense in which Paul’s theology is ‘eschatological’ through and through – not that he spent all his time talking about the future, but that all his thinking, on all key topics, was shaped by his belief that in Jesus, and especially in his death and resurrection, the expected ‘end’ had come forward into the middle of history, and that by the work of the spirit, implementing the achievement of Jesus, the long-awaited renewal was already starting to take place. This has been clear throughout the previous two chapters. In both monotheism and election, something promised in Israel’s scriptures, and hoped for in the second-Temple period, had now, already, come true – albeit in a new and shocking form.

But (to lapse into the normal technical language) though this eschatological hope had been well and truly *inaugurated*, it was not yet *consummated*.²¹ I have sometimes been strangely accused of holding an over-realized eschatology, but I hope the present chapter will put paid to such rumours.²² The ‘not yet’ is as important, and in its way just as interesting, as the ‘now’. And when we look at the ‘not yet’ areas of Paul’s thought, we find that they fall into two categories, of which the second then subdivides.

First, there are those aspects of ancient Israel’s hope which were clearly *not* fulfilled at once in Jesus and the spirit. Sin and death were still present realities in Paul’s world, as his own suffering reminded him day by day. Wolves and lambs, literal and metaphorical, had yet to make up their ancient quarrel. The creation had been flooded neither with justice nor with

peace. But the vision that these things *would* happen had not gone away. Rather, a new road to it had been opened up – by the achievement of the Messiah and the work of the spirit.

That is why, to take the obvious example to which we shall shortly return, ‘the day of YHWH’ in the Hebrew scriptures has become ‘the day of the lord Jesus’ in Paul. Several aspects of the older hope are thus ‘translated’ into a new, Pauline form. Studying these phenomena will enable us to answer the three standard questions we mentioned a moment ago. First, Paul shared the detailed and complex eschatological expectations of much second-Temple Judaism, which cannot be reduced to the scholarly oversimplifications sometimes misleadingly associated with the word ‘apocalyptic’. Second, he mostly drew on his biblical and Jewish traditions for this, not on non-Jewish sources (though some of his eschatological language had strong echoes in the pagan world). Third, to suggest a straightforward ‘development’ of his eschatology is in fact a further oversimplification which acknowledges neither the subtle complexity of all his thought nor the situational dynamics which called forth (for instance) a good deal of eschatological teaching in 1 Thessalonians and hardly any in Galatians.²³ The rich, dense coherence which we have seen in his vision of monotheism and election is once again on view as we contemplate his eschatology.

Second, there are two areas of eschatology which, though not strange from the scriptural viewpoint, are opened up in a new way. These two areas are what we might call *ethics* and *ethnics*: the question of what to do and how to do it, and the question of Israel.

One can see the first to good advantage by asking: if ‘the end’ has come, if all the promises really do find their ‘Yes’ in the Messiah as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1.20, why are even the Messiah’s followers not themselves perfect? Why do they still sin, and what should be done about it? That places Paul’s entire *ethical* thought within the category of inaugurated eschatology. In one sense, the question is familiar: many second-Temple writers reflected on what it would mean for the chosen people to be holy. For Paul, however, there was a new framework. He addressed the new

situation with a Messiah-shaped and spirit-driven exposition of the call to holiness by means of a transformation of mind, heart and will, and hence of action. As we saw in chapter 6, the unity and holiness of the Messiah's people stood at the heart of Paul's symbolic worldview: the outward markers of Jewish life (circumcision, the food laws, the sabbath) were no longer required, but the moral standards which were supposed to distinguish Israel from the nations were if anything intensified.

Likewise, if Israel's God has been faithful to his promises, then why has Israel as a whole – most of Paul's Jewish contemporaries, that is – rejected the message? And what will Israel's God do about it? That places Paul's entire reflection on *ethnic Israel* within the same framework of inaugurated eschatology. In one sense, again, the question is familiar: many second-Temple writers reflected on the obvious failures of the Jewish people, and on the question of what their God would do next. But for Paul there was a new framework: he analyzed the failure of Israel to believe the gospel in terms of the messianic fulfilment of scriptural promises and warnings, setting the stage for a subtle and powerful exposition of how 'all Israel shall be saved'.

Both of these questions – ethics, and the future of Israel – belong in one sense just as much in chapter 10, with 'election', as they do here. But only when we address them within the context of Paul's freshly reworked eschatology, I believe, will they reveal their full dimensions.

The source from which all these streams flow is Paul's belief that with the resurrection of Jesus the hope of Israel had been split into two. Jesus had been raised first, demonstrating him to be Israel's Messiah; all his people would be raised later, at the moment Paul calls 'the end'.²⁴ The future had burst into the present, close up and personal; at the same time, the future remained future, glimpsed as in a darkened mirror. This sudden irruption of future into present, Paul concluded, was not simply a strange accident, as though a cog had slipped in the providential clock, leading it to strike the hour too soon. Paul was not just freewheeling pragmatically into an unexpected situation, making up inaugurated eschatology on the hoof. When he reflected on what was *already* the case and how that related to

what was *not yet* the case, but would become so through Messiah and spirit, he advanced arguments which *sought to explain that this interval, however unexpected, had itself a specific purpose within the divine economy*. To repeat and amplify what was said above: within eschatological ethics, this purpose has to do with the present development of *character*. The present time is the time of the formation of truly human beings; this cannot be achieved at a stroke, precisely because of what a human being is. Within the eschatology of Israel's election, it is the need to bring all, Jew and gentile alike, 'under sin', in order that all who are saved may be saved by mercy alone. The inaugurated eschatology caused Paul 'great sorrow and endless pain in [his] heart' (Romans 9.2), but he discerned a clear though startling divine purpose in the time-lag. This was how God had planned it all along, to ensure that his entire plan of salvation would depend, not on privilege, but on mercy (Romans 11.32). The present time is the time when, after the long years in which Israel was called to be the light of the world, the mission to the gentiles was to be the means of rescuing Israel itself.

Three areas, then: features of the ancient Jewish hope redrawn around Jesus and the spirit; eschatological ethics; and the future of Israel. In order to see all this clearly we shall need to begin by recapitulating enough of the previously sketched picture of Jewish hope to set the discussion in context. Then we shall remind ourselves, again briefly, of the ways in which Paul saw the hope of Israel *already realized* in the Messiah and the spirit, as set out in chapters 9 and 10. That will lead naturally to the question of the 'not yet', and the way in which the *still-future* hope is likewise to be understood in terms of that Messiah-and-spirit reshaping of Israel's expectation, in the three larger categories outlined a moment ago.

[2. Israel's God and the Story of Hope](#)

Much second-Temple Jewish eschatology was focused, as I have argued already, on the scripturally highlighted expectation that YHWH would return to Zion.²⁵ This became the matrix from which there grew a good deal

of first-century Christian theology. Israel's hope *had* already come to pass through Jesus and the spirit; Israel's hope *would still* come to pass, again through Jesus and the spirit.

Central to all this was Paul's belief, which we studied in chapter 9, that the creator God had made himself known in person in and as Jesus the Messiah. Biblical motifs originally related to YHWH could thus be re-expressed in relation to Jesus. This prepares the way for specifically eschatological motifs in which the same thing happens.

Likewise, Paul's understanding of the spirit as the personal presence of the same God informed his eschatology, both in its 'now' and in its 'not yet'. Some of the biblical promises of future divine presence and action were seen to be fulfilled in the present gift of the spirit. This, too, we studied in chapters 9 and 10. Others, yet to be fulfilled, would come about through the future work of the same spirit.

The present chapter thus not only builds on the two previous ones but contributes as it were in reverse to the arguments of both, consolidating and filling out further the picture we have already drawn. Monotheism, election and eschatology are not, for Paul, three detached loci. We separate them out, as the doctor separates in her mind the physics, chemistry and biology of the patient, not in order to keep them apart but in order to understand more fully the complex interworkings of the whole.

The post-exilic hope that YHWH would return at last to dwell in the Jerusalem Temple and to put all things to rights is rooted in the much older expectation of 'the day of YHWH'. This idea was already well enough established by the eighth century BC for the prophet Amos to reinterpret it, taking what seems originally to have been a promise of YHWH's victory over Israel's enemies and turning it into a warning that when YHWH arrived in judgment Israel itself would face the most severe inquisition.²⁶ The theme of YHWH's 'day' is widespread among prophets on either side of the Babylonian exile, with most of the references carrying the same thrust. The idea that Israel, the people of God, was itself under the judgment which was often invoked on the nations was scarcely a first-century or Christian innovation.²⁷

The coming judgment on that ‘day’ was seen in various ways, but among the most obvious was that of military action. So-called ‘natural’ disasters or unexpected events might also figure in the mix. YHWH, being the creator God, could act as he pleased within creation. The greatest model of all, the exodus, had after all been accomplished without any human assistance. But, insofar as there was a ‘normal’ way for the judgment to operate, it was through kings, armies, battles and conquests. YHWH will use the king of Assyria as a stick with which to beat his people, though the pagan monarch himself will then be judged for his arrogance. The king of Babylon will take Jerusalem; a new king of Persia will order its restoration.²⁸ At the same time, however, the hope also grew that the positive side of YHWH’s future action, the final restoration of Israel and the overthrow of all enslaving powers, would be accomplished through the true Israelite monarch, the anointed son of David.²⁹ That scenario, already sketched in Psalm 2, underlies and shapes numerous expressions of biblical and Jewish hope right across the period.³⁰ All of this is rooted, as one can see again and again in Israel’s scriptures, in the vision of YHWH as the creator who made human beings as his image-bearers, the ones through whom he would exercise his stewardship over his world as it were from within. As with later (including early Christian) readings of Psalm 8, the biblical vision of *human* sovereignty over the world is brought into sharp focus in the vision of *messianic* sovereignty.³¹

The transformation of the pre-exilic ‘day of YHWH’ motif into its post-exilic successor is shaped above all by the widespread belief that YHWH had abandoned the Temple to its fate at the hand of the Babylonians and, despite its rebuilding, had never returned. The promise of that return is stated most fully at the end of Ezekiel, balancing the dramatic story, near the beginning of the book, in which the divine presence takes its leave.³² But the aching sense of absence, coupled with further promises – and warnings! – that this absence will not last for ever, continue to echo through the post-exilic period, summed up vividly in Malachi. The priests, ministering in the renewed Temple, are bored and careless. But Israel’s God is not finished. There will come a final messenger of warning, and then ‘the

Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple'.³³ But, as with Amos several centuries earlier, so now: 'who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?'³⁴

This hope for YHWH's return continued unabated throughout the period.³⁵ Among the most obvious passages are those which link the divine return directly to YHWH's royal victory over the pagan nations and to the long-awaited 'return from exile'. This is what it means when the prophets speak of Israel's God being, or becoming, 'king'. Isaiah 52 says it all:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.' Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of YHWH to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for YHWH has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. YHWH has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of YHWH. For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for YHWH will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearguard.³⁶

This hope for YHWH's return, picking up elements of 'the day of the lord', belongs (like a great deal of second-Temple writing) within the expectation of a 'new exodus'.³⁷ It is in the book of Exodus, after all, that we find not only the great liberating act, freeing the Israelites from foreign rule, not only the majestic moment when the Torah is given on Mount Sinai, but also, as the climax of the book and hence of the entire biblical narrative to that point, the construction of the tabernacle and the glorious presence of the covenant God taking up residence in it – despite the awful moment when it seemed as though his presence would be withdrawn for ever because of Israel's sin with the golden calf. (A compromise was reached, as we saw in chapter 9: YHWH agreed to accompany the people, but his tabernacle remained outside the camp.) The presence of the creator God with the first humans in the garden, as in the opening of Genesis, looks forward to this moment at the end of Exodus, as Abraham's family, the new form of the human race, journey to their 'garden', their promised land.

Moses puts the finishing touches to the tabernacle and its furniture, and then:

the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle ... The cloud of YHWH was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.³⁸

As we find later, at key moments in Israel's subsequent story, the Israelites and the later Jewish people came to regard it as the norm, the desired state, that the strange, dangerous presence of Israel's God would dwell in their midst, first in the tabernacle and then in the Temple in Jerusalem.³⁹ This, they believed, was how things should be. And if, for comprehensible reasons, that immediate presence had been withdrawn, as it was at the time of the exile and afterwards, resulting in the people's renewed captivity, then to hope for YHWH's return was to hope as well for national restoration, for escape from slavery, for peace and prosperity, for the new exodus. 'The return of YHWH to Zion' was thus closely integrated with all other aspects of the ancient Jewish hope. To put it more strongly still, pointing forward to a key moment in Paul's greatest letter: if someone from this context were to speak of 'the hope of the glory of God', this is the vision they would be invoking. One day the glory, the tabernacling presence of YHWH, would return, and all flesh would see it together.

The theme of YHWH's 'filling' the tabernacle, and later the Temple, was seen by some ancient writers as pointing forward to a greater 'filling' yet, pointing back once more to the story of creation. This already appears in a surprising 'aside' in Numbers, when YHWH is assuring Moses of his forgiveness after the people's rebellion against the idea of going into the promised land:

Then YHWH said, 'I do forgive; just as you have asked; nevertheless – as I live, and *as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of YHWH* – none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times, and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it.'⁴⁰

This idea is repeated variously in later texts, often in settings which indicate that this is the implicit larger hope, out beyond the immediate horizon. What YHWH does in the tabernacle or Temple is a sign and foretaste of what he intends to do in and for the whole creation.⁴¹ Sometimes, to be sure, the same idea is expressed with a centripetal rather than a centrifugal motif, with the nations of the world converging upon Jerusalem to worship the God who has taken up residence there once more.⁴² Israel's central symbol thus spoke both of the powerful presence of the creator God, returning to live in the midst of his people, and of the promise, as in the Psalms and Isaiah, to renew the whole creation.⁴³ The complex of 'new-exodus' themes fits together in different patterns, but with the same regular overall content: Israel's God will act to rescue his people, to overthrow their pagan oppressors, to enable them to keep his Torah at last, to fill the whole earth with his glory and to set up his kingdom of justice, peace and prosperity. Not all these themes are found in all texts, of course. No doubt many first-century Jews lived out their lives without much clear sense of what seems to us, their later long-range readers, quite explicit. But there is a family likeness right across the large and diverse range of later biblical texts, second-Temple sources and some at least of the rabbis, which completely justifies the presentation of this overall, if generalized, picture.⁴⁴

Four further themes fill out the picture.

(1) First, in some texts but not all, and in some political movements of the time though not all, the key agent of this whole programme is the coming king, the Messiah.⁴⁵ As long as the Jewish people sang the Psalms, they could hardly avoid the classic vision of Psalm 2:

Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against YHWH and his anointed [*meshiho*, 'his messiah'], saying,

'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.'

He who sits in the heavens laughs; YHWH has them in derision.

Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.'

I will tell of the decree of YHWH: he said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.'

You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'
Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve YHWH with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, or he will be angry and you will perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Happy are all who take refuge in him.⁴⁶

The same vision, of YHWH's anointed king ruling the nations of the earth and calling them to account after their arrogant folly, reappears elsewhere. It functions, obviously, as one way of bringing to expression the larger Jewish hope for the creator God to exalt his people, to liberate them from their enemies and to bring his sovereign rule to bear on all the world. Thus, while it seems to be true that by no means all Jews were 'expecting a Messiah', and that those who did hold such a hope conceived and expressed it in different ways, when such expectations existed they formed a sharp point of the national hope, not a separate or detached phenomenon.⁴⁷

(2) When this great liberation came about, with or without a 'Messiah' to lead the way and fight the key battle, this would be the moment when the covenant was renewed. We have studied this in detail in chapter 2 above. Here we simply note that the idea of covenant renewal itself goes back to the Pentateuch, specifically to the closing chapters of Deuteronomy, seen in the first century (at least by Josephus and Philo) as a kind of long-range prophecy both of the devastation of the nation and perhaps of its eventual restoration after judgment.⁴⁸ The later prophets who drew on this same theme of covenant renewal, particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel, did so explicitly in terms of the prophecies of restoration after exile and of the return of YHWH to his people. They stressed, again in line with Deuteronomy, the renewal (or 'circumcision') of the heart which would transform Israel at last into a people who would be able to keep Torah properly. The idea of covenant renewal, we note, is an affirmation both of the goodness of the covenant in the first place and of its inability (not through its own fault but through the hard-heartedness of the people) to make them the people they were called to be.

The covenant, too, supplies the inner meaning, in relation to Israel, of the character of Israel's God. Israel would finally be rescued *because this God*

kept his promises: the promises to Abraham, the promises of Exodus and Deuteronomy, the promises of the Psalms, Isaiah and the rest. One of the most obvious ways in which this vision of God as the faithful, covenant-keeping God was expressed was through the repeated, though today often misunderstood, notion of the *tsedaqah elohim*, or in the Septuagint the *dikaiosyne theou*, phrases which are regularly translated into English as ‘the righteousness of God’.⁴⁹ This ‘righteousness’ formed the backbone of the great prayer in Daniel 9 which both explains why the exile happens and appeals for it to come to an end at last:

Righteousness is on your side, O YHWH, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us ... To YHWH our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him ... So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you. He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven ... Indeed YHWH our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice.

And now, O YHWH our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and made your name renowned even to this day – we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O YHWH, in view of all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem ... We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies.⁵⁰

YHWH is ‘in the right’: *hatsedaqah*, *hē dikaiosynē*, is on his side, expressing itself equally appropriately in the curse which Deuteronomy foretold⁵¹ and in the mercy and forgiveness which was also promised and which his previous ‘righteous acts’ (*tsidqotheka*, *ten dikaiosynēn sou*) had foreshadowed.⁵² This points towards the full meaning of the phrase, or its near equivalents, in sundry second-Temple texts, such as the Scrolls or *4 Ezra*. God’s *dikaiosynē* is that which is called into question when Israel suffers major disasters (since, as Israel’s covenant God, he should have been preventing such things from happening), but the same characteristic can then be evoked as the explanation of the disaster (since the covenant always envisaged penalties for disobedience) as well as the reason why he will in fact be merciful in the end (since the covenant always envisaged mercy on the other side of judgment), even though this mercy may take

different forms from those which many Jews had been expecting or wanting.⁵³ Within situations of great stress and grave disaster, it is precisely the *dikaiosynē theou* that is both questioned and evoked. This is a central element in second-Temple Jewish eschatology, perfectly dovetailing with all the other themes we are noting.⁵⁴ Though the ‘righteous acts’ of Israel’s God are, in effect, great deeds of saving power, that denotation does not obliterate or ignore the connotation, that these are saving acts *done precisely in fulfilment of the covenant promises*.⁵⁵ Had they been miscellaneous ‘saving acts’ without reference to any long-term promises or commitments, there would have been other ways of referring to them. The mention of *dikaiosynē* indicates that such actions reveal the fact that Israel’s God has been faithful to the covenant. Even if we were to flatten out the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words so that they simply meant that such actions were the ‘right’ thing for YHWH to do, the reason why rescuing Israel was the ‘right’ thing for him to do was precisely because he was bound in a special relationship to his people.

(3) When that happens, several strands of expectation envisaged that the nations of the world would perceive it not simply as bad news (being defeated and smashed to pieces) but also as good news. YHWH will be glorified beyond the borders of Israel.⁵⁶ Though many texts in the scriptures and subsequent Jewish writings continued to speak of a coming judgment on the nations, some saw a different though parallel vision (parallel in that the fate of the nations still depends upon God’s final great act for Israel): when the one God restored the fortunes of his people, the nations would come flocking in pilgrimage towards Zion:

In days to come the mountain of YHWH’s house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.’
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,

and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.⁵⁷

This hope is another way of putting the vision of cosmic renewal in Isaiah 11.1–10, and finds further expression in the famous passage in Isaiah 49:

And now YHWH says ...
It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.⁵⁸

The same vision, expressed in a variety of ways, continues to haunt the whole book of Isaiah. The ‘servant’, like the coming Davidic king in chapter 11, will establish justice to the ends of the earth. Foreigners will join themselves to YHWH, so that his house will be a house of prayer for all peoples.⁵⁹ When Israel is restored, the nations will come to its light, and kings to the brightness of its dawn.⁶⁰ They will bring their treasures to Jerusalem, so that YHWH’s house may be filled with splendour.⁶¹

The theme emerges again in the book of Zechariah:

Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion!
For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says YHWH.
Many nations shall join themselves to YHWH on that day, and shall be my people;
and I will dwell in your midst.
And you shall know that YHWH of hosts has sent me to you.⁶²

Thus says YHWH of hosts:
Peoples shall yet come, the inhabitants of many cities;
the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying,
‘Come, let us go to entreat the favour of YHWH, and to seek YHWH of hosts;
I myself am going.’
Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek YHWH of hosts in Jerusalem,
and to entreat the favour of YHWH.

Thus says YHWH of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'⁶³

Then all who survive of the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year by year to worship the King, YHWH of hosts, and to keep the festival of booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, YHWH of hosts, there will be no rain upon them.⁶⁴

These oracles are surrounded by others which envisage a great triumph *over* the nations, and that apparent tension continues across the second-Temple period, just as the Psalms could speak in one breath of the nations of the world being smashed in pieces like a potter's vessel and in the next of all the ends of the earth remembering and returning to YHWH.⁶⁵ Thus the great thanksgiving prayer in the book of Tobit branches out from considering how YHWH has treated his own people in their exile and restoration to a vision of the nations streaming in to worship:

A bright light will shine to all the ends of the earth;
many nations will come to you from far away,
the inhabitants of the remotest parts of the earth to your holy name,
bearing gifts in their hands for the King of heaven.
Generation after generation will give joyful praise in you;
the name of the chosen city will endure for ever.⁶⁶

And this is backed up by a solemn promise:

After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendour; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted (*epistrepsousin*) and worship God in truth. They will all abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into their error; and in righteousness they will praise the eternal God.⁶⁷

Other texts from roughly the same period show signs of a similar point of view: not necessarily an actual pilgrimage to Zion, but certainly the nations coming to salvation as a by-product of the end-time restoration of Israel.⁶⁸ If it is fair to say that this theme is not especially prominent in the literature of Qumran, or the Pseudepigrapha,⁶⁹ it is also important to remember that

books like Isaiah continued to be treasured and studied, and the Psalms continued to be sung. How Israel's God was going to accomplish all these varied things in relation to the rest of the world was never made clear. That he would eventually do so could not be doubted without doubting monotheism itself. YHWH was the one creator God and it was his eventual responsibility to sort out the whole creation. Since he had promised to come back and live in Jerusalem for ever, it was clear that the nations would have to come there to worship him, whether or not they would have to be dealt with severely first in order to learn the lesson. In one way or another, this 'pilgrimage of the nations to Zion' was a significant, though not highly developed, part of the vision of the future.⁷⁰

(4) One way of speaking about the great coming future was to divide world history into two chronological periods: the 'present age' and the 'age to come', the 'new age'. By the time of the rabbis, the notion of 'two ages' had become well established, and the distinction between 'the present age' and 'the age to come' – the present time when evil seemed to be triumphing, and the future time when it would have been overthrown – was well known.⁷¹ But the distinction goes back well into the second-Temple period, with its roots in the scriptures themselves.⁷² It is by no means indicative, as is sometimes said, of a 'dualism', one of the characteristics ascribed to the movement loosely and unhelpfully called 'apocalyptic' or 'apocalypticism'.⁷³ Indeed the idea of 'two ages', a 'present (evil) age' and the 'age to come', is not at all the prerogative of a single movement within the second-Temple Jewish world. It is simply part of that world as a whole – embraced, no doubt, by some more enthusiastically than others, but expressive of a Jewish way of looking at things, a Jewish way of telling the world's great story, which continued and flourished unabated long after people had stopped writing 'apocalypses'. The distinction of the two ages was almost inevitable, granted the parlous state of Israel on the one hand and the spectacular biblical promises on the other. The only alternative (which was of course embraced by some in due course) was some kind of gnosticism: if there was no future within the present world of space, time and matter, perhaps the answer was to escape into a different sphere

altogether. It is important to note, then, that the distinction between the ‘present age’ and the ‘age to come’ was a way of *not* capitulating to that ontological ‘dualism’. It was a way of affirming the goodness of the created world and the belief that its creator would eventually liberate it from its present condition. Somehow, the present time could not be ‘all there was’. Israel’s God was committed to doing something new. And this new ‘age’, *aiōn* in Greek, would mean new *life*: hence the phrase *zōē aiōnios*, ‘the life of the age [to come]’, frequently and unhelpfully translated ‘eternal life’.⁷⁴

(4) The fourth and final element – which caused considerable surprise and alarm in some Jewish circles – was resurrection. Here too I have set out the material elsewhere.⁷⁵ The point to note for our present purposes is that ‘resurrection’ was not an isolated or speculative promise, bolted on to the outside of other second-Temple Jewish expectations. Like the rest, it was rooted deep within the ancient scriptures, in their twin notions of YHWH as creator and as judge. If he was to set the world right at last, it would not do for him, as creator, to obliterate it, or to decide after all that the created order of space, time and matter was a bad thing, rather than (as in Genesis 1) a good thing. There were earlier hints and guesses which could be taken, and were sometimes taken later on, to point to a renewed bodily life the other side of a period of being bodily dead. These hints and guesses came to life particularly in the book of Daniel and then, spectacularly, in 2 Maccabees, which grew out of and helped to sustain the vision of most Jews, certainly all Pharisaic Jews, in the time of Saul of Tarsus.

These four themes thus flesh out the vision of YHWH’s return and the establishment of his kingdom, the vision (that is) which we may securely suppose to have been held by a devout and zealous Pharisee such as Saul of Tarsus. The Jewish hope was not a collection of miscellaneous motifs strung together with the string of political expediency – though of course political hope, or even ambition, regularly fuelled its expression. It formed a more or less coherent whole, expressing and embodying the two basic beliefs (monotheism and election) that we have already studied. It highlighted the notion of victory: YHWH’s victory over all enemies, from Egypt to Babylon and beyond; the Messiah’s victory over the nations and

their rulers; the creator's victory over chaos and injustice within the whole creation. It was energized by the notion of faithfulness: YHWH had promised to do this, and do it he would. But it foregrounded particularly the notion of *presence*: YHWH would return to live in the midst of his people. This would be the ultimate vindication of Israel as YHWH's people, but behind that it would be the vindication of monotheism itself:

They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'YHWH is our God.' ...

And YHWH will become king over all the earth; on that day YHWH will be one and his name one.⁷⁶

This hope was *expressed* in a wide variety of ways: in psalms, in visions, in political movements which promised to create the conditions for it to happen, and in narrative which, like the Pentateuch itself, was read both as history and as prophecy. It was *expected* both as the long-awaited fulfilment of promises and as a new thing: one of the most regular prophetic promises is that when YHWH acts to do what he had always intended to do this will take everyone, Israel included, by surprise. It was *experienced* in fits and starts: some at least of those who lived through the Maccabean revolt really did believe the ancient prophecies were at last being fulfilled, and the Qumran sect would not have existed were it not for the belief that the promises had been fulfilled in advance, albeit secretly, in their community, and would be fulfilled more completely in the coming days.⁷⁷ Expressed, expected and experienced (you can take the scholar out of the pulpit but you can't take the pulpit out of the scholar): the ancient hope of Israel came to fresh and coherent life not only in texts but also in movements, in prayer, in faithfulness, in zeal. This is the hope which fired Saul of Tarsus in his own life of Torah-devotion. And in his zealous persecution of the early church.

Our task now is relatively straightforward. I shall argue that Paul, with this complete and striking Jewish hope in his head and his heart, believed both that it *had already* been fulfilled in Jesus and the spirit, and that it *was yet to be* more completely fulfilled. The 'now and not yet' shape of all this is obvious, and often pointed out.⁷⁸ What is not so often noticed is that both

the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’ embody very closely the christological and pneumatological revision of the central and enlivening hope of second-Temple Judaism, and indeed of the ancient scriptures of Israel themselves.

3. Hope Realized and Redefined

(i) Through Jesus

The obvious and easy starting-point for understanding Paul’s reimagining of Jewish eschatology is the place we reached a moment ago. Nobody had been expecting ‘the resurrection’ to happen to one person in the middle of ongoing history. Those who expected ‘resurrection’ expected it to happen to everybody, or at least to all the faithful, at the end of history when the new age dawned and the divine justice and mercy flooded Israel and the world. The point has often been made, but needs to be stated again, because it is the foundation of everything that Paul the apostle came to believe: if Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead, then it meant either that the whole cosmos had gone completely mad or that ‘the resurrection’ had come forward into the present, in just this one case, with Jesus leading the way and everyone else following in due course.

Again, by itself this might not have made much sense. Why Jesus? one might ask; and why would his resurrection mean that others would follow? Here we encounter one of the other key implications of Easter: if Jesus had been crucified as a messianic pretender, but had been vindicated by being raised from the dead (which could only be the work of the creator God), then he was, after all, Israel’s Messiah.⁷⁹ And that, as we have already seen, compelled a fresh evaluation of more or less everything else. *Israel’s hope had been realized; Israel’s hope had been redefined.* ‘Look! The right time is now! Look! The day of salvation is here!’ Paul casts himself as the latter-day prophet, announcing that Isaiah’s ancient vision has come true at last.⁸⁰

That Paul was thinking in exactly these ways – resurrection dividing into two, resurrection meaning that Jesus really was the Messiah – is clear from

two seminal passages. We have already studied these in connection with our earlier discussion of Jesus' Messiahship itself, but it is important to look at them again from this angle. Taking the latter point first:

... God's good news, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the sacred writings – the good news about his son, who was descended from David's seed in terms of flesh, and who was marked out powerfully as God's son in terms of the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead: Jesus, the king, our lord!⁸¹

Here, introducing his greatest letter, Paul highlights right at the start the universal early Christian conviction: the resurrection was the public divine declaration that Jesus was indeed Israel's Messiah, and hence the world's true lord. We note, too, the mention of the spirit, seen by Paul as the active agent in giving life both to Jesus' dead body and, at the end, to the bodies of believers.⁸² And, as the letter unwinds, the notion of the messianic 'son', the one who (in line with Psalm 2) will have the nations for his 'inheritance', sharing his status with all his people, comes to full expression in the central climax of 8.18–30.

Jesus' Messiahship is also central to the classic passage in which Paul explains the other foundational point, that the notion of 'resurrection' has itself now split into two:

But in fact the Messiah has been raised from the dead, as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since it was through a human that death arrived, it's through a human that the resurrection from the dead has arrived. All die in Adam, you see, and all will be made alive in the Messiah.

Each, however, in proper order. The Messiah rises as the first fruits; then those who belong to the Messiah will rise at the time of his royal arrival. Then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the father, when he has destroyed all rule and all authority and power. He has to go on ruling, you see, until 'he has put all his enemies under his feet'. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, because 'he has put all things in order under his feet'. But when it says that everything is put in order under him, it's obvious that this doesn't include the one who put everything in order under him. No: when everything is put in order under him, then the son himself will be placed in proper order under the one who placed everything in order under him, so that God may be all in all.⁸³

This passage displays a great deal of Paul's reimagined Jewish eschatology, not simply these opening points about the temporal division of

‘resurrection’ and about the link between the Messiah and his people through the harvesting metaphor of the ‘first fruits’. It is also the classic passage for Paul’s vision of ‘the kingdom of God’, which, like resurrection, has itself split into two. The Messiah’s own temporary kingdom is already inaugurated, while the final ‘kingdom of God’, when God is ‘all in all’, is still to come. It is, however, guaranteed by the victory which the Messiah has already won.⁸⁴

Within that context, we find two further important themes: the scripture-based victorious rule of the Messiah in the present time, and his ‘royal arrival’ (*parousia*) in the future. We shall say more about the *parousia* in a moment. But the fact that Paul sees Jesus *as already ruling the world*, after the manner of a king who is now consolidating an initial victory over rebel subjects, indicates clearly what has happened. This is the ancient Jewish vision of world sovereignty, such as we find in Daniel 7.⁸⁵ It is focused, as in the Psalms, on the Messiah himself:

To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all people, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed ... The holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever ... Then judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom ... The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.⁸⁶

I will tell of the decree of YHWH: he said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’⁸⁷

May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust.⁸⁸

These are the themes in the background of 1 Corinthians 15.20–8, joining the dots to complete Paul’s scripture-based picture. In the foreground are two more quotations from the Psalms, the one linked to the rule of the ‘son of man’ and the other to the victory of the Messiah:

YHWH says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool ... YHWH is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter heads over the wide earth.

What is a human being, that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him? You have made him a little lower than God, and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.⁸⁹

The passage in 1 Corinthians thus gives every indication that Paul had combined these great biblical themes: Adam, creation and the dominion of humans over the animals; the Messiah, his victory over the nations and his continuing rule until all are subject to him; the hope of resurrection set before all the people of God. We can already see that Paul is lining up Jesus, as Messiah, with Adam (verses 22, 45–9), and it is abundantly clear here and elsewhere, as we said before, that Paul sees the resurrection as constituting Jesus as Messiah. What this passage reveals further, albeit densely, is the intimate connection between those two (Adam and Messiah) in Paul's mind. Whether or not we can conclude that he read Daniel 7 itself messianically, and was deliberately echoing it in this passage, is another matter, but in the light of this convergence of themes I think it highly probable.⁹⁰ Josephus gives clear evidence that many Jews in the middle of the first century looked to Daniel as predicting that 'at that time a world ruler would arise from Judaea'. Josephus says, with what sincerity may be debated, that this was in fact a prophecy about Vespasian.⁹¹ Paul, beyond any doubt, fully and thoroughly believes that it was a prophecy about Jesus, a prophecy now already fulfilled. This vision of Jesus, already ruling the world, is near the heart of Paul's inaugurated eschatology, his drastic revision of the Jewish hope.⁹²

It was not, of course, the kind of 'rule' that many had imagined. The bracketing out of political readings of Paul (resulting, for instance, in people insisting that Paul avoided the idea of Jesus' Messiahship, despite regularly calling him *Christos* and evoking scriptural promises about the Messiah to expound the significance of his achievements) has sidelined the question which ought to arise at this point.⁹³ The newer 'political' readings

of Paul, in their eagerness to have the apostle speak to the present day, do not always get the answer right, either. Here and in several other passages Paul declares loud and clear that Jesus is already the world's true lord and king; that he is already reigning. What did he mean?

Paul knew as well as we do that this claim seemed absurd. Not only did he believe that a once thoroughly dead man was now thoroughly and bodily alive again, but he believed that this same man was already in charge of the world, despite the fact that murder and mayhem continued and that he, Paul, a key representative of this dead-but-now-alive man, was suffering imprisonment and persecution! The claims for Jesus' sovereignty are made, though, right across the Pauline letters, and we cannot wish them away as a slip of the pen. The only possible conclusion is that for Paul the 'rule' of Jesus was something very different from the picture in either Psalm 2 (bruising people with a rod of iron) or Psalm 110 (shattering kings and breaking heads). But here, as often, the difference between prophecy and fulfilment is not to be located where much western exposition has imagined, namely at the axis between 'politics' and 'piety', with the 'rule' taking place, safely and conveniently, only in the hearts of believers and/or in a distant 'heaven'. That is the highway to gnosticism, and was indeed one reason why many would later take that road. Politically speaking, it was convenient and quite safe.⁹⁴ When Paul said that Jesus was now in charge, he meant something much more dangerous and subversive. He meant, in some sense or other, that Caesar was not the world's ultimate ruler. That qualification, 'in some sense or other', should not be allowed to blunt the edge of Paul's belief.

The same point emerges in Acts. Luke does not attempt to rebut the charge levelled against the apostle in Thessalonica: Paul was saying that there was 'another king, Jesus!'.⁹⁵ When Paul goes on to Athens and defends himself against serious accusations, he navigates the choppy and dangerous waters of rival theologies, but comes back to the same message of an inaugurated kingdom:

Now, instead, [God] commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has established a day on which he intends to call the world to account with full and proper justice by a man whom he has

appointed. God has given all people his pledge of this by raising this man from the dead.⁹⁶

A strong case can be made for saying that whenever Paul refers to Jesus as *kyrios* – from Romans 1.5 onwards! – it is this that he has in mind: the sovereign rule of the Messiah, inaugurated already, fulfilling the prophecies in which the world would at last be brought to book by the true human in charge of the ‘animals’, by the Messiah in charge of the nations. Certainly the concept of the messianic ‘inheritance’, in the sense of Jesus’ sovereignty over the whole world, is assumed by Paul to be central, as in Romans 8.17–25, in which the ‘now and not yet’ consists of Jesus already ruling the world and his people promised their share in that saving, liberating regime – even though at the moment their participation in it seems to consist mostly of mysterious groanings and inarticulate prayers.⁹⁷ The kingship of Jesus is already, for Paul, a present reality. He is ‘at the right hand of God’, as in Psalm 110.⁹⁸

The biblical resonances of this language ought to indicate well enough that Paul has in mind the ancient Jewish overlap of heaven and earth, so that when he speaks of the exaltation or ascension of Jesus he is not talking about primitive space travel but about Jesus now being installed at the place of executive power in the cosmos. Thus, in Ephesians, we find the same combination of themes as in 1 Corinthians 15:

This was the power at work in the king when God raised him from the dead and sat him at his right hand in the heavenly places, above all rule and authority and power and lordship, and above every name that is invoked, both in the present age and also in the age to come. Yes: God has ‘put all things under his feet’, and has given him to the church as the head over all.⁹⁹

And in Philipians the point is equally clear:

That now at the name of Jesus
every knee within heaven shall bow –
on earth, too, and under the earth;

And every tongue shall confess
that Jesus, Messiah, is lord,
to the glory of God, the father.

... We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we're eagerly waiting for the saviour, the lord, King Jesus, who is going to come from there. Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he's going to transform it so that it's just like his glorious body. And he's going to do this by the power which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority.¹⁰⁰

This in turn points to the full statement, in Colossians, of Jesus' world sovereignty:

... For in him all things were created,
in the heavens and here on the earth.
Things we can see and things we cannot,
– thrones and lordships and rulers and powers –
all things were created both through him and for him.

And he is ahead, prior to all else
and in him all things hold together;
and he himself is supreme, the head
over the body, the church.

He is the start of it all,
firstborn from realms of the dead;
so that in all things he might be the chief ...¹⁰¹

As I have argued elsewhere, the spectacular poem of which this forms a part represents a subtle and dense reworking of Jewish wisdom-themes. These are themselves closely linked in the tradition with royal expectations, based on the memory of Solomon as (a) the ultimately wise man, (b) the peaceful ruler of David's extensive kingdom and (c) the one to whom the kings of the earth would bring gifts. They are also linked with the promise of the vindication of the righteous and the overthrow of tyrannical and enslaving rulers, and with the theme of creation itself and the place of humans within it. The Wisdom of Solomon is of course another place where these themes all come together. Whether or not Paul was consciously echoing that book, he certainly shares the same heritage.

It is in Colossians, too, that we find one of the clearest statements of the victory which has already been won, bringing to inauguration that crucial element of Jewish eschatology. In a breathtaking shift of perspective, Paul declares that God

stripped the rulers and authorities of their armour, and displayed them contemptuously to public view, celebrating his triumph over them in him.¹⁰²

This seems to be cognate with the cryptic line in 1 Corinthians, where Paul says that ‘the rulers of the present age’ didn’t know about God’s secret, hidden wisdom. ‘If they had, you see’, he writes, ‘they wouldn’t have crucified the lord of glory.’¹⁰³ Assuming that by ‘the rulers of the present age’ Paul means Caiaphas, Pilate and the power-systems which they represented, what this seems to indicate is that when these ‘rulers’ crucified Jesus they were, in fact, signing their own death warrant. Here, in line once more with Jewish eschatological expectations, we find Paul alluding to the distinction between ‘the present age’ and ‘the age to come’. The ‘present age’ is ruled over precisely by people like Caiaphas and Pilate, while the age to come is ruled over by ... Jesus. The two ‘empires’ stand, for the moment, side by side: just as in Galatians 1.4 (see below), so in Colossians 1.13 he declares that God ‘has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son’.¹⁰⁴

How has this happened? Paul is under no doubt. It is through the cross, always remembering that it is the cross of the one who was then raised; without the resurrection, the cross would simply be a defeat, and the powers of the world would still be in charge. The cross is the victory through which the powers of the old age are brought low, enabling the new age to be ushered in at last. Here, once again, we see what was foundational for Paul: *that which Jewish eschatology looked for in the future, the overthrow of the enslaving evil powers and the establishment of YHWH’s reign instead, had truly been inaugurated in and through the messianic events of Jesus’ death and resurrection.* As a result, the ‘rulers of the present age’ are now ‘being done away with’.¹⁰⁵ Their power is at an end, and they unwittingly brought that result upon themselves by crucifying the one who always was ‘the lord of glory’ and who is now revealed as such through his resurrection. The fact that Paul can drop this reference into an argument which is basically about something else (though of course in the end all these things join up) indicates well enough how solidly established it was in his mind.

Referring to the cross, even implicitly, as God's victory over the rulers of the present age, and hence as inaugurating the 'age to come', takes us across to another key mention of this same inaugurated-eschatological version of the 'two ages' theme: Galatians 1.4. Here, in the highly significant introduction to his most polemical letter, Paul announces that when Jesus died on the cross he

gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of God our father, to whom be glory to the ages of ages, Amen.

Here, again in line with the Jewish notion we mentioned above, Paul designates 'the present age' as basically 'evil'. We should not make the mistake of supposing he was a dualist at heart. The 'evil' of the present age, in Jewish thought, consists not in the present world being a dark, wicked place from which we should try to escape, but in the intrusion into, and infection of, God's good creation with the power of evil.¹⁰⁶ The idea of the Messiah 'giving himself for our sins' is every bit as central for Paul himself as the 'rescue from the present evil age', as is clear from the repetition of the idea of the Messiah 'giving himself for me' in the climactic and decisive 2.20.¹⁰⁷ The two go together, as always in Paul, with the first enabling the second: it is because, on the cross, sins have been dealt with that the power of the 'present evil age' is broken. But once again the point is clear. *The 'age to come' has now been inaugurated*, with Jesus as its agent and leader.¹⁰⁸ This means that 'the life of the age [to come]', *zōē aiōnios*, is now the ultimate future state, that is, resurrection within the renewed creation – but one which is *already assured* for those who are 'in the Messiah'.¹⁰⁹ With this language, too, Paul is locating himself firmly within second-Temple apocalyptic eschatology, and declaring that 'the age to come' has already arrived in Jesus and is therefore secured for all his people.

If all this is so, we should expect to find that the new exodus *has taken* place and *is taking* place. This, too, is right there in the middle of Paul's thought. Exodus language comes naturally to him as he reflects on what God has done through the Messiah, in the passage we glanced at a moment ago:

He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son. He is the one in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.¹¹⁰

More particularly, the exodus forms the main backdrop for one of Paul's most decisive statements of God's action in the Messiah:

When we were children, we were kept in 'slavery' under the 'elements of the world'. But when the fullness of time arrived, God sent out his son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And, because you are sons, God sent out the spirit of his son into our hearts, calling out 'Abba, father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son! And, if you're a son, you are an heir, through God.¹¹¹

The 'new-exodus' language is clear: from slavery to sonship, by means of God's 'redemption', resulting in this people being the 'heir' of the 'inheritance'.¹¹² Paul develops this more fully in Romans 6—8, where the narrative of the exodus stands, arguably, behind the entire exposition. In Romans 6, those who are 'in the Messiah' are brought from slavery to freedom; in Romans 7, the story takes us to Mount Sinai; then in Romans 8, with echoes of the Galatians passage, the Messiah's people are 'led', not by the cloud and fire, but by the spirit, and, assured of that 'sonship' which is itself an exodus-blessing, they are on the way to the 'inheritance'.¹¹³

This is the larger context which enables us to understand Paul's more incidental references to the same point, such as his exhortation in 1 Corinthians 10. The original exodus events happened as 'patterns' for us, Paul declares, to warn us in our own pilgrimage in case we make the same mistakes as they did. They were 'baptized into Moses', and they all 'ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink'.¹¹⁴ In other words, the baptism and eucharist which mark out the church are exodus derivatives, as one might expect granted Paul's other language about them.¹¹⁵ They have launched the Messiah's people on their own exodus journey, and

these things happened to them as a pattern, and they were written for our instruction, since it's upon us that the ends of the ages have now come.¹¹⁶

In other words, being the people of the new exodus goes very closely with being the people of the ‘age to come’ which has already been inaugurated in the Messiah.¹¹⁷ At every point the conclusion is the same: that which the Jews had expected has been fulfilled, though in a highly surprising way, by the God whose purpose was implemented in the Messiah.

As with everything else in Paul’s thought, all this leads by one route or another to the achievement of Israel’s God in and through the Messiah’s cross. This, too, is a vital and central element in Paul’s inaugurated eschatology. Not all his statements of the achievement of the cross fit snugly within a ‘new-exodus’ theme, but some (including those just mentioned) clearly do, and the others draw on related biblical passages such as Isaiah 40—55. The danger, in western theology at least, has been that what is usually called ‘atonement’ is seen in a dehistoricized fashion, as though the cross functioned simply as the peculiar historical outworking of an essentially abstract or ‘spiritual’ transaction. But if we keep second-Temple Judaism in mind, the reality of what Paul means by ‘redemption’ was that Israel’s God had acted decisively within history to deal with evil in general and the sin of his people in particular, meaning that with this blockage out of the way the new creation could be set in motion, starting with the resurrection of Jesus and continuing to its completion in the renewal of all things. In the end, the one God would be ‘all in all’. The cross, then, is not simply part of the definition of God (chapter 9, above) or the key fulcrum around which the purpose of God in election is accomplished (chapter 10, above). It is also at the heart of Paul’s inaugurated eschatology.

All this meant, for Paul, that the one God had now acted out his faithfulness to the covenant. He had kept his promises, specifically the promise to Abraham and the many other promises which flowed from that. In the light of our exposition of Paul’s narrative world in chapter 7, we do not need to labour the point that to speak of the divine covenant faithfulness is not to suggest that, for Paul, the covenant with *Moses* is as it were to be ratified as it stands. As we saw in the previous chapter, the relationship of gospel to law – specifically, the Mosaic law – is far more complex. We

concentrate here, rather, on the *inaugurated eschatology* in which what Israel expected – that the one God would act out of faithfulness to the covenant, passing judgment on the wickedness of the world, rescuing his people from that wickedness and its consequences, and establishing his justice and mercy in the whole world – had been fulfilled in and through the Messiah. The questions that rang through Jewish minds from Daniel to *4 Ezra* and beyond – questions about how the covenant God would fulfil his promises, how he would make the new exodus happen, how he would bring the exile to an end at last and (in the case of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*) what on earth he was doing in the recent shocking events – these were all questions about the *tsedaqah elohim*, the *dikaioynē theou*, the ‘righteousness of God’.

The fact that this English phrase does not instantly suggest those meanings to most readers today leaves us in a quandary to which there is no obvious right answer, and we must do the best we can. I have suggested ‘God’s covenant justice’ in some passages, and ‘God’s covenant faithfulness’ in others. The point, as the whole of Romans 4 and then Romans 9—11 insists, is that God has done, in the events concerning Jesus the Messiah, what he always *intended* to do, and what he always *promised* to do, even though nobody prior to Jesus, certainly not Saul of Tarsus, had thought it would work out like this. That is the dialectic between those uncomfortable categories, ‘salvation history’ and ‘apocalyptic’: God always said he would act shockingly and unexpectedly, and that is precisely what he has done. The gospel of Jesus the Messiah, and his faithful obedience to death, was the unveiling in action of God’s faithful covenant justice – but it was ‘to the Jew first and also, equally, to the Greek’, with Jews equally under judgment.¹¹⁸ When the gospel was announced, Paul believed, it unveiled this covenant justice again and again.¹¹⁹ Paul can refer to the whole Messiah-event as ‘God’s covenant faithfulness’, precisely because in Jesus and the spirit the promises God made, not only to Abraham but also in Deuteronomy 30, have been and are being fulfilled.¹²⁰

Ultimately, as we have insisted throughout, the reason the covenant was there in the first place was to address and solve the problem which the

creator had faced from the time of Genesis 3. How was his purpose for the whole creation now to be fulfilled? The call of Abraham, and the promises that were made to him, were specifically designed not just *for* Abraham and his family but for the larger purposes that the creator God intended to accomplish *through* Abraham and his family. Clearly, the redemption of human beings – their rescue from the guilt and grip of evil, and their fresh embodiment in the ultimate resurrection – is at the centre of this. But, as those redemptive passages themselves make clear, the point of rescuing human beings, like the point of calling Abraham in the first place, was not for their own sake, but in order, through them, to rescue the world. Inaugurated eschatology ought therefore to result in *new creation*, not yet of course complete, but at least decisively launched.

That, too, is what we find. ‘If anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation!’¹²¹ Most now read this line, rightly in my view, as pointing not just to what is true of the ‘anyone’ in question (though it surely does that as well), but beyond that to the larger reality of ‘new creation’ that the gospel has opened up. The Greek is simply *ei tis en Christō kainē ktisis*: ‘if anyone in Messiah, new creation!’. The single newly created human being functions as a small window on the new, large, eschatological reality. God is renewing the world, and is calling human beings both to be renewed in themselves (‘be transformed’, says Paul, ‘by the renewing of your minds’¹²²) and then, it seems, to be agents of that renewal. And in that new creation the divisions of the human race that marked, and marred, the ‘present age’ are to be done away. ‘Circumcision, you see, is nothing; neither is uncircumcision! What matters is new creation.’¹²³ The whole argument of Galatians depends on the assumption that in the Messiah and by the spirit this ‘new creation’ has decisively begun. After all, ‘the Messiah gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age’ (1.4)! If the ‘new creation’ had still been in the future, Paul’s opponents would have been right to insist on the ethnic boundary-markers that kept the chosen people safe and sound (but also ‘under Torah’, with all the tensions of Romans 7) while awaiting the new day. Here as elsewhere, Paul’s real objection to those who would perpetuate such things was that they were

past their use-by date. The divisions of humanity belonged to the old age, and the new had already arrived. Not, of course, that it was complete. That, as always, constituted the tension in Paul's thought. We wait with patience, he says, for the time when 'creation itself [will] be freed from its slavery to decay, to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified'.¹²⁴ If we are to understand the *not yet* in Pauline theology, we must do so in the light of the *now* on which he insists again and again. God *has already* delivered us from the present evil age, he says, and *has already* made us part of his new creation. The future still matters enormously. But we must not imagine, because of the *not yet*, that Paul had forgotten the *now*.

All this massive inauguration of eschatology, accomplished by Israel's God through the Messiah, draws the eye up to one final point. If it has all happened in such a rich combination of scriptural fulfilment, practical Christian living and everything in between, what has happened to the central theme itself, the return of Israel's God to Zion? What is the Pauline equivalent, if there is one (and, granted all that we have said, it would be very surprising if there were not such a thing), to the Johannine 'the word became flesh, and lived among us', where the English verb 'lived' inadequately translates *eskēnōsen*, 'pitched his tent' – in other words, picking up the overtones John intends us to hear, 'tabernacled' in our midst?¹²⁵ Where is the christological 'new temple' in Paul's theology?

We have already answered this question in chapter 9. Despite earlier generations in which doubt was cast on any suggestions of a high christology in Paul, we can firmly say that he believed that Israel's God was fully and personally present in and as Jesus the Messiah. There are two places in particular in his writings where we detect that Johannine theme of the divine glory returning as promised to live within the temple – but with the temple in question being, not the building in Jerusalem, but the person of Jesus himself. Both 2 Corinthians 4.5–6 and Colossians 1.15–20 make this clear. The tabernacling presence of God in 2 Corinthians 4 is part of the theme of new covenant and new creation that pervades Paul's account of his Messiah-shaped ministry throughout chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. And the

‘indwelling’ language of Colossians 1 and 2 picks up the language of the Shekinah dwelling in the Temple. This, Paul is saying, is the reality for which post-exilic Judaism had longed. The covenant God had returned in person, in the person of Jesus. Redefined monotheism and redefined eschatology dovetail together exactly.

(ii) Through the Spirit

Perhaps the clearest sign that Paul is thinking in terms of a surprising fulfilment of the Jewish hope of YHWH’s return to his people is his further use of ‘temple’-imagery in relation to the indwelling of the divine spirit within the Messiah’s people. This too we have studied already. Three times he says this, twice in relation to the church as a whole and once in relation to individual Christians.¹²⁶

This imagery is anything but an incidental metaphor (which is how many commentators have treated it in the past). An erstwhile Pharisee would be unlikely to toss around the idea of the Temple, so central to the Judaism of the period, as one image among many. The stress on the Temple’s holiness in all three passages, and on the building of the Temple in the first of them,¹²⁷ indicates that it is indeed Israel’s Temple that Paul is thinking of, and we are therefore not merely encouraged but compelled to take these passages as an indication of the strange fulfilment of the ancient Jewish hope. YHWH has returned at last, but not as the pillar of cloud and fire, and not to dwell in Herod’s Temple in Jerusalem. His powerful, personal presence has come to inhabit his people, turning them individually into walking temples and corporately into a single body designed for praise, holiness and sacrifice.¹²⁸ This is the long-awaited new temple, inhabited personally by the long-awaited God of Israel.

This theme of the new temple thus belongs, in Paul, equally to the Messiah and to his spirit-filled people, and it is not surprising that we find him oscillating easily between the two. One such passage is Romans 8.9–11, where the notion of the spirit’s ‘indwelling’ is a strong indication of the implicit ‘temple’-theme, though the absence of this theme from much

Pauline scholarship (and the presence in the passage of several other important ideas) has meant that most exegetes have missed the point altogether.¹²⁹ God's spirit, he says, 'lives within you', *oikei en hymin*. He repeats this in verse 11: the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead 'lives within you', *oikei en hymin*. When the divine spirit takes up residence in a place, that place becomes a temple, whether it realizes it or not; when a second-Temple Jew speaks of this happening, with the result that the Temple itself is reconstructed (presumably as a still more fitting residence for the divine spirit), this cannot simply be an isolated prediction of a strange future event. It is another instance of Paul's inaugurated eschatology. Israel's God had long promised that the Temple would be rebuilt and that he would come and dwell in it. Paul has combined these elements in a new way – first the indwelling, then the rebuilding – but it is these same elements of the Jewish hope that he has reworked.

This points across to another somewhat surprising passage in Colossians, which again is not normally read in this way but perhaps ought to be. The Messiah, living within his people, is 'the hope of glory'.¹³⁰ The 'glory' here is not, I think, simply the 'glory' that each individual Christian awaits. As we saw, it is the 'glory' of Israel's God which, as promised, will flood and drench the whole world. This 'glory' – the personal and sovereign presence of Israel's God – will come back not simply to the Temple in Jerusalem, not simply to be within Israel, but to fill all creation. As a sign and foretaste of that still-future 'filling', the Messiah is dwelling within his people in the present time, even within the little group of new-minted Christians in the small town of Colosse. The present possession of 'the Messiah' as the one who, by his spirit, indwells his people, is the inauguration of the promise of YHWH's return. This is part of what Paul means, to be sure, when he writes that all God's promises find their 'yes' in the Messiah, one of the clearest statements of the principle that our whole present chapter is expounding.¹³¹

The mention of 2 Corinthians takes us back once more to one of the central chapters for Paul's view of the spirit. Chapter 3 has long been controversial: why would Paul want to spend so much time talking about Moses? One regular answer, of course, is that he didn't want to do so, but

that his opponents forced him into it by speaking of Moses and his glorious ministry in contrast to Paul and his apparently less than glorious one.¹³² That might indeed be part of the explanation in this case. One can never rule out such a possibility. But it is hardly a sufficient reason for Paul's development of the theme. Like a good chess player, Paul was well capable of taking something his opponent had done and responding with a fresh and brilliant move that was much more than a mere tit-for-tat response. The moment a public speaker longs for is when a heckler, thinking to have scored a clever point, succeeds in raising, in just the right way, the topic one wished to address anyway.

What is often missed here is that Paul is expounding, more fully than elsewhere (though he alludes to the theme in various places), the passage in Exodus in which Moses wrestles with Israel's God over the promise to live within his people, in their midst. For this we may simply refer to our previous treatment of the same theme in chapter 9. For our present purposes we note, in particular, that Paul brings together the dramatic 'now' of the present indwelling spirit with the equally dramatic 'not yet' of 2 Corinthians 4.7–12: we have this treasure in earthenware pots. But Paul's description of the present painful state of affairs is not simply a way of balancing out the glorious truth he has just unveiled. The inner renewal (4.16), in the midst of that suffering, is the *present* reality which functions as the signpost to the *future* reality.

Galatians and Romans pick up the same theme: the presence of the spirit is the sign, for Paul, that YHWH has returned as he had always promised. In Galatians 4.1–7 Paul is evoking the theme of the exodus, the redemption of the slaves so that they now become 'sons'. But it is precisely in the exodus that we have not only the fresh revelation of the divine name (Exodus 3.13–15) and of the divine nature as the covenant-keeping God (6.2–8; 34.6–7), but also the fulfilment of the promise that this God would, despite his people's rebellion and idolatry, come and live in their midst. Here in Galatians this picture is developed in relation both to the Messiah and to the spirit, here described as 'the spirit of his son'. The living God has come in the person of his son to rescue his people, and in the work of the

spirit to dwell within them. As we saw in chapter 9, Paul can then refer to this whole complex of thought by saying, ‘now that you’ve come to know God – or, better, to be known *by* God’.¹³³ What drives the appeal of 4.8–11, at the root, is not some odd scheme or strange new prejudice on Paul’s part, but his conviction that with the son and the spirit Israel’s hope has been fulfilled. The covenant God has returned to dwell in and with his people.

This is spelled out, as we have seen several times, in relation to the work of the spirit transforming the *heart*. That vital little passage, Romans 2.28–9, which stands behind so much of the rest of the letter, insists that the thing for which Israel had hoped had been accomplished by Israel’s God through the spirit:

The ‘Jew’ isn’t the person who appears to be one, you see. Nor is ‘circumcision’ what it appears to be, a matter of physical flesh. The ‘Jew’ is the one in secret; and ‘circumcision’ is a matter of the heart, in the spirit rather than the letter. Such a person gets ‘praise’, not from humans, but from God.

In other words: the promises (and warnings) of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Ezekiel have been fulfilled, and this fulfilment is open to all, Jew and gentile alike.¹³⁴

Paul uses the running theme of these promises and warnings to his advantage in his argument for the inclusion of the uncircumcised. Since what counts for the prophets, when it comes to membership in the renewed covenant, is the circumcision of the heart, this is clearly unrelated to the circumcision of the flesh. Physical circumcision is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the real circumcision (though he does not use the word ‘real’, here or in the parallel in Philippians 3.3) which is the badge of the new-covenant family. The passage is thus all about inaugurated eschatology. The ancient Israelite hope, and more recently the second-Temple Jewish hope, is fulfilled through the coming into being of a Jew-plus-gentile family whose hearts have been transformed through the work of the spirit.

Paul alludes to this heart-transformation in three further passages as Romans continues (5.5; 6.17; 8.27), showing that we are still on track. The

theme then comes to the fore dramatically in the passage we shall be studying from a different angle in the final main section of the present chapter, where he describes the way in which Israel's God can and will answer the prayer he, Paul, has been praying for the 'salvation' of presently unbelieving Jews. Paul picks up the strand of 'heart-transformation' in Deuteronomy 30, linking it with Deuteronomy 9.4 ('Do not say in your *heart*') with, presumably, just this desired effect:

Don't say in your *heart*, Who shall go up to heaven? (in other words, to bring the Messiah down), or, Who shall go down into the depths? (in other words, to bring the Messiah up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your *heart*' (that is, the word of faith which we proclaim); because if you profess with your mouth that Jesus is lord, and believe in your *heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Why? Because the way to covenant membership is by believing with the *heart*, and the way to salvation is by professing with the mouth.¹³⁵

Here too, as in Romans 2, the point is then made: this is for all, since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (10.12). This passage, which grows out of the spectacular 'new covenant' exposition of 7.1—8.11 and all that goes with it, is near the very centre of Paul's inaugurated eschatology. God has done at last what he had promised, even though it looks nothing like what the people who had been clinging to that promise had been expecting (10.2–4). As Josephus claimed to do, Paul read the closing chapters of Deuteronomy as an eschatological prophecy coming true in his own day. The hope of Israel was being realized.¹³⁶

Here, in particular, the spirit is the active agent, though not explicitly mentioned. As often, Paul's brief reference to one part of a key text brings with it the resonances of the larger section. Immediately after the passage just cited, he explains that the abolition of distinction between Jew and Greek is because 'the same lord is lord of all', rich (i.e. in mercy and grace) towards all who call upon him. Then, in 10.11, he quotes Joel 2.32:¹³⁷ 'all who call upon the name of the lord will be saved.' This is part of the longer prophecy of a covenant renewal in which, precisely, all and sundry will be involved:

Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of YHWH shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as YHWH has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom YHWH calls.¹³⁸

Within this spirit-driven inaugurated eschatology all sorts of other new things begin to happen, not least of course the transformation of behaviour upon which Paul insists throughout his writings.¹³⁹ Many times, despite his own polemic against those who try to live within Torah (i.e. as though the new day of the gospel had not dawned), he nevertheless speaks of a ‘fulfilment’ of Torah on the part of those who believe and are led by the spirit. They are not ‘under Torah’, but they nevertheless do what Torah intended.¹⁴⁰

There can be no doubt, then, that for Paul the long-awaited expectation of Israel has begun to be realized. Those who believe his gospel are, as it were, starting again not only like the original exodus generation (1 Corinthians 10) but also like the wife in the original primal pair, with the Messiah playing the role of husband (2 Corinthians 11.2–3).¹⁴¹ New creation in its fullest sense is still, of course, awaited, and that is why the Messiah’s people ‘groan’ in the present.¹⁴² But to deny that it has already begun is to cut off the branch upon which the whole early Christian movement, and Paul’s theology within it, is sitting.

Paul, then, sees Israel’s hope as *realized* in the present time, albeit in a radically new way, reconceived around the Messiah and the spirit. But this realization is clearly and importantly incomplete. There is a ‘not yet’. And this, too, Paul has expressed as a messianic and pneumatological reworking of the same Jewish hope.

[4. Hope Still to Come – through Jesus and the Spirit](#)

As with the present, so with the future: the central promise is that YHWH will return in glory to his people, bringing all things to completion, overcoming all enemies, vindicating his people and establishing his kingdom at last. And the central achievement of Paul in relation to this great hope was to transform the ancient Israelite vision of ‘the day of YHWH’ so that it became ‘the day of the Messiah’, or – with that characteristic ambiguity we studied in chapter 9 – ‘the day of “the lord” ’, where ‘the lord’ clearly denotes Jesus the Messiah but also, through the Septuagintal echoes of *kyrios*, resonates powerfully with the divine name itself.¹⁴³

Sometimes Paul uses the whole biblical phrase, ‘the day of the lord’, often modifying it with the name of Jesus:

[God] will establish you right through to the end, so that you are blameless on the day of our lord, King Jesus.¹⁴⁴

... you must hand over such a person to the satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the lord Jesus.¹⁴⁵

We are your pride and joy, just as you are ours, on the day of our lord Jesus.¹⁴⁶

You know very well that the day of the lord will come like a midnight robber.¹⁴⁷

Please don't be suddenly blown off course, in your thinking ... through a letter supposedly from us, telling you that the day of the lord has already arrived.¹⁴⁸

Sometimes, instead, he uses ‘the day of the Messiah’ or a similar variant:

The one who began a good work in you will thoroughly complete it by the day of the Messiah Jesus.¹⁴⁹

Then you will be ... sincere and faultless on the day of the Messiah.¹⁵⁰

That's what I will be proud of on the day of the Messiah.¹⁵¹

And sometimes he just speaks of ‘the day’, clearly referring to the same moment and modifying it in various ways, not least with warnings of judgment:

You are building up a store of anger for yourself on the day of anger, the day when God's just judgment will be unveiled.¹⁵²

... on the day when (according to the gospel I proclaim) God judges all human secrets through King Jesus.¹⁵³

The night is nearly over, the day is almost here.¹⁵⁴
Everyone's work will become visible, because the Day will show it up, since it will be revealed in fire.¹⁵⁵

Don't disappoint God's holy spirit – the spirit who put God's mark on you to identify you on the day of freedom.¹⁵⁶

May the lord grant him to find mercy from the lord on that day.¹⁵⁷

The lord, the righteous judge, will give [the crown of righteousness] to me as my reward on that day.¹⁵⁸

In order to explain both the idea which Paul is expressing here and the way in which he came to see this as a good way of expressing it, we need to draw on much of the material we have surveyed in earlier chapters. The important point is this. The idea of a coming 'day' when the creator of the world, Israel's covenant God, would act in judgment and mercy was, as we saw, an important theme in the biblical prophets. Paul believed that the accomplishment of Jesus as Messiah, and the gift of the spirit, meant that in one sense the new day had already dawned: 'the day of salvation is here'. But, just as 'resurrection' itself had as it were split into two, so 'the day' itself had divided up into the 'day' – the ongoing 'now' of the gospel – in which promises were truly fulfilled, not just anticipated, and the further 'day' in which the work would be complete and the creator would be 'all in all'. We have already quoted 1 Corinthians 15.20–8, in which the distinction is made, and where 'the end' (*to telos*) in verse 24 ('then comes the end, the goal, when he hands over the kingly rule to God the father, when he has destroyed all rule and all authority and power') clearly refers to the same moment as 'the day' elsewhere in the letter (as cited above). Chapter 15 of

course yields further rich material concerning what will happen on that 'day', to which we shall presently return.

It will be, it seems, primarily a day of *judgment*. Not simply 'condemnation', though 'judgment' includes that, as in Romans 2.5, quoted above. It will be 'judgment' in the more ancient biblical sense: the time when everything gets sorted out, when everything that needs putting right is put right. It will be the time when all secrets are disclosed, when the quality of work done by the lord's people will appear, and when in particular those who have borne fruit through their work will receive their proper reward (Paul is not nearly as queasy about the idea of 'reward' as some of his zealous post-Reformation followers). When we put together the various passages cited above it appears that for most of the time the different imagery used to describe the day (such as fire, in 1 Corinthians 3) is just that, imagery. There is also, however, a puzzling sense in one of the references that perhaps, as in the Old Testament, this 'day', too, will divide up into different 'moments', some of which may fall *within* the present course of world history:

Please don't be suddenly blown off course in your thinking, or be unsettled, either through spiritual influence, or through a word, or through a letter supposedly from us, telling you that the day of the lord has already arrived. [159](#)

The point has been made often enough, but is worth repeating: if the Thessalonians were likely to receive a message or letter telling them that 'the day of the lord has already arrived', then presumably they at least did not suppose that 'the day of the lord' meant the actual dissolution of the space-time universe. But perhaps Paul did not, either. We must probe further in his eschatology to find out.

In particular, we must consider the possibility that Paul, who was most likely more aware than we are of how prophetic traditions worked, not only believed in a 'now' and a 'not yet', as though there were two and only two 'moments' in Christian eschatology, but also in penultimate fulfilments, particular moments which one might interpret in terms of their relation to the one-off fulfilment in the Messiah and the ultimate future 'day'. This, I

think, is what is going on in the Thessalonian correspondence. Clearly, he is looking ahead to the ultimate ‘last day’ when Jesus will return and the dead will be raised.¹⁶⁰ But he is also looking ahead to a very specific moment when something strange and dark will happen. Speaking of the Judaeans who have done their best to prevent the spread of the gospel, as they did their best to get rid of Jesus, he declares that ‘the fury has come upon them for good’.¹⁶¹ We must return to this passage later in the present chapter. Suffice it to say for now that it looks as though Paul here, and in the passage quoted above from 2 Thessalonians, may reflect the widespread early Christian awareness that Jesus had prophesied the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, and that when that terrible event came about it was to be interpreted in the same way that Jeremiah had interpreted the similar disaster six hundred years before.¹⁶²

Before leaving the notion of ‘the day of the lord’, though, we must re-emphasize the basic theological point. In the second-Temple period, ‘the day of YHWH’ would have struck the chords of ‘the return of YHWH to Zion’. What we find in Paul’s new concept of ‘the day of the lord *Jesus*’ is another manifestation of the same reimagined hope. When Paul spoke about the future day of Jesus, he was speaking of the time when, in the person of his son, Israel’s God would come back once and for all, to call the whole world to account and to establish his reign of justice, mercy and peace.

The best-known Pauline term to denote this coming moment is of course *parousia*.¹⁶³ Unlike most of Paul’s technical terms, this word has no biblical overtones. It comes, rather, from the classical world, and its simple and basic meaning is ‘presence’ as opposed to ‘absence’, as when a friend is here in the room with me rather than being on the other side of town.¹⁶⁴ However, if the friend, having been far away, then turns up on the doorstep, his or her *presence* will be rightly perceived as the result of *having arrived*, and thus the word *parousia* slides gently from its home base, *presence*, into the meaning *arrival*.

As such, it can be used of all kinds of situations, whether it be a friend making the journey across town or an official state visit from royalty or nobility. The latter is particularly noteworthy when, for instance, *parousia* is

used of Caesar or some other high official paying a visit to a city or province or, indeed, returning to Rome or some other centre after such a trip.¹⁶⁵

In parallel with this particular and well-known usage, *parousia* was also widely used to denote the ‘appearance’ or ‘manifestation’ of a divinity. (Since the Caesars were on their way to being regularly divinized in Paul’s day, the ‘imperial’ and ‘divine’ meanings could already be combined.) A striking example, in relation to Israel’s God, is found in Josephus, when he speaks of the thunderbolts on Mount Sinai as signifying the *parousia tou theou*, the ‘arrival’ of Israel’s God to do business with Moses.¹⁶⁶ Equally interesting is his description of what happened once the tabernacle had been constructed in the wilderness:

He came as their guest and took up His abode in this sanctuary ... While the heaven was serene, over the tabernacle alone darkness descended, enveloping it in a cloud not so profound and dense as might be attributed to winter storm, nor yet so tenuous that the eye could perceive a thing through it; but a delicious dew was distilled therefrom, revealing God’s presence [*theou dēlousa parousian*] to those who both desired it and believed in it.¹⁶⁷

Josephus rather carefully qualifies his statement by adding a romantic touch to the scene, and then implying that the ‘presence’ was only revealed to those who wanted or believed in it, thereby appearing to distance himself from any strong affirmation of its objective reality. This should not obscure the point, which is obviously relevant to the way we have approached the whole subject of Paul’s revised version of second-Temple eschatology. Paul, I have been arguing, saw the future in terms of the ultimate fulfilment of the promise that YHWH would return. Here Josephus uses the word *parousia* to denote one of the moments that stood as a paradigm for that hope.¹⁶⁸

These two meanings (the royal arrival of a monarch or similar official, and the manifestation or powerful presence of a divinity) seem to be combined in a creative way by Paul himself. As far as he is concerned, Jesus is not ‘absent’ or far away. As the risen sovereign of the whole world, he is always present and powerful. But one day this powerful presence will be revealed in action in a new way, when in the perception of those to whom he is thus revealed it will seem as though he has in fact ‘arrived’. Like a king returning from abroad to reclaim his rightful possession, he will ‘come’ from heaven to earth, not for a brief visit but to combine the two into one:

We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we’re eagerly waiting for the saviour, the lord, King Jesus, who is going to come from there. Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he’s going to transform it so that it’s just like his glorious body. And he’s going to do this by the power which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority.¹⁶⁹

But when this happens it will also be like the ‘manifestation’ of a divinity, for the very good reason that it *will* be the manifestation of the one who, as we saw earlier, Paul regarded as the living human embodiment of Israel’s God. For that reason we need to note, at the same time, the term *epiphaneia*, ‘appearing’ (as in the English ‘epiphany’), which could carry the same double meaning as *parousia* (with other shades as well): the ‘manifestation’ of a divinity¹⁷⁰ or the accession of an emperor.¹⁷¹ This abstract term is related to the verb *phaneroō*, ‘to make manifest’,¹⁷² and both the noun and the verb draw our attention to the fact that the early Christians, Paul included, did not think of Jesus as a long way away from them and needing to make a substantial journey to come back, but rather of Jesus as present but hidden and needing to be made manifest.¹⁷³

Despite its non-biblical background, then, the content with which Paul fills the word *parousia* indicates well enough that this future moment will be the time when the long hope of Israel will be realized, as with the expected return of YHWH:

The Messiah rises as the first fruits; then those who belong to the Messiah will rise at the time of his royal arrival [*parousia*].¹⁷⁴

When our lord Jesus is present once more [*en tē autou parousia*], what is our hope, our joy, the crown of our boasting before him?^{[175](#)}

That way, your hearts will be strengthened and kept blameless in holiness before God our father when our lord Jesus is present again [*en tē parousia tou kyriou hēmōn Iēsou*] with all his holy ones.^{[176](#)}

We who are alive, who remain until the lord is present [*hoi perileipomenoi eis tēn parousian tou kyriou*], will not find ourselves ahead of those who fell asleep.^{[177](#)}

May your complete spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming [*en tē parousia*] of our lord Jesus the Messiah.^{[178](#)}

Now concerning the royal presence [*hyper tēs parousias*] of our lord Jesus the Messiah, and our gathering together around him ...^{[179](#)}

The lord Jesus will destroy [the lawless one] with the breath of his mouth, and will wipe him out with the unveiling of his presence [*tē epiphaneia tēs parousias autou*].^{[180](#)}

What has happened, it seems, is a combination of five things:^{[181](#)}

1. There is the older Jewish expectation: YHWH will come back, with all his holy ones,^{[182](#)} and will sort out the mess of Israel and the nations once and for all.
2. There is the messianic version of this expectation: David's son and heir will destroy the wicked with the sword of his mouth and the breath of his lips.^{[183](#)}
3. Then there is Paul's reappropriation of these and related traditions, based on his firm belief (itself grounded in Jesus' resurrection) that the hope of Israel had been dramatically inaugurated through Jesus and the spirit: this future scenario had come to birth in the present, but with the all-important eschatological now-and-not-yet division.
4. Then, since Paul identified Jesus as the one in and through whom YHWH had become personally present, it was not difficult to transfer to him the still-future expectation of YHWH's 'day' or

‘coming’ or ‘appearing’. This sustained the ‘divine manifestation’ meaning of both *parousia* and *phaneroō*.

5. Finally, it will not have been lost on Paul that *parousia*, *epiphaneia* and related ideas were familiar as terms for the royal visit, or appearing or return, of Caesar himself.¹⁸⁴

When, therefore, he speaks of Jesus’ triumphant return in power to establish his sovereign rule over the whole world, and when he uses, in relation to Jesus, language which was in fairly common use for the return or appearance of Caesar, the present ‘world ruler’, we should draw the obvious conclusion. Just as the ancient Israelite expectation of ‘the day of YHWH’ included the hope that YHWH would be revealed as the true ruler of the world by the overthrow of pagan tyrants, whether of Egypt, Babylon or anywhere else, so Paul’s expectation of ‘the day of the lord’ included the expectation that, on the last day, that which was already true would at last be revealed: Jesus is lord, and Caesar is not.¹⁸⁵

The immediate result of all this, in terms of final eschatology, is that the creator and covenant God will, at the last, put the whole world to rights.¹⁸⁶ Here I see no reason to doubt that Paul meant what he wrote in Romans 2.1–16, despite the large number in recent years who have proposed either that this is simply a Jewish tradition which he quotes in order to show how superior the gospel is, or a hypothetical case which will be rendered null and void by the fact that (as he goes on to demonstrate) all alike are sinful, or – the most recent, and extreme case – that this is part of a ‘speech in character’ which Paul cunningly puts into the mouth of an opponent whom he will then outflank.¹⁸⁷ On the contrary: the whole passage is important as part of the foundation for what Paul is going to say in each section of Romans.

The passage’s importance lies not least in its final line: the creator God will judge all human secrets ‘through King Jesus’. This is not simply a Pauline appendix to a non-Pauline final scenario. Rather, with the resurrection of Jesus and his installation as Messiah, it makes sense – good, first-century Jewish sense – to think that Jesus himself will be the one

through whom the one God exercises the judgment which many Jews believed was coming upon the world. And the emphasis at the centre of the passage is on that characteristically Pauline (and not so characteristically first-century Jewish) theme, that Jew and gentile stand on absolutely level ground on that final day.

The first six verses set the scene:

So *you* have no excuse – anyone, whoever you are, who sits in judgment! When you judge someone else, you condemn yourself, because you, who are behaving as a judge, are doing the same things. ²God’s judgment falls, we know, in accordance with the truth, on those who do such things. ³But if you judge those who do them and yet do them yourself, do you really suppose that you will escape God’s judgment?

⁴Or do you despise the riches of God’s kindness, forbearance and patience? Don’t you know that God’s kindness is meant to bring you to repentance? ⁵But by your hard, unrepentant heart you are building up a store of anger for yourself on the day of anger, the day when God’s just judgment will be unveiled – ⁶the God who will ‘repay everyone according to their works’.

This opening paragraph (verses 1–3), springing the trap on the self-satisfied moralist, simply assumes a future judgment. The second (verses 4–6), warning against taking the divine kindness and forbearance for granted (these themselves are a familiar second-Temple theme, an explanation for why judgment is delayed), simply assumes that there will be a coming ‘day of anger’, ‘the day when God’s just judgment will be unveiled’ (verse 5). The Greek is *apokalypseōs dikaiokrisias tou theou*, the day ‘of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God’. Paul has already spoken (1.18) of the *apokalypsis* of God’s wrath as a present event, though what exactly this means remains controversial.¹⁸⁸ But 2.1–16 is clearly looking to the future as a further ‘apocalypse’ (if we dare use that muddled modern English term to translate its quite clear Greek homonym). If there is a sense in which the veil has been pulled back, through the messianic events concerning Jesus, on the *present* state of the world as being under the wrath of the creator, there will come a further time when the creator’s just and proper determination to draw a line between good and evil, and to rid the world of the latter, will itself be unveiled. (We remind ourselves, in line

with various writers, that if the creator does not, at the end, rid the world of evil, then – to put it no more strongly – his credentials both as the creator and as the God of justice are severely called into question.¹⁸⁹) And part of this future unveiling of the creator’s right and proper decision¹⁹⁰ will be, as in verse 6, the classic principle: ‘he will repay everyone according to their works.’ This uncontroversial maxim goes back at least to the Psalms and Proverbs,¹⁹¹ and is echoed in many strands of later Jewish thought.¹⁹² It can hardly be thought un- or sub-Christian, since it reappears in one form or another not only in Paul but in several other strands of the New Testament.¹⁹³ One could only deny its validity if, with some late-modern trends, one were to convert the quite proper doctrine of ‘justification by faith’ into its modernist parody, that of a God who shrugs his shoulders over human behaviour and ‘tolerates’ anything and everything.

These preliminaries over, Paul then states more fully how he conceives the final future judgment working out:

⁷When people patiently do what is good, and so pursue the quest for glory and honour and immortality, God will give them the life of the age to come. ⁸But when people act out of selfish desire, and do not obey the truth, but instead obey injustice, there will be anger and fury. ⁹There will be trouble and distress for every single person who does what is wicked, the Jew first and also, equally, the Greek – ¹⁰and there will be glory, honour and peace for everyone who does what is good, the Jew first and also, equally, the Greek. ¹¹God, you see, shows no partiality.

Verses 7 and 8 state the general principle, in terms not of individual, one-off actions but of the whole tenor of a person’s habitual life. We note that Paul here sees ‘the life of the age to come’ (*zōē aiōnios*), in good Jewish style, as the ultimate destination, while ‘wrath and fury’ will be the lot of those who do not attain that ‘life’.¹⁹⁴ We also note that the description of the first category includes patience in doing good, and the *pursuit* of the goals of glory, honour and immortality. Paul does not imply that people necessarily attain them fully, still less that they ‘earn’ them as a right. All this, I think, is Pauline innovation, carefully designed to eliminate in advance any suggestion that he might after all be telling people that, in principle, they were supposed to be earning their membership in the ‘age to come’. Then

comes the second, more obvious, Pauline innovation. Repeating the double statement, this time the other way round (in verses 7 and 8 he mentions the good first, and the wicked afterwards; now, in verses 9 and 10, he mentions the wicked first and the good afterwards), he twice emphasizes ‘the Jew first and also, equally, the Greek’. And then, just to rub home the point, he states another biblical maxim which, though well known, was not normally applied like this: ‘God shows no partiality.’¹⁹⁵ So far this is very Jewish and also very Pauline: Paul is gently modifying a standard Jewish theme in the light of his larger theology, rooted as it is in the Messiah and the spirit.

The point about gentiles and Jews is then expanded further in 2.12–16:

¹²Everyone who sinned outside the law, you see, will be judged outside the law – and those who sinned from within the law will be judged by means of the law. ¹³After all, it isn’t those who *hear* the law who are in the right before God. It’s those who *do* the law who will be declared to be in the right!

¹⁴This is how it works out. Gentiles don’t possess the law as their birthright; but whenever they do what the law says, they are a law for themselves, despite not possessing the law. ¹⁵They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their conscience bears witness as well, and their thoughts will run this way and that, sometimes accusing them and sometimes excusing, ¹⁶on the day when (according to the gospel I proclaim) God judges all human secrets through King Jesus.

The passage has, understandably, provoked controversy, particularly between those who conclude that the gentiles who have ‘the work of the law written on their hearts’ are, so to speak, ‘good pagans’, and those who conclude (not least but not only on the grounds that Paul declares in due course that there are no ‘good pagans’ as such) that these are actually Christians, an anticipation of the category we meet, much less controversially, in 2.26–9.¹⁹⁶ I have in the past argued the latter case, and I stick to it, though I do think that Paul has quite deliberately left the matter apparently open for the moment and has, again quite deliberately, used language that might be recognized by a Stoic moralist.¹⁹⁷

The point I want to draw out here, in line with what was said in chapter 10 above, is that in these five verses it is abundantly clear that when Paul speaks of ‘justification’ he is referring to something that will happen on ‘the

day’, the *future* day when the creator God will judge the secrets of the hearts. We cannot deduce, from the placement of this point within the argument of Romans, that this final judgment is therefore in some sense ‘primary’ over the inaugurated-eschatological verdict of which Paul speaks in Romans 3.21—4.25. (The rhetorical needs of the letter could well trump the theological order that Paul might employ in the abstract. Paul is not committed to laying out his thoughts to correspond to a post-Reformation *ordo salutis*.) However, in this case it does appear that when we meet the *present* verdict in 3.21—4.25 it is indeed logically, as well as rhetorically, related to 2.1–16. In other words, the ‘but now’ of 3.21 indicates the *bringing into the present* of a moment – the final divine judgment – which Paul is also happy to think of as future. And the criterion for this future judgment is ‘doing the law’ (2.13, 14).

This, of course, is the point which has caused so many to deny that Paul really meant what he says here.¹⁹⁸ It is always possible to cut the knot of his dense and complex arguments, and so to reduce his thought to a shallow ‘coherence’ which does not, however, plumb its true depths. Far better, in my judgment, to stick with what he actually says, and then see how he explains himself as the letter goes forward. In this case, he has more to say about gentiles ‘doing the law’ in 2.26, 27, and he explains it in 2.28–9 in a way which looks reasonably similar to the present passage. There is a hint, too, that Paul sees faith itself as a fulfilment of the law in 3.27; a further hint about a different kind of lawkeeping in 8.4–7; and then, in his spectacular exegesis of Deuteronomy 30, Paul finally reveals what he means by ‘doing the law’ (10.6–10). I have written about these in the previous chapter, except for the last, which comes later in the present one. My purpose here is simply to draw attention to the fact that a reading of 2.1–16 is available which makes good sense of the passage both in its context and in the wider context of Paul’s theology, not in tension with ‘justification by faith’ but precisely as its eschatological horizon. There will come a day when God will put the whole world to rights, including judging the secrets of all human hearts and lives. And this judgment will be exercised, perfectly consistently with Jewish messianic expectation, through

the judge himself, Jesus the Messiah.¹⁹⁹ Romans 2.1–16 does indeed embody traditional Jewish eschatology, but it has been rethought around the Messiah and around the principle of ‘no respect of persons’ which, while itself rooted in the ancient scriptures, had attained a new focus through Paul’s understanding of the gospel and the gentile mission.

This, in other words, is a further aspect of our thesis throughout this chapter: Paul has reworked Jewish eschatology around Jesus. (The spirit is in hiding in the section just quoted, but if we allow 2.25–9 to stand as an interpretative elaboration of 2.12–16 then the spirit is there too.) This is the *final justification* of which we spoke in chapter 10. Only in the light of Paul’s carefully and thoroughly developed eschatology can we understand key doctrines such as justification by faith.²⁰⁰

There ought in any case to be no question about Paul holding firmly to a Jewish-style notion of a coming day of judgment. He repeats the point later in Romans:

We must all appear before the judgment seat of God [several manuscripts read ‘of the Messiah’], as the Bible says:

As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee shall bow,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.

So then, we must each give an account of ourselves to God.²⁰¹

And he says substantially the same thing in 2 Corinthians:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of the Messiah, so that each may receive what has been done through the body, whether good or bad.²⁰²

A remarkable passage in 1 Corinthians confirms the same theme, fitting very closely both with Romans 2.12–16 and with 2.29:

So don’t pass judgment on anything before the time when the lord comes! He will bring to light the secrets of darkness, and will lay bare the intentions of the heart. Then everyone will receive praise – from God.²⁰³

In context, this is almost a throwaway line, simply brought in to underline a point about how the Corinthians should think about Paul and Apollos. The Corinthians are in danger of sitting in judgment on their own apostles and teachers. Don't even go there, says Paul. Judgment and vindication are God's business, delegated to Jesus, and he will carry out this duty at the appointed time.²⁰⁴

This makes it all the more striking when we find passages in which believers are encouraged to think of themselves as *sharing* that future role of judgment – and even, on occasion, anticipating it in the present:

Can it really be the case that one of you dares to go to law against a neighbour, to be tried before unjust people, and not before God's people? Don't you know that God's people will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you really incompetent to try smaller matters? Don't you know that we shall be judging angels? Why not then also matters to do with ordinary life? Is it really true that there is no wise person among you who is able to decide between one Christian and another?²⁰⁵

This is an extraordinary passage for more than one reason. One suspects that the Corinthians might well have answered Paul's repeated 'Don't you know', with 'No, actually, we didn't know that'. Certainly it is not something that Paul troubles to mention elsewhere; though the occasional comments about the renewed people of God 'reigning' (Romans 5.17) may indicate that the other hints about this 'reign' may not be entirely sarcastic.²⁰⁶ The most likely explanation is that Paul, like some other early Christians, firmly believed that the future rule of the Messiah would be shared with his people.²⁰⁷ The most likely explanation of this, in turn, is that passages such as Daniel 7 were woven deeply into Paul's belief-structure, so that though he clearly saw Jesus as the unique Messiah and 'son of God', he saw the 'kingdom' which Jesus had inherited – the sovereign rule over the world, bringing the divine order into the chaos of the 'monsters' – as given to 'the holy ones'.²⁰⁸

This, I think, is the best explanation too for the subtle meaning, often missed, at the heart of the great eschatological climax of Romans 8. It is not so much that the non-human creation is going to *share* 'the glorious liberty of the children of God', as several translations imply.²⁰⁹ Indeed, in the

earlier hint of the same point in Romans 5.2, most translations seem to balk at the idea that would, as I argued before, be suggested to a second-Temple Jew by the phrase ‘the hope of the glory of God’. To a Jew who knew Isaiah, Ezekiel and the rest, ‘the hope of the glory of God’ would imply the hope that the divine glory would return to the Temple at last, and would deliver Israel from bondage to the nations. When, therefore, in Romans 5 and 8, Paul speaks of a coming glory through which *creation itself* is going to be released from its ‘bondage to decay’, we are not only invited but I suggest compelled to hear two closely related strands of thought coming to new expression. First, the whole created order has been in its own ‘Egypt’, from which it will now have its own ‘exodus’. Second, as with the first exodus, and as with the repeated prophecies of the ‘new exodus’ upon which the early Christians drew, the means by which this will come about is the personal, glorious presence of Israel’s God, coming back at last, as he came to dwell in the wilderness tabernacle in Exodus 40, and as in Isaiah 40 and 52 he promised to do once more.

This double theme of exodus and glory is exactly what Paul is exploring at this point. But the ‘glory’ in question is not now something apart from the humans involved, something at which they might (or might not) be allowed to gaze. This is where the vision we studied in 2 Corinthians 3, with the glory already present by means of the spirit, gives shape also to the future hope. The ultimate ‘return of YHWH to Zion’, as translated by Paul into the future hope redefined around Messiah and spirit, is that those who suffer with the Messiah will be glorified with him (Romans 8.17).

‘Rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God’ (5.2) can, then, be seen in terms of ‘sharing’ the divine glory, but for a full understanding it is important not to short-circuit the Jewish hope and jump straight into the (usually rather vague) modern expression of Christian hope in terms of ‘glory’ as an inexact synonym, or at least metonym, for ‘heaven’. Paul is not here talking about ‘heaven’. He is talking about the renewal and restoration of creation, and about the role within that purpose, under the creator God, of human beings in whom the spirit has been at work. The Messiah will ‘inherit’ the whole world, as Psalm 2 promised. He is, after all, the true seed of

Abraham, to whom that promise had already been made (Romans 4.13). And the Messiah's people, the full seed of Abraham, will share that inheritance, because the divine spirit has taken up residence in them to enable them to fulfil the intention which the creator had purposed, from the beginning, for his image-bearing human creatures.

If, then, humans are supposed to be running the world under the rule of God (not worshipping it as idolators, as in 1.25, or exploiting it out of greed, as in Ephesians 5.3–5), the hope of creation is for these humans to take up their ancient charge once more. That is why creation is waiting on tiptoe for God's children to be raised from the dead, to become at last the wise stewards of God's world (8.19). The 'glory' of God's children is precisely that which creation will *not* share, since the 'glory' is the glorious *rule* through which creation itself will be set free from corruption, 'to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified'.²¹⁰ That is what it means, I think, for the Messiah's people to be 'co-glorified' with him (8.17). This, then, is yet another part of Paul's 'not yet', the future eschatological scenario which has been rethought around Messiah and spirit. 'Those he justified, he also glorified': this does not mean, as it has so often been taken to mean, that 'those he justified *in the present time* will be "glorified", that is, assured of "heaven", in the *future*'. The aorist tense of 'glorified' is not simply 'prophetic', as is often claimed, stating as a past event something which can be utterly relied upon. 'Justification' is both present and future, which is part of the point of Romans 8 in any case; and so is 'glorification'. The point is that Israel's God justifies humans, puts them right, so that they can be people through whom the world is put right. That rule over the world, in both present and future, is what in Romans 8 Paul denotes by the language of 'glory'. The echoes of Psalm 8.6–7 in Romans 8.20–1 are all-important here:

You have made them [human beings] a little lower than God,

wrote the Psalmist,

and crowned them with glory and honour.

This ‘glory and honour’ is not something other than what immediately follows: the next verse, rather, explains what this ‘glory and honour’ are all about:

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet (*panta hypetaxas hypo tōn podōn autōn*).

Paul is contrasting the creator’s intention, to ‘subject’ the creation to humans, with the post-fall reality that it has been ‘subjected’ instead to ‘futility’ (*mataiotēs*) (8.20). When human beings are raised from the dead, however, having been delivered from death itself and from the sin which brings it about (8.10), then creation will itself be set free to be truly itself at last under the rule of the redeemed ‘children of God’ (8.21).

Romans 8, of course, stands alongside 1 Corinthians 15: the two great expositions of Paul’s vision of new creation.²¹¹ In Romans 8, the picture is of the birth-pangs through which the new world will be born. In 1 Corinthians, it is the great victory over all the forces of evil, up to and including death itself. But the result is the same. God will be ‘all in all’ (1 Corinthians 15.28). This is not pantheism, in which the divine is everything and everything is divine. It is, to coin an ugly term, the eschatological goal of ‘the-en-panism’. The prophet glimpsed the world already full of divine glory; one day it will be filled in a new way, as the waters cover the sea.²¹² This, we might suggest, is a clue to the old question as to why a good God would create a world that was other than himself: would that not necessarily mean something less than perfect, and would that not compromise the supposed divine goodness? No: the creator has made a world that is other than himself, but with the capacity to respond to his creative power and love in worship and praise, and with the capacity in particular to be filled with his breath, his life, his spirit. And when that happens, it will not constitute something other than ‘the hope of the glory of God’, the ancient hope of Israel. It will be that hope, translated and transformed, through the Messiah and the spirit. This will be the ultimate messianic victory: the divine love, poured out in the death of the divine son, will overcome all

obstacles and enemies. Indeed, it will enable his people to overcome them, and more than overcome them (Romans 8.37).

These pictures fill out the incidental (and otherwise tantalizing) references to ‘new creation’ we find in 2 Corinthians 5.17 and Galatians 6.15. Paul would have endorsed the vision at the close of the book of Revelation: the creator will, at the last, remake the entire cosmos, eliminating decay and death and all that causes them. That will be the triumphant reaffirmation of the original creation, achieved through the long and dark story of the covenant which was shockingly fulfilled in the Messiah.

The outworking of that achievement will be through the spirit. Romans 8 makes clear that the spirit is the one through whom those ‘in the Messiah’ will be raised from the dead (8.10–11). This is of course a major and central theme of Paul’s ‘not yet’ eschatology, worked out in great detail, from its Jewish roots, in terms of Messiah and spirit. I have offered quite a full account of it elsewhere, together with its corollary, an ‘intermediate state’ between present death and future resurrection – again, a Jewish idea reworked around Messiah and spirit.²¹³ It is the spirit’s work in the present, leading them to their ‘inheritance’ (not, now, the ‘promised land’, but the entire creation), and groaning within them in their life of prayer, that anticipates in the present that saving rule over creation which they will exercise in the future. Here again Paul has taken a strand from ancient Jewish expectation²¹⁴ – a strand which, though infrequent in the literature, expresses perhaps the deepest level of expectation that a creational monotheist can hold – and has imagined it afresh in the light of the Messiah and the spirit. His hope for the bodily resurrection of all the Messiah’s people, repeatedly emphasized, constitutes the dramatic and decisive claim that Israel’s hope, already fulfilled in the Messiah, will be fulfilled, by the spirit, in and for all his people.²¹⁵ This is why, more than once, Paul can speak of the present gift of the spirit as the *arrabōn*, the ‘down-payment’, the foretaste of what is to come, the signpost towards the final goal.²¹⁶

It should now be clear that Paul’s vision of the future is, once again, the radical redrawing of the Jewish expectation. The hope which has been

fulfilled has also thereby been reshaped. The present judgment passed on sin in the Messiah's crucifixion points on to the future, ultimate judgment that will be passed on the last day, when 'the day of YHWH' in the Old Testament has been transformed into 'the day of the lord (Jesus)' in the new. This transformation has generated a new category. Changing the hope for the return of YHWH into the hope for the return of the Messiah opened up the possibility of a more direct confrontation between that *parousia* and the 'arrival' or 'presence' of a pagan emperor of deity. Paul was not slow to take up such possibilities. And in the resurrection death itself would be defeated, as the 'last enemy'.²¹⁷ This is the negative way of saying what Paul says positively in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15: the whole creation will be set free from its present slavery to corruption, and the one God will be 'all in all'. Though Paul seldom says so explicitly, this is the ancient Jewish hope for 'the kingdom of God', brought into sharp focus through the gospel. This, the ultimate vision of Jewish hope, *has been* fulfilled in Messiah and spirit, and *will be* fulfilled in the same way.

We can then, by way of summary, fill out our earlier answers to the three main questions about Paul's eschatology. Paul's hope was nothing less than the redemption and renewal of all creation, and of humans within that. This would be the result of the divine 'judgment', exercised through the Messiah himself on his 'day', whose verdict is already known for those 'in the Messiah'. Paul did not shift an inch from the ancient Jewish hope, claiming rather in one passage after another that it was fulfilled in the Messiah and the spirit. He could draw on other ideas, such as that of *parousia*, but all the actual elements of his future expectation are fully explicable in terms of scripture on the one hand and the gospel on the other. As for whether his eschatology developed, it is hard to say.²¹⁸ I have argued elsewhere that we would be wrong to postulate such a development between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. There is clearly considerable difference of emphasis between the various letters: the Thessalonian correspondence has a good deal to say about the coming day, Galatians virtually nothing and the other letters somewhere in between.²¹⁹ As usual, Paul seldom says the same thing twice, though he can come back through familiar territory from a new angle.

It is within Paul's freshly reworked eschatology that we can now approach two of the most tricky topics in his whole thought: the questions of *ethics* and the questions of *ethnics*. How does Paul's eschatology shape his vision of Christian living, behaviour and action? And how does his vision of the divine action in Messiah and spirit enable him to tackle the question of 'all Israel'?

[5. Eschatology and Christian Living](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

The two outstanding questions raised by Paul's inaugurated eschatology, (1) questions of Christian behaviour and action and (2) the future of 'Israel', are, for Paul, substantially new questions. Yes, of course: Jews and gentiles alike had endlessly discussed questions of what we call 'morality', of human behaviour and action, just as Jews had endlessly puzzled over the question of how the covenant God would save his people in the end. But, just as no Jewish thinker before Paul had faced the question we must study in the next section (the question of what would happen if the Messiah came and most of his people rejected him), so it is fair to say that no Jewish thinker before Paul faced the question of what would happen in an interim time, a time when the Messiah had come, when the spirit had been given, and yet humans were not yet perfect and a final end had still not appeared. And of course no non-Jewish thinker had framed the question of human behaviour in that way, either.

One might propose exceptions. The Qumran scrolls provide evidence of a community which believed that the new covenant had been inaugurated, the spirit had been given and a new fulfilment was now happening in which new codes were appropriate. In a different key, Ben-Sirach believed that the divine wisdom had come to dwell in the Temple in the form of Torah, so that the combination of proper Temple-cult and proper Torah-teaching would exemplify and/or bring about a new Eden, a freshly watered garden.

The ancient prophetic dream of a time when all the covenant people would keep Torah properly was being glimpsed, grasped at, imagined and even attempted.²²⁰ Granted. But with Paul the question was posed quite differently. For both Qumran and Sirach it could be assumed that the ultimate goal was to keep Torah, and that the people doing the Torah-keeping would be Jews: loyal Jews; perhaps a minority, a remnant; but Jews for sure. Paul approaches the question quite differently, as will be obvious to anyone who grasps his Messiah-and-spirit-based redefinition of election. For Paul, the Messiah has come, and has been crucified and raised from the dead; and with that a previously unimagined door has opened in a previously impenetrable stone wall, revealing a new world beyond, enticing and troubling in equal measure. It is a world in which non-Jews will, in some sense, 'do the Torah', while Jews themselves will come by faith to belong to a family in which Torah is no longer either the boundary or the ultimate goal. Theologically this is like an eighteenth-century artist walking into a room full of Picassos. All the perspectives are wrong, jarring, frightening. But the new world beckons, because the Messiah has led the way into it. That is how Paul saw what we call ethics. Nobody, so far as we know, not even Jesus himself, had faced the challenge of figuring out how it would work from that point on.²²¹

The word 'ethics' is itself, of course, a problem. It comes to contemporary discourse carrying baggage from the philosophical debates of the last few centuries, which have often been framed in ways that meet Paul only at a tangent. That is why some recent writers have preferred phrases like 'moral vision', and why I have spoken here of 'behaviour' and 'action'.²²² This is not the place to explore such matters. Our task is to understand Paul. But, closer to home, there is another problem. Though all students of Paul can see at a glance that he is very concerned with appropriate Christian living, the western protestant tradition has been cautious, perhaps too cautious, in how it has approached the subject. If Paul's theology of redemption provides the main structure of his thought, and if his redemptive theology finds its centre in 'justification by faith', and if 'justification by faith' means that one must place no reliance on 'works'

in the sense of moral performance, then it is hardly surprising that ‘ethics’ as a subject has been pushed towards the back of the book. The subject is then hidden in a sanitized compartment to stop its dangerous germs of potential ‘works-righteousness’ from leaking out to infect the main body of doctrine. This protestant impulse has regularly tended to cut the connecting cables between faith and obedience.²²³ But if, as I have been arguing, this whole way of looking at Paul is subtly but deeply mistaken, and if his thought is better understood in terms of his Messiah-and-spirit-driven reformulations of the ancient Jewish doctrines of monotheism, election and eschatology, then all sorts of things begin to look quite different.²²⁴ Fear not: this is not a prelude to smuggling in ‘works’, to building up again a life of proud (or perhaps anxious) moralism. That is simply anachronistic. Once we understand how Paul’s eschatology works, and how moral behaviour and indeed moral *effort* (a major theme in Paul, screened out altogether within some interpretative traditions) is reconceived within that world, any such imagined danger disappears.²²⁵

A similar problem, stemming from both the Reformation and the Enlightenment, is that ‘ethics’ is often conceived individualistically, whereas everything Paul says about behaviour he says in relation to the whole community, that is, the Messiah’s people as a whole and sometimes the wider society as well.²²⁶ (This links the present discussion to my analysis of the centre of Paul’s worldview in Part II above.) As I have argued elsewhere, one of the major differences between virtue ethics in the ancient non-Jewish world and their equivalent in Paul is that for the tradition from Plato and Aristotle onwards ‘virtue’ was basically a solo occupation, whereas for Paul it was, and could only be, a team sport.²²⁷ Most of Paul’s imperatives are plural, and this is not accidental. Likewise, we should in fact follow Paul’s own train of thought on ‘justification’ itself into the wider notion of ‘justice’, that is, of a community that embodies in its own life the wise ordering which is the creator’s will. When he talks about ‘love’, and seeks to put that into practice in the churches to which he writes, he is talking specifically about something that happens within, and something that transforms, whole communities.²²⁸

If everything Paul said about Christian behaviour he said within a carefully thought out theological and ecclesial framework, it is more specifically the case that everything he said about Christian behaviour he said within an (often explicit) framework of revised eschatology.²²⁹ A gap had opened up in his previously assumed chronology, with ‘the resurrection’ already happening in the case of Jesus but not yet happening for anybody else. Locating the Christian pilgrimage within this chronological gap not only enabled Paul to give fresh shape to the moral arguments familiar to Jews and non-Jews of his day; it also enabled him to glimpse an answer to the question of *why*, in the providence of the creator God, such a gap should have been necessary. Why not act all at once, to produce the long-awaited perfection? Paul’s answer was deeply humanizing: the one God did it this way in order to enable the humans who would share in the running of his new creation to develop the character they would need for that ultimate task. A moment’s thought will reveal a gulf between this vision of ‘Christian ethics’ and the popular notion that Paul, and other early teachers, were providing apparently arbitrary ‘rules’, cobbled together in a mixture of tradition and prejudice. Once we understand not only the inaugurated-eschatological *shaping* of Paul’s moral world, but also what he seems to have conceived as the *purpose* of that inaugurated eschatology, all sorts of issues appear in a new light.

This way of handling Paul’s ‘eschatological ethics’ is radically different from those in which such a phrase would have to do with the ‘imminent *parousia*’. I have argued elsewhere against that basic idea as a historical construct in its own right, let alone as a shaping force for theology or ethics.²³⁰ For Paul what mattered was primarily something that *had* happened, namely, the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the spirit: eschatology still involved a solidly future dimension, as we have just seen, but when I speak of ‘eschatological ethics’ I refer not to an ethic determined by a sense that the world was about to end but to a sense of human vocation shaped equally by what *had* recently happened and what *would* one day happen.²³¹

This helps particularly with the frequently repeated proposal that Paul's ethics are a matter of 'indicative' and 'imperative': what you already *are* 'in the Messiah', over against how you *must now behave*. There is of course a well-established linguistic point here, made two generations ago by Rudolf Bultmann and endlessly repeated.²³² It is, however, oversimple to suppose that 'theology' is located with the 'indicative' and 'ethics' with the 'imperative'. Life is more complicated than that, as the integration just noted bears witness.²³³ In fact, the modern splitting of 'indicative' and 'imperative' seems to bear witness, not to a division of thought in Paul himself, but to a desire to render his thought into the categories of post-Enlightenment theory on the one hand, and the ancient non-Jewish ethics on the other. To highlight the linguistic forms is a kind of demythologization, or even potential paganization, of the underlying reality, which is the eschatological tension caused by the gap between the arrival of 'the end' in the middle of history with Jesus' resurrection and the still-to-be-awaited further 'arrival' of 'the end' in the sense of 1 Corinthians 15.24 ('then comes the end (*telos*)').²³⁴

Locating Paul's 'ethics' in this newly opened up eschatological gap helps, as well, in discerning the origins of his thought about Christian behaviour and action. Gone are the days when it could be assumed that Paul, having set out his primary theological proposals, simply shovelled in a miscellany of hellenistic *paraenesis* to give his churches something to be going on with.²³⁵ Indeed, despite the widespread use of that word in this connection, Udo Schnelle is undoubtedly correct to raise the question as to whether one should not rather speak, as Paul does, of *paraklēsis*, 'encouragement'.²³⁶ The question of the origin of Paul's ethical thought has wobbled to and fro for some time now on the old lines of a history-of-religions debate: was Paul basically a Jewish thinker or a Greek one? Did he get his ideas from the scriptures (particularly from the Torah itself) or from his surrounding culture?²³⁷ This discussion, however, needs to be relocated within the larger picture of election and Torah which we have sketched in chapter 10 above. From that viewpoint it will become clear that Paul was indeed a deeply biblical thinker, in his 'ethics' as in everything

else; that he believed in a strange new sort of transformed Torah-fulfilment which was open to gentiles as well as Jews; and that he believed that such Torah-fulfilment would form the Messiah's followers into a kind of genuine humanity, the sort of thing which his pagan contemporaries glimpsed from time to time but confessed their own inability to attain. This explains the way in which he frequently alludes to themes and categories from his wider non-Jewish environment, as is now routinely shown.²³⁸

This opens up a new perspective (so to speak) on the question not only of the origin of Paul's ethics but of what we might call his 'public theology'. In the ancient non-Jewish world of Paul's day 'ethics' related directly to 'physics': behavioural norms were correlated to 'the way things are'. That, actually, might have been an obvious location for the combination of 'indicative and imperative'. But for Paul the whole point was that a *new* world had been launched in and through Jesus. This is the strong point of today's so-called 'apocalyptic' interpretation: Paul sees everything in a new light because the new world has come into existence. 'Ethics' may still be related to 'physics', but only in the sense that 'the way things are' has been radically transformed by the events concerning Jesus, and will be further radically transformed when what was there begun is finally complete. 'Ethics' must relate, then, to a radically redrawn 'physics': new action in a new age. But at the same time Paul believed, on classic Jewish grounds, that this new world was the new *creation*, in continuity with the old, however much radically transformed. That is why his 'ethics' have a close analogy on some points at least to those of his non-Jewish contemporaries (see below). His aim and hope is that the new way of life in his churches will commend itself to the pagan world, not as an odd, bizarre way to be human, but as a way which makes sense of their own deepest aspirations. We shall pursue these matters further in chapter 14 below.²³⁹

This complex picture of Paul's ethical thought is not, then, reducible to terms of 'Jew or Greek', indeed of 'derivation' as a controlling category. Nor can it be caught in the oversimplifications of a grammatical slogan. It is about the eschatological and behavioural aspect of the redefined election we examined in the previous chapter, itself rooted in Paul's revised

monotheism. And this fascinating development of a new kind of ‘ethics’, dependent on what we might call a new kind of ‘physics’ – the new creation! – is what provides the shape for the rest of this section. The new creation – both the *new* creation and the new *creation* – has already been launched, and Messiah-people must learn how to live within that new world. They are ‘already in the new age’. Equally, the final *new creation* is yet to come, and their behaviour must look ahead to, and live in accordance with, something which is ‘not yet’ a present reality.

(ii) Already in the New Age

Paul leaves his hearers in no doubt that an event has happened in the middle of history through which the long-awaited ‘new age’, the ‘age to come’ of Jewish expectation, has dawned. Jesus ‘gave himself for our sins’, he writes in what may be the earliest paragraph of his that we possess, ‘to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of God our father’.²⁴⁰ As a result, they must not let themselves ‘be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age’. Rather, he declares to his Roman audience, you must ‘be transformed by the renewing of your minds’.²⁴¹ When he speaks of a ‘new creation’, and of people sharing in that new reality, this is what he has in mind: something has come about through the achievement of Jesus, something in which those who are ‘in the Messiah’ now share, and that ‘something’ is a previously unimagined state of affairs: ‘the age to come’ has arrived, even though ‘the present age’ is still rumbling on its way. This is the famous ‘overlap of the ages’, of which we spoke earlier.²⁴² Those who find themselves in the middle of the picture we drew in the previous chapter – the reconceived election by gospel, spirit, baptism and faith – are to be taught the significance of the final worldview question: What time is it?

One of Paul’s favourite images to express this overlap of the times or ages is that of the new day which is dawning. We who are familiar with jet-lag are used to the idea that the sun may already be rising in, say, Hong Kong, while it is still midnight in Johannesburg. I do not know if the

ancients, whose fastest method of travel was on horseback, understood what we now think of as time-zones. Did a Roman living in Spain, for instance, know that his friend serving in the army in Syria was enjoying sunrise an hour or two ahead of him? That, in any case, is the kind of image Paul is using: he tells the citizens of the night-bound world that they are to live as though they belonged to the new day. The night is passing, he says, and the day is at hand. This has a trace of theological metonymy as well as metaphor, since it obviously correlates with the ‘day of the lord’ of which we spoke earlier. Paul develops the image to suggest the contrast between the sort of behaviour that prefers the cover of darkness and the sort that is happy to be under public scrutiny – a hint that his ‘ethic’ is not simply a matter of private and peculiar ‘Christian morality’, but in line with what the pagan world around knew in its bones was healthy and wise behaviour.²⁴³ ‘The works of darkness’ are shameful even to speak of, and need to be exposed by the light. He quotes what appears to be an early hymn to this effect:

Wake up, you sleeper!
Rise up from the dead!
The Messiah will shine upon you!²⁴⁴

The same image enables him to echo some well-known sayings of Jesus about watching out for burglars in the night, though in characteristic Pauline fashion he develops this metaphor by means of two or three others: the woman will go into labour (echoes, there, of the old biblical theme of the ‘birthpangs of the new age’), so one must not get drunk, but must put on armour for the day:

We daytime people should be self-controlled, clothing ourselves with the breastplate of faith and love, and with the helmet of the hope of salvation.²⁴⁵

And of course the image of ‘sleeping’ and ‘waking’, picked up in these passages, goes very closely with the event that had generated this new moment. The metaphor of ‘sleep’, for death, and of ‘waking up’, for resurrection, was already well established in Jewish thought, looking back

to Daniel 12.2. For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus had ushered in the dawn of the ‘age to come’, and all those who were ‘in the Messiah’ through baptism were declared to be ‘daytime people’. The resurrection functioned, for him, as the platform on which the Messiah’s people now stood, on which they could learn to become genuine human beings at last:

Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into the Messiah, Jesus, were baptized into his death? That means that we were buried with him, through baptism, into death, so that, just as the Messiah was raised from the dead through the father’s glory, we too might behave with a new quality of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection ...

But if we died with the Messiah, we believe that we shall live with him. We know that the Messiah, having been raised from the dead, will never die again. Death no longer has any authority over him. The death he died, you see, he died to sin, once and only once. But the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way you, too, must calculate yourselves as being dead to sin, and alive to God in the Messiah, Jesus.²⁴⁶

‘Calculate yourselves ... alive to God.’ There is no sense here, as one popular view has it, that Paul thinks the baptized have died to sin but that he is postponing their ‘resurrection’ to the future.²⁴⁷ Paul’s argument would make no sense if that were the case. Clearly there is still a future resurrection, as in Romans 8.9–11. But if they are already ‘in the Messiah’, and if the Messiah has died and been raised, then they must ‘calculate themselves’ as being raised ‘in him’ or ‘with him’. The future tenses of verses 5 and 8 are *logical* futures, not chronological: ‘if X is the case, Y will also be the case’. Paul’s point, in urging his readers to ‘calculate’ or ‘reckon’ that they are already raised with the Messiah, is precisely that their behaviour must undergo a radical change. If they are not in some sense already ‘alive from the dead’, he is asking for the impossible:

So don’t allow sin to rule in your mortal body ... Rather, present yourselves to God, *as people alive from the dead*, and your limbs and organs to God ...²⁴⁸

This is, then, substantially the same point that we find in Colossians 3. After explaining in chapter 2 that there is no help to be found in the spurious moralisms on offer elsewhere, Paul sets out a different way. The new *status* must be the basis for new *behaviour*, which is to be achieved by

implementing the death-and-life of the Messiah, and which can be spoken of in terms both of a *new human nature* and of ‘putting on the Messiah’ like a suit of clothes:

So if you were raised to life with the Messiah, search for the things that are above, where the Messiah is seated at God’s right hand! Think about the things that are above, not the things that belong on the earth. Don’t you see: you died, and your life has been hidden with the Messiah, in God! When the Messiah is revealed (and he is your life, remember), then you too will be revealed with him in glory.

So, then, you must kill off the parts of you that belong on the earth: illicit sexual behaviour, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and greed (which is a form of idolatry). It’s because of these things that God’s wrath comes on the children of disobedience. You too used to behave like that, once, when your life consisted of that sort of thing.

But now you must put away the lot of them: anger, rage, wickedness, blasphemy, dirty talk coming out of your mouth. Don’t tell lies to each other! You have stripped off the old human nature, complete with its patterns of behaviour, and you have put on the new one – which is being renewed in the image of the creator, bringing you into possession of new knowledge. In this new humanity there is no question of ‘Greek and Jew’, or ‘circumcised and uncircumcised’, of ‘barbarian, Scythian’, or ‘slave and free’. The Messiah is everything and in everything!²⁴⁹

The Messiah’s resurrection, then, has brought about total change. Those who have died and been raised with him have a new identity; patterns of behaviour which belong with the old life must simply be killed off. There is a to-and-fro implied here between what is already true at one level (‘you *have* stripped off the old human nature’) and what must become true by sheer, new-creational moral effort (‘you *must* kill off ...’). The clear implication is that the latter is possible because the former has happened; and here, as in Romans 6, the reason appears to be baptism.²⁵⁰ Of course, here as in Romans (and Galatians 3.25–9) this is closely correlated with faith. But Paul believed that in baptism one entered a new reality, a new family, a new version of the human race, in which all sorts of things were possible that previously had not been. Paul elsewhere (not least in 1 Corinthians 10) has some sharp reminders for people who presume upon baptism as if it operated by magic; but that is no reason to ignore what he actually says about it. For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus was a truth not just about the Messiah but about all those who were ‘in him’, and baptism celebrated that truth about the whole church while incorporating another

member into it.²⁵¹ Christian behaviour was what it was because of that *past* event through which the ‘age to come’ had become a reality for the believer.

The incorporation of the believer into the Messiah is the context within which we can understand Paul’s exhortation to *imitate* him. More precisely, Paul urges his hearers to imitate *him* as he imitates the Messiah, or perhaps to join him in imitating the Messiah.²⁵² This is not applied so much in terms of every detail of ordinary life, but in terms of the central events of the gospel and the pattern they create, as we can see in the sequence of thought which joins Philippians 2.5–11 to 3.2–11 and thence to 3.17. Paul imitates the Messiah in giving up his privileges and status, and he urges the Philippian Christians to take him, doing this, as their model. This is a very similar line of thought to what we find in 1 Corinthians 8—10, summed up in 11.1. In particular, this helps us understand the meaning of that much-debated verse Philippians 2.5, which I have translated, ‘This is how you should think among yourselves, with the mind that you have because you belong to the Messiah, Jesus.’²⁵³ It is not a matter of a surface-level ‘imitation’, with people simply attempting to copy Jesus and so make themselves better people. It is a matter of the ‘mind of the Messiah’ which they already possess (see below), and of them allowing this shared and transformed ‘mind’ to work out into actual patterns of thought and then behaviour (as in 2.1–4).²⁵⁴ The outward signs of this can be seen in the various places where Paul seems to be echoing actual sayings of Jesus.²⁵⁵ But the underlying reality is that the Messiah’s people are as it were enfolded within the *narrative* of Jesus’ incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation. This is where some recent writers have referred to ‘cruciformity’ or even ‘Christosis’, and where the line of thought explored by Morna Hooker over many years, that of ‘interchange’, comes into its own.²⁵⁶ All this is seen once more, bringing the argument of Romans to its climax, in 15.3, 15.5 and 15.7: the community is to live by the negative rule of not pleasing oneself, and by the positive rule of mutual welcome, both of which are modelled by and ‘in accordance with’ the Messiah himself as foreshadowed in scripture and as acted out in the gospel events:

We, the ‘strong’ ones, should bear with the frailty of the ‘weak’, and not please ourselves. Each one of us should please our neighbour for his or her good, to build them up.

The Messiah, you see, did not please himself. Instead, as the Bible says, ‘the reproaches of those who reproached you are fallen on me’. Whatever was written ahead of time, you see, was written for us to learn from, so that through patience, and through the encouragement of the Bible, we might have hope. May the God of patience and encouragement grant you to come to a common mind among yourselves, *in accordance with the Messiah, Jesus*, so that, with one mind and one mouth, you may glorify the God and father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

Welcome one another, therefore, *as the Messiah has welcomed you*, to God’s glory. Let me tell you why: the Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy.²⁵⁷

The underlying logic here is very close to that of Philippians 2 (and, indeed, to the appeal for Messiah-shaped generosity in 2 Corinthians 8.9). And the end in view is the same, too: in Philippians, it is the unity of the church at the deepest level (2.1–4); in Romans, it is the mutual welcome which leads to shared worship.²⁵⁸

The identity of this new community, which Paul urges so passionately to imitate the Messiah, is bound up with the narrative which dominates so much early Christian thought: that of the new exodus. As we have seen, Romans 6 is all about those who come through the water of baptism, like the Israelites coming through the Red Sea, and who are therefore *freed slaves* on the one hand, and a *holy people* on the other because they are ‘sanctified’ by the powerful presence and guidance of the spirit.²⁵⁹ This of course joins up once more with the whole theme of revised ‘election’, and it carries clear obligations:

But now that you have been set free from sin and enslaved to God, you have fruit for holiness. Its destination is the life of the age to come. The wages paid by sin, you see, are death; but God’s free gift is the life of the age to come, in the Messiah, Jesus our lord.

So then, my dear family, we are in debt – but not to human flesh, to live our life in that way. If you live in accordance with the flesh, you will die; but if, by the spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

All who are led by the spirit of God, you see, are God’s children. You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery, did you, to go back again into a state of fear? But you received the spirit of sonship, in whom we call out ‘Abba, father!’²⁶⁰

In other words: you have come through the Red Sea; you are on the way to your inheritance; so don't even think of going back to Egypt! This is age-to-come ethics, located within Paul's reworked eschatological narrative. Learn where you are in the story, he says, and what time it is, and questions about appropriate behaviour will appear in the proper light. The challenge in Romans 8.12–16, repeating the stark choice faced by the Israelites in the wilderness, is that of the two ways: one path that leads to death, the other that leads to life.²⁶¹ It would be possible, reading this out of context, to suppose that he was setting up exactly that kind of merit-based system which his own doctrine of justification should have destroyed several chapters earlier. I have answered this objection in the previous chapter.

This brings us to another feature of Paul's eschatology which bears strongly on the question of present Christian behaviour: the kingdom of God. Though this is normally, in Paul, a future reality (and will therefore be covered in the next sub-section), Paul can also speak of it as a present truth to which behaviour must conform. This is clear in Romans 14.17: 'God's kingdom ... isn't about food and drink, but about justice, peace, and joy in the holy spirit.' In addition, we note that in the cryptic mention of 'the kingdom of the Messiah and of God' in Ephesians 5.5 it is probable that Paul understands the Messiah's kingdom to be the present reality, as in 1 Corinthians 15.25, and the divine kingdom the future reality.²⁶² He is not always strictly 'consistent' in his usage, no doubt precisely because he is always aware of the 'already' and the 'not yet' jangling against one another.

If the Messiah's resurrection is for Paul the crucial factor in determining the Christian's *status* and *goal*, the powerful agent by which, in the meantime, humans are enabled to turn that status into behaviour is of course the *spirit*. Indeed, one may put it the other way round: the spirit is given so that those who are 'in the Messiah' can *anticipate*, in present behaviour, the life of the coming age. The role of the spirit has already emerged in some of the passages quoted, and it becomes a major theme in Galatians 5 and 6 in particular. I have written about this at length elsewhere and do not need to repeat the point here.²⁶³ One thing we should note, however: when Paul speaks of the 'fruit of the spirit', in contradistinction to the 'works of the

flesh’, he is not talking of things that happen ‘automatically’, as some contemporary romantic or existentialist thinkers would suppose.²⁶⁴ Part of the mystery of the spirit’s work, at least as Paul understands its work, is that that work does not cancel out human moral effort, including thought, will, decision and action. Rather, it makes them all possible. It opens up a new kind of freedom and offers help, encouragement and companionship in discerning and putting into practice the fresh actions to which different believers may be called (see below). That is why Paul can speak of his own hard work and then, in the same breath, declare that it was actually the divine power at work within him. It felt like hard work at the time – which is why he regularly encourages his hearers not to give up when faced with the same challenge – but in retrospect he knows that the energy came from elsewhere.²⁶⁵

One or two important final notes about what it means that those in the Messiah are already part of the God-given new age. First, as we have seen often enough, those in the Messiah and indwelt by the spirit form the people to whom Paul gives the word ‘the Jew’, ‘the circumcision’ and even – if that reading is correct – ‘the Israel of God’.²⁶⁶ He speaks to the Corinthians about the time ‘when you were pagans (*ethnē*)’, and assumes that despite that background they can be included in the ‘we’ that speaks of the ancient Israelites as ‘our ancestors’.²⁶⁷ He appeals to the Thessalonians, in a strongly worded section which is rightly to be seen as a summary of his main ethical stance, that they should no longer behave ‘like gentiles who don’t know God’.²⁶⁸ He sees the church standing out from the world around, living by a kind of fulfilled-Jewish standard through which all others – including Jews themselves! – are now to be judged:

So people who are by nature uncircumcised, but who fulfil the law, will pass judgment on people like you who possess the letter of the law and circumcision but who break the law.

There must be no grumbling and disputing in anything you do. That way, nobody will be able to fault you, and you’ll be pure and spotless children of God in the middle of a twisted and depraved generation. You are to shine among them like lights in the world, clinging on to the word of life.²⁶⁹

Or, more bluntly:

So this is what I want to say; I am bearing witness to it in the lord. You must no longer behave like the gentiles, foolish-minded as they are. Their understanding is darkened; they are cut off from God's life because of their deep-seated ignorance, which springs from the fact that their hearts are hard. They have lost all moral sensitivity, and have given themselves over to whatever takes their fancy. They go off greedily after every kind of uncleanness.

But that's not how you learned the king! – if indeed you did hear about him, and were taught in him, in accordance with the truth about Jesus himself. That teaching stressed that you should take off your former lifestyle, the old humanity. That way of life is decaying, as a result of deceitful lusts. Instead, you must be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and you must put on the new humanity, which is being created the way God intended it, displaying justice and genuine holiness.²⁷⁰

Here, of course, we meet the familiar paradox once more.²⁷¹ Paul is urging his converts to maintain what is in all sorts of ways a thoroughly and strictly Jewish lifestyle, over against the swirling currents of pagan amorality. But he wants them to do this *without becoming ethnically Jewish*, without circumcision, the food taboos and the sabbath. He instructs them to live a life which, for the Jew, focused on Temple and Torah and on the family home in which, with Jew marrying Jew, the life and the lifestyle would be maintained. Paul takes it for granted that the Messiah, the ultimate representative Jew, has created in himself a new people, a new home, a new temple, a new way of life in which all the moral distinctives between Jew and pagan would be maintained.²⁷²

We might even suggest that this is the real reason for the inclusion of those much-debated 'household codes'.²⁷³ It is not simply that Paul wants Messiah-people to live a socially respectable family life, though he does to be sure want Christians to be known by their neighbours for their adherence to basic moral norms.²⁷⁴ It is, rather, that just as Jews in the Diaspora were sustained in their distinctive life not only by the synagogues but just as much by their home life, so Paul sees the home life of the new people to be a vital context within which the practice of following and imitating the Messiah is to be inculcated and sustained. Such codes would not, therefore, simply be an accommodation to prevailing social mores – as is already indicated by the various specifically Christian modifications and startling innovations, such as crediting children and slaves with serious

responsibility, and giving strict and counter-cultural instructions to husbands and slaveowners. They offer evidence of a fundamentally Jewish, and indeed renewed-Jewish, perception of the dispersed messianic people.²⁷⁵

At the heart of Paul's 'fulfilled-Jewish' vision of the moral life we find a point which should not be controversial but often is: those in the Messiah, indwelt by the spirit, are assumed to fulfil the real intention of Torah.²⁷⁶ Paul never spells out as precisely as we would like him to the difference between the 'works of Torah' which cannot bring justification and the 'work of Torah' which, written on the heart, produces even among gentiles the lifestyle which Torah wanted to produce but, because of unredeemed Adamic 'flesh', could not. (This is the distinction which older theology tried to capture in the imprecise, and potentially misleading, distinction of the 'moral' and 'ceremonial' law.) Generations of quasi-Marcionite post-Reformation readings, eager to label the Jewish law as a 'bad' thing now happily 'abolished' in the gospel, have produced a climate of thought where Paul's key sayings on this point have not been taken seriously, but he means them all right. This is where the so-called 'new perspective', and the contribution of James Dunn in particular, have been especially helpful.²⁷⁷ Some Jewish teachers said that if only all Israel were to keep Torah for a single day, then the Messiah would come. Paul reverses the point: now that the Messiah has come, his true people will truly 'keep Torah', even though this Torah-keeping will not look like what those teachers had imagined:

If uncircumcised people keep the law's requirements (*ta dikaiōmata tou nomou phyllassē*), their uncircumcision will be regarded (*logisthēsetai*) as circumcision, won't it? So people who are by nature uncircumcised, but who fulfil the law (*ton nomon telousa*), will pass judgment on people like you ...

Circumcision is nothing; uncircumcision is nothing; what matters is keeping God's commandments!

So what happens to boasting? It is ruled out! Through what sort of law? The law of works? No: through the law of faith.

God sent his own son ... in order that the right and proper verdict of the law (*to dikaiōma tou nomou*) could be fulfilled in us, as we live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Look at it like this. People whose lives are determined by human flesh focus their minds on matters to do with the flesh, but people whose lives are determined by the spirit focus their minds on matters to do with the spirit. Focus the mind on the flesh, and you'll die; but focus it on the spirit, and you'll have life, and peace. The mind focused on the flesh, you see, is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law, in fact, it can't. Those who are determined by the flesh can't please God.²⁷⁸

The point is often missed in the flurry of other ideas in Romans 8, but it is clear: *the 'mind of the spirit' submits to Torah*. Those who are 'in the flesh', by which Paul obviously means those outside the Messiah's community of faithful and baptized people who have died and been raised with him (7.4–6), have 'the mind of the flesh', which summarizes the description he had given in 1.18–32. This 'mind' does not, and cannot, submit to the divine law. But from this it should be clear that 'the mind of the spirit' *does* submit, in the senses indicated in 2.25–9 and elsewhere. That is why 'the right and proper verdict of the law' is pronounced over them, namely that they will 'have life', as Paul indicates in the two short paragraphs 8.9–11 and 8.12–16. This is, clearly, not a matter of slavishly looking up texts in Torah and trying to make them fit every question Paul and his communities might face. He clearly does not do that.²⁷⁹ He is after something deeper, something which will sometimes (as in eating meat offered to idols) cut across what a strict interpretation of Torah itself would have said.²⁸⁰

This then points forward to two further 'law-fulfilment' passages in Romans. The first, at the heart of Romans 10.1–13, we shall consider more fully below. The second, less complicated, sums up the ten commandments, and insists that all of them are fulfilled in the law of love:

Don't owe anything to anyone, except the debt of mutual love. If you love your neighbour, you see, you have fulfilled the law. Commandments like 'don't commit adultery, don't kill, don't steal, don't covet' – and any other commandment – are summed up in this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to its neighbour; so love is the fulfilment of the law (*plērōma nomou*).²⁸¹

This is itself summed up in Galatians:

You must become each other's servants, through love. For the whole law is summed up in one word, namely this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'²⁸²

And there is a lot to be said for seeing the same idea under the cryptic phrase in the next chapter:

Carry each other's burdens; that's the way to fulfil the Messiah's law.²⁸³

No doubt this has rhetorical, as well as theological, force: 'if it's lawkeeping you want, go for the Messiah's law!' The latter phrase, as is well known, is controversial: as with many key moments in Paul's writings, he sums things up in a phrase which is a bit too dense for us easily to unpack it. Some have suggested that he here means the Mosaic law as reinterpreted through the lens of the work of Jesus; others, that it is simply the teaching of Jesus himself that is in mind. Many variations on these have been canvassed.²⁸⁴ I suspect, in view of the rest of my present argument, that he has coined the phrase in a deliberately teasing fashion, but that he is alluding yet again to something he says repeatedly: that the entire incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus form not only a standard to be adhered to as an external 'command', not only the locus of clear and sharp moral teaching, but also the inner life which must now shape and direct all Christian living. The underlying point should not be in doubt. Paul understands the Messiah's people to have been liberated from the 'old evil age', to have entered the 'new age', to be 'daytime people' charged with living by the standards of light even though the world around is still in darkness. As such, he sees them as the people of the renewed covenant, the people in whose hearts and lives the Torah, for all its necessarily negative work, is actually fulfilled.²⁸⁵ That fulfilment points forward all the way to resurrection itself, the ultimate fulfilment of Torah's promise of life; and within that eschatological framework, based on the Messiah and energized by the spirit, the behaviour which Paul expects of those 'in the Messiah' is precisely *Israel*-behaviour, fulfilled-Torah behaviour. Messiah-people must be 'blameless'.²⁸⁶ They must be different from the world around, not by the 'works' which separated ethnic Jews from the rest of the world but by the

change of heart, mind and life to which Torah pointed and which, through the Messiah and the spirit, the one God has now produced. Messiah-people are already in the new age. Their baptism, justification and spirit-indwelt sanctification give them the platform on which to base this lifestyle. This is the first and major element of Paul's eschatological ethics.

(iii) Not Yet Perfect: Inaugurated but Incomplete

The second major element, following through the logic of inaugurated eschatology, is that in certain respects the 'new age' has *not* yet arrived. At one level this might appear to be a problem, but Paul is clear that it is in principle a good thing. If the creator were to foreclose on the world at once, the result would be widespread condemnation. The reason there is a delay is because of the divine *mercy*. 'Don't you know', writes Paul, 'that God's kindness is meant to bring you to repentance?' The day of judgment is coming, but it is held back in order to allow a breathing space, time for people to come to their senses, turn from their wickedness and live. But if they fail to make proper use of this interval, this gap, the delay will only make matters worse. They will be hardened, like Pharaoh, so as to be the more fit for the judgment when it eventually comes.²⁸⁷ Paul is not content, then, simply to accept the idea of a divided eschatology as a new, bizarre fact and work around it. The idea of an interval is not new. It was already well known in ancient Judaism, in which hope deferred had become a way of life, and in which the long interval between scriptural promises and eventual fulfilment was well known and variously interpreted. Even the idea of an interval *between Messiah's coming and the final end* was not entirely new: we catch echoes of such a thing in *4 Ezra*, and in the notion of a messianic task, including cleansing the Temple and fighting the ultimate battle.²⁸⁸ Paul filled these earlier ideas with the more specific content gained from his belief that in the Messiah the resurrection itself had already happened, producing a different sort of interval, one in which that resurrection power, unleashed through the spirit, was available in the gospel to transform lives.

There is therefore a strong sense of ‘not yet’ about Paul’s eschatology which has a clearly visible effect on his teaching about Christian behaviour; but that which is ‘not yet’ is not merely postponed to some unidentifiable future date. The fact that the ‘not yet’ is nevertheless assured means that it must be *anticipated* in the present.

There is a crucial link, for a start, between Christian behaviour and the *future* resurrection. The whole of 1 Corinthians is dominated by the theme of resurrection which Paul eventually states towards the end of the letter, and in chapter 6 we see a striking example of this:²⁸⁹

‘Food for the stomach, and the stomach for food, and God will destroy the one and the other’ – but the body is not meant for immorality, but for the lord, and the lord for the body. What’s more, God raised the lord; and he will raise us, too, through his power.

... Or don’t you know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit within you, the spirit God gave you, so that you don’t belong to yourselves? You were quite an expensive purchase! So glorify God in your body.²⁹⁰

The point here is *continuity*. Those who already stand on resurrection ground, and must learn to live in this new world, need to be reminded that what they do with their bodies in the present matters, because the spirit who dwells within them will cause them to be raised as the Messiah was raised.

Knowing where one is within the essentially Jewish story-line as now further defined by the Messiah’s death and resurrection commits one also to a sober assessment that one has not yet arrived at the destination, is not yet perfect:

I’m not implying that I’ve already received ‘resurrection’, or that I’ve already become complete and mature! No; I’m hurrying on, eager to overtake it, because King Jesus has overtaken me. My dear family, I don’t reckon that I have yet overtaken it. But this is my one aim: to forget everything that’s behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what’s ahead. I mean to chase on towards the finishing post, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God in King Jesus.²⁹¹

Chasing towards the line: one of Paul’s various athletic metaphors, indicating that the ‘not yet’ of eschatology does not mean hanging around with nothing to do.²⁹² And this gives rise at once to a sharp statement of the kinds of behaviour which are not appropriate for people running that as yet

unfinished race. They are to maintain the position they have already attained, and shape their behaviour in the light of the still-unrealized goal.²⁹³

This has a strongly negative as well as positive point. We noted above that Paul believes in some sense in a *present* ‘kingdom of the Messiah’, and also ‘kingdom of God’, but normally when he speaks of the latter he is referring to the ultimate future. When he does so, it is sometimes in order to warn that there are certain present lifestyles which are simply incompatible with being part of that future. This is much more than simply providing a kind of ‘negative warrant’, a stick as opposed to a carrot. It is reminding people of an analytic truth: when the creator finishes his kingdom-project, those who are included within it will be those who have already learned to embody the kind of human life which reflects his own character. That is what is meant by saying that people who do certain things, who embrace certain habits of life, ‘will not inherit the kingdom’. As long as we regard ‘inheriting the kingdom’ in terms of ‘going to heaven’ – as much of the Christian tradition has done – this, again, is bound to look like a merit-based soteriology (or at least a demerit-based condemnation!). But if, as I have argued throughout, this language reflects Paul’s vision of the coming divine rule over the whole creation, and of humans being called to share in this rule, we get a rather different picture: these are the sort of people through whom the one God will establish his sovereign rule, bringing his wise order to his world.²⁹⁴ Paul is thinking of the formation of a genuine humanity who will reflect the divine image into the world; and the things which mar this image are to be left behind in dying with the Messiah in baptism, in the sanctifying presence of the spirit and in the divine verdict of ‘righteous’ issued over faith:

Don’t you know that the unjust will not inherit God’s kingdom? Don’t be deceived! Neither immoral people, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor practising homosexuals of whichever sort, nor thieves, nor greedy people, nor drunkards, nor abusive talkers, nor robbers will inherit God’s kingdom. That, of course, is what some of you were! But you were washed clean; you were made holy; you were put back to rights – in the name of the lord, King Jesus, and in the spirit of our God.²⁹⁵

The point is repeated in Galatians, after the list of the ‘works of the flesh’: ‘people who do such things’, Paul declares, ‘will not inherit God’s kingdom’.²⁹⁶ And it is expanded in Ephesians 5:

You should know this, you see: no fornicator, nobody who practises uncleanness, no greedy person (in other words, an idolator), has any inheritance in the Messiah’s kingdom, or in God’s. Don’t let anyone fool you with empty words. It’s because of these things, you see, that God’s wrath is coming on people who are disobedient.

So don’t share in their practices. After all, at one time you were darkness, but now, in the lord, you are light! So behave as children of light. Light has its fruit, doesn’t it, in everything that’s good, and just, and true. Think through what’s going to be pleasing to the lord. Work it out.²⁹⁷

We should probably take the double ‘kingdom’, of the Messiah and of God himself, in the same sense as we find in 1 Corinthians 15.20–8. There the Messiah is already ruling, and will hand over the kingdom to his father once he has overcome all his enemies, death itself being the last. Thus here in Ephesians 5 ‘the Messiah’s kingdom’ presumably indicates the *present* ‘rule of the Messiah’ in and through the present church (as I suggested above), and ‘God’s kingdom’ presumably looks ahead, as with 1 Corinthians 6 and Galatians 5, to the time when the one God will be ‘all in all’.²⁹⁸ Once again the warning comes in connection with habits and lifestyles, especially in the area of sexual behaviour, which destroy genuine humanness, and from which faith, baptism and entry into the community of the Messiah’s people ought to deliver people.²⁹⁹ We note once more – and will shortly return to the point – that Paul does not usually produce a list of bad behaviours in order just to say, ‘don’t do it!’. He explains that there are two things which enable one to escape from the slavery of such a lifestyle. First, remember who you are in the Messiah, where you are in the eschatological narrative: already released from slavery and ‘sanctified’ by the spirit, declared to be ‘in the right’ on the basis of faith, promised the ‘inheritance’. Second, *work it out*. Think it through. At the centre of Paul’s vision of a renewed humanity is the renewed *mind*. To this we shall shortly return.

There are, as we have seen, some ways in which the future can and must be anticipated in the present; but there are also ways in which that future must *not* yet be anticipated. The surprising news that the Messiah’s people

will share in the judgment of both recalcitrant humans and rebellious angels means, on the one hand, that Paul can challenge his hearers to produce from among their number people who are already capable of sorting out local disputes.³⁰⁰ But he is equally clear that there are other matters in which final judgment is deferred, and one must not jump the gun. Among those matters are the assessment of his own apostolic performance. That kind of judgment belongs to the lord alone, and to the future day:

So don't pass judgment on anything before the time when the lord comes! He will bring to light the secrets of darkness, and will lay bare the intentions of the heart. Then everyone will receive praise – from God.³⁰¹

A similar reticence, holding back from a 'judgment' which is the lord's sole prerogative, is evident in Romans 12 and 14. In Romans 12, vengeance belongs to the lord, so human vengeance is ruled out: one must leave room for the divine anger to do what it has to do in its own time and way.³⁰² This is closely correlated with the passage that follows immediately, about human rulers and authorities with their God-given but strictly penultimate jurisdiction. This is a matter of disentangling the different layers of 'judgment', and making sure that the judgment which belongs to the creator – including that which he delegates to civic officials, and for which he will hold them responsible – is not usurped in an excited rush of over-anticipated eschatology.³⁰³ This comes out as well in Romans 14, where the tendency for Christians to 'pass judgment' on one another in relation to matters which Paul deems to be 'adiaphora', such as food, drink and special holy days, must be ruled out. 'If you want to exercise your judgment', he says with gentle sarcasm, 'do so on this question: how to avoid placing obstacles or stumbling blocks in front of a fellow family member.'³⁰⁴ This ruling, which plays a vital part in Paul's larger vision of church unity, is framed entirely in terms of eschatology, reworked as always around Jesus and the spirit.

Paul, then, insists that the Messiah's followers have to learn to live in the 'not yet' as well as the 'now'. This is not, to repeat, a matter of merely marking time. The interval has a Messiah-shaped purpose. This emerges in

particular when we consider the centre of Paul's ethics, which I have elsewhere argued to be a kind of Christian transformation of the ancient traditions of virtue, of character-development. This, indeed, is the point at which his ethical teaching is at the same time closest to, and most interestingly distinguished from, that of the world around.³⁰⁵ As with the tradition from Plato and Aristotle onwards, Paul has a goal in view, but his goal is not Aristotle's 'happiness', *eudaimonia*. Nor is the attaining of that goal a matter, as it is in Aristotle, of the 'self-made man' producing the cardinal virtues of courage, justice, temperance and prudence that were required for a soldier or statesman in ancient Greece. Paul's goal, his *telos*, is the mature humanity which reflects the divine image and which will be reaffirmed in the resurrection.³⁰⁶ The attaining of that goal is as much a matter of self-denial as of self-fulfilment. And the virtues which are to be produced include four which no ancient pagan would have recognized as positive character-traits: patience, humility, chastity and above all *agapē*, 'love'.³⁰⁷

At crucial points Paul, like other early Christians, can state all this in terms of character-development:

Through [Jesus the Messiah] we have been allowed to approach, by faith, into this grace in which we stand; and we celebrate the hope of the glory of God.

That's not all. We also celebrate in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patience, patience produces a well-formed character, and a character like that produces hope. Hope, in its turn, does not make us ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us.³⁰⁸

Here again we glimpse not only a sense of *what* one is supposed to be doing during the interval between the Messiah's resurrection and the final day, but also *why* this interval is necessary. The interval is enabling the growth to maturity of human beings who are being fitted to be partners, stewards, in the ruling of the creator's new world.³⁰⁹ Those he justified, he also *glorified*; and that 'glory', as we saw, includes, and perhaps here is focused on, the sharing in the divine *rule* over creation. Because the creator's character has been revealed in the crucified Messiah, the normal modes by which the world is run must be stood on their heads, as Jesus himself had

repeatedly insisted. Instead of pride and power, humility and service; instead of military victory, the strange power of suffering – something which Paul never tires of emphasizing.³¹⁰ Suffering was itself a sign, for Paul in his Jewish context, that one was living between the times, caught between promise and fulfilment, between the passing of sentence on the old world and the final disappearance of evil. Hence the Jewish theme of ‘tribulation’, which Paul recapitulates in a Christian key precisely as part of his ‘not yet’.³¹¹ And that is part of the reason why he can speak, however paradoxically, of suffering setting off a train of character-development which leads, not to despair, but precisely to *hope* – which again would not have been one of the Greek or Latin virtues. For Paul, character-development is above all eschatological, because it is derived from the promised future which has already come forward into the present in the person of the Messiah and the work of the spirit.

It is no surprise, then, to discover that for Paul the road to this character-development, this growth in genuine humanness, will involve the messianic way of dying and rising. This is part of his theme of imitating the Messiah, not in a superficial way, but at the level of the transformation of heart, character, mind and life.³¹² Those who have already died and been raised with the Messiah, as in Galatians 2.19–20, must learn to ‘crucify the flesh with its passions and desires’ (5.24), to kill off the things which belong with the pagan way of life to be renounced (Colossians 3.5), to ‘put to death the deeds of the body’ (Romans 8.13). This is a regular theme of Paul’s moral discourse, and it is obvious where it came from. The fact that this ‘putting to death’ will require moral effort, and that such effort is itself part of the ‘fruit of the spirit’, is indicated by the fact that in the list of ‘fruit’ he includes ‘self-control’, *engkrateia*. The ‘fruit’ does not, then, appear ‘automatically’, any more than a fruit tree will continue to blossom and bear fruit if left untended and unprotected against predators.

When it comes to particular things that need to be killed off, Paul focuses attention on two areas in particular: angry speech and behaviour on the one hand, sexual malpractice on the other. We cannot here explore either in detail, since our purpose is simply to indicate how his commands embody

his messianic and spirit-led inaugurated eschatology. Paul envisages a renewed humanity in terms of *new creation*, a new world in which the creator's original intention would at last be fulfilled; and this new world is to be seen in advance in the Messiah's people. Angry speech and behaviour destroys that vision within the church, whose unity as we saw in Part II was for Paul the central symbol of the Christian worldview. Sexual immorality destroys the vision of a new creation in which the purpose begun in Genesis 1 and 2 can at last find fulfilment. Genesis 1, 2 and 3 stand, after all, rather obviously behind his great eschatological passages, Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15. The new creation is the renewal of creation the way it was meant to be. It is not the scrapping of the present world and the launching of something quite different. This is why his sexual ethic focuses so clearly on marriage as the norm for sexual behaviour.³¹³

The eschatological dimension to his ethic is also the reason why Paul can advocate the possibility of celibacy. This was counter-intuitive in much of the ancient world, especially in the case of women.³¹⁴ Paul's permission is explicitly related to his eschatological perspective. We should avoid the excesses of those who have argued from 1 Corinthians 7 that Paul really did think the space-time universe was about to disappear.³¹⁵ But he clearly understands the present time, both the 'present time' of famine and distress across the world of the eastern Mediterranean in the early 50s, and the 'present time' between the Messiah's first coming and his second, to be limited and temporary. One should act in relation to the longer purposes of the creator, not out of short-term goals. That is the way, in the present, to build the character-strengths which will form the true humanity in the creator's future world.

In particular, Paul famously highlights love, the self-giving love for which he, like other early Christians, adopted the previously more general word *agapē*.³¹⁶ This character-trait is one of the three which Paul specifies as things which will last into the future world, when activities like tongues and prophecy will be no longer needed: this, of course, is the ultimate meaning of an eschatological ethic, something inaugurated in the present which will last into, and indeed be a central characteristic of, the future new

creation.³¹⁷ Love also heads the list of qualities which together make up the singular ‘fruit of the spirit’.³¹⁸ It is the one thing which ‘fulfils the law’.³¹⁹ It is the means by which the entire ‘Messiah’s body’ holds together: it is no accident that 1 Corinthians 12 is followed immediately by 1 Corinthians 13, and no accident either that the development of the ‘Messiah’s body’ image in Ephesians 4 ends with that body ‘building itself up in love’.³²⁰ And this ‘love’ is very practical. When Paul tells the Thessalonians to love one another more and more, he is most likely referring not to emotional feelings but to practical financial help and support within the church.³²¹ It is love that drives his complex and evidently somewhat embarrassing programme to raise money from largely gentile churches to give to the struggling Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem.³²² And it is love, in the form of true *koinōnia*, that he sees evident in the gift which the Philippians have sent him in prison.³²³

Love, then, is obviously and uncontroversially central to Paul’s vision of the Christian moral life, in a way which was not true in either Judaism or the greco-roman world. ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ is of course a command in Torah.³²⁴ It is reflected in the various rabbinic sayings which expound the Golden Rule.³²⁵ But it is fair to say that one could read through second-Temple Jewish literature for a long time before coming upon any mention of such a notion, let alone any attempt to make it central, the quality ‘which ties everything together and makes it complete’.³²⁶ One does not expect to find a poem like 1 Corinthians 13 at Qumran, or within the Wisdom of Solomon, or indeed the *Psalms of Solomon*. Nor can one find anything like it in ancient paganism, where care for others extended only to immediate family and close associates.³²⁷ This promotion of the ‘love’ command to its position of prominence in early Christianity fits exactly with several other features we have seen in Paul’s theology as a whole: something which was there in the ancient scriptures, but which emerges in a new way as a result of the work of the Messiah and the gift of the spirit.

It is of course fair to say that the central position of ‘love’ within Paul, and indeed John,³²⁸ is not matched in terms of literary structure and thematic emphasis in Mark, or Acts, or Hebrews, or Revelation. That is why it cannot serve by itself as a catch-all concept for the whole early Christian moral vision.³²⁹ But it is also fair to say that Mark’s picture of Jesus going to his death, the glimpses in Acts of the community of goods in the early church, and the vision of the conquering Lamb in Revelation, all demonstrate in practice what it was that John and Paul summed up in their use of the word *agapē*. John and Paul are not out on a limb. They are putting into clear language the larger challenge, which is that of the cross itself, the place where both of them see what the word ‘love’ really means.³³⁰ And Hays is surely right to say that the English word ‘love’ has become too generalized, too floppy, to carry this sharp and challenging meaning in today’s world. As I said myself in an earlier book, ‘The English word “love” is trying to do so many different jobs at the same time that someone really ought to sit down with it and teach it how to delegate.’³³¹ This does not mean at all that Hays has ‘dismissed’ or ‘abandoned’ the notion of love, as has strangely been suggested.³³² On the contrary: two of his three organizing principles for New Testament ethics, namely ‘community’ and ‘cross’, are quite simply all about *agapē*. The problem is that our word ‘love’ is still regularly used, at both scholarly and popular levels, in ways that have little to do with either.³³³

It is love, not least, that is Paul’s aim when teaching the churches in Rome and Corinth about things which must not divide the church, the things later called *adiaphora*. It becomes clear, as we read Romans 14.1—15.13 and 1 Corinthians 8—10 (not to mention 1 Corinthians 12—14, where chapter 13 forms the still centre amid a whirligig of charismatic energy³³⁴) that throughout these discussions he is concerned for the health of the whole body, which includes the educated consciences of every member.³³⁵ Paul, as a pastor, knew that conscience was a sensitive instrument, and if roughly handled might suffer lasting damage. This, too, is part of the ‘not yet’ of the gospel. Presumably Paul thinks that in the new

creation such problems will disappear. Learning how to live wisely within a world, and a church, in which such issues loom large is for him a further impetus towards a Messiah-shaped love in which no party insists on 'rights' and all concentrate on mutual responsibility and service.³³⁶

For the development of this kind of character, there is one thing above all which Paul sees as an absolute necessity: the formation of a Christian *mind*. Over and over again he urges his hearers to learn to think clearly; not to be deceived by smooth and slippery talk, especially when it concerns matters of moral behaviour; to gain the wisdom and insight they need to navigate the dangerous waters of the world.³³⁷ This theme reaches one kind of climax in the remarkable claim in 1 Corinthians 2:

Someone living at the merely human level doesn't accept the things of God's spirit. They are foolishness to such people, you see, and they can't understand them because they need to be discerned spiritually. But spiritual people discern everything, while nobody else can discern the truth about them! For 'Who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of the Messiah.³³⁸

As so often in Paul's thought, he holds together the fact that something is a fresh gift, a new revelation which could not have come about through human study and contemplation, and the fact that it must nevertheless be developed and worked at. If the latter were not the case, he would not have needed to write any letters at all: he would just rely on the spirit to produce 'the mind of the Messiah' in his congregations. But that is not how things work – not because Paul is after all a pragmatist who fails to live up to his own theory, but because his theory is precisely that what the one God wants to do in the world, and in people's hearts and lives, he wants to do *through* human agency. The work of pastors and teachers, and of an apostle who combines both and more besides, is therefore needed both to remind those 'in the Messiah' that the Messiah's 'mind' is already given to them as their birthright and that they need to inhabit it, to develop it, to learn to think straight and not to be deceived, to grow up in their thinking and no longer think baby-thoughts. We have already seen how this works in relation to Philippians 2.5, and several have argued that actually Philippians as a whole

is focused on the need to develop and maintain specifically Christian patterns of thinking.³³⁹ Paul intends that Christians should grow to maturity, and his pastoral work is constantly aimed at this.³⁴⁰

The reason for this, and the fullest sustained exposition of what it means, is found in Romans. One recent writer has seen Romans not only as a *description* of the acquisition of the Christian mind but as a kind of therapy: the hearers, as they listen again and again to the letter, are meant to find themselves brought from the ‘darkened mind’ of chapter 1 to the ‘transformed and renewed’ mind of chapter 12.³⁴¹ The letter is meant not simply to *instruct* the hearers about this necessary transformation, but actually to accomplish it. Whether or not this attractive thesis is accepted, the vital role of the mind is indeed a central theme of the letter:

Ever since the world was made, [God’s] eternal power and deity have been seen and known in the things he made. As a result, they have no excuse: they knew God, but didn’t honour him as God or thank him. Instead, they learned to think in useless ways, and their unwise heart grew dark. They declared themselves to be wise, but in fact they became foolish. They swapped the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of the image of mortal humans – and of birds, animals and reptiles.

So God gave them up to uncleanness in the desires of their hearts, with the result that they dishonoured their bodies among themselves. They swapped God’s truth for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen ...

Moreover, just as they did not see fit to hold on to knowledge of God, God gave them up to an unfit mind, so that they would behave inappropriately ...³⁴²

Paul here assumes three things. First, the human mind can in principle grasp the truth about the creator God. Second, the *mind* determines the *behaviour*. Third, the *mind* is closely linked to the *heart*: the reasoning faculty is linked to the driving centre of the personality, with its emotions and longings. From these he argues three further things. First, idolatry produces a darkening of the heart and a failure to think straight, an inversion of wisdom and folly. Second, this results in dehumanized and dehumanizing behaviour. Third, the creator allows this process to take its natural course: the ‘unfit’ decisions lead to an ‘unfit’ mind, a mind not fit for purpose, for the purpose of grasping the truth and living in the light of it. That is a core part of his diagnosis of the problem of the whole human race.

As we saw earlier, Paul's description of Abraham's faith in chapter 4 provides a significant reversal of Romans 1. The word 'mind' is not mentioned, but the same overall picture is produced, this time in positive mode:

He didn't become weak in faith as he considered his own body (which was already as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old), and the lifelessness of Sarah's womb. He didn't waver in unbelief when faced with God's promise. Instead, he grew strong in faith and gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God had the power to accomplish what he had promised.³⁴³

Paul might have summed up those sentences by saying that Abraham had learned to think straight about the creator God; that he had grasped the truth; and that his mind, rather than being 'unfit', was doing its proper job.

The dilemma of the 'mind' is then displayed, and resolved, in the dense and complex passage Romans 7.7—8.11. First, it is held captive, so that even when it wants to do the right thing it cannot:

I delight in God's law, you see, according to my inmost self; but I see another 'law' in my limbs and organs, fighting a battle against the law of my mind, and taking me as a prisoner in the law of sin which is in my limbs and organs.

What a miserable person I am! Who is going to rescue me from the body of this death? Thank God – through Jesus our king and lord! So then, left to my own self I am enslaved to God's law with my mind, but to sin's law with my human flesh.³⁴⁴

As I have argued elsewhere, this is Paul's retrospective Christian diagnosis of the problem of Israel under Torah.³⁴⁵ Unlike those described in chapter 1, this 'mind' is not 'unfit': it really does delight in the God-given law. But Israel too is part of Adamic humanity, here seen in terms of 'the flesh', and until 'the flesh' as the locus of powerful sin has been dealt with there is no hope, but only frustration. Then, however, the gospel provides the remedy for just this condition. As we saw a few moments ago, whereas 'the mind of the flesh' is hostile to the creator and his law, 'the mind of the spirit' is given life and peace, and can at last 'submit to the law' and thus 'please God'.³⁴⁶ In case that last deduction is challenged, we note that this is exactly what Paul then says in the glorious conclusion to the sequence of

thought, where the key elements of the diagnosis of evil in chapter 1 are reversed:

So, my dear family, this is my appeal to you by the mercies of God: offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Worship like this brings your mind into line with God's. What's more, don't let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God's will is, what is good, acceptable and complete.³⁴⁷

Once again we note the primacy of worship, the worship of the true God. Once again we note the tight nexus between mind and behaviour. Once again we see the eschatological location of it all: 'the present age' will try to claw believers back into its grip and squeeze them into the old shape, but the believer must be transformed, as a whole person, by the renewing of the *mind*. This is the key to Paul's regular motif about learning to think straight, about not being deceived. And this will be the key, too, to some practical issues yet to be addressed: 'Each person must make up their own *mind*' (14.5).

Paul's whole written work, in fact, could be seen as an extended application of Romans 12.1–2. Here is the true God who is worthy of worship with our whole selves, body and all. Learn to think straight, as members of the age to come which has already been launched. Discover in this way, in thought and practice, what a genuine and God-pleasing human life looks like. And, in particular, *work out what God's will is*. That 'working out', *dokimazein*, lies at the heart of Paul's vision of Christian *freedom*: it is not only freedom *from* the deadly constraints of sin and death, but also freedom *for* the multiple and varied styles of service to which one may be called. We should not be surprised that in Romans 12 the opening general command quickly gives way to a scattering of possible gifts and callings, or that this resonates with the central image of the 'Messiah's body' in 1 Corinthians 12.³⁴⁸ The different *charismata* in these two passages and elsewhere are one aspect of that freedom: different people have different callings, and must think wisely through what that means and where they belong within the larger whole. That is what Paul is getting at in

his tight little exposition of Christian *thinking* in Romans 12.3: ‘Don’t think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think. Rather, think soberly (*phronein eis to sōphronein*), in line with faith ...’

This comes to the fore again particularly in Philippians, which as we saw can be regarded as a particularly concentrated exposition of how Christians should think.³⁴⁹ Paul wants his hearers to think out for themselves, and put into practice, wise decisions as to what conformity to the Messiah’s pattern looks like in *this* situation or *that* one, not just in obedience to clear moral norms – though there are obviously plenty of those – but in the practical reasoning that, aided by the spirit, learns the ‘Messiah’s mind’ in day-to-day choices whose freedom only emerges once those moral norms are recognized (as one only discovers the ‘freedom’ to drive around the countryside once the ‘norms’ of traffic rules are recognized). ‘Work at bringing about your own salvation,’ he instructs them, not at all in the sense of ‘save yourselves by your good works’, as some have anxiously imagined, but ‘figure out what *your* version of *sōtēria* is going to look like in practice’, as opposed to the ‘salvation’ offered elsewhere.³⁵⁰ ‘Think through what’s going to be pleasing to the lord,’ he says in Ephesians. ‘Work it out.’³⁵¹ ‘Don’t be foolish’, he goes on, ‘but understand what the lord’s will is.’³⁵² ‘Test everything,’ he tells the Thessalonians.³⁵³ This is what it will look like to discover, more as an art than a science, what sort of a *poiēma*, a ‘work of art’, one is supposed to be, and hence what sort of ‘good works’ may have been prepared, ahead of time, for one to ‘walk in’.³⁵⁴

This development of a Christian ‘mind’, not simply in the sense of a calculating-machine that deduces norms from first principles, but in the sense of developing the freedom to think wisely and carefully about particular vocational and innovatory tasks, is at the heart of Paul’s vision of Christian character – in the sense of ‘character’ as formed through the ‘strengths’, i.e. the ‘virtues’, that we have discussed. From this there flows an ethic which is not so much about listing rules to keep (though they will be there in case the characters, not yet fully formed, are tempted to go astray again) but rather about teaching people to think as day-dwellers in a still darkened world.³⁵⁵ Paul would have understood the old maxim about

giving someone a fish and feeding them for a day as opposed to teaching them to fish and feeding them for life. He did from time to time give people blunt and direct instructions, to keep them on the rails for the immediate future. But he was far more concerned to teach them to think through, with a mind renewed by the spirit, what it meant to live in the new age when the two ages were still overlapping. Indeed, he was concerned to teach them to think, reflexively as it were, about the mind itself, and about its role within the total self-sacrificial obedience of the whole person. This, he would have said, is what it means to have the mind of the Messiah.

My case throughout this sub-section has been that Paul's reflections on and teachings about Christian behaviour are best understood as part of his modification, by Messiah and spirit, of the Jewish eschatology in which the age to come was to arrive and transform all things. And for this purpose, with all its constituent parts, right down to every moral decision, every blossom that points to the 'fruit of the spirit', every virtue painfully won, Paul sees the full achievement of the Messiah, and the implementation of that achievement by the spirit, as picking up and bringing into fresh focus *the whole intention of Torah*.³⁵⁶ Paul is quite capable of simply quoting a passage of Torah as authoritative. His writing is often telegraphic, and he does not usually add the footnotes to explain his hermeneutical theory of precisely how Torah, having been in one sense left behind at the cross, is in another sense projected forward into the present time. We find ourselves filling in those gaps from the hints he gives here and there. It is far too simplistic, and tends to marginalize Paul's own focus on Messiah and spirit, to suggest either that he leaves Torah behind entirely as a moral code or that he simply uses and develops it with little or no break. There are some ways in which it is clearly left behind: the distinctive badges of ethnic identity such as circumcision and food laws on the one hand, the sacrificial cult on the other. There are other ways in which it is emphatically restated: the command to love the neighbour, and the strict rules on sexual behaviour. But we should never forget that Paul, like many of his contemporaries, saw Torah itself as much more than a list of commands. It was a *narrative*, and the commands were embedded within it as pointers to the character of the

people of the covenant God. Paul saw that narrative fulfilled in the Messiah and the spirit. It is not surprising that in that fulfilment he should have found, though not yet fully explained, fresh ways of speaking of Torah and the way of life it always intended to generate.

I have argued in particular in this section that Paul understood the new interval that had surprisingly opened up between the resurrection of the Messiah himself and the consummation of all things as being a necessary if unexpected part of the divine plan. He shaped his ethical teaching at every point by the combination of the ‘now’ (the Messiah has already died and been raised, the spirit has already been given, the day has already dawned, the Messiah’s people have been rescued from ‘the present evil age’) and the ‘not yet’ (we have not yet attained what we are promised, we are not yet made perfect, we must judge nothing before the time). And he has seen that the unexpected interval has a specific purpose: to allow a space in which there can be formed a genuine human character, with renewed minds, spirit-transformed hearts and bodily obedience all in tune with one another and with the creator. This has its own eschatological purpose, summed up in Romans 5—8 with the word ‘glory’: the creator intends, as in Psalm 8, to put humans in charge of his world, and the present chronological gap between the work of the Messiah and the final new creation is required for such humans to have their character formed, indeed *conformed* ‘to the image of his son, so that he might be the firstborn of a large family’.³⁵⁷

We shall shortly turn to the other unexpected interval which confronted Paul: the time when, following the widespread Jewish rejection of the Messiah, gentiles were coming in instead. He understands, analyses and resolves this problem in a very similar way to what he has done in relation to moral behaviour. The covenant God is using the present time to ‘make my “flesh” jealous, and save some of them’. But before we get there we have the last element of the ‘not yet’ to consider. The battle is not yet done.

We should not be surprised that Paul sometimes uses the imagery of warfare. He is regularly dealing, after all, with what happens when people try to do what he says in Romans 12, to live according to the age to come rather than the present age from which they have been rescued, and find

that they are swimming upstream against a fast-flowing current. To think of this in terms of a great battle has many Jewish precedents, including some where it was meant literally, as in the great revolts of AD 66–70 and 132–5. The myth of a cosmic battle goes a long way back in the tradition.³⁵⁸ For Paul, of course, the battle has been redefined, like everything else, by the Messiah's death and resurrection. When Paul picks up the image it is not only metaphorical but also largely defensive: as is often pointed out, the only offensive weapon in this set of armour is the sword, which is the divine word:

Put on God's complete armour. Then you'll be able to stand firm against the devil's trickery. The warfare we're engaged in, you see, isn't against flesh and blood. It's against the leaders, against the authorities, against the powers that rule the world in this dark age, against the wicked spiritual elements in the heavenly places.

For this reason, you must take up God's complete armour. Then, when wickedness grabs its moment, you'll be able to withstand, to do what needs to be done, and still to be on your feet when it's all over. So stand firm! Put the belt of truth round your waist; put on justice as your breastplate; for shoes on your feet, ready for battle, take the good news of peace. With it all, take the shield of faith; if you've got that, you'll be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is God's word.

Pray on every occasion in the spirit, with every type of prayer and intercession. You'll need to keep awake and alert for this, with all perseverance and intercession for all God's holy ones – and also for me!³⁵⁹

This famous passage is echoed elsewhere in Paul's writings, and requires little extra comment here.³⁶⁰ The main thing for our purposes is that at no point does Paul allow the 'now' to eclipse the 'not yet'. He is never complacent. Indeed, it is because of the 'now' that the 'not yet' comes into focus; unless the Messiah had fought and won the decisive battle, his followers would not be precipitated into theirs.

The other thing to notice here is that prayer plays a necessary and central role within the whole between-the-times stance. Never was this more powerfully expressed than in that climactic eschatological passage, Romans 8 itself. Here the 'now' of inaugurated eschatology, with the spirit already dwelling in the transformed hearts of believers, is fused with the 'not yet' in which world and church alike are groaning in travail. At that moment, when

by the spirit the people concerned are keeping the *Shema*, ‘loving God’ from the heart, when monotheism and election come together most obviously in their new messianic shape, Paul speaks of a ‘groaning’, the birth-pangs of the new age coming to inarticulate expression. The lament which arises from Israel’s prayer down the centuries is transformed into the groaning which takes place when the one God comes to the heart of the world’s pain, producing the messianic shape of a people bearing the sorrows of the world into the presence of the creator:

The spirit comes alongside and helps us in our weakness. We don’t know what to pray for as we ought to; but that same spirit pleads on our behalf, with groanings too deep for words. And the Searcher of Hearts knows what the spirit is thinking, because the spirit pleads for God’s people according to God’s will.³⁶¹

This, for Paul, is not something other than eschatological ethics. It is at its very heart. The practice of prayer, itself energized by the spirit and formed after the pattern of the Messiah, gives evidence of the same transformation we have observed throughout. The people who are called to stand at the crossroads of time, the strange interval between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’, the present and the future, are also called to stand at the intersection of heaven and earth, sharing the pains and puzzles of the present creation but sharing also in the newly inaugurated life of the spirit. Romans 8.26–7 is in fact part of the outworking of the temple-theology of 8.9–11. As the Temple was the place where the one God chose to dwell in the midst of his people, so those who belong to the Messiah are the new temple where this one God now dwells in the midst of his world. This, indeed, is part of what is meant by ‘glorification’. The glory, the Shekinah, has returned, not in a blaze of fire and light but in the prayer of unknowing, the intercession that cannot yet come into articulate speech, the voice of the voiceless like the cry of a child waiting to be born. This is what inaugurated eschatology not only looks like but feels like. For Paul, the battle image of Ephesians 6 and the inarticulate prayer of Romans 8 belong closely together. Those phenomena take, no doubt, many forms. But there is always a recognizable shape: the

messianic and spirit-led transformation of the eschatology of a Pharisaic Jew.

The gospel of Jesus raised new questions for Paul, and the question of Christian life and behaviour was one of the most important. He answered it in a way entirely consistent with the way he answered the questions of monotheism and election; indeed, his answers belong in many cases within the realm of ‘symbolic praxis’, part of the Christian worldview itself. How Jesus’ followers behaved was to embody the new covenant and new creation. To be sure, his ethical teaching was framed in such a way as to take on the wider discussions of the world around him. We shall return to that in chapter 14. But its roots were Jewish and messianic.³⁶² Paul never shifted from that ground. That is why the other major new question which the gospel had raised was, for him, so painful. And so important.

[6. The Eschatological Challenge of Redefined Election](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

If the question of Israel was painful and important for Paul, it remains difficult and contentious for us. But it cannot be avoided. Over many years I have observed that several lines of early Christian thought, in the gospels as well as in Paul, converge not only on Romans 8 but also on Romans 9—11. Once you take seriously the Jewish rootedness of the early Messiah-movement, you cannot avoid addressing these issues; and these three chapters, now widely acknowledged as the rhetorical heart and climax of his greatest letter, are where Paul has said most fully, and (we must assume) most carefully, what he thinks on the subject. And alongside Romans 9—11 we find two other passages, one in Galatians and one in 1 Thessalonians, which are often, and rightly, referred to in the same breath.

This is not to say that these passages, particularly Romans 9—11, come to us as neat, packaged, detached theological statements, without specific historical context or rhetorical intention. Far from it. History and rhetoric

must be taken fully into account. But we must remind ourselves that a good deal of what we know about the historical context of all the letters is gained by elaborate mirror-reading; in other words, by informed guesswork. We know vastly more about what Paul actually says in Romans (or Galatians, or whatever) than we do, independently of the letters, about the context into which, or the purposes for which, the documents were sent. Granted all this, and granted that I have written elsewhere on the contexts and purposes, there is a good deal to be said for providing a fresh *exegetical* account in terms of the letters in question.

As we do so, the rhetorical needs of the present book must also be taken into account. I write into a situation where certain quite different pressure groups are looking over my shoulder. A word about each may help.

First, there is the traditional Protestant for whom ‘justification by faith’ is more or less what Luther, and/or the Westminster Confession, said it was. From that point of view, the emphasis I have put on Israel, on the covenant with Abraham and the fulfilment of that covenant in Jesus the Messiah, and on the covenant membership which God’s people enjoy because they are ‘in the Messiah’ and wearing his own badge of *pistis* – all this is a strange irrelevance, or even a dangerous ‘ecclesial’ distraction from ‘the gospel’. In many traditional protestant readings of Romans at least, Abraham in chapter 4 is simply an ‘example’ or a ‘proof from scripture’ of the ‘doctrine of justification by faith’ – a reading which I have done my best to argue out of court in this book and elsewhere.

Second, there is the strongly would-be ‘pro-Jewish’ post-holocaust reading of Paul in general and Romans in particular, which would approve of my placing the question of Israel at the centre of interest but not at all of what I have done and am doing with it. For such writers, who would include the late and gracious Krister Stendahl but also John Gager, Lloyd Gaston and recent apologists such as Pamela Eisenbaum and William Campbell, anything short of a two-covenant solution, in which God is happy for gentiles to be Christians but would prefer Jews to remain Jews – and in which Paul endorses this point of view – is regarded as suspicious and probably (that blessed word again) ‘supersessionist’.³⁶³ This kind of

writing thrives, particularly in North America, on a half-truth which, when portrayed as the only truth, becomes an untruth: that the position of the church for many generations has been that of a ‘replacement theology’ in which the church (thinking of itself as a non-Jewish body) has ‘replaced’ Israel in the divine purposes, a position which has been justified in terms of a negative portrayal of Judaism as a bad or inadequate sort of ‘religion’. There have of course been some would-be Christian thinkers who have said that kind of thing. But this is where the trap of treating early Christianity as basically a ‘religion’ in the eighteenth-century sense, and of then comparing it with other ‘religions’ as though it were appropriate to line them up and compare their ‘good’ and ‘bad’ points, comes home to roost.³⁶⁴ For the first Christians, the point was not about ‘religion’, but about coming to terms with the fact that if Jesus really was Israel’s Messiah, as they believed the resurrection had demonstrated him to be, then in some sense or other the narrative and identity of Israel had not been ‘replaced’ but fulfilled – fulfilled by him in person, and therefore fulfilled in and for all his people. When Akiba hailed bar-Kochba as Messiah, and some of his colleagues objected, would they, or indeed he, have said that Akiba was ‘replacing’ something called ‘Judaism’ with something different? Clearly not.³⁶⁵ We must never forget that in Paul’s sharpest writing, as in Galatians, we are witnessing an *inner-Jewish dispute*, not a dispute between ‘Jews’ on the one hand and somebody else on the other. Indeed, it also seems to be an *inner-Christian* dispute: the ‘agitators’ in Galatia, like Peter in Antioch, considered themselves followers of Jesus. Whatever has happened to these texts in subsequent re-readings (and perhaps misreadings), any historical investigation must take serious account of these dimensions, and not reduce them to anachronistic oversimplifications.³⁶⁶

In between these two extremes there are many other positions, two of which are popular in western circles for very different reasons. First, there is still in North America a remarkable undertow from the now traditional ‘dispensationalism’ of the nineteenth-century Plymouth Brethren. According to one version at least of this understanding of the scriptural narrative, many of the biblical promises to the Jewish people were never

fulfilled when Jesus appeared, and they are still due to be fulfilled in a concrete sense (a geographical ‘return from exile’ and an actual rebuilding of the Temple) in the ‘End Times’. This is not the place to describe these views in full, let alone to critique them. I have done my best to undercut the implicit eschatology of this position in my work on the resurrection, and do not need to repeat the argument here.³⁶⁷ But the legacy of such views, and their easy assumption in many ecclesial and educational contexts, is still strong. Even among those from that background who have distanced themselves from some of the wilder flights of ‘End-Times’ fancy the belief still persists (a) that ‘the Jews’ must still return to ‘their land’ at some point and (b) that Paul more or less said something to this effect in Romans 11. (The further points (c), that the event of the founding of the State of Israel in the late 1940s was the beginning of the ‘fulfilment’ in question, and (d) that this must be allowed to have a powerful influence on the western powers’ Middle East policy, take us way beyond our present concern, but still exercise a profound influence in some circles where the writings of Paul are discussed.) Thus, even though Romans 11 actually says nothing about a geographical ‘return’ (saying ‘the redeemer will come from Zion’ hardly counts), the sense that Paul must somehow in that chapter be talking about a ‘final salvation of the Jews’ has often, in my view, clouded the judgment even of some otherwise fine exegetes.³⁶⁸

Second, there is in many parts of the western world a very different mood, namely that of relativism and universalism. All faiths are basically as good as one another, and all sensible people now realize this and act accordingly.³⁶⁹ Again, it would help to have Paul on one’s side in saying this; and, though there are many passages in his letters where he does not look one tiny bit like a relativist, let alone a universalist, one can (it seems) ignore them and concentrate on the passages where he stresses ‘all’: one man’s stumble led to condemnation for ‘all’ and one man’s act of righteousness led to the justification of life for ‘all’; God has shut ‘all’ in the prison of disobedience so that he may have mercy upon ‘all’.³⁷⁰ Thus, though the exegete may draw back from saying so explicitly, Paul can triumphantly be invoked against – triumphalism; at least, against the

triumphalism of saying that one particular ‘way of salvation’ is the only way. (The ‘relativism’ in question is itself of course the haughty triumph of a post-Enlightenment progressive modernism.) To this extent, the question of ‘the Jews’ then becomes, in a way strangely parallel to Ernst Käsemann’s very different proposal, all about ‘religious humanity’ in general; except that for Käsemann *homo religiosus* was a bad thing, ‘the hidden Jew in all of us’, to be struck down by the anti-religious gospel of Jesus, while in the relativistic or universalistic perspective all ‘religions’ turn out to be good after all (except, presumably, their conservative or fundamentalist versions, which the relativist would deplore while still insisting that people who held such views would nevertheless be saved, if only through the fires of the modernist thought-police). There are some signs that some of Käsemann’s exegetical grandchildren may be taking this sort of route.³⁷¹

It may seem demeaning to the historical and exegetical nature of our present task to allow such questions even the briefest of air time, but I think it is necessary because, having been around such discussions most of my life, I have observed these and similar pressures and have often had cause to wonder about their insidious effect on historical exegesis. I hasten to add (since, if I don’t, reviewers no doubt will) that I too have all kinds of interests, partisan views, quirky ideas, situational perspectives, hopes and fears about what might turn out to be true, and indeed about what Paul might really have meant, and whether *that* was true. Perhaps, at the risk of allowing autobiography to intrude upon a historical discussion, I should state one or two of these at the outset.

First, for the first twenty years of my life I was not aware of what one might call the ‘Jewish question’. I had Jewish friends at school, but their ethnic identity and religion was taken for granted and was never a matter for comment, let alone discussion, let alone prejudice of thought or action. I remember only one moment, in my first twenty years, of hearing anything approaching an anti-semitic remark (it was directed against a Jewish friend whose Jewishness was otherwise taken for granted), and what I mostly remember about that moment was sheer puzzlement at its absurdity and complete irrelevance. On a wider scale, we naturally heard about the

holocaust, but it was like a horror movie, way beyond our ability to comprehend. It may be hard for American Christians to believe, but neither the church of my upbringing nor the less formal Christian fellowships of my teenage years ever mentioned ‘the question of Israel’.

When, in my twenties, I first became seriously aware of the plight of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Nazi atrocity, and came upon would-be Christian reflections on the subject, my gut reaction was to hope, with some excitement, that the New Testament might indeed predict a great future for the Jewish people, and that twentieth-century events might perhaps relate to that. Some of my earliest explorations into Romans 9—11 were made in the hope and expectation that this would turn out to be so. Alas: I discovered, try as I might, that the exegesis simply did not work. I abandoned that view for those reasons alone. My emotional sympathies were still with Israel, in the first and the twentieth century, but I could no longer compel Paul’s text to predict a large-scale, last-minute ‘rescue’ of all, or even most, Jews (and, as I say, there was never any question of discovering predictions of a ‘return to the land’ in Romans 11).

Since then I have looked at the question from every angle open to me, not least through repeated visits to the middle east, including a spell as a visiting Professor at the Hebrew University. These visits (to put it mildly) have added several different and conflicting impressions and points of view.³⁷² This increasingly dense and contested view of contemporary events has formed a counterpoint to my continuing attempts to understand Romans 9—11. Each time I come back to the passage I ask myself whether I am about to change my mind once more. (That has happened to me in other areas; serious changes of mind are one of the excitements and challenges of mature scholarship.) In some ways I would quite like to do so. I take no pride in holding a minority position. But as a historian and exegete I must stick to the text and try to understand what it actually says, not what I might like it to say.

To those who comment, ‘But you’re a bishop, so presumably you take a “Christian” view,’ I reply: Yes; but the ‘Christian’ view I take, in my tradition at least, is to let the text be the text, rather than make it say what

we want. There is after all no one ‘Christian’ view on these matters. If it turns out that Paul says things I do not want to hear, I shall live with it. If it turns out that I say things which Paul doesn’t want to hear, perhaps he will one day put me straight. If it turns out that Paul says things the twenty-first century doesn’t want to hear, it’s better that we get that out into the open rather than sneakily falsifying the historical evidence to fit our predilections.

With that, to business. Before we reach Romans 9—11 itself, we begin with Galatians and 1 Thessalonians: and, first, with one of the sharpest and most difficult of Paul’s polemical passages.

[\(ii\) Galatians 4—6](#)

The passage in question is the final part of the letter to the Galatians. Opinion is divided on how chapters 4, 5 and 6 are related to the earlier parts of the letter; I have myself in the past tended to see the main argument as concluding at 4.11, though I am now moving towards those who see it continuing through as far as 5.1. Nothing much for our purposes hangs on this question, but we simply note that the ‘allegory’ of Sarah and Hagar, in Galatians 4.21—5.1, can be seen both as the culmination of the long argument from the start of chapter 3 and also as setting up the terms for the concluding (and quite complex) exhortations.

First, then, the allegory itself:

²¹So, you want to live under the law, do you? All right, tell me this: are you prepared to hear what the law says? ²²For the Bible says that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave-girl and one by the free woman. ²³Now the child of the slave-girl was born according to the flesh, while the child of the free woman was born according to promise.

²⁴Treat this as picture-language. These two women stand for two covenants: one comes from Mount Sinai, and gives birth to slave-children; that is Hagar. ²⁵(Sinai, you see, is a mountain in Arabia, and it corresponds, in the picture, to the present Jerusalem, since she is in slavery with her children.) ²⁶But the Jerusalem which is above is free – and she is our mother.

²⁷For the Bible says,

Celebrate, childless one, who never gave birth!

Go wild and shout, girl that never had pains!
The barren woman has many more children
Than the one who has a husband!

²⁸Now you, my family, are children of promise, in the line of Isaac. ²⁹But things now are like they were then: the one who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one born according to the Spirit. ³⁰But what does the Bible say? ‘Throw out the slave-girl and her son! For the son of the slave-girl will not inherit with the son of the free.’ ³¹So, my family, we are not children of the slave-girl, but of the free.

5.1 The Messiah set us free so that we could enjoy freedom! So stand firm, and don’t get yourselves tied down by the chains of slavery.

Abraham had two sons: yes indeed. If we have guessed rightly what arguments the ‘agitators’ were putting forward, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they may have used this story to explain to the erstwhile pagan Galatians that they were only second-order citizens in Abraham’s family. They were, after a fashion, in the position of Ishmael, and it was time for them to join the true covenant family, the Isaac-children, by getting circumcised.³⁷³ With due regard for the problems of ‘mirror-reading’, this guess may be better than most, though it would be wrong to conclude that Paul only talks about Abraham, here or elsewhere, because his opponents have forced him to do so.³⁷⁴ Likewise, it would be wrong to focus too much attention on Paul’s comment about his own ‘picture-language’. The word he uses, *allēgoroumena*, indicates a broad category of figurative speech, including typology, and should not be taken to indicate that Paul is treating the Torah in the same way as, say, Philo – though making Sarah and Hagar stand for different abstractions, ‘slavery’ and ‘freedom’, ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’, does seem to point in that direction as well. Paul’s aim, though, is not to draw attention away from the story to focus instead on qualities to be cultivated by the individual. He is continuing to talk about the actual ‘inheritance’ of Abraham’s family, as throughout 3.1—4.7. The point is not the private or individual cultivation of inner dispositions, but the public demarcation of Abraham’s family.³⁷⁵

Whether or not Paul is here responding directly to a different use of Genesis, his own position soon becomes clear. The genuine children of

Abraham, the ‘Isaac-like’ children as opposed to the ‘Ishmael-like’ ones, are those who, relying on the divine promise, are thus embracing freedom, rather than those who, relying on the ‘flesh’, are thus embracing slavery. These two contrasts, slave and free on the one hand and promise and ‘flesh’ on the other, dominate most of the paragraph, though it is clear that Paul has other contrasts in mind as well which he can correlate with these, the most obvious being that in 4.29 we find ‘flesh’ contrasted with ‘spirit’. The slave/free contrast picks up and develops further the theme of 4.1–7, where Paul was plugging in to a different slave/free moment in the scriptural narrative, namely the liberation from Egypt.³⁷⁶ The promise/flesh contrast likewise picks up earlier themes, this time from chapter 3.³⁷⁷

Paul’s basic strategy, which he has approached through the rhetorically skilful 4.12–20, is to offer a stark choice. We note again that he is *not* talking about ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’, but about two very different visions of the essentially Jewish belief that the Messiah has come and that what matters is the formation of Messiah-communities. The ‘agitators’ are convinced that gentiles entering a Messiah-community must be circumcised; Paul is convinced that they should not be. Thus the ‘agitators’ want ‘to shut you out, so that you will then be eager for them’ (4.17): in other words, like Peter refusing to allow gentile Christians to eat with him (2.11–14), they are in effect forcing such people to ‘judaize’ in order to belong to the innermost circle. That is why, later on, Paul restates the agitators’ intention: they ‘are trying to force you into getting circumcised’ (6.12). Now Paul addresses the problem with a sharp either/or: perhaps after all it is *they* who ought to be shut out!

This conclusion is quite popular in current exegesis.³⁷⁸ It has not, however, gone unchallenged, since it appears to offer a vision of the Messiah’s people which is just as ‘exclusive’ as that of the ‘agitators’ themselves.³⁷⁹ But that is indeed Paul’s position. It is difficult to read Galatians 1.6–9, 2.11–21, 5.2–12, or 6.11–17 – to cite only the most obvious passages – and suppose for a moment that Paul was aiming in this letter to bring about a result where, in Galatia, ‘everyone has won and all shall have prizes’. That result is not normally achieved by throwing around

anathemas and warning about people ‘bearing their condemnation’ (5.10).³⁸⁰ We should note, however, that he is writing about *discipline*, not about the eternal salvation of those against whose teaching he is warning. ‘Salvation’ as such is never mentioned in this letter, though of course it stands just off stage throughout. He is concerned with the health of the community. As we know from his disciplinary methods elsewhere, drastic action may sometimes be necessary precisely in order to safeguard ultimate salvation.³⁸¹ That, I suggest, is how we should then read Galatians 4.21—5.1: starting with ‘Are you prepared to hear what the law says?’ in 4.21, it reaches its climax with ‘What does the Bible say? Throw out the slave-woman and her son!’

It is perhaps important not to over-read this command. Paul is quoting from Genesis 21.10, and he does not add a sentence to apply the passage to the Galatian situation.³⁸² The quotation remains a strong hint rather than a direct command. It is strong, though. Paul has placed it at the rhetorically powerful moment near the end of the paragraph. He clearly intends that it should be applied to the present situation, since he has in the previous verse (4.29) drawn a parallel between the ‘persecution’ of Isaac by Ishmael and the present circumstances.³⁸³ He has linked that parallel to the quotation by asking, ‘But what does the Bible say?’ This makes it clear that what Sarah said to Abraham in the original story is now to be heard as a word of *graphē*, ‘scripture’, by the community – and paid attention to, as indicated in 4.21.

Even if this hint is so strong as to constitute an effective command, however, Paul is not saying that any of the Galatian believers themselves should be ‘cast out’, even if some have already gone the whole way and got circumcised. The problem is the false teachers – or perhaps one in particular, as 5.10 perhaps indicates.³⁸⁴ Their teaching constitutes a radical misunderstanding of the nature of the Abraham-family to which they are trying to appeal. Such a misunderstanding cannot be *adiaphora*, like the decision to eat (or not to eat) meat offered to idols, or indeed any meat at all.³⁸⁵ Indeed, the things which Paul considers ‘indifferent’ are precisely the things which, if insisted upon, would indeed divide the community along

Jew/gentile lines, which is precisely what the ‘agitators’ (like Peter in Antioch) are effectively doing. And Paul sees this as a denial of the ‘truth of the gospel’ itself. Nothing less is at stake than the fact of the Messiah’s crucifixion: like so much else in the letter, the present passage is held between 2.19–21 on the one hand (‘I have been crucified with the Messiah ... if “righteousness” comes through the law, then the Messiah died for nothing’) and 6.14 on the other (‘God forbid that I should boast – except in the cross of our lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world’). The force of the paragraph is not simply, ‘You must not listen to these other views, but must stand firm in your identity as Isaac-children, children of promise, the people of freedom and of the spirit.’ It is, more sharply, once the hint has been understood, ‘You must *reject* the alternative teaching, and *eject* those who are teaching it.’³⁸⁶

All this (to locate the present discussion within our own much larger argument) is a clear redefinition of election, as in our previous chapter. And it is done on the same terms as usual: the ‘freedom’ of the Isaac-children is that which was acquired for them by the Messiah;³⁸⁷ they are the people who, as in Romans 2.28–9, are defined in terms not of flesh but of spirit.³⁸⁸ Those who emphasize the ‘flesh’, i.e. the necessity for circumcision for gentile converts, do not count as genuine children. (We notice once again that the target of Paul’s polemic is not ‘Jews’ or ‘Judaism’, but one particular form of *Jewish Christianity*, namely a form that insisted on circumcising believing gentiles.) Election redefined, then, around the Messiah – especially his cross – and the spirit.

We have not yet, however, considered the very centre of this difficult passage, and when we do so we see how important this passage is not only for Paul’s redefinition of second-Temple election but also for his reworking of second-Temple eschatology, the subject of the present chapter. As so often, Paul quotes from Torah and prophets side by side, and here the prophetic passage has powerful resonances. Isaiah 54.1, quoted in verse 27, was already connected in post-biblical Jewish thought with the notion not only of restoration after exile (its obvious referent in context) but also with

Sarah on the one hand (it echoes the mention of Sarah's childlessness in Genesis 11.30) and the 'new Jerusalem' on the other.³⁸⁹ So what harmonies are set up by these various echoes?

It has recently been argued that the quotation from Isaiah 54.1 in 4.27 should be understood in relation to a regular and repeated use of the central chapters of Isaiah throughout Galatians, and that this quotation in fact forms a kind of rhetorical and scriptural climax to the entire argument from the start of chapter 3, or even the end of chapter 2.³⁹⁰ Isaiah 54 speaks of the restored Jerusalem, and had already been understood in Jewish tradition in terms of Sarah, referred to explicitly in Isaiah 51.1–3.³⁹¹ But Isaiah 54 also comes, of course, immediately after Isaiah 53, where the servant is finally vindicated and exalted after his suffering and death. And this triumph is itself the long-awaited kingdom of YHWH: the fourth 'servant song' was the vision which explained the 'gospel' announcement in Isaiah 52.7–12. And Isaiah 54 goes on to celebrate the fact that YHWH himself is Jerusalem's husband (54.5), who is re-establishing his 'covenant of peace' with her once and for all (54.10). This in turn leads to the universal invitation of the gospel (55.1), through which YHWH promises to establish the Davidic covenant with all who come (55.3).

This rich cluster of themes resonates at so many levels with so much that Paul is talking about throughout Galatians that it is hard to imagine that his quotation of Isaiah 54.1 was a random proof-text thrown in for mere rhetorical effect. The reference constitutes a clear claim: the Messiah's people, the servant's people, are the 'children of the barren woman', that is, of Sarah. They are 'children of promise', because they have believed God's promises as Abraham did, as in 3.6–9. And, not least, these promise-children are the true *returned from exile* people: that was what Isaiah 54 was celebrating. The return from exile has happened at a 'heavenly' level, that is, within the newly enacted purposes of the creator, producing once again the 'now/not yet' contrast, in this case that between the 'present Jerusalem', still enslaved (both theologically and perhaps, in Paul's view, because of Roman domination),³⁹² and the 'Jerusalem above', already established on earth in the action of the covenant God through the Messiah

and the spirit.³⁹³ The eschatology of a restored Jerusalem has finally come to pass in terms of the new messianic community characterized by promise, spirit and freedom. The ecclesiology of the single community, which as we saw in chapter 6 was central to Paul's symbolic world, is itself central to his inaugurated eschatology. And we should not be surprised that when the central symbol is under attack, as it was in Galatia, he reacts with full force. One cannot undermine central worldview-symbols and expect to be 'tolerated'. And the point of locating all this within 'eschatology' should now be clear. *This is not a debate about 'types of religion'. It is a matter of eschatology.* Either the long-awaited 'age to come' has arrived with the Messiah or it has not. Paul announces that it has – precisely through the Messiah's death and resurrection and the work of the spirit. The message of the 'agitators' clearly implies that it has not. When we frame these complex passages and questions within Paul's overarching inaugurated eschatology we see not only that the use to which they have been put in 'Christian/Jewish' polemic was unwarranted in the first place, but also that the reaction to that abuse continues to miss the point. Nor is this about an 'apocalyptic' moment which sweeps away all previous 'religion'. It is about the fulfilment of the ancient covenant plan in the Messiah and the spirit – and about the various strategies used in the first century, as well as in the twenty-first, to avoid the radical implications of that fulfilment.

Mention of the covenant plan brings us back to the last section of the paragraph to be considered here, namely Paul's introduction to the Sarah/Hagar theme in verses 24 and 25. These women, says Paul, are 'two covenants'. It is the only time he ever uses the phrase. Some have suggested that he is referring, as in 2 Corinthians 3, to the 'old covenant' and the 'new covenant' mentioned in Jeremiah 31.³⁹⁴ But this is highly unlikely. The 'old/new' scheme refers in 2 Corinthians 3 to the renewal of the *Mosaic* dispensation, but here in Galatians the context of chapter 3, where the original Abrahamic covenant is expounded at length, sets up a contrast not between the old (Mosaic) covenant and its renewal but between the Abrahamic covenant, as in Genesis 15 and Galatians 3, and the Sinai covenant made through Moses. That was what was going on in 3.15–29,

and it fits the present passage very well. In this context, Sarah is not just an allegorical signifier for the Abrahamic covenant, but part of the means by which it was fulfilled: she is metonymy here, not simply metaphor. How then does Hagar fit in? Simple: Sinai is a mountain in Arabia, and it was well known (at least Paul thought he could assume it) that Hagar, being the mother of Ishmael, was the ancestress of the Arabians.³⁹⁵ Hagar has metonymic connections with Sinai, as Sarah does with Abraham. Here again we see Paul's revised eschatology, exactly as in 3.23–9: now that the Messiah has come, we are no longer under the Torah. And – a brilliant polemical side-thrust, but fitting exactly into the same revised eschatology – we no longer take orders from 'the present Jerusalem'. We belong to the new Jerusalem, not in the sense of 'going to heaven when we die', but in the sense that the long-awaited return from exile, and indeed rebuilding of the temple, has happened. The heavenly Jerusalem has come to earth in the person of Jesus the Messiah and the power of the spirit. The people who are therefore celebrating the new day of Isaiah 54, the surprising yet long-promised birth of children for Sarah/Jerusalem, on the basis of the work of the servant, must avoid all temptations to go back to Babylon, back into slavery. 'The Messiah has set you free' (5.1): it is substantially the same point as in 3.13–14, where the law's curse of exile has been undone by the Messiah's redemptive death. The Mosaic Torah had kept the Israelites confined, locked up, enslaved, under the rule of the *paidagōgos*, under the care of enslaving powers, under the curse of exile, until the coming of the Messiah.³⁹⁶ Torah formed a 'yoke', a word sometimes used by the rabbis in a good sense but here, perhaps with deliberate irony, indicating slavery.³⁹⁷ But, as in 4.1–7, the slaves have now been freed. The ancient narrative of Exodus has come true again in the newer reality of return from exile. And with that freedom, the returned-from-exile freedom, the blessing of Abraham has come upon the gentiles, the spirit has been poured out on people of faith irrespective of ancestry, and second-Temple Jewish eschatology has been well and truly inaugurated. The Sarah/Hagar 'allegory' says again, with more bells and whistles than one can easily hold in one's head all at once, and with consequently massive rhetorical effect,

what Paul had been saying throughout chapter 3. The promise to Abraham has been fulfilled; the ‘inheritance’ is secure for all his ‘seed’; and the law of Sinai is quite simply out of date.

Is Paul saying, then, not just that non-Messiah-believing Jews will not inherit the Abrahamic promises, but also that Messiah-believing Jews *who insist on circumcision for gentile converts* will not inherit them? That brings us back to where we were a few minutes ago. If Paul is continuing to speak, not of salvation, but of discipline and of the nature of the Christian community, the following passage makes sense. Up until 5.1 Paul has been expounding the Abraham/Sinai contrast, and urging the Galatians to reject, and perhaps eject, the teachers who are saying that the only way to Abraham is through Sinai. Now, in 5.2–6, he assumes, not a soteriology primarily, but an ecclesiology, and explains that there is no room within the Messiah’s people, here and now, for people who insist on circumcision or who think that being circumcised themselves will solidify their membership. Begin at the end of the short paragraph, where, with the characteristic double *gar*, Paul explains the reason for the previous three verses:

⁵For we are waiting eagerly, by the spirit and by faith, for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in the Messiah, Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any power. What matters is faith, working through love. [398](#)

Here is election and eschatology, redefined around Messiah and spirit, folded up and put into a paper bag. When he says ‘*what matters* is faith, working through love’, what he means by ‘what matters’ is ‘what counts as the definition of the community’. Circumcision, or the lack thereof, were being seen as community markers: the circumcised were ‘in’, the uncircumcised were ‘out’. No, says Paul, all that has gone. There is a new set of markers: (a) being in the Messiah, as the controlling category; (b) faith, as in the whole letter to date; (c) working through love – the first mention in Galatians of what suddenly becomes a major theme. [399](#) It is important to remind ourselves that he is *not* saying that being a gentile is now what matters rather than being a Jew, but rather that ethnic background

of whatever sort counts for nothing within the community of God's people. The 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision' point is, obviously, one of the main thrusts of the whole letter, and he will return to it towards the end in another memorable definition, just as he used the same phrase in a different context in 1 Corinthians.⁴⁰⁰

Working back through the explanations, verse 5 provides the only mention in Galatians of 'hope', of a future 'righteousness' at the last day. This, in shorthand, is eschatology redefined: the ultimate hope of *dikaiosynē*, of vindication on the last day, has nothing to do with producing the 'works of Torah'. It is a matter of the spirit, of faith and of hope. The echoes of Romans 5.1–5 ought to be clear.

Verses 5 and 6 provide the support for the four rapier-thrusts of verses 2, 3 and 4. Once you see what it means to be 'in the Messiah' in verses 5 and 6, it becomes analytically true that this messianic identity is irrelevant, and of no use, to someone who insists on getting circumcised (verse 2). To do that, says the erstwhile hardline Pharisee, is to sign on for a programme of total lawkeeping (verse 3), resulting in someone desperately trying to build the new Jerusalem while still in exile in Babylon – and while the new Jerusalem has already been established! The result, in verse 4, is that such a person is saying, with their actions, that they are not part of the Messiah-family, not part of the spirit-family, not part of the entire new creation launched by 'grace'. Again there are echoes from earlier in the letter, this time 1.6 and 2.21: the one God called them in the first place by the 'grace' of the Messiah, and to turn to the law would be to set that grace aside. He is not saying such a move would be permanent. He is suggesting that, if it became permanent, it would be fatal. There are no promises of 'inheritance', or 'freedom', or ultimate 'righteousness', for those who decide to leave the dwelling-place called 'grace', where 'faith working through love' are the only badges of occupancy, and to move back to the old house called 'law'.

We can move rapidly over the next paragraphs, since they have comparatively little to contribute to our present topic of Paul's view of Israel within his revised eschatology. I note simply, in passing, my

disagreement with the normal reading of Galatians 5.17–18, a passage which sounds as though it had escaped from Romans 7:

¹⁷For the flesh wants to go against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. They are opposed to each other, so that you can't do what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.⁴⁰¹

As in some other passages, Paul has missed out a middle term in his implied syllogism. We might expect him to say, 'if you are led by the spirit, you are not in the flesh', much as he does in Romans 8.9. The fact that instead he says 'you are not under the law' is easily explained, since for Paul, as in Romans 7.5, being 'in the flesh' is directly correlated with being 'under the law' – and those who are in the Messiah, who have died and been raised with him (Romans 7.6 here echoing Galatians 2.19–20), have ceased to be, in that technical sense, 'in the flesh', that is, they are no longer defined in terms of that 'fleshly' existence, and have come instead to be defined in terms of Messiah and spirit. Galatians 5.17 and 18, then, function like a miniature version of Romans 7.7–25 and Romans 8.1–11, as indeed we might have expected from 5.16, which declares that those who live by the spirit will not do what the flesh wants them to do. In other words, we have here again a small glimmer of that larger inaugurated eschatology we see in Romans and elsewhere.⁴⁰² The covenant has been renewed, and the people of God have been transformed. To live according to the flesh – whether in the sense of a focus on ethnic identity and thus on circumcision, or in the sense of the 'works of the flesh' listed in verses 19 and 20 – is to stay in the old world. Paul's eschatological vision is of those who 'belong to the Messiah' (5.24) having 'crucified the flesh', exactly as in 2.19: indeed, they are to be people for whom, through Jesus, 'the world has been crucified to them, and they to the world'. But that already points us on to the final paragraph of the letter.

When Paul takes the pen in his own hand to sign off (6.11), he cannot resist one final flourish. He returns to the point he made earlier: the 'agitators' are simply wanting to avoid persecution themselves, which means they are trying to avoid the cross (6.12). They do not themselves

keep Torah – or not in the way that Saul of Tarsus would have done, as in his self-description in 1.14! – but they simply want ‘to boast in your flesh’ (6.13). That, however precisely we reconstruct the hypothetical historical situation, is what he means by saying that they are trying to ‘force you into getting circumcised’.⁴⁰³ This leads to a further breathtakingly radical summary redefinition of election around the cross of the Messiah:

¹⁴As for me, God forbid that I should boast – except in the cross of our lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. ¹⁵Circumcision, you see, is nothing; neither is uncircumcision! What matters is new creation. ¹⁶Peace and mercy on everyone who lines up by that standard – yes, on God’s Israel.⁴⁰⁴

We had better take these three verses slowly. This is a major moment in Paul’s understanding. Tired, but satisfied that he has made the case, he is now drawing the threads together. At such a moment a speaker or writer tends to say what comes from the depths of heart and mind.⁴⁰⁵

For a start, there is no ‘boasting’. The obvious parallel is in Romans, where it is particularly the ‘boast’ of ‘the Jew’.⁴⁰⁶ The other close parallel is 1 Corinthians 1.31, where Paul quotes Jeremiah 9.22–3: the one who boasts should boast of the lord.⁴⁰⁷ Here, as in 1 Corinthians, the ‘boasting’ is specifically in the *crucified* lord, for the same reason as in Galatians 2.19–20: his death has constituted ‘my’ death. Only now Paul puts together the ‘representative autobiography’ of 2.19–20 with the cosmic scope of 1.4, where that same self-giving death of the Messiah was the instrument of God’s delivery of his people from ‘the present evil age’. This is how it has happened: what occurred on Calvary was the earthly instantiation and outworking of a much larger and darker battle. ‘The world has been crucified to me’: the old has passed away, as in 2 Corinthians 5.17, and the new has come. What the gospel has unveiled is not a ‘new way of being religious’, not even a ‘new way of being saved’. (As we have seen, ‘salvation’ is not mentioned in this letter.) Nor is it even ‘a new way of being God’s people’, though that is certainly involved. It is nothing short of ‘new creation’. A new world has come into being, and everything appears

in a new light within it. To highlight this point has been the strength of the so-called ‘apocalyptic’ emphasis in recent American writing on Paul.

This ‘new creation’, furthermore, now becomes the defining mark of the people of God: neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, is anything; what matters is new creation! This is obviously parallel to 5.6, and elsewhere to 1 Corinthians 7.19, and the point is, in the language we have adopted in this book, that *eschatology defines election*: the ‘new creation’ determines the identity of the single family, the ‘seed’ promised to Abraham, and in doing so utterly relativizes the marks of circumcision, on the one hand, or any possible gentile pride in uncircumcision, on the other. (This is not insignificant when it is implied, whether through unthinking anti-Jewish sentiment in the church or in the natural pro-Jewish reaction, that ‘the Jews’ have been *replaced* by ‘gentiles’. Paul would be just as hard on that nonsense as he is on the essentially anti-eschatological position of the ‘agitators’.)

But it still matters that God’s people are God’s people. As in every breath of the letter so far, Paul understands God’s people in terms of the Messiah and his death and resurrection, and in terms of the people who, through their *pistis*, are declared to be members of his extended family, the true and single *sperma* of Abraham. Anyone who reads Galatians 1.1—6.15 in anything like this way – and the cumulative case is massive – will find it almost literally unthinkable to suppose that when Paul then says, ‘Yes, on God’s Israel’ at the end of verse 16 he should mean anything other than this: that the noble, evocative word ‘Israel’ itself now denotes, however polemically, *the entire faith-family of the Messiah*, defined by ‘faith working through love’ (5.6) and ‘new creation’ (6.15).⁴⁰⁸

The evidence for this position is many-sided and powerful. First, there is as I say the cumulative weight of the entire letter.⁴⁰⁹ Paul’s whole argument is that the one God has one family, not two, and that this one ‘seed’ consists of all those who believe in Jesus the Messiah, with no distinction of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male or female. He has spoken of this single family as ‘the church of God’, *ekklēsia tou theou*, the people whom he formerly persecuted (1.13).⁴¹⁰ The only other time he uses exactly this

phrase it is interestingly distinguished from both ‘Jews’ and ‘Greeks’, giving strong support to the possibility that Paul was using it in the same sense here.⁴¹¹ His struggle in Jerusalem and Antioch for ‘the truth of the gospel’ was precisely the battle to ensure that Jewish and gentile Messiah-believers belonged without distinction at the same table, as the sign of their membership in the single family, defined by nothing other than Messiah-faith (chapter 2). The argument of chapter 3 was that God always promised Abraham a single family in which gentiles would have an equal share, and that this has been provided through the Messiah and the spirit: all the baptized and believing Messiah-people form the single ‘seed’ who are the true ‘heirs’ of the promise. Chapter 4 reinforced that from several different angles, and chapter 5 turned up the ironic and polemical volume to a level where even those theologically stone-deaf could hardly miss what was being said. The context of the letter as a whole thus all points one way.⁴¹²

So, too, does the context of the final paragraph itself – again, often ignored or downplayed by those who challenge the majority reading.⁴¹³ This paragraph actually reflects rather closely the blunt and polemical opening, with its mention of the world-redeeming death of the Messiah, the ‘troublers’ and the repeated anathemas.⁴¹⁴ If we remove the last six words of verse 16, *kai epi ton Israel tou theou* (literally: ‘and upon the Israel of God’), nobody could imagine that these seven verses did anything other than summarize and emphasize the rest of the letter.⁴¹⁵ In particular, we should note verse 17, often ignored in this connection: ‘For the rest, let nobody make trouble for me. You see, I carry the marks of Jesus on my body.’ That offers a strong and again ironic and polemical reinforcement of 6.15, where neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters: the marks of persecution which Paul bears, the sign of his sharing of the Messiah’s sufferings, are the only physical marks which mean anything, and anyone who tries to say otherwise is ‘making trouble’ for him.⁴¹⁶ And the earlier parts of the paragraph, 6.11–15, tell the same story, in the same tone. If we are to read the last phrase of verse 16 in any other sense we would be, in effect, treating it as a strange aside, like someone in the middle of a speech turning to say something in quite a different tone of voice.

What about the word ‘Israel’ itself? It is of course true that Paul uses the word sparingly throughout his letters (except for Romans 9—11), and nowhere else in Galatians at all.⁴¹⁷ But the word was in any case multivalent in the hellenistic-Jewish world of Paul’s day.⁴¹⁸ It was by no means equivalent to *hoi Ioudaioi*, ‘the Jews’: a powerful memory remained of the fact that the original chosen people, the children of ‘Israel’ i.e. Jacob, had been cut down to a remnant by the disappearance of the ten northern tribes, leaving only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin and such Levites as lived among them – and they had themselves then been taken to Babylon, whence some but not all had returned. The word *Ioudaios*, ‘Jew’, thus strictly denoted the tribe of Judah, extended to include returnees from Benjamin and Levi, and was used in various ways in the second-Temple period, sometimes but not always by ‘Jews’ to refer to themselves, more often by non-Jews to refer, sometimes contemptuously, to the Jewish people whether in the middle east or in the Diaspora. Meanwhile the word ‘Israel’ was likewise used in a variety of ways, but often in careful distinction from ‘Jew’ or ‘Jews’, and usually in the context of evoking the original biblical sense of the covenant people, carrying the claim and/or the hope that the present *Ioudaioi* would turn out at the last to be the ‘Israel’ of whom it would be said that ‘all Israel has a share in the age to come’. The word was subject to constant, and implicitly polemical, redefinition, right across the world of second-Temple Jewish sectarianism: it was, obviously, a word that everyone wanted to claim, from Qumran to the rabbis. It was connected, not least, to the expectation (or the claim) of a Messiah, and/or to the belief that the present group was a kind of Israel-in-waiting, a ‘remnant’ out of which the ultimate Israel might grow. There is of course no precedent in second-Temple literature for a meaning of ‘Israel’ which would correspond to the meaning most commentators believe it must bear in Galatians 6; but then there wouldn’t be. Until Paul, nobody had imagined what it might mean for the people of God if the Messiah appeared *and was crucified*. Unprecedented situations generate unprecedented results.⁴¹⁹

Obviously, then, if Paul were to use ‘Israel’ in this passage to mean ‘the whole seed of Abraham, believing Jews and believing gentiles together’,

this would constitute a seriously polemical redefinition. But that is hardly foreign either to his practice in general or to the present passage in particular. In general, we have already had occasion to notice his breathtaking redefinition of ‘Jew’ itself in Romans 2.29, and of ‘circumcision’ in Romans 2.26 and Philippians 3.3. We studied numerous other redefinitions in the previous chapter, such as the striking use of ‘temple’-language, and of the covenant promises, in 2 Corinthians 6.16.⁴²⁰ Within the present context, there are several other sharp, almost gnomic redefinitions of traditional terms, and densely compressed summary phrases: ‘the Messiah’s law’, in 6.2, for instance – an otherwise unexplained coinage, adding a genitive to a major term to indicate a significant if perhaps opaque modification; ‘the world crucified to me and I to the world’; ‘new creation’. Perhaps we should add *zōē aiōnios*, a phrase not used elsewhere in the letter and itself constituting a redefinition of the Jewish idea of ‘the life of the age to come’.⁴²¹

Are there any signs that ‘Israel of God’ might be just such a polemical coinage, like ‘the Messiah’s law’? Was it, perhaps, a phrase already used by Paul’s opponents as a way of denoting what they saw as the genuine people of God, i.e. the circumcised?⁴²² Whether or not the latter suggestion has merit, there is excellent reason to suppose that Paul regularly employed such polemical redefinitions, not least of Jewish prayers and blessings. For a start, the adjectival genitive ‘of God’ clearly introduces a *modification* of ‘Israel’, as the phrase ‘of the Messiah’ modifies ‘law’ in 6.2. Paul was capable of simply taking over major community-defining terms such as ‘Jew’ or ‘circumcision’, as we saw, without adding any adjectives or genitives, but when such additions occur we may rightly suspect that a similar redefinition is going on.

But why would he say ‘of God’? Here there should be no doubt, in the light of Galatians as a whole, of the intended effect. Not only do we have ‘the church of God’ in 1.13. We also have Paul saying in 2.19, ‘Through the law I died to the law that I might live *to God*.’ The idea of such an antithesis would have made no sense to Saul of Tarsus, but that is the effect of coming to terms with a crucified Messiah. Then there is the clipped but

actually clear 3.20: the mediator, that is, Moses, is not mediator of the single family promised to Abraham, *but God is one*, and therefore desires, and has created in the Messiah, exactly such a single family.⁴²³ We might also compare the striking role of ‘God’ in 4.7, 8 and particularly 9: those ‘in the Messiah’ are children and heirs of God, have come to know God or rather to be known by him, and must not turn back to the *stoicheia* – which, however puzzling a usage it may be, is obviously closely related in Paul’s mind to the Galatians’ desire to get circumcised.

All this points us on, from earlier moments in the letter, to the highly probable reading of the additional phrase ‘of God’ in 6.16b. ‘The Israel of God’, in the light of the letter so far, *must* mean ‘the household of faith’ (6.10), ‘those who walk according to the rule of new creation as opposed to that of circumcision/uncircumcision’ (6.15), and so on.⁴²⁴ Paul is talking precisely about an ‘Israel’ not defined by *sarx*, ‘flesh’, but by the Messiah in whom the grace of God has been embodied (2.19–21). This in turn points to, and is then strengthened by, the implicit antithesis, ‘Israel according to the flesh’, in 1 Corinthians 10.18, however much commentators resist such a possibility.⁴²⁵ Granted, there is no equivalent ‘Israel according to the spirit’ in Paul (though we might compare once more Romans 2.25–9 and Philippians 3.3), but that means little: as Galatians 4.21—5.1 demonstrates, Paul has several overlapping contrasts up his sleeve and can draw on them at will. He is after all writing urgent, compressed letters, not a doctoral dissertation in systematic theology. The high probability, therefore, is that with ‘Israel of God’ in 6.16b we are faced with a Pauline innovation.⁴²⁶

How then does verse 16 actually work? The first half is clear: literally, ‘as many as walk by that rule, peace upon them ...’ The ‘rule’ in question is obviously that of verse 15: neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but new creation. The ‘as many as’ here seems to be in deliberate contrast to the ‘as many as’ in 6.12 (literally, ‘as many as want to make a good showing in the flesh, they are compelling you to be circumcised’): here is the one group, the circumcisers, and here is the other group, the neither-circumcision-nor-uncircumcision people. The whole paragraph is shaped and structured as a contrast between these two groups.

The sentence itself is tricky, because of the two occurrences of *kai* in the middle (in addition, that is, to the one at the start of the verse). ‘Peace upon them *kai* mercy *kai* upon the Israel of God.’ Greek *kai* can of course mean not only ‘and’ or ‘also’, that is, signalling a new entity being added to those already indicated, but also ‘even’, that is, signalling a further meaning to be found within those already indicated. It can, in other words, be a mark of addition, but also of intensification.⁴²⁷ Thus there might be three options:

1. peace and mercy (a) upon them (‘those who walk by this rule) and (b) upon the Israel of God (a different group from ‘them’);
2. (a) peace upon ‘those who walk by this rule’, and (b) mercy even for ‘the Israel of God’ (a different group from ‘those who walk by this rule’);
3. peace and mercy upon ‘those who walk by this rule’, yes, even upon ‘the Israel of God’ (i.e. the same group).

The third of these is the one which, I am suggesting, the whole letter would indicate. Is there anything in the grammar to suggest that this is ruled out? No. Indeed, it might be thought that the second *kai* actually makes (b) at least very difficult. If Paul had wanted to say ‘peace upon *this* group and mercy upon *that* one’, it would have been much clearer had he missed out the second *kai* altogether: *eirēnē ep’ autous* on the one hand, and *eleos epi ton Israēl tou theou* on the other. The second *kai*, coming so soon after the obviously ‘additional’ one between *eirēnē* and *eleos*, is far more likely to be intensive, that is, to be supplying an extra dimension of meaning to something already mentioned, not introducing a new element.

This probability is strengthened by the echo, here, of what was most likely already in Paul’s day a well-known Jewish prayer formula, seen to good advantage in the last of the so-called ‘Eighteen Benedictions’: ‘Show mercy and peace upon us, and on thy people Israel.’⁴²⁸ Similar formulae are found in the *Kaddish d’Rabbanan*: ‘May there be abundant peace from

heaven, and a happy life for us and for all Israel'; 'He who maketh peace in his high places, may he in his mercy make peace for us and for all Israel'.⁴²⁹

One might of course object that such prayers do envisage two different but overlapping groups: (a) the congregation praying this prayer and (b) the larger company of 'all Israel'. One could argue on this basis that perhaps Paul, too, has a pair of groups in mind: (a) 'those who walk by this rule', and (b) 'those Jews who do not at present walk by this rule but may in the future come to do so'.⁴³⁰ But there are obvious responses to this. First, if Paul is alluding to any such prayer-formulae, he may well be adapting it to new use, changing the order of 'mercy and peace' and employing this otherwise unknown phrase 'Israel of God'. So it is not certain that he must be following the pattern of two overlapping but distinct groups, either. But, second, it is perhaps possible, if he is following some such pattern, that he thinks of 'those who walk by this rule' not in the first instance as a general statement about 'all those in the Messiah', but as a specific description of what he wants to see in Galatia, with 'the Israel of God' then following as the larger category of 'all the Messiah's people, whoever and wherever they are'. Third, however, we must be alert to the fact that Paul can pick up ancient Jewish prayers and make them serve new purposes. Just as he can *narrate* believing gentiles into the story of Israel, as in 1 Corinthians 10,⁴³¹ so he can *pray* them there as well. We observed two chapters ago how he breathtakingly rewrites the *Shema* itself, the prayer which marks out Israel as the truly monotheistic people.⁴³² We might observe, closer to home, that in Galatians 3.28 he implies a drastic revision to a well-known synagogue prayer: his claim that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, no male and female' answers quite directly to the prayers of thanks that the person praying has not been made a heathen, a slave or a woman.⁴³³ (Similar invocations are found within the non-Jewish world as well. It is not only Jewish traditions that Paul is rejecting.⁴³⁴) It seems to me highly likely, and in keeping with the tone as well as the content of Galatians, that Paul would at this climactic and summary moment at the end of the letter offer a prayer which echoed, but also subverted, invocations which he knew from

childhood and which had earlier served to reinforce the distinction between Jew and gentile, between circumcised and uncircumcised, which he now so emphatically rejected on the basis of the crucified Messiah and the spirit.⁴³⁵

If there is no good reason to see ‘the Israel of God’ as a different group from ‘those who walk according to this rule’, there is no good reason either to press the word ‘mercy’ as though, either by its strange placing *after* ‘peace’, or its meaning in Romans 9—11, it would have to carry the connotation of a further act of divine redemption for a group at present resistant to the Pauline gospel.⁴³⁶ For Paul, the idea of ‘mercy’ cannot be separated from the gospel of the Messiah.⁴³⁷ More importantly, it may well be that ‘peace and mercy’ is another echo of Isaiah 54. Paul has already quoted 54.1 at 4.27, where as we saw it forms something of a climax to the argument not only of the paragraph but of the central argument of the letter. In 54.10, in the middle of the promise of a new creation from ‘the Holy One of Israel’ who is also ‘the God of the whole earth’ (54.5), the prophet declares

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love (*eleos*) shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace (*eirēnē*) shall not be removed,
says YHWH, who has compassion on you.

It has been argued forcibly that this passage, and similar passages elsewhere in scripture and second-Temple literature, were being echoed by Paul at this point, and that this, granted Paul’s other use of the same passages, makes a further strong case for seeing ‘the Israel of God’ in 6.16b not as a separate entity but precisely as the believing church.⁴³⁸

The case for the majority view, then, is overwhelming. It is not unthinkable to challenge it, as we have seen: many, seeing only too well the implications of this position, have, like Peter in Antioch, drawn back, fearing the circumcision party (I speak, of course, in human fashion, because of the weakness of the flesh). But if it were the case that Paul, suddenly at this late stage, meant something else by ‘God’s Israel’ – meant, for instance, to refer either to all Jews, or to all Christian Jews, or to some

subset of either of those whether now or in the future – then he would, quite simply, have made nonsense of the whole letter. Why write Galatians 3 and 4, if that was where it was going to end up? Why not settle for two families, two ‘inheritances’, instead of the single one? Why not allow that people who want to follow Moses can do so, and that those who want to follow Abraham without Moses can do so too? Why not, in short, behave as if the Messiah had not been crucified? That is what such a position would amount to.

Paul will have none of it. He bears in his body the only marks that count: not the knife-mark of circumcision, but the cuts and bruises of physical persecution, of the stones that were thrown at him in one city and the synagogue-beatings received in another, of ‘countless floggings’, a beating with rods and no doubt much besides.⁴³⁹ He is himself a living, breathing demonstration of what it means that the world is crucified to him and he to the world. This, he suggests as in 2 Corinthians, is what ‘new creation’, or at least its emissary, looks like as he walks around the world.⁴⁴⁰ ‘I have been crucified with the Messiah. I am, however, alive – but it isn’t me any longer, it’s the Messiah who lives in me.’ And it is the *crucified* Messiah that so lives. That is Paul’s fresh, eschatologically oriented understanding of election. Controversial then, controversial now.

[\(iii\) 1 Thessalonians 2](#)

From the heights and depths of argument and pathos in Galatians to an altogether different letter, and yet one with considerable challenges for the interpreter. We have noted the various ways in which 1 Thessalonians highlights both the power of the gospel and the change in life that comes from being grasped by it. One of the other things, though, that Paul knew would happen when people came to believe in Jesus the Messiah was persecution. So when he is encouraging the Thessalonians to stick with the word of God that has done its work in them, one of the arguments he uses is that they, by their suffering, have already shown that they know it is God who is at work in them, and that they are firmly located on the map

alongside others who have been persecuted, and indeed with Jesus himself. All this provides further evidence of Paul's redefined election and eschatology.

But, in saying this, Paul says something more. This reflects not just a personal frustration with the non-believing Judaeans,⁴⁴¹ but a theological judgment about where they stand within God's newly revealed eschatological purposes:

¹⁴For, my dear family, you came to copy God's assemblies in Judaea in the Messiah, Jesus. You suffered the same things from your own people as they did from those of the Judaeans ¹⁵who killed the lord Jesus and the prophets, and who expelled us. They displease God; they oppose all people; ¹⁶they forbid us to speak to the gentiles so that they may be saved. This has had the effect, all along, of completing the full total of their sins. But the fury has come upon them for good.⁴⁴²

Certain things stand out in this (to us) remarkable outburst. First, we should not make the trivial but far-reaching mistake of thinking that the outburst is directed against 'the Jews'. Paul was himself of course Jewish; the people he describes as 'assemblies (*ekklēsiai*) of God in Judaea in the Messiah, Jesus' were Jews. The parallel Paul is drawing is between the Thessalonian Messiah-people, who are being persecuted by their pagan neighbours, and the Messiah-people in Judaea, who are being persecuted by non-Messiah-believing Judaeans. There is therefore no particular 'bias against Jews' here, as has sometimes been suggested.⁴⁴³ As many have seen, the comma often placed between verses 14 and 15 is grammatically unwarranted.⁴⁴⁴ The phrase 'who killed the lord Jesus and the prophets' restricts the phrase 'the Judaeans': instead of 'the Judaeans, who killed ...' it is 'the Judaeans who killed ...', which I have paraphrased above 'You suffered the same things from your own people as they did from those of the Judaeans who killed the lord Jesus and the prophets.' In other words, Paul is being quite specific here. He is not lumping all Judaeans together (still less all 'Jews'! – Paul himself being a Jew, like all the first Christians), and declaring that they were all alike guilty of all these crimes, and that 'the fury' or 'the wrath' has come upon all of them indiscriminately. 'He does not speak of all Jews, but of those who acted against their fellow Jews.'⁴⁴⁵ Rather, he is

specifying that strand of current Judaeen activity which, having strongly opposed Jesus and sent him to his death, was now continuing in the same vein by opposing the Messiah-people in their taking the gospel to the gentiles.

This is of course heavily ironic, in that Paul himself had been one of the very people involved in such activity. The list of wrongs which Paul lays at the door of this group of Judaeans, then, reaches its climax in their opposition to the gentile mission, which joins up with what has happened to the Thessalonians, who, according to Acts, were the targets of local persecution not least because of Jewish jealousy.⁴⁴⁶ Paul's own former persecution of the early church maps exactly on to this movement.⁴⁴⁷

Second, though, Paul places this persecution of the Judaeen Messiah-people by their fellow countrymen on the chart of a longer opposition to the movement – specifically, in line with violent Judaeen opposition to Jesus himself. It comes as a shock, after a couple of generations in the twentieth century in which we have all bent over backwards to insist (in line with the gospel accounts) that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by Roman soldiers on the order of the Roman governor, to have Paul say the unmentionable, that the reason all this happened was (again in line with the gospel accounts) that the Judaeen leaders handed Jesus over to just that fate.⁴⁴⁸

The addition of 'and the prophets' after 'killed the lord Jesus' looks like the traditional accusation of prophet-killing that we find in Matthew 5.12 and elsewhere.⁴⁴⁹ This seems the more likely in view of the echo in 2.16 of Matthew 23.32–3: 'fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors', referring to the ancestors who had themselves persecuted the prophets. The idea of 'filling up' a measure of sin, after which judgment must fall, goes way back to Genesis 15, where the delay in Abraham's children coming back to their inheritance is said to be because 'the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full'.⁴⁵⁰ Paul, in line with this tradition, is envisaging the particular Judaeen leaders and activists responsible for these wrongs as the leading edge of a kind of anti-*Heilsgeschichte*, an ongoing rebellion against God's will which ultimately led to the death of Jesus and is now working its way out in opposition to the gentile mission. (One might imagine that Paul could offer

a theological account of this movement in terms reminiscent of Romans 7: this fierce, zealous adherence to Torah was actually increasing the grip of ‘sin’.) The point is this: there was already an established tradition in which second-Temple Jews would narrate a historical sequence of wrongdoing through which divine wrath would accumulate towards an ultimate day of reckoning. Paul, invoking that tradition, turns it back on those whose actions reflected his own earlier ‘zeal’.⁴⁵¹

If this is so, it strengthens what already seems to me the likely reading of the sharp conclusion to verse 16: ‘the fury has come upon them to the end’. Let us be clear: if we met a statement like this in a document which we knew came from later than AD 70 (say, the *Epistle of Barnabas* or a similar text), we would have no hesitation in saying that it was referring to the fall of Jerusalem. Why should we resist such a conclusion just because we are sure that 1 Thessalonians was written about twenty years before that cataclysmic event? If, as I have argued elsewhere, Jesus himself really did utter solemn oracles against Jerusalem in general and the Temple in particular, warning his contemporaries that to oppose his kingdom-movement would have the consequence of calling down the wrath of Rome upon the city, then it is already highly likely that this was well known in the early Christian movement.⁴⁵² If others, like Stephen, had been accused of speaking against the city and the Temple, it looks as though the early Christians had something of a reputation for saying similar things to what they remembered Jesus saying. For Paul to echo that tradition does not seem to me impossible or unlikely. Just because this is the only place where we can detect such a thing (I bracket out 2 Thessalonians here, partly because many are unsure about its Pauline standing and partly because today’s scholarship still finds it difficult to interpret), that does not mean that he could not or would not have said anything like this.

The alternative, canvassed by Robert Jewett nearly thirty years ago and still not unattractive, is that Paul was referring to a similar, if smaller-scale, event which had happened in very recent memory.⁴⁵³ Early on in the procuratorship of Ventidius Cumanus, a stupid soldier made a provocative gesture at the large crowd assembled for Passover, provoking a riot which

in turn provoked a backlash. In one account Josephus says that twenty thousand died; in another, more than thirty thousand.⁴⁵⁴ It is perfectly possible that Paul would have seen such an event as part of the providential outworking of the Judaeans' earlier refusal to heed the Messiah's message of peace.⁴⁵⁵ The 'zealous' revolutionaries of the time, among whom the young Saul of Tarsus would have numbered himself,⁴⁵⁶ had seen the divine wrath as continuing against Israel, needing to be appeased and turned away by violent actions which would purge God's people of their treachery and impurity. Paul, familiar with this language, would then in the present passage be declaring that, on the contrary, it was such actions, against both Jesus himself and his followers, that had brought 'the wrath' to such a peak. This was a normal first-century Jewish way of thinking about the strange interplay of politics and providence, and it makes good sense to suppose that Paul, encouraging his churches as they themselves faced persecution, would have invoked in such a way the roughly parallel situation in Judaea. The passage would thus constitute yet another Pauline reworking of Jewish tradition, in line with his taking over words like 'Jew' and 'circumcision'.

This, to repeat, does not make him anti-Jewish, still less anti-semitic – any more than Josephus was anti-Jewish for blaming the disaster of AD 70 on violent Judaeans troublemakers. Paul would have snorted at the very suggestion. As with Elijah and Ahab ('Is it you, you Israel-troubler?' 'It isn't me that's troubled Israel, it's you and your father's house!'⁴⁵⁷) he would insist that the charge rebounds. In any case, his point here is that the Judaeans who opposed Jesus and the first Christians were typical, precisely not of 'Jewish' behaviour, but of *local opposition*, which in the Thessalonians' case was obviously non-Jewish.⁴⁵⁸ Part of our difficulty here is caused by the extremely low grade of much contemporary moral discourse, in which everything is reduced to being 'pro-' this or 'anti-' that, as though there were no more nuanced positions available, and as though, in particular, all ethical or theological *judgments* could be reduced to 'prejudices' and 'attitudes'. This is not the place to develop a counter-critique. But it is necessary to note the problem, in order to clear the hermeneutical space to say what needs to be said about 1 Thessalonians

2.14–16: (a) it is certainly original to Paul; (b) it does not constitute or express an anti-Jewish attitude, still less anything ‘anti-semitic’; (c) it refers to the (perhaps quite small) subset of Judaeans that had been behind the move to get rid of Jesus, and that is now behind the opposition to the gentile mission; (d) Paul perhaps sees this as an acceleration of wickedness towards a judgment which either will fall on them or has already done so, in line with Jesus’ words, which were themselves in line with ancient prophecy;⁴⁵⁹ (e) this will be *eis telos*, not a ‘final eschatological judgment’ as in Romans 2.1–16, but the completion of the ‘wrath’ which is the tragic consequence of their own actions.

Nothing is said here about the ‘ultimate future’ for ‘the Jews’. That is a problem we bring to this text from Romans 9—11 on the one hand and from modern concerns on the other, but which is simply not under consideration at this point. The passage is after all directed, not to a ‘statement’ about ‘the Jews’, but to an encouragement to the Thessalonians in the face of their own local opposition. The implication is that, sooner or later, the providence of God *will deal with the local Thessalonian opposition, too*. The word of God is at work in their midst;⁴⁶⁰ Paul knows that what God begins, he will bring to completion.⁴⁶¹ What we can hear, however, not far behind this text, is an echo of Paul’s warning in Romans 12: vengeance belongs to God alone. To say that *divine* wrath has come, or is coming, upon wrongdoers is to say, by clear Pauline implication, that *human* wrath is inappropriate.⁴⁶² Those who (like the present writer) have not had to live with violence and the threat of violence, as many in the middle east tragically still do, are ill placed to pass moral, let alone theological, judgments on those like Paul for whom that was a constant reality.

This short passage in an early letter points on, however poignantly, to a long passage in a late one. As most pastors will realize, it is not a long step from sharp words against someone to bitter tears and grief on their behalf. We should thus not be altogether surprised – still less postulate a major change of mind or heart – when we turn from 1 Thessalonians 2 to Romans 9—11. This is where the covenantal challenge of Paul’s redefined eschatology comes into full focus at last.

(iv) Romans 9—11

(a) Introduction

It is easy to be overwhelmed by Romans 9—11: its scale and scope, the mass of secondary literature, the controversial theological and also political topics, and the huge and difficult questions of the overall flow of thought on the one hand and the complex details of exegesis and interpretation on the other.⁴⁶³ For our present purposes I want to keep a clear focus on certain issues to do with Paul's redefinition of the foundational Jewish doctrines. The present section, of course, could almost as well be discussed under his revision of 'election'; the fact that I discuss it here, under 'eschatology', has to do with the fact that the reason he retells the story of Israel's election and the divine covenant purposes in Romans 9—10 is because he then wants to peer into the future, and to say 'what now?'. In other words, as we saw at the start of the previous section of this chapter, we are now faced with the second of two areas where precisely the shape of Paul's revised monotheism and election leave him with two questions: how then shall Christians behave, and what is the future of God's elective purposes for Israel? Nobody before Paul had faced the question of how second-Temple eschatology would be affected if the Messiah arrived and most of his people failed to recognize him. Paul is out on his own at this point, thinking through a fresh model of Jewish eschatology in the light of Messiah and spirit.⁴⁶⁴

We have already seen, throughout this Part of the book, that several lines of thought earlier in the letter point forward sharply and clearly to elements within Romans 9—11, with more subtlety than is usually noted. One good thing about the scholarship of the last fifty years: we hear no more, these days, of the previously common view that these chapters are irrelevant to the rest of the letter, perhaps even an old sermon about 'the Jews' which Paul happened to have with him and decided to insert into the Roman letter at this point.⁴⁶⁵ That devastating misreading grew out of, and then further contributed to, a mid-century scholarly mood which is now quite hard even

to remember, since so much has happened to alter the landscape. But when we have agreed that these chapters belong where they are, bound into the letter's whole structure by a thousand silken strands, we have not yet made much real progress in exegesis or theology. How are we to find the heart and centre of what Paul is saying here about God's electing and above all eschatological purposes?

Four preliminary points about these chapters are important in shaping our discussion and developing our thesis. Keeping these in mind may help to retain some clarity in the midst of necessary complexity.

1. For a start, if Romans as a whole is a book primarily about God, that is particularly so here, especially in chapters 9 and 11. Here we find, straight off, the question of God's word, God's children, God's promise, God's purpose in election, God's call, God's love (and hatred), God's justice (or injustice), God's mercy, God's power, God's name, God's sovereignty, God's will, God's rights as the potter over the clay, God's wrath and power, God's patience, God's glory and God's people.⁴⁶⁶ And that's only chapter 9. Anyone even mildly interested in God might find plenty here to be going on with, but Paul is not done yet. These questions lead the eye up to the central discussion of God's *dikaiosynē*, his 'righteousness', at the start of chapter 10. This then brings us to the heart of the whole section, which runs through the middle of chapter 10; and that in turn sets the scene for more discussion – of God. Has God forsaken his people, Paul asks; and he gives a clear answer. In developing it he moves at last to statements rather than questions: statements of God's kindness and severity, God's power once more, God's future purposes, God's gifts, God's call once more, and God's present purpose in shutting up all in the prison of 'disobedience' in order to have mercy upon all.⁴⁶⁷ This entire structure – questions, questions and yet more questions followed at last by statements, particularly about God's future purposes – shows that we are right to treat this entire section under 'eschatology'. The questions are those raised by the Messiah-and-spirit-shaped inaugurated eschatology we have already seen; the answers are the result of a similar rethinking of the hope of Israel, all in terms of monotheism itself. We are not surprised when the chapter, the section and

the whole argument of the letter to this point are summed up and rounded off with a celebration of ‘the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God’, unsearchable in his judgments and inscrutable in his ways, and an ascription of glory, in the style of classic Jewish monotheism, to the one ‘from whom, through whom and to whom are all things’.⁴⁶⁸ This echoes, in the mode of praise, the similar ascription of blessing at the start of the section, where it was offered in the mode of lament.⁴⁶⁹ Nor are we surprised, looking back, to remind ourselves that this is indeed the climax of a letter whose stated topic was the ‘righteousness of God’ revealed in ‘the gospel of his son’ (1.16–17 with 1.3–5) – a point that should never be forgotten. This whole section, then, is about God.⁴⁷⁰ If we came upon it in the desert, smouldering with latent Presence, we might find ourselves impelled to take off our shoes. Removing shoes is not something exegetes often do (we like our footnotes the way they are), but granted that even exegetes may have a life, including a devotional life, outside the exegetical task, we may cautiously take that dimension as read and proceed to reflect on the other introductory aspects of the section.

2. The second point is this: unless one is particularly short-sighted it is clear that Romans 9 belongs smack in the middle of that second-Temple genre which consists of retellings of Israel’s story (one thinks of *Jubilees*; of *Pseudo-Philo*; of Josephus, of course; and, in the early Christian writings, of passages like Acts 7 and Hebrews 11).⁴⁷¹ Here is Abraham; then Isaac; then, via Rebecca, Jacob and Esau; then we pass to Moses and his stand-off with Pharaoh; then we move to the period of the prophets, and their vivid denunciations (and also promises) to the people of Israel. The story then seems, so to speak, to run into the sand: even if Israel’s sons are numbered like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved (9.27); but then we come to the Messiah himself (10.4), and with him the long-awaited fulfilment of the promises of Deuteronomy 30 (10.6–10) and of other key prophecies (10.11–13). It ought to be completely uncontroversial to point out that *this is Israel’s story*, told of course, like every other retelling, from a particular point of view. There is simply no possibility that Paul was making general theological points and just happened, by a quirk of

coincidence or subconscious memory, to frame these general points within something that looks like Israel's story but wasn't really intended that way.⁴⁷² This chapter walks like Israel's story, talks like Israel's story ... it *is* Israel's story. From one angle.

But what then happens to the story? That is the question that haunted so many thinkers, mystics, rabbis and others in the period from the Babylonian exile right through to the Mishnaic period and beyond. How do you tell the story when the story seems to have got stuck? Answer: new mysteries may be revealed. Fresh possibilities may emerge. And particularly, as we saw in chapter 2, there might perhaps be a prophetic sequence on which to hang one's apocalyptic hat, or one's chronological calculations based on Daniel 9, or one's hope for fresh 'wisdom'. Some of the prophets had spoken of a coming great reversal, when the story would come back with a bang, the world would be turned the right way up, God would reveal his currently well-hidden faithfulness. Maybe, even, the Messiah would appear. Sometimes those prophecies spoke of covenant renewal, with the heart being softened and Torah at last obeyed in a new way. Sometimes they included the remarkable passages in Isaiah about the servant who would be a light to the nations. Sometimes they offered explanations – often cryptic, often powerful – for why the present Israel was in such dire straits. Sometimes all these lines of thought ran back to the Pentateuch: to the great single (if complex) story of Abraham, of the exodus, of Moses, of Moses' own prophecies at the end of Deuteronomy. Normally, routinely, they clung on for dear life to the one God who, having created the world, and having called Israel, was the one and only sheet-anchor for all the promises, all the possibilities.

When Paul gets to the 'end' of the story in 9.26–9, and to its further, new 'end' in 10.21, he too draws on exactly these resources to take it forward. We ought not to be surprised at his hints of covenant renewal, based on Isaiah and Deuteronomy, in 9.30—10.21. Granted all we know of Paul's way of thinking, we ought to have expected cryptic but prophetically based explanations for Israel's present plight. We should have anticipated that the Messiah would appear in Paul's argument, as in his previous argument in

chapter 3, and indeed as in some (by no means all) retellings of Israel's implicit narrative, as the fulfilment, the manifestation, of God's righteousness. We might have known Paul would go back to Deuteronomy 30 and offer his own creative re-reading of that vital passage. And we should of course have assumed that, with or without shoes on his feet, he would invoke the one God, the one lord. We should, in other words, have been able, granted the narrative frame of chapter 9, to see through a glass darkly the shape, and possibly the content, of chapter 10.

But how might the story go on from there? The truly remarkable thing about Romans 11, not I think sufficiently commented on (including in my own various earlier attempts), is that from here onwards Paul is out on his own. He is, in respect of this larger question, in the same position he was in when telling converts what their life should now be like: how to be the renewed people of God when the boundary of Torah is no longer there, or not in the same way. There are no Jewish texts, in scripture or in the second-Temple period, that address the question of what happens when the Messiah turns up and most of Israel rejects him, when the covenant is renewed and most of Israel opts out. At least, if one reads Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53 messianically, one might assume that some sort of rejection had occurred, but there is no road map for imagining what might come next. So Paul is faced with the task of thinking (and, as he tells us, praying) his way into a new world, a strange, unmapped new land, working out, from first principles, what *ought* to happen next, what ought *not* to happen next, and how one could say all this to a church in Rome in which Israel's story might not have been the topic of conversation on everyone's lips – or, if it was, might have been accompanied by a sneer or a wink.

First principles? For Paul, that meant God, and that meant Jesus. It has been a commonplace of one strand of writing about Paul and Romans to suggest, following the late and much lamented Krister Stendahl, that Paul deliberately soft-pedalled any notion of Jesus in these chapters, in order to make room for those Jews who simply couldn't get their heads or hearts around the idea that he really was the Messiah after all. With the greatest respect (and I well understand why Stendahl and others wanted Paul to sing

that song), I believe this is radically mistaken.⁴⁷³ It isn't just that Paul refers explicitly to the Messiah, and to his death and resurrection, at the very centre of this discussion. The Messiah is in fact woven tightly into the fabric of the whole argument, especially when Paul is having to think in fresh ways, to move forwards in hope but also in warning. But to see this more clearly we must make the third general introductory point.

3. The third point ought to be obvious, but is sometimes challenged. The entire section comes about in response to the double problem faced by Paul at the end of Romans 8: his fellow Jews, by and large, rejected Jesus himself; and now they are, by and large, rejecting the gospel message about him. Those who have tried to advocate a new approach to Paul at this point have done their best to play this down, but it is inescapable. The basic category to which Paul returns several times is that of *unbelief*: they did not believe Jesus himself, and they have not believed the message about him.⁴⁷⁴ They did not pursue 'the law of righteousness' by faith (9.32); they are lacking in the 'faith' described in 10.6–13; if they are to be 'grafted back in again' that can only be on the basis that they 'do not remain in unbelief' (11.23); they have 'disbelieved' (10.21, 11.31). This is at the heart of the other ways in which Paul gets at the same point: they have stumbled over the stumbling-stone (9.32); their zeal is not according to knowledge (10.2); they are 'disbelieving and disagreeable' (10.21, quoting Isaiah 65.2); they have 'tripped up' (11.11); they have committed a 'trespass' (11.11–12), which has resulted in 'impoverishment' (11.12). They have thus been 'cast away' (11.15), like branches broken off from the parent tree (11.19–24). All this constitutes a 'hardening' (11.7, 25), making Paul's unbelieving fellow Jews into 'enemies' (11.28) because of 'disobedience' (11.30–2). All of this means, hardly surprisingly, that Paul experiences constant and terrible grief on their behalf, since he believes that all of this, as it stands, threatens their very salvation (10.1). Everything he has said about faith up to this point in the letter, especially in chapters 3 and 4, indicates that the one thing which marks out Abraham's genuine family is the one thing most of his fellow Jews do not have. Whatever one may say about his resolution of this

question in chapter 11, we gain nothing by pretending that his analysis of the plight is other than sharp, unrelenting and dire.

4. The final introductory point has to do with the remarkably careful, almost artistic, structure of the section. The closest thing I know to this elsewhere in Paul might be 1 Corinthians 15; but that was only fifty-eight verses, and this is ninety. Structural analysis (as opposed to *structuralist* analysis, which I would not dream of inflicting on Paul) is tricky but often necessary if we are to see where Paul wanted the emphasis to lie, how the different parts make up a carefully constructed whole.⁴⁷⁵ The more I have pondered this section, the more convinced I have become that Paul intended the carefully crafted pattern I shall propose, and that he intended it to carry the theological weight that was vital for his entire argument.

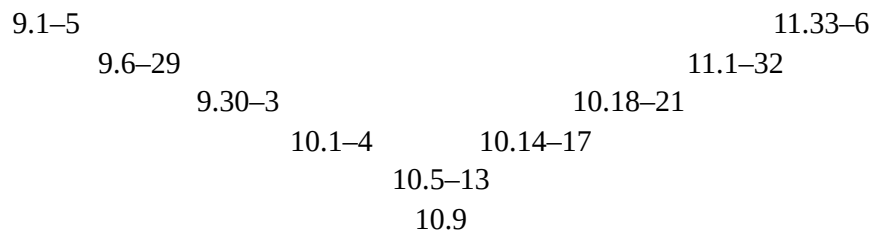
It may be news to some readers of Paul that any writer ever thinks like this. We are so used to being told that Paul's letters are 'occasional', that they were in any case dictated not written;⁴⁷⁶ the implication being that he dashed them off without thinking where he was going, making it up as he went along much as Tony Blair's 'New Labour' Party tinkered with the British Constitution in the late 1990s and early 2000s. We are on absolutely safe ground in saying that Romans (and chapters 9—11 in particular) was not like that. The structure is clear; the balance is remarkable; the rhetorical effects are intended; the theology is reflected in the way the parts fit together into the whole. Paul was not thinking this through for the first time as he paced the room while Tertius waited, stylus in hand. He had been through these arguments countless times, in synagogues and lecture halls, in the tent-maker's shop and in the homes of friends. He had long pondered the various ways in which he might make his point, and had long settled in his mind on a particular strategy.⁴⁷⁷ That strategy involved a careful structure and balance, a particular shape, a deliberate way of drawing the ear and the mind to focus on what was central and important. I am almost tempted to liken this section to a poem by George Herbert.

The basic analysis of Romans 9—11 is actually not difficult, but when done is striking. The opening and closing choose themselves, as we have already seen: 9.1–5 and 11.33–6, five verses in the one and four in the other,

each ending with an invocation of blessing to God himself.⁴⁷⁸ The outer flanking sections, the great long arguments of chapters 9 and 11, likewise balance quite well: 9.6–29 and 11.1–32, the latter being a bit longer, but both subdividing, if not sharply, into three ‘movements’. By almost universal consent, the middle of the section is then constituted by 9.30—10.21.⁴⁷⁹

Within that central section, the same pattern repeats. 9.30–3, highlighting the paradox of gentile inclusion and Jewish incomprehension, is balanced by 10.18–21, on the same theme only more so: four verses in each case (with more words in 10.18–21). Coming closer to the very heart of it all, the opening verses of chapter 10 (10.1–4) are in a sense balanced by the exposition of Paul’s gentile mission in 10.14–17 – again, four verses in each case, the earlier ones continuing to expound the ‘unknowing’ of Israel, the latter ones developing the means of gentile inclusion.⁴⁸⁰ That then leaves 10.5–13, structurally the heart of it all: nine verses which begin with the exegesis of Leviticus and then particularly Deuteronomy, and conclude with the invocation of Isaiah and Joel, all pointing to the great theme of covenant renewal. And in the middle of it all, right at the very centre, is the statement which constitutes as clear a vision of Paul’s central theological theme as we could wish to find: ‘if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved’.

Thus we detect a careful chiasmic structure. There is room for debate about details, but not, I think, about the overall effect:



A moment’s reflection on the central passage 10.5–13, with its statement about Jesus and about faith and salvation, will reveal that it is straightforwardly impossible to read Romans 9—11 as anything other than a statement firmly and deeply grounded in christology (in the sense of

Paul's belief about the Messiah). The middle passage is itself flanked by further references to the Messiah (10.4, 'The Messiah is the goal of the Law', and 10.14, 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?'). But the nine central verses (10.5–13) contain no fewer than seven references to Jesus, ruling out any challenge to the proposal that the Messiah, and the justification and salvation available in him, is central to the whole of chapters 9—11:

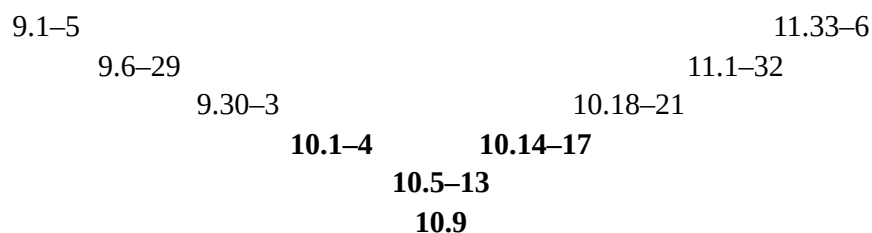
⁵Moses writes, you see, about the covenant membership defined by the law, that 'the person who performs the law's commands shall live in them'. ⁶But the *faith*-based covenant membership puts it like this: 'Don't say in your heart, Who shall go up to heaven?' (in other words, to bring **the Messiah** down), ⁷or, 'Who shall go down into the depths?' (in other words, to bring **the Messiah** up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we proclaim); ⁹because if you profess with your mouth that **Jesus is lord**, and believe in your heart that **God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved. ¹⁰Why? Because the way to covenant membership is by believing with the heart, and the way to salvation is by professing with the mouth. ¹¹The Bible says, you see, 'Everyone who believes **in him** will not be put to shame.' ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since **the same lord is lord of all**, and is rich towards all **who call upon him**. ¹³'All who call **upon the name of the lord**', you see, 'will be saved'.

Not only is there no distinction between Jew and Greek; there is no distinction here between Romans 9—11 and Romans 1—4, or for that matter Romans and Galatians. We are on extremely familiar territory – except, of course, for the remarkable exegesis of Deuteronomy. In fact, Paul says what he says if anything more clearly here than anywhere else. He carefully distinguishes 'justification' and 'salvation', while also closely correlating them; he lines up (a) the personal belief and confession and (b) the coming together of faithful Jew and faithful Greek; he draws together the law and the prophets, reading the Torah prophetically and the prophets as pointing to a different kind of Torah-fulfilment.⁴⁸¹ Though he does not mention the spirit explicitly, the reference to Joel 2.32 (LXX 3.5) in verse 13 is from the passage made famous by Acts 2, where it is the key Pentecost-text, to explain that the manifestations of God's spirit on that

occasion were the signs of the covenant being renewed around the Messiah. Paul does not need to spell this out.⁴⁸² Anyone who knew the strands of thought in his world of second-Temple Judaism would have picked up the signals already. This is all about the fulfilment of Deuteronomy 30: in other words – though this is almost always missed by commentators! – *covenant renewal and the end of exile*.⁴⁸³ It is all about God’s righteousness revealed in the good news of the Messiah for the benefit of all who believe. That is, after all, what Paul had said the letter was to be about, right back in 1.16–17, itself based on 1.3–5. And that is the theme through which he will finally come back and answer the question of the unbelief of Israel.

If I am correct in suggesting that, in addition to the linear narrative of Israel, we also have in these chapters a carefully structured chiasmic whole, we will do well to begin at the heart and work out from there, moving step by step back up the levels of the chiasm. That way we may stand less chance of being overwhelmed with necessary details by the time we get to the passage which stands foursquare at the centre of it all. We begin, therefore, in the middle, with 10.1–17 (whose heart, as I say, is 10.5–13, and within that 10.9), before proceeding to 9.30–3 and then 10.18–21, and from thence outward to 9.6–29 and finally 11.1–32. That will bring us at last to the outer framework with their balancing, and yet so very different, doxologies. Both the lament of 9.1–5 and the praise of 11.33–6 are in evidence all the way through, not least in the passage to which we now turn. Romans 10.1–17 stands, arguably, at the very centre of this section. I believe this was quite deliberate on Paul’s part, and it therefore makes sense to begin at this point.

(b) Exile, Justification, the Righteousness of God and Salvation: 10.1–17



We had better pause for a moment, before plunging in, to make clear what was latent earlier in the present book (in chapter 2) and which now becomes manifest.

We spoke before about the way in which the narrative of Israel in Romans 9 appeared to run into the sand. This is of course because of the ‘exile’, both the actual geographical exile and the muddle of partial return, which generated new theological and narrational puzzles. As we saw earlier, at least *some* Jews in the period, including significant writers, did not really believe ‘the exile’ was yet over. Some of those writers, including interestingly both Josephus and Philo, re-read the Mosaic prophecies in Deuteronomy 27—30, and also in Deuteronomy 32 and 33, as large-scale long-range warnings and promises about what would happen to Israel, and what YHWH would do in and for Israel, *becherith hayamim*, in the latter days. The ‘curse’ would continue, and then, at last, YHWH would circumcise people’s hearts so that they would obey him and keep his Torah from their heart. That was how he would restore their fortunes. And that needed to happen because, as Moses himself had warned, Israel was still after all rebellious and recalcitrant. That sense of an overarching *narrative* is what makes sense of the otherwise apparently disparate uses of the closing chapters of Deuteronomy in texts as disparate as 4QMMT, Baruch, Josephus and Philo.⁴⁸⁴

Granted that context (and granted that, even though not all Jews of Paul’s day would have thought like that, some clearly did, and their world of thought appears to form the matrix for Paul’s own reading), it should be reasonably obvious what Paul thinks he is doing in his re-reading of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10.6–8, as the denouement of the long story that began in 9.7–9 with the Abrahamic promise and family.⁴⁸⁵ He is doing, from this angle and within the context of the present argument, exactly what he did in 2.25–9 within that context and argument. That is, he is drawing on scriptural resources to say: this is the new covenant, this is the true Torah-fulfilment, this is the heart-circumcision, this is the work of the spirit not the letter, this is where we find ‘the Jew’ (Romans 2.29). The curse of exile, as in Deuteronomy 27 and 28, is over; here is the real restoration.⁴⁸⁶ When

we add to this picture the wider strands of thought that converge at this point, he is also saying: this is where we find ‘the circumcision’ (Philippians 3.3), the chosen, the called, the ‘seed of Abraham’ (Galatians 3.29), the ones who love God from the heart (1 Corinthians 8.3; Romans 5.5) – in other words, the *Shema*-people. Here, at the centre of Romans 9—11, is Paul’s richest statement of what he thinks has happened to the doctrine of election as he had understood it in his Pharisaic days. It is precisely *eschatological*: that is, it has been transformed around the Messiah who has inaugurated the long-awaited new covenant. And it is now transformed also around the spirit who, promised by Joel, enables people to ‘call on the name of the lord’, which as we saw earlier is itself a way of invoking the God of Abraham *by invoking Jesus himself*. Freshly understood monotheism gives birth to freshly understood election, and both can only be understood from the standpoint of freshly understood eschatology. This is the deep theological structure of what Paul is doing; attempts to impose an older dogmatic framework such as ‘God’s sovereignty’ in chapter 9 and ‘Israel’s responsibility’ in chapter 10 have little merit, and actually distort the text.⁴⁸⁷ That is why I and some others have become convinced that when Paul quotes Joel 2.32 (LXX 3.5) in 10.13 he intends a reference to the whole passage, in which the promise of the spirit is prominent as one of the key features of the coming eschaton.⁴⁸⁸ This maintains the narrative of Israel exactly as we would expect on the analogy with other ‘new-covenant’ movements such as Qumran.

We should not be surprised, then, to find such a clear statement of ‘justification by faith’ at just this point. Indeed, were it not that western theology did not really know what to do with Romans 9—11 as a whole, still less with Paul’s reading of Deuteronomy 30, one might have supposed that it would have been Romans 10.9–13, rather than Romans 3 or Galatians 3, that would have been the parade text for this greatest of Reformation doctrines. Such are the ironies of hermeneutics. It is all here (building on 2.25–9, 3.21—4.25 and also in a measure 8.1–11 and 8.31–9, which as we saw in the previous chapter are extremely important for justification): the faithfulness of God; the work of the Messiah as the

ground and basis for it all; belief in God's raising of Jesus as the tell-tale signal that precipitates the divine verdict 'righteous'; and the confession 'Jesus is lord' as the public, outward behaviour (signalling, of course, an entire world of obedience to this Jesus) which is the pathway from the *initial* 'justification', based on nothing other than faith, to the *final* 'salvation' which is based on the whole of life – life lived in the Messiah and in the power of the spirit. Here is 'justification' once more, once more at the heart of Paul's redefined election, once more meaning what it means within the revised eschatology. (What we do *not* have, since it was the key to what Paul was saying in Romans 1—4 but not here, is specific 'lawcourt' imagery.) Here is the strong assertion that there is 'no distinction between Jew and Greek' because of *this* christology and *this* soteriology.

Here, in other words and above all, is the renewal of the covenant; and here we have as clear an indication as we ought to wish for that when Paul uses the language of *dikaiosynē* that is what he is talking about. Scholars have puzzled over the way in which Paul introduces Deuteronomy 30: having ascribed Leviticus 18 to 'Moses', Paul personifies *hē ek pisteōs dikaiosynē*, 'the righteousness of faith', as the 'speaker' in Deuteronomy.⁴⁸⁹ But, as the many and diverse second-Temple Jewish thinkers we have already studied all knew, this was the passage in which was prophesied the return from exile and the renewal of the covenant. Thus, as in Romans 4.11, Paul takes a passage which is about the *covenant* and speaks of it in terms of *dikaiosynē*. That is why I have elsewhere translated 10.6a 'But the *faith*-based covenant membership puts it like this'. Once we fully grasp the role of Deuteronomy 30 in second-Temple eschatology, as we tried to do in chapter 2 above, one traditional problem after another in the exegesis of the chapter and of the whole section is resolved.⁴⁹⁰ Romans 10.1–13, in this light, is in fact as central a Pauline passage as one can imagine. And it is indeed exactly and precisely the centre of the carefully constructed whole we know as Romans 9—11.

In particular, it focuses attention on, and fully clarifies, 'the righteousness of God'. Romans 10.3 remains inevitably controversial, not least because of the variant reading caused by one or more scribes who felt that Paul had

used the word *dikaïosynē* once too often and that they should give him a little help with his style.⁴⁹¹ I have encountered copy-editors like that, too, but they are usually to be resisted when every word in a dense passage is actually doing its bit for the common cause. And what Paul says here about the ‘righteousness of God’ is so revealing, so supportive of the case we argued before about Romans 3.21 and 1.17, that it is worth drawing attention to the completion of this argument as well. There should be no question, here or elsewhere, of ‘the righteousness of God’ being seen as the righteous status which humans receive from God, though that continues to be assumed here and there.⁴⁹² When Paul speaks of ‘God’s righteousness’ in 10.3 as something of which Paul’s unbelieving Jewish contemporaries were ‘ignorant’, he is, I suggest, invoking the entire train of thought from 9.6 forward. It was that strange narrative of God’s elective purposes which raised the question of God’s righteousness in the first place (9.14, *mē adikia para tō theō*, ‘is there injustice with God’), and Paul answered the question with more of the same narrative. When we put together the ‘ignorance’ motif in 10.3 with the material towards the end of the chapter, and ask what Paul supposed these people were ignorant of, it is clear: (a) that they were ignorant of what God had all along been doing in their history, in other words, of the way in which the purpose of election had actually been working out not just through the choice of Abraham but also through the narrowing down of his offspring to an exiled remnant; and (b), exactly cognate with that, they were ignorant of the fact that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah. In Romans 1.17 and 3.21–6 it was the crucified and risen Jesus (and the gospel message about him) that revealed God’s righteousness.⁴⁹³ Here we have exactly the same point, shaped exactly to fit the present argument.

Paul believes that the right response to God’s righteousness would be to *submit* to it (10.3). This is an unusual way of putting it, but the implication seems to be that God’s sovereign will is revealed in the events in which his ‘righteousness’ is displayed, and that the path of wisdom, never mind loyalty, is to accept that this is how God has willed it. We should not suppose, though, that this ‘submission to God’s righteousness’ *denotes*

something other, in Paul's mind, than believing the gospel of Jesus the Messiah and being baptized into him. The *connotation* of submitting to God's righteousness, however, has to do with the results that this would have for the loyal Jew. For that, we cannot do better than reflect on the journey Paul himself had travelled: being 'crucified with the Messiah' (Galatians 2.19), discovering that all previous gain was to be counted as loss for the sake of knowing the Messiah (Philippians 3.7–11), embracing the scandal of the cross (1 Corinthians 1.23; Galatians 5.11) and discovering that Abraham's family was much larger, and more varied, than one had ever dreamed possible (Romans 4.1–25; Galatians 3.23–9) and that it was defined not by the marks of Jewish ethnicity but by 'Messiah-faith'.⁴⁹⁴ All of this is of course part of his overall theology of the covenant with Israel and its renewal through the Messiah.

Instead of thus 'submitting to God's righteousness', Paul's unbelieving fellow Jews were, he says, 'seeking to establish their own righteousness'. We remind ourselves that here Paul is talking not least about his own former self; this passage has the strong tinge of autobiography about it, as the reference to 'zeal for God' makes clear.⁴⁹⁵ Of course, the phrase about 'their own righteousness', glimpsed out of context in the dark with the light behind it, with a glass of Wittenberg beer in hand and another already on board, could no doubt be read as indicating that these Jews were guilty of proto-Pelagianism, imagining that by doing 'good works' in the sense of making the moral effort to keep Torah they were earning favour, or indeed 'righteousness', with God.⁴⁹⁶ But the entire narrative sweep of chapters 9—11, not to mention the absence of any language about 'good works' anywhere in 9.30—10.21, makes this extremely unlikely.⁴⁹⁷ The story Paul is telling is about the covenant narrative of Israel, and about the fact that, to his own surprise and shock, this narrative has been turned inside out through the Messiah and the spirit so as to include gentiles within it. The status of *dikaiosynē* which the unbelieving Jews thought to establish for themselves is therefore a status of 'covenant membership' *which would be for Jews and Jews only*. That was the problem. And it was writ large right across second-Temple Judaism, inscribed not least by the earlier Saul of

Tarsus and his zealous colleagues. This has been, from the start, one of the key insights of the so-called ‘new perspective’ on Paul.

It is important to make it clear at this point (since we are not ignorant of certain devices) that to discern a *problem* in the idea of ‘seeking to establish their own status of covenant membership’ has nothing whatever to do with the supercilious (and, for all I know, supersessionist) tendency to claim the apparent high moral ground of late-modern ‘universalism’ and to look down one’s nose at those benighted Jews with their ‘particularism’. It may be that some, not least within the so-called ‘new perspective’, have surreptitiously smuggled in such false ideas to spy out the freedom which people have to think Jewish thoughts, to relish the Jewish doctrine of election, to affirm the call of Abraham himself as one of the great moments in world history. Let it be said loud and clear that Paul’s critique at this point, and my attempt to analyze and re-express it, would be straightforwardly derailed by any such modernistic moralization. Save him from his friends, I cry, as I read the philosopher Alain Badiou congratulating Paul on ‘The Foundation of Universalism’.⁴⁹⁸ (Of course, when Badiou says, repeatedly, that Paul’s own foundation was Jesus’ resurrection, which he knows, and assumes his readers know, to be a fantasy and a fable, that does rather let the cat out of the bag ... because Jesus’ resurrection is, from a modernist and indeed moralizing standpoint, one of the least ‘universal’ and most ‘particular’ things Paul could have affirmed.) On the contrary. Paul has *reimagined*, reconceived, the Jewish doctrine of election. He is just as ‘particularist’ in his own way, because he believes that Jesus of Nazareth was and is Israel’s Messiah. He has tried to say what he has seen in the Messiah, which is that this was the true meaning of the doctrine of election all along, that it is only in the Messiah that the living God has provided and will provide covenant renewal, justification, life, and new creation itself. That particularism is just as unwelcome in modernistic circles as the supposed Jewish particularism out of which it grows and which it claims to fulfil. If that fulfilment remains a scandal to Jews, it also remains folly to Greeks, including the Greeks who define themselves in terms of Voltaire and Rousseau, of Kant and Hegel.⁴⁹⁹

By the same token (continuing this long but perhaps necessary aside), to insist now on the virtue of particularism has nothing whatever to do with the *postmodern* moralism (often, pseudo-moralism) which exalts the particular, the little story, the individual speciality, over the bland and hegemonic universal. These fashions in popular culture come and go, and shine their broken lights variously on this or that aspect of religious and other traditions. They do not offer serious fixed points around which to reorganize exegesis and theology. When Paul says that his unbelieving Jewish contemporaries ‘were ignorant of God’s righteousness, and, seeking to establish a righteous status of their own, did not submit to God’s righteousness’, he is not subtly privileging a modernistic universalism against a pre-modern Jewish version of postmodern particularism. He does indeed advocate something that can loosely be called ‘universalism’, namely the coming together of Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female in the one people of the Messiah. But to advocate this position because it reminds one of modernistic universalism, or indeed to criticize it on the same grounds, is to commit the kind of massive, whole-hog anachronism that we would commit if we congratulated Paul on his ecological sensitivity in taking a sailing boat from Caesarea to Rome while everyone else was getting into their jumbo jets. Or if we criticized him for carrying all that cash on his person from Corinth to Jerusalem when any sensible person would have sent it by American Express credit transfer.

In fact (to come back down to earth, or at least to text, after these flights of fancy) we may note one of the more interesting little echoes that bounce off the biblical walls when Paul writes Romans 10.6. He has just quoted Leviticus 18.5, as indeed he had done in Galatians 3.12, in order to point out, as in Galatians 5.3, that if what you want is ‘righteousness under Torah’, a covenant status marked out by Torah itself, there is only one way forward: you have to ‘do’ the whole thing. He has stated often enough, in this letter and elsewhere, the problem with that ambition: it’s impossible. That is the plight of the ‘I’ in Romans 7, and that is why the boast of a covenant status defined by Torah is self-defeating, as Paul pointed out briefly and cryptically in Galatians 2.17–18. But Paul then comes to

Deuteronomy. He does not start straight in with chapter 30, as one might expect granted the prominence of that text in some parts of his background. Rather, he begins with what looks like an innocent opening gambit, but which carries a direct challenge to the position he has mentioned in 10.3. The initial warning comes from Deuteronomy 9.4, and this is how it runs:

Do not say in your heart, ‘It is because of my righteousness that YHWH has brought me in to occupy this land’: it is rather because of the wickedness of these nations that YHWH is dispossessing them before you. It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of those nations that YHWH your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfil the promise that YHWH made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, then, that YHWH your God is not giving you this good land to occupy because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked YHWH your God to wrath in the wilderness; you have been rebellious against YHWH from the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place.⁵⁰⁰

There is a great deal compressed into these verses, and it bears a remarkable similarity to several things that Paul is saying throughout Romans 9—11 but especially at this point. For a start, the passage invokes the oath made by YHWH to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For another thing, it makes clear that, left to itself, Israel is stubborn and rebellious – the same charge that Moses himself will lay against God’s people at the end of the book, in the great ‘song’ of chapter 32 which Paul will quote in 10.19. But, in particular, what we have here is the question of Israel’s own ‘righteousness’ *in relation to the non-Israelite nations*. The status Israel hopes to invoke, against which Moses is warning, is a status of ‘righteousness’, based it seems on an imagined success in keeping God’s law, which will make Israel automatically superior to the other nations. This, we may assume, is more or less what Paul means by ‘their own righteousness’ in 10.3, corresponding to the ‘righteousness of my own’ which he renounced in Philippians 3.9. Moses responds to the possibility of such a claim by making it clear that, though the other nations are indeed wicked, Israel too has no particular moral worth to write home about. At the ‘end of the law’, the close of the Five Books, Israel will inherit the promised land. But this is happening, not because of Israel’s special merit but because of God’s promise to the

patriarchs, another theme to which Paul will return. Deuteronomy 9.4 thus sparks off a resonant set of echoes which, like the notes of an orchestral chord still audible in the concert hall, create just the context within which then to hear Deuteronomy 30.

Paul's basic claim about Deuteronomy 30 is that the great change in Israel's fortunes which that chapter describes – or, as many of his contemporaries would have said, prophecies – is precisely what has come about through Jesus the Messiah. Deuteronomy 30 comes, as we have remarked before, at the turning-point of Israel's prophetic history, the moment for which so many were waiting during much of the second-Temple period, and the moment for which Paul's own narrative in Romans 9.6–29 was implicitly waiting as well. In fact, if we treat the Pentateuch as containing, in both history and prophecy, the full story of the people of God (and there is, as we saw in chapter 2, some evidence that some Jews did see it like that), we could plausibly suggest that what Paul is doing in 9.6–10.13 is *telling the Torah's own story of Israel*, from the call of Abraham through to the ... *telos*, the 'goal', the 'end' in the sense of 'the moment when, with the covenant renewed, Israel would finally be established as God's people'. *Telos gar nomou Christos*, writes Paul (10.4): the Messiah is the end, the goal, the final destination of Torah.⁵⁰¹ This is where the narrative had been heading all along. Through the Messiah the prophecies have come true, the covenant has been re-established, exile is over, God himself has acted to unveil his faithfulness to his promises, and God's people are now able ... to keep Torah from the heart.

How so? Paul has spoken elsewhere of the heart-circumcision that Deuteronomy predicted, and has said, remarkably enough, that people with that transformed heart 'fulfil the Law' and keep its commandments.⁵⁰² Now, reading Deuteronomy 30.12–14, he discerns within it a pattern which he recognizes: it is the pattern of the Messiah, seen as God's revelation of his own 'word', coming from God to Israel and enabling Israel to be God's people in a new way. There is room here for some further pondering, though not in the present book, about the implicit theology of grace at work in this ancient passage:

This commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and do it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to do it.⁵⁰³

Note the repeated 'so that we/you may do it'. In the Septuagint, this is expressed with various uses of the common verb *poiein*. And that is the link Paul makes with the passage from Leviticus he has just quoted: the one who *does* them, *ho poiēsas auta*, shall live in them. Paul is not playing off Leviticus against Deuteronomy, a 'legalistic' form of Judaism against a 'non-legalistic' one. He is not reading the Pentateuch as containing two strands, as Dodd thought two generations ago and as some have argued afresh in recent times.⁵⁰⁴ Paul is using Deuteronomy 30 to say: Ah, but in the enabling promise of covenant renewal, God himself holds out a new way of 'doing the law', a way which will be 'in your mouth and in your heart', a way which will come from God himself in the form of his 'word', and which will enable you to 'do' it. This is the massive claim which Paul is making through his bold and creative, but covenantally coherent, use of Deuteronomy.

Notice how this coheres, too, with the passage that follows, where the thought is developed. The Greek term for 'word' in this passage of Deuteronomy is *rhēma*. Paul hardly ever uses this term elsewhere.⁵⁰⁵ But it comes again and again in Romans 10, and in exactly this sense: the idea of the divine initiative which, in the form of the spoken word, brings new life and new possibilities.⁵⁰⁶ This echoes, albeit distantly, the passage about 'new creation' in Isaiah 55, in which the 'word', the *rhēma* in the Greek, comes down from heaven like the rain and the snow, not returning to YHWH empty, but fulfilling his purpose and making the thorny land sprout fresh shrubs.⁵⁰⁷ After the initial quotation of Deuteronomy 30.14 in 10.8, 'the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart', together with its explanation, 'this is the word of faith which we preach', Paul makes it clear, in going on to describe just that 'preaching', that 'the word' is the powerful thing, the divine initiative, which summons people to hear, believe and

obey. ‘The word’ is what will create them as Deuteronomy-30 people, new-covenant people.

But that is not the end of it. After quoting Isaiah 52 as the explanation of the gentile mission (10.15), and Isaiah 53 as a way of holding on to the question of continuing unbelief (10.16), Paul concludes: ‘so faith is from hearing, and hearing is through the word of the Messiah’, *dia rhēmatos Christou*. The exegete, having wrestled with Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10.6–8, may have heaved a sigh of relief and forgotten this key term within a verse or so; but as far as Paul is concerned the train of thought has continued into the following passage, and indeed spills over into verse 18 as well, with another Septuagint quote, this time from the great psalm of creation and Torah: ‘their sound went out into the whole land, and their words, *ta rhēmata autōn*, to the ends of the earth’.⁵⁰⁸ Clearly the powerful divine *rhēma* is at the front of his mind throughout this whole sequence of thought.

Three things should by now be coming clear. First, 10.1–17 (and, within that, 10.5–13) does indeed make a statement which is fit to stand as the vital centre of Romans 9—11. Second, this passage expresses exactly the same theology of justification and salvation that we find elsewhere in the letter and in Paul’s other letters, only if anything more clearly. Third, it offers a very full answer to the prayer which Paul describes himself as praying in 10.1 (as opposed to the prayer he describes himself as *not* praying in 9.4): the prayer that comes from his own heart, in relation to his unbelieving kinsfolk according to the flesh, the prayer ‘unto salvation’, *eis sōtērian*: in other words, ‘that they may be saved’. This last point must now be developed a bit further.

The theme of ‘salvation’, we recall, is unmentioned in Galatians. But it is stated as a major theme at the beginning of Romans (1.16), it is expounded in the central part of the letter (5.9–10; 8.24) and it now comes to particular fine-tuned expression. The paragraph 10.1–17 looks as though it constitutes Paul’s own basic answer to the question raised by his own reported prayer, as to how this ‘salvation’ might come about for his kinsfolk according to the flesh (and indeed anyone else, since he says more than once that this is

equally true for non-Jews). He has explained, quite fully and in terms of central prophetic texts, how it is that Israel's God has provided for Israel's salvation through Israel's Messiah. I have highlighted the texts relating to salvation, and italicized verse 9, which stands at the very centre of 9—11 as a whole:

⁵Moses writes, you see, about the covenant membership defined by the law, that 'the person who performs the law's commands **shall live in them**'. ⁶But the *faith*-based covenant membership puts it like this: 'Don't say in your heart, Who shall go up to heaven?' (in other words, to bring the Messiah down), ⁷or, 'Who shall go down into the depths?' (in other words, to bring the Messiah up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we proclaim); ⁹*because if you profess with your mouth that Jesus is lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* ¹⁰Why? Because the way to covenant membership is by believing with the heart, and **the way to salvation** is by professing with the mouth. ¹¹The Bible says, you see, 'Everyone who believes in him **will not be put to shame.**' ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same lord is lord of all, and is rich towards all who call upon him. ¹³'All who call upon the name of the Lord', you see, '**will be saved**'.

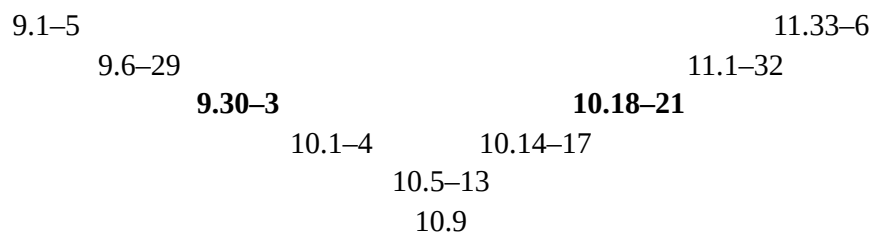
This theology and exegesis generate mission: people need to believe, so they need to hear, so they need to have someone sent to them, someone through whose witness the powerful *rhēma* can do its Deuteronomic work, its spirit-work of circumcising hearts and producing faith and confession (10.14–15), even if the unbelief of which Isaiah spoke remains a continuing sorrow (10.16–17). At this point we simply note this link between the prayer of 10.1 and the exposition of Deuteronomy and Joel in 10.5–13: if the passage is really as central to the whole of 9—11 as I have been suggesting, this will in turn be an important clue to other exegetical and theological issues.

In particular, this means that if Paul had held, or had even thought of holding, the kind of 'two-covenant' theory espoused in some circles, according to which Jews are saved by being good Jews and gentiles are saved by becoming Christians, he would have had no need to pray the prayer of 10.1, let alone 9.1–5, in the first place. What is more, when he

speaks in 11.26 of ‘all Israel being saved’, he has already told us in considerable detail in the present passage what he thinks ‘being saved’ involves, and how it is effected. In a piece of writing as carefully balanced as Romans 9—11, we do well to pay close attention to what has been put at the very centre.⁵⁰⁹ And in a treatment of Paul’s eschatology, such as we are offering in the present chapter, we do well to note at the exegetical outset that Paul has placed here at the heart of his discussion a description of the way in which the ancient covenant has been renewed. Faith and confession in the risen lord Jesus is the true ‘doing of the law’ which characterizes those who belong to the renewed covenant. As we shall see, Paul’s emphatic inclusion of *gentiles* within the ranks of those prophesied in Deuteronomy and Joel as people of the renewed covenant (10.12) is a clear signpost to the way his mind is working in the next chapter as well. The *inauguration* of this eschatology in 10.4–17 looks ahead to its *consummation* in chapter 11. The basic question of the whole three-chapter section has been posed in 10.1, and the basic answer given in 10.2–13.

(c) The Surprised gentiles and the Jealous Jews: 9.30–3; 10.18–21

We now pan the camera back from this dense, central passage of 10.1–17, and examine briefly the shorter passages either side of it, which link it to the two longer main sections which comprise most of chapters 9 and 11 respectively.



Chapter 9.30–3 draws together the threads of 9.6–29 in order to move things on to the next stage of the argument. In that earlier passage, for the most part, Paul has been talking about God’s strange purpose in narrowing Israel down to a ‘remnant’ (9.27–30, the end of the line that started with the

selection of Isaac rather than Ishmael in 9.6–9). But he has also hinted, out of the blue as it were, that in the same process God is also getting ready to welcome gentiles into the family (9.24). In the four-verse summary at the end of the chapter, he draws this together with three controlling themes: ‘righteousness’, Torah and the stumbling stone. And the main point, here as in 10.18–21, is that ‘Israel’ (as a whole; Paul will point out in 11.1–6 that he and others like him constitute the present ‘remnant’) has strangely failed to arrive where they had hoped, and that gentiles have found themselves arriving there instead.

The place where they have arrived is ‘righteousness’, *dikaïosynē*. We find once more that the best sense is made of the passage if we take this term as referring to ‘membership in God’s people’, in other words, to ‘covenant status’. Gentiles, Paul says, picking up from the sudden and surprising 9.24 (on which see below) and the sustained exposition of 3.21—4.25, have received this ‘righteousness’, this status as members of God’s covenant family. Those who read the text this way, in the light of the strange new form of law-fulfilment Paul has in mind, will arrive at his meaning here, while exegetes who approach in the more normal way will fail to do so. Why? Because they are not thinking in terms of the covenantal narrative of chapter 9, but in terms of an abstract theological system. That approach would expect Paul to say that ‘Israel, hunting for righteousness, did not attain righteousness’; but what he says is ‘Israel hunting for *the law of righteousness*, did not attain *to the law*.’⁵¹⁰ Paul, unlike many of his interpreters, is already building into his discussion a positive meaning of the law, anticipating what he will say in 10.6–8, which is that, however surprisingly, faith in Jesus as the risen lord is in fact the true law-fulfilment spoken of in Deuteronomy. Israel was pursuing *the right goal* (the Torah) *by the wrong means* (works!). Paul is already hinting at the reading of Leviticus and Deuteronomy we were discussing a moment ago: the Torah itself can indeed be attained, and gentiles are indeed attaining it (alongside the Jewish remnant), because they are doing so by faith.

If we fail to hear the echoes of Romans 7.1—8.11 at this point, we need to re-tune our hermeneutical hearing aids.⁵¹¹ Here at the end of chapter 9

we find ourselves at the further unwinding of the spiral of argument which began way back in chapters 2 and 3 and continued with the throwaway remarks of 5.20 and 6.14, generating Paul's head-on discussion of the matter in 7.7–25. There, Israel rightly clung to Torah, because Torah really is God's word, holy and just and good; but Israel found that Torah gave sin its opportunity, and that sin thereby deceived and killed those who were embracing Torah. That, we saw, had an explosively positive purpose: 'sin' was itself lured into doing its worst in one place, so that it could be condemned there, 'in the flesh' of the Messiah. Israel, embracing Torah, did not succeed in fulfilling Torah ... but (8.3–4) God has done, in the Messiah and the spirit, 'what was impossible for Torah'. So here Israel pursued Torah and failed to attain to it; but in 10.1–13 Paul demonstrates that there is a new 'fulfilling of Torah', through the covenant-renewing work of Messiah and, by implication, the spirit. And the 'stumbling stone' in 9.32–3 seems to play a similar role in the present sequence of thought to Paul's earlier exposition of sin being lured on to one place, to be condemned.

A major difference between the two passages is that in 9.30–3 Paul is no longer talking about 'sin'. The word *hamartia* and its cognates, massively present throughout Romans 1–8 and especially chapters 5, 6 and 7, occur precisely once in this section, in 11.27, and that in a biblical citation. Nevertheless, we see clearly a very similar train of thought: Israel is embracing Torah, struggling with it, getting it wrong, stumbling over the stone ... and then come the Messiah and the covenant renewal. Romans 9.30–10.13 thus resonates with the sequence of thought in 7.7–8.11, especially 7.21–8.4.

So what are we talking about this time? What is the same, and what is different? With this question we approach near the heart of the darkest mystery in these chapters.

The idea that the law would have made Israel alive, had it been able to do so, goes back in Paul's thought to Galatians 3.21. Israel was correct, in other words, to look to the law as 'the law of righteousness', the law through whose possession and keeping Abraham's physical children would be assured of the status of being God's people in perpetuity. But they 'did

not attain to the law’, because, Paul declares, they were pursuing it in the wrong way. They were pursuing it, hunting for it, ‘not by faith but *as though* by works’, *hōs ex ergōn*; and the *hōs* says it all. ‘*As if* by works’; but, from Paul’s point of view, it was never supposed to be ‘by works’, but always ‘by faith’. Here we are back with Romans 3.27–31: boasting is excluded, ‘by what law? of works? No: through the law of faith.’ Because (to telescope together the different segments of Romans for a moment), though Paul does indeed see the law as erecting a solid boulder between the promises God made to Abraham and the fulfilment of those promises in the creation of a single worldwide family, the fault is not in Torah itself but, as Paul has insisted in passage after passage, *in the people to whom Torah was given – or rather in their Adamic condition*. They are ‘in Adam’ like everyone else. But their use of ‘works’ (sabbath, food laws, circumcision and so on) as the way of ‘hunting for the law of righteousness’ was the way of using some of the badges of Torah-keeping as the way of doing what Deuteronomy 9 warned them against, setting themselves up to be inalienably God’s people, and keeping everyone else at bay.

But this itself was not outside the divine purpose. That is the point of the ‘stumbling stone’ image. Israel has misused the Torah, *but God seems to have intended that Israel should do just that*.⁵¹² Here we are again back with Romans 7, this time with that repeated *hina* in 7.13 which echoes the all-important *hina* in 5.20.⁵¹³ So what is he saying? That the purpose of Torah was *to increase sin*? To ‘magnify the trespass’? Yes, because God’s aim – his aim, Paul seems to be saying, in election itself, not as a sub-plot but as the main idea all along, finally now revealed in the Messiah – was so that through Israel, and through Torah’s strange work in Israel, God might draw sin on to that one place, on to the Messiah as Israel’s representative, on to the Messiah as the embodiment of God himself, God in the person of his ‘Son’, so that God himself might deal with ‘sin’ by both enacting and enduring its condemnation in himself. That was the point of 7.7–8.11, especially of 7.13 and 8.3–4. Now, at the next point up the spiral of the argument of Romans, we have in 9.30–10.4 something similar but different. No longer are we talking about the death of the Messiah bearing

the condemnation for sins. We are talking about Israel itself, as the elect people, being redefined, reconstituted, around Israel's own Messiah and on the initiative of Abraham's God, so as to include all those non-Israelites who were envisaged (along with Israel itself) in the original Abrahamic promises. And Paul sees *that this too was necessary for the plan to work*. Israel had to 'stumble' so that the world might be saved. That is the clue not only to the 'stone' image in 9.32–3 but to a good deal of chapters 9 and 11. And that is the point at which his revision of election gives birth to his revision of eschatology.

This leads to a vital point. I have suggested that Torah functioned as the 'stumbling stone' in 9.32–3. But we should hear in the Isaiah quotation at the end of verse 33 ('the one who believes in him/it will never be put to shame') a reference also to the Messiah (as in the apparent meaning of 'believing in him' in the final line, echoed in 10.11, and as in some other early Christian uses). (In Isaiah 8.14, we note, the 'stone' appears to be God himself.)⁵¹⁴ This is confirmed in 10.11 by the repetition of the same clause, quoted from Isaiah 8.14, with the addition of *pas*, 'all', 'everyone',⁵¹⁵ where it is clear that the object of faith is the Messiah himself. Here we are near the heart of the strange situation Paul is explaining throughout these chapters. He discerns a close link between God's work through Torah and God's work in the Messiah. To put it another way, the rejection of the Messiah himself, and of the gospel message about him, is seen by Paul as cognate with, and expressive of, the failure to 'pursue' Torah in the way that would lead to covenant membership. Or, to put it yet another way, if anyone, Jew or gentile, is to attain to the *dikaïosynē*, the covenant status, held out in Deuteronomy 30 as the real 'return from exile', they must do so by *pistis*, the 'faith' which some gentiles now have (9.30) while many Jews do not (9.32). Pursuing Torah as a charter of national privilege circumscribed by 'works' would not do; that is the problem which Paul then sums up in 10.2–3. The Messiah – and when Paul says *Christos* at this stage of Romans we should hear, bundled up inside that word, all that has been said about him in chapters 1–8 – is the *telos nomou*, the goal of Torah. The two lines converge. To confess Jesus as lord and to believe that God raised

him from the dead is to ‘attain the Torah’, the *nomos dikaiosynēs*, the ‘law of covenant membership’, the point towards which the whole Pentateuch was heading. Conversely, to reject the Messiah is to fail to attain Torah, to stumble over the stone. Some gentiles have now done the first; many Jews have now done the second. And the point of 9.32–3 is to say: this too is the deliberate work of God. He has placed in Zion the stone over which they would trip, the Torah, the Messiah. Why? Paul has not yet said, except in the most cryptic hint in 9.22–4, to which we shall return. It is wrong to play off the two possibilities, Torah and Messiah, against one another. Paul allows resonances of both to jangle together before resolving them in chapter 10 into a new and previously unsuspected harmony.⁵¹⁶

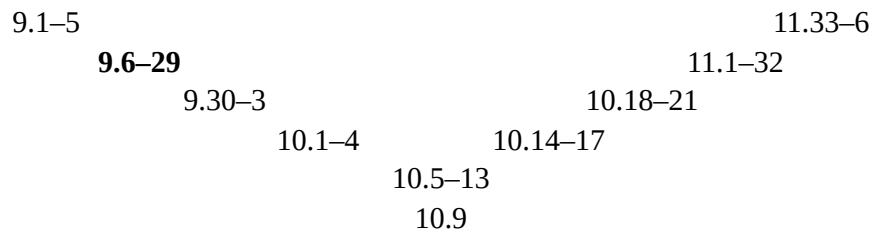
Reading 9.30–3 in this way as an introduction to 10.1–17 can then be balanced by studying the conclusion to the central section of 9—11, in other words, 10.18–21. Here Paul draws on a psalm, on Deuteronomy again (chapter 32 this time) and on Isaiah (writings, Torah, prophets). His purpose is to say, first, that despite the unbelief mentioned in 10.16, God’s word is indeed going out and doing its work. It may be that the balance within Psalm 19, celebrating creation (especially the sun) in the first half and Torah in the second, had caused Paul to ponder the relationship between God’s revelation to the whole world in creation and the revelation to Israel in Torah.⁵¹⁷ The Israel-specific revelation picks up, it seems, the larger message to the whole human race. But in the middle of that, Israel *did* always know *that gentiles were going to be brought in to make Israel jealous*. That is what Deuteronomy itself had claimed, what Moses himself had warned. If there is any mention of ‘supersession’ anywhere in Paul, it might just be here – in a key passage from Moses himself! Gentiles will come in *and make Israel jealous*. That only makes sense if, as I have been arguing all along, Paul really does hold that the Messiah-family into which gentiles are incorporated is ‘the circumcision’, and so forth. But the potential charge of ‘replacement’, which one can hear going on in the background at this point like a dripping tap, is undone in the next chapter by the way in which Paul develops and exploits Moses’ word about ‘jealousy’. This is not ‘replacement’; it is fulfilment. To this we shall shortly return.

The Isaiah passage, on the other hand (it is a single verse, Isaiah 65.1, which Paul has quoted in two parts), simply states the two conclusions and leaves them side by side, repeating exactly the point made in 9.30, only this time in terms not of the *nomos dikaiosynēs*, but of Israel's God himself: gentiles, who were not looking for YHWH, have found him, while Israel, supposedly YHWH's own people, have remained 'disobedient and recalcitrant', *apeithounta kai antilegonta*, 'not-obeying and speaking-against'.⁵¹⁸ Here is the massive paradox with which Paul is wrestling: (a) the one God chose a people; (b) after a long time he did what he had promised and sent them their Messiah – and they rejected him; (c) this God renewed the covenant, and the covenant people for the most part refused to join in.⁵¹⁹ Where can Paul now turn? How can he begin to understand what this strange and apparently unpredictable God has been up to? This is perhaps the biggest question in the whole of Paul's eschatology. It is possible, however, that even in the last devastating quote from Isaiah there is a hint of what is to come. Just as Paul in the next chapter will exploit 'I will make you jealous' from 10.19 (quoting Deuteronomy 32.21), we might see 'All day long I have stretched out my hands' in 10.21 (quoting Isaiah 65.2) not simply as a gesture of divine frustration, but also as a continuing commitment. Israel's God, like the father of the Prodigal Son, will go out to reason with the older brother who, for apparently good reasons, has decided to stay out of the party.⁵²⁰

Faced with the ultimate eschatological question, and with the consequent search for fresh wisdom, the Paul we know will always answer that wisdom is to be found *in the Messiah*.⁵²¹ The Messiah, somehow, will provide the clues. It is in and through him, after all, that God's righteousness has been unveiled. But what will those clues look like? How will they play out? We go back to the first full passage in the section, Romans 9.6–29, to find the first part of the answer.

[\(d\) Bearers of God's Strange Purpose: Romans 9.6–29](#)

We move back up the chiasmic structure to the first main sub-section, 9.6–29, which balances 11.1–32, its final main sub-section:



Paul sets off in 9.6 on a narrative, instantly recognizable as the narrative of Israel. In chapter 11 he is indubitably pointing to the final end of this same narrative, the time of redemption, the completion of God’s purposes, familiar in outline from second-Temple eschatology. This, in fact, is how that eschatology regularly works: first you tell the story of Israel so far, and then you look on to what is still to come. That is why our consideration of chapters 9—11 belongs at this point in the book, within the overall discussion of Paul’s revision of second-Temple eschatology.

We have seen that 9.30—10.13 stands in between the two elements of this basic narrative. That is the new thing, the messianic story which has intruded, functioning now as the fulcrum around which everything else moves. There is a rough sense, in fact, in which chapter 9 is about the past, chapter 10 about the present and chapter 11 about the future.⁵²² But 10.5–13, and indeed the immediately larger section to which it belongs, 9.30—10.13, is not itself part of the great narrative. It stands upright in the middle of that story, the *telos* of all that has gone before – and perhaps, though Paul does not put it like this, the *archē* of all that will now follow. It is the messianic moment, the ‘but now’, the sudden sabbath which creates a new sort of time, a heaven-and-earth time, a time when the ‘word’, the *rhēma Christou*, can leap down from heaven and do its work of replacing the thorn with the myrtle, its work of renewing and circumcising hearts so that they can believe and confess the gospel. The Messiah is both in time and out of time, transforming time itself and inevitably therefore eschatology too. Romans 9—11 thus exhibits in its very literary form the combination of (what ought to be meant by) ‘salvation history’ on the one hand and (what

ought to be meant by) ‘apocalyptic’ on the other. God has done, in the middle of Israel’s history but disrupting and rearranging that history, the thing he had always promised. And only in the light of that ‘vertical’ disruption does the ‘horizontal’ narrative, from Abraham to the ‘remnant’ in chapter 9 and from the ‘remnant’ to the fulfilment of the patriarchal promises in chapter 11, make the sense it does.

But this messianic moment, even though it has a different character in relation to time before and time after, nevertheless does belong at the centre of precisely this narrative. To this extent, we might even see Romans 9—11 not simply as a chiasm but as a cruciform structure, with this great vertical providing the definite line, the straight-downward line, that refocuses the edge-lured arguments and holds them together as they spread out into past (9.6–29) and future (11.1–32). All else east or west of Jesus: the arrow that says ‘You are here’.⁵²³

A fanciful notion, no doubt. And yet there is something about the cruciform shape of the argument which infects the details, too, and that is the rubric under which we now turn to 9.6–29. Paul, I propose, is re-reading the story of Abraham’s family in the light of the great vertical which he knows is coming up, the messianic event which had forced him to rethink everything, to conclude that this was what it had meant all along. ‘It cannot be that God’s word has failed’: so, if God’s word has now been spoken and heard in and through the scandalous crucified Messiah, the one in whom the *dikaiosynē theou* has been revealed (3.21), the one whose rejection embodies the ‘stumbling’ over the ‘stone’, we must assume that the story of election had somehow reflected this cruciform necessity all along in a way which only the inaugurated messianic eschatology can reveal.

Once again Romans 7 is an essential part of the background. There, Israel’s problem was that, being given Torah and rightly delighting in it, Israel found that Torah became the place where ‘sin’ gained its opportunity, indeed, grew to its full height. But that, too, was exactly what God had planned (5.20; 7.13). That was the way by which sin could be condemned – not in Israel, but in the representative who was also Israel’s substitute, properly acting as Israel-in-person but also properly doing for Israel what

Israel could not do (and was not meant to do) for itself (8.3). Now here, in 9.6–29, in the story of election itself, we find the strange principle, which it will take to the end of chapter 11 to work out, that Israel is indeed ‘the people of the Messiah’ – and that this means, in the massive corporate version of Galatians 2.19, ‘I through the Law died to the Law; I am crucified with the Messiah’. Yes, there is a further word, ‘Nevertheless I live’; but that will not come until chapter 11. For the moment, Paul tells the narrative of Israel under the rubric of the crucified Messiah. Just as, in our reader’s eye, we can see the cross etched into the structure of Paul’s argument, so Paul, in the eye of his heart, could see the *stauros tou Christou* written across the pages of history. When the Messiah died, he was doing, close up and personal, what Israel had, all unknowing, been living through ever since the time of Abraham. No wonder Israel ‘was ignorant of God’s covenant faithfulness’. Think of Jeremiah. If God’s people had known what this would involve, they might have opted out a lot earlier. It was to the same end: as with the Messiah, so with Israel itself. Israel was to be cast away so that the world might be redeemed.

Some theories of election have stopped short of the first hurdle in this sequence, fearful of saying something politically incorrect. They have thereby missed entirely the extraordinary achievement of Paul in these chapters. He is not here offering a ‘theology of history’ in some grand developmental or Hegelian sense. Nor is this a theory of predestination, or a philosophical discourse about determinism and free will. This is a passage in which we discover that the living God has scratched his name on the hard rock of history. But we only learn to read that name when we have come to know it in the Messiah, whether in the blinding glare of a Damascus Road or the slow, watery light of a December morning.

I have suggested that 9.6–29 is parallel, within Paul’s overall design, to 11.1–32. This is not just a matter of loose structure. There are numerous thematic parallels as well, ideas which are absent in 9.30—10.13. Both passages have to do with the patriarchs and the promises God made to them. Both stress the ‘call’ of God, the ‘mercy’ of God and the fact that neither are dependent upon ‘works’. Both insist upon the ‘patience’ of God,

while emphasizing God’s activity in ‘hardening’ people. Both highlight the ‘remnant’, albeit in perhaps a slightly different sense. Both, interestingly, use the word ‘Israel’ in more than one way.⁵²⁴ These themes are not distributed in the two sections in exactly the same way, but there is nevertheless a sense that in chapter 11 Paul is working his way back to where he started. This can be seen at a glance:

9.6–13 ‘Israel’ and ‘Israel’	11.25–32 ‘Israel’ and ‘Israel’
9.14–26 Patriarchs Pharaoh ‘hardened’ (to make God’s name known)	11.11–24 Patriarchs non-remnant ‘hardened’ (so that gentiles are included)
9.27–9 Remnant	11.1–10 Remnant

This begs questions, of course, as do all chiasmic schemes. The single words and phrases I have used here do not represent a full or balanced summary of the subtle arguments Paul makes in each of these passages. There are difficult questions about the subdivision within 9.14–29, which I have not attempted to resolve here (there are slight turns in the argument at verses 19 and 24 as well as 27). In particular, the mere suggestion that the distinction of two ‘Israel’s in 9.6 might be parallel to a similar phenomenon in 11.25–6 will already produce wailing and gnashing of teeth in certain quarters.⁵²⁵ There are also themes in common to the larger units (9.6–20 and 11.1–2) which do not fall in the equivalent place: the emphasis on ‘not by works’, for instance, in 9.12 and 11.6, and the strong note of ‘mercy’ in 9.15–16 and 11.31–2. The parallels in chapter 11 to the notion of ‘hardening’ in 9.17–18 come in 11.7 and 25 (and with a different term). But all the same the parallels are remarkable. They suggest that Paul, having worked his way forward from 9.6 to 9.29 in a series of careful steps, is then retracing those steps, not slavishly but still quite thoroughly, as he writes chapter 11. Chapter 11 is, as it were, much harder work. Nobody has told that story before, whereas the narrative outline of 9.6–29 was extremely

well known. Anyway, the payoff of this proposal will appear more fully when we ourselves reach Romans 11 presently, but it is important to be aware of the parallels as we study chapter 9.

So what is going on in 9.6–29? It may surprise some to reflect that it would be hard for a devout Jew – Saul of Tarsus, say – to find fault with the overall movement of the passage.⁵²⁶ There were plenty of other second-Temple retellings of Israel’s narrative. They would have gone along with the line of selection from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob, allowing Ishmael and Esau to fall by the wayside. No first-century Jew would have supposed that the ‘seed of Abraham’ was continued equally by Ishmael as well as Isaac, or that Esau shared the same ‘elect’ status as Jacob.⁵²⁷ They would have agreed, further, that God had the right, faced with the bullying Pharaoh, to reveal his own name and power in all the world through the events of the exodus. They would certainly have agreed that when Israel made and worshipped the golden calf God had the right to do what he pleased, and if he showed mercy to some, that was up to him (9.15, quoting Exodus 33.19). They would have reflected, with Paul, on the strange ways that Israel had come through the failure of the monarchy and the eventual exile, and that YHWH again had the right to remould Israel through such events, as a potter would remould clay. That brings us all the way from 9.6 to 9.23, with any Jewish listeners nodding in sympathy. This is their story.⁵²⁸

Then comes the first point where something new happens, something that Saul of Tarsus and his kinsfolk according to the flesh would not have expected or approved. The ‘vessels of mercy, prepared in advance for glory’, consist, it seems, of ‘us whom he called, not only from among the Jews but also from among the gentiles’ (9.24). This would indeed be highly controversial, as would Paul’s use of Hosea 2 to back up the point (9.25–6).⁵²⁹ One is reminded of the moment in Acts when the crowd listened attentively to Paul until he mentioned gentiles, at which point chaos broke out once more.⁵³⁰ But with the last three verses of the section (9.27–9) there could again be no quarrel. The prophets had spoken of a remnant, of Israel being narrowed down to a point, a *hypoleimma* (a ‘remainder’, like the

numbers left over after a division sum), a *sperma*, a seed that remained after the tree had been cut down.⁵³¹ Paul was simply rehearsing what devout Jews already knew.

It appears, then, that apart from the mention in 9.24 of gentiles as among the ‘called’, who have been ‘foreordained to glory’, *what Paul says in 9.6–29 would not have been controversial, at least to the kind of Jew he was thinking of in 10.3*, those who have ‘a zeal for God’, albeit not according to knowledge; those, that is, among whose number he would have placed himself until his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus. No Jew would have objected to the proposition ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’ (it was, after all, in the Bible); no Pharisee would deny that God was right to condemn both Pharaoh and those who worshipped the golden calf. No second-Temple Jew who had studied the prophets would doubt that God-the-potter had the right to remould the clay, and that he had done so in fact. Nobody doubted, with ten tribes lost half a millennium earlier and much of the remainder scattered around the world, that God had left ‘only a remnant’.

This leaves us with a question which is not sufficiently asked. Who then is Paul really addressing in this whole section? What is he trying to say to them?

Part of the answer must lie in the implicit addressee of the questions in 9.14 and 9.19: is God unjust in his ‘love’ for Jacob? Is God unfair in blaming those who are ‘hardened’ by his own will? These questions would more likely be raised, I think, by *gentiles*: gentiles who had found the whole story of Israel challenging in the very idea of there being a chosen people, let alone the Jewish people, and gentiles who, with a bit of moral philosophy in their heads or at least in their popular culture, would hear the story of Israel and at once begin to raise questions about what sort of God would behave in so unprincipled a fashion. Gentiles who might well be disposed to regard the Christian message and experience as something which had now left behind its Jewish roots altogether ...⁵³²

This is a rather different way of reading the chapter from the way frequently proposed. Many have suggested, as a kind of interim solution to

the question of the integration of chapters 9—11 into the letter, that Paul is facing the problem: if people are going to believe the promises set out in chapters 1—8, might they not reasonably ask why, granted the apparent failure of the promises to Israel, they should nevertheless trust this God? I do not think that captures the heart of Paul's argument, or indeed his wider theology. *Israel is not simply an example of a people to whom God made promises in the past.*⁵³³ Israel was and is, for Paul as for Israel's own scriptures, the people through whom God would bless the world. This section is where Paul shows how, in the Messiah, God *has* done that, and *will* do it, and what that strange new fulfilment means for Israel itself.

This is, I believe, the right way to approach 9.6–29. It points forward at once to the thrust of chapter 11, which is warding off precisely the kind of gentile arrogance that would want to turn the tables against ethnic Israel and deny them any part in the divinely planned future. The significance, then, of saying that 'the word of God has not failed' in Romans 9.6 is not merely to do with theodicy, 'justifying' or explaining away what God has done. It is a point, directed at gentile Messiah-believers in Rome, which says, 'Do not imagine that your inheritance of Israel's promises means that you can discount their history, their scriptures, their very election. On the contrary, their entire story stands firm, makes sense in its own terms and is the foundation of yours as well.' Paul is not trying to make the ancient Israelite theology of election stand on its toes and do tricks. He is allowing it to be itself. This is the point that gentile Christians in Rome need to take on board. They have to learn that they have been, as Hays puts it, narrated into the story of Israel, as in Galatians, 1 Corinthians 10 and elsewhere.⁵³⁴ This is Israel's story, and they should be so lucky as to find themselves part of it (11.11–24: see below).

My first proposal about 9.6–29, then, is this. The reason Paul is telling the story of Israel in this way is not to make a point 'against' Jewish unbelievers, but to tell their story *from their own point of view* (except for the sudden insertion of gentiles into the story in 9.24) and to defend this way of telling the story, at least preliminarily, against the charge which he knew would come from gentile (including gentile Christian) interlocutors.

Paul must after all have had this conversation hundreds of times as he explained things to gentile converts and taught them the scriptures. His point here is *to establish the basic Jewish doctrine of election*, not to undermine it or even, at this stage, to modify it except by that one proleptic hint about gentile inclusion, a hint he could of course have backed up from within the covenantal scriptures themselves, though he does not do that here.⁵³⁵ He does not want to modify the narrative, but to draw out from it (and to rub gentile noses in the point) the truth that the entire story of God's purposes into which they have come (through inheriting the sonship, the glory, the covenants and so forth, and particularly the Messiah) has been this story and no other: the story of the free electing grace of the God of Abraham. Even the narrowing down of Israel to a 'remnant', a 'seed', in 9.27–9 cannot, as it were, count 'against' Israel or for that matter against God. It is not an 'anti-Jewish' or 'unJewish' way of saying what has happened. Torah, prophets and writings all concur. Granted human sin, and Israel's own recapitulation of Adam's trespass, God had the right and perhaps even the duty to do what he had done. My first main point about this section is therefore that Paul's primary 'target audience' here appears to be the puzzled gentile Christians in Rome.

The argument of 9.6–29 is held together by the mention of the 'seed' in 9.7 and 9.29. Paul begins by affirming that 'not all of Israel are in fact Israel',⁵³⁶ that 'not all Abraham's children are his "seed", but "in Isaac shall your seed be called"', and he ends with 'unless the Lord of hosts had left us seed'.⁵³⁷ This brings us to the second main point about this section. Paul has built into his unexceptional narrative of Israel's election certain features which we can see to be hints of that larger purpose which will then unfold. Within the story, in a manner to which no well-educated or zealous first-century Jew could object, there was a distinction made between the 'children of Abraham': not all of them count as *sperma*, 'seed', because the 'seed' is the people who are 'called in Isaac'.⁵³⁸ This re-introduces the distinction between 'children of flesh' and 'children of promise': only the latter are *sperma*. We would not know, on the basis of the present passage alone, that Paul had in mind that the *sperma Abraam* would include

Messiah-believing gentiles, as he insists in chapter 4 and indeed in Galatians 3. He has the soft pedal on at the moment, hitting the same notes but keeping the overtones quiet. But they are there, ready to be reawakened when the music changes key, fleetingly in 9.24 and then, spectacularly, in 9.30—10.13.

In the same way, although no well-taught second-Temple Jew could object to the exposition of the Jacob/Esau scenario in 9.10–13, Paul is building into the picture a fresh element which he will exploit in due course. If God was already choosing and calling people without any prior merit, there should be no problem about God then calling gentiles despite them not having, or keeping, Torah. We should again be alert to the echoes of 2.25–9. The principle of election is the necessary basis for the surprising things that God has planned all along. The promise to Abraham always envisaged that God would justify gentiles by faith (Galatians 3.8) and that God would ‘justify the ungodly’ (Romans 4.5). Now, it seems, the principle of election itself points the same way. Positively, it means that God can do surprising new things, not only on the basis of human ‘works’ but simply on the basis of his ‘call’: 9.12 (‘not because of the works but because of the one who calls’) is thus itself a highly cryptic foretaste of the less cryptic but still surprising 9.24 (‘us whom he called not only from among the Jews but also from among the gentiles’).

The negative point – a distinction between *tekna* and *sperma*, in other words, a distinction between the ‘children of Abraham’ (both Isaac and Ishmael) and the ‘seed’ who are the line of promise, and ultimately the distinction between one ‘Israel’ and another in 9.6b – is carried forward by Paul to explain the obvious fact that, through successive national disasters, there had been a distinction among the descendants of Jacob (= Israel) as well. Many second-Temple Jewish retellings of the story, naturally happy to go along with the bracketing out of Ishmael and Esau, would have balked at applying the same principle to the offspring of Jacob.⁵³⁹ At the moment, though, Paul’s point would simply be to follow the narrative through and to demonstrate that, both in the time of Moses and the golden calf and in the days of the prophets, God was bound to whittle down Jacob’s family, too, to

a much smaller number. But the positive point, too, is being built in meanwhile: the same sovereignty by which God has the right to narrow Abraham's seed down to a 'remnant' is the sovereignty whereby he can and does call surprising new people to be part of the same family.⁵⁴⁰

The negative point is still on display in 9.14–18, where Paul is as ever aware of the narrative context of the passages he cites. Once more he is not expecting any dispute from Jewish hearers, including (if any such were to stumble upon this text) any hard-line Pharisees. When Israel worshipped the golden calf, the question was not whether God had the right to have mercy on whom he had mercy, but whether he was going to have mercy on *any at all*, or was going to blot them all out and begin over again with Moses himself.⁵⁴¹ There is here an echo, in the prayer which Moses prayed at that point, of the prayer Paul said that he might have prayed.⁵⁴² Moses proposed to God that he himself should be 'blotted out of the book that you have written'; Paul had contemplated praying that he might be *anathema apo tou Christou*, under a ban and away from the Messiah, on behalf of his kinsfolk.⁵⁴³ This echo may introduce into the argument a note which would indeed imply a critique of presently unbelieving Jews: they are being aligned with the generation that committed idolatry in the wilderness!⁵⁴⁴ The echo of Exodus 32, however, is distant in Romans 9.3, only perhaps being amplified when we get to 9.15 with its explicit quotation of Exodus 33. We may suppose that Paul already had this in mind when dictating 9.3, but it does not distract from his main point.

His chief emphasis, again, is that God has the right to do all this. In particular, he chooses to highlight God's address to Pharaoh, explaining that part of the point was to display God's power and make known his name in all the world. Here again Paul is building in elements which will be important for the way his argument goes. The 'hardening' of Pharaoh is explicitly said to be in the service of the worldwide proclamation of God's name, and this too is preparing the way for 9.24 and also for 11.7–10, 11–15, and 25. But at the moment he is saying nothing that would be unacceptable to an eavesdropping Pharisee. He is offering a very specifically Jewish, and biblically rooted, analysis of what has happened to

Israel between the promises to the patriarchs and the present small 'remnant'.

When we move on to the potter and the clay, in response to the moral-philosophical objection of verse 19, Paul once again has in mind the context within which those images were born. He is not talking about 'humans in general', about God treating people in an arbitrary and whimsical fashion. He is talking about Israel, and now at last about the *purpose of election*: that all this 'choosing' is not for its own sake, not (as was supposed in some medieval, Reformation and Puritan theology) in terms of God's arbitrary 'choice' of people for salvation, but in terms of *God's wider purpose which was to be carried forwards through the people he was thus shaping*.

The purpose for which God was shaping this people, however, could not simply be the pleasant one of developing the world into the kind of creation he had always intended. This is the point where the modern idea of 'apocalyptic' must make its point against the equally modern construct of 'salvation history'. There can be no smooth crescendo from the call of Abraham to the new creation. The call of Abraham must be the call of a people through whom God would deal with the evil that had infected the world. At the heart of those modern, and comparatively trivial, debates we find the much deeper and darker point: that for the call of Abraham to be effective in accomplishing God's purpose, Abraham's family would be the ones in whose history would be inscribed, simultaneously, the rebellion of all humanity and the divine solution to that rebellion. That is what Paul will unfold in the explosive centre of chapter 11, where the christological redefinition of eschatology reaches its own climax.

Once again, in 9.22 and 9.23 in particular, we need to recall Romans 7. The choice of Israel, and the giving of Torah to Israel, was not so that Israel could be 'the chosen people' in an easy-going sense, obeying Torah and enjoying for ever the status of being God's special ones.⁵⁴⁵ The specialness of Israel consisted precisely, according to Romans 5.20 and 7.7–25, in being the people in whom, even paradoxically through Torah itself, 'sin' could do its worst, increasing and bringing into sharp focus the 'problem of Adam', allowing sin to grow to its full height. And, whether we want to hear this or

not, Paul has said in 1 Thessalonians 2 that the full height of that sin was the handing over of Jesus to the Romans and so to his death, and the similar opposition to God's purposes which consisted of trying to stop the gentile mission going ahead – the activity in which he, Paul, had previously taken a leading role. As a result, the tears, grief and prayers of 9.1–5 and 10.1 were on behalf of a people who Paul knew had been the people of Romans 5.20, the people of Romans 7, the people who had a 'zeal for God' but not 'according to knowledge', the people who, being ignorant of what God was up to in his covenant purposes, were merely heightening the problem of Romans 7.24.

The point then is this: 'What if God ...' (9.22) – in other words, Paul is beginning to suggest a new *interpretation* of this narrative, an interpretation in line both with the selection he has made from Israel's whole wide history and the way he has highlighted that selection, but an interpretation which grows also out of his own perception, that is, out of the gospel itself. Perhaps, after all, it is at this point, in verse 22, not simply in verse 24 with the mention of gentile inclusion, that he begins to say things which our eavesdropping Pharisee might have begun to worry about. 'Supposing', he says, that

God wanted to demonstrate his anger and make known his power, and for that reason put up very patiently with the vessels of anger created for destruction,²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, the ones he prepared in advance for glory –²⁴ including us, whom he called not only from among the Jews but also from among the gentiles?

In other words, supposing that God's larger purposes required that, as with Pharaoh, the evil which had infected the world needed to be gathered together and dealt with, in order that then a new thing might emerge as a fresh gift of creative grace? Supposing, as in Romans 7, that sin needed to be lured on to one spot so that it could be condemned right there? Supposing, now, that Israel's whole history was a kind of large-scale instantiation of this point, with the redemptive purposes of God being etched into history in the story of Israel itself? Supposing, in other words, that the doctrine of election *always envisaged the elect themselves being the*

people through whom God would perform the negative task essential to rescuing the world, namely the outpouring of his anger and power? This is such an enormous thing to suggest that we can easily see why Paul casts it in the mode of a tentative proposal, a ‘What if’, much as in Philemon he inserts a *tacha*, ‘perhaps’, into the crucial interpretative sentence.⁵⁴⁶ It is not, then, that ‘election’ simply involves a selection of some and a leaving of others, a ‘loving’ of some and a ‘hating’ of others. It is that the ‘elect’ themselves are elect *in order to be the place where and the means by which God’s redemptive purposes are worked out*. That will not mean that the ‘elect’ escape from the plight of the world. On the contrary, it means that they will be led, in the strange providence of God, to the place where the plight of the world goes to its deepest point.⁵⁴⁷

We should be under no doubt as to the shocking nature of this proposal. The idea of ‘hardening’, carried forward from the discussion of Pharaoh in 9.17–18 to the discussion of Israel at the time of the exile (the pot in the hands of the potter) in 9.20–3, is not about a *temporary* ‘hardening’. Pharaoh was not hardened for a time and then as it were unhardened. When Paul speaks elsewhere of God bearing with much patience those who are fitted for destruction (2.3–6), he knows that some will turn from their wickedness, but for the rest the patience of God merely allows them to go on, with a ‘hard and impenitent heart’, until they are fit for judgment (2.5). That, as we saw, is a frequent second-Temple theme.⁵⁴⁸

In the present argument, however, I suggest that Paul saw the ‘hardening’ of Israel – the entire theme of exile, alluded to in 9.20–9 and again in 11.8 (see below) – as part of *the saving purposes of God*. This, as he explains in chapter 11, is how it had to happen, so that the world might be redeemed, so that ‘mercy’ might extend to ‘all’ once they had been shut up in the prison-house of ‘unbelief’ (11.32).

Where might Paul have got such an idea? Might it not be, exactly, in the train of thought we see in Romans 5.20 and 7–8? Might it not arise because he has seen that *that was what had happened to Israel’s representative, the Messiah himself?* According to Romans 8.4, the Messiah himself was the place where, at the climax of Israel’s history, sin did its

worst – even, with extreme paradox, the sin of his being ‘handed over’, which was itself the means of the divine ‘handing over’!⁵⁴⁹ – in order that sin itself might then be condemned. I am following Paul’s own lead in addressing these issues through a ‘what if’, because even exegetically, let alone theologically, we would be right to sense here an ocean of possibilities and problems crashing in twenty-foot waves over our heads whichever way we try to swim. But might it not be that Paul, in the years of reflection and debate that have led up to the writing of this extremely careful piece, has determined to approach the new, eschatological question of Israel’s election through the question of *the Messiah’s own election*, that is, the Messiah’s own standing at the point where Israel’s history reached its zenith? And might that not be because he saw the Messiah as Israel’s representative precisely in terms of the ‘servant’ figure of Isaiah 52 and 53, as indicated by Romans 10.14–17? This motif of ‘hardening’, in other words, should not be read as a rejection of Israel, of Israel’s specialness, of Israel’s call to be the light of the world, the bearer of God’s promises to the nations. This is, on the contrary, the way in which that call had to become a reality. That was how it had been with the Messiah himself.

If all this is so (if we at least hold it in our minds as a possibility, before we even look on to 10.4 where Paul says more or less exactly this) then we might glimpse the possibility that the reference to the Messiah being ‘from their race according to the flesh’ in 9.5 (which echoes the ‘of the seed of David according to the flesh’ in 1.3, and with the same preliminary, scene-setting intent) would indicate a determination to understand, and to retell, the story of Israel in terms of God’s strange plan to work out his worldwide purposes, the long entail of the promises to Abraham. We might glimpse the possibility that God had done this by allowing the people of Israel, not least through Torah, to become the very place where God’s condemnation of evil might be seen and known, not for themselves but precisely because they were the ‘people of the Messiah’. Might it not be that Paul was determined now to understand the history and purpose of Israel in terms of the Messiah, not only as representative but also as substitute? What if Paul were re-reading the whole history of Israel through the lens of the cross?

If that is so – and what Paul writes next does indeed indicate that we are on the right lines – then we can see a bit more clearly what is going on throughout this whole section. Paul is retelling the story of Israel in such a way as to insist that even the negative side of ‘election’, the choice of those in whom God’s power and wrath would be displayed, had strongly positive intent, just as in chapter 7. And that positive intent is then starting to bubble up from beneath the surface of the story. Paul cannot keep it down at this point. It breaks through: that in the accomplishment of this purpose God would make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory ... including gentiles among ‘those whom he called’ – which is, as we saw, a standard way of denoting God’s people.⁵⁵⁰

The three main features of 9.6–29 to which I call attention for present purposes, then, are these. First, Paul has retold the story of Israel in such a way that, apart from the surprising inclusion of gentiles as ‘returning exiles’ in 9.24–6, it would be hard for a well-taught second-Temple Jew to object. Second, however, within the telling of this story Paul has highlighted certain features. He has laid stress on the ‘call’ which is ‘not by works’;⁵⁵¹ on the ‘hardening’ for the purpose of a worldwide proclamation. These then prepare the way for the surprising twist in the narrative at 9.24, grafting (as it were) the wild olive branch of ‘gentile inclusion’ into the cultivated olive of Israel’s own narrative, and doing so in such a way as to leave the gentile Christians themselves fully aware that their status as such has nothing to do with any special virtue in being gentiles and everything to do with the surprising mercy of the God of Israel. That, of course, is precisely the point Paul will develop in chapter 11. And all of this, third, is shaped around the notion that Israel is to be seen as the Messiah’s people according to the flesh, sharing his ‘casting away’ for the sake of the world.

By the end of 9.29, then, Paul has reached the point where God’s judgment, precisely upon Israel itself, has produced the paradox that constituted the problem in 9.1–5. God’s whittling down of Israel to a small ‘remnant’, though exactly in line with what the prophets had foretold, has gone far further than a zealous Pharisee would bear to contemplate: that the

Messiah has come, and Israel as a whole has rejected him (both in rejecting Jesus himself and in rejecting the apostolic gospel about him). Meanwhile, though Paul has only given one explicit mention of the fact in verse 24, gentiles have been ‘called’, in line with an extended reading of Hosea 2 in which the rejected northern kingdom serves to represent the wider community of non-Israelites. Verses 24–6 of Romans 9 thus stand in relation to verses 27–9 somewhat as 10.20 does in relation to 10.21, quoting the two halves of Isaiah 65.1:

gentiles called alongside Jews
(9.24–6)

Israel cut down to a remnant
(9.27–9)

God revealed to gentiles not looking for him
(10.20)

Israel disobedient and contrary
(10.21)

In other words – and this is exactly how Paul sums it up in 9.30—10.4 – gentiles, who were not looking for Israel’s God, or for the status of membership within his covenant people, have discovered both; while Israel itself, zealous for God and eager for covenant status, has failed to recognize ‘the Messiah, who is God over all, blessed for ever’. Israel has thereby failed also to acknowledge, and submit to, ‘the righteousness of God’, the covenant plan which contained at its heart the darkness of Calvary as well as the bright light of God’s presence and ongoing purposes. Indeed, as Romans 1—8 should have made clear, the cross of Jesus the Messiah is actually, for Paul, the place where both the righteousness of God and the love of God are most deeply on display (5.6–11). We should not be surprised, then, at these themes coming together here in just this fashion.

I propose, then, to repeat, that 9.6–29 is best read in three interlocking ways. First, in terms of the Jewish context, it is *a largely non-controversial Jewish presentation of election*, with hints of surprises but nothing more. Second, to an unsuspecting non-Jewish reader it is *a deliberately contentious account of God’s justice displayed in ways which the gentile moralist might well think peculiar*, but which is designed to affirm the Jewish doctrine of election, not to undermine it, and to show the gentiles who will be directly addressed in 11.11–32 that their place in the narrative

is precisely one of surprising inclusion into Abraham's family and its ongoing history. Third, in and through both of these it is a *christologically formed retelling of Israel's narrative*, drawing on themes developed earlier in the letter in such a way as to highlight God's purpose to save the world through the 'handing over' of the Messiah, Israel's representative, an event which could only come about as the focal point and intentional climax of the divine plan *for Israel itself to experience the covenantal 'casting away' which was, itself, the strange purpose of election*.

In case anybody doubts this – I am sometimes accused of optimism, but at this point I will be realistic – we may note, before turning explicitly to chapter 11, that when Paul sums up the present state of things he does so in exactly this manner: 'by their trespass, salvation has come to the nations; their trespass means riches for the world, their impoverishment means riches for the nations; their casting away means reconciliation for the world'.⁵⁵² Paul does not there elaborate exactly what he means, but he appears to be summing up something he has previously said (just as in referring to Jesus' death in 5.12–21 he is referring back to the earlier, fuller accounts in 3.24–6, 4.24–5 and 5.6–11). And the place he appears to have said it is in the long, and biblically anchored, account of election and its purpose in 9.6–29, focused particularly on the bit that has made so many liberal theologians so alarmed: the potter and the pot, the 'what if God', the revelation of wrath and the making known of God's power. In other words, when in chapter 11 Paul states in a brief form something he apparently thinks he has said already about Israel's 'trespass', 'stumbling', 'casting away' and 'hardening', it is this interpretation of chapter 9 to which he is referring. And, to put the same point the other way round, chapter 11 confirms a *cruciform*, and *redemptive*, reading of the story of Israel's strange elected history in chapter 9.

These references also take us back helpfully, within the larger flow of thought of the letter, to Romans 2. There, the 'wrath' of God was to be poured out against all human unrighteousness and wickedness, the Jew first and also the Greek. But in sketching that picture at that point, Paul also built into his narrative the note of God's *makrothumia*, his 'great-

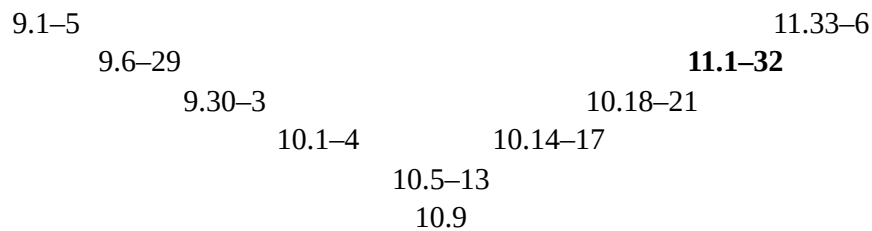
heartedness’ or ‘patience’, and God’s ‘kindness’, delaying the final outpouring of wrath so that more will reach repentance.⁵⁵³ This, too, will be a keynote of his resolution of the question in Romans 11, though again not in the way often imagined.

We turn, then, to Romans 11 itself. What is Paul to make of it all?

(e) All Israel Shall Be Saved: Romans 11.1–32

(α) Introduction to Romans 11

We now move to the passage which, by common consent among many commentators, balances out the one we have just studied. This is where the whole argument had been heading all along.



Ahead, the virgin snow: no-one has come this way before. Behind, the only track his stumbling footprints. Questions now are real; his own; not mere rhetorical devices, but driven by the thought, *you can't stay here*. The path must carry on; must lead from tragedy to hope; but hope now wears a human face, that died, and lives. So that's the meaning? 'What will their acceptance be, but life from death?'

This might have been the counsel he had given to young Onesimus: when you return, be sure you don't look down on those who've come a different route. God has imprisoned all, so all may now receive an equal mercy. It is the advice, or rather the stern warning, that he now gives to the Roman audience, largely gentile (and specifically addressed as such in 11.13). As I have suggested, they have been in view from the start, objecting on apparently moral grounds to the ancient Israelite doctrine of election, only

to discover that it was that doctrine which came to its head in the Messiah himself. The attempt to get the messianic result without the underlying theology of election is the story of many theological wrong turns over the last two millennia.

This is the point at which we must firmly resist, on cast-iron exegetical grounds, the suggestion of Krister Stendahl and others: that Paul is asserting that God has now changed his plans.⁵⁵⁴ The whole point of chapters 9 and 10 has been to *deny* that God had changed his plans, and to say, instead: this is in fact what had been planned, promised and envisaged all along, even though nobody in Israel (certainly not Saul of Tarsus!) had ever seen it like that before. After all, nobody in Israel had imagined a crucified Messiah. Paul has rethought the doctrine of election around the Messiah, and is now reworking Israel's vision of the future on the same basis. In doing so he has been careful precisely *not* to allow anyone to say that he has invented a new 'doctrine of election'. Verses 6–29 of chapter 9 are, as we have seen, a standard Jewish presentation, save only the intruding note about gentiles in verse 24. But the point is that 'the plan of God', in most Jewish thought, led up to the Messiah and no further. Those second-Temple Jews who believed that a Messiah would come had various overlapping ideas about what he would do. But apart from the strange vision in *4 Ezra 7*, written a generation after Paul and, more importantly, some time after the disaster of AD 70, most people simply assumed that with the Messiah God's perfect world would be ushered in, with Israel in particular rescued, vindicated, sharing his worldwide rule. So, granted that Paul believes Jesus to be the Messiah, and granted that things have not worked out at all like that, something must be said about this new and unexpected post-messianic situation. But what? To stop at the end of chapter 10, however well grounded that might have been in Isaiah and Deuteronomy, would hardly be satisfactory – especially in view of what he takes to be the situation in Rome. So Paul, out on his own, tramps off into uncharted territory, exploring what might now be said if this was truly how the covenant had been fulfilled, how Israel's election had played itself out. This is where

eschatology must be freshly envisaged in the light of the reworking, through Messiah and spirit, of monotheism and election themselves.

If the covenant and the election were to be understood on the basis of the Messiah and his death, what then? That is the question, I suggest, which dominated his mind as he explored the previously unimagined problem of an eschatology inaugurated by a crucified Messiah and not yet completed. And among the key elements of Romans 11 which have themselves not been highlighted, I mention for the moment only one: that whereas earlier in the letter Paul affirmed the role of Israel as the people called to be God's instruments in the plan of world salvation (2.17–24), so in this passage – perfectly consistently with 9.30–1! – he places *gentile Christians* in the equivalent position. What has happened to the Jews has been instrumental in their salvation; now, in turn, what is happening to them is happening for the sake of Israel (11.11–14, 30–1). This theme, pregnant with significance for the meaning of the passage as a whole, has not received the attention it deserves.

The main divisions of chapter 11, like those of its balancing chapter 9, are not particularly difficult to discern. The questions which Paul asks in verses 1 and 11 set the terms, and he appears to take a deep breath at verse 24 before plunging into verses 25–32. Within verses 11–24 many have discerned a smaller shift of direction, either at verse 17 or, as I prefer, at verse 16.⁵⁵⁵ As we have done with Romans 9–11 as a whole, starting at the centre point and working outwards, I propose to begin here too at the middle, with 11.13–15, working outwards to 11.11–12 and 11.16–24, which tell a very similar story, before adding 11.1–10. We shall then review the whole of 11.1–24 before proceeding at last, with proper awe, to the 'mystery' of 11.25–32. The reason for this is partly to be sure we are paying attention to the way Paul has written the chapter, but also to be sure that when we arrive at 25–32 we do so with as full as possible an awareness of what has been said so far.

[\(β\) The Centre: 11.13–15](#)

We begin, then, at the centre:

11.1–10

11.11–12

11.13–15

11.16–24

11.25–32

At the heart of 11.1–32, and at the climax of this central mini-section, we find the statement which most obviously echoes things that Paul has said elsewhere about the Messiah. Here is the whole central passage:

Now I am speaking to you gentiles. Insofar as I am the apostle of the gentiles, I celebrate my particular ministry, so that, if possible, I can make ‘my flesh’ jealous, and save some of them. If their casting away, you see, means reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?⁵⁵⁶

This, I suggest, is central to the appeal which Paul is making throughout the chapter. To put it in christological shorthand, relating back as Paul clearly intends to the advance statement in 9.5: if 9.6–29 expounds what it means that Israel is the Messiah’s people ‘according to the flesh’, and if 9.30—10.13 expounds what it means that God has renewed the covenant in the faith in the one who is ‘the same lord of all’ (10.12), 11.1–32 now expounds what it means that Israel is called to be part of the people of the risen Messiah, who is ‘God over all, blessed for ever’.⁵⁵⁷ If Paul has been determined to rethink Israel’s election in the light of Jesus the Messiah, it is only to be expected that he would make such a move as this as he explains what this will mean eschatologically.

We need to be clear just how striking 11.15 really is in its evocation of earlier language in Romans about Jesus and his redemptive work.⁵⁵⁸ Here we have

If their casting away means reconciliation for the world
(*ei gar hē apobolē autōn katallagē kosmou*)

What will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?
(*tis hē proslēmpsis ei mē zōē ek nekrōn*)

The last time we met language like that, it was in the triumphant christological summary in 5.10, in a similar *a fortiori* argument:

When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son
(*ei gar echthroi ontēs katēllagēmen tō theō dia tou thanatou tou hyiou autou*)
how much more, having already been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life?
(*pollō mallon katallagentes sōthēsometha en tē zōē autou*)⁵⁵⁹

Chapter 5 has a good claim to be the driving heart, not only of chapters 1—8, but of the whole epistle. We should not, in other words, be surprised at the echo. What is striking, though, is to find this christological emphasis here: if Israel has embodied the *casting away* of the Messiah, Israel will now find a way to share his *resurrection* as well.⁵⁶⁰ And the word Paul uses for the way by which they will get there is *proslēmpsis*, ‘acceptance’. Like *apobolē*, this is a general word in ‘secular’ use,⁵⁶¹ presumably because Paul does not want at the moment to commit himself to more technical language about either element of the narrative. But the overall point should be clear: in order to discern how to move forwards within the uncharted theological territory in which he finds himself, the one clear signpost is that if Israel, as the Messiah’s people, have lived through the historical equivalent of his crucifixion, being ‘cast away for the reconciliation of the world’, then we *should expect some equivalent of the resurrection*. This expectation grounds and sustains the hope held out in chapter 11. The Messiah is Israel’s representative, summing up his people in himself, so that what is true of him is true of them. That was part of the reason why Paul said what he did in 9.5. Paul has worked out, earlier in the letter, what it means that all who belong to the Messiah inherit the blessings promised to Abraham. Now he is working out what it means that the Messiah’s own people according to the flesh are just that, ‘his own people according to the flesh’. And, at the heart of this, he has *endorsed not only Israel’s election but also the purpose of that election in bringing about worldwide salvation*. This takes us back, in Romans, to 2.17–24; and, in Israel’s own scriptures, to Genesis 12 and Isaiah 49. Paul is neither denying the election of Israel as the focal point of God’s worldwide saving plan nor reducing it to a secondary place. He is interpreting it in the light of the Messiah’s death, in order to find a way forward to an equally reinterpreted eschatological hope. He is not

abandoning traditional Jewish eschatology. He is redefining it, too, around the Messiah.

He has not yet said what all this will mean. We would be rash to suppose that by *zōē ek nekrōn* he means ‘resurrection’ here in a simple sense, corresponding to 8.10–11, in other words their own future bodily resurrection. That, to be sure, might be involved. The case is often made. According to this view, there will be a large-scale conversion of Jews, perhaps of all Jews then alive (or even of all Jews who have ever lived, by some means or other), either at the time of the general resurrection or (as it would appear from the present passage) immediately prior to that event. The resurrection, in turn, as we know from 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, was expected at the time of Jesus’ final ‘appearing’ and the great cosmic renewal spoken of in Romans 8.18–26. But there are strong reasons to resist this interpretation of 11.15.

First, ‘life from the dead’ is of course what Paul describes as the effect of baptism itself. Those who are baptized are ‘dead to sin and alive to God’.⁵⁶² Since what the present passage envisages is presently unbelieving Jews joining the ‘remnant’ of which Paul himself is a part, that might well be his meaning. Such Jews, coming for baptism, would be a fresh revelation of this ‘life from the dead’.

Second, more specifically, this is the language Paul uses of himself as a Jew in his ‘dying to the law’ and ‘living to God’. This is what it meant for him, already a member of Abraham’s family according to the flesh, to come to belong to the Messiah: ‘I through the Torah died to Torah, that I might live to God; I am crucified with the Messiah – nevertheless I am alive, yet not I, but the Messiah who lives in me.’⁵⁶³

Third, again more specifically, Paul speaks of ‘life from the dead’ in Romans 4 in relation to Abraham’s promised family. In 4.17, as is often noted, he indicates that God is both the one who ‘raises the dead’ and the one who ‘calls into existence things that do not exist’. This is often taken as a reference to those who move from unbelief to faith, first the Jews (being raised from their ‘dead’ state within Abraham’s family) and then the gentiles who are, as it were, created out of nothing. Such Jews, coming

from death to life, are regular Messiah-people, not yet physically raised from the dead but brought, like Paul in the passage just mentioned, through the ‘death with the Messiah’ to a new ‘life with God’ – just as the ‘children’ promised to Abraham in Genesis 15 were ordinary children, born through the gift of life to his and Sarah’s ‘good-as-dead’ bodies (4.18–21), not children who had been born, died and then been raised from the dead in that sense.

Fourth, Paul is here, in any case, at a particular point in the spiral argument of the letter, and is talking here about a *national*, corporate, ‘casting away’ and ‘receiving back’.

It is, then, not only possible but probable that in 11.15 Paul is saying that when, in the present time, during the course of his gentile mission and as a result of the ‘jealousy’ this has aroused, more of his ‘[kinsfolk according to the] flesh’ come to believe in and confess Jesus as the risen Messiah and lord, this will be a further sign to the whole body of Messiah-people of God’s power to raise the dead, with all the excitement and celebration that would evoke. He might also mean that the arrival of more Jewish Messiah-believers would impart something of a new lease of life to the *ekklēsia*, a new dimension which a mostly gentile community would lack.

Whether some such explanation is on target, one thing is sure: verse 15 *explains* verse 14 (*gar*), and must then somehow be correlated with ‘and save some of them’. It is not meant to be a new, different or larger point. The new term *proslēmpsis* must refer back to *kai sōsō tinas ex autōn*: it is the ‘saving some of them’, in other words, that is picked up by the ‘what will their acceptance mean’. This would not of itself rule out the possibility that Paul had in mind two different (though related) events, first the steady coming-to-faith of ‘some’ Jews during the course of his own gentile ministry as a result of ‘jealousy’, and second a larger-scale conversion of Jews at the time of, or as the signal for, the general resurrection. But what he has written up to this point gives no suggestion whatever of the latter, which has to be read back into the present passage, if at all, from verses 25–7, to which we shall come later on. The high probability then seems to be that whenever one or more Jews become ‘jealous’, and turn in faith to the

God who has now revealed his covenant plan and purpose in the Messiah (10.1–13), that event ought to be understood by the church, particularly its gentile members, not as a peculiar or even unwelcome event but as another bit of ‘resurrection’, to be celebrated as such. As in 2 Corinthians 3, where Paul has to *argue* that his ministry is a revelation of ‘glory’ (which is, at first sight, bizarre; arguing that glory has been revealed is rather like arguing that the sun has risen – either you can see it or you can’t; but Paul’s point is that it is the hidden glory of God seen in the face of Jesus the suffering Messiah, and that the apparent invisibility is due to the blind eyes of the observers), so here Paul has to *argue*, against those who would see the coming-to-faith of more Jews as unnecessary and undesirable, that such an event is part of inaugurated eschatology: ‘life from the dead’, happening here and now.

When we place verse 15 into the context of verses 13 and 14, which it is designed to explain, we see more clearly what is going on. The whole of chapters 9–11 is aimed rhetorically at a gentile audience, trying to get them to see that what has happened to God’s ancient people was all along part of the divine plan, and that they themselves, so far from ‘replacing’ Israel in that plan, should count themselves fortunate to be incorporated into it.⁵⁶⁴ Now Paul makes explicit what was implicit before, and homes in on the point of the whole section:

¹³Now I am speaking to you gentiles. Insofar as I am the apostle of the gentiles, I celebrate my particular ministry, ¹⁴so that, if possible, I can make my ‘flesh’ jealous (*hina parazēlōsō mou tēn sarka*), and save some of them.⁵⁶⁵

He is talking about the *salvation* of ‘some of them’, some of the presently unbelieving Jews. This relates directly, of course, to the question he raised in his agonized prayer of 10.1: How will God *save* them? According to 10.2–13, he will do it by renewing the covenant, as foretold by Moses himself in Deuteronomy 30, a passage drawn on by other second-Temple Jews for exactly this purpose. Paul’s interpretation of it is that the covenant is renewed in and for those who confess that Jesus is lord and believe that God raised him from the dead: such people, whether Jew or gentile (10.12),

will be both ‘justified’ and ‘saved’. When therefore he speaks of ‘saving some of them’ here in 11.14, we are bound to conclude that this is what he has in mind, not because Paul is after all the apostle to the Jews as well as the gentiles (we remember, as Paul undoubtedly did, the division of labour in Galatians 2.7–9), but because his gentile ministry itself will ‘make them jealous’ and thus ‘save some of them’.⁵⁶⁶

The word ‘some’ seems to imply a small ambition. Why not all of them? Is that not what he will go on to say in 11.26? But the ‘some’ here corresponds to the realistic conclusion to 1 Corinthians 9.22: I became all things to all people, so that I might by all means save *some*. One or two manuscripts of the latter passage could not resist making Paul say what the demands of rhetoric might have suggested, ‘so that I might by all means save *all*’, *tois pasin gegona panta, hina pantōs pantas sōsō*.⁵⁶⁷ But Paul does not say that, there or here.

That is an important first comment. But two other things stand out. First, the means by which Paul will ‘save some of them’ is through their *jealousy*. This is the motif which goes back to Deuteronomy 32.21, quoted in 10.19: ‘I will make you jealous with a non-nation.’⁵⁶⁸ In other words, God will – as Moses warned! – bring in people who are not from Israel, people who will then share ‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants’ and so on, and who will thus make Israel itself realize the result of turning away from God, failing to submit to his righteousness and refusing to believe in the messianic good news. The note of ‘jealousy’, in other words, echoes back through chapter 9, in particular in 9.4–5. This is the force of what has happened throughout Romans so far: Israel’s vocation and privilege has been focused on the Messiah, and has then, ‘in him’, been given to all who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. That then drives the lament of 9.1–5. Paul has already located this initially surprising phenomenon (Jews missing out, gentiles coming in) on the map of ancient prophecy (9.30–3; 10.14–21). Now he interprets it, in this light, to mean that his own ministry among the gentiles has a deeper, secondary purpose. It is not simply about bringing gentiles into Abraham’s single, believing family. It is ‘to make my flesh jealous and so save some of them’.

It has been speculated that this ‘making my flesh jealous’ may have been part of the point of the Collection to which Paul devoted so much time and effort, and whose final stages are envisaged in 15.25–28. Perhaps he thought that, by bringing money from gentile churches to help the poor Messiah-community in Jerusalem, this would stir up ‘jealousy’ among the non-Messiah-believing Jerusalemites. That seems to me somewhat more convoluted than the programme envisaged in 11.11–14, though a connection is not impossible. Others have speculated that the proposed mission to Spain was designed with this ‘jealousy’ in mind: if people from the ends of the earth, as Spain was considered to be, were to hail Israel’s Messiah and join the community of his followers, maybe this would be the trigger for a larger-scale ‘jealousy’ and so a larger-scale ‘salvation’, and perhaps even the *parousia* itself. This has sometimes been linked with the idea of the ‘pilgrimage of the nations to Zion’, though it is striking that Paul makes virtually no use of that tradition, no doubt because he sees the whole Zion tradition itself radically redrawn around the Messiah.⁵⁶⁹ Here too I think we must be cautious, though in view of what Paul actually says in 11.13–14 we must allow that both the Collection and the planned Spanish mission, being key elements in Paul’s gentile apostolate, must have been part of what he had in mind. I suspect, though, that Paul is not only thinking of his own *future* gentile-apostleship work, but of that which he had already accomplished: ‘I magnify my ministry’ need not refer only to things still unaccomplished. It refers more naturally to things he *has* already done, as in 15.15–21:

¹⁵But I have written to you very boldly at some points, calling things to your mind through the grace which God has given me ¹⁶to enable me to be a minister of King Jesus for the nations, working in the priestly service of God’s good news, so that the offering of the nations may be acceptable, sanctified in the holy spirit.

¹⁷This is the glad confidence I have in King Jesus, and in God’s own presence. ¹⁸Far be it from me, you see, to speak about anything except what the Messiah has accomplished through me for the obedience of the nations, in word and deed, ¹⁹in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of God’s spirit. I have completed announcing the good news of the Messiah from Jerusalem round as far as Illyricum. ²⁰My driving ambition has been to announce the good news in places where

the Messiah has not been named, so that I can avoid building on anyone else's foundation.

²¹Instead, as the Bible says,

People who hadn't been told about him will see;

People who hadn't heard will understand.

It is in this light that we must read 11.15, with its promise not only of a different future for presently unbelieving Israel, but of a greater future for the gentile Messiah-people as a result:

If their casting away, you see, means reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

This makes more explicit what was hinted at in 11.12, 'how much more will their fullness mean!'. Granted, this is all still quite deliberately vague. Paul is not spreading out a detailed map of what is going to happen next; he is cautiously pointing ahead in the dark towards uncharted territory. This is how his reimagined eschatology comes about.

From all this there emerge two points of particular relevance for our present study. First, Paul has given a fresh and positive role to the newly converted gentile believers. Their very existence will be the means of making his 'flesh' jealous and bringing some of them to salvation. In other words, the gentile Messiah-people are now, themselves, *elect for the sake of others*. Israel was elect for the sake of the world; that election has been focused on the Messiah; gentile believers have come to share in the Messiah's life and identity; so now, with complete consistency though with daring innovation, Paul declares that *gentile believers* now play a role, simply by being who they are, in an entirely new and previously unimagined phase of the divine eschatological purpose. Just as Israel had to be reminded of a still-controversial point, that the ancient scriptures themselves saw their own election as being for the sake of God's saving purposes for the wider world (and that those same scriptures saw them as having failed in that elective purpose⁵⁷⁰), so gentile Christians now need to be reminded that their own status, as the new and surprising addition to God's covenant family, is not for their own sake, but so that through their very existence, now, God will confront his ancient people with the

challenge: Look, strangers are inheriting your promises; are you not jealous? We are back once more with the older brother in Luke 15.

Throughout, as in chapter 9, Paul insists that this is not a change of plan on God's part. It is the new, further, surprising, unexpected revelation of a previously unthought-of mystery – unthought-of because the question to which it was the answer, or at least *an* answer, had never been asked, could never have been asked, prior to this moment.

Second, when Paul speaks here of 'making my flesh jealous', *hina parazēlōsō mou tēn sarka*, flattened out in so many translations into 'my fellow Jews' or some such,⁵⁷¹ we should hear once again the resonances of chapter 7, filtered through 9.4 ('my brothers, my kinsfolk *kata sarka*, according to the flesh') and 9.5 ('of their race, *kata sarka*, according to the flesh, is the Messiah'). We recall the sequence of 7.5—8.11:

⁵For when we were living **in the flesh** (*hote gar ēmen en tē sarki*), the passions of sins which were through the law were at work in our limbs and organs, causing us to bear fruit for death ...

¹⁴We know, you see, that the law is spiritual. I, however, am **made of flesh** (*sarkinos eimi*), sold as a slave under sin's authority. ¹⁵I don't understand what I do. I don't do what I want, you see, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶So if I do what I don't want to do, I am agreeing that the law is good.

¹⁷But now it is no longer I that do it; it's sin, living within me. ¹⁸I know, you see, that no good thing lives in me, that is, **in my human flesh** (*en tē sarki mou*). For I can will the good, but I can't perform it. ¹⁹For I don't do the good thing I want to do, but I end up doing the evil thing I don't want to do. ²⁰So if I do what I don't want to do, it's no longer 'I' doing it; it's sin, living inside me ...

So then, left to my own self I am enslaved to God's law with my mind, but to sin's law **with my human flesh** (*tē de sarki*).

¹So, therefore, there is no condemnation for those in the Messiah, Jesus! ²Why not? Because the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus, released you from the law of sin and death.

³For God has done what the law (being weak **because of human flesh** (*dia tēs sarkos*)) was incapable of doing. God sent his own Son **in the likeness of sinful flesh** (*en tō homoiōmati tēs sarkos hamartias*), and as a sin-offering; and, right there **in the flesh** (*en tē sarki*), he condemned sin. ⁴This was in order that the right and proper verdict of the law could be fulfilled in us, as we live **not according to the flesh** (*ou kata sarka*) but according to the spirit.

⁵Look at it like this. People whose lives are **determined by human flesh** (*hoi gar kata sarka ontes*) focus their minds on **matters to do with the flesh** (*ta tēs sarkos phronousin*), but people whose lives are determined by the spirit focus their minds on matters to do with the spirit. ⁶**Focus**

the mind on the flesh (*to phronēma tēs sarkos*), and you'll die; but focus it on the spirit, and you'll have life, and peace. ⁷The mind **focused on the flesh** (*to phronēma tēs sarkos*), you see, is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law; in fact, it can't. ⁸Those who are **determined by the flesh** (*hoi de en sarki ontes*) can't please God.

⁹But you're **not people of flesh** (*hymeis de ouk este en sarki*); you're people of the spirit (if indeed God's spirit lives within you; note that anyone who doesn't have the spirit of the Messiah doesn't belong to him). ¹⁰But if the Messiah is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of covenant justice. ¹¹So, then, if the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you, the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies, too, through his spirit who lives within you.

The parallel sometimes observed between *autos egō* in 7.25 and the same phrase in 9.3 appears, after all, to be more significant than might have been imagined. ⁵⁷² Once again, Paul is not making the *identical* point in 9—11 to that which he made in chapter 7. He is not simply repeating himself in somewhat different terms. He is moving on, up to the next level of the spiral of argument, to say that what was worked out on the ground plan of chapters 7 and 8 is now being implemented one floor above. We already observed an interesting family resemblance between 9.30—10.4 and 7.7—8.4. Now we discern a further similarity, in that the problem to be addressed is highlighted in terms of 'flesh', and the solution is seen in terms of 'resurrection':

What the Torah could not do in that it was 'weak because of **the flesh**', God has done ... so you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit ... and God will give **life** to your mortal bodies through his Spirit.

... so that I may make '**my flesh**' jealous, and so save some of them; for if their casting away means life for the world, what will their acceptance be if not **life from the dead**?

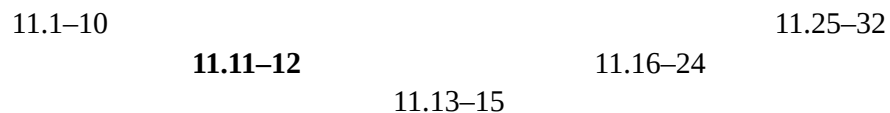
So what does Paul mean this time round? Apparently this: just as God, through the Messiah, has dealt with the problem of 'flesh', because of which the Torah produced 'sin' (chapter 7), so he has now dealt with the further problem of Israel's 'descent according to the flesh' (9.8), because of which the Torah produced the zeal for 'their own righteousness' (9.31; 10.3). Thus, just as the divine solution to the original problem resulted in

‘resurrection’ (8.9–11), so the fresh configuration leads to a fresh divine solution (11.15): a ‘resurrection’, in terms of their being ‘received back again’ (*proslēmpsis*), welcomed back into the one people of God, the single family of Abraham.

Here is Paul’s central answer to the question, What now? The template of the Messiah’s redemptive work, as set out in chapters 7 and 8 (which is itself drawing further conclusions from the earlier argument of chapters 3 and 4, not to mention the very similar material in Galatians), provides the answer to the question which had to be faced at the end of chapter 10. The Messiah himself has ‘revealed’ the ‘mystery’ of God’s plan, not only the plan that led to the messianic events of Jesus’ death and resurrection but the plan that now leads forwards, pointing into the otherwise unknown future for gentile and Jew alike. And part of the clue, again with echoes back to the end of Romans 2, is that the very existence of gentile Messiah-believers, receiving mercy from the God of Israel, has an unexpected but crucial significance in the divine purpose. This is a further sign of the eschatological redefinition of election. Those who are ‘in the Messiah’, even as gentile newcomers, are now themselves bearers of the promise and the purpose for what is still to come. This is at the heart of Paul’s reimagined eschatology.

[\(v\) 11.11–12](#)

We pull the camera back this time from 11.13–15, and consider the passages on either side. First, 11.11–12:



Here, in the sequence of thought of Paul’s actual letter (as opposed to the way we are coming at it, working outwards from the middle) we find the second key question of the chapter. If Paul asked at 11.1, in effect, whether *any* Jews at all could be saved, and gave a strong ‘yes, of course’ (see

below), he here asks whether any *more* Jews can be saved. ‘Have they tripped up in such a way as to fall completely?’ We must remind ourselves constantly (despite the shrill chorus of those who want to find here a grand statement about ‘the scope of salvation’) that Paul is not after all writing a systematic treatise, but a *letter* to a *largely gentile church* in Rome, where he strongly suspects that some are tempted to say that God has finished with the Jews, so that from now on Jesus’ people will consist of gentiles only. Paul is, in other words, *opposing* any idea of ‘replacing’ the ancient people of God with a new gentile body. The irony of much recent study of Romans 11 is that while Paul is attacking what with hindsight we may see as an early form of Marcionism, of ‘replacement’ theology, people who expound his attack on that viewpoint find themselves accused of ‘supersessionism’ or, yes, ‘replacement’ or ‘substitution’ theology.⁵⁷³ Paul’s whole point is to say, *Yes: Jews can still be saved*. If he had wanted to say, ‘Well, no, at the moment Jews can’t be saved, but they all will be at the end,’ he would have written 11.11–24 very differently, or perhaps not at all. Such a view would not have functioned as a warning against present gentile arrogance.

We spoke a moment ago of the parallels between 11.15 and Romans 5, and verse 11b offers another one. In 5.12–21 the trespass of Adam caused the problem that was then overcome by the rescue-operation of the Messiah. Here it is the ‘trespass’ of *Israel*, acting out (exactly in as in 5.20 and 7.7–12) that primordial Adamic ‘stumble’, but with remarkably different results. Here is Adam’s ‘trespass’ in chapter 5:

¹⁷For if, by the **trespass** of the one (*tō tou henos paraptōmati*), death reigned through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace, and of the gift of covenant membership, of ‘being in the right’, reign in life through the one man Jesus the Messiah.⁵⁷⁴

And then, immediately, a further explanation:

¹⁸So, then, just as, through the **trespass** of one person (*di’ henos paraptōmatos*), the result was condemnation for all people, even so, through the upright act of one person, the result is justification – life for all people.⁵⁷⁵

And then, almost at once, the placing of Torah (and hence of Israel) on this Adamic map:

²⁰The law came in alongside, so that the **trespass** might be filled out to its full extent (*hina pleonasē to paraptōma*). But where sin increased, grace also superabounded ... [576](#)

In terms of Romans 5—8, this is part of the ‘problem’: Israel, clinging to Torah for dear life (7.10), found that, through the presence of sin, the only result was death. That ‘problem’ is then addressed in 8.1–11, clearing the way for the ‘new exodus’ and ‘inheritance’ of 8.12–30.

But in terms of Romans 9—11, the *paraptōma* of Israel can now be seen in a different light. Israel’s acting out of Adam’s ‘trespass’ *has itself had redemptive consequences*, and, in addition, the next stage of Israel’s journey will have a ‘so much more’ flavour to it:

Have they tripped up in such a way as to fall completely? Certainly not! Rather, by their **trespass** (*tō autōn paraptōmati*), salvation has come to the nations, in order to make them jealous. ¹²If their **trespass** means riches for the world (*ei de to paraptōma autōn ploutos kosmou*), and their impoverishment means riches for the nations, how much more will their fullness mean! [577](#)

There is only one explanation for this, and it is the spectacular one we glimpsed when we glanced ahead to the present passage from 9.6–29. Israel’s ‘fall’ is precisely the fall of *the Messiah’s people according to the flesh*. It therefore, remarkably, shares something of the redemptive quality of the Messiah’s crucifixion. [578](#) Paul says as much in summing up the whole argument towards the close of the chapter: ‘you [gentiles] have now received mercy *through their disobedience*’ .[579](#) That, indeed, linking back to 11.11–12, is a further sign that the ‘mystery’ revealed in 11.25–6 is not a new idea, discontinuous with the rest of the chapter, but is the new idea which is being expounded all the way from 11.11 to 11.32. [580](#)

Here, moreover, is a further unexpected meaning to Paul’s representative claim in Galatians 2.19, *Christō synestaurōmai*, ‘I am crucified with the Messiah’. Nowhere else has Paul even hinted at this fuller redemptive significance of the ‘stumble’ of Israel. Now at last we see where his sharp-edged, and often controversial, ‘doctrine of election’ in Romans 9 was

going. This was never an abstract ‘doctrine of predestination’, attempting to plumb the mysteries of why some people (in general, without reference to Israel) hear and believe the gospel and others do not. Paul never encourages speculation of that sort. Rather, it was a way of saying, very specifically, that the fact of Israel’s election (starting with the choice and call of Abraham) had always been there to deal with the sin of the world; that Israel’s election had always involved Israel being narrowed down, not just to Isaac and then to Jacob, but to a *hypoleimma*, a ‘remnant’, a ‘seed’; and that this ‘remnant’ itself would be narrowed down to a single point, to the Messiah himself, *who would himself be ‘cast away’ so that the world might be redeemed*. The point of ‘election’ was not to choose or call a people who would somehow mysteriously escape either the grim entail of Adam’s sin or the results it brought in its train. It was not – as in some low-grade proposals! – about God simply choosing a people to be his close friends. The point was to choose and call a people through whom the sin of humankind, and its results for the whole creation, might be brought to the point where that sin, and those results, could at last be defeated, condemned, overcome. Hence the line that runs, in Romans, from 3.24–6 to 8.3–4 and on to 10.3–4, backed up by the summaries in 5.6–11 and 5.12–21. Here is the faithfulness of the Messiah, which discloses, unveils, *apocalypticizes*, the righteousness of God, God’s covenant faithfulness.

Where has this brought us? Deuteronomy 32, a vital passage for Paul not least in Romans, spoke of God’s ‘degenerate children’ as having ‘dealt falsely with him’.⁵⁸¹ What Paul has shown, through the long-range outworking of the Messiah’s death and resurrection, is that *even that falsehood has redounded to God’s glory and the work of salvation*. This is not something other than what he was saying in 3.2–3. The Israelites were ‘entrusted’ with God’s oracles, but if some proved unfaithful, that cannot nullify God’s faithfulness, for God will be true even if every human is false. In other words, God will work *through Israel* for the salvation of the world, even though Israel as a whole will turn away. What’s more, indeed, God will work *through Israel’s large-scale turning away* for the salvation of the world! This, Paul is saying, is what has now been accomplished. The

glimpses of chapters 9—11 which could be seen in the questions of 3.1–9 have finally yielded up their secrets. Only when Romans is understood as a tightly composed symphonic whole can its various parts be understood.

For Paul, therefore, this is the key to, and the guarantee of, a further turn in the road, a new possibility, the possibility and indeed the promise that Israel has not after all ‘stumbled so as to fall’. The disbelief, the rejection of the Messiah, the failure to acknowledge and submit to ‘God’s righteousness’ in the electing purpose from Abraham onwards and all the way to the Messiah, and even the futile attempts of some of Paul’s contemporaries to stand in the way of the gentile mission – all this has in fact turned out for ‘the salvation of the nations’. Their ‘trespass’, he repeats with a different metaphor, has meant ‘riches for the world’ and their loss (*hēttēma*) has meant ‘riches for the nations’.⁵⁸² What then will their *plērōma* mean?

As with *apobolē* and *proslēmpsis* in 11.15, so with *plērōma* here in 11.12: it is not at all clear what exactly Paul has in mind, and he probably intended it that way. Eschatology, even messianically revised eschatology, is all about peering ahead into the darkness, believing in certain clear fixed points but not being able to say what exactly will happen next. He is not going to make any predictions about whether God will save a myriad of his presently unbelieving fellow Israelites, or somewhat less; only (a) that he will save ‘some’, in other words considerably more than at present, (b) that this will count as a ‘fullness’, *plērōma*, and (c) that this will be the full extension of the small but growing ‘remnant’ of which he, Paul, is himself a part. But here, though this is not so often noticed, Paul hints at something else, something beyond even the *plērōma* or the *proslēmpsis* of his kinsfolk according to the flesh: there will be a ‘how much more’ in terms of benefits for the gentiles as well. Just as the Messiah’s death won great blessings, but his resurrection even more so (5.10), so if Israel’s ‘diminution’ has brought blessings to the world, their ‘fullness’ will mean something more, something Paul does not name except in the language of resurrection (11.15), which as we have seen itself remains, perhaps deliberately, ambiguous if evocative.

It thus appears that 11.12 draws together *both* the ‘Adamic’ parallel, whereby Israel acts out Adam’s trespass, *and* the christological one, whereby Israel acts out the Messiah’s death and resurrection. This, I suggest, contains Paul’s basic answer to the new eschatological question that he faces in Romans 11. It fits exactly with the rhetorical thrust of the whole section, aimed at potentially cynical or even ‘anti-Jewish’ gentile Messiah-believers in Rome. The call of gentiles now places those ex-pagan believers into a position, not of easy-going privilege, but of awesome responsibility. As with ‘the Jew’ in 2.17, they are the ones through whom God will now accomplish his remaining purposes. They are not there for their own sake, but so that God may work through them. This is part of the call to humility which emerges in 11.17–24, arguably the rhetorical climax of the chapter.

Paul’s reference to Israel’s *paraptōma* ties in with yet another theme from chapter 9. At the end of that chapter, as Paul is summing up the results of the strange election-narrative, he refers back to the well-known Isaianic passage about the stumbling stone:

They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,³³ as the Bible says,
Look: I am placing in Zion a stone that will make people stumble,

a rock that will trip people up;
and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.⁵⁸³

As we noted before, the ‘stone’ seems to have converging interpretations: *both* Torah *and* Messiah. But the point now is the *divine purpose* in the ‘stumbling’. Here, at the end of the long account of the strange and apparently negative election – election in order to be pared down to the bone – we find a statement which emerges on the other side of the central account of the Messiah and the new covenant (10.1–13) in terms of the *divinely intended stumble* of Israel. Thus when Paul sums up Israel’s failure in 11.11 with the words ‘through their tripping up (*paraptōma*)’ we can see where his line of thought in chapter 9 was heading. The word *paraptōma* came to have the technical sense of ‘trespass’, ‘wrongdoing’, as in classical Greek it had the metaphorical sense of ‘blunder’, ‘going off course’. But its basic sense of ‘false step’, ‘slip’, ‘stumble’ could easily be recalled.⁵⁸⁴

If there is a *felix culpa* theology in the New Testament, it is perhaps at this point. Not the sin of Adam, about which there was nothing *felix*, not even in the long prospect of ‘such a great redeemer’. If I have understood Paul, he would have said that the one who was from all eternity ‘equal with God’, the ‘image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation’, would have appeared anyway ‘when the time had fully come’, not then to redeem, but to rule gloriously over the completed creation.⁵⁸⁵ However, granted the sin of humankind and the consequent corruption and decay of creation, the creator God called Abraham and his family so that through them the problem could be dealt with, *so that he might himself deal with the problem by coming as Abraham’s seed, coming in person as Israel’s representative Messiah*. And Paul’s point throughout chapters 9—11 is that this divine redeeming action, for which Israel’s election was the necessary means, both in the original choice and in the outworking, down to the remnant, casts its light around it, so that the history of the redemption-bearing people is also redemptive, even though it is the Messiah, not Israel, in whose flesh ‘sin is condemned’ (8.3). If there is such a thing as *Heilsgeschichte*, it is only because at its heart it is *Verdammungsgeschichte*, the story of how the condemnation of the world was borne by Israel’s Messiah, so that the world could be rescued. If there is

a salvation history, it is only because the radically new thing that God did in the middle of history gives, at last, the meaning which that history would otherwise lack. The laying of the ‘stumbling stone’ in Israel, then, was itself part of the plan that the world might be redeemed precisely through Israel’s ‘casting away’. Paul, as so often, is here advancing the argument of 11.11–24 by invoking a theme he had mentioned earlier.

[\(8\) 11.16–24](#)

All this brings us back to the main thrust of Romans 11. Having begun with the central verse 15 (with its contextualizing introduction, 11.13–14), and having then looked back at 11.11–12, we now come to the passage which immediately follows:

11.1–10			11.25–32
	11.11–12	11.16–24	
		11.13–15	

Here we have the much discussed ‘olive tree’ picture (11.16b–24), introduced by a different metaphor: the first-fruits and the whole lump (11.16a):

If the first fruits are holy, so is the whole lump;
If the root is holy, so are the branches.

Much ink has been spilt on the precise referent of Paul’s two metaphors here, though part of the point of using picture-language is after all to be evocative and not mathematically precise. Does the ‘first fruits’ refer to the Messiah, risen from the dead, as in 1 Corinthians 15.20? Would the point then be that the Messiah, being himself a Jew, is the start of the ‘remnant’ of which Paul speaks in 11.1–6? Or does it refer to the remnant itself, the comparatively small group which, based on grace (11.6), has no reason not to get much bigger? Perhaps he means both. And as for the ‘root’ and the ‘branches’: since he says ‘root’ and not ‘tree’ (that comes later), does he mean Abraham? Or God? Or, again, the Messiah? Or the remnant?⁵⁸⁶

Fortunately for our purposes a decision on these much-debated issues is not necessary – though the ‘olive tree’ image does provide some clarity, since the ‘remnant’ would seem to be Jewish branches that, by grace (11.5–6), find themselves in the ‘tree’, and can hardly therefore be the root itself. Paul’s thrust in both images is actually clear: the ‘lump’ and the (currently broken off) ‘branches’ are both ways of speaking of presently ‘unbelieving’ or ‘hardened’ (11.7) Jews, and of insisting in both cases that such people are ‘holy’ – not in the sense that they are already ‘sanctified’ in the full sense,⁵⁸⁷ but in the sense of 1 Corinthians 7.14, where both an unbelieving spouse, and the children from such a mixed marriage, are ‘holy’.⁵⁸⁸ It is possible, and seems to me now likely, that in the two metaphors of verse 16 he arrives at the same conclusion by a different path, with the ‘first fruits’ being the ‘remnant’ as in 11.1–7 (with the Messiah not far away, but not foregrounded) and the ‘root’ being the patriarchs (to whom God had made the promises which remain the source of nourishment for gentile Christians as well as Jews, as in Romans 4).⁵⁸⁹ The main difference between the images, though, is that the picture of the olive tree allows more metaphorical and even allegorical development: the ‘tree’ itself is the important thing, with some branches being broken off and others being grafted in. The main aim, throughout the entire section, is to say, ‘Don’t boast over the branches’ (verse 18); ‘Don’t get big ideas about it’ (verse 20); ‘You mustn’t ... think too much of yourselves’ (verse 25). Jews who are at present unbelieving are still part of the people ‘according to the flesh’ to whom the creator God made great and unbreakable promises. They are to be respected, and gentiles who have come to believe in the Jewish Messiah have no business to act superior to them. God is not finished with them; they have not been ‘replaced’ or ‘disinherited’ or ‘substituted’. *God has already brought plenty of them to faith in their own Messiah; we can now understand the reasons why they were ‘hardened’ in the first place; so God will undoubtedly want to bring plenty more to faith, too.* That is the emphasis of the ‘olive tree’ picture.⁵⁹⁰

The analogy with the unbelieving spouse is instructive. Paul is *not* saying that presently unbelieving Jews are, or will be, necessarily saved, any more

than he was saying in 1 Corinthians that an unbelieving spouse, however much ‘sanctified’ by the believing one, was automatically saved. If he had believed that about his fellow (but unbelieving) Jews, he could have saved himself a lot of heartache: 9.1–5 would be beside the point, and the exposition of ‘salvation’ in 10.2–13, in answer to the prayer of 10.1, would be irrelevant. His point is not ‘so they are automatically saved’. His point, here and throughout the section, is that they are not automatically *not* saved. That is the rhetorical thrust of the entire chapter, and in a measure of the whole of chapters 9–11.

Paul, after all, knew what the atmosphere in Rome would be like. He had lived and worked in pagan cities for most of his life, as a hard-line young Jew in Tarsus and later as a travelling missionary for the Messiah. He knew, few better, what gentiles thought about Jews. He knew that a largely gentile church would need little encouragement to turn its nose up at the synagogue down the street, especially if the Jews had earlier been banished from town and had only recently been allowed back.⁵⁹¹ Once again we insist: he was not writing a treatise on soteriology, however much earnest expositors in older traditions try to turn Romans 1–4 into such a thing, and however much earnest expositors in newer traditions try to turn Romans 11 into such a thing. He was writing a letter: aware of a likely problem, and doing his best to nip it in the bud.

He therefore builds up his argument carefully. Having established that there was indeed a remnant of believing Jews (11.1–6), he has now said, vaguely but evocatively, that since we can glimpse, through a christological lens, the reason for what God has done, we can also expect a similarly christologically shaped ‘fullness’, a ‘receiving back’, a glorious future in which many more Jews will be ‘saved’, so that it will be like ‘life from the dead’ (11.11–15). All this, though exciting and evocative, is I think deliberately vague and arm-waving.⁵⁹² He is deliberately not saying precisely what this ‘fullness’ will look like. His aim is simply ‘to save some’. But the ‘olive tree’ picture is a way of moving from these generalizations to very specific instructions. That is why verse 16 is linked with a *de* rather than a *gar*: it is not a further explanation of what has just

been said, but a conclusion now to be drawn from it. God, he now says, is certainly capable of grafting ‘broken branches’ – Jews at present ‘in unbelief’ (11.23) – back into the ‘tree’ which is after all their own native plant. Indeed, this is a far more ‘natural’ thing for God to do, he says, than his grafting in of you gentiles! So do not indulge in a kind of theological inverted snobbery, imitating the ‘boasting’ of 2.17–20 which was ruled out at 3.27.

So what is the ‘olive tree’? It is, of course, a metaphor for Israel itself. Israel as an olive tree is a familiar biblical image, often in a positive and attractive sense.⁵⁹³ The whole point of the image is that there is – just as in Galatians 3! – a *single* family; a family rooted in the patriarchs and the promises God made to them; a family from which, strangely, many ‘natural branches’ have been broken off, but into which many ‘unnatural branches’ have been grafted.⁵⁹⁴ This is the family Paul has been talking about, on and off, throughout the letter, not least in chapter 4. This is the people into which some gentiles have surprisingly been brought and from which some Jews have, equally surprisingly, opted out, as in 9.30—10.13. There ought to be no further question about this: Paul is talking about the ancient people of God, now radically reconfigured around the Messiah. As one of America’s scholarly elder statesmen put it in a recent commentary,

Clear, of course, is Paul’s insistence that by faith Christian gentiles are *incorporated into Israel* ... Paul probably understands the gentiles ‘coming in’ [as in 11.25] as their entering the people of God ... As Paul sees it, gentiles abandon their religion when they accept the gospel (1 Thess 1:9–10), but observant Jews who accept it do not change religions but reconfigure the religion they already have. Together both groups constitute something new, a new ‘people’ united by a shared conviction about the Christ-event as God’s eschatological act.⁵⁹⁵

‘Incorporated into Israel’: yes, precisely. There are not two ‘peoples of God’, one for gentiles to be incorporated into and one for Jews to remain within. The ‘olive tree’ can mean nothing else; and that should alert us as to the way the whole chapter is running.⁵⁹⁶ An even older statesman put it like this:

From what have the unbelieving Jews been cut off? It cannot be that they have been cut off from the Jewish people considered as an ethnic entity: they are still Jews. The branches broken off ... , then, are those Jews, and they are the majority, *who have refused to be part of the true Israel*, the remnant

that has believed in Christ. The olive in 11:17 stands for the community of Christian believers, the Church, at first composed of Jewish Christians of the root of Abraham ... through their acceptance of the gospel the gentiles have been engrafted into the people of God, the olive tree. And this olive tree ... is continuous with the root of Abraham ...⁵⁹⁷

Keck and Davies do not appear to be saying exactly the same thing. Keck sees believing gentiles as being incorporated into 'Israel'; Davies appears to restrict the phrase 'true Israel' to the believing Jewish remnant, though he like Keck sees the olive as a single tree into which the believing gentiles have been grafted. Jewett has yet a third angle of vision on the same reality:

... the basis for acknowledging the continued priority of Israel is that it provided the vehicle by which the holy, righteous community of the church came into the world ... Israel is the root and a Gentile believer is the branch.⁵⁹⁸

Does a gentile believer then become part of 'Israel'? If not, in what sense is he or she a branch now belonging to that root?⁵⁹⁹

All this amounts to the same overall point, which is very similar to that of Galatians 3. Abraham has one family, in which all believers share. The difference between the two epistles is this. In Galatians Paul is warning gentile believers that they must not try to become physically, ethnically, Jews. To do so would undermine that single family by insisting on an ethnic basis. In Romans he is warning gentile believers that they must not imagine that God cannot and will not bring more and more Jews back into what is, after all, their own proper family. That, too, would be to insist on an ethnic basis, only now a non-Jewish one rather than a Jewish one.

The question then, picking up Keck's way of putting it, is this: what does it mean to 'accept the gospel', and to 'reconfigure the religion they already have'? Paul has already answered those questions in Romans 3.21—4.25 and 10.1—13. Here he simply summarizes it: 'if they do not remain in unbelief, they will be grafted back in' (11.23).

Paul's use of this picture is relatively clear. But we should not miss the overtones of some of the biblical passages that stand behind the 'olive tree' picture, and one in particular. Jeremiah 11 resonates closely with Paul's meaning in certain respects. It is worth glancing at its key elements:

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH: Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. You shall say to them, ‘Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt ...’

And YHWH said to me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.⁶⁰⁰

This seems to be a clear echo of the covenantal threats in Deuteronomy 27—9. Indeed, Jeremiah 11.3 is more or less a quotation of Deuteronomy 27.26, which Paul himself uses in Galatians 3.10. When Jeremiah then says ‘so I brought upon them all the words of this covenant’, this indicates clearly that Jeremiah supposes that the curses of Deuteronomy have now fallen on the people – as Paul himself strongly implies both in Galatians and (by his use of Deuteronomy 29, 30 and 32) in the present section. The prophet then receives and passes on a long catalogue of Israel’s misdemeanours, whereupon YHWH warns Jeremiah against even praying for the people any more, because he has no intention of listening.⁶⁰¹ (That, of course, resonates faintly but poignantly with Paul’s mention of prayer in 9.3 and 10.1.) Then comes the devastating oracle, referring back to those earlier, happier days for the olive tree:

YHWH once called you, ‘A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit’; but with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed. YHWH of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done ...⁶⁰²

The prophet then finds himself ‘like a lamb led to the slaughter’, discovering that the people have been saying something similar about him:

I did not know that it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!’⁶⁰³

But he continues, none the less, with his work of uttering devastating oracles.⁶⁰⁴

Paul's use of the 'olive tree' picture appears to pick up where Jeremiah's leaves off. Jeremiah had the tempest ripping off branches and consuming them. But Paul, who like Jeremiah has been following the covenantal narrative of Deuteronomy, has a further word to speak. Yes, branches have been broken off, and other things have followed, but this is not the end of the story:

¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you – a *wild* olive tree! – were grafted in among them, and came to share in the root of the olive with its rich sap, ¹⁸don't boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember this: it isn't you that supports the root, but the root that supports you.

¹⁹I know what you'll say next: 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.'

²⁰That's all very well. They were broken off because of unbelief – but you stand firm by faith.

Don't get big ideas about it; instead, be afraid. ²¹After all, if God didn't spare the natural branches, there's a strong possibility he won't spare you.

²²Note carefully, then, that God is both kind and severe. He is severe to those who have fallen, but he is kind to you, provided you continue in his kindness – otherwise you too will be cut off.

²³And they, too, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted back in. God is able, you see, to graft them back in. ²⁴For if you were cut out of what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will they, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.⁶⁰⁵

This famous passage has caused much discussion, but it is not really as complex as it has sometimes appeared. Two preliminary points may help.

First, Paul is just as much aware as modern commentators, perhaps more, that the process he is describing is 'contrary to nature'.⁶⁰⁶ He may have been a town- and city-dweller rather than a countryman, but he knows perfectly well that the normal practice is to graft a cultivated shoot on to a wild stock, rather than the other way round, so that the energy of the wild stock will be channelled into the fruit-bearing cultivated stock. He deliberately describes the process outlined here as *para physin*, 'against nature' (verse 24). He is, after all, inching his way forwards into new territory. In the nature of the case, from his point of view at least, God has never done anything like this before.

Second, we do not need to be certain what situation Paul envisaged in Rome in order to understand what he is saying here. Enough to know, as we said before, that the normal Roman view of the Jews was disdainful or dismissive at best and angrily prejudiced at worst.⁶⁰⁷ What is more, if Paul did indeed have a sense that the situation in the middle east was getting worse, as we suggested when looking at 1 Thessalonians 2, it will have been important to address this head on in case people in Rome, including gentile Messiah-followers, should begin to think of ‘the Jews’ in a still more negative way. But the urgent appeal he launches throughout this passage clearly indicates his belief that gentile Messiah-believers in Rome are already being tempted to suppose that ‘the Jews’ have been cut off for good. Perhaps some had even been quoting Jeremiah (a piece of shameless and unproveable mirror-reading; if others can guess what texts Paul’s opponents had been quoting, why shouldn’t I, just this once?). There you are, they were perhaps saying, those unbelieving Jews have broken the covenant, they have been cut off for ever. The tree is being destroyed with its fruit. Paul, happy as ever to pick up a scriptural challenge, will come back presently to the question of the covenant, and show what Jeremiah and others did with it.⁶⁰⁸ First, though, he develops the picture of the olive tree in his own way, to devastating effect.

This moves in three steps. If we take it slowly we will see what he has in mind.

To begin with, the present situation and the danger of misinterpreting it (11.17–18). Branches have been broken off, and gentiles, wild olive shoots,⁶⁰⁹ have been grafted in among the remaining ones,⁶¹⁰ ‘sharing the root of the olive with its rich sap’. That highlighting of the benefit of being grafted in, and of the goodness which is still in the original olive itself, shows the direction of Paul’s argument. Sure enough, he proceeds with a warning against the danger of forgetting just this, and of ignoring the relationship they have to the olive. ‘Don’t boast: or, if you do, remember that the root is supporting you, not the other way around.’

So far, so good. As in Galatians, the gentile Messiah-believers have come to belong to the tree which is Abraham’s family. This would make no sense

unless Paul, here as elsewhere, is narrating the gentile believers into the story of Israel. They are part of that single family: neither the beginning of a new family in which Jews are not welcome (as Paul is afraid some Roman Messiah-followers may think); nor even a brand new family into which a few of Abraham's old family happen to have been included; but *the same family* which began with Abraham. Here is a challenge for the various large narratives which have been superimposed on Paul in recent years: so-called 'apocalyptic', for instance, which envisages God sweeping away all that had gone before and starting something totally new. What Paul says here is totally consistent with the revised election we studied throughout chapter 10 above – and, more important, fully in line with all the relevant passages earlier in Romans, such as 2.25–9, 3.21–4.25 and not least the great narrative of redemption in chapters 6–8.

Second, then, he explores the possible objection that 'the (new) branches' might raise to what he is saying, and explains, revealingly, why that objection would be ill-founded (11.19–21). 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in': in other words, God's purpose was to include gentiles, and those other branches have been broken off as though to make room for the new ones. That, taken as it stands without Paul's further serious modification, might be seen as the beginning of a real 'supersession', not indeed of 'Jews' by 'gentiles' but of 'Jews' by 'gentile Christians'; and it would leave the gentile Messiah-followers still as it were in the driving seat. They would constitute the new reality, the leading edge of the movement. Paul accepts the premise, that branches have indeed been broken off and others grafted in, and that there may even have been some causal connection between these two events. That, after all, is what he was saying in 11.11–15: by their trespass, salvation has come to the nations. But his acceptance of this, for the sake of argument as it were (*kalōs*; 'all right: put it like that if you want'⁶¹¹), allows him to point up *how and why* this has happened, and to pose the challenge which removes any sense of new-found superiority. 'They were broken off *because of unbelief* (*tē apistia*), but you stand firm *by faith* (*tē pistei*).' This is a critical addition to the argument. Commentators may have forgotten what Paul said in 10.6–13, but Paul himself has not. The

whole problem of Romans 9—11 arises simply because ‘the natural branches’, or many of them, have not ‘had faith’, have not believed in Jesus’ resurrection and lordship (10.6–13).⁶¹² But this means that the Roman church needs to be warned, in the rather strong terms of verses 20–1: Don’t get big ideas about all this; instead, be afraid. God is quite capable of applying the same treatment to you as he did to the ‘natural branches’. Paul seems to be addressing, not individuals, but the whole church in Rome: if you substitute boasting for faith, replacing an identity found only in the Messiah with an ethnic ‘identity’ of your own, you too will be cut off (11.22).⁶¹³

Third, then, ‘the kindness and severity of God’ (11.22–4). Here Paul has come back to the foundation of his discourse, which is not about branches, nor about nations and peoples, but primarily about God. He will not take this discussion forward except in those terms, and with those terms he will evoke the entire train of thought from the start of the letter. In particular, as with 2.4–5 and 9.21–2,⁶¹⁴ he is grappling with the issue of God’s patience, and the situation that results when people either do or do not make appropriate use of the breathing space created by the divine forbearance. He has already said, in one of those earlier passages, that God’s ‘kindness’ is meant to lead to repentance (2.4b). Now he says that it is meant to lead to *faith*. Branches were broken off because of unbelief; but you, he says, stand fast through faith (11.20). That is why, as we just saw, gentile Messiah-people must ‘remain in his kindness, otherwise you too will be cut off’, while ‘they’ (presently unbelieving Jews), ‘if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted back in’.

This is the key point: *if they do not remain in unbelief*. Paul is not talking, and has never been talking, about a ‘grafting back in’ which can be accomplished by a route other than the faith he was so careful to spell out in 10.6–11.⁶¹⁵ There is less of a fashion now for postulating a *Sonderweg*, an ‘alternative route’ to salvation which bypasses what Paul calls ‘faith’ (always linked directly to the revelation of God in the gospel of Jesus). Paul is clear, as he has been all along. ‘All who call upon the name of the Lord

will be saved,’ and what that means has been stated unambiguously in chapter 10.

He adds a note (verse 24) to the effect that this will pose no horticultural problems. The tree is already thoroughly miraculous, and God can do yet more. But this allows him to finish the section with the message he wants the Roman church to hear above all else: ‘how much more will they ... be grafted back into their own olive tree’.

Both halves of this are important. On the one hand, the ‘how much more’, echoing the similar, albeit deliberately imprecise, statement in 11.12: it will be much easier for God to bring Jews back in than it was to bring gentiles in from the outside. Any suggestion that it is now difficult for God to do anything further with Jewish people must therefore be thrown out from the start. On the other hand, it is *their own olive tree, tē idia elaia*. Paul knew that the standing temptation for gentile Messiah-believers would be to regard the ‘tree’, which one must think of as in some sense ‘the people of Abraham defined around the Messiah’, as now somehow *their own*, instead of the natural property of Abraham’s physical descendants. Not so, he says: it is ‘their own’. He has come back to where he started: ‘They are Israelites, and *theirs* are the sonship, the glory’ and so on. The *hōn*, ‘theirs’, in 9.4 corresponds directly to *tē idia elaia*, ‘their own olive tree’, in 11.24. This is the truth of which a zealous snatching at ‘their own righteousness’ (*tēn idian dikaiosynēn*, 10.3) was a distorted parody. This is what Paul wants gentile Messiah-followers in Rome to grasp. The ‘tree’ into which they have been grafted remains Israel’s, the single ‘tree’ of Abraham and his seed. Israel’s covenant narrative, however much it has had to be retold in biblically dark tones as in 9.6–29, remains the divinely intended, and never rescinded, plan of salvation. That was the point of 3.1–9, and it is the point of 11.16–24 as well.

Without going very far down the route of mirror-reading or guessing as to historical context, and indeed without getting into needless complexity, I think we can see what Paul has in mind. Indeed, since this is more or less the rhetorical climax of the letter, coming as it does at the strategic moment within the third of the four great sections, we can now see what he has in

mind in Romans as a whole. He is facing, more or less, the opposite problem to the one he had faced in Galatia. There, ex-pagan Messiah-believers were being pushed towards getting circumcised and becoming ‘children of Abraham according to the flesh’. Here, Paul has a shrewd suspicion that in Rome he will find ex-pagan Messiah-believers whose local culture is pushing them towards a view of Judaism, and of the unbelieving Jews who embody it, as beyond the pale, possessing as it were a tangential relationship to Jesus but having turned aside from him, and leaving the way clear for this new movement, apart from its earliest members, to consist of gentiles only.⁶¹⁶ That was, more or less, what Marcion taught in Rome, within a hundred years of this letter. It was a popular message. Paul did not need special prophetic gifts to see the danger just a little way down the road.

This question is so different from those that have haunted Christian–Jewish discussions for at least the last seventy years in the western world that it is easy now to miss what Paul is saying.⁶¹⁷ The key question is not, Are the various religions equally valid ways to a distant deity? Nor is it, How can Christians affirm the ‘civil rights’ of Jewish people in the Post-holocaust world? The question Paul addresses follows on from the apparent failure of Israel described in 9.30—10.13. It comes, as we saw, in two stages: first (11.1–10), can any Jews at all be saved? and second, as in 11.11–24, can any *more* Jews be saved? ‘Salvation’ here, exactly as set out in 10.1–13, is correlated with the Messiah, and with the faith that believes his resurrection. In our own day, one runs the risk of being stigmatized as anti-Jewish if one even suggests that Jesus was and still is Israel’s Messiah, who still longs for his own ‘flesh’ to accept him as such. For Paul – the irony would not be lost on him if he could listen in to our late-modern, postmodern or even postliberal debates – the real anti-Jewish position would be the opposite: the suggestion that the messianic death and resurrection of Jesus, and his worldwide rule as *kyrios*, should be seen as a fine religious option for gentiles but off limits for Jews; the suggestion, in other words, that Jews are ‘all right as they are’, and should not under any circumstances be presented with the ancient messianic claim that Jesus’ followers made, and

still make, on the basis of nothing more nor less than his resurrection from the dead.

The olive tree picture militates against the idea that Paul is here speaking of a large-scale or last-minute re-entry of Jews by a kind of automatic divine fiat. First, he insists (11.23) that such re-entry will be for those ‘who do not remain in unbelief’, which relates directly to 10.6–13. Many, if not most these days, have tried to align this to the *parousia*.⁶¹⁸ This appears to avoid the suggestion of a *Sonderweg* for Israel, because the Israel that is to be saved in the end will thereby no longer ‘remain in unbelief’, but accept Jesus as Messiah when he is revealed to them. But it also avoids the currently unwelcome idea, which is nevertheless precisely what Paul says in 11.11–15, that the gentile mission itself will make Jews ‘jealous’ and so save some of them *in the present time*. But this postponement of the ‘grafting back in’ to the *parousia* hardly fits with the point Paul is eager to ram home throughout the chapter. Such a postponement would not relate to his specific warning to the gentile Christians in Rome. He introduces this warning as it were eyeball to eyeball in 11.13, and engages sharply with objections through the rhetorical second person singular in 11.17–24. The latter passage is focused on 11.18: ‘Don’t boast.’ And this relates directly to the opening of the following passage, to which we will presently turn: ‘You mustn’t get the wrong idea and think too much of yourselves.’ If this is the point Paul wishes to get across in 11.1–24 – that gentile Christians must realize that God can and will re-graft presently unbelieving Jews into the ‘olive tree’ by means of bringing them to faith (11.23) – then it makes no sense for him suddenly to say, in effect, that in point of fact no Jews will come to faith until the *parousia*. How would that support his warning and exhortation? It would allow Christian gentiles in Rome to shrug their shoulders, to turn their backs on Jews for the present – which is the very opposite of what Paul is so eager to stress.⁶¹⁹

Of course, if we approach Romans 9–11 as though it is primarily a treatise either about soteriology or about theodicy, we may easily be led into thinking that Paul is now saying ‘all will be saved’ (or at least ‘all Jews will be saved’), on the one hand, or ‘God will do the decent thing in the end’ on

the other. But if Paul is writing a *specific letter*, into this *specific situation*, it is vital that he should be talking, not about some sudden future event, but about the sort of things he mentioned in 11.14 (‘and save some of them’), and about the consequent imperative (‘don’t boast’). And those relate, not to some postponed last-minute rescue, but to his own continuing ministry. He is, after all, seeking support for his Spanish mission, and his explanation for his apostolic practice in 10.14–17 and here as well must be read as part of his description of the kind of mission he is hoping the Roman church will unite in affirming.

What then about ‘the Deliverer coming from Zion’ in 11.26? We shall come to that presently. First, though, we need to look back to the opening of chapter 11. Here Paul sets out some of the key categories in terms of which he will then make his emphatic final statement.

[\(ε\) 11.1–10](#)

We return, then, to the beginning of the chapter:

11.1–10

11.11–12

11.13–15

11.16–24

11.25–32

The start of chapter 11, as we have suggested, is the point at which Paul is out on his own. If the prophecies of Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 65 have come so worryingly true, as at the end of chapter 10, what is to happen next? Can it be – as a cursory reading of 9.30–3 and its balancing 10.18–21 might suggest – that God’s elective purposes have now simply switched from Abraham’s physical family to a gentile-only family defined by Messiah-faith?

If this is a new question, Paul is determined to answer it as far as possible by reference to lines of thought, and not least biblical exposition, which he has already established. It is important to track the close links and echoes between this opening paragraph and the whole of 9.6—10.21. Though this is new territory, the way forward into it is not to forget all that has gone before

and to try something new, but to build on the strength of what has already been said.

The answer to the question, whether God has forsaken his people, is, ‘Of course not’ – and the argument of chapter 9 has in fact already made this clear, in the crucial verse 9.24: ‘us whom he called, not only from Jews but also from gentiles’. *Not only from Jews*: in other words, certainly from Jews! This already shows that the ‘Israel’ that in 9.31 ‘pursued the law of righteousness but did not attain to that law’, was already a *subset* of Abraham’s physical family. It denotes ‘the majority of Jews’, ‘Israel as a whole’, but with key exceptions, namely, those who have believed, who have ‘submitted to God’s righteousness’ and so, surprisingly, have ‘attained to Torah’ in the sense then clarified in 10.6–13. That is why there were two ‘Israels’ in 9.6b. So here in 11.1–6, the first part of this first sub-section, Paul insists that he himself is the obvious exception to any suggestion that ‘God has rejected his people’. Echoing 1 Samuel 12.22, where the choice of the Benjaminite Saul as king reflected the fact that YHWH had not forsaken his people, so the calling of Saul of Tarsus can be advanced to the same end.⁶²⁰ Paul is thus not simply a one-off, random example of the fact that Israel as a whole has not been cut off; his own case provides scriptural resonances which reinforce the point.⁶²¹ Paul is himself an ‘Israelite’, the word used already in 9.4, and now resonating also with the second ‘Israel’ meaning in 9.6b.⁶²²

The explanation he offers is rooted in the later narratives of the monarchy: there is a ‘remnant’. More autobiographical hints emerge: there is excellent reason to suppose that Saul of Tarsus had modelled himself on Elijah and/or Phinehas, the great exemplars of ‘zeal’, and that what had happened on the Damascus Road had sent him off to complain to Israel’s God that everything had gone horribly wrong, much as Elijah had gone off to complain to God about Ahab’s threats following the victory over the prophets of Baal.⁶²³ And the answer to Elijah is the answer to Saul of Tarsus, now becoming Paul the Apostle: there is still a remnant, a *leimma*. That, picking up the *hypoleimma* of 9.27,⁶²⁴ is Paul’s summary word to refer to God’s statement that he has ‘left for himself (*katelipon emautō*) seven thousand’, which in turn was the

answer to Elijah's overstated claim that he was 'left alone' (*kagō hypeleiphthēn monos*). The idea of the 'remnant' is thus rooted not only in written prophecy, but in the narrative of Israel. Elijah, the prophet of 'zeal',⁶²⁵ is firmly told that God has provided a loyal remnant.

Yes, says Paul, and it is the same in the present time. Not all of 'Israel' have been disobedient and contrary: some have believed and confessed.⁶²⁶ But this is '*according to the election of grace*'; that is the vital interpretative addition to the story. The first place Paul will find to stand, from which he can move cautiously forward into unexplored territory, is the place already marked out in his narrative of Israel in 9.6–13. As with Jacob and Esau, so now, the 'purpose of God in election' (9.11) will be established, 'not of works, but of the one who calls' (9.12). It is sometimes suggested that Romans 11 contradicts Romans 9. But here, as Romans 11 gets under way, we find Paul building on exactly the foundation he had laid two chapters before. As he does so, rubbing in the point in verse 6 ('if by grace, no longer by works, or grace would no longer be grace') what he says resonates strongly also with the description of Abraham's family in chapter 4.⁶²⁷ At this point, he has not moved an inch from what he has already said about that family in chapters 1–4, or from the exposition of new-covenant salvation in 10.1–13.

The point of this 'remnant', then, is significantly different from the 'remnant' we find in some Jewish thinking roughly contemporary with Paul. There, the 'remnant' was the small number who had remained faithful Torah-observant Jews while everyone else fell away: a small number, in other words, who in Paul's terms in 9.30–10.3 had stuck with the pursuit of 'the law of righteousness', had pursued this law 'by works' and had believed themselves to have succeeded in sustaining 'their own righteousness'. This is precisely what Paul is here denying in insisting that it is 'by grace, no longer by works', as in chapter 4. *His theology of the 'remnant' is radically different from, say, that of Qumran.*⁶²⁸ And this idea of a remnant chosen by grace then enables him to move forwards. Instead of a small number that looks like getting even smaller, this is a small number that looks like the start of something much bigger. That is the point of 11.11–15.

That, then, is the thrust of 11.1–6. But the fact that there is now a ‘remnant according to the election of grace’ then generates an important distinction: on the one hand, the ‘election’ or ‘remnant’ (including Paul himself); on the other hand, ‘the rest’, *hoi loipoi*. This is what he outlines in 11.7–10, where he returns to the question of Israel’s ‘search’, or pursuit, as he had described it in 9.30–1, 10.3 and 10.20 (*ho epizētei Israēl*, ‘that which Israel sought’). I am inclined to punctuate verse 7 with a double question mark. The normal reading has a question followed by an answer: ‘What then? Israel did not obtain what it was looking for; but the elect obtained it.’ Perhaps, however, we should read, ‘What then? Did Israel not obtain what it was looking for? Well, the elect obtained it.’⁶²⁹ This is not merely a matter of style. Without that second question mark, Paul would appear to be making a distinction between ‘Israel’ and ‘the chosen ones’, leaving the word ‘Israel’ apparently denoting *simply* the company of those who did not obtain that which had been sought. With the second question mark, the distinction is between one ‘Israel’ and another, exactly as in 9.6b (‘not all who are of Israel are Israel’, *ou pantes hoi ex Israēl, houtoi Israēl*). ‘Did Israel not obtain it? Well, the chosen ones did’ – in other words, ‘the chosen ones’, *hē eklogē*, are the *positive* answer to the question, the ‘Israel’ that *did* obtain it, the second ‘Israel’ of 9.6b. Paul is here repeating, in a new form, the point he made in 9.31 and 10.3: Israel as a whole was looking for something but did not find it. There the contrast was with the gentiles who were finding something without looking for it; here the contrast is with ‘the remnant’ of Jews, the ‘Israel’ who, like Paul himself, have found it, albeit by grace not ‘works’. ‘The chosen company’, *hē eklogē*, the second ‘Israel’, with Paul in their midst, are carrying forward the purposes and promises of God. They are the ‘first fruits’ of the much larger ‘lump’, as in 11.16a.

This brings us to the question: What then about ‘the rest’? – the question which, one way or another, becomes crucial for much of the remainder of the chapter. From verse 7b through to verse 10 Paul explains, quoting once more from the law, the prophets and the Psalms (this, as usual, is surely not an accident, but an indication of a solemn statement), what has happened to ‘the rest’. This is not, in other words, a bit of new or extraneous polemic against

those who hold the position he once held himself. What has happened was foretold, and explained, in Israel's own traditions.

The basic claim is that 'the rest' have been 'hardened' (*epōrōthēsan*, verse 7b). It is important to understand what this means, and how the language of 'hardening' works, both in Paul's Jewish world and in his own thought. Obviously this has particular relevance for understanding 11.25, but we must do our best to set some parameters before we get there, rather than allow an assumed reading of that later verse to drive the present one.

The idea of 'hardening' is found at a similar point in 2 Corinthians 3. There, Paul is explaining the reason why Moses put a veil over his face: 'the sons of Israel' were not to be allowed to look at 'the end of what was being abolished', a cryptic way of referring both to the gradually fading glory of Moses' face following his encounter with God and to the ultimate 'end' or 'goal', the final future glory of which Moses' glory was a foretaste (3.13). Paul explains this by saying that in the case of the Israelites, 'their minds were hardened', *epōrōthē ta noēmata autōn* (3.14). What is more, he says that this same condition, symbolized by the veil, persists to his own day: the equivalent of the hardening of the mind is that 'a veil lies over their heart' (3.15). This continuing condition of unbelieving Israel is only changed by the spirit-given freedom which enables one to gaze at 'the glory of the lord', at the one who 'has shone in our hearts to produce the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah' (3.16–18; 4.6). This happens 'whenever one turns to the lord': 3.16 quotes Exodus 34.34, and explains it in terms of the spirit. In other words, the hardening of the mind, or the veiling of the heart, is the continuing condition which is only to be transformed by the spirit's revelation of God's glory in the face of Jesus – in other words, through what Paul elsewhere refers to in terms of the 'call' of God and the work of the gospel of Jesus, resulting in Messiah-faith.

The two other references to 'hardening' in Romans are in very similar passages, in chapters 2 and 9. The word is different, using the *sklērotēs* root rather than *pōrōsis*, but the concept is closely aligned. In chapter 2, 'hardening' is what happens when God's judgment was already deserved but

when God, in his patience and forbearance, provided a stay of execution to allow people to repent – and they refused:

²God’s judgment falls, we know, in accordance with the truth, on those who do such things. ³But if you judge those who do them and yet do them yourself, do you really suppose that you will escape God’s judgment? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of God’s **kindness**, forbearance and **patience**?

Don’t you know that God’s **kindness** is meant to bring you to repentance? ⁵But by your **hard**, unrepentant heart (*kata de tēn sklērotēta sou kai ametanoēton kardian*) you are building up a store of anger for yourself on the day of anger, the day when God’s just judgment will be unveiled – ⁶the God who will ‘repay everyone according to their works’. [630](#)

The repetition of ‘God’s kindness’ here in verse 4 (*chrēstotēs* and then *to chrēston*) is echoed in 11.22 (*chrēstotēs* no fewer than three times), and in a very similar context. Similarly, the notion of God’s ‘patience’ here (*makrothymia*) is picked up in 9.14–23, precisely the other passage where the notion of ‘hardening’ plays a part:

¹⁷For the Bible says to Pharaoh: ‘This is why I have raised you up, to show my power in you, and so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.’ ¹⁸So, then, he has mercy on the one he wants, and he **hardens** (*sklērunēi*) the one he wants.

¹⁹You will say to me, then, ‘So why does he still blame people? Who can stand against his purpose?’ ²⁰Are you, a mere human being, going to answer God back? ‘Surely the clay won’t say to the potter, “Why did you make me like this?”’ ²¹Doesn’t the potter have authority over the clay, so that he can make from the same lump one vessel for honour, and another for dishonour?

²²Supposing God wanted to demonstrate his anger and make known his power, and for that reason put up **very patiently** (*en pollē makrothymia*) with the vessels of anger created for destruction, ²³in order to make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, the ones he prepared in advance for glory – ²⁴including us, whom he called not only from among the Jews but also from among the gentiles?

As we have already noted, in Romans 2 ‘God’s kindness’ is meant to lead to ‘repentance’, and in Romans 11 it is meant to lead to ‘faith’. At the same time, God’s ‘hardening’ of someone’s heart appears to be a summary way of saying what is happening to Pharaoh in verse 17, quoting Exodus 9.16: God has raised him up, or ‘made him stand’, to reveal his power and announce his name in all the world. But this is what is then picked up in 9.22–4, with

Paul's 'what if': in the events of exile and restoration, the 'potter and clay' moments spoken of by the prophets, *God is doing with Israel what he did with Pharaoh*, and indeed what he did with the 'hard and impenitent hearts' of chapter 2. That is, he is exercising great patience in order to make a space for something new to happen, but meanwhile 'hardening' those who, like the arrogant would-be judge in chapter 2, and Pharaoh in 9.17–18, persist in holding God's saving purposes at bay.⁶³¹ And the interesting parallel with 1 Thessalonians 2.16 makes its own point: this is the regular second-Temple Jewish theme of people using a time-interval to 'fill up the measure of their sins'.⁶³²

The point of Romans 11.7b is then to draw out the full meaning of this situation. 'The elect obtained it'; that is what Paul has insisted in 9.24 and 11.1–6, and presumably in the inclusion of Jews within the scheme of new-covenant salvation in 10.4–13. But 'the rest were hardened': they were, in other words, in the condition of resisting God's saving purpose, stumbling over the stumbling stone (9.32–3), and remaining 'ignorant of God's righteousness' (10.3). This, he insists, is precisely what scripture envisaged.

The scriptures in question begin with a quote from the Torah, namely Deuteronomy 29.4: 'But to this day YHWH has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.'⁶³³ Deuteronomy 29 is of course part of the long warning about the 'curse', immediately preceding the crucial chapter 30 which Paul has set at the centre of his carefully constructed argument (10.6–8). God, declares Moses in prophesying the time of 'curse' and 'exile', has not given Israel a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, up to this very day, despite the fact that Israel had seen all his wonders in Egypt.⁶³⁴ In Deuteronomy, this condition will characterize Israel *up to the point where the covenant is renewed in chapter 30*. Even though Paul's judgment on his fellow (though unbelieving) Jews sounds harsh, he has been careful to couch it in terms which, in their original narrational context, are rooted in the covenantal scriptures and pointing forwards to the moment of covenantal resolution and rescue. Paul's reworked eschatology has not left the home base of monotheism and election.

The next reference is to Isaiah 29.10 ('God has poured out upon you a spirit of stupor', *pneuma katanyxeōs*), which links with the Deuteronomy reference by means of the regular Isaianic theme of unseeing eyes and unhearing ears.⁶³⁵ This is the condition which, in the book of Isaiah as a whole, describes Israel as it is apart for the rescuing work of God described in terms of the unveiling of his righteousness, the revelation of his glory and not least the work of the servant. Finally, Paul quotes from the Psalms ('Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a punishment for them'): the original passage invokes the divine curse on those (presumably within Israel itself) who are opposed to the righteous and devout.⁶³⁶ We should probably see this as an oblique reference to the 'table-fellowship' which non-Messiah-believing Jews, and also some Jewish Messiah-people, would try to restrict on ethnic grounds, as in Galatians 2.11–15 and 4.17. The reference to the 'stumbling block' picks up not only 9.32–3 (and thereby looks on also to 11.11–12), but also 1 Corinthians 1.23 and Galatians 5.11. The second couplet of this quotation ('Let their eyes be darkened so that they can't see, and make their backs bend low for ever') echoes the Isaiah prophecy about the unseeing eyes.

Let us put it delicately: if Paul had wanted to say that the condition of 'the rest' was not really that bad, that they could stay like that for a while and all would nevertheless be well in the end, that this was a temporary situation which would all come right eventually, he has gone about it in a very strange way. We should not read too much into the 'for ever' (*dia pantos*) in the last line, but we do not need to.⁶³⁷ The entire passage from the second half of verse 7 through to verse 10 indicates that 'the rest', those who at present are not in the 'remnant', the *eklogē charitos*, are in the condition summarized by Deuteronomy 32 as well as 29. Paul aligns this condition with the 'hard and impenitent hearts' that refuse to use God's kindness as a chance for repentance in chapter 2, and the 'hardened' ones of chapter 9, those whom God has patiently put up with while developing his plan to make his power and his name known in all the world. The wider context of Romans 11 should leave us in no doubt that this is precisely the seam of thought into which Paul is here tapping once more – and, even, that it was *because* he

wanted to get to *this* point in *this* way that he set up the previous categories, in chapter 9 especially, in the way that he did. Of course, the biblical quotations, especially that from Deuteronomy, hint that the condition of ‘the rest’ is by no means necessarily permanent. If someone is in the position described in Deuteronomy 29, they can always move forwards to Deuteronomy 30. That is what Paul has described in Romans 10.⁶³⁸ But they also indicate that there is no hope for those who stay in that condition and do not move forward into the covenant renewal which has now taken place in the Messiah and is being implemented through the spirit.

[\(ζ\) Romans 11.1–24: What Does Paul Envisage?](#)

It is time to summarize our findings from the first twenty-four verses of the chapter, before proceeding to the final main section:

11.1–10		11.25–32
	11.11–12	11.16–24
	11.13–15	

What then, according to 11.1–24, did Paul think was going to happen next, and on what grounds? I have argued above that, just as the centre of 9—11 as a whole is the christologically focused 10.1–17, so the centre of 11.1–32, that is, 11.13–15, is likewise essentially christological, echoing the ‘reconciliation’ theme in 5.10 as well as the ‘Adamic’ passages in 5.15–21, and leading, here as there, to the promise of ‘life’ (5.10, 21). I have suggested that this is the longer outworking of Paul’s stated theme in the programmatic 9.5 (and, behind that, 1.3–4): Israel is ‘the Messiah’s people according to the flesh’, and it is ‘my flesh’ that Paul seeks to ‘make jealous’, and some of whom he hopes to save (11.15). This ‘jealousy’ flows naturally from 9.30–1 (Israel is missing out, gentiles are coming in) and especially 10.18–21, focusing on Deuteronomy 32.21 (10.19).⁶³⁹ This, to look back again, relates to 9.4–5: Paul’s list of Israel’s privileges summarizes what he has ascribed to the Messiah, and thence to his people, in Romans 3—8. Further back again, one might relate the ‘jealousy’ to 2.25–9, with its radical

redefinition of *ho Ioudaios* and its mention of ‘law-keeping uncircumcised people’.

But if the motif of ‘jealousy’ is natural as well as scriptural, because of gentiles coming in to the single Abrahamic family, Paul’s use of it here is not only positive, pointing to the goal of salvation. He also uses it to remind the gentiles in Rome of what he had said back in 1.16: the gospel is *Ioudaiō te prōton kai Hellēni*, ‘to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek’. The present section maintains that careful balance. Paul never diminishes the ‘also, equally’. That is what generates the ‘jealousy’. But his renewed emphasis here, to the gentile Christians who seem to have needed it, is ‘to the Jew first’.⁶⁴⁰ His key move, transforming the ‘jealousy’ from negative into positive, is to indicate that even his own ‘gentile apostolate’ has Jewish salvation as its intended by-product. He ‘glorifies’ his particular ministry (11.13) – but not for its own sake. This is where the gentile Messiah-people discover that the ‘elect’ are the people *through whom*, not only *for whom*, God will work his saving purposes. When Paul sees gentiles believing the gospel, he thinks, ‘Perhaps this will make my flesh jealous *and save some of them*’ (11.14b). In terms of the entire flow of the letter, and not least of 9.1–11.10, this statement must be correlated with 10.1–13, where Paul prays for ‘their’ salvation and explains how this ‘salvation’ will be accomplished, going on in 10.14–17 to speak of the apostolic ministry as the necessary instrument of this faith-focused covenant renewal. However paradoxical it may seem, *Paul’s own gentile mission will be the means*, or at least *a means*, *by which this prayer will be answered*. This, however counter-intuitive to many today, and perhaps also to many in Paul’s own day, is at the heart of his argument.

That, at any rate, is Paul’s hope, stated in realistic terms. He knows that most of his fellow Jews still resist the gospel message, even though he knows of many who, like himself, have come to recognize Jesus as Messiah after themselves previously being ‘hardened’.⁶⁴¹ That is the point of 11.1–6: there is a ‘remnant’, *and this is the kind of remnant that can be expanded indefinitely*. As in 1 Corinthians 9.22, the ‘some’ in 11.14 is not an anticlimax: it is the Pauline mixture of certain hope and sober realism. That

is to say: the ‘lump’ and the ‘branches’ of 11.16 are emphatically not beyond the reach of God’s salvation. God has not abandoned the Jewish people; their ‘tripping up’ (11.11) does not mean that they have ‘fallen completely’, that no more Jews can ever be part of the second ‘Israel’ of 9.6b.

That is the main point he wants to get across, throughout the chapter, to the potentially anti-Jewish Roman Christians. But the ‘salvation’ for which he prays in relation to presently unbelieving Jews (10.1) will still depend on faith (10.6–13; 11.23). The main thrust of Paul’s argument is firmly against anyone (gentile Christians, clearly) who might say ‘God has cut them off, so God cannot and will not graft them back in’. The gospel remains ‘to the Jew first’. The door is always open for them to return, and Paul’s own gentile apostolate is itself part of the paradoxical means by which it will happen. But if Paul knew that there would come a time when some might say ‘Very well: so you are saying that all Jews will after all be saved in the end,’ all the evidence suggests that he would have rebutted that suggestion with equal force.

All this, then, points forward to the crucial little passage 11.25–7. This is where many controversies have clustered, much like seagulls round a fishing boat.

[\(η\) ‘All Israel Shall Be Saved’: 11.25–7](#)

The final section of 11.1–32 consists of verses 25–32.



As so often in Paul, a dense opening statement (in this case, 11.25–7) is followed up with explanatory remarks (11.28–32) which draw the point to a sharp rhetorical conclusion. We note the obvious but often ignored rule: the dense opening statement means what the later verses say it means! With this in mind, we plunge into the all-important verses 25–7. I have translated them like this:

²⁵My dear brothers and sisters, you mustn't get the wrong idea and think too much of yourselves. That is why I don't want you to remain in ignorance of this mystery: a hardening has come for a time upon Israel, until the fullness of the nations comes in. ²⁶That is how 'all Israel shall be saved', as the Bible says:

The Deliverer will come from Zion,
and will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

²⁷And this will be my covenant with them,
whenever I take away their sins.

Faced with this, a majority of exegetes today have held Paul to be saying, basically, four things. First, he announces a new 'mystery', in addition to what has already been said and perhaps even trumping or contradicting some of it.⁶⁴² Second, the content of this 'mystery' is that the 'hardening' on the majority of 'Israel' is only temporary, and that it will in the end be removed, allowing those formerly 'hardened' to come to be saved in a large group. Third, this large group will be added to the presently existing Jewish 'remnant', this total (and totally Jewish) group being what Paul means by 'all Israel'. Fourth, the *parousia* of Jesus will be the time when, and perhaps also the means by which, this will happen.

There are of course variations. Some see the 'mystery' as consisting in the whole train of thought from verse 11, a position with which I am sympathetic for reasons that will become apparent. Some see the 'salvation' as being effected through 'faith', as in 11.23, even if this 'faith' is a sudden thing, occurring at the *parousia* itself; others insist that it must be a fresh act of powerful divine grace, without any correlated human activity, even 'faith' itself. Even granted the Jews-only view of 'all Israel', there are plenty of options: all Jews who have ever lived? All Jews alive at the time? Most but not all? And so on.

I wish to argue, not for the first time, against all four of these points. However unpopular this case is, exegetical arguments, rooted in the assumption that Paul has built up a subtle and sustained argument over three chapters to this point (and, indeed, over all eleven chapters so far!), must be allowed a hearing.

1. First, on the ‘mystery’. It is highly unlikely that when Paul says ‘I do not want you to remain in ignorance of this mystery’ he is referring to a *new* ‘mystery’, a secret piece of wisdom or doctrine which he is about to reveal.⁶⁴³ For a start, the *gar* indicates that verse 25 is continuing to explain what has just gone before; it is not a new point, but a further drawing out of what was said in 11.16–24. For another thing, the purpose clause (literally, ‘so that you may not be wise beyond yourselves’), which interestingly anticipates the similar appeal in 12.3, picks up exactly the thrust of the ‘olive tree’ picture and of 11.11–24 as a whole, repeating and amplifying the warning but not introducing anything new. Joachim Jeremias argued a generation ago that what we have here is not, as is often imagined, an ‘apocalyptic speculation’, but a combination of ‘paraenesis’ and ‘warning against arrogance’.⁶⁴⁴ Nils Dahl agrees:

Paul introduces this statement as the disclosure of a revealed mystery. Yet the solution draws the conclusion of the preceding arguments. We should probably not think of a sudden, unmediated revelation granted to Paul but rather of a mystery hidden in Scripture until its explanation was unveiled.⁶⁴⁵

This is exactly right: what Paul says here summarizes, and draws out the significance of, the whole previous section from verse 11, rather than adding something substantially new.⁶⁴⁶ The passage warns against gentile arrogance; well, he has already issued that warning, coming at the question from various angles from 11.13 onwards and sharpening the point in verses 17–24 with the rhetorically forceful second person singular. The passage speaks of a ‘hardening’ of Israel (except for the remnant); well, he has already spoken about that in 11.7, building on the ‘hardening’ passage in 9.14–23. The passage speaks of gentiles ‘coming in’ as a result of what has happened to most Jews; well, he explained in 11.11–15 that the Jews’ ‘stumble’ had led to gentile inclusion, that the Jews’ *apobolē* had resulted in the world’s *katallagē* (11.15). Every element in verse 25 is thus simply a summary of what has gone before. Likewise, the possibility of restoration for Jews at present ‘hardened’, of their sins being taken away, as in the combined scriptural quotations of 11.26b–27, is held out in the generalized terms of verses 12, 14 and 15, and becomes the key subject in 11.23–4, at the

climax of the ‘olive tree’ allegory and the lead-in to the present short passage. The biblical citations are therefore likewise a summary of what has been said already. In particular, the notion of God’s ‘covenant’ with Israel, so emphatically stressed in verse 27 with the combined quotation from Jeremiah 31 and Isaiah 27, looks back to the great exposition of the renewed covenant in 10.6–13, where Deuteronomy 30 was highlighted, and picks up from the implied promise in 11.8, where Paul quoted the immediately preceding chapter, Deuteronomy 29. The entire section from 9.6 onwards stands under the question of whether God has kept his word. The ‘mystery’ of Romans 11, in fact, is *the entire sequence of thought from 11.11 onwards*, building on the whole argument of 9.6—11.10, and drawn together in a single statement (11.25–7) at the start of its final sub-section. And this ‘mystery’ is rooted in the christology of the earlier chapters.

We would be wrong, in any case, to suppose that when Paul speaks of a ‘mystery’ he must necessarily be talking of a ‘new doctrine’ which is to be added on to those already taught.⁶⁴⁷ Paul is obviously well aware that the word could be used in that fashion, but in several of his own uses he seems to mean something different, something more like a penetrating insight gained through a combination of scripture and reflection on the gospel.⁶⁴⁸ The gospel itself, after all, was for Paul a ‘revelation’, not just in that Jesus had appeared to him in person on the road to Damascus but in that when it was proclaimed it ‘unveiled’ the righteousness of God.⁶⁴⁹ In 1 Corinthians he writes of having proclaimed God’s mystery to them simply by speaking of Jesus and his crucifixion.⁶⁵⁰ When he speaks of himself as a ‘household manager for God’s mysteries’, he means much the same;⁶⁵¹ and there may be more than a touch of irony, as he explains to the Corinthians, eager for ‘special effects’, the very down-to-earth gospel which he not only preaches but also embodies. To be sure, there may well be all kinds of heavenly secrets into which some may be able to peer.⁶⁵² But again and again they are all focused, for Paul, on the Messiah himself.⁶⁵³ Indeed, to suppose that there might be a ‘mystery’ which was *not* centred upon the Messiah would have called into question some of Paul’s most central beliefs. A ‘mystery’ for him was not a different thing, a separate category of knowledge from

‘ordinary’ Christian truth. The term became, rather, a way of flagging up the fact that some aspect of the gospel conveyed (a) a startling perspective on reality which other worldviews would not have imagined, (b) a perspective which would transform the faithful beholder and (c) a perspective which would join up the dots in the otherwise opaque eschatological plan of God.

This might include the *parousia*, but from the passages just cited it need not. Granted, of the two other passages in which Paul declares, after a long discussion, that he is now revealing a ‘mystery’, one of them has to do with the *parousia*, but as the previous discussion indicates this is by no means necessary. About the Messiah, yes; about the *parousia*, not necessarily. In 1 Corinthians 15.51, sometimes cited as an example of Paul telling a ‘new doctrine’, the ‘mystery’ which Paul solemnly announces is not in fact a completely different truth from the one he has been explaining for the preceding fifty verses (that is, the future bodily resurrection based on the resurrection of Jesus himself). It is a new angle of vision on the *same* point, explaining (as in 1 Thessalonians 4.15–17, using different imagery) what will happen to those who are left alive. But that leads Paul back, through the quotation of Isaiah 25.8 and Hosea 13.14 in 1 Corinthians 15.54–5, to the very point he made nearly thirty verses earlier, in verse 26: ‘Death is the last enemy to be destroyed.’ The ‘mystery’ here, in other words, is the result, not of a new revelation of a special doctrine quite different from anything hitherto spoken of, but of a particular, scripturally rooted, angle of vision which takes the hearers back, in more clarity and depth, to what had already been said. I suggest that in Romans 11 the combined quotation in verses 26 and 27 has much the same effect: taking the hearers’ minds back to the points he was making around forty verses earlier, that is, in 10.1–13. ‘This will be my covenant with them, whenever I take away their sins’ (11.27) answers to, and deepens, the exposition of Deuteronomy 30.

The other similar passage makes the point more graphically. Ephesians 3 grows out of the programmatic 1.8–10 and the summing up of the gospel’s effects in 2.11–22. In the latter passage, we find a viewpoint not unlike that of Romans 11: the coming together of Jews and gentiles in the single family

of God, as both a tell-tale sign of God's plan to unite all things in the Messiah and a warning sign to the principalities and powers. Thus:

¹⁸Yes, with all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the secret (*mystērion*) of his purpose, just as he wanted it to be and set it forward in him ¹⁰as a blueprint for when the time was ripe. His plan was to sum up the whole cosmos in the Messiah – yes, everything in heaven and on earth, in him.

³²I'm assuming, by the way, that you've heard about the plan of God's grace that was given to me to pass on to you? ³You know – the secret purpose that God revealed to me, as I wrote briefly just now? ⁴Anyway ...

When you read this you'll be able to understand the special insight I have into the Messiah's secret (*mystērion*). ⁵This wasn't made known to human beings in previous generations, but now it's been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶The secret is this: that, through the gospel, the gentiles are to share Israel's inheritance. They are to become fellow members of the body, along with them, and fellow-sharers of the promise in the Messiah Jesus.

⁷This is the gospel that I was appointed to serve, in line with the free gift of God's grace that was given to me. It was backed up with the power through which God accomplishes his work.

⁸I am the very least of all God's people. However, he gave me this task as a gift: that I should be the one to tell the gentiles the good news of the Messiah's wealth, wealth no one could begin to count. ⁹My job is to make clear to everyone just what the secret plan (*mystērion*) is, the purpose that's been hidden from the very beginning of the world in God who created all things. ¹⁰This is it: that God's wisdom, in all its rich variety, was to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places – through the church! ¹¹This was God's eternal purpose, and he's accomplished it in the Messiah, Jesus our lord.

What Paul describes as a *mystērion* in Ephesians 3 is what he has spent half the previous chapter spelling out in detail, namely the coming together of Jews and Gentiles in a single body. This is not a *new* point, then, but a drawing of attention to the depth and power, to the heaven-and-earth nature, the fresh revelation, of the point just made. Much western scholarship has exemplified a characteristically protestant tendency to allow eschatology to trump ecclesiology, and so to prefer the 'mystery' of 1 Corinthians 15 (the future resurrection) to that of Ephesians 3 (the polychrome people of God). But part of Paul's point – in both letters, actually, and then especially in Romans itself! – is that ecclesiology (the fresh and full understanding of the

Jewish doctrine of election in the light of Jesus the Messiah and of the spirit) is correlated all through with eschatology, similarly understood. The balance of our own present chapter and the previous one should make this point, but for the moment we simply note that the ‘mystery’ of Ephesians 1 and 3 (holding 2.11–22 in the middle), and the parallel passages in Colossians and indeed in the ending of Romans itself,⁶⁵⁴ are not tell-tale indications of a different kind of theology to what we find in the ‘main letters’. They are, rather, characteristically Pauline expressions of the belief that the central gospel events themselves reveal the secret, age-old plan of God the creator, the plan for ‘the fullness of the times’, for the ‘but now’ moment,⁶⁵⁵ through which God would bring together all things in heaven and on earth and, in particular, would unite Jews and gentiles in a single body. There is every reason, therefore, to reject the idea that in Romans 11.25 Paul is putting forward a fresh ‘revelation’ which will state a new point out beyond, in addition to and perhaps even in contradiction to what he has said already.

This way of understanding the ‘mystery’ language here already hints at a very different reading of 11.25–7 from that of the majority. Before we can get to that, however, we must turn to the second point. What does he mean by saying that ‘a hardening has come for a time upon Israel, until the fullness of the nations comes in’?

2. The normal view (to repeat) is that this ‘hardening’ (*pōrōsis*), clearly referring to 11.7 (‘the rest were hardened’, *hoi de loipoi epōrōthēsan*), is a temporary condition imposed on Israel (upon all, that is, except the ‘remnant’, such as Paul himself, who have already come to faith in the Messiah), which will then be removed through the events spoken of in verses 26 and 27, allowing ‘the rest’ to join ‘the remnant’ in coming to this same faith and so to the same salvation.⁶⁵⁶ (The other view, still very popular, that sees a ‘salvation’ for ‘the rest’ apart from faith in the Messiah, is ruled out by verse 23, as well as 10.1–13 – as well as by 1.16–17, 3.21–4.25, and by Paul’s earlier emphasis against there being any *prosōpolēmpsia*, ‘respect of persons’, with God.⁶⁵⁷ Such a ‘salvation for all Jews’ would leave unsaved gentiles in the position of complaining against God for

unfairness after all – and, according to Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, they would have Abraham championing their cause.)

Let us be quite clear. Paul sees, in Romans 11 and in the parallel in 2 Corinthians 3, that there is indeed a possibility of this ‘hardening’ being removed. The whole point of 11.11–24 is that Jews who are at present in the category of ‘the rest’ who are being ‘hardened’ can indeed be made ‘jealous’ and so aroused to faith in the Messiah and to the salvation held out in 10.1–13. They can at any time, in other words, move from Deuteronomy 28 to Deuteronomy 30, to the covenant of heart-circumcision, to the Torah-keeping which consists of faith (10.6–9). This is what Paul means when he says, in 2 Corinthians 3.16, ‘when one turns to the lord, the veil is removed’. That had happened to Paul himself, by his own account the most zealous of them all, and Paul looked for it to happen again and again *during the course of*, and indeed provoked by, his gentile apostolate. There is no sense, then, that the category of ‘the rest’ who are presently ‘hardened’ is a fixed number from which there can be no further movement. That is precisely what Paul is arguing against. But the ‘unhardening’ happens precisely ‘when one turns to the lord’; or, in Romans, ‘if they do not remain in unbelief’.⁶⁵⁸

By the same token, the notion of ‘hardening’, as we have seen it developed in chapters 2 and 9, and as Paul expresses it again in 2 Corinthians 3, does not of itself encourage the idea that this ‘hardening’ is a temporary condition *to be followed by an automatic unhardening*. The idea ‘that this malady will ultimately be overcome’⁶⁵⁹ is so firmly fixed in recent exegetical tradition that it, ironically, has itself formed such a hard crust on the reading of the passage that it may take a miracle to break through. One might invoke something Markus Bockmuehl says in a different context: ‘Perhaps this is yet another instance where less is known than is confidently asserted.’⁶⁶⁰ Much as we might like to hope for a sudden universal unhardening, this is simply not how the notion of ‘hardening’ itself functions. As we saw, the ‘hard and impenitent heart’ of 2.4–5 was what came about when the ‘kindness’ of God, meant to lead to repentance, was refused, so that the ‘hardening’ was the prelude, not to a sudden mercy despite the lack of repentance, but to judgment. This is cognate with the

ancient biblical idea (not least in the Abraham-narrative and its exodus-promise) of a nation's sins being 'filled up' to the point where judgment was the only remaining possibility.⁶⁶¹ Similarly, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which in the narrative of 9.14–23 was then applied to the 'vessels of wrath' at the time of God's whittling down of Israel to a remnant, was not a temporary state which would then be reversed, but rather a condition brought about through the mysterious combination of human hard-heartedness and divine purpose. This, as we saw, Paul interpreted as the result of Israel's being 'the Messiah's people according to the flesh', with the Messiah's crucifixion inscribed into their history as it was into Paul's own very being.⁶⁶²

To repeat: Paul is not saying that all those presently 'hardened' are bound to remain in that condition. On the contrary. That is the position he fears the gentile Christians in Rome may adopt, and he is arguing against it, all the way from 11.11 to 11.32. Indeed, it is partly in order to argue against that position that he has constructed this seriously dense and densely serious section of the letter. Presently hardened Jews can at any time, he insists, be 'made jealous', and can thereby be brought to Messiah-faith and so to salvation. But we must not, in our eagerness to agree with him on this subject, overaccept the point and over-exegete the passage. The 'until' clause ('until the fullness of the nations comes in') does indeed provide a temporal marker, but it is not a marker which of itself can tell us what happens to the 'hardened' part of Israel once that time is reached. The majority view among recent exegetes has been to read the 'until' as indicating the time after which the 'hardening' will be lifted, and all 'the rest', suddenly unhardened, will be saved (with or without faith).⁶⁶³ But Paul does not say this, and we must not without warrant lurch after such an understanding.

On the contrary. Insofar as there is a 'hardening', it is because the alternative is swift judgment, as in 1 Thessalonians 2.14–16. If that judgment is delayed, it is because of God's kindness and forbearance. But the proper response to that kindness and forbearance is not to tax it further, not to presume upon it continuing until a time when the 'hardening' is removed

automatically, but to use the time thus created, the breathing space as judgment is delayed, for repentance (2.4) and faith (11.23). I am not aware of any occurrence of the quite widespread biblical theme of ‘hardening’ which envisages such a phenomenon as leading to anything other than eventual judgment.⁶⁶⁴ (At this point someone will say, ‘Ah, but that’s where Paul is different.’ But it begs the question to offer Romans 11.25–7 as evidence.)

Paul does not, in 11.11–32, spell out his view of what will happen to those who do not use this breathing space appropriately. But 11.7–10 tells its own story, as of course do 9.1–5 and 10.1. If, after all, Paul really did believe that those at present ‘hardened’ would sooner or later be rescued by a fresh divine act (perhaps sooner, if he did indeed expect the *parousia* in a short time), then why the tears? Why the unceasing anguish of heart? Why the heartfelt prayer for ‘their’ salvation, and the careful exposition of what it would take to bring that about (10.1–13)?⁶⁶⁵ The only possible answer to this would be the exegetically fantastic one: that *up to the point of writing Romans* Paul has had this unceasing sorrow and anguish of heart, but *now that he has thought the matter through afresh*, or perhaps indeed has received a sudden divine revelation between the writing of verses 24 and 25 of Romans 11, through which he has discovered the new ‘mystery’ of Romans 11.25–7, he sees that actually he need not have been so concerned.⁶⁶⁶ And that, as we have seen, would indeed be a fantasy. It is ruled out absolutely both by the extremely careful rhetorical planning and structuring of this whole section, and by the fact that 11.25 is closely linked to, and does not appear to offer a new view over against, all that has preceded it.⁶⁶⁷ If the majority view were correct, Paul ought really to have told Tertius, his scribe, to throw away these three chapters and start again. And, actually, with that, he should have told him to scrap the whole letter. A good deal of chapters 2, 3 and 4 would have to go as well.

Exegesis, then, tells heavily against the majority view, of a present ‘hardening’ which will suddenly be removed. This is not to say that *apomerous* in 11.25 cannot be temporal (‘for a time’), as opposed to partitive (‘in part’), i.e. ‘a hardening has come upon *a part* of Israel’.⁶⁶⁸ Such a

temporal meaning, though, would not point to a sudden last-minute ‘unhardening’. The anguish of 9.1–5, and the heartfelt prayer of 10.1, are best explained, indeed perhaps can only be fully explained, if we assume that Paul thinks the ‘hardening’ will eventually give way to final judgment.⁶⁶⁹ That gives just as much of a sense of time-lag: ‘for a while’. But it is in my judgment far more likely that Paul is here referring to the ‘hardening’ coming upon *one part* of Israel, as in 11.1–7, especially verse 7.⁶⁷⁰ This, as we have seen, was for a purpose: with the ‘remnant’ on the one hand and Paul’s gentile mission on the other, not only will gentiles continue to ‘come in’, but the ‘remnant’ itself will become very much larger, moving towards an eventual ‘fullness’ (verse 12). The gentiles, too, will have their ‘fullness’ as they come in (verse 25): just as there was a ‘fullness of time’ at which God would act, so there is a ‘fullness of persons’, the completion of God’s plan of worldwide salvation. That is the process of the gentile mission, which has been in view since 10.14–18, and which plays its key part in the argument of chapter 11 at verse 14. And that mission, Paul has already said in 11.14, is *the means by which God is making ‘his flesh’ jealous and so saving some of them*. Hence the two ‘fullnesses’ are related.

3. That, I propose, is how we should read 11.26a: *kai houtōs pas Israēl sōthēsetai*, ‘and in this way “all Israel shall be saved”’. At this point an exegete arguing my present case may well feel like Paul as he quotes Elijah: ‘I’m the only one left!’⁶⁷¹ It is not true, of course. There may not be seven thousand, but there might be seven or more out there who have not ... well, perhaps we had better not complete that sentence; anyway, if this is a Pauline remnant, as opposed to an Essene one, there might yet be more to come.⁶⁷² So strong has the majority view been that it has simply been assumed, not usually argued, (a) that this refers to a *new* event over and above anything yet described, (b) that ‘all Israel’ here can only refer to Jews, (c) that this may therefore refer to a mode of salvation other than that described in 10.1–13 or envisaged in 11.14, 23, and (d) that this will take place at the *parousia*.

The last of these points (d) will be dealt with presently when we look at the scriptural quotations in 11.26b–27 and challenge the fourth common assumption (that Paul is here thinking of something which happens at the

parousia). The third (c) (a different mode of salvation) had its peak period of popularity a decade or two ago, at the climax of the post-holocaust reaction, and now seems to be in decline, though not without powerful advocates.⁶⁷³ Most of those who now take 11.26a to refer to a future event, perhaps at the *parousia*, take Paul's point and link this to faith in Jesus, often suggesting a parallel with the sudden revelation through which Paul himself became convinced that Jesus had been raised and was Israel's Messiah.⁶⁷⁴ But to assess this we must look more closely at (a) and (b).

(a) First, does verse 26a describe a *further* event, in addition to and subsequent to what has already been described, or does it describe, from a different and ironic point of view, the *same* event which Paul has been speaking of in 11.11–15 and 11.16–24? The first option – a further event – has regularly been allowed to pass unchallenged because of English translations which have rendered *kai houtōs* as 'and so'.⁶⁷⁵ This, though accurate in its way, has allowed slippage: Paul's Greek means 'and in this way', or, as I have translated it, '*that is how* "all Israel shall be saved" '. But the English 'so'⁶⁷⁶ can also mean 'then', which *houtōs* does not normally permit but which the majority view has assumed to be correct.⁶⁷⁷ In this view, *first*, the fullness of the gentiles coming in, *then, after that, subsequently*, a new event involving the salvation of 'all Israel' as a different body.

Part of the argument against this majority reading has already been provided. If this were the case, why is Paul in such anguish? If Paul has known all along that all his fellow Jews will eventually be saved – especially if, as the majority suppose, he envisages this at the *parousia* and expects that event in the near future – then why is there such a problem? Actually, however, the regular meaning of *houtōs* provides a rebuttal of (a) above: Paul gives no indication that he is talking about a *further* event, but rather gives every indication that this process in 11.25 – the hardening of Israel *apomerous*, and the use of the time thus created for the fullness of the gentiles to come in – *is the means by which* God is saving 'all Israel'.

The distinction between reading *houtōs* as an indication of time and an indication of manner effects a serious shift. If we read it as temporal, it

opens up a forward perspective in the text: ‘and *then*, something new will happen, namely the salvation of “all Israel”, as scripture says ...’. But if we read it as an indication of manner, it looks back: ‘and *that*, the entire sequence of 11.11–24, summed up in 11.25, is *how* “all Israel” will be saved’. But this brings us to the all-important phrase itself.

(b) The apparent strength of the majority case on 11.25–7 is undoubtedly that the word ‘Israel’, elsewhere in this discussion, appears to refer to Jews and only Jews. Is it possible to gain any more precision at this point?

It is. Paul, as we have seen, has very carefully structured the entire three-chapter sequence. And he opens the account, the great historical narrative in which his theological point is displayed, with a clear distinction: not all those who are ‘of Israel’ are in fact ‘Israel’ (*ou gar pantes hoi ex Israēl houtoi Israēl*) (9.6b). That distinction hangs over the rest of the discussion like a puzzling question mark: who then are ‘Israel’, if not all Abraham’s physical children are to qualify? Already this ought to alert us to the fact that *pas Israēl* in 11.26, close to the balancing point with 9.6 in the rhetorical architecture of the whole section, is not likely to mean ‘all Abraham’s physical children’.⁶⁷⁸

But (it will be objected) in 9.6–13 there is indeed a process of selection from *within* Abraham’s physical family, a narrowing down which will continue through 9.14–29; but that still implies that ‘Israel’ is going to designate a subset of Abraham’s physical children, rather than including gentiles. Not so. The all-important verse 9.24 indicates otherwise: ‘we whom he called’ is specifically broadened to include ‘not only from Jews but also from gentiles’. And the ‘call’ here is the same technical term that we see in 9.7 and 9.12: ‘in Isaac shall your seed be *called*’, *klēthēsetai*, and ‘not of works but of the one who *calls*’, *tou kalountos*. 9.24, in fact, indicates already what is then picked up in 9.30 and 10.19–20: gentiles have found *dikaioynē*, have even found God himself (10.20: ‘I was found by those who were not looking for me’). This is the meaning of 10.6–13 as well. The Deuteronomic covenant renewal, Israel’s great hope, has been fulfilled in and for all, Jew and gentile alike, who confess Jesus as *kyrios* and believe that God raised him from the dead. It would be absurd to say that, though

believing gentiles are now numbered among the Deuteronomic new-covenant members, the ones whom God ‘called’, the ones who in turn, as in Joel, ‘call on the name of the lord’, the ones who, back in 2.25–9, ‘fulfil the law’, have their uncircumcision reckoned as circumcision, and are given the name *Ioudaios* – that these ones are not after all to be classified also as ‘Israel’, Abraham’s seed. This, too, is already foreshadowed in the densely programmatic 9.5: the Messiah is ‘of their race according to the flesh’ and also ‘God over all, blessed for ever’, picked up dramatically in 10.12, *ho gar autos kyrios pantōn*, ‘for the same lord is lord of all’. Gentile believers hail Israel’s Messiah as ‘lord’; Paul says they have found what Israel was looking for.

This is the evidence that must be set alongside the fact that the regular meaning of ‘Israel’ in chapters 9–11 is ‘all, most or at least some Jews’. Leaving aside the distinction in 9.6, there are seven such references.⁶⁷⁹ But the line of thought throughout the whole letter has all along indicated the possibility of a *polemical redefinition* even of this noble term for God’s people.⁶⁸⁰ We have already studied the relevant passages: 2.25–9, with its redefinition of ‘circumcision’ and even ‘Jew’, and chapter 4 as a whole, with its radical redefinition of Abraham’s family, the discussion from which, in effect, chapter 9 then picks up the threads. The parallels in Philippians 3.2–11 (‘we are the circumcision’, 3.3), and especially Galatians, make the point strikingly. Galatians 6.16, as we saw, uses the phrase ‘the Israel of God’ to refer to the whole family of Abraham, Jewish Messiah-believers and gentile Messiah-believers alike.⁶⁸¹ We note again, as we did above, the interesting reference to ‘Israel according to the flesh’ in 1 Corinthians 10.18. Paul is there expounding the exodus-narrative, in order to apply it to the Jew-plus-gentile *ekklēsia* in Corinth to whom he has said that ‘our fathers’ were under the cloud and passed through the sea. In teaching the *ekklēsia* to think of itself as the people who tell this story as their own and learn to live within it, Paul’s reference to ‘Israel *kata sarka*’ is revealing. Had he wished to reserve the word ‘Israel’ to mean ‘Jews and Jews only’, he would hardly have needed to add the qualifying phrase. This then coheres with the tripartite division of the human race in 10.32: Jews, Greeks, and the *ekklēsia tou*

theou, the church of God. Clearly Paul has not settled on a single designation for the Messiah-people. But, equally clearly, he constantly refers to that people in ways which indicate what his explicit argument in Romans 2—4, in 2 Corinthians 3, in Galatians as a whole and in Philippians 3 all make clear: that in Israel's Messiah, Jesus, the one God has fulfilled the ancient Israelite hope, expressed by Torah, prophets and Psalms alike, by bringing the nations of the earth to belong to Abraham's people. Paul is acutely aware of the many painful paradoxes that go with this belief, but he will not draw back from it.

What is more, as we saw in examining 11.11–24, the whole context, particularly the 'olive tree' metaphor, encourages the reader to regard believing gentiles and believing Jews – and especially a lot more of the latter – as part of the same 'tree', which as we have seen many who remain unsure about the referent of 11.26 are happy to see as in some sense 'Israel'. This is the point where Ross Wagner, in his full and detailed study of Romans 9—11, agrees strongly with me on the redefined meaning of 'Israel', though not on the mode and timing of the final inclusion of ethnic Jews:

This view [that ‘all Israel’ may include believing gentiles] is certainly a plausible inference from Paul’s language of the gentiles ‘coming in’, particularly when it is heard in conjunction with the olive tree metaphor, where Gentile ‘branches’ are grafted into the ‘root’, which is Israel ... For Paul, ‘Israel’ will be a complete entity only when ‘the fullness of the gentiles’ comes in and ‘the Redeemer’ comes from Zion to take away ‘Jacob’s’ sins.⁶⁸²

I note in particular Wagner’s point about the gentiles ‘coming in’ while part of Israel is ‘hardened’: what are they ‘coming in’ to, if not ‘Israel’, especially once more in the light of the olive tree? This makes it more difficult than people usually imagine to insist that the ‘Israel’ in verse 25, since it only refers to Jews, must be determinative for the ‘all Israel’ in verse 26.⁶⁸³ Instead, what we have, in line with verse 19, is an ‘Israel’ simultaneously emptied (in part) by the exclusion of ‘broken branches’ and refilled by the inclusion of ‘wild olive branches’. If that was what Paul means in verses 17–24 – and it seems uncontroversial – then we could gloss verse 25b–26a as follows, with the italicised portion imported from 11.11–15 and 11.23–4:

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

All Israel! A polemical redefinition indeed, making perfect sense in view of the repeated ‘all’ in 10.4, 11 and 13, and anticipating the ‘all’ of 11.32.⁶⁸⁴ Indeed, if ‘come in’ is taken in that sense of ‘coming in’ to the olive tree, to Israel,⁶⁸⁵ the normal argument swings round 180 degrees: instead of saying ‘Israel in verse 25 is ethnic, so it must be in verse 26 as well’, we ought to say ‘Israel in verse 25 consists of the whole people of God, within which many Jews are presently “hardened” *but into which many gentiles are being incorporated*, so “all Israel” in verse 26 must reflect that double existence.’⁶⁸⁶

First, then, there is the situation Paul faces when writing the letter:

ISRAEL

most Jews currently hardened small but growing remnant gentiles brought in

which leads to the future he envisages:

ALL ISRAEL

hugely increased 'remnant', through jealousy/faith

fullness of gentiles

The 'all' in 'all Israel' here is in my judgment best understood as a typically Pauline (and characteristically cryptic) note of redefinition, in line with the other such points elsewhere, not least Galatians 6.16.

There is every possibility, therefore, that *pas Israēl* in Romans 11.26 is just such another polemical redefinition, picking up the phrase which may have already been current: 'All Israel has a share in the age to come'. Just as the rabbis redefined that phrase so that it excluded Sadducees, and other Jews deemed to be beyond the pale,⁶⁸⁷ so Paul has redefined it to include (1) Messiah-believing Jews – himself, all others already in that category and, he hopes, a much larger number who come to be 'jealous' and so to believe,⁶⁸⁸ and (2) Messiah-believing gentiles ('to the Jew first, and also equally to the Greek'). But it excludes, as the rabbis' own 'all Israel' excluded those who were deemed outside, those Jews who, despite being given a space of time by God's patience and kindness, have stumbled over the stumbling stone and have not picked themselves up, have not become 'jealous' in the way Deuteronomy 32 described, have not been provoked by Paul's own gentile apostolate, have not come to believe and confess in the way Deuteronomy 30 indicated, have not 'submitted to God's righteousness' (10.3), have not availed themselves of God's circumcision of the heart, have not joined in the renewal of the covenant and have not grasped at the divine fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises. To be sure, Paul locates this multiple failure ultimately in the inscrutable purposes of Israel's God. But he also lays all these charges at the door of his contemporaries.

This is not what most exegetes in the modern western tradition have wanted to hear. But it is what Paul wanted to say. Just as 'the wrath of God' in 1 Thessalonians 2.16 may refer, not to the judgment of the last day, but to an event or events within concrete history, so the saving of 'all Israel' may refer here, as in 11.14 and the surrounding verses, to actual concrete

‘turnings’ in which more and more of Paul’s fellow kinsfolk will no longer ‘remain in unbelief’ (11.23).

We may note in particular, in concluding this point, that it is very close to what Ed Sanders argued thirty years ago, in an exposition which has not, I think, had its proper impact on subsequent discussion. Though Sanders continues to take ‘Israel’ as meaning ‘Jews’, he emphatically rejects ‘two-covenant theology’, as proposed by Mussner, Stendahl and others.⁶⁸⁹ ‘There is only one olive tree’, he writes, ‘and the condition of being a “branch” is “faith”, for the Jew just as much as for the Gentile.’⁶⁹⁰ The simplest reading of 11.13–36, he concludes, is this:

The only way to enter the body of those who will be saved is by faith in Christ; the mission to the gentiles will indirectly lead to the salvation of ‘all Israel’ (that is, ‘their fullness’) [at this point Sanders adds a footnote: ‘this supposes that *plērōma* in 11:12, *tinas* in 11:14 and *pas* in 11:26 mutually interpret one another’]; thus at the eschaton God’s entire plan will be fulfilled and the full number of both Jews and gentiles will be saved, and saved on the same basis ...⁶⁹¹

This holding together of the ‘fullness’ of verse 12, the ‘save some of them’ of verse 14 and the ‘all Israel’ in verse 26 is crucial. Paul is not offering two different routes for Jews, the first through ‘jealousy’ during the course of his ministry (and presumably, since by now Paul was used to the fact that he might die before the final End, during the course of other people’s ministries) and the second through sudden fresh revelation at the *parousia*. How, in any case, would the latter escape the charge either of arbitrariness, if all Jews alive at the time were to be converted as Paul had been by a sudden revelation of Jesus (what about those who had died in the meantime?), or of partiality, if this applied retrospectively to all Jews who had ever lived (if God was going to do that for them, what about the scrupulous fairness of Romans 2.1–11, 3.27–30, and 10.6–13?), or indeed of coercion, if it were to be automatic, with no room for the response of faith? And how would such an assertion support the warnings of 11.17–24 and especially 11.25? But if, when Paul says ‘all Israel’, he is envisaging a large, ‘full’ accumulation of a far greater number than at present, but by essentially the same means of ‘jealousy’ at the success of the gentile mission, then the passage holds

together both in itself and with the rest of chapters 9—11, not least the central and vital 10.1–17.

4. All this brings us back to the fourth and final point of contention. What about the biblical citations which follow immediately upon 11.26a? Do they not state clearly that Paul is thinking both of the *parousia* and of a large-scale last-minute conversion of Israel, in the sense of presently unbelieving and ‘hardened’ Jews?

No. We note, as a preliminary point, that even if verses 26b and 27 did refer to such a thing, the implication would be, against the drift of the post-Stendahl ‘two-covenant’ reading, that Paul would still suppose that presently unbelieving Jews needed to have their ‘ungodliness’ removed, to have their ‘sins’ forgiven. But it is not only the two-covenant theory that is ruled out here. Paul’s combination of quotation, allusion and echo, including his interesting modification of Isaianic passages in particular, indicates that he is *describing* the same event as in 11.14 (the possibility that presently unbelieving Jews will be made jealous and will come to faith and so to salvation), and that he is *connoting* the larger picture which he has already set out in 10.6–13, namely the fulfilment of the Deuteronomic ‘new covenant’, as interpreted further in Isaiah and, by echoing implication, Jeremiah. The ‘covenant’ which is cited here in verse 27 (‘and this will be my covenant with them’, *kai hautē autois hē par’ emou diathēkē*), the first actual mention of *diathēkē* since 9.4 though it has been implicit underneath the argument all along, is not a separate ‘covenant’ to the one Paul has expounded in Romans 2.26–9, 4.1–25 and now in the present section, particularly 10.6–13. It is certainly not a ‘covenant’ which God has made with the Jewish people behind the back of the Messiah and of Abraham himself, to whom was promised, and to whom has now been given, a worldwide family. That would be dangerously close to the position against which Paul argues throughout Galatians, especially in chapter 3, and which has been firmly ruled out in 9.30—10.21. The covenant in question is precisely the covenant *through which sins will be forgiven*, which for Paul can only mean the covenant in which God has at last accomplished the purpose for which he called Abraham in the first place. It is the covenant

through which, as in Deuteronomy 30, the ‘curse’ is lifted at last; the covenant through which, as in Isaiah 27 and Jeremiah 31, Israel’s sins are forgiven.

It is worth looking at those two passages in more detail.⁶⁹² Isaiah 27 follows the sequence which predicts Israel’s redemption, climaxing in resurrection.⁶⁹³ The chapter picks up the theme of Israel as YHWH’s vineyard, first heard in chapter 5. The picture is not developed as smoothly here as in that earlier chapter, but the image of God’s people as a tree recurs again and again, first in terms of the promise of blessing:

Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit⁶⁹⁴

but later in terms of continuing judgment:

when its boughs are dry, they are broken; women come and make a fire of them. For this is a people without understanding; therefore he that made them will not have compassion on them, he that formed them will show them no favour.⁶⁹⁵

It is just possible that Paul has had this picture of the tree, restored and judged by God, in his mind as he developed his parallel image of the ‘olive tree’ with its branches. Whether or not that is so, his apparent quotation of a verse in between those two would fit nicely. The MT of the passage is translated thus in the NRSV:

By expulsion, by exile you struggled against them; with his fierce blast he removed them in the day of the east wind. Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated, and *this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin*: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no sacred poles or incense altars will remain standing.⁶⁹⁶

Paul, however, seems to have the Old Greek in mind: instead of ‘this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin’, the Greek has *kai touto estin hē eulogia autou, hotan aphelōmai tēn hamartian autou*, ‘and this will be his blessing, whenever I remove his sin’. Paul is echoing that final phrase, substituting *autōn*, ‘their’, for *autou*, ‘his’, and placing it at the end of the clause, and making ‘sins’ plural for singular. Thus, in the Isaiah passage, God’s eschatological actions of mercy and judgment, like God’s kindness and severity in Romans 11, stand on either flank, textually and theologically,

of the forgiveness of sin, which in context means the removal of Israel's continuing idolatry. This fits well with the Deuteronomic context of Paul's own critique of his fellow Jews, in which he understands their refusal to believe the gospel, to 'submit to God's righteousness', in terms of the age-old idolatry predicted by Moses and pointed out by the prophets.

The forgiveness of sins is of course the ultimate blessing of the 'new covenant' predicted by Jeremiah.⁶⁹⁷ Paul echoes this theme in the one other passage (2 Corinthians 3) where he speaks of the present 'hardening' of non-Messiah-believing Jews and where, as we saw, he speaks of Messiah-believers in terms very similar to those in Romans 2.25–9 and 7.4–6. According to Jeremiah,

The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says YHWH. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know YHWH', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says YHWH; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.⁶⁹⁸

Paul is not quoting directly from this passage in Romans 11.27. But the way in which Jeremiah, here as elsewhere, picks up the Deuteronomic picture (God placing his law within his people and writing it on their hearts) resonates with Romans 2 and 7 as well as with 2 Corinthians 3. More particularly, it goes exactly with Paul's exegesis of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10.6–10. When, therefore, he declares that 'this will be my covenant with them, whenever I take away their sins', we would be right to hear the strong echo of Jeremiah 31 alongside or within the quotation from Isaiah 27. That in turn strongly reinforces a reference to Deuteronomy 30 in the sense which Paul has understood it in Romans 10.

This sends us back to Paul's primary biblical reference in these verses, which is from Isaiah 59. Here there is no problem in establishing the quotation; the difficulty is rather the reverse: why has Paul not quoted the whole passage, which is so germane to his purpose throughout these chapters? The answer may well be that Paul, here as elsewhere, was content

to strike a note and let it resonate, intending indeed to refer to the whole passage but in haste to bring in also the other element, of the forgiveness of sin, which was found in the promises of restoration in Isaiah 27 and Jeremiah 31. Here, in any case, is the full Isaiah passage in question. Following a chapter in which the prophet has complained about the absence of justice (*mishpat, krisis*) and righteousness (*tsedaqah, dikaiosynē*), and has declared that Israel's transgressions are many, and that they testify against them, the prophet declares that YHWH himself will act, unveiling his own righteousness:

YHWH saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle. According to their deeds, so will he repay; wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital. So those in the west shall fear the name of YHWH, and those in the east, his glory; for he will come like a pent-up stream that the wind of YHWH drives on.

And he will come to Zion⁶⁹⁹ as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says YHWH. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says YHWH: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says YHWH, from now on and forever.⁷⁰⁰

This whole passage is clearly very congenial to Paul: the revelation of God's righteousness, resulting in judgment and mercy, in the renewal of the covenant, in the gift of the spirit, in the words (*rhēmata*) in the mouth – all of this takes us back once more to 10.1–13, and makes us insist once more that Paul is here reaffirming what was said there, rather than trying out a different 'solution', an alternative way of salvation.⁷⁰¹ I do not think his switching, after 'this is my covenant with them',⁷⁰² to Isaiah 27 and (by implication) Jeremiah 31, has anything to do with a backing off from what Isaiah 59 goes on to say; rather the reverse. He is taking Isaiah 59 for granted, but is building in a further element, namely, that some in 'Israel' are presently under judgment but that their sins can be forgiven, and that this message is urgently needed by those at present 'hardened'.

At the same time, he has transformed Isaiah 59.21, so that instead of the Redeemer coming *on behalf of* Zion, he is coming *from* Zion. (Paul has elsewhere, of course, taken texts about the coming of YHWH and made them into texts about the coming of Jesus, as we saw earlier.) This change from *on behalf of* to *from* cannot be accidental. I suggested elsewhere that it could be an echo of another Isaianic passage, the promise of the Torah and God's word flowing out *from* Zion in order to bring judgment and peace to the nations of the world.⁷⁰³ It might also be an echo of the blessing of Moses which ends (33.28–9) with the salvation of Israel: in 33.2 we read that 'the Lord comes from Sinai', *Kyrios ek Sina hēkei*.⁷⁰⁴ A third option is Psalm 14.7:

O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
(LXX *tis dōsei ek Siōn to sōtērion tou Israel*)
When YHWH restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.⁷⁰⁵

Perhaps it is all three. The combination of Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms (Torah, prophets and writings once more) would not be unknown in Paul, to say the least. The effect, anyway, is the same: he has transformed a promise about something that God will do *for* Zion into a promise about something which God will do *through* or *from* Zion. It is quite true, as Terry Donaldson has argued (against his own earlier view), that Paul makes almost no use of the theme of 'the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion', which might at first sight seem strange granted his 'inclusive' vision and apostolate.⁷⁰⁶ But the reason, I believe, now emerges, and forms a key element in Paul's redefinition of Jewish eschatology around Jesus and the spirit. If, as we have seen throughout this Part of the book, Paul sees Jesus and the spirit as constituting the renewed temple, the place where and the means by which Israel's God has returned as he had promised, then it would make no sense to undo this powerful theology by reinstating the earthly Jerusalem as the place to which the nations should go to find salvation (or, indeed, by translating it into a heavenly Jerusalem, a concept with which Paul was familiar but which is not relevant to the present discussion).⁷⁰⁷ On the contrary: salvation is coming *from* Zion to the nations. Paul is not reinscribing the older centripetal

tradition,⁷⁰⁸ but nor is he abandoning the old belief that when Israel's God finally acted to fulfil his promises to his people the gentile nations would come under his rule, whether for rescue or ruin.⁷⁰⁹ Rather, he is transforming the tradition into a centrifugal movement: the Redeemer now comes, with the gospel, *from Zion to the world*, and as a reflex (exactly as in 11.11–15) will 'banish ungodliness from Jacob'.⁷¹⁰ Paul has already stated in these chapters that he understands his own commission as the apostle to the gentiles to be the fulfilment of the Isaianic promise of the herald announcing God's kingdom (10.15, citing Isaiah 52.7), and that this same ministry to the nations is designed, he has already said, to make 'his flesh' jealous and so save some of them. All this would fit exactly with the two lines of Isaiah 59 as Paul has adjusted them in Romans 11.26b. This, then, will be God's covenant: yes, the spirit and the word, as in Isaiah 59 and as in Romans 10, but more particularly the forgiveness of sins. 'Hardened' Israel cannot be affirmed in its present condition. Rather, the Israel that at the moment is still in the position of Deuteronomy 27—9 (as in 11.8) needs to be brought forwards into Deuteronomy 30. And that means Messiah-faith.

The complex of quotations in verses 26 and 27 thus have no specific reference to the *parousia*. True, Paul can use the verbal equivalent of the noun *ho rhuomenos*, 'the Deliverer', when referring to Jesus' return and his delivering of his people from the wrath to come.⁷¹¹ But that does not mean that whenever he uses a cognate word he must always be referring to the 'second coming'.⁷¹² In fact, there are good arguments for suggesting that it is God himself who is coming to deliver his people, not Jesus specifically, even though as we have seen elsewhere Paul cannot now speak of God without thinking of Jesus, or vice versa.⁷¹³ Perhaps once more, as in 11.11–15, Paul is deliberately leaving the prediction imprecise. What matters is that scripture will be fulfilled, the sin-forgiving covenant will be enacted and God's word will not have failed (9.6a).

What is particularly telling is the exact form of the quotation from Isaiah 27 at the end of 11.27, *hotan aphelōmai*, 'whenever I take away' their sins. The natural reading of this is not to refer to one single action, a unique, one-off saving event at the end of all things, but to an indefinite future

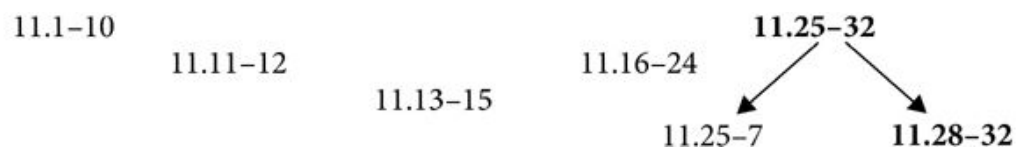
possibility. It could of course mean ‘whenever it may be that I perform that single action’, but it could equally mean ‘at whatever time, however frequently repeated, people “turn to the lord and have the veil removed”’, as in 2 Corinthians 3.15.

The point of it all – the thrust of this passage within the actual argument of Romans 11, as opposed to any grander scheme of soteriology or salvation history – is once again to insist, not upon a grand, large-scale last-minute conversion of all Jews (which would not have been relevant to the theme Paul is here stressing; if that was what was intended, the gentile Christians in Rome could have shrugged their shoulders and waited for God to do that in his own time) but upon what we might call the saveability of Jews within the *continuing* purposes of God. And this in turn is because Paul wants to be sure that the gentile Christians in Rome have really understood *grace*: all who are saved are saved by God’s grace, and that means that ethnic origins, whether Jewish or gentile, generate no claim in themselves. That is the point of verses 20 and 23–4 in particular: gentile Christians ‘stand fast’, not because they are gentiles (the temptation which Paul is warding off) but because they are Messiah-faith people. Likewise, when they are faced with the cultural pressure to dismiss the Jews as hopelessly cut off from God for ever, they must continually remind themselves that, following their ‘casting away’, such unbelieving Jews are now just as open to grace, just as able to be ‘received back’, as were the gentiles themselves – indeed, more so, since the ‘olive tree’ from which they have been cut out is still ‘their own olive tree’ (verse 24).

This then points to the final emphatic conclusion.

[\(θ\) Disobedience and Mercy for All: 11.28–32](#)

The last five verses of this section explain what has just been said and draw the argument of the letter so far to a rhetorically satisfying conclusion:



Once more we remind ourselves that Paul is here emphasizing what the potentially proud gentile Messiah-believers in Rome need to hear. The Jews who are at present ‘hardened’ are not to be seen as automatically outside the saving purposes of God. Here is the mystery of ‘election’ and its reframing by Paul in the light of the gospel:

²⁸As regards the good news, they are enemies – for your sake! But as regards God’s choice they are beloved because of the patriarchs. ²⁹God’s gifts and God’s call, you see, cannot be undone. ³⁰For just as *you* were once disobedient to God, but now have received mercy through *their* disobedience, ³¹so *they* have now disbelieved as well, in order that, through the mercy which has come *your* way, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has shut up all people in disobedience, so that he may have mercy upon all.

Every word here is important, but among the most important is the word ‘now’ towards the end of verse 31 (‘they too may *now* receive mercy’). Some early scribes found this puzzling, and either omitted it or changed it to ‘later’, but the strong probability is that this is what Paul said.⁷¹⁴ To repeat: he is not talking of a *subsequent* mercy for presently ‘hardened’ Jews. He is referring to a *continuing possibility* that ‘some of them’ (11.14) will be made ‘jealous’ and so provoked into faith and salvation.⁷¹⁵

The final verse, 32, is strongly reminiscent of Galatians 3.22, indicating that Paul has not actually said anything radically new at this point, but rather has worked out more fully, and in a different polemical context, the theology of God’s people and of the work of the Messiah which he stated some years earlier. The way he put it there was

Scripture shut up everything together under the power of sin, so that the promise – which comes by the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah – should be given to those who believe.

The connection of mercy with faith/faithfulness is made explicit in that passage; in the light of 11.23 we should suppose that it is implicit in the present context as well. Paul is not discussing, or proposing, the issue of ‘universalism’ which has haunted twentieth-century theological discussions.⁷¹⁶ Again, had he thought his way into such a position, he could have dried his tears and stopped being so sorrowful about ‘his kinsfolk

according to the flesh' (as well as scrubbing out – as some recent interpreters have tried to do! – passages like Romans 2.1–16). He is talking about *all people*, 'the Jew first and also the Greek', the 'all' over whom the Messiah is 'God' (9.5) and 'lord' (10.12). Perhaps only those who have lived in societies split down the middle can appreciate how that 'all' sounded in Paul's world – the early Christian world – where 'Jew and gentile' were the key categories. To allow his 'all' to resonate instead in the echo-chambers of the modern western world, with its quite different theological and soteriological questions, is mere anachronism.

Israel according to the flesh has thus found its history and eschatology shaped according to the messianic pattern, the christological pattern. *Israel has followed the Messiah through his 'casting away', and now is invited to join him also in his 'receiving back'*: the pattern of cross and resurrection is etched into Israel's history, as Israel's election itself is discerned, in the light of the Messiah himself, to be something significantly different from anything imagined either by devout Jews on the one hand or by anti-Jewish pagans on the other. From Paul's point of view, Israel's election was from the start the act of God for the redemption of the world; but Israel, itself in need of that redemption, could not be 'faithful' or obedient to God's vocation (3.2). The 'faithfulness' of the Messiah, as Israel's representative, accomplished that worldwide redemption. If Israel according to the flesh is now, for the most part, 'hardened', Paul sees this as the necessary placing of them in the same category as gentiles, that is, all alike utterly dependent upon God's mercy, with nobody able to claim any kind of 'favoured nation clause'.

Thus for the moment, in 11.28, they are 'enemies because of you' – a radical way of putting what Paul had already said in 11.11, 12 and 15. The Jewish people as a whole have disbelieved, and as a result the word has gone out to the gentiles, just as Deuteronomy and Isaiah had said would happen. But this does not mean that God now regards unbelieving Jews as automatically *disqualified*. That has been the main point Paul is stressing ever since 11.11. They remain 'beloved', not in the sense of 'automatically saved', but in the same sense that they are 'holy' in 11.16, corresponding to

the ‘holiness’ of the unbelieving spouse in 1 Corinthians 7. They are, in other words, well within distance of God’s call to faith, because of the patriarchs. Verse 28b (‘beloved because of the patriarchs’) seems to allude not only to 9.6–13, and behind that to chapter 4, but also perhaps to the ‘root’ of the tree, or even the tree itself, in 11.15b–24. The family to which unbelieving Jews still belong is, in other words, the physical family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the promises to them have not been taken back. Paul echoes the same theme in 15.8, where, summing up his gospel message one more time, Paul declares that the Messiah’s faithful servant-work was undertaken ‘on behalf of God’s truthfulness’ and ‘to confirm the promises to the patriarchs’, with the result that ‘gentiles would glorify God for his mercy’ – a very similar point to the present passage, and one which strikingly confirms our reading of the whole of chapter 11. Verse 28 is then further explained by the great statement of God’s faithfulness: God’s spiritual gifts, and God’s ‘call’, are irrevocable (29). God will not say to Abraham that his physical children used to be welcome in his true family but will be no longer. Again, the ‘call’ resonates with the same term in 9.7, 12 and 9.24: God has ‘called’ both Jews and gentiles, and that call is not to be rescinded.⁷¹⁷

The pair of verses which follow, 11.30–1, explain further in a balanced doublet. You (gentiles) were formerly disobedient to God, but now have received mercy; so they have now disbelieved, so that they too may now receive mercy. That is clear. What is not immediately clear is how to take the extra clauses Paul has inserted into this balanced statement:

30: Gentile disobedience	mercy to gentiles
	(in relation to Jewish disobedience)

31: Jewish disobedience	mercy to Jews
	(in relation to mercy to gentiles)

It is possible to arrange the sentence as a chiasm:

A	You were disobedient
B	You received mercy
C	in relation to their disobedience

- C They too have now disobeyed
- B in relation to your mercy
- A So that they too may now receive mercy.⁷¹⁸

The problem with this is the sense: in what way did the Jews disobey ‘in relation to your mercy’? (The translation ‘in relation to’ reflects the ambiguity of the datives in both instances.) Verse 30 is clearly summing up one element in 11.11–15: God has used the Jewish ‘stumble’ or ‘casting away’ as the means of showing mercy to the gentiles. There are strong reasons, then, for taking verse 31 as a summary of the other side of the coin, again as in 11.11–15: the mercy shown to gentiles will be the means of making Jews ‘jealous’ and so bringing mercy to them as well. These two verses, in fact, go so closely with 11.11–15 that we see once again the high probability that in 11.25–7 Paul is not introducing a new or different scheme, but simply drawing out the full meaning of the one he has been expounding all along.⁷¹⁹ I am inclined therefore to go with those commentators and translators who render verse 31 to the effect: ‘so they have now disbelieved as well, in order that, through the mercy which has come your way, they too may now receive mercy’.

This then leads naturally into the final verse of the argument (11.32): God has shut up all people in disobedience, so that he may have mercy upon all. All must come the same way. Paul has now applied this to the gentile Messiah-followers in Rome, to warn them away from a kind of inverted ethnic pride. There is no room for arrogance of any kind. All have been shut up in the prison house of ‘disobedience’, so that all who find themselves in God’s family will know that they have come there by mercy alone. Paul knows this through the cross and resurrection of the Messiah, and the fresh understanding of the covenant which he has received through that great event. He has now worked it out with passion and rhetorical skill. This is Paul’s ultimate revision of the second-Temple eschatology with which he had grown up. No longer would ethnic Israel look for a time when the nations of the world would come flocking in to Zion. The ‘pilgrimage of the nations’ had been turned inside out: now the apostolic mission would go ‘from Zion’ into the whole world, as in 10.14–17, and the fruits of that

mission would make Paul's fellow Jews 'jealous' and provoke them out of their unbelief. This is reflected of course in Paul's theological explanation for the Collection: the nations have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, so it is right and proper that they should minister to their earthly needs.⁷²⁰ There is a sense in which not only 11.11–32, but the whole of chapters 9–11, form the 'mystery' which Paul sums up in 11.25–7: this is the fresh reading of scripture, rethought around the Messiah, which has issued in a fresh understanding of the hope of Israel. Without leaving the home base of Israel's scripture-rooted doctrine of election, Paul has retold the historical and eschatological narrative, weaving it into a pattern which is at once totally unexpected and totally shaped around the Messiah. That is how he worked.

(1) The End and the Beginning: 11.33–6 and 9.1–5

9.1–5

9.6–29

11.33–6

11.1–32

9.30–3

10.18–21

10.1–4

10.14–17

10.5–13

10.9

In the end we glimpse the beginning. This most carefully constructed section of this most carefully constructed letter is held in balance between those most characteristic Jewish expressions, lament and praise: like many psalms, the section opens with the one and closes with the other.⁷²¹ The famous opening – great sorrow, endless pain, a prayer rising unbidden to his lips that he might himself be cast off if only that would rescue his fellow Jews – finds expression in the list of precious gifts to which Paul’s kinsfolk are heirs. The famous conclusion – the unsearchable riches and inscrutable ways of God – finds expression in a paean of praise in which phrase after phrase resonates with the scriptures while also picking up themes in which the Jewish wisdom tradition overlapped with the speculations of the wider world, especially that of the Stoics. Paul is doing again what he does best: expounding the ancient faith of Israel, rethought and reimagined around Jesus and the spirit, in such a way as to take every thought captive to obey the Messiah.

It is curious, then, that the sorrowful doxology of 9.5 and the glorious doxology of 11.33–6 have both been subject to the comment that they do not concern Jesus. Many commentators still divide 9.5 so that, while the Messiah is ‘of their race according to the flesh’, it is ‘God over all’ who is ‘blessed for ever, Amen’.⁷²² We saw in an earlier chapter that this is in fact by far the less likely reading, and in the present section we have seen that chapters 9–11 as a whole are in fact predicated precisely on a *christological* reading both of Israel’s strange pathway – the fall and rise of many in Israel, as old Simeon put it! – and of the way by which Israel and the gentiles alike will come to salvation. *Ho gar autos kyrios pantōn*: the same lord is lord of all, for ‘all who call on the name of the lord will be saved.’ And the ‘lord’ in question, at the heart of the section in 10.9–13, is the Jesus to whom Paul ascribes biblical texts referring to YHWH. The Jewish Messiah according to the flesh, who is God over all, blessed for

ever: that is the advance statement, not just of one theme to be woven into the ongoing discussion, but of the theological principle around which Paul will construct his revised eschatology, and of the hermeneutical principle in the light of which he will re-read those great texts from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, the Psalms and elsewhere.

By the same token, many have seen significance in the fact that Jesus is not mentioned in 11.33–6. Without going into details (this is after all a chapter on eschatology, not a commentary on Romans) we may beg to differ. By this stage in the argument, as we saw in relation to 11.11–15, christology has been woven into the very fabric of Paul's thought. It is the key to everything. When he celebrates the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God, he knows very well that the Messiah is the place where one may find all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge.⁷²³ When he asks 'who has known the mind of the Lord?', he is well capable of answering his own question by saying 'We have the mind of the Messiah.'⁷²⁴ And when he concludes 'for from him, through him and to him are all things', the prayer which had itself been reformed around the Messiah echoes closely just underneath: there is one God, the father, from whom are all things, and we to him, and one lord Jesus, the Messiah, through whom are all things, and we through him.⁷²⁵ As Ed Sanders put it,

By the time we meet him in his letters, ... Paul knew only one God, the one who sent Christ and who 'raised from the dead Jesus our lord' ... There should be no hard distinction between 'theocentric' and 'christocentric' strains in Paul's thought.⁷²⁶

We began this section by pointing out that it was all about God. Paul himself has told us that this means it is all about Jesus. Jesus was the reason for, and the eventual focus of, the opening lament. Jesus, the Messiah, was the *telos nomou*, the goal towards whom the whole narrative of Torah had been moving until at last it arrived at the covenant renewal of Deuteronomy 30, which Paul naturally interpreted in terms of the climactic events of Jesus' resurrection and enthronement. Jesus, as Israel's representative, was the one whose saving death and resurrection provided the pattern which enabled Paul to glimpse the astonishing 'mystery' that, instead of Israel

being redeemed and the nations coming in to see what all the fuss was about, the gentiles would be redeemed so that the Jewish people might become jealous and come back into the ‘tree’ which was their own tree in the first place. Structurally, thematically, theologically, even rhetorically, Jesus the Messiah is the central clue to Paul’s view of God, of God’s people and of God’s future for the world. Romans 9—11, framed as it is between lament and praise, encapsulates exactly that inaugurated and reshaped eschatology which completes the triple account of Paul’s theological vision.

7. Conclusion: Hope and Its Consequences

(i) Introduction: Paul’s Revised Hope

Our sketch of Paul’s theology is complete. He has rethought monotheism, election and eschatology – and their complex interrelationships! – in the light of Jesus the Messiah and of the spirit, and of the ancient scriptures which he regards as having found their ‘yes’ in Jesus. This is the coherent centre of his theological thought, upon which he draws in all kinds of situations to make points and develop arguments which deal with many different topics but which all relate coherently to this centre. I have come to see Paul’s letters not so much as themselves the means by which he was developing his thought – that, I think, is a back-projection from our modern book-based academic culture – as small windows on to a larger, richer and denser world of belief and life, of exegesis and prayer, of faith and love and, yes, hope. The modern historian, reading Paul, is in the position of someone who discovers a few old family photograph albums. One could stay on safe ground and treat them as accidental combinations of individual snapshots. Or one could try to reconstruct the story of the family whose albums they were. The minimalist option, to deny the possibility of knowing anything outside what Paul actually says, is always open. But that would purchase the ‘certainty’ of a strictly limited positivistic account at the high price of ignoring the much more interesting and complex world from within which

these texts emerged and of which they do indeed give us tantalizing glimpses. I have tried here to see what happens if we follow up, and join up, those glimpses, starting from the hypothesis that Paul's thought remained that of a first-century Pharisee who believed that the one God had fulfilled his ancient promises through his son and his spirit. I submit that this hypothesis has been more than fully demonstrated, resulting both in a much larger coherent centre to Paul's thought than has normally been supposed and in a rather different arrangement of the topics with which he was most concerned.

In particular, we have seen in the present chapter that Paul did indeed transform the hope of Israel. He took that hope, to which he had clung as a young and zealous Pharisee, and thought through what it meant to say, as he found himself compelled to say, that this hope both *had been fulfilled* through Jesus, in his kingdom-establishing death and resurrection, and the life-transforming spirit, and *would yet be fulfilled* in the second coming of Jesus and in the work of that same spirit to raise all the Messiah's people from the dead. Jews had lived for many generations with different kinds of 'now and not yet' combinations, the most obvious being the 'now' of having returned geographically from Babylon and the 'not yet' of the still unfulfilled prophecies of Daniel 9, Isaiah 40—55 and the rest. Having a hope of that shape, inaugurated but not consummated, was a typically second-Temple Jewish position.⁷²⁷ Paul shifted – or rather, Paul believed that God had shifted – those now-and-not-yet hopes on to a different level. The hope remained profoundly Jewish, for all that Paul faced outwards as he proclaimed it, outwards to the world where a new kind of eschatology had been making its way into popular consciousness. The hope may well have developed as Paul taught it (and for every 'snapshot' we have in his letters we have to assume hundreds if not thousands of hours of teaching, explanation, scripture study, argument and prayer), but though Paul explains more about this hope in Romans than he does anywhere else there is no fundamental change, except in his own perspective (that he realizes, by the time of Philippians and 2 Corinthians, that he may not live to see the End himself). The hope remained the Jewish hope: the resurrection of the dead,

as the centrepiece of the renewal of all creation, the flooding of God's world with justice and joy. It was transformed by the belief that this had already happened in and through Jesus, and in and through those in whom the spirit now dwelt, and that the still-future aspects of this hope would happen by exactly the same means. And that meant, of course, that hope was confirmed as such: 'Hope in turn', wrote Paul, 'does not make us ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us.'⁷²⁸ The resurrection of Jesus remained, for Paul, the sure anchor of the entire future hope; the spirit was the *arrabōn*, the down-payment, the guarantee of the full 'inheritance'.⁷²⁹

(ii) The Effect of Paul's Theology.

The threefold picture of Paul's theology which we have now completed takes its place within the overall argument of the present book in two ways. First, this theology is what Paul believed his churches needed to embrace, and to engage with, if the central symbol of their worldview, the unified and holy community itself, was even to exist, let alone to flourish. Second, this way of understanding Paul's central vision of God, God's people and God's future holds together, and enables us to make sense of, the many major debates which have swirled around 'Pauline studies' over the last century or so.

First, my overall case in Part II of this book was that when we study the worldview which Paul attempts to inculcate in his converts we find that its central symbol is the united and holy community itself; but that this community was equipped with none of the symbolic markers (circumcision, food laws, sabbath, ethnic identity and endogamy, allegiance to the Jerusalem Temple) which gave Jewish communities in the Diaspora such a comparatively solid basis for their continuing common life. My overall case in Part III has been that Paul's theology, the prayerful and scripture-based exploration of the foundational Jewish themes of monotheism, election and eschatology, was designed to supply this lack, thus elevating something

which (with hindsight) we now call ‘theology’ to a position, in terms of a community and its worldview, which it never previously possessed and which it still does not possess outside Christianity itself. First-century Jews engaged in the study of Torah because Torah not only supplied the community’s boundary-markers but also brought its students into the presence of God – a belief which gained in importance for those who lived at a distance from the Temple itself. First-century pagan philosophers discussed questions to do with the gods as a matter of intellectual curiosity on the one hand and inner personal exploration or development on the other, but these questions were never required to play anything like the role that Christian theology had to take on from the start. For Paul, reflecting on God, God’s people and God’s future was the vital activity that enabled him to address urgent pastoral and practical questions in his communities, not least to do precisely with their unity and holiness.⁷³⁰ In Paul’s hands, ‘theology’ was born as a new discipline to meet a new challenge.

Paul’s teaching seems to have been aimed at enabling his converts to continue this theological work for themselves. He does not supply all the answers, even to the comparatively few questions he addresses. What he does is to teach his hearers to think theologically: to think forward from the great narrative of Israel’s scriptures into the world in which the Messiah had established God’s sovereign rule among the nations through his death and resurrection, inaugurating the ‘age to come’, rescuing Jews and gentiles alike from the ‘present evil age’, and establishing them as a single family which was both in direct continuity (through the Messiah himself) with the ancient people of Abraham and in radical and cross-shaped discontinuity with Abraham’s physical family and its traditions. The radical newness which had come about, the new life and energy in which Paul’s converts found themselves caught up, was to be understood as the effect of the covenant renewal and new creation which had come about as the one God of Israel had revealed himself in dynamic action in and as Jesus the Messiah on the one hand and the spirit on the other. Only if the little churches of Asia, Greece and Rome had matured to that point in their thinking would they be able to be true to their vocation to remain united, to live with the

radical holiness demanded by this new creation, and in both of these things to bear witness to the pagan world around. Theology is what Paul used to bring depth and stability to the worldview of his churches.

Second, this vision of Paul's theology enables us, I believe, to draw together the strong points of the many different schools of Pauline interpretation that have emerged over the last century as scholarship has struggled to come to terms with this most powerful and enigmatic first-century activist and thinker. To begin with, we have firmly laid to rest the suggestion, influential ever since F. C. Baur, that Paul abandoned his Jewish framework of thought whether for ideological reasons (because it was legalistic and 'earthly') or for pragmatic ones (because it was irrelevant and incomprehensible to his gentile converts). On the contrary. The fact that Paul insisted on welcoming gentiles into God's people without circumcision had nothing to do either with an ideological rejection of 'Judaism' as the wrong sort of religion or with the pragmatic reflection that a 'law-free' gospel (there's a slippery shorthand term if ever I saw one) would attract more converts. He remained a deeply Jewish thinker, not least precisely at those points where he carved out a new path on the basis of the crucified and risen Messiah and the covenant-renewing spirit. What he did with these two foundational ideas was both anchored in the Jewish scriptures and aimed at producing and sustaining a kind of fulfilled Judaism, the kind Paul saw prophesied in Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Psalms. In fact, it was precisely because he remained a Jewish thinker that he engaged with the wider world. If that seems like a paradox, it is only because so much history-of-religions work has screened out, before the discussion even began, the possibility of such a thing, of a Jewish thinker with a message for the world (though that, of course, is what books such as the Wisdom of Solomon purported to be and to offer). As we saw in chapter 4, great harm is done to our understanding of Paul if we make 'religion' the catch-all category.

Paul engaged with the thought-forms of his day, pagan as well as Jewish. If his arguments seem to interact with Stoic thinking and expression, that is probably because he meant them to do so. But that does not mean that the

best available analysis of what he was doing must be a semi-Jewish kind of Stoicism, any more than the best analysis could ever be that he was some sort of a gnostic.⁷³¹ Debates will no doubt continue over whether Paul was in fact a good or a loyal Jew (see chapter 15 below). Much the same question was raised in the first century, by no means only about Paul: many Jewish groups and teachers asked it of one another, and this came to a height first in the Roman/Jewish war of AD 66–70 and then in the bar-Kochba revolt in the 130s. Was bar-Kochba the Messiah, or was he leading Israel astray? Akiba, noblest of rabbis, believed that bar-Kochba was the Messiah, and he suffered for it. Paul, apostle to the pagans, believed that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah, and he suffered for it. But of Paul's *intention* to be a good, loyal member of Abraham's family there should be no doubt. What, after all, was a loyal Jew supposed to do if he believed he had discovered (or, better, that God had revealed) the Messiah?

But if Paul was, and remained, a basically Jewish thinker, what *sort* of Jewish thinker was he? We shall return to these questions in chapter 15 below, but a brief summary at this point is in order. Was he a rabbi who happened to believe that he now knew the name of the Messiah? Was he an apocalypticist who believed that God had broken into the world in a fresh way, sweeping everything else off the table in order to establish something quite new? Was he the promoter of a 'salvation history' in the form of a smooth, untroubled narrative which had now reached its destination? He was none of these, though each has a point to make. He was (by his own self-description) a Messiah-man; but nothing in Judaism had prepared him or anyone else for what a Messiah-man might look like if the Messiah had been crucified. Paul had to work that out from scratch, and some of his sharpest theological expressions occur when we can see him doing exactly that. Galatians 2.15–21 is perhaps the most obvious of many possible examples. And in this working-out we see that, for Paul at least, one could not simply add this Messiah on to the end of an existing structure of thought, a new final chapter which would leave everything else as it was already. Everything would change. Nothing less than death and resurrection would be involved, right through the pattern of thought as well as the life of

the believer. A new form of Torah-obedience was required and enabled (from the heart, but not involving such central Torah-observances as circumcision!); a new sort of ‘apocalypse’ had happened and was happening (the unveiling of Jesus as Messiah, both in the gospel events themselves and in the ongoing gospel proclamation); salvation there was, and history there was, but they no longer related to one another as once Paul might have imagined (the history was as much a damnation history as a salvation history, and both had reached their *telos* with the Messiah). The events concerning the Messiah, and the proclamation of those events, were at the centre of the paradox: these shocking, tradition-overturning, radically new events were *the things that Israel’s God had promised all along*.

Underneath all of this was Paul’s radical sense, rethought in every detail around the Messiah and the spirit: this was what the covenant with Abraham had always envisaged. The covenant *entailed* God’s providential ordering of Israel’s history. But, because the covenant was made with one branch of Adamic humanity, the covenant also, through the secondary provision of Torah, *entailed* God’s ‘No’ to any suggestion that Israel could be affirmed as it stood. That is the plight of Romans 7; and that is why the covenant also *entailed* the bursting-in of the Messiah upon a Jewish world that was looking in the wrong direction for the wrong thing, though perhaps, in some cases at least, at the right time. Covenant theology, in the sense we have expounded it in relation to Galatians 2—4 and Romans 2—4 and 9—11, offers a rich, scriptural framework within which the proper emphases of what has recently called itself ‘apocalyptic’ and what in the past has sometimes called itself ‘salvation history’ can be retained and enhanced, despite the process of *metanoia* through which both must pass if they are to arrive at that destination. The covenant, as far as Paul was concerned, always envisaged God’s call of Israel *for the sake of the nations*. Paul believed that it was the covenant in this sense that had been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and that was being implemented through his own apostolic mission.

For Paul the rabbi, the prospect is more bleak. By Paul’s own judgment, the zeal for Torah which characterized him and his colleagues in the

Pharisaic movement was what had led them in the wrong direction. When he claimed that faith in Jesus as the risen lord was the true Torah-fulfilment of which Deuteronomy 30 had spoken (Romans 10.6–8), his mode of arguing the point, and the many other points that followed from it, bore no resemblance to anything we find in the Mishnah, let alone the Talmud. He can still line up scriptural quotations from Torah, prophets and writings. He can allude here and there to traditions of interpretation which are paralleled in various rabbinic texts. But Israel's Torah is now playing, at best, second fiddle to the new revelation which has taken place. The role which the rabbi assigned to Torah – the mode of YHWH's presence, the guide of his people – was, for Paul, taken rather obviously by Jesus and by the spirit. Torah does indeed continue to play a role, and a varied and subtle role, in Paul's thought. But it has been radically reshaped, like everything else, around the new self-revelation of Israel's God.

Paul, then, was a Jewish thinker for the gentile mission; a covenant thinker who drew together Israel's sense of historical tradition and the apocalypticist's dream of a totally fresh revelation. In particular, he combined, in a way that western theology has struggled to do, the sense (a) that the one God would call the whole world to account, and that this 'forensic' judgment could be brought forward into the present and (b) that this God had redefined his people, in the act of rescuing them from their sins and thus from the present evil age, in, through and around the Messiah. Paul allowed 'forensic' and 'participationist' categories to interact in his thinking. Indeed, we may doubt whether he would have recognized our 'categories' as neat, separate packages. Each emphasis took its place in relation to the other in a complex dance which should never have been separated. 'Justified *in the Messiah*', with the Messiah's death and resurrection 'reckoned' to those who are 'in him', and with *pistis* as the badge which demonstrates that those in whose heart the spirit has worked by means of the gospel really are Messiah-people – that is how this combination works. It is always possible, of course, for theologians and preachers to oversimplify in this way or that, to take a few elements of what Paul says and arrange them in a pattern that may satisfy for a while. But this

regularly involves leaving out – or, indeed, striking out! – some elements, a verse here, a passage there. We have tried in these three chapters, particularly the central chapter 10, to indicate that the division which Schweitzer saw between ‘law-court’ language and ‘being in Christ’ language is a divide not in the mind of Paul but in the eye of the (modern) beholder, and that the stand-off between expositions that have favoured one and marginalized the other is unhelpful and misleading. Again, I have proposed the category ‘covenantal’ as a heuristic label to denote the combination of the two, taken together with the other features mentioned in the previous paragraphs, and to locate the whole complex of thought where it belongs, which is with Paul’s fresh messianic understanding of God’s purposes *with, for and especially through* Israel. There may be better labels, but ‘covenantal’ still has merit. It highlights, in particular, Paul’s great emphasis: that everything, in the last analysis, comes back to the question of God. And among all the other things which one might say, and which Paul does say, about God, this stands out as one of the main clues to Paul’s theology, and hence to the strengthening of his worldview and the energizing of his mission: that God is, and has been, faithful.

[\(iii\) Paul’s Theology and His Three Worlds](#)

With this vision of Paul’s theology, we are at last in a position to see how he related to the three worlds he inhabited. As to his native Judaism: his critique was not that it was bad, shabby, second-rate, semi-Pelagian or concerned with physical rather than spiritual realities. His critique was eschatological: Israel’s God had kept his promises, but Israel had refused to believe it. The Messiah had come to his own, and his own had not received him. Had Paul read John’s prologue he would have nodded at that point, and muttered ‘I wrote three whole chapters about that.’ Of course, Paul’s reimagining of the Jewish theology of God, God’s people and God’s future created many points of potential confrontation. But as with Qumran, where the community believed that the one God had secretly re-established his covenant with them, leaving the rest of Israel behind the game, so with

Paul. He believed that the sun had risen, while most of his fellow Jews were insisting on keeping the bedroom curtains tight shut. We shall explore this, not least in relation to his fresh readings of scripture, in chapter 15.

With regard to the Greek world of popular religion and philosophy, Paul's radically revised monotheism, election and eschatology gave him a robust intellectual platform from which to critique, by implication and sometimes head on, the philosophies of the time, not least Stoicism.⁷³² But his real target was the popular culture: many gods, many lords and many idols, clamouring for allegiance and dehumanizing any who gave it. Paul may have been aware, too, of an implicit clash between his gospel and the mystical religions of the Orient, though this does not lie on the surface of his text. He did not derive his message or his practice from such sources, though he may have been aware that his vision of Christian initiation (for instance) was in a sense upstaging the 'mysteries'. I see him rather, as Luke saw him in Athens, with his spirit grieved at a city full of idols, ready to debate more serious perspectives when given the chance. But at the level of hope, as we said earlier, there was no contest. The only hope in the ancient world was either for the smile of 'Fortuna' or for an escape to the Elysian fields. Paul held, taught and lived a hope which outflanked those options, because he believed in a God who was creator and judge, neither of which beliefs featured prominently in greco-roman religion or philosophy. We shall explore all this in chapters 12 and 13.

Perhaps the most striking thing about Israel's hope in its fresh Pauline expression was its undesigned coincidence with the realized eschatology of the Augustan age. It just so happened, as we saw in chapter 5, that Paul was telling Israel's story, from Abraham to the Messiah, in a world caught up in Rome's story, from the Trojan Wars to Augustus. When Paul spoke of the *parousia* or the *epiphaneia* of Jesus, he was writing for hearers who applied those words to a very different incarnate divinity. As we reflect on the full sweep of Paul's reworked Jewish theology, we should not be surprised that, like Genesis, Isaiah and Daniel before him, he told and lived the story of the creator God, of God's people and of God's future plans in a world where pagan empire was claiming to provide all the 'future' anyone could want.

Our next chapter, introducing the final Part of this book, will therefore examine Paul's clash with the world of Roman empire.

This is after all a good place to begin as, with Paul's worldview and theology spread out before us, we now locate him within the wider world of his day. The patience of filter and focus will enable us to screen out the mass of details we have studied, and to zoom in on the question of, so to speak, What St Paul Really Did. The flocks of unruly birds, beating their wings around the bush, now gather into one. Only when we place him historically, culturally and intellectually within the multiple overlapping worlds we studied in Part I will we see the concentrated focus of his life and work. Paul's eschatological vision of the Messiah's victory (past and future), of the work of the spirit, and of the consequent new creation, had brought him to the place given matchless expression by Gerard Manley Hopkins:

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness, deep down things.
And though the last lights off the black west went,
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward springs;
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast, and with ah! Bright wings.⁷³³

This is the bird, perched and ready, in which all the others are concentrated and gathered.

¹ On C1 Jewish hope see *NTPG* ch. 10; and [above, ch. 2, esp. 108–75](#).

² On all this see *RSG* 124f., pointing out that the older attempts to 'derive' developed Jewish beliefs from e.g. ancient Persia now seem considerably less secure. See too Collins 2000b, distinguishing 'political eschatology', 'cosmic eschatology' and 'personal eschatology' and tracking the varied beliefs of many cultures.

³ Eph. 2.12.

⁴ On the apparent exception of Virgil *Ec.* 4, [see below](#). For the idea of rotating historical periods, with the golden age eventually reappearing, see *JVG* 451 n. 32. On these see Collins 2000b.

⁵ See *RSG* 47–51, 77–80.

⁶ Isa. 11.1–4, 6–9.

⁷ Ps. 98.7–9.

⁸ See e.g. Collins 2010a.

⁹ [Above, e.g. 163–75](#); and see esp. *NTPG* ch. 10; *RSG* chs. 3 & 4; and Wright 2008 [*Surprised by Hope*].

¹⁰ *JVG* ch. 13. [See above, 157, 633, 663f., 673–5, 681–90; and below.](#)

¹¹ cf. e.g. Watts 2000 [1997].

¹² Mk. 1.2f., quoting Mal. 3.1; Isa. 40.3.

¹³ See the forthcoming work on the gospels by Richard B. Hays. See too the brief statement in Wright 2012a [*HGBK*], ch. 5.

¹⁴ [Ch. 7 above](#). On the Roman imperial narrative, the sole apparent exception, see above, [298–311](#).

¹⁵ One need only think of psalms such as 89, or 104–7, to see the point.

¹⁶ It is noticeable that in Schechter 1961 [1909] there is no separate chapter on ‘eschatology’, but the future hope is expounded in various places precisely in relation to the election of Israel and the coming divine kingdom. In Montefiore and Loewe 1974 [1938] there is a chapter on ‘The Life to Come: Resurrection and Judgment’, in which are highlighted the themes we take up here. Schreiner 2001, 453f. rightly insists that though ‘eschatology’ can be treated as a separate topic it actually characterizes the whole of Paul.

¹⁷ A previous, much shorter, version of this argument was sketched in ch. 7 of Wright 2005a [*Fresh Perspectives*]. In the present treatment I am highlighting things somewhat differently and addressing two major issues for which the earlier treatment had no space.

¹⁸ The regular Pauline theologies, naturally, treat eschatology; though the question of whether it forms a separate topic at the end of a list (as for instance in Ridderbos 1975 [1966], ch. 12; Dunn 1998, §12, 18, 19; Schreiner 2001, ch. 16; Schnelle 2005 [2003], ch. 22; Wolter 2011, ch. 9), or a fundamental category, remains open. In the present book I am treating it, in a sense, as both.

¹⁹ On Paul’s eschatology see the helpful summaries and analyses in Kreitzer 1987; 1993.

²⁰ See *JVG* ch. 6.

²¹ The distinction goes back a long way, for instance to the seminal work of Ladd 1974a, 1974b.

²² e.g. Allison 1999.

²³ On the question of development between 1 Cor. and 2 Cor. cf. esp. *RSG* chs. 6 and 7.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 15.24.

²⁵ cf. Adams 2006.

²⁶ Am. 5.18–20.

²⁷ e.g. Isa. 2.12; 22.5; Jer. 46.10; Ezek. 7.7; 13.5; 30.3; Joel 1.15; 2.11, 31; 3.14; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1.7, 14; Zech. 14.1; Mal. 4.5; cf. ‘the day’ or ‘the days’, with similar effect, in Isa. 13.6; Ezek. 7.10; 12.23; 21.25; 22.4. See the brief summaries and bibliographies in e.g. Hiers 1992; Allison 2007a.

²⁸ Assyria: Isa. 10.5–19; Babylon: Jer. 27.6–11; Persia: Ezra 1.1–4 (cf. Isa. 45.1–6).

²⁹ Details in *NTPG* 307–20; and cf. *JVG* 481–9.

³⁰ Dan. 7; *Ps. Sol.* 17, 18; etc.

³¹ Obvious examples include Rom. 8.17–20; 1 Cor. 15.27; Eph. 1.22; Heb. 2.6–9.

³² Ezek. 40—8, focused on 43.1–9, and the closing promise (48.35) that the city will be called *YHWH shamah*, ‘YHWH is there’. For the Shekinah abandoning the Temple: Ezek. 10.1–22; 11.22–3.

³³ 1.5, 11; 3.1 (cf. too 4.5–6).

³⁴ Mal. 3.2; cf. Am. 5.18.

³⁵ Full survey of relevant texts in *JVG* 615–24; cf. too *HGBK* ch. 5.

³⁶ Isa. 52.7–12.

³⁷ cf. e.g. Wis. 10—18.

³⁸ Ex. 40.34–5, 38–9.

³⁹ Isa. 6; 1 Kgs. 8; etc.

⁴⁰ Num. 14.20–3.

⁴¹ 1 Kgs. 8.11; 2 Chr. 5.14; 7.1; Ps. 72.19; Isa. 6.3; Ezek. 10.4; Hab. 2.14; cf. the promise in 2 Macc. 2.8. On the link of Temple and creation see esp. Beale 2004.

⁴² Zech. 14.16–19, though the passage also contains elements of warning. On the pilgrimage of the nations (e.g. Isa. 2.2–4 (= Mic. 4.1–4); Isa. 25.6–10; 56.6–8; 66.18–23; Zech. 8.20–3) see esp. Donaldson 1997, 187–97. Note also the symbolic role of the story of the Queen of Sheba coming to Solomon (1 Kgs. 10; 2 Chr. 9: in the latter, 9.23 adds to 1 Kgs. 10.24 the note that ‘all the kings of the earth’ came to Solomon). A verbal echo of Zech. 8.23 (and Isa. 45.14) may be heard at 1 Cor. 14.25.

⁴³ cf again Pss. 96; 98; Isa. 55.

⁴⁴ One theme, important in the second-Temple period, appears absent in the NT, namely the reassembly of the ten lost tribes: see e.g. Ezek. 37.15–28; Hos. 1.10f.; Zech. 10.6–12. Starling 2011 has explored the possibility that Paul does in fact work with this notion in e.g. Rom. 9.25f. where Hos. 1.10 and 2.23 are cited.

⁴⁵ On messianic expectations see *NTPG* 307–20; *JVG* 477–89; and [above, 815–36](#).

⁴⁶ Ps. 2.1–11.

⁴⁷ e.g. Ps. 72; Isa. 9.2–7; 11.1–16; 42.1–9; 61.1–11; 63.1–9.

⁴⁸ cf. Dt. 30.1–20; 32.36, 43 (in the context of a lengthy and scathing denunciation of the people in their present state). [See above, e.g. 117–31](#).

⁴⁹ Out of the massive secondary discussion of this phrase three points emerge. First, since Paul in his discussion of *dikaiosynē theou* regularly engages with biblical passages (esp. the Psalms and Isaiah) in which it occurs, it makes sense to begin from the meaning of the phrase in those contexts (over against those who argue that Paul is giving it a new meaning without reference to earlier usage). Second, the attempt by Käsemann and his followers to suggest that the phrase denotes ‘God’s salvation-creating power’ as a ‘technical term’ in ancient Judaism, without reference to the covenant with Israel, fails in its exegesis both of the second-Temple texts to which they appeal and of Paul – though Käsemann is undoubtedly correct to understand the phrase as denoting the righteousness of the creator God himself (and the ‘cosmic’ dimensions of his responsibility and action) rather than a ‘righteousness’ which is given, reckoned, imputed or whatever to those who have faith. Third, more positively, the context of books like *4 Ezra*, and the exegesis of passages like Rom. 3.1–9 as well as chs. 4 and especially 9–11, show that Paul’s meaning is very closely tied to the idea of the divine faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant (called in question when disasters happen), even though the events of Messiah and spirit have caused Paul to rethink what that covenant actually meant. For more on this see Käsemann 1969 [1965], ch. 7; Brauch 1977; Williams 1980; Soards 1987; and [above, e.g. 480, 801–4, 841, 928, 991, 1003](#).

⁵⁰ Dan. 9.7, 8, 11–12, 14, 15–16, 18.

⁵¹ Dan. 9.11–13 clearly refers to Dt. 27–8.

⁵² 9.16. The reading *dikaiosynēn* is that of the LXX; Theodotion has *en pasē eleēmosynē sou*.

⁵³ On God’s righteousness in *4 Ezra* and Rom., see B. W. Longenecker 1990; 1991.

⁵⁴ e.g. the idea of a ‘new exodus’: in the original exodus, YHWH remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 2.24; 6.5), and acts accordingly.

⁵⁵ cf. e.g. Pss. 7.9f.; 35.24; 40.10–12; 50.6; 97.6; Isa. 41.10; 51.1, 5f., 7f.; 54.17. This is not infrequently obscured by translations which render *tsedaqah/dikaiosynē* and their cognates with words like ‘deliverance’ or ‘salvation’. The mighty deeds of Israel’s God have the *effect* of ‘rescuing’ his people, but they have the *character* of things done because of covenantal commitment; and it is this character that is connoted by the *tsedaqah/dikaiosynē* root.

⁵⁶ Mal. 1.5; 1.14.

⁵⁷ Isa. 2.2–4, more or less identical to Mic. 4.1–3; cf. too Jer. 3.17.

⁵⁸ Isa. 49.5–6. The ‘light to the nations’ theme flickers briefly in Wis. 18.4b; *T. Lev.* 14.4.

⁵⁹ Isa. 56.6–8.

⁶⁰ Isa. 42.3–6; 60.3–7; cf. 25.6–10a; 66.18–21.

⁶¹ Hag. 2.7.

⁶² Zech. 2.10f.

⁶³ Zech. 8.20–3.

⁶⁴ Zech. 14.16f.

⁶⁵ Pss. 2.9; 22.27f.; cf. 66.4; 67.3f.; 68.32; 72.8–11; 86.9; 102.22; 117.1.

⁶⁶ Tob. 13.11. There are hints of the same thing in e.g. *1 En.* 10.21; 57.3; 90.33; 91.14; cf. too *4 Ezra* 13.13.

⁶⁷ Tob. 14.5–7.

⁶⁸ So e.g. Donaldson 1990, 8.

⁶⁹ cf. *T. Zeb.* 9.8; *T. Benj.* 9.2; *Sib. Or.* 3.767–95. The vision of *Pss. Sol.* 17.26–46, cited by Moo 1996, 684 as the clearest example of the tradition, seems to me dubious: the nations will indeed ‘come from the ends of the earth to see his glory’ (17.31), but this is in the context of aliens and foreigners being driven far away (17.28) and of the gentile nations serving under the yoke (17.30), which hardly sounds like the vision of Isa. 2 or Zech. 8; the passage is actually cited by Schweitzer 1968 [1930], 178 as a rejection of ‘universalism’ and consequently a contradiction of Isaiah and Zechariah. See further Donaldson 1990, 9.

⁷⁰ On this tradition see esp. Donaldson 1990, and older works referred to there; e.g. Schoeps 1961 [1959], 219–29.

⁷¹ Classic expression of this point is found in *4 Ezra* 7.50: ‘The Most High has made not one age but two’; cf. too e.g. *1 En.* 71.15; *2 Bar.* 14.13; *mAb.* 4.1; *mSanh.* 10.1; *bBer.* 9.5. Copious other refs. are listed in e.g. de Boer 2011, 30f. For discussion cf. *NTPG* 252–4; 299f.; with Moore 1927, 1.270f.; Schürer 1973–1987, 2.495. Sanders 1992, ch. 14 offers a good overall picture though with occasional strange lacunae.

⁷² See *NTPG* 299f. We might cite passages such as Isa. 2.2–5.

⁷³ cf. *NTPG* 252–5, where I distinguish ten different things sometimes called ‘dualism’. As I say at 253, ‘virtually all second-Temple Jews, with the possible exception only of the aristocracy, believed that they were living in a “present age” which was a time of sorrow and exile, and which would be succeeded by an “age to come” in which wrongs would be righted and Israel’s god would set up his kingdom’.

⁷⁴ This phrase first makes its appearance in Dan. 12.2, i.e. in a context of a two-age scheme with resurrection hope as the content of the ‘age to come’. Within second-Temple Judaism cf. e.g. *Ps. Sol.* 3.12; 13.1; Wis. 5.15 (in the context of the future ‘kingdom of God’); *2 Macc.* 7.9, where the first of the martyrs claims that his God will raise him up to ‘an everlasting renewal of life’ (*eis aiōnion anabiōsin zōēs*), which in context clearly means resurrection (cf. 7.14, 23, 29, on which see *RSG* 150–3); *4 Macc.* 15.3; cf. *1QS* 4.7. On ‘eternal life’ in the Johannine writings cf. *RSG* 441, 463f. Cranfield 1975, 147 is remarkably vague, calling *zōē aiōnios* simply ‘a comprehensive term for final blessedness’. Dunn 1988a, 85 is in my view misleading, translating the phrase ‘life without end’ and saying that this ‘would be readily comprehensible to Greeks’, implying that it was playing into a Platonic vision of life after death rather than the very specifically Jewish two-age doctrine.

⁷⁵ RSG, esp. chs. 3, 4. It is remarkable that Sanders (1992, 298–303) does not integrate ‘resurrection’ into his very this-worldly picture of Jewish eschatology.

⁷⁶ Zech. 13.9; 14.9.

⁷⁷ See e.g. 1 Macc. 14.4–15. On Qumran’s eschatology cf. *NTPG* 203–9; *RSG* 181–9.

⁷⁸ cf. e.g. Aune 1992, 602f. Aune is right to say that a major difference between Paul and his Jewish context is that for him the age to come has already in some sense arrived in the present, but I do not think this results in the distinction being ‘softened or blurred’, as he suggests. The distinction between the two ages remains clear.

⁷⁹ See *RSG* 554–63. Perhaps, indeed, it was this – God doing for Jesus what Paul had expected him to do for Israel – which compelled Paul towards that tight nexus of Messiah-and-Israel which was such a feature of his theology (see above, 815–36).

⁸⁰ 2 Cor. 6.2, referring back to Isa. 49.8; see the discussion above, 874–85. On Paul’s strongly eschatological use of ‘now’, see above, 550–62. The ‘now’ is not the ‘now’ simply of a smooth chronological progression, steadily reaching its climax as a clock hand reaches midnight. It is the surprising ‘now’ when the phone rings at three in the morning with news of a new grandchild. We knew she was coming at some point, but were not expecting her just then.

⁸¹ Rom. 1.1–4. ‘God’s son’ is of course messianic, alluding to Ps. 2.7 and similar passages such as 2 Sam. 7.12–14, where a hint of resurrection (‘I will raise up your seed’) goes with the promise of sonship. Attempts to marginalize this passage on stylistic or linguistic grounds, or to suggest that it embodied a traditional formula which Paul was quoting merely to fit in with expectations rather than to express his own conviction, fails because of the tight thematic links between these verses and several key elements in the letter, not least its theological conclusion, 15.12. See above, 815–36.

⁸² Rom. 8.11.

⁸³ 1 Cor. 15.20–8. The theme of a *messianic* kingdom which expresses and anticipates the ultimate *divine* kingdom has deep Jewish roots, as we can see in e.g. Schechter 1961 [1909], ch. 7, esp. 103.

⁸⁴ ‘Kingdom of God’ is comparatively rare in Paul; but when the phrase occurs it is clearly a concept he can take for granted. See Rom. 14.17; 1 Cor. 4.20; 6.9f.; 15.24, 50; Gal. 5.21; Eph. 5.5 (where he speaks of ‘the kingdom of the Messiah and of God’); Col. 1.13; 4.11; 2 Thess. 1.5. Cp. the ‘royal’ language at e.g. Rom. 5.17, 21; 6.12–23; 1 Cor. 4.8; 15.23–8. In the Pastorals cf. 1 Tim. 1.17; 6.15; 2 Tim. 4.1, 18.

⁸⁵ See above, 114–21.

⁸⁶ Dan. 7.14, 18, 22, 27. This is of course the famous ‘son of man’ vision, drawing on the ancient theme of the human one set in authority over the animals. Through the fresh readings of Dan. 7 which we find in the second-Temple period we can watch the way in which the symbolism of the original vision (where ‘one like a son of man’ functions as the literary symbol for ‘the holy ones of the Most High’) turns into the belief (as e.g. in *4 Ezra* 11–12) that the coming Messiah will represent Israel as a whole.

⁸⁷ Ps. 2.7–9.

⁸⁸ Ps. 72.8–9.

⁸⁹ Ps. 110.1, 5–6 (v. 1 quoted in 1 Cor. 15.25); 8.4–6 (quoted in 15.27). In the NRSV the latter passage is made inclusive by being put in the plural; in the Heb. and Gk., and for Paul, it is in the singular as here, and since Paul clearly took the masculine singular in this case as a reference to Jesus it is best to leave that explicit. Note the combination of echoes of Pss. 2 and 8 at Rom. 8.17–21.

⁹⁰ The same probability emerges through Paul’s use of the ‘stone’ imagery in relation to Jesus and his installation as Messiah/world ruler. This draws obviously on Ps. 118.22 (cf. too Mk. 12.10 par.;

Ac. 4.11; 1 Pet. 2.7) and Isa. 8.14; 28.16 (quoted in Rom. 9.33); but it also resonates closely with Dan. 2.34–5, 44–5, which itself anticipates the climax of Dan. 7. See *NTPG* 291–7.

⁹¹ Jos. *War* 6.312–14 (and cf. 3.399–408); cf. *NTPG* 304, 312–4; and [above, 116f.](#), [130f.](#), [142f.](#)

⁹² cf. [above, 142–8](#) for discussion of the close links in the second-Temple period between a Daniel-based hope and the understanding of covenant renewal as in Dt. 30.

⁹³ [See above, e.g. 817–25.](#)

⁹⁴ See Wright 2006b [*Judas*], ch. 5.

⁹⁵ Ac. 17.7.

⁹⁶ Ac. 17.30–1. For a fresh interpretation of the whole speech, opening new possibilities for reading it as a genuine summary of Paul's message, see Rowe 2011.

⁹⁷ 8.23, 26–7.

⁹⁸ Rom. 8.34.

⁹⁹ Eph. 1.20–2.

¹⁰⁰ Phil. 2.10–11; 3.20–1.

¹⁰¹ Col. 1.16–18. On the poem see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 5.

¹⁰² Col. 2.15.

¹⁰³ 1 Cor. 2.8.

¹⁰⁴ Col. 1.13; the next verse amplifies that in terms of 'redemption, the forgiveness of sins', exactly as in Gal. 1.4 ('who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age').

¹⁰⁵ 1 Cor. 2.6.

¹⁰⁶ On 'dualism' see *NTPG* 252–6. Gal. 1.4 is a key text in the construction of Martyn 1997a, on which [see below.](#)

¹⁰⁷ Against Martyn 1997a, 95–7, who sees 'gave himself for our sins' in Gal. 1.4a as a concession to the traditions which the Galatian 'teachers' propounded and which Paul himself wished, if not to deny, then at least to place in a different light.

¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere in Paul: Rom. 12.2 ('don't let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age'); 1 Cor. 1.20 ('where is the debater of this present age?'); 3.18 ('if anyone ... supposes they are wise in the present age, let them become foolish ...'); 2 Cor. 4.4 ('the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers'). The other passages where Paul seems to call the present age 'evil' is Eph. 6.13 ('this dark age'); cf. 'these are wicked times we live in' (literally 'the days are evil') in 5.16. The contrast of 'the present time' and that which is to come is also evident in Rom. 8.18; 1 Cor. 2.6, 8; 7.26; Eph. 2.2. This is clearly among Paul's fundamental beliefs. It is remarkable to find Schnelle 2005 [2003], 580 suggesting that Paul takes over this Jewish idea 'only partially and in a broken form'. I would say that he takes it over completely and in a christologically fulfilled form.

¹⁰⁹ cf. Rom. 2.7; 5.21; 6.22, 23; Gal. 6.8. The wider context in Rom. leaves no doubt that Paul, like Dan. or 2 Macc. (see *RSG* 109–15, 150–3), is thinking of resurrection within the new creation as the content of this 'life'. The difference between Paul and John at this point is that in John (e.g. 3.15f., 36, etc.) 'the life of the age [to come]' is emphatically an 'already'; Paul obviously agrees with an 'already' status but uses *zōē aiōnios* primarily to look forward. Closer to Paul are e.g. Mk. 10.17, 30; Ac. 13.46, 48.

¹¹⁰ Col. 1.13f. 'Redemption' (*apolytrōsis*) regularly refers to what God accomplished in the slave-freeing act of the exodus ([above, 845](#)).

¹¹¹ Gal. 4.3–7.

¹¹² For 'sonship' in this context cf. Ex. 4.22. On the 'exodus' motif here [see above, 656–8](#).

¹¹³ See *Perspectives* ch. 11; and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 510–12.

[114](#) 1 Cor. 10.2f.

[115](#) The Messiah is seen as the Passover lamb in 1 Cor. 5.7; and [see above](#).

[116](#) 1 Cor. 10.11.

[117](#) On ‘ends of ages’ [see above, 552](#).

[118](#) Rom. 1.16; 2.1–11.

[119](#) For the first: Rom. 3.21–6 (and in fact 3.21—4.25 as a whole); for the second, Rom. 1.16f.

[120](#) Rom. 10.3 with 9.7f. (Abraham) and 10.6–9 (Deut. 30). [See below, 1165–76](#).

[121](#) 2 Cor. 5.17.

[122](#) Rom. 12.2.

[123](#) Gal. 6.15.

[124](#) Rom. 8.21.

[125](#) Jn. 1.14.

[126](#) Church as temple: 1 Cor. 3.16f.; 2 Cor. 6.16–18; Christians as temples: 1 Cor. 6.19f.

[127](#) 1 Cor. 3.10–15 uses building imagery in a way which suggests that Paul has had the Temple in mind for some verses before he mentions it explicitly in 3.16f. [See above, 391f](#).

[128](#) cf. e.g. Rom. 12.1f.; and again 1 Cor. 3.16f.; 6.19f.; 2 Cor. 6.16–18, insisting on a new sort of endogamy ([see above, 369, 444](#)).

[129](#) [See above, 716f](#).

[130](#) Col. 1.27. See *Perspectives* ch. 23.

[131](#) 2 Cor. 1.20.

[132](#) Paul’s opponents are of course shadowy characters, seen darkly in a mirror, regularly invoked by scholars as convenient explanations for various phenomena, in particular for why Paul spoke of things which the same scholars think irrelevant to his central thought. On the problem, see e.g. Barclay 1987.

[133](#) Gal. 4.9 ([above, 376, 643, 657](#)).

[134](#) Warnings: Dt. 10.16 (cf. Lev. 26.41); Jer. 4.4; 9.26; cf. Ezek. 44.7; promises: Dt. 30.6; Jer. 31.33; 32.39f.; Ezek. 11.19; 36.26f.

[135](#) Rom. 10.6–10. For fuller exegesis [see below, 1174–6](#), and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 658–64.

[136](#) cf. Dt. 32.21, quoted in Rom. 10.19 (and nb. 32.20, where YHWH says ‘I will see what their end will be’, which in the LXX is *deixō ti estai ep’autois ep’ eschatōn*. It is not surprising that this was read by some, including Josephus, as a long-range prophecy of Israel’s ultimate future (on Josephus here [see above, 130f](#)).

[137](#) 3.5 MT/LXX.

[138](#) Joel 2.28–32 (3.1–5 MT/LXX).

[139](#) e.g. Rom. 6.12–23; Gal. 5.16–26; [see below](#).

[140](#) e.g. Rom. 2.26, 27 (remarkably explicitly); 3.27, 31 (remarkably cryptically); 8.4 and, by clear implication, 8.7–9 (‘the mind focused on the flesh is hostile to God. It doesn’t submit to God’s law; in fact, it can’t ... But you’re not people of flesh; you’re people of the spirit ...’ In other words, there is a sense in which you *do* now ‘submit to God’s law’: the sense, presumably, of 8.4). See too 10.4–13; 13.8–10; 1 Cor. 7.19; Gal. 6.2. On not being ‘under the law’: Gal. 5.18. On the whole theme [see above, 1032–8, esp. 1037f](#).

[141](#) For the ‘new marriage’ to the Messiah rather than Adam see too Rom. 7.1–4, on which [see above, 892f](#).

[142](#) Rom. 8.23.

¹⁴³ Dunn 1998, 308 notes this usage in passing, but avoids the christological implications.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 1.8.

¹⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 5.5.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Cor. 1.14.

¹⁴⁷ 1 Thess. 5.2.

¹⁴⁸ 2 Thess. 2.2.

¹⁴⁹ Phil. 1.6.

¹⁵⁰ Phil. 1.10.

¹⁵¹ Phil. 2.16.

¹⁵² Rom. 2.5.

¹⁵³ Rom. 2.16.

¹⁵⁴ Rom. 13.12.

¹⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 3.13.

¹⁵⁶ Eph. 4.30.

¹⁵⁷ 2 Tim. 1.18.

¹⁵⁸ 2 Tim. 4.8.

¹⁵⁹ 2 Thess. 2.2.

¹⁶⁰ 1.10; 2.19; 3.13; 4.13—5.11.

¹⁶¹ 1 Thess. 2.16.

¹⁶² Perriman 2010, 50f. makes perhaps more of this theme than is exegetically warranted, but since most exegetes ignore it altogether there is perhaps a balance to be redressed. [See below, 1154](#). There is also of course the whole theme of the ‘man of lawlessness’ and the ‘restrainer’ in 2 Thess. 2.1–12, on which see, in addition to the commentaries, Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 508–28.

¹⁶³ For details on the following analysis, cf. LSJ 1343; BDAG 780f., with copious references. For a summary of key issues see e.g. Allison 2007b, 296.

¹⁶⁴ Compare the ‘ordinary’ uses in e.g. 1 Cor. 16.17; 2 Cor. 7.6, 7; 10.10; of Paul himself, Phil. 1.26; 2.12.

¹⁶⁵ cf. e.g. Polybius 18.48.4; 3 Macc. 3.17; of the arrival of an army, 2 Macc. 8.12; other refs. in BDAG 781.

¹⁶⁶ *Ant.* 3.80; Thackeray ad loc. tr. ‘the advent of God’.

¹⁶⁷ *Ant.* 3.203.

¹⁶⁸ cf. too *Ant.* 9.55, summarizing the effect created in 2 Kgs. 6.15–19: Elisha prays that God will ‘reveal ... His power and presence [*emphanisai tēn hautou dynamin kai parousian*] to his servant’. Here *parousia* is simply ‘presence’ – ‘the fact that he was there all along’ – rather than ‘arrival’.

¹⁶⁹ Phil. 3.20f. Neither *parousia* nor *epiphaneia* ([see below](#)) occur here, but nobody will doubt that this passage describes the event for which Paul elsewhere uses those and similar terms.

¹⁷⁰ e.g. Plut. *Them.* 30.

¹⁷¹ Of Caligula: *Inscr. Cos.* 391. On *epiphaneia* see LSJ 669f.; BDAG 385f.

¹⁷² BDAG 1048.

¹⁷³ Thus e.g. Col. 3.4; cf. 1 Pet. 5.4; 1 Jn. 2.28; 3.2 (*phaneroō*); 2 Thess. 2.8, where *epiphaneia* is combined with *parousia* (‘with the unveiling of his presence’, *tē epiphaneia tēs parousias autou*); BDAG suggest that here *epiphaneia* ‘refers to the salvation that goes into effect when the *parousia* takes place’, but this hardly fits the sense either of the verse or of the words. *Parousia* here is the ‘presence’ of the lord, and *epiphaneia* its unveiling – not, in 2 Thess. 2.8, for salvation, but for

judgment on ‘the lawless one’. *Epiphaneia* is comparatively frequent in the Pastorals: 1 Tim. 6.14; 2 Tim. 1.10; 4.1, 8; was this because of a desire on the part of the writer to contrast Jesus with Caesar, whose *epiphaneia* was celebrated? See esp. the emphatic Tit. 2.13.

[174](#) 1 Cor. 15.23.

[175](#) 1 Thess. 2.19.

[176](#) 1 Thess. 3.13.

[177](#) 1 Thess. 4.15. Dunn 1998, 299f. is right to stress that the primary action in the whole scenario is that of God himself, but offers little more help. Schreiner 2001, 460f. seems to leave open the traditional literalistic reading of a ‘rapture’. For more details on this controversial passage see RSG 214–19.

[178](#) 1 Thess. 5.23.

[179](#) 2 Thess. 2.1.

[180](#) 2 Thess. 2.8; see n. 173 above. The ‘lawless one’ himself also has a *parousia* in v. 9; this usage seems to be formed by analogy with that of Jesus, much as in Revelation the Beast is a parody of the Lamb.

[181](#) Dunn 1998, 295f. rightly sees the novelty of Paul’s *parousia*-teaching, but not the rootedness of this idea in ancient Jewish ideas about YHWH’s return.

[182](#) Zech. 14.5.

[183](#) Isa. 11.4.

[184](#) Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 535f. is wrong to imply that one has to choose between seeing Sinai-imagery and Emperor-imagery here. It is precisely part of Paul’s genius to combine Jewish sources and gentile targets.

[185](#) See below, ch. 12.

[186](#) In American, I understand, people do not use this expression, replacing it with ‘put the whole world right’ or something similar. Even Australians, I discover, sometimes need to have it explained. The reason I retain the English usage is because ‘putting something *to rights*’ carries not only the meaning of sorting it out, making it work properly, putting right what was wrong with it, but also the notion of *justice*. Despite the dangers of our late-modern ‘rights culture’, always threatening to collapse into the mere swapping of thwarted prejudices, the idea of restoring someone’s proper ‘rights’, and doing so on a cosmic scale, is endemic to the biblical notion of justice.

[187](#) For these three options see e.g. Sanders 1983, 123–35; Käsemann 1980 [1973], 73 (‘the possibility here is also fictional, at least in the immediate context’); Campbell 2009, 547–71. Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 553 argues strongly against the ‘hypothetical’ line, as taken by Lietzmann 1971, 39f., citing the parallel in e.g. Rom. 14.10f.

[188](#) See above, 764–71.

[189](#) On this, see e.g. Cranfield 1975, 1979, 108f.: if God ‘did not react to our evil with wrath’ it would raise the question ‘whether God could be the good and loving God’, since ‘indignation against injustice, cruelty and corruption’ is ‘an essential element of goodness and love in a world in which moral evil is present’.

[190](#) A *krisis* is basically a decision between two or more things. The word then quickly passes into the making of judgments; then, more specifically, legal judgments, deciding officially between right and wrong.

[191](#) Pss. 28.4; 62.12 [LXX 13]; Prov. 24.12.

[192](#) e.g. Jer. 17.10; 32.19; 50.15, 29; Job 34.11; Eccl. 12.14; Sir. 35.19 [LXX 35.22]; *T. Lev.* 3.2; *Pss. Sol.* 9.5.

[193](#) 2 Cor. 5.10; 11.15; Mt. 16.27; 2 Tim. 4.14; 1 Pet. 1.17; Rev. 2.23; 18.6; 20.12f.; 22.12.

[194](#) On *zōē aiōnios* see above, 163f., 1029, 1060.

[195](#) 2 Chr. 19.7; Sir. 35.14f. [LXX 12f.]. These look back to e.g. Dt. 10.17; Job 34.19. The point is repeated frequently in the NT: Ac. 10.34; Gal. 2.6; Eph. 6.9; Col. 3.25; 1 Pet. 1.17. On the whole theme see Bassler 1982.

[196](#) I originally wrote ‘uncontroversially’; but that was before I had read Hultgren 2010, 131.

[197](#) On all this, see below, 1379–82; and see ‘The Law in Romans 2’ in *Perspectives* ch. 9.

[198](#) See the passages in Sanders and Käsemann referred to above, n. 187; and Eisenbaum’s comment (above, 937 n. 459). Schreiner 2001, 279–82 says that although the ‘hypothetical’ reading is attractive it is to be resisted; at 469–71 he offers a cautious balance.

[199](#) Nb. the striking similarity to the conclusion of the Areopagus speech (Ac. 17.31); cp. Ac. 10.42.

[200](#) See above, e.g. [925–66](#).

[201](#) Rom. 14.10–12.

[202](#) 2 Cor. 5.10; cp. Ac. 10.41.

[203](#) 1 Cor. 4.5.

[204](#) See too the substantial account in 2 Thess. 1.5–10, with the developed picture of coming judgment on the AntiChrist in 2.8–12.

[205](#) 1 Cor. 6.1–3, 5.

[206](#) 1 Cor. 4.8. See above, [481](#), [544](#).

[207](#) cf. e.g. Rom. 5.17; 2 Tim. 2.12; Rev. 5.10; 20.4; 22.5 (cf. 3.21). Cf. too Mt. 19.28; Lk. 22.28–30; *Pss. Sol.* 17.26, 29.

[208](#) Even if the ‘holy ones’ of Dan. 7.18, 22, 27 were originally angels (see e.g. Collins 1993, 304–19), it seems clear that by the first century the passage was being read in terms of the faithful Jewish people as a whole. This is the best explanation, too, for passages like Wis. 3.8; Sir. 4.15.

[209](#) NRSV: ‘obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God’; NJB: ‘brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God’; NEB ‘enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God’.

[210](#) NTE.

[211](#) It is remarkable that Schreiner 2001, a book whose title heralds Paul as ‘apostle of God’s glory in Christ’, appears to offer no treatment of 8.18–30. At 328 he speaks of the ‘heavenly inheritance’, which implies that he has not seen the point of the ‘inheritance’ in Rom. 8, where the whole cosmos, liberated from corruption, is the ‘inheritance’.

[212](#) Isa. 6.3; 11.9; Hab. 2.14. (Other similar refs. [above, 190–3](#).)

[213](#) On all this see *RSG* Part II. On the ‘intermediate state’ see too Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 497–508.

[214](#) e.g. Isa. 65.17–25, itself a reworking of 11.1–10; 66.22; cf. 2 Pet. 3.13; *4 Ezra* 7.75.

[215](#) On Paul’s hope of resurrection see the full discussion of all relevant passages in *RSG* Part II (207–398).

[216](#) Rom. 8.23; 2 Cor. 1.22; 5.5. Eph. 1.14.

[217](#) 1 Cor. 15.26.

[218](#) See the discussions in e.g. Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 491f., 500 n. 33; Dunn 1998, 310–13; Schnelle 2005 [2003], 581–7.

[219](#) The only mention of the future hope in Gal., apart from warnings about ‘not inheriting the kingdom of God’ (5.21), is in 5.5: ‘we are waiting eagerly, by the spirit and by faith, for the hope of righteousness.’

²²⁰ e.g. Jer. 31.31–7; Ezek. 36.16–38. One might also add the efforts of Philo to translate Moses into terms of hellenistic philosophy and thus to enable his contemporaries to appropriate Torah in a new way.

²²¹ See Bockmuehl 2000, 162: Jesus, so far as we know, did not even begin to address the question of how gentiles should behave within the company of his followers. This is among many reasons why it is wrong to suppose that the traditions found in the gospels are primarily a reflection of the life of the early church: see e.g. *NTPG* 421f.

²²² ‘Moral vision’: e.g. Hays 1996b; cf. too Meeks 1996, 3. Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 274 comments wisely on the way in which the Enlightenment in general, and Kant in particular, have skewed the relevant debates. The word ‘ethics’ goes back in the tradition, of course, to Aristotle ([see above, 201f., 234f.](#)); for the ancient philosophical schools, this was closely linked with ‘physics’, a description of ‘what there is’ ([see below, 1098f., on ‘indicative’ and ‘imperative’](#)).

²²³ It is to the credit of e.g. Ridderbos 1975 [1966] and Schreiner 2001 that this is not the case, but that Christian behaviour finds a more Pauline place near the centre of their works. See too Bockmuehl 2000, 147.

²²⁴ An obvious point: any kind of Jewish-style monotheism carries with it a primary ‘ethical’ obligation, namely, not to worship idols.

²²⁵ Schnelle 2005 [2003], 546 rightly states that when someone is ‘accepted’ through the gospel, that acceptance is ‘unconditional but not inconsequential’.

²²⁶ ‘Community’ is one of the three focal points in the sweeping analysis of Hays 1996b. The relation of Paul’s churches to wider society is especially in view in Rom. 12.14—13.10 (see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 712–27), which is the principal location of Paul’s important teaching on non-retaliation and learning the art of peace, a theme elsewhere associated more with the church’s own life but here looking outwards (12.17–21; cf. Rom. 14.17, 19; 15.13; 1 Cor. 14.33; 2 Cor. 13.11; Eph. 2.14–17; Phil. 4.7, 9; Col. 3.15; 1 Thess. 5.13, all contrasting with the ‘imperial peace’ of 1 Thess. 5.3). On this see recently e.g. Swartley 2006.

²²⁷ cf. Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*], 187f./216–18.

²²⁸ cf. e.g. Dunn 1992; Gorman 2011.

²²⁹ On the tight integration of theology and ethics in Paul see e.g. Hays 1996b, 18, 20, 46, 56 n. 1 (against those who suppose that his ‘ethics’ is simply a random mélange of unsorted bits and pieces); behind this, cf. the whole work of Furnish 1968: as he says (13), ‘the apostle’s ethical concerns are not secondary but radically integral to his basic theological convictions’, making any separate analysis of a ‘Pauline ethic’, apart from theology, problematic. Bockmuehl 2000, 149 points out that in the ancient world all ‘ethics’ were deeply ‘religious’, with hellenistic moral teachings nested within a larger assumed world of pagan divinities.

²³⁰ See *NTPG* 342f., 459–64; cf. too *JVG* 360–8. See further, on the critical passage in 1 Cor. 7.29–31 (from whose slender beam great weights have been suspended), Thiselton 2000, 580–3.

²³¹ This ‘now and not yet’ was how Paul thought on a cosmic scale, but it was also true at a local level: ‘[Paul] envisioned a corporate narrative in which his communities began as slaves of various vices and then pursued the goal of their transformed existence. He writes in the middle of that narrative ...’ (Thompson 2011, 207).

²³² Bultmann 1995 [1924]. See the discussions in e.g. Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 255–8; Furnish 1968, 242–79; Dunn 1998, 628–31; Burridge 2007, 105f. Perhaps the most positive thing one can say about the ‘indicative/imperative’ question is the comment of Wolter 2011, 315: this corresponds to the relation between election and Torah.

²³³ It is, in particular, wrong to suggest that Paul divided his letters into ‘doctrinal’ and ‘ethical’ sections (so, rightly, e.g. Dunn 1998, 626f.; Burrige 2007, 106). Romans, sometimes astonishingly cited as an example, at once gives the game away, with a tight integration of theology and ethics being obvious in e.g. 2.12–16, 25–9; 4.20–5; 6.2–23; 8.5–16 and indeed 12.1–2; 14.1–15.13. The best actual example might be Eph., with an almost formal bipartite structure (1–3; 4–6); but, quite apart from questions of authenticity, there is plenty of ‘ethics’ in the first half and plenty of ‘doctrine’ in the second.

²³⁴ Schnelle 2005 [2003], 547f. launches a detailed attack on the ‘indicative/imperative’ analysis, demonstrating its inadequacy and proposing instead a paradigm of ‘transformation and participation’ (as in his earlier article, Schnelle 2001). This seems to me substantially on the right lines. See too now Zimmerman 2007. The much-vaunted split between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ is commonly thought to go back to Hume and Kant; but, while they did indeed envisage an epistemological separation between empirical truths and moral values, they both believed that moral value could be stated *as a kind of reality*. Almost all Hume’s own moral judgments are formed with the verb ‘is’. I owe this point, as indeed much else, to Prof. Oliver O’Donovan.

²³⁵ Hays 1996b, 17, rightly rejects such theories (as expounded by M. Dibelius and others). The word *paraenesis*, which means ‘exhortation’, is not found in the NT, and its cognate verb, occurring twice in Ac. (27.9, 22), is not used by Paul.

²³⁶ Schnelle 2005 [2003], 556; see too Thompson 2011, 59f.; but cf. e.g. Wolter 2011, 311f., advocating what seems basically a heuristic use of *paraenesis*. Paul uses both *paraklēsis* and its cognate *parakaleō* frequently: cf. BDAG 764–6.

²³⁷ On Paul’s scripturally rooted ethics see esp. Rosner 1994; Bockmuehl 2000, 145–73; Tomson 1990; and esp. Thompson 2011. On the greco-roman world of moral exhortation see the important work of Malherbe 1986; Meeks 1986b; 1993; 1996. Posing some difficult questions of detail to the question of ‘Paul and scripture’ in ethical contexts is Tuckett 2000, though we may suspect that Tuckett has not fully grasped the larger point that Hays and others are making. Dunn 1998, 662 suggests that the denial of Paul’s use of scripture in his ethics is ‘one of the curiosities of twentieth-century exegesis’. The curiosity is, of course, explicable by the implicit dominance of a quasi-Marcionite reading. This has survived the transition from an older Lutheranism, in which ‘the law’ was rejected in favour of ‘justification by faith’, to a newer liberal or even postmodern theology in which scriptural reference as a whole is relativized in favour of the ‘inclusion’ of a wide range of cultural norms and practices. See the description in Thompson 2011, 12, including G. Strecker’s suggestion that ‘concrete norms would violate Paul’s message of freedom’ and R. Scroggs’s aligning of Paul with ‘situation ethics’.

²³⁸ See e.g. the works of Meeks and Malherbe, as in [the previous note](#).

²³⁹ An important monograph in relation to all this is that of Rabens 2010.

²⁴⁰ Gal. 1.4.

²⁴¹ Rom. 12.2.

²⁴² [Above, 477f.](#), [500](#). On ‘new creation’ cf. e.g. 2 Cor. 5.17; Gal. 6.15.

²⁴³ Rom. 13.11–14. [See above, 614](#); and [below, 1374–6](#).

²⁴⁴ Eph. 5.11–14.

²⁴⁵ 1 Thess. 5.8, within the larger paragraph of 5.1–11.

²⁴⁶ Rom. 6.2–5, 8–11.

²⁴⁷ See e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 579, with many commentaries.

²⁴⁸ Rom. 6.12f.

²⁴⁹ Col. 3.1–11.

[250](#) Col. 2.11–12, which underlies the entire argument from 2.13 to 3.17.

[251](#) See above, 421–4.

[252](#) So e.g. 1 Cor. 4.6, 16; 11.1; Phil. 3.17; 4.9; Col. 3.15; 1 Thess. 1.6; 2.14; 2 Thess 3.7, 9; and ‘imitating God’ in Eph. 5.1. See Hays 1996b, 31; BurrIDGE 2007, 144–8, with good discussion of recent literature. See too the suggestive study of Eastman 2008.

[253](#) Or, as Gorman 2009, 11 suggests: ‘Cultivate this mindset in your community, which is in fact a community in Christ Jesus ...’

[254](#) See e.g. Bockmuehl 1998, 121–3; behind that, Hurtado 1984; also now Fowl 1998; Dodd 1998. The objections of Käsemann 1968 to an ‘ethical’ reading of Phil. 2.6–11 are well explained by Morgan 1998, e.g. 59, 67: his target was an ‘ethical idealism’ which ‘would not get us out of the old world’. Most of those advocating an ‘ethical’ reading today are not, I think, proposing what Käsemann was denying. An important recent study is that of Hood 2013.

[255](#) On sayings of Jesus in the letters of Paul, see the important study of Kim 1993.

[256](#) See e.g. the first four chapters of Hooker 1990, and the helpful brief summary now in Hooker 2013; Gorman 2013. On ‘transformation’, [see the discussions above, esp. 952–60](#).

[257](#) Rom. 15.1–9. On this see esp. Thompson 1991, 208–41.

[258](#) BurrIDGE 2007, 148 expounds all this well, but at the end seems to me to hint at a somewhat different agenda. He is right to say that Paul highlights Jesus’ deeds rather than his words, and to see this focused particularly on the cross. But to slide from that, via ‘concern for others, especially the weaker’, to Jesus’ ‘acceptance of others, what we have called his open pastoral practice’ needs to be confronted more explicitly with Rom. 6.2–11 (which BurrIDGE expounds at 102–7, but does not seem to relate to the idea of ‘open practice’); cf. too 8.12–16, which strangely does not appear in BurrIDGE’s index). As BurrIDGE himself notes (176), Jesus’ ‘open pastoral practice’ itself included saying things which made some people go away sorrowfully, unable to meet the stringent moral demands of Jesus’ brand of ‘inclusivity’ (Mk. 10.22).

[259](#) The word ‘sanctify’ and its cognates have a long history in Christian moral discourse, but its temple-overtones, which would be obvious to a first-century Jew, are not normally explored (e.g. the minimal reference in Johnson 2009, 100). Paul’s use of *hagiasmos* and similar terms reflects his new-temple theology, as in the passage from 1 Cor. 6 just referred to, and as in Rom. 8.9–11. The Christian, indwelt by the spirit, is a ‘holy place’ in the sense of the biblical sanctuary. That is why for Paul ‘sanctification’ goes so closely with ‘glorification’ (since the divine glory comes to dwell in the sanctuary).

[260](#) Rom. 6.22f.; 8.12–15.

[261](#) cf. Dt. 3.15–20.

[262](#) On the temporary messianic kingdom cf. e.g. Aune 1992, 603.

[263](#) Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*].

[264](#) Gal. 5.19–23.

[265](#) So e.g. 1 Cor. 15.10, 58; Col. 1.29; on hard work and not giving up: Gal. 6.9; 1 Thess. 5.14; 2 Thess. 3.6–13.

[266](#) cf. Rom. 2.29; Phil. 3.3; Gal. 6.16. On the relevant debates, and particularly on Rom. 9–11, see below.

[267](#) 1 Cor. 12.2; 10.1.

[268](#) 1 Thess. 4.5. On the role of 1 Thess. in general and 1 Thess. 4 in particular as effective summaries of Paul’s ethics see Thompson 2011, ch. 3. Actually the definite article in the Greek of 4.5 might suggest ‘like *the* Gentiles, who don’t know God’: not that there are some gentiles who do

know this God and some who don't, but that gentiles, by definition, do not know the true God. The close implied link between wild lust and idolatry is reinforced by the explanatory note in Eph. 5.5 and Col. 3.5, where sexual greed is said to be (a form of) idolatry.

[269](#) Rom. 2.27; Phil. 2.14–16.

[270](#) Eph. 4.17–24. The idea of 'putting on the Messiah' itself partakes in the 'now and not yet' of Paul's ethics: it has in principle already happened (Gal. 3.27) and it is something which the baptized must be sure to do (Rom. 13.14; Col. 3.10).

[271](#) See esp. above, ch. 6; and below, ch. 15.

[272](#) Sanders 1983, 201f. helpfully summarizes Newton 1985: 'Paul was concerned with the church's unity (and thus denied the parts of the law which separate Jew from Gentile), and also with its *purity* (and thus insisted on keeping aspects of the law which kept the church pure from the contagion brought by idolatry and sexual immorality)' (italics original). This is the major exception to Paul's normal rule (Sanders 1983, 178) that 'the factors which separated Jews from Greeks must be given up by the Jews'.

[273](#) Eph. 5.21–6.9; Col. 3.18–4.1; 1 Pet. 2.18–3.7. Cf. Towner 1993; Boring 2007; and below, 1375.

[274](#) e.g. Rom. 12.9–15.

[275](#) One might contrast, e.g., Paul's advice to slaves and masters with the rather different advice in Sir. 33.25–30 (though cf. the change of tone in 33.31–3).

[276](#) On this see e.g. Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 278–88, against A. Nygren in particular (who wants to rule out any positive sense of Torah) and also H. Lietzmann (who wants to insist that the Christian must simply act spontaneously, without legal instruction); Dunn 1998, 631–42; Schreiner 2001, 321–9. See esp. the helpful summary in Rosner 2003, 214–16.

[277](#) See e.g. Dunn 2008 [2005], chs. 17, 19; and cf. e.g. Wolter 2011, 322f.

[278](#) Rom. 2.26f.; 1 Cor. 7.19; Rom. 3.27; 8.3–8; cf. Hays 2005, 149–51.

[279](#) So, rightly, Schnelle 2005 [2003], 552f. Schnelle does not, I think, see the deeper sense of 'fulfilment' which lies underneath these surface discrepancies. The argument of Bockmuehl 2000, ch. 7, that what we have in Paul and elsewhere in early Christianity is a taking up of what later came to be seen as the 'Noachide' commands – that is, laws for all humans, not just for Abraham's family – is an ingenious attempt to preserve a sense that Paul was indeed drawing on specific Torah-commands for his ethical instructions.

[280](#) The question is examined from a modern systematic theological perspective by Meilander 2011, 581–3.

[281](#) Rom. 13.8–10; cf. Wolter 2011, 338.

[282](#) Gal. 5.13f. This introduces, of course, the sequence of thought which climaxes in the 'fruit of the spirit', the first of which is 'love'. Witherington 1998, 381 points out that 'summed up' here is *peplērōtai*, 'has been fulfilled', from the same root as *plērōma* in Gal. 4.4, and that this is 'eschatological language', indicating the promised time when the basic intention of Torah, 'to produce a unified people of God, unified on the basis of love toward the one true God and toward each other', is fulfilled.

[283](#) Gal. 6.2.

[284](#) An excellent recent brief survey and summary is that of Schreiner 2010, 358–60, though I want to firm up his conclusion a bit more: I agree that for Paul the law is to be interpreted christocentrically, and in relation to love, but in addition to Christ's life and death as 'the paradigm, exemplification, and explanation of love' (Schreiner 2010, 360), something needs to be said about

the inner transformation and motivating power, as in Gal. 1.16 ('to reveal his son *in me*') and 2.20 ('the Messiah lives *in me*').

[285](#) On the negative work of Torah [see above, 1033f.](#)

[286](#) cf. e.g. Phil. 2.15; Col. 1.22; 1 Thess. 3.13; 5.23. On the notion of early Christian perfection cf. e.g. Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 265–72.

[287](#) Rom. 2.4–6; see e.g. Wis. 11.23. For judgment being delayed until the wicked are ready cf. Gen. 15.16.

[288](#) cf. 4 *Ezra* 7.26–36: after the temporary messianic kingdom, and the death of the Messiah himself, there will be an interval, followed by a general resurrection. At that point, 'compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn'; 'only judgment shall remain, truth shall stand, and faithfulness shall grow strong' (7.33f.).

[289](#) On resurrection as the theme of the whole letter, see *RSG* ch. 6. On the present passage see *RSG* 288–90.

[290](#) 1 Cor. 6.13f., 19f.

[291](#) Phil. 3.12–14.

[292](#) See also e.g. 1 Cor. 9.24; 2 Tim. 2.5; 4.7f.; Heb. 12.1f.; and, for the image, 4 *Macc.* 6.10; 17.11–16.

[293](#) Phil. 3.15–16; 17–19.

[294](#) On 'inheritance' and the renewed cosmos, see Rom. 8.18–26 ([above, 488f.](#)).

[295](#) 1 Cor. 6.9–11. Elements of this, as of all translations, are of course controversial: see the extensive discussions in the commentaries, esp. Thiselton 2000, 438–55; Fitzmyer 2008, 254–8.

[296](#) Gal. 5.21.

[297](#) Eph. 5.5–10.

[298](#) Though cf. Rom. 14.17 ([see above, 663, 668, 1063](#)).

[299](#) So too 1 Thess. 4.3–5.

[300](#) Rom. 2.27; 1 Cor. 6.1–6.

[301](#) 1 Cor. 4.5.

[302](#) Rom. 12.19.

[303](#) Rom. 13.1–7: [see below, ch. 12](#).

[304](#) Rom. 14.13; cp. the whole discussion of 'judgment' in 14.1–12, where everything is located in relation to the forthcoming eschatological judgment (14.10–12).

[305](#) See Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*], esp. chs. 5 and 6, which provide a much fuller discussion of the matters which follow here. See further Harrington and Keenan 2010; Thompson 2011.

[306](#) The 'virtue'-tradition has often been discounted within protestant circles, but it seems to me that it fills precisely the gap which is evident in various accounts of Paul's ethics: for instance, in Dunn 1998, 669 where he tries to balance the 'outward' and 'inward' aspects; or Meilander 2011, 583–6, who expounds the mainstream 'virtue'-tradition but finds it hard to see how Paul might fit into it.

[307](#) See Blackburn 2008 [1994], 381: these four would have been 'unintelligible as ethical virtues to ancient Greeks'. See e.g. Dunn 1998, 665; Thompson 2011, 106 on humility. Paul of course speaks warmly of the virtuous pagan life in e.g. Phil. 4.8 (see e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 556f.). But Schnelle does not see the radical discontinuity. When he says (558) that Paul's imperative 'has no really new content', since 'what is essentially human must not be newly created and thought through', I suspect that this comes over as sharper than he really intends (the German original is 'das Humanum musste nicht neu erschaffen und bedacht werden'). The translator, M. E. Boring, comments to me that, for

Schnelle, 'Paul's ethic ... is not utterly discontinuous with the ethics advocated by Hellenistic Judaism and Greco-Roman ethics in general, but is certainly not reducible to them' (personal communication, 7 March 2013). With that I would agree, but I think the sentence as it stands implies a stronger identification between Paul's ethics and those of his wider context. What is ruled out is the position of e.g. Betz 1979, 282 (lists like Gal. 5.19–25 'sum up the conventional morality of the time'). To look no further, 'sexual offenses (or offenders) appear in all of the vice lists in the Pauline literature, but do not appear in Hellenistic vice catalogs' (Thompson 2011, 94).

[308](#) Rom. 5.2–5.

[309](#) Rom. 5.17; 8.17–30.

[310](#) e.g. Rom. 8.17–27; 1 Cor. 4.9–13; 2 Cor. 4.7–18; 6.3–13; Phil. 1.29f.; 2.17f.; 3.10; Col. 1.24f.; 1 Thess. 3.1–4.

[311](#) See Allison 2007b, 298.

[312](#) See Schnelle 2005 [2003], 548f.

[313](#) See esp. 1 Cor. 5.1–13; 6.9–21; 7.1–40; Gal. 5.13–21; Phil. 3.17–19; Col. 3.1–11; 1 Thess. 4.3–8.

[314](#) 1 Cor. 7.8, 25–40. See e.g. Witherington 1995, 173–81.

[315](#) cf. *NTPG* 342f., 459–64.

[316](#) On *agapē* and its cognates see BDAG 5–7. A glance at the concordance to the LXX indicates that the word's pre-Christian usage by no means had the high sense we find in John or Paul; it is, then, insufficient to say that Paul 'derives the term *agapē* from the Septuagint' (Thompson 2011, 180). Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 293 notes that Paul is here close to the preaching of Jesus.

[317](#) 1 Cor. 13.8–13.

[318](#) Gal. 5.22.

[319](#) Rom. 13.8–10; Gal. 5.14.

[320](#) Eph. 4.16.

[321](#) 1 Thess. 4.9–12.

[322](#) On the Collection, [see below, 1202, 1255, 1495–7, 1507](#).

[323](#) Phil. 1.9–11; 4.10–20.

[324](#) Lev. 19.18, cited at Rom. 13.9; Gal. 5.14; Mt. 22.39 and pars. Cf. esp. Furnish 1972.

[325](#) e.g. Hillel (bShabb. 31a); cp. e.g. Tob. 4.15; Sir. 31.15. Cf. R. N. Longenecker 1990, 243f.

[326](#) Col. 3.14. The major exception is probably Philo *Virt.* 51–174, which expounds the Mosaic law in such a way as to bring out the elements of kindness and mercy throughout, and contrasts them with pride and arrogance. A much shorter version of the same point is found in Jos. *Ap.* 2.209–14. For the idea of *agapē* (in this case love of 'wisdom') as the fulfilling of the laws, cf. Wis. 6.17f. Brotherly or neighbourly love is commanded in e.g. *T. Reub.* 6.8f.; *T. Iss.* 5.2; 7.6; *T. Gad* 4.2; 5.2f.; *T. Zeb.* 5.1; *T. Benj.* 3.3f. Cf. too *T. Gad* 4.7: 'the spirit of love works by the Law of God through forbearance for the salvation of mankind' (tr. H. C. Kee in Charlesworth 1983, 815); cf. too *Aristeas* 227. All these are important, and sometimes show signs of the 'double commandment' of loving God and neighbour, but hardly constitute a major or central theme in second-Temple Judaism comparable to the place of *agapē* in early Christianity (against Thompson 2011, 39f., who seems to me to overstate the case quite considerably; one cannot build much on e.g. Tob. 4.13).

[327](#) cf. Wolter 2011, 335–7. Wolter holds on to the possibility of 'love' as an 'organizing centre'. On the love-command at Qumran, restricted to fellow members of the community, cf. e.g. 1QS 1.3, 9; 9.16, 21; CD 6.20f. On love in the ancient greco-roman world see the summary in Klassen 1992, 382–4.

[328](#) cf. Jn. 13.34f.; 1 Jn. 4.7f.

[329](#) So, rightly, Hays 1996b, 200–3.

[330](#) Rom. 5.6–11; cf. Jn. 3.16; 1 Jn. 3.1; 4.7–12.

[331](#) Wright 2010 (*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*), 157f./183.

[332](#) BurrIDGE 2007, 108f. misses the point: Hays explains that ‘love’ will not do as an overall theme for the whole NT, for reasons just given. BurrIDGE strangely says that Hays’s treatment of Paul ‘does not include love at all!’ (108, exclamation original), which overlooks Hays 1996b, 35. BurrIDGE says, in the same passage, that Campbell 2005, 117 is ‘commenting on Hays’ abandonment of love’; but what Campbell says, with approval, is that Hays, like Hauerwas and many others, has been prompted ‘to abandon “love” as a central organizing principle for Paul’s ethics, and for ethics more broadly’ (my italics).

[333](#) One might also suggest that Hays’s third category, ‘new creation’, is also all about *agapē*, both in the generous self-giving love of the creator and in the way of life which is the central characteristic of the new world.

[334](#) Hays 1996b, 35 points out that it is there, in a passage on the unity of the church, that we find the great love-poem, not (say) in the context of the discussion of marriage in ch. 7.

[335](#) Bockmuehl 2000, 168 suggests that 1 Cor. 8—10 is not after all about *adiaphora*, since Paul still insists that one must ‘flee idolatry’ (10.14). But that is just the point: Paul is distinguishing between the things which are mandated (no idolatry, which for him means no going on to the premises of idol-temples and their attendant eating-rooms) and the things which are indeed ‘indifferent’ (permission to eat anything sold in the market (10.23) – which no observant Jew could have granted). The point about ‘things indifferent’ is that one must tell the difference between the things that make a difference and the things that do not.

[336](#) See esp. 1 Cor. 8.7–13; 10.25—11.1.

[337](#) See, almost at random: Rom. 16.17–20; 1 Cor. 3.18–23; 6.9; 14.20; 2 Cor. 11.3; Gal. 6.7; Eph. 4.14, 23; 5.6; Col. 2.4, 8; 2 Thess. 2.3. See too the warnings against ‘deceit’: Eph. 4.22; Col. 2.8; 2 Thess. 2.10.

[338](#) 1 Cor. 2.14–16.

[339](#) See also, similarly, Phil. 1.9f.; 1 Thess. 5.21. See Schnelle 2005 [2003], 551; Fowl 1990; 1998; Meeks 1991; and [see below, 1124f.](#)

[340](#) 1 Cor. 14.20; Eph. 4.14–16; Col. 1.28; 4.12.

[341](#) Griffith-Jones 2012.

[342](#) Rom. 1.20–5, 28.

[343](#) Rom. 4.19–21.

[344](#) Rom. 7.22–5.

[345](#) On all this, see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 549–72, and [above, 892–7.](#)

[346](#) Rom. 8.5–8.

[347](#) Rom. 12.1–2. I have paraphrased the notoriously difficult phrase *logikē latreia* as ‘worship like this brings your mind into line with God’s’ to bring out one aspect at least of what I take Paul to be saying: see further e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 555; Jewett 2007, 729–31.

[348](#) Rom. 12.3–8; cf. 1 Cor. 12.12–31.

[349](#) cf. *phroneō* in Phil. 1.7; 2.2 (twice), 5; 3.15 (twice), 19; 4.2, 10 (twice). Various different senses are included in these but the concentration is still remarkable: see Meeks 1991; Fowl 2005, 80–92.

[350](#) Phil. 2.12: cf. below, 1295f.

[351](#) Eph. 5.10. I have here rendered *dokimazein*, the same verb as in Rom. 12.2, with those two expressions: it is about thinking something through and working out its relevance in particular situations.

[352](#) Eph. 5.17.

[353](#) 1 Thess. 5.21: again the verb is *dokimazein*.

[354](#) Eph. 2.10.

[355](#) On the continuing if subordinate place of ‘rules’ within a virtue-based Christian ethic see Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*], 171f. [US edn. 200f.].

[356](#) On Torah [see above, 1032–8](#).

[357](#) Rom. 8.29.

[358](#) Aune 1992, 598.

[359](#) Eph. 6.11–19.

[360](#) cf. 1 Thess. 5.8. The echoes of Isa. 59.17 are important: this suit of armour is, more or less, the one which YHWH himself wears when winning his decisive victory. Cf. too Wis. 5.18.

[361](#) Rom. 8.26f.

[362](#) cf. Thompson 2011, 109: ‘Paul reflects the influence of the Greco-Roman moralists less than do his predecessors in the Diaspora. He is indebted to the Holiness Code, the summaries of the law, and the Jewish paraenetic tradition. Undoubtedly, the humiliation and self-denying love of Jesus provided Paul’s deeper insights into the nature of love, the dominant feature in Paul’s lists.’

[363](#) See Stendahl 1995; Gager 1983; Gaston 1987; Eisenbaum 2009; W. S. Campbell 2008; 2012. On the whole question see Hays 1996b, 411–17; 2000, 308f.

[364](#) [See ch. 4 above](#).

[365](#) Sometimes summary remarks give the game away. Mark Nanos, writing a blurb for Bachmann 2008 [1999], says that Bachmann’s arguments challenge interpretations ‘that continue to be instrumental for expressing negative views of Judaism through Paul’s voice, as well as cornerstones of replacement theology’. To set up the question in this way, or to warn against the ‘disinheritance’ or ‘expropriation’ of Judaism (Bachmann 2008 [1999], 123; 2012, 104), however justified in terms of positions misguidedly taken over recent centuries, is a sure way to rule out any genuine historical understanding of early Christianity, where the strong note of *fulfilment*, emphasized across the whole early church, presupposed a strong and positive evaluation of Israel’s traditions and hopes.

[366](#) See, rightly, Hays 2000, 300, 302. The description of ‘supersessionism’ in Martyn 1997a, 450 n. 168 is no doubt accurate as an account of how some people have thought, but Martyn does not see (a) that there is indeed a sharp opposition in the text between what Paul might have described as two visions of the people of God – i.e. Paul is taking one side in an inner-Jewish dispute; and (b) that his own view, throughout his commentary, is pressing for opposition to and abandonment of all ‘religion’, of which the obvious example in Galatians is some form of Judaism, and its ‘replacement’ with something else.

[367](#) *RSG; Surprised by Hope*. On ‘dispensationalism’ see e.g. Mason 2000; Marsden 2006 [1980].

[368](#) I initially wrote these lines in December 2009. In August 2011 the *New Yorker*, which used to employ rigorous fact-checkers, published an account (Lizza 2011) of the then would-be Republican Presidential candidate Michele Bachmann (no relation, I think, of the German scholar cited a few notes back). Bachmann had once lived on a kibbutz in Israel, explained the article, ‘a state whose creation, many American evangelicals believe, is prophesied in the Bible’. By way of explanation, the article adds an astonishing parenthesis: ‘St. Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, says that Jews will one day gather again in their homeland; modern fundamentalists see this, along with the coming of the Antichrist, as presaging the Rapture.’ The truly striking thing is that in the subculture in question

it is simply taken for granted that Paul in Romans prophesies the return of the Jews to their homeland, something which is of course never mentioned, or even hinted at, in the actual text of the letter. The author of the article, and the editor of the prestigious magazine, clearly took this fundamentalist assumption for granted.

³⁶⁹ cf. Esler 2001, 1205: there is ‘a modern aversion to the powerful in-group/out-group antipathies of the first-century Mediterranean world which are largely alien to modern North American and northern European culture and which interpreters are often slow to recognize in NT texts’. This is of course true, but anyone who supposes that the modern culture in question has no in-groups and out-groups, and that it does not indulge in ‘violent stereotypification and vilification’, only needs to turn on the television.

³⁷⁰ Rom. 5.18; 11.32.

³⁷¹ I think, for instance, of those who have gone further than J. L. Martyn did and have basically embraced a would-be Pauline universalism. The obvious example is de Boer 2011; see below for his disagreement with Martyn on Gal. 6.16.

³⁷² For some reflections on this in a different mode, see Wright 1999 [*The Way of the Lord*].

³⁷³ This is not as straightforward as it might sound, since in Gen. 17.25f. Ishmael was circumcised before Isaac was even born.

³⁷⁴ The seminal essay on this topic is Barrett 1976 (= ch. 9 in Barrett 1982). On ‘mirror-reading’ see the rightly famous article by Barclay 1987 (reprinted in Nanos 2002b, 367–82, from which I cite). Barclay 381, after applying quite stringent tests, thinks it ‘probable’ that Paul’s opponents made reference to the Sarah–Hagar narratives.

³⁷⁵ On ‘allegory’ here see esp. Witherington 1998, 321–3; de Boer 2011, 295f. Hays 2000, 301f. is right to say that all Paul means here is a ‘figurative sense’, though he also rightly notes (1989, 215) that typology is a sub-species of allegory. Betz 1979, 243 n. 49 quotes Quintilian (9.2.46) to the effect that when a metaphor is pushed far enough it becomes an allegory.

³⁷⁶ Hagar was of course Egyptian (Gen. 16.2f.; 21.9), but Paul shows no sign of making that link between her and the later slavery in Egypt.

³⁷⁷ Rightly, Hays 2000, 301.

³⁷⁸ See e.g. R. N. Longenecker 1990, 211–17; Witherington 1998, 325–9; Hays 2000, 303–6.

³⁷⁹ So Eastman 2006, 313, using the language of postmodern moralism: ‘rather than creating inclusive, graceful communities, [Paul] exercises his authority to evict those who pose a threat to his leadership and his preaching. If such exclusive power is the tactical purpose of 4.30, then in a sense Paul is no better than the other missionaries ... his use of power to “cast out” those who oppose him is equally cliquish and coercive.’ But Paul is not opposing the ‘agitators’ because they are ‘cliquish’ or ‘coercive’. He is opposing them because they are abolishing the scandal of the cross (5.11), seeking to avoid the persecution which it would bring (6.12) and so misunderstanding the entire nature of the gospel (1.6–9), denying its ‘truth’ (2.5, 14) and undermining the freedom it brings (5.1, etc.). This has nothing much to do with the postmodern sin of ‘deporting’ or ‘silencing’ different or dissenting voices (Eastman, 327), and everything to do with the fact that, as Eastman elsewhere says, ‘Paul’s Christ-centered gospel is exclusive and unapologetically hegemonic in the claims it makes on ... Christians’ (329).

³⁸⁰ To say nothing of the sharp words in 5.12.

³⁸¹ 1 Cor. 5.1–5 (cf. 2 Cor. 2.5–11). Note that Paul uses the image of leaven, as a corrupting presence needing to be purged from a community, in both passages: 1 Cor. 5.6–8; Gal. 5.9. Eastman 2006, 332 sets up a straw man by suggesting that Gal. 4.30, read in the light of Paul’s ‘angry and dismissive voice’, ‘seems to pronounce a final judgment that permanently excludes the other

missionaries and their followers from the life of the Spirit and the reign of God'. These ideas are not mentioned here.

³⁸² The fact that the verb remains in the singular, however, is presumably irrelevant (against Eastman 2006, 324; see too Eastman 2007, 133): to do so would have made no sense within the quotation.

³⁸³ On the strange question of what exactly Ishmael was doing in Gen. 21.9 that was so offensive, see the rabbinic traditions discussed helpfully by Meeks 1982, 69f.

³⁸⁴ So e.g. Perkins 2001, 92f. (cited by Eastman 2006, 319f.), distinguishing between Galatian Christians themselves, i.e. Paul's actual audience, and 'visitors whose views cause agitation in the community' who 'might be sent packing'.

³⁸⁵ 1 Cor. 8; Rom. 14.

³⁸⁶ Eastman 2006, 324, 327 seems to me to pose a false alternative: Paul is not suggesting expulsion, but rather that the community should stand firm. The text seems to me to suggest that the latter will be a lot easier if the former takes place.

³⁸⁷ 5.1, summarizing what was spelled out in 2.19–21, 3.13–14 and 4.4–7.

³⁸⁸ 4.29, summarizing what was said in 3.2–5, 14 and 4.6–7, and looking ahead to 5.16–26.

³⁸⁹ See Witherington 1998, 334; Hays 2000, 304; and the detailed studies of Willitts 2005; Eastman 2007, 141–55; and Harmon 2010, 173–85. Sarah is referred to in Isa. 51.1–3, her only appearance in the OT outside Genesis itself.

³⁹⁰ See Harmon 2010, here at 177, 183.

³⁹¹ So Hays 2000, 304.

³⁹² See Hays 2000, 303f. Schreiner 2010, 302 questions this, but says that perhaps the present Jerusalem was seen by Paul as 'still in the wilderness': this is odd, because the 'wilderness' people were the exodus generation who, though not yet obtaining their inheritance, were by definition free from slavery in Egypt.

³⁹³ For the notion of the 'new' or 'heavenly' Jerusalem cf. e.g. *4 Ezra* 7.26; 10.25–8; 13.36; *1 En.* 90.28f.; *2 Bar.* 4.2–6; Heb. 12.22; 13.14; Rev. 3.12; 21—2; see further R. N. Longenecker 1990, 214.

³⁹⁴ So e.g. Betz 1979, 243–5.

³⁹⁵ See Betz 1979, 245 n. 70, questioning whether the Galatians could have made the link (suggested already by Lagrange): see Ps. 83 (LXX 82).7; 1 Chr. 5.19. This provides a clear reason for supporting the shorter reading in 4.25 (*to gar Sina horos estin en tē Arabia*), from which the other readings are easily explicable (against e.g. R. N. Longenecker 1990, 211f.; Dunn 1993, 251f.; Witherington 1998, 332f.; Hays 2000, 302). The definite article, much puzzled over and in my view misrepresented e.g. by Martyn 1997a, 436–8; Schreiner 2010, 301f., is no problem: 'Sinai', an indeclinable noun, is the subject; the *to* refers back to the same word in the previous verse; *horos*, 'mountain', is the complement. See further *Perspectives* ch. 10, esp. 155 n. 12.

³⁹⁶ See 3.10, 19, 22, 23, 24; 4.1–3.

³⁹⁷ cf. e.g. mAb. 3.5.

³⁹⁸ 5.5f.

³⁹⁹ The verb of course occurs at 2.20.

⁴⁰⁰ Gal. 6.15; 1 Cor. 7.19.

⁴⁰¹ 5.17–18. On this, see Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*], 163–71/189–98.

⁴⁰² Against e.g. Barclay 1988, 112; Hays 2000, 326.

⁴⁰³ 6.12, echoing 2.3 and 2.14. On the historical situation see e.g. Jewett 2002 [1970–1]; Hardin 2008; and, among the commentaries, the thorough if cautious survey of Schreiner 2010, 30–51.

⁴⁰⁴ 6.14–16.

⁴⁰⁵ Bachmann 2008 [1999], 115 is wrong to suggest that v. 16 has a ‘not insignificant independence’ – a rather obvious attempt to split the final phrase from the whole thought of the letter which, from every other point of view, looks as though it is being restated in summary form throughout 6.11–17. So too Eastman 2010, 386, suggesting a ‘shift of focus’ in 6.16b comparable to that between Rom. 8 and Rom. 9. The problem with this is (a) that 6.16b consists of only four words, and (b) that Paul then ‘shifts’ back again dramatically in 6.17.

⁴⁰⁶ Rom. 2.17; 3.27; cf. 4.2.

⁴⁰⁷ cf. too 2 Cor. 10.17; Phil. 3.3.

⁴⁰⁸ At this point the majority of recent commentators are agreed: e.g. Betz 1979, 322f.; Sanders 1983, 174; R. N. Longenecker 1990, 298f.; Williams 1997, 167; Martyn 1997a, 574–7; Witherington 1998, 453; Hays 2000, 346; Stanton 2001, 1165 (this interpretation ‘is now widely accepted’); Bell 2005, 179f. (though Bell misleads by labelling this a ‘substitution model’); Schreiner 2010, 381–3 (with copious literature); Cohen 2011, 344 (the latter the more interesting in that it is part of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament*); see too Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 336; Barclay 1988, 98 n. 34; Longenecker 1998, 87f., 176f. (though holding open wider possibilities, which he has now embraced in Longenecker 2012, 16f.); Schreiner 2001, 82f.; Schnelle 2005 [2003], 589f.; Bird 2012, 27. Interestingly, this is the position taken by all those in Nanos 2002b who refer to the question; Nanos himself, in Nanos 2002a, does not discuss the point. Dunn 2008 [2005], 245, 252 (articles orig. pub. 1993, 1994) might be taken to support the majority view, but his fuller account (Dunn 1993, 344–6) suggests a view more like (one reading of) Rom. 11, namely that by ‘the Israel of God’ Paul is referring to the Jew–gentile believing church *and* the as yet unbelieving Jewish people, making the point that in Gal. Paul is not *excluding* future Jewish converts (whoever thought he was, I wonder?). For the history of the debate see Schreiner, loc. cit., and e.g. Eastman 2010, 369: among the main supporters of the minority view we must esp. mention Burton 1921, 358; Richardson 1969; Mussner 1974; and, most recently and impressively, de Boer 2011, 404–8 (the more interesting in that this is one of the places where de Boer parts company from Martyn). The minority view itself divides, with some (e.g. Richardson 1969, 82–4) seeing ‘the Israel of God’ as present Jewish Christians, some (e.g. Bachmann) seeing the phrase as denoting all Jews, and some (e.g. Burton) hinting that Paul might even be referring specifically to his opponents and those who shared their views.

⁴⁰⁹ Curiously ignored by Eastman 2010. See, rightly, Sanders 1983, 174; Weima 1993, 105; Schreiner 2010, 383: ‘The decisive argument for seeing the church as the Israel of God is the argument of Galatians as a whole.’

⁴¹⁰ Remembering that *ekklēsia* was a normal word for ‘synagogue’. Hence the redefinition in 1.22: the messianic ‘assemblies’ in Judaea, as opposed to the non-messianic ones (cf. too 1 Cor. 15.9; 1 Thess. 2.14). De Boer’s suggestion (2011, 407f.) that ‘the church of God’ in 1.13 referred to ‘the mother church in Jerusalem’ is curious: Paul clearly persecuted more widely, and despite what de Boer says at 2011, 85–8, I see no good evidence that he would have referred to the Jerusalem Christians in that way.

⁴¹¹ 1 Cor. 10.32: ‘Be blameless before Jews and Greeks and the church of God.’ Thiselton comments (2000, 795), ‘In 10:1–22 Paul has stressed the continuity of the Church with Israel; the phrase **the Church of God** in this context calls attention at the same time to a discontinuity, as if to imply that “the people of God” are partly redefined, although not in exclusivist terms since their roots and basis of divine promise and covenant remain in continuity with Israel’s history’ (bold type original).

⁴¹² Bachmann’s argument (2008 [1999], 101–6, 121–3), that Gal. has an ‘orientation toward the history of redemption’, and that therefore Paul maintains ‘the priority of Judaism’, is an argument

against a de-Judaized and non-covenantal reading of the letter such as used to be popular in Germany and elsewhere; but it is scarcely an argument against the view expounded throughout the present book.

[413](#) So, rightly, Sanders 1983, 174: 6.12–13 recalls 2.14; 6.14 recalls 2.20.

[414](#) 1.4; 1.7; 1.8f.

[415](#) Bachmann 2008 [1999], 107 is wrong to suggest that 6.11–17 is ‘less aggressive’ or ‘more gentle’ than what has gone before. Paul’s tone, here as throughout the letter, is a mixture of irony and pastoral concern. But every single verse in the paragraph is sharp and clear, with multiple echoes of the letter in general and not least of its equally important opening. See, more accurately, Weima 1993, 90–2; Beale 1999, 205.

[416](#) cf. too 4.12–14.

[417](#) cf. 1 Cor. 10.28; 2 Cor. 3.7, 13; Eph. 2.12; Phil. 3.5. Many writers insist, correctly, that we cannot invoke Rom. 9–11 to help us at this point; Gal. must stand on its own terms. Furthermore, even in Rom. 9–11, despite many claims, the use is not unambiguous or univocal: see, rightly, Davies 1984, 343 n. 20.

[418](#) On what follows see the still very helpful analysis of K. G. Kuhn and W. Gutbrod in *TDNT* 3.359–91. It is too simple to take the usage of 1 Macc. (Jews refer to ‘Israel’, non-Jews to ‘the Jews’) as representative of the period (Stendahl 1995, 4): for a start, 2 Macc. is very different.

[419](#) I am reminded of a moment in Worcester College, Oxford, not long after women were first admitted as Fellows, when one such woman became engaged to one of the existing male Fellows. When, that evening, I proposed that the assembled company rise and drink their health, the Senior Fellow, a lawyer, objected that there was no precedent for such a thing. I pointed out that, in the nature of the case, there could not have been. (We compromised: we drank their health, but stayed seated.)

[420](#) The attempt of Bachmann 2008 [1999], 112 to diminish the force of these parallels must be counted a failure.

[421](#) See above, [163f.](#), [1060](#).

[422](#) For this suggestion, cf. Betz 1979, 323, and later discussions e.g. Weima 1993, 105.

[423](#) See above, [871–3](#). This point is similar to that made by Martyn 1997a, 576.

[424](#) de Boer 2011, 406 suggests that it constitutes a ‘significant problem’ for this view that ‘the Israel of God’ is ‘far removed’ from ‘all who will follow this standard’. This is clutching at straws: (a) seven words is hardly ‘far removed’; plenty of Paul’s arguments depend on much more long-range connections; (b) *ep’ autous* undoubtedly refers back to ‘all who follow’ etc., and that effectively closes the gap to a mere two words (*kai eleos*).

[425](#) Eastman 2010, 368 and Bachmann 2012, 87 both cite Schrage 1995, 442f. to the effect that the ‘Israel’ spoken of in 1 Cor. 10.18 is ‘the idol worshipping [Israel] of vv. 6–10’. But Paul’s point here, as in 10.1–4, is not to say that the idea of Israel’s ‘feeding’ and ‘participating in the altar’ represented their subsequent rebellion. He is simply stating what is true of ancient, biblical Israel as a whole. The implicit contrast is evoked by the fact that in 10.1, as negatively in 12.2, Paul is telling Israel’s story in such a way as to include the Corinthian Christians within it, while differentiating them precisely from ethnic Israel as such; cf. again 10.32, and e.g. Wolter 2011, 413f., and [below, 1231–52](#).

[426](#) For the idea of this as a ‘Pauline innovation’ see e.g. Wolter 2008, 155–8. In view of the use of ‘God’ in the letter so far, reaching its climax here, I regard it as less probable that ‘Israel of God’ was a phrase coined by the ‘agitators’ and taken over by Paul.

[427](#) i.e. the so-called ‘epexegetic’ *kai*. This summary is itself a considerable oversimplification, as the entry for *kai* in BDAG 494–6 indicates (nb. 494: ‘the vivacious versatility of *kai* ... can easily be

depressed by the tr. “and”, whose repetition in a brief area of text lacks the support of arresting aspects of Gk. syntax’). See the full note of Beale 1999, 206 n. 7.

⁴²⁸ SB 3.579. The dating of the Eighteen Benedictions is not important for our purposes; I assume that such formalized prayers from later generations grew out of long-standing traditions going way back into the second-Temple period.

⁴²⁹ ADPB 16.

⁴³⁰ This is the solution preferred by De Boer 2011, 407f. Of course, this would not satisfy the hopes of at least Bachmann and similar thinkers, for whom the idea of future Jewish *conversions*, or of presently law-observant Jewish Christians coming round to Paul’s point of view, would still mean ‘replacement’, ‘displacement’ or whatever. De Boer’s proposal, that Paul has in mind ‘the churches of the Petrine mission’, recognizing its proper mission to Jews (though not its improper invasion of Paul’s territory according to the agreement of Gal. 2.7–9), looks like a valiant attempt to avoid (for him) the Scylla of saying that here ‘Israel’ means ‘the church’ and the Charybdis of having Paul here invoke a blessing on those anathematized in 1.8f. (de Boer has responded to this, in correspondence, by saying that Paul does indeed invoke the divine ‘mercy’ on them). It is ironic that de Boer invokes Romans at this point, having attempted from the start (2011, 2) to suggest that such a move would be, if not actually illegitimate, then certainly dangerous.

⁴³¹ Hays 2000, 346 n. 302.

⁴³² Above, 661–70.

⁴³³ ADPB 6f.; cf. SB 3.557–63: cf. tBer. 7.18; j.Ber. 13b; bMenah. 43b.

⁴³⁴ e.g. Diog. Laert. *Vit. Philos.* 1.33; Plut. *Marius* 46.1.

⁴³⁵ Dunn’s point (1993, 344) that such prayers were ‘strongly Jewish’ hardly means that Paul must be hinting, by using them, at a diminution of his christocentric and ‘new-creation’ position.

⁴³⁶ Against Eastman 2010: the appeal to how Paul ‘surely’ must have felt about his kinsfolk (388) tells us nothing about what Paul actually wrote in this letter.

⁴³⁷ The words *eleos* and *eleeō* are used in Rom. as often in relation to gentiles (Rom. 9.23; 11.30, 31, 32; 15.9) as in relation to Jews (Rom. 9.15, 16, 18; 11.31, 32). One cannot therefore deduce from this word – even supposing one could argue straightforwardly from Rom. to Gal. 6.16! – a supposedly special Pauline emphasis of ‘mercy’ for presently unbelieving Jews.

⁴³⁸ So Beale 1999, esp. e.g. 208. The other texts he proposes are Pss. (LXX) 84.11; 124.5; 127.6; Ezra 3.11; 1QH 13.5; *Jub.* 22.9.

⁴³⁹ 6.17; cf. 2 Cor. 11.23–5; we do not know, of course, how much of what Paul there reports had already been suffered before his writing of Galatians.

⁴⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 5.17 with 4.7–18 and 6.3–10.

⁴⁴¹ The term is of course geographical, not ethnic.

⁴⁴² I see no need here, by the way, to think in terms of interpolations or later scribal alterations (as proposed by e.g. Pearson 1971 and others since; firmly refuted by e.g. Donfried 1984; Davies 1984, 124–7; Weatherly 1991; Malherbe 2000, 164f.; Sängler 2010, 135). That has too long been the refuge of scholars who should have known better. Yes, no doubt manuscripts get altered; but the burden of proof lies on those who propose such a thing with no textual evidence, not least to explain why someone would have inserted *this* material *here*. Watson 2007 [1986], 81 n. 66 rightly points out that if Paul can cite Ps. 68.23f. ‘even in the relatively irenic Romans 11’ there is no reason to suppose that 1 Thess. 2.14–16 is inauthentic.

⁴⁴³ Best 1972, 122 goes so far as to say this comment is ‘anti-Semitic’. As Fee (2009, 102f.) points out, that is like accusing someone of anti-Americanism because they criticize the current President. This is an ‘inner-familial conflict’ (Wolter 2011, 416).

⁴⁴⁴ Fee 2009, 95f.; cf. too Gilliard 1989.

⁴⁴⁵ Malherbe 2000, 169.

⁴⁴⁶ e.g. Ac. 17.5–14; 18.12–17.

⁴⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 15.9; Gal. 1.13f., 23; Phil. 3.6; 1 Tim. 1.13; cf. Ac. 8.3; 9.1f., 21; 22.4f.; 26.9–11. As is now frequently pointed out, an earlier scepticism about Acts' accounts of Paul preaching in synagogues is directly contradicted by Paul's own testimony about his receiving synagogue punishments (2 Cor. 11.24–7); cf. too 1 Cor. 9.20–2, and e.g. Meeks 1983, 26; Sanders 1983, 190–2; Malherbe 2000, 175.

⁴⁴⁸ See *JVG* ch. 12.

⁴⁴⁹ e.g. Mt. 21.35f.; 22.6; 23.34, 37; Ac. 7.52. It seems to me less likely that it refers to the killing of some early Christian prophets (Fee), and it does of course make his view about the absence of the comma even stronger; but why Paul would single out the killing of early Christian prophets here, when there was an old and strong tradition about the killing of prophets, is a mystery to me at least.

⁴⁵⁰ Gen. 15.16.

⁴⁵¹ cf. e.g. Dan. 8.23; 2 Macc. 6.14; Wis. 19.3–5; *LAB* 26.1–3; and, not least, the instructive parallel in *T. Lev.* 6.3–11. There, 'Levi' describes the punishment of the sons of Hamor for the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34.1–31). Their wickedness, says 'Levi', was the accumulation of previous sins: they persecuted Abraham when he was a nomad, they harassed his flocks when pregnant and they grossly mistreated 'Eblaen' (an otherwise unknown character). So, the text says, 'this is how they treated the nomadic people, seizing their wives and murdering them' (6.10). Then the result of this stored-up wickedness: 'the wrath of God ultimately came upon them' (*ephthasen de hē orgē ep' autous eis telos*). (Tr. H. C. Kee in Charlesworth 1983, 790.) See too Gaventa 1998, 37. The likelihood of dependence between this passage and 1 Thess. 2 is minimal; this seems to be a regular way of second-Temple thinking about how providence deals with accumulated sin. The parallel suggests (against Malherbe 2000, 178f., who sees *eis telos* as 'eschatological') that we are right to look for a specific first-century event as the content of 'the wrath' in 1 Thess. 2.16. Eschatology, for Paul, is frequently inaugurated.

⁴⁵² See *JVG* ch. 8.

⁴⁵³ Jewett 1986, 37f., and Jewett 2002 [1970–1], 340f., referring to earlier articles of Johnson 1941 and others, and canvassing other violent incidents in Judaea as alternative options.

⁴⁵⁴ *Jos. Ant.* 20.105–12; *War* 2.223–7; cf. *NTPG* 175 for the larger context.

⁴⁵⁵ cp. Lk. 19.41–4.

⁴⁵⁶ cf. Gal. 1.13f.; Phil. 3.6.

⁴⁵⁷ 1 Kgs. 18.17f.

⁴⁵⁸ cf. 'from your own people', *hypo tōn idiōn symphyletōn* (2.14), indicating 'the same tribe or people group' (BDAG 960). This does not undercut Ac. 17.5–15, where local Jewish groups were involved in the initial opposition to Paul and his message; what is indicated is the local non-Jewish hostility which continued thereafter.

⁴⁵⁹ See esp. e.g. Lk. 19.42–4, which echoes various scriptural prophecies but cannot be reduced to an 'after the event' post-70 write-up for the good reason that some of the things predicted did not actually happen (see *JVG* 348f.).

⁴⁶⁰ 2.13; 2.14–16 is introduced with *gar*: Paul at least supposes 2.14–16 is an explanation of why he can give thanks for what is going on in their midst, not a detached statement about events in Judaea (see Malherbe 2000, 167).

⁴⁶¹ Phil. 1.6.

[462](#) Rom. 12.19–21 (with 13.4!).

[463](#) Among my previous readings: Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 13; *Romans*, 620–99. Those familiar with these earlier treatments may like to know that the argument of the present section proceeds by a different route. It would have been possible to extend the present section into a long book of its own by engaging in more detail with recent literature, not least Bell 2005 and Wilk and Wagner 2010.

[464](#) The spirit is not mentioned as such in chs. 9–11, but as we shall see is visible just underneath the argument in 10.12f.

[465](#) Dodd 1959 [1932], 161–3. In this, Dodd was representative of a much wider sweep of scholarship. I remember on my first visit to Bonn, in 1976, being introduced to the great Heinrich Schlier. He asked me about my doctoral work; I said I was exploring the links between Rom. 9–11 and the rest of the letter. His only response was, ‘Very daring! Very daring!’ On the relationship in question see now e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 591f.

[466](#) 9.6, 8, 8f., 11, 12, 13, 14, 15f., 17, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 22, 23, 25.

[467](#) 11.22, 23, 24, 29, 29, 32.

[468](#) 11.33–6.

[469](#) 9.4f. Jewett 2007, 556 draws attention to this parallel.

[470](#) Among recent comments, see e.g. Grieb 2010, 391.

[471](#) [See above, 114–39.](#)

[472](#) Harink 2003, 175f. suggests that ‘the story of Israel seems (to most readers except Wright) not often to come into view ... in Paul’s letters’. He accuses me of constructing this narrational worldview ‘out of the texts of Judaism of Paul’s time’, a charge to which I plead guilty – except that it was not the second-Temple Jews who invented the sequence of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, the remnant, the Messiah and the new covenant. According to Harink (176 n. 31) ‘Wright simply drags that story line to the text and superimposes Paul’s argument upon it’, whereas ‘Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau appear in 9:7–13 not as characters in a history of the “covenant people” but as paradigmatic examples or *types* of God’s sovereign, selective, and often surprising act ...’ (177, emphasis original); so too with Moses, Pharaoh and so on (178f.). Harink’s real target becomes obvious (178): ‘Paul traces no story line from Israel in the past, through Israel in the present, to Israel (or Israel’s replacement, the church) in the future.’ But the idea of ‘replacement’ has always been alien to my exegesis. Harink, one might say, has dragged that idea to my text and superimposed my argument upon it (much as Bell 2005, 159f. has done with his phrase ‘substitution model’).

[473](#) Stendahl 1995, 38: ‘Perhaps [Paul] didn’t want Christians to have a “Christ-flag” to wave’, and so constructed the closing doxology with reference only to God.’ (Stendahl is wrong to say that it is the only such doxology in Paul: cf. Phil. 4.20.) This in any case ignores Paul’s revised monotheism (ch. 9 above). See too, breathtakingly in view of 9.30–10.17, Hultgren 2010, 433: ‘The doxology makes no mention of Christ ... the last time Christ was mentioned in chapters 9 through 11 is at 9:1–5.’ I suspect that when Keck 2005, 282 says that ‘apart from 9:5 and 10:17 Christ is not mentioned in chaps. 9–11’ this is a misprint for ‘apart from 9:5–10:17 ...’, though since that section comprises nearly half of 9–11, including its vital centre, the point is less significant.

[474](#) Rightly, Jewett 2007, 557. Gaston 1987, 92 protests too much: ‘How is that people can say that chapter 9 deals with the unbelief of Israel when it is never mentioned ...?’ He assumes, among other things, that one can split 9.1–29 off from the rest of the discussion, and that if Paul was talking about Jewish ‘unbelief’ this would constitute an attack on ‘Judaism’ as such. Without this ‘problem’, why the heartbreak in 9.1–5, why the prayer in 10.1? Gaston once admitted to me that his view of 9–11 would be easier to sustain if Paul had not written 11.23; he is followed by Harink 2003, 169f., who skips over 11.23 in a dense footnote (173 n. 24).

⁴⁷⁵ Here we may cite in particular Aletti 2010 [1992], 213–20. I reached my conclusions independently but it is good to see them confirmed by so expert an analyst.

⁴⁷⁶ e.g. Stendahl 1995, 6.

⁴⁷⁷ See e.g. Wagner 2002, 269f.; contra e.g. Tobin 2004, 319, 380, and esp. Watson 2007 [1986], 322: ‘As Paul embarks on his long discussion of Israel’s election, he himself does not know exactly where the argument will take him. It is *as he writes* that he receives insight ...’ (Watson’s italics). Even if the structural balance were not so careful, I find it incredible to suppose that Paul had not faced these questions, and discussed them and taught about them, over and over during the years preceding Romans. Paul has *shaped* the discourse rhetorically so as to lead the hearer on a journey with deliberate twists and turns (and, no doubt, so as to reflect his own prayerful agonizing: so e.g. Grieb 2010, 396); but when he writes Romans he knows the end from the beginning, and knows how to set out the argument to maximum effect.

⁴⁷⁸ See Keck 2005, 226; Jewett 2007, 556; Wilk 2010, 239–41. This balance seems to me to rule out the idiosyncratic suggestion of Tobin 2004, chs. 9–12, that the real section is chs. 8–11 and (302) that 8.31–9 somehow balances 11.25–36.

⁴⁷⁹ So, rightly, Aletti 2010 [1992], 217f.; and e.g. Getty 1988.

⁴⁸⁰ On this division between 10.17 and 10.18, see the use of *rhēma Christou* in 10.17, picking up the *rhēma* of Dt. 30.14 in 10.8. However, since the quote from Ps. 19 in 10.18 also uses the word, perhaps we should rather divide between 10.18 and 10.19. This would not make much difference. Dahl 1977, 143 n. 24 proposes that a new start is made at 10.1. There is clearly a break at this point, but most rightly see the *ti oun eroumen* of 9.30 as indicating the start of a larger section, admittedly summarizing 9.6–29 but doing so in such a way as to point on to 10.1–21 and indeed beyond.

⁴⁸¹ See Watson 2004, 329–41; Watson 2007 [1986], 330 n. 46.

⁴⁸² cf. e.g. Rowe 2000, 152–6.

⁴⁸³ See again above, 117–39.

⁴⁸⁴ See e.g. Wagner 2002, 254–7 and 166 n. 143. It is puzzling that Lincicum 2010, 153–8, having set up the discussion, does not follow it through to this conclusion. This may be cognate with the surprising absence from his book of Steck 1967. See too, similarly, Waters 2006. Jewett 2007, 626 (following Dunn 1988b, 603–5) notes how the passage is used in second-Temple Judaism but does not perceive the significance of this for Paul’s argument. By contrast Ciampa 2007, 109 at least points momentarily in the right direction, albeit almost as an afterthought: ‘Moses looks forward to a future day when God’s presence and word would be restored to his people ... after they had returned to God and seen the end of their exile.’ On Bekken 2007 see below. On the parallels with 4QMMT and Baruch see my essay in *Perspectives* ch. 21; and see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 658–63. Wagner 2002, 115, 166 points out a further Qumran parallel, namely 4Q504 frgs. 1–2 cols. 5–7, esp. 5.6–14 with its allusions to Lev. 26.44f. and Dt. 30.1f., which ‘metaphorically places the community “in exile”, petitioning God for deliverance’ (Wagner 166 n. 143), ‘with its assurance that God will gather repentant Israel from the ends of the earth’ (Wagner 115 n. 233). We note that in 5.15 the community claim that God has ‘poured his holy spirit upon us’, a classic sign of covenant renewal.

⁴⁸⁵ However well one knows the exegetical tradition, one still gasps with astonishment at the list of distinguished writers who have proposed that Paul is not really quoting or using Dt. 30 at all, merely echoing its apparently proverbial sayings: e.g. Sanday and Headlam 1902 [1895], 289; Davies 1980 [1948], 153f.; others in Badenas 1985, 253 n. 297; Tobin 2004, 344 should now be added. Longenecker 1991, 220 n. 2 and Bekken 2007, 4 n. 11 are wrong to include Barrett 1971b [1957], who does indeed say (198) that Paul quotes Dt. 30. A truly distant echo of Dt. 30 can be found at *Thomas 3* (Elliott 1993, 136).

⁴⁸⁶ Bekken 2007, 16 speaks of the ‘eschatological aspect’ of Paul’s thought (and, at 187, of the ‘eschatological perspective’), but despite drawing attention to passages in Philo which point in this direction (e.g. *Vit. Mos.* 2.288), he never sees how his other important Philonic parallels make sense within this larger eschatological narrative. It is a measure of this that, astonishingly, the highly important parallel in 4QMMT appears only fleetingly in his work (2f., 118).

⁴⁸⁷ So, rightly, Watson 2007 [1986], 322f.

⁴⁸⁸ See Joel 2.28f. (LXX 3.1f.): the whole passage (2.28–32; LXX 3.1–5) is quoted in Ac. 2.17–21; cp. Ac. 2.33; 10.45; Rom. 5.5. See Schreiner 1998, 562: ‘Paul would certainly have identified the prophecy of Joel with the outpouring of the Spirit on those who confessed Jesus as Messiah and lord.’ He points out that the *all* of the quotation relates also to the ‘all flesh’ in 2.28 (3.1) upon whom the spirit will be poured out, thus emphasizing again the inclusion of gentiles. Moyise 2010, 75 suggests a similar echo at 1 Cor. 1.2; see too Fatehi 2000, 232.

⁴⁸⁹ See, famously now, Hays 1989a, 1–5, 73–83. Hays describes all this as ‘baffling’ and as ‘an apparently capricious act of interpretation’ which ‘looks on the face of it like a wild and disingenuous piece of exegesis’ (73f.), so that ‘the argument ... rests on sheer force of assertion’ and on a metaphorical reading which ‘seems especially jarring to modern historically sensitive readers’, even though the echoes of the wisdom tradition ‘suggest hauntingly that Paul’s reading is less arbitrary than it sounds’ (82). But once we see the wisdom tradition in the parallel Bar. 3 (highlighted by Suggs 1967; made central by e.g. Keck 2005, 253) not as an independent feature but as part of the widespread second-Temple *new-covenant* and *return-from-exile* reading of Dt. 30, the exegesis is neither capricious, wild, nor disingenuous, and the poor historically sensitive readers may be put out of their misery. On the present passage as a ‘speech in character’ cf. Stowers 1994, 309; Tobin 2004, 343.

⁴⁹⁰ This is not to say that the present chapter provides a full or detailed answer to the fascinating study of Watson 2004, esp. ch. 7. I do think, though, that Paul does overcome the ‘dichotomies’ which appear to be set up. He is saying, just as in Rom. 3.27–30 and 8.5–8, that faith in Jesus as the risen lord is in fact the ‘doing of the law’. It is not just ‘doing’ that is redefined (see the comments on Hays and Wagner in Watson 2004, 331 n. 35) but the law itself.

⁴⁹¹ The mss, though significantly divided, are overall in favour of the longer reading, which is clearly the harder and to be preferred: see e.g. Jewett 2007, 606, who attributes the omission (in the MSS ABDP etc.) to haplography.

⁴⁹² e.g. Bekken 2007, 164; Hultgren 2010, 382.

⁴⁹³ On the Jewish ‘ignorance’ cf. Ac. 3.17.; cp. 13.27; 1 Cor. 2.8; 1 Tim. 1.13; and, wider, Lk. 23.34; Jn. 16.3.

⁴⁹⁴ Rom. 3.21—4.25; Gal. 2.15—4.11; Phil. 3.2–11.

⁴⁹⁵ 10.2, *zēlon theou*; cf. Gal. 1.14; Phil. 3.6; cf. ‘Paul and Elijah’ in *Perspectives* ch. 10. Ortlund 2012 attempts to reinstate an ‘old perspective’ reading (‘zeal’ as ‘general obedience to Torah’) over against a focus on maintaining Israel’s ethnic distinctiveness.

⁴⁹⁶ cf. Luther 1971 [1516], 288f.

⁴⁹⁷ ‘Works’ are mentioned in 9.12 and 11.6: [see below](#). A more subtle version of Luther’s position is offered by Seifrid 2007, 652f.

⁴⁹⁸ Badiou 2003.

⁴⁹⁹ See now particularly Levenson 2012, 18–35. This is not the place to take up the key issues raised by this fascinating book.

⁵⁰⁰ Dt. 9.4–7. Cf. Hays 1989a, 78f.; Lincicum 2010, 155; Ciampa 2007, 107. Watson 2004, 338f. suggests that Paul’s additions from there (and Dt. 8.17) are designed to disguise the fact that Dt. 30 is

in fact about ‘the righteousness of the law’. I have proposed a different way forward, in line with Rom. 2.25–9 and elsewhere: Paul is drawing attention to the fact that, under the new covenant of Dt. 30, a new meaning has opened up for ‘doing the law’ itself.

⁵⁰¹ The phrase has of course generated enormous discussion, polarized between those who think *telos* here means ‘cessation’ (e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 346f.; Watson 2004, 332) and those who think (in line with the main linguistic arguments, for which cf. Badenas 1985, 38–80) it means ‘goal’ or ‘destination’ (e.g. Keck 2005, 248–50; Jewett 2007, 619f.). Our argument goes much further than Jewett, encompassing also the sense that with the Messiah the narrative of Israel from 9.6 onwards has arrived at the ‘goal’ marked out by Moses’ prophecy. Starling 2011, 153f. approaches this solution without (it seems to me) quite grasping it: ‘[Christ] comes after the era of the law, with all its blessings and curses, not as a continuation or extension of Moses’ ministry, but as the next (and intended) turn of the story, to which Moses himself pointed forward and in which the law of Moses will be “fulfilled” by being written on the heart.’ If I am right, Paul is proposing that with the Messiah the era of new blessings, promised by Moses himself, has arrived.

⁵⁰² Rom. 2.26f.

⁵⁰³ Dt. 30.11–14 (NRSV altered).

⁵⁰⁴ Dodd 1959 [1932], 177 congratulates Paul on anticipating ‘modern criticism’ in seeing Lev. as ‘hard and mechanical’ and Dt. as having ‘more of the prophetic spirit’. On an altogether more sophisticated plane, Watson 2004, 314f., 331–3 and elsewhere nevertheless still insists on a sharp antithesis between Lev. 18.5, quoted in Rom. 10.5, and Dt. 30.12–14, quoted in 10.6–8. At 341 Watson suggests that Paul ‘heard two voices in the Deuteronomy passage’ itself. Watson later (2004, 415–73), in a remarkable discussion, explores the ways in which the end of Dt. forms part of a long-range prophecy of exile and return. This, I think, actually undermines his earlier position and suggests a much closer and more eschatologically integrated reading of different Pentateuchal emphases.

⁵⁰⁵ 2 Cor. 12.4; 13.1 (in an LXX quote); Eph. 5.26; 6.17.

⁵⁰⁶ Rom. 10.8 (twice), 9, 17, 18; elsewhere in Paul, 2 Cor. 12.4; 13.1; Eph. 5.26; 6.17.

⁵⁰⁷ Isa. 55.11.

⁵⁰⁸ Ps. 19.4 [LXX 18.5], qu. in 10.18.

⁵⁰⁹ For this whole theme, see Rowe 2000.

⁵¹⁰ RSV, unpardonably, translates ‘who pursued the righteousness based on law’; so too NRSV, ‘Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law’. Cf. too Sanders 1983, 42; Zeller 1984, 184; Fitzmyer 1993, 577f.

⁵¹¹ Barrett 1982, 140 points out that Rom. 7 sheds light on the present passage, though he does not develop the point in the way I am doing.

⁵¹² Watson 2007 [1986], 330 is anxious that my earlier treatment of this passage shifted the focus from the sovereign divine agency ‘to the dubious category of ‘Israel’s fault’’. Paul *does* speak about a ‘fault’ in 9.31 and 10.3, but I hope it is clear that I agree with Watson here about Paul’s theological priority, and about the apparent scriptural foundation for what ‘Israel’ did, and about the inappropriateness of ‘Israel’s fault’ or ‘Israel’s responsibility’ as a heading for 9.30—10.21 (see too Watson 323 n. 39).

⁵¹³ See above, 894f.

⁵¹⁴ See the other relevant NT passages: 1 Pet. 2.8; cf. Mt. 16.23; 18.6f.; Lk. 17.1; Mt. 21.44 (cf. Dan. 2.34f., 44f.). Elsewhere (1 Pet., Mt.) these texts have been combined with Ps. 118.22f. (the rejected stone which becomes the cornerstone) but Paul does not go in that direction here. Full discussion in the commentaries: e.g. Keck 2005, 244f.; and cf. e.g. Oss 1989; Wagner 2002, 126–45.

⁵¹⁵ Holding together the train of thought that runs from the *panti tō pisteuonti* in 10.4 to the *pas* (in the quotation from Joel) at 10.13.

⁵¹⁶ Barrett 1982, 144 argues strongly for Torah as the main referent of the ‘stone’, without quite seeing how Paul draws Torah and Messiah together – and without reflecting that the problem chs. 9–11 are addressing, which Paul is here summarizing, is that his Jewish contemporaries have failed to believe in the Messiah. See the summary of positions in Keck 2005, 245.

⁵¹⁷ Paul spoke about the revelation in creation in 1.18–23.

⁵¹⁸ Nb. Ac. 13.45, where the *Ioudaioi* in Pisidian Antioch are filled with *zēlos* and ‘speak against’ what Paul has said (*antelegon*). See Bell 1994, 312–17.

⁵¹⁹ The obvious echoes of Jn. 1.10f., and of parables such as those in Mt. 21.28–32; 22.1–14 indicate that Paul is not out on a limb at this point from wider early Christian perceptions. Those two parables are separated by the ‘wicked tenants’ (Mt. 21.33–46), including Jesus’ warning about the ‘stone’ (21.42).

⁵²⁰ See Keck 2005, 261f.; and of course Lk. 15.31f.

⁵²¹ Col. 2.1–3.

⁵²² See e.g. Tobin 2004, 321.

⁵²³ All this is hugely annoying, no doubt, both for the modern universalist and the postmodern particularist; but, as Mr Bingley said to his sister Caroline when she suggested that it might be more rational to have conversation rather than dancing at a ball, it would indeed be much more rational, but it would not be near so much like a ball.

⁵²⁴ On all this see Aletti 2010 [1992], 217, comparing 11.25–32 in particular with the various sections that precede it; and Aletti 2012, 138.

⁵²⁵ Eastman 2010, 377 n. 34 says that it is confusing at 9.6 to speak of a division *within* Israel. In my view, faced with Paul saying ‘not all of Israel are Israel’, it is confusing not to. Her suggestion, that ‘the distinction is between the line of promise and those descendants of Abraham who became the progenitors of the gentiles’, introduces a novel element: since when were Ishmael and Esau the father of all gentiles? At 382 n. 51 she suggests that I draw a distinction ‘between ethnic Israel and Israel as “the Messiah and his people”’, but that is misleading, implying that ethnic Israel is automatically excluded from the latter category, which is what Paul is denying in 11.11–24.

⁵²⁶ Jewett 2007, 590 rightly points out that the objections raised in 9.14, 19 would actually be ‘unacceptable’ from ‘the perspective of Jewish orthodoxy’. See too e.g. Johnson 1989, 148. Contrast Wolter 2011, 425, who supposes that here Paul is in dialogue with his own former self. Barclay 2010 draws a sharp contrast between Rom. 9–11 and Wis., which postulates the kind of ordered and symmetrical moral and rational cosmos that Rom. 9–11 appears to subvert with its stress on the apparent unpredictability and incomprehensibility of God’s purposes, so that (for instance) the story of Jacob and Esau (Wis. 10.9–12) teaches a moral lesson which Rom. 9.10–13 appears to rule out. Paul’s theology, says Barclay (109) has been ‘twisted ... into this strange shape’ because of the ‘gift’ which is the Christ-event. I fully agree that Paul has rethought Israel’s election, and indeed ‘morality, justice [and] reason’ themselves (Barclay 108) around the Messiah, but I still see broad convergence at a deeper level: telling *this* story is the key to God’s dealings with the world. As far as I can see, the main thing a Pharisee might object to would be the ‘calling’ of gentiles in 9.24 and their inclusion in the ‘returning exiles’ prophecy of Hos. 2.1, 25 (9.25f.).

⁵²⁷ cf. e.g. *Jub.* 15.28–32; 20.11–13. The sharp distinction between the Israelites and their Abrahamic cousins is reinforced in passages like Ps. 83.6–8. For other second-Temple retellings of Israel’s story [see above, 121–39](#).

[528](#) cf. Getty 1988, 457: ‘Paul is broadening his understanding of Israel to include the gentiles, not attacking the fundamentals of Israel’s theology.’

[529](#) See esp. Starling 2011.

[530](#) Ac. 22.22.

[531](#) cf. Isa. 6.13; not that Paul is explicitly alluding to this, but the point of *sperma* here does not seem to be the positive one of ‘Abraham’s seed’ in the sense of ‘the full family’ but rather ‘what is left ...’. It goes with the theme that runs from Isa. 1.9 (which is what Paul quotes explicitly) through 4.2 and is picked up in 6.13 but also in e.g. 10.22, which Paul quotes in 9.27.

[532](#) I thus agree with e.g. Stowers 1994, 287f., though for interestingly different reasons; see too Keck 2005, 241. Nanos 2010a, 349 grasps this point but in my view mistakes its rhetorical force. Paul is not undoing the ‘no distinction’ of 2.7–11; 3.23, 27–30; 4.13–17 and particularly 10.4–13. He is warding off a dangerous and false corollary of that position. Nanos’s attempt to get Paul to say that the ‘faithfulness’ of Israelites would consist in recognizing that a new day has dawned (though without themselves believing Jesus to be the Messiah) so that now they are to join in the project of being heralds to the nations (350 n. 25, 351, 364–6) must be regarded as a failure: 10.14–17 is completely dependent on 10.1–13, making it clear that the ‘heralds’ are those who announce Jesus as the risen lord, so that all alike may believe in him. If Nanos were correct, Paul has seriously misstated his own position in 9.30–10.13.

[533](#) I have in mind here especially Käsemann (e.g. Käsemann 1969 [1965], 187); but he is representative of a much larger tradition of reading.

[534](#) Hays 2000, 346 n. 302; cf. Keck 2005, 225: ‘When Paul explicitly addresses Christian gentiles (11:13–24), he insists that they are actually *being included in Israel*’ (my italics).

[535](#) Rom. 9.24–6 thus functions, both thematically and in terms of playing an advance role within the argument of 9–11, somewhat as 2.25–9 does within the argument of 1–8.

[536](#) Jewett 2007, 575 speaks of the ‘true Israel’, a phrase Paul never uses but which (as with the equally non-existent phrases ‘true Jew’ in 2.29 and ‘true circumcision’ in Phil. 3.3) express what he has in mind. See too Gaventa 2010, 259, pointing out that some (e.g. Moo 1996, 573) read 9.6b the other way round (‘All those who are of Israel, these are not Israel’).

[537](#) For the *inclusio*, see e.g. Keck 2005, 238. This confirms, to my mind, the meaning of 9.7 (with e.g. Dunn 1988b, 540; Tobin 2004, 327; against e.g. Hafemann 1988, 44; Fitzmyer 1993, 560): the ‘children’ is the larger category (divided into ‘children of promise’ and ‘children of flesh’), while the ‘seed’ are identified with the ‘children of promise’.

[538](#) Another ‘in’ with a patriarch, as in Gal. 3.8.

[539](#) We might compare the narrative of *Jubilees*, in which the separation of Isaac from Ishmael and Jacob from Esau are well marked but the twelve sons of Jacob are affirmed – even though, by the time the book was written, most of them had disappeared.

[540](#) Keck 2005, 239f. is right to say that in the prophetic literature the idea of the ‘remnant’ was a sign of hope. But Paul’s quotations of Isa. in 9.27–9 refer to this group as simply the small number left after a process of judgment. In 11.1–6 Paul does indeed turn the idea in a positive direction, but this is not evident in 9.27–9.

[541](#) Exod. 32.10. To suppose that Paul did not intend, and his hearers could never have understood, a reference to the golden calf incident (Harink 2003, 170) is to fail to see how second-Temple Jews, their heads full of Torah, constructed discourse.

[542](#) *euchomēn*: ‘I could pray?’ ‘I might have prayed?’ ‘I used to pray?’ See Jewett 2007, 560f.

[543](#) Ex. 32.32; Rom. 9.3.

[544](#) cf. too Rom. 1.23 with its echo of Ps. 106.20 (as well as e.g. Jer. 2.11).

⁵⁴⁵ This is where the restatements of one kind of traditional Jewish ‘election’ by e.g. Kaminsky, following Wyschogrod (see above, 806), seem to be more or less exactly what Paul is opposing in 10.3.

⁵⁴⁶ Philem. 15.

⁵⁴⁷ For the ‘Christian’ version of this see Rom. 8.18–27.

⁵⁴⁸ See above, [1151–6](#), on 1 Thess. 2. See e.g. Keck 2005, 234.

⁵⁴⁹ cf. the paradox of Ac. 2.23; 3.13; cf. the motif of ‘ignorance’ in 3.17; and, for Paul’s ‘handing over’ language, Rom. 4.25; 8.32, with their echoes of Isa. 53.12.

⁵⁵⁰ ‘call’: see above, and e.g. 9.12: ‘not of works but of the one who called’.

⁵⁵¹ Jewett 2007, 600 notes, following several commentators, that in 9.25 Paul has changed the *erō* of LXX Hos. 2.25 to *kalesō*, reversing the clauses in order to do so. Clearly the ‘call’ was a crucial theme at this point.

⁵⁵² 11.11, 12, 15. [See below](#).

⁵⁵³ 2.4; cf. 2 Pet. 3.9 (and nb. this is the passage about which the author comments that ‘our beloved brother Paul’ has written, 3.15); Wis. 11.23. The motif of God’s patience is traditional: Wis. 15.1; Sir. 18.11; *P. Man.* 7; *4 Ezra* 7.74, 134.

⁵⁵⁴ Stendahl 1976, 28.

⁵⁵⁵ See Aletti 2012, 139–71, and the discussion of options in Jewett 2007, 668, 671f. Keck 2005, 262 proposes, unusually, that the first section continues to v. 12.

⁵⁵⁶ 11.13–15.

⁵⁵⁷ This places a question beside Keck’s proposal (2005, 228f.) that the punctuation and meaning of the final clause in 9.5 is as it were independent of the larger context.

⁵⁵⁸ Here I repeat, but also amplify, material from Wright 1980 [‘Messiah and People of God’], 181f., 1991 [*Climax*], 247f., and esp. 2002 [*Romans*], 681–3, and hope to respond to Jewett 2007, 674 n. 70, who suggests that my proposal lacks a basis. At 681 Jewett notes the parallel with 5.10–11 (which is the ‘basis’ in question), but turns aside to the theme of ‘global reconciliation’ in the Roman civic cult, which is indeed important but should not obscure the interconnections of Paul’s own writing. Bell 1994, 111f. (and 2005, 247f.) objects to my proposal on the grounds that ‘Israel’s casting aside is quite different to the casting aside of the Messiah’, since the one happens because of disobedience but the other through obedience. That is actually the point and the paradox: Paul is treating Israel precisely as the Messiah’s people *according to the flesh*, the place where the Adamic and messianic identities are held together.

⁵⁵⁹ For the theme of ‘reconciliation’, *katallagē*, cf. too 2 Cor. 5.19; Col. 1.19f.

⁵⁶⁰ This is exactly the point made by Hays 1989a, 61: ‘What Paul has done ... is to interpret the fate of Israel christologically ... Israel undergoes rejection for the sake of the world, bearing suffering vicariously.’ I should perhaps stress that this is a significantly different interpretation from that of Barth 1936–69, 2.2.278f. (followed cautiously by Cranfield 1979, 556), for whom Israel’s ‘stumble’ was the handing over of Jesus to crucifixion, through which event ‘reconciliation’ was effected.

⁵⁶¹ *apobolē* = ‘throwing away’ or ‘loss’ (see Jewett 2007, 680 nn. 141–3); *proslēmpsis* = ‘accepting back’ or ‘welcome’ (Jewett 2007, 681).

⁵⁶² Rom. 6.11.

⁵⁶³ Gal. 2.19–20.

⁵⁶⁴ So, rightly, Keck 2005, 275: ‘Inclusion ... is *not* replacement’ (italics original).

⁵⁶⁵ 11.13–14.

⁵⁶⁶ Baker 2005, 170–3 proposes that there is no causal connection between ‘making them jealous’ and ‘saving some of them’, since *parazēlōsō* really means ‘stirring up zeal’, which would lead away from faith in Jesus, not towards it. He is right that the translations have had to add ‘so’ (NEB) or ‘thus’ (NRSV) to make the point; Paul’s text simply reads ‘so that I may make my flesh jealous and save some of them.’ But I find it impossible thus to separate the two halves of v. 14, where *ei pōs* introduces both verbs, with the thought leading easily on to ‘save’, and with ‘some of them’ indicating a positive relationship with ‘make ... jealous’. Had Paul been intending (why?) to make *some* ‘jealous’ in the sense of ‘angry, stirred to zeal’, and to bring *others* to faith and salvation, I think he would have written the sentence quite differently. See too 11.31, where the *hina* implies the same kind of connection.

⁵⁶⁷ The western tradition of mss. (DFG latt), and 33, have *pantas* for *tinās* (Did[pt]. Cl. and 33 add *tous* before *pantas*). Note too the next verse which begins *panta de poiō*. See the fuller note by Robertson and Plummer 1914 [1911], 193; Fee 1987, 422.

⁵⁶⁸ See the full study of Bell 1994.

⁵⁶⁹ For the proposal, see e.g. Aus 1979; Bell 1994, 337–46 (including discussion of Aus, 345f.). This is a modification of the earlier theory of Munck 1959 [1954]; see ch. 16 below. Note the important response of e.g. Cranfield 1979, 766–8; Best 1984, 21f.: Paul cannot have been ignorant of the many other lands to east, north and south which remained unevangelized.

⁵⁷⁰ Rom. 2.17–24.

⁵⁷¹ So RSV. cf. NRSV ‘my own people’; NJB ‘my own blood-relations’; REB ‘those of my own race’.

⁵⁷² See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 628.

⁵⁷³ Stowers 1994, 313 suggests that Barrett’s exegesis here is controlled by ‘the narrative of gentile Christianity’s supersession of the Jews as the people of God’. One does not have to agree with everything Barrett says to find this charge extraordinary. Bell 1994, 3f. suggests that ‘behind’ my own view there lies ‘the theory that the Church has taken on Israel’s role, and Israel is disinherited’. Let the present chapter, and book, serve as the answer: my view is that, for Paul, *the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth is Israel’s Messiah*. All else follows from this.

⁵⁷⁴ 5.17.

⁵⁷⁵ 5.18.

⁵⁷⁶ 5.20.

⁵⁷⁷ 11.11–12.

⁵⁷⁸ The idea of others sharing in the Messiah’s sufferings, and of those extended ‘messianic’ sufferings having positive consequences, is of course not new in Paul: see e.g. 2 Cor. 4.7–15; Col. 1.24.

⁵⁷⁹ 11.30.

⁵⁸⁰ So e.g. Wagner 2010, 429: Paul ‘only states plainly what he has been arguing all along’.

⁵⁸¹ Dt. 32.5.

⁵⁸² *hētēma* is very rare: according to LSJ, it is only found elsewhere in Isa. 31.8 LXX; 1 Cor. 6.7, with the meaning ‘an utter loss’ (see e.g. Keck 2005, 269). It is cognate with the more frequent *hēttaomai*, which (BDAG 441) has the sense of ‘be defeated’, as (for instance) in losing a race, or ‘be treated worse’. Stowers 1994, 312–16 builds too much on the idea of ‘losing a race’: see, rightly, Wagner 2002, 267f. n. 155.

⁵⁸³ 9.32b–33.

⁵⁸⁴ cf. BDAG 770 ('offence, wrongdoing, sin') as against LSJ 1322 ('false step, slip, blunder', with resonances of 'falling from the right way').

⁵⁸⁵ On the whole 'Scotist' christology herein implied, see now the important book of van Driel 2008. I am grateful to Prof. Ivor Davidson for this reference.

⁵⁸⁶ I have held various positions on these questions in the past (cf. e.g. Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 683f.). I trust one is allowed to change one's mind from time to time.

⁵⁸⁷ As e.g. Rom. 6.19; 1 Cor. 6.11; 1 Thess. 4.3; etc.

⁵⁸⁸ On which see e.g. Fitzmyer 2008, 299–301, and esp. Thiselton 2000, 527–33, with a history of interpretation.

⁵⁸⁹ This is substantially the position of Fitzmyer 1993, 587, referring to others also. I find it significant that when the 'root' is mentioned again in v. 18 it is to warn against boasting: it isn't you that supports the root, but the root that supports you. This, in context, implies that the 'root' is the foundation of ethnic Israel, i.e. the patriarchs (cf. v. 28), rather than either God or the Messiah (though Bell 2005, 276 is right to point out messianic resonances in the word 'root': e.g. Isa. 11.10; 53.2).

⁵⁹⁰ Nanos 2010a, 339f., begins by warding off readings which 'proclaim the supplanting of Israel by the church, the conflation of Israel with the church and especially that Christian gentiles are grafted into Israel, which the tree is understood to represent ... In essence, "Israel" in this sense functions as a metonym for "Christianity."' This seems to me a way of ruling out what Paul is actually saying, in line with Rom. 1—4, Gal., etc., that Christian faith is the way in which gentiles join the family of Abraham. Nanos may well be right, here and at 372, to say that later generations have used the passage in ways which do not reflect Paul's intention, but to say that the 'tree' is not Israel (340f.) seems to me, as to most exegetes, straightforwardly wrong; he tacitly recognizes this when he then asserts that the allegory is itself 'broken' (369) or 'inadequate' (371), and 'does not sit well with the surrounding allegories and arguments' (373). Nanos's regular usage of 'Israelite' to mean 'Jew' (despite 9.6b) seems itself designed to ward off what most see as Paul's natural meaning. His earlier thesis (Nanos 1996), that the 'weak' in Rom. 14 are non-Christ-believing Jews in whose synagogues the Christ-believing gentiles are worshipping, has won little support.

⁵⁹¹ See the discussions and different views in e.g. Das 2007, ch. 4; Esler 2003b, ch. 4. My case here does not depend on this particular reconstruction, but it would certainly fit well (see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 406–8).

⁵⁹² Wagner 2002, 271f.: 'somewhat cryptic'; 298 'rather fuzzy'.

⁵⁹³ Pss. 1.3; 52.8; 128.3; Hos. 14.6.

⁵⁹⁴ Nanos 2010a, 354 suggests that Paul is making a distinction between branches being 'broken' (*ekklaō*, as in 11.17, 19, 20) but still as it were loosely attached, and 'cut off' (*ekkoptō*, as in 11.22, 24, expressing the more severe threat to the 'wild branches' if they begin to boast). There may be a hint of a distinction here, but there are four problems with the proposal as it stands: (a) v. 19 suggests that the 'breaking' has made room for gentile ingrafting; (b) Paul parallels the fate of the 'natural branches' with the possible fate awaiting boastful gentiles (v. 21) (as Nanos sees, 364, 368, leading him to suggest that Paul's metaphor 'goes awry here', and that (369) 'the tree allegory ... is itself broken'); (c) when he says 'you too will be cut off' (v. 22), the 'too' (*kai*) indicates that 'cutting off' is basically the same fate which the 'natural branches' have already suffered; (d) Paul envisages the 'grafting in' of gentiles as equivalent to what the 'broken branches' will experience if they do not remain in unbelief (vv. 23f.).

⁵⁹⁵ Keck 2005, 276, 279, 286 (my italics).

⁵⁹⁶ So too (perhaps surprisingly) Bell 2005, 297: ‘The primary reference of the olive tree has to be Israel ... It is into the olive tree of Israel that Gentile Christians have been grafted.’

⁵⁹⁷ Davies 1984, 154f. (my italics).

⁵⁹⁸ Jewett 2007, 683.

⁵⁹⁹ Hill 2001, 1103 roundly declares that ‘there is no possibility here that Paul is referring to the church as (“spiritual”) Israel’. Cf. too Nanos 2010a, 360: ‘The gentiles join Israelites in the worship of the One God ... but they are not Israel, nor are they grafted into Israel.’ He does, however, say (371) that believing gentiles are ‘adopted ... into the family of God’ (or ‘God’s larger family’, 376) but without explaining the difference, and the relation, between this ‘family’ and ‘Israel’.

⁶⁰⁰ Jer. 11.1–4, 6–8.

⁶⁰¹ 11.14–15.

⁶⁰² 11.16–17.

⁶⁰³ 11.19.

⁶⁰⁴ 11.20–3.

⁶⁰⁵ 11.17–24.

⁶⁰⁶ See the discussion in Jewett 2007, 683–5; Nanos 2010a, 355–8: ancient husbandry was more complex than earlier commentators realized.

⁶⁰⁷ See Wagner 2002, 274 n. 178: it is not clear whether Paul knew of existing tensions in Rome or whether a situation was ‘simply imagined by Paul on the basis of his experience elsewhere’. On normal pagan anti-Jewish prejudice see Stern 1974–84; 1976. Nanos 2010a, 355 is surely correct to say that ‘presumption toward Israelites who are not Christ-believers is a special problem that Paul fears is present among the members of the nations in Christ in Rome’. See too e.g. Wiefel 1991.

⁶⁰⁸ 11.27, quoting Jer. 31.33f.: see below.

⁶⁰⁹ This seems to be the meaning, though the rare word *agrielaios* refers to an actual tree, not a branch or a collection of branches.

⁶¹⁰ *en autois*; not, then, ‘in their place’ or ‘instead of them’ but ‘among them’. This, presumably, cannot mean ‘among the ones that were broken off’ (as, strangely, Davies 1984, 356 n. 6; Nanos 2010a, 358f. links this with his theory that the ‘broken’ branches are not actually broken off), but ‘among the branches, some *others* of which were broken off’; see Cranfield 1979, 567; Dunn 1988b, 661; Bell 2005, 298. Hence the *syn* in *synkoinōnos* in 11.17, corresponding to Eph. 2.11–22: gentile Messiah-believers are now fellow branches with the existing Jewish Messiah-believers.

⁶¹¹ Jewett 2007, 687 discusses the various nuances of the word; cf. too Donaldson 1993, 85.

⁶¹² cf. too of course 3.2; 9.30–3; 10.18–21.

⁶¹³ Nanos 2010a, 370 n. 65, is wrong to suggest that I have reduced this threat to that of temporary discipline: see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 686. See Haacker 2003, 91 on Paul’s careful balance between personal ‘assurance’ as in Rom. 8.38f. and the necessary warning of e.g. 1 Cor. 10.12.

⁶¹⁴ cf. 3.26, stressing God’s forbearance (*anochē*).

⁶¹⁵ Jewett 2007, 692 skates quickly over the point, criticizing Käsemann (1980 [1973], 310f.) for ‘reify[ing] the doctrine of grace and rely[ing] on doctrinal instruction to evoke faith’, which, Jewett declares, ‘places those who think they have the right understanding of doctrine on the pedestal of honor and power, thus leaving the prejudices of Gentiles as well as Jews untouched’. This seems unfair to Käsemann, who like Jewett insists on the point being ‘God is able’, *dynatos*. Jewett’s real problem seems to be that, in pressing towards some kind of universalism, he is unwilling to admit, as does Käsemann (310), that Paul’s hope for unbelieving Israel ‘certainly also here remains tied to

grace and faith'. Jewett thus appears to allow his sociological honour/shame scheme to trump Paul's theological framework of grace and faith.

⁶¹⁶ Jewett 2007, 686 speaks anachronistically of 'anti-Semitism', but the basic point is correct.

⁶¹⁷ Sievers 1997 offers a helpful account of discussions in Roman Catholic circles.

⁶¹⁸ e.g. Hofius 1990.

⁶¹⁹ There are also theological puzzles about the now-popular 'all saved at the *parousia*' reading of 11.26a: [see below, 1231–52](#).

⁶²⁰ The multiple echoes here are fascinating (and go beyond those proposed by e.g. Wagner 2002, 221, 224): (a) as the Benjaminite Saul persecuted the anointed but not yet enthroned David, so Saul of Tarsus persecuted the one he now regards as Messiah; (b) as Samuel interceded for Israel (1 Sam. 7.5, and esp. 12.19–25, with 12.22 quoted here), so Paul intercedes, and with similar promises and warnings, in 9.3; 10.1. The echoes of 'YHWH will not forsake his people' take us to Ps. 94 [LXX 93].14 and Jer. 31.37. Haacker 2003, 88 suggests an echo of Jdg. 20—1 when the tribe of Benjamin had to recover from being reduced to 600 men. Jewett (2007, 653, 655) refers to Elijah, too, as a Benjaminite; I am aware of no evidence for this, and the northern focus of his work, together with his home town of Tishbe in Gilead in northern Transjordan (1 Kgs. 17.1), makes it seem very unlikely.

⁶²¹ Against e.g. Dunn 1988b, 635; Esler 2003a, 293f., who insists that Paul is here expressing 'ethnic pride' (the older view of e.g. Dodd 1959 [1932], 184, reflected in the NEB: 'has God rejected his people? I cannot believe it! I am an Israelite myself ...' This misses the scriptural echoes (as in the previous note), resulting in Dunn confessing that he cannot see the point of the reference to Benjamin.

⁶²² cf. too Phil. 3.5: *ek genous Israēl*.

⁶²³ See *Perspectives* ch. 10.

⁶²⁴ Where he quotes Isa. 10.22f. [21f. MT/EVV] in conjunction with Hos. 2.1 [1.10 MT/EVV].

⁶²⁵ Immediately before the passage he quotes here (1 Kgs. 19.10b, 14b) we find Elijah's great protestation of 'zeal': 'I have been very zealous for YHWH, the God of hosts' (v. 10a, repeated at 14a). This resonates with Paul's own claim to 'zeal' in Gal. 1.13f., Phil. 3.6; and with his comment about those who (like his own former self) have 'a zeal for God', but not according to knowledge (Rom. 10.2).

⁶²⁶ Did Paul see *apeithounta kai antilegonta* (10.21, quoting Isa. 65.2) as a kind of double opposite for the 'belief and confession' of 10.9f.?

⁶²⁷ 4.4–6 and esp. 4.13–17, focused on 4.16: *ek pisteōs hina kata charin*.

⁶²⁸ Details in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 676.

⁶²⁹ Elsewhere in Rom. *ti oun* as an opening question is followed by a second question: 3.9; 6.15. Cf. too *ti oun eroumen*, likewise regularly followed by a second question: 4.1 (see *Perspectives*, 579–84); 6.1; 7.7; 9.14, 30 (which should perhaps be re-examined in this light); cf. 1 Cor. 10.19.

⁶³⁰ Rom. 2.2–6.

⁶³¹ See Jewett 2007, 586.

⁶³² [Above, 1153–5](#).

⁶³³ LXX 29.3.

⁶³⁴ On all this, see Watson 2004, 436; Seifrid 2007, 670.

⁶³⁵ cf. Isa. 6.9f., and e.g. 42.18–20 with 42.7; 43.8.

⁶³⁶ Ps. 68.23f.; cf. 15.3, quoting 68.10. Cf. too Rom. 3.10–18! And Ps. 35.8 (36.2 qu in Rom. 3.18).

⁶³⁷ Jewett 2007, 664f. suggests that the probable meaning is 'continually' (cf. REB 'unceasingly') rather than (with RSV, NRSV, NEB, KNT) 'for ever'. Keck 2005, 267f. warns against the possible

overtones of ‘for ever’; see too Cranfield 1975, 1979, 2.552 and other lit. cited there; Dunn 1988b, 643f. See however Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 678: ‘As the next passage will make clear, Paul does not suppose that any particular ethnic Jews are subject to this condemnation; there is always room for them to come to faith. The perpetual condemnation ... lies upon the rejection of the crucified Messiah, not upon this or that person who has acquiesced in that rejection ... judgment must be judgment if grace is to be grace.’

⁶³⁸ Hill 2001, 1103 is wrong to suggest that ‘the “mystery” revealed in 11:11–32 does not follow *logically* from 1:1—11:10’ (his italics). Paul has carefully set up the category of the ‘remnant according to grace’ in such a way as to argue for its considerable increase. It is interesting that Hill sees vv. 11–32, and not just vv. 25–32, as revealing the new ‘mystery’, since vv. 11–24, as we have seen, do not themselves support the majority interpretation of vv. 25–32.

⁶³⁹ We may note the immediately preceding verse, Dt. 32.20: They are a perverse generation, children in whom there is no faithfulness (*huioi, hois ouk estin pistis en autois*). This is precisely Paul’s analysis of the problem in 11.20, 23.

⁶⁴⁰ The Jew-and-gentile point is repeated in 2.1–11; 3.21—4.25; and esp. 9.24; 10.4–13.

⁶⁴¹ See e.g. the list in Rom. 16, which includes various of his own kinsfolk (16.7; 11 – and possibly more: Prisca and Aquila (16.3) are said in Ac. 18.2 to be Jewish). Cf. too Col. 4.10f.

⁶⁴² Jewett 2007, 695 transfers the word ‘mystery’ into its English equivalent, speaking of the ‘mysterious, future salvation of all Israel’. This is to use semantic slippage to point away from what Paul is actually saying.

⁶⁴³ e.g. Bruce 1963, 221. Jewett 2007, 698 unsurprisingly reports that ‘efforts to specify the precise source of this oracle have not been successful’: another case of hunting in the dark for a black cat that wasn’t there anyway. On the emphatic nature of this opening, see e.g. Jeremias 1977, 195.

⁶⁴⁴ Jeremias, *ibid.*; see too Ridderbos 1975 [1966], 358: ‘One is not to think here of a special revelation he received, an esoteric secret, but of the insight he has into the realization of God’s counsel ...’ Contra e.g. Wolter 2011, 427, who suggests that Paul can only solve the puzzle he faces when he speaks the language of apocalyptic (‘apokalyptisch redet’).

⁶⁴⁵ Dahl 1977, 152, citing the background in the Scrolls for the use of ‘mystery’ as something present in scripture but only recognized by inspired interpreters; he compares Eph. 5.32.

⁶⁴⁶ Of course, one could then argue the other way, and suggest that 11.11–24 is hinting all along at what we now find in 11.25–7; but one cannot then use the dense 11.25b–26a, interpreted in a particular way, to avoid what is said at more length in the earlier passage.

⁶⁴⁷ As suggested by e.g. Bockmuehl 1997 [1990], 170–5, speaking (174) of a ‘hitherto unreleased piece of eschatological intelligence’.

⁶⁴⁸ See Bockmuehl 174f.: ‘The catalyst (as in many Jewish examples) is a Biblical meditation sparked by a problem of current concern: and the answer thus obtained is described as a mystery, i.e. a gift of revelation.’ Whether we describe this as ‘charismatic exegesis’ (discussed by Bockmuehl 175 n. 88) does not affect his, or my, point. Bockmuehl is right to say that Paul ‘couches new disclosures in fully traditional language and Biblical reasoning’ (174), but this is precisely what he has done in 11.11–24, which does not predict the large-scale End-Time ‘salvation of Jews’ favoured by the majority.

⁶⁴⁹ Rom. 1.17; 3.21.

⁶⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 2.1f. This is reinforced a few verses later when he refers to ‘speaking God’s hidden wisdom in a mystery’, again related directly if paradoxically to the cross (2.7f.).

⁶⁵¹ 1 Cor. 4.1.

⁶⁵² 1 Cor. 13.2; 14.2.

⁶⁵³ e.g. Eph. 1.9f.; Col. 1.26f., summing up the great poem in 1.15–20 and explaining that the ‘mystery’ which has been revealed among the nations is ‘the Messiah in you as the hope of glory’; cf. 2.2.

⁶⁵⁴ Col. 1.26f.; 2.2, both of which look back to what has already been said in 1.15–20; Rom. 16.25, on which see Wagner 2002, 164f. n. 140; 271 n. 166.

⁶⁵⁵ See Gal. 4.4.

⁶⁵⁶ Harink 2003, 180–4, finds the phrase ‘coming to faith’ indicative of an individualistic understanding of ‘faith’ as something ‘voluntary and self-moved’, as opposed to Paul’s being ‘radically interrupted, accosted, captured, and commissioned in an apocalypse of the risen lord’. This, he says, leads to a failure to read God’s relationship to Israel apocalyptically, ‘that is, as a relationship in which God is the sovereign actor who interrupts and lays hold of Israel for his own purposes’. The present discussion should give the lie to the latter charge (and cf. e.g. Watson 2007 [1986], 329 n. 45). To the former, I refer to what has been said in ch. 10 above about ‘faith’ as the result of the spirit-driven ‘apocalypse’ in the gospel; and, in Rom. 9—11 itself, to 9.32; 10.4, 9–13, 14, 16, 17; and perhaps above all 11.20 and 23. The phrase ‘coming to faith’ may evoke, for some, an individualistic or voluntaristic self-caused fideism; I have used it heuristically, to summarize these and similar Pauline passages. Here as elsewhere W. S. Campbell 2008, 149–51 has followed Harink into an unnecessary ditch. [See further below.](#)

⁶⁵⁷ So, rightly, Cosgrove 1997, 32, with many others including e.g. Sanders 1978, 183; Wagner 2002, 298 n. 238, against Stendahl, Gager, Gaston, and many others including now, it seems, Jewett 2007, 701f. For ‘respect of persons’, see 2.11 and [discussion above.](#)

⁶⁵⁸ This is ‘individualistic’ (see Wagner 2002, 279 n. 194) only, but exactly, to the extent that *tinas* in 11.14 should be understood thus: individuals but precisely members of ethnic Israel who become, by faith, part of the second ‘Israel’ of 9.6.

⁶⁵⁹ Jewett 2007, 700.

⁶⁶⁰ Bockmuehl 1997 [1990], 174.

⁶⁶¹ Gen. 15.16; cf. again Mt. 23.32, [and above, 1153f.](#), on 1 Thess. 2.16.

⁶⁶² Again, Gal. 2.19f.; 6.17.

⁶⁶³ Jewett 2007, 662 quotes Cranfield 1979, 549 approvingly in relation to the ‘provisional character of the hardening’.

⁶⁶⁴ cf. 2 Thess. 2.6–12, where the idea of ‘restraint’, though not the same as here, likewise means a delay in eschatological judgment.

⁶⁶⁵ Jewett 2007, 698 sees this point clearly but cannot resolve it. See Schreiner 1998, 618: ‘it is unlikely ... that the hardening to which Paul refers is reversible’, except in the case of those who by grace come to believe.

⁶⁶⁶ A version of this is offered by e.g. Schnelle 2005 [2003], 351.

⁶⁶⁷ Starling 2011, 156 suggests that ‘Israel’ in 11.26 cannot mean ‘the church’ because this would be against the whole drift of the previous paragraphs. This is extraordinary: to look no further, the ‘olive tree’ of 11.17–24 clearly envisages the single community of God’s people in which believing Jews and believing gentiles are both full members.

⁶⁶⁸ The alternative partitive reading, ‘a partial hardening’ (REB; cf. Gaston 1987, 143, ‘there were only some things that Israel did not understand’), misses the point: in view of 11.1–10, being ‘partly hardened’ would make as much sense as being ‘partly pregnant’. Wagner 2002, 278 translates ‘a partial insensibility’, but I do not think he intends the same view as Gaston.

⁶⁶⁹ In parallel with 1 Thess. 2.14–16, though the referent may be different; [see above, 1151–6.](#)

⁶⁷⁰ The phrase is temporal in Rom. 15.24; partitive (or ‘quantitative’) in Rom. 15.15; 2 Cor. 1.14; 2.5. See Bell 1994, 128 with other refs. Bell thinks that *apo merous* must go with *pōrōsis* rather than either *gegonen* (Cranfield’s choice: 1979, 575, which I followed in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 688) or with *Israēl*, which I now strongly prefer (with e.g. Keck 2005, 279). Paul is evoking, as the chiasmus of chs. 9—11 reaches its conclusion, the division within ‘Israel’ adumbrated in 9.6.

⁶⁷¹ 11.3, quoting 1 Kgs. 19.10, 14.

⁶⁷² cf. e.g. Whiteley 1964, 97f.; Glombitza 1964–5; Giblin 1970, 303; Jeremias 1977; Martin 1981, 134f.; Ponsot 1982; Aageson 1986, 284f.; Chilton 1988 (cf. too Chilton 2004, 234: Paul was aiming ‘to include all the gentiles ... within an Israel now defined by faith alone’); and, a notable back-up for the list, Barth 1936–69, 2.2.300 (and behind him Irenaeus, Calvin and many others). Others are noted by Moo 1996, 721; Jewett 2007, 701 n. 73. See too the partial agreement from Donaldson, Keck (by implication), Niebuhr, and Wagner, noted below.

⁶⁷³ e.g. now Jewett 2007, 701. It is extraordinary to see the normally precise Jewett declaring that ‘all’ in ‘all Israel’ ‘does not lend itself to the expression of exceptions’; one need only glance at mSanh. 10.1–3 to see the obvious counter-example, with three substantial paragraphs listing (and in some cases disputing) categories of people who might have been thought to be ‘all Israel’ but who will not inherit the coming age. The frequent OT phrase ‘all Israel’ makes the point (e.g. Ex. 18.25; Dt. 1.1; 5.1; 13.11; 29.2; 31.11; 34.12; Josh. 3.7; 1 Sam. 3.20; 7.5; 25.1; 2 Sam. 8.15; 1 Kgs. 8.62; 12.1; 18.19; 1 Chr. 9.1; 18.14; 29.21; 2 Chr. 12.1; 29.24; Dan. 9.11): these regularly refer to the great bulk of the people, without at all implying ‘every single individual’.

⁶⁷⁴ e.g. Hofius 1990, 36f.; Jewett 2007, 701; Wolter 2011, 432 and many others.

⁶⁷⁵ RSV and NRSV follow KJV, RV: ‘and so all Israel will be saved’; NEB is shameless in its paraphrase, ‘when that has happened, the whole of Israel will be saved’; REB goes an inch further with ‘once that has happened ...’. Contrast e.g. NJB: ‘and this is how all Israel will be saved’.

⁶⁷⁶ In German, so is consequential, not temporal. But the 1967 edition of the Luther translation has *alsdann*, ‘then’ or ‘thereupon’, which makes exactly the wrong point.

⁶⁷⁷ van der Horst 2006, 176–80 and Jewett 2007, 701 produce various possible exceptions in which *houtōs* has a temporal sense; not all of them are to my mind convincing, though they succeed in putting a question mark beside the absolute non-temporal meaning indicated in e.g. BDAG 741f. and stressed by Fitzmyer 1993, 622f. See too Bell 2005, 259f. Davies 1984, 347 n. 36 sees *houtōs* as the equivalent of *tote*, ‘then’, which even the putative exceptions (he mentions Jn. 4.6) hardly warrant; see too e.g. Hofius 1990, 33–5. Schreiner 2001, 477 n. 14 (and 481) says that he is not suggesting that *kai houtōs* is temporal, only that the context reveals a temporal sequence. That is precisely what is at issue. A good deal of this was already well addressed by Jeremias 1977, 198.

⁶⁷⁸ See Keck 2005, 280: ‘In 9.6 ... [Paul] distinguishes the phenomenon “Israel” in history ... from the Israel that will be saved on the day of salvation. This Israel may also be the olive tree into which the *plērōma* of the gentiles have been grafted, joining the regrafted Jews.’

⁶⁷⁹ 9.27 (twice), 31; 10.19, 21; 11.2, 7.

⁶⁸⁰ See esp. Cosgrove 1997, 23, insisting that the burden of proof here rests on those who would argue for what he calls ‘national Israelism’. Donaldson 1997, 236–47 argues that Paul sees gentile converts as ‘proselytes to a reconfigured Israel’, so that ‘Gentiles “in Christ” are ... members of Abraham’s family; thus gentiles share in righteousness and salvation by becoming full members of a redefined Israel’ (247). See the discussion in Wagner 2002, 293. Donaldson, however, distances himself from my own reading (345f. n. 41; 354f. n. 29), which may mean that I had not made myself fully clear. I was not (and am not) saying that, for Paul, the present situation (with only a small

number of converts) is all that there is; rather, Paul is arguing from that present fact to the certainty that there will be many more, a future ‘fullness’.

⁶⁸¹ See above 1145–51. In that case, as in the present one, the conclusion can only be resisted by ignoring the argument of the rest of the letter.

⁶⁸² Wagner 2002, 278f.

⁶⁸³ Against, it seems, Wagner himself (2002, 237 n. 65). The idea that ‘entering in’ is a pre-Pauline expression reflecting Jesus-tradition about the kingdom (e.g. Cranfield 1979, 576; Käsemann 1980 [1973], 313; Dunn 1988b, 680; Moo 1996, 718) seems to me a way of ignoring the rather obvious link to the ‘olive tree’ (note the ‘grafting in’ of vv. 17, 19, 23, 24, and remember the *gar* of v. 25; Jewett 2007, 700 considers this link ‘less likely’ without saying why), and thence to the idea of ‘Israel’ (Jewett 701: ‘the eschatological church containing the predestined number of Jews and gentiles’). I am for some reason reminded of Schweitzer’s famous remark about fetching water from a distance in a leaky bucket to water a garden which already has its own flowing stream (though he was making a different point).

⁶⁸⁴ See Niebuhr 2010, 43ff.: the expression ‘Israel’ has been given new semantic content through ‘those who call on the name of the lord’ (which for Paul is focused on the Christ-event) in 10.13. On this point see esp. Rowe 2000.

⁶⁸⁵ See too Keck 2005, 279: the ‘coming in’ refers to ‘their entering the people of God’.

⁶⁸⁶ This shows, too, that Donaldson’s objections (1997, 346f.) to my proposal miss the point: Paul does indeed envisage that the present ‘some of them’ in 11.14, which forms the background to 11.23f. and so to 11.25f., will become significantly more than at present, justifying the exalted (though deliberately vague) language of 11.11–15. No ‘significant semantic shift’ is required between vv. 25 and 26. Schreiner 2001, 477 speaks for the majority: in 11.25 ‘hardening is ascribed to “Israel” and salvation to “Gentiles”.’ That is exactly wrong: ‘hardening’ is ascribed to *part of Israel*, and what is ascribed to gentiles is ‘coming in’. I hope it is clear that my argument for reading ‘all Israel’ in this way is not based on, but merely parallel to, my reading of Gal. 6.16 (against Eastman 2010, 385 n. 63). Nor is it ‘against the context’ of 11.25; it is in line with it (against most commentators; e.g. Bell 2005, 260; Reinbold 2010, 403).

⁶⁸⁷ mSanh. 10.1.

⁶⁸⁸ Wagner 2002, 279 n. 194, argues that the ‘massive turning of Jews to Christ’ will be ‘*as a result of and subsequent to* the entrance of the full number of gentiles’ (his italics). But the ‘as a result of’ is dependent on 11.11–15, especially 11.14, and there Paul is clearly talking about the ongoing effect of his own ministry, not something which will happen as a distinct, later event. Most who see the large-scale final turning of Jews to the Messiah here envisage that this will be the result, not of gentiles coming in and their becoming jealous, as in 11.11–15, but of the *parousia* (e.g. Seifrid 2007, 673).

⁶⁸⁹ Sanders 1983, 192–5.

⁶⁹⁰ Sanders 1983, 195.

⁶⁹¹ Sanders 1983, 196. Sanders goes on to say that he thinks Paul’s views would have changed if he could have seen all that has happened in the time since he wrote.

⁶⁹² On all this see esp. Wagner 2002, 280–98.

⁶⁹³ 26.19; cf. RSG 116–18.

⁶⁹⁴ 27.6.

⁶⁹⁵ 27.11. The LXX bears little relation here to the MT.

⁶⁹⁶ 27.8–9. The italicized clause (MT *wezeh kol-periy hasir chatta thō*) has come out quite differently in the Greek, and it is this to which Paul is alluding: [see below](#).

⁶⁹⁷ So e.g. Dahl 1977, 153. Wagner 2002, 290 is right to correct me for saying in an earlier article (Wright 1995 [‘Romans and the Theology of Paul’], 61 = *Perspectives* ch. 7, 120) that Paul is quoting Jer. here, but he misses the key point: Jer. 31.34 (LXX 38.34) speaks of God forgiving iniquity and sin. Rom. 11.27, affirming that God’s covenant will consist of his forgiving his people’s sins, while at one level obviously quoting Isa. 59.21 and 27.9, at another level resonates powerfully with Jer. 31.33–4.

⁶⁹⁸ Jer. 31[LXX 38].31–4. The final clause in LXX is *kai tōn hamartiōn autōn ou mē mnēsthō eti*.

⁶⁹⁹ MT *wuba ltsiyon go’el*; LXX *kai hēxei heneken Ziōn ho rhuomenos*. Why LXX has *heneken* instead of merely *eis* is not clear, but the result, MT’s ‘to Zion’ and LXX’s ‘on behalf of Zion’, is what Paul then radically adjusts: [see below](#).

⁷⁰⁰ Isa. 59.15b–21.

⁷⁰¹ Though the ‘spirit’ is not mentioned explicitly in Rom. 10, there is good reason to conclude that Paul understands the spirit’s work when he quotes Joel 2.32 [LXX 3.5] in 10.13; and the parallels with Rom. 2.26–9 point in the same direction. [See above, 1164–6](#).

⁷⁰² *kai hautē autois hē par’ emou diathēkē*, the identical words in LXX Isa. 59.21 to Paul’s quote in 11.27a.

⁷⁰³ Isa. 2.3 (=Mic. 4.2): *ek gar Ziōn exeusetai nomos kai logos kyriou ex Iērousalēm*. See Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 250f. Wagner 2002, 292 draws attention to Seitz 1993, 72, who points out that in this Isa. passage the gentile nations come in to Zion first, followed (Isa. 2.5) by ‘the house of Jacob’ in 2.5. Donaldson 1997, 329 n. 66 says, against my proposal, that ‘nothing in Rom 11:25–26 parallels Isa 2:2–3, where God’s word goes out from Zion to the gentiles’; but that depends on the prior assumption that Paul is here speaking of the *parousia*. If he is speaking (as in 10.14–21; 11.11–15) of a gentile mission whose reflex will be to ‘make my flesh jealous’ and so save some of them, it fits rather well: [see below](#).

⁷⁰⁴ cp. the similar use in *1 En.* 1.4: cf. Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 692 n. 463.

⁷⁰⁵ Ps. 14 [LXX 13].7; the NRSV has turned the question in MT and LXX into the expression of a wish. Ps. 53.6 (suggested by Donaldson 1997, 329 n. 66) prays for salvation to come ‘from Zion’, but it is there salvation for Israel only.

⁷⁰⁶ Donaldson 1993, 92; 1997, 101f.; against Donaldson 1986. The connection is assumed by e.g. Hays 1989a, 162.

⁷⁰⁷ For the heavenly Jerusalem see Gal. 4.26. Some of the later rabbis transferred the ultimate ‘pilgrimage’ to the heavenly Jerusalem: e.g. bBB 75b (ascribed to R. Jochanan, a late third-century teacher).

⁷⁰⁸ See e.g. Davies 1974, 217, using language which has now become politically incorrect though correctly Pauline: ‘The life “in Christ” is the life of the eschatological Israel, an Israel, which, through Christ, transcends the connection with the land and with the Law attached to that land.’

⁷⁰⁹ Donaldson 1993, 92 suggests that an inversion of the sequence ‘Israel – gentiles’ would mean ‘the abandonment of the foundation of the tradition itself’, since in that tradition the salvation of gentiles is the *consequence* of their seeing ‘the redemption of Israel and the glorification of Zion’. This ignores Paul’s central point, especially in 10.4–13: in the events concerning the Messiah, and in the outpouring of the spirit, Paul sees precisely the fulfilment of Israel’s ancient hope. It is as a consequence of *that* that gentiles are now coming in. Moo’s reply to Donaldson (1996, 684), that Paul’s quote from Isa. 59.20f. is immediately adjacent to Isa. 60.1–7, one of the most important ‘pilgrimage to Zion’ texts, is well taken; but Paul is radically recasting the tradition around the Messiah, not simply echoing it. For earlier debates on this issue, e.g. between Stuhlmacher and Zeller, see Sanders 1983, 199f.

⁷¹⁰ ‘Ungodliness’ here echoes God’s ‘justification of the ungodly’ in 4.5; Paul sees ‘Jacob’ in the same position as the pagans. On the transformation of the ‘pilgrimage’ tradition cf. Dunn 1988b, 680–2, though with some differences from my treatment here.

⁷¹¹ 1 Thess. 1.10.

⁷¹² Against e.g. Bell 2005, 267.

⁷¹³ See e.g. Fitzmyer 1993, 624f.; Keck 2005, 281f.; Wagner 2002, 297; Sanders 1983, 194. The normal *parousia* view is reaffirmed in Jewett 2007, 704.

⁷¹⁴ So, cautiously, Metzger 1994 [1971], 465; more strongly, Jewett 2007, 694: ‘it is difficult to conceive that [the mss with the extra *nyn*] gratuitously added a third reference to “now”’. See too e.g. Seifrid 2007, 677 (the *nyn* is to be preferred as *lectio difficilior*). It seems to be the case that not all the scholars who favour the addition of the extra *nyn* appreciate the weight it gives to the reading of the whole passage in which Paul envisages the salvation of ‘all Israel’ as something to be achieved within the present dispensation, rather than as something only to be accomplished in a sudden last-minute divine action, perhaps at the *parousia*.

⁷¹⁵ See the strong, almost sermoniac, words of Barth 1936–69, 2.2.305: ‘The second *nyn* in v. 31, which is well established critically, seems to be rather out of place because the demonstration of the divine mercy towards the Jews, of which the verse speaks, is after all still future ... But [the mercy shown to the gentiles in the present] is the means of divine mercy for the Jews too, so that in this sense the latter is already present.’ This rules out ‘the relegation of the Jewish question into the realm of eschatology’ – which is, ironically, what one version of the present ‘majority’ reading of Rom. 11 succeeds in doing. If what Paul meant in 11.25f. was a salvation at the *parousia*, the second *nyn* in 11.31 should have read *hysteron* – as indeed we find in one or two mss. The ‘majority’ view appears to have some early scribal antecedents. Dunn 1988b, 677 is undecided on the textual matter, and says (687) that if the *nyn* is there it highlights the ‘eschatological imminence’ of this final phase. This is a way of resisting its actual force.

⁷¹⁶ cf. e.g. Bell 2005, 264f., and many commentators e.g. Jewett 2007.

⁷¹⁷ Jewett 2002, 708 rightly interprets ‘call’ here as specifically relating to Jews (comparing 9.7, 11 [sic: presumably 12], 24, 25, 26), even though in 9.24–6 the relevant verb is applied precisely ‘not only to Jews but also to gentiles’, and despite its use elsewhere (Phil. 3.14; 2 Thess. 1.11). Once again we remind ourselves that Paul’s aim here is to stress to gentile Christians God’s continuing concern for the Jewish people.

⁷¹⁸ See e.g. Dunn 1988b, 687f., following Wilcken and others, and followed now by Moo 1996, 734f., Schreiner 1998, 627f., Jewett 2007, 710.

⁷¹⁹ At first sight the ‘so that’ clause in v. 31 might look a little odd in the Greek, but there are other examples of similar constructions: e.g. 2 Cor. 2.4; Gal. 2.10; Col. 4.16, all of which have the *hina* delayed until after words which belong to the clause which it governs.

⁷²⁰ Rom. 15.27.

⁷²¹ See e.g. Grieb 2010, 396.

⁷²² See the discussion in Wright 2002 [Romans], 629–31; Jewett 2007, 566–9; and [above, 707–9](#).

⁷²³ Col. 2.3.

⁷²⁴ 1 Cor. 2.16.

⁷²⁵ 1 Cor. 8.6. See [above, 661–70](#).

⁷²⁶ Sanders 1983, 194, cf. 41f.

⁷²⁷ cf. e.g. Watson 2004, 137: ‘In spite of the historical realities of exile and return, the post-exilic writings in [the Book of the Twelve Prophets] are testimonies precisely to the deferral of a fulfilment which so often seems near at hand but never actually arrives.’

[728](#) Rom. 5.5.

[729](#) Rom. 8.23; 2 Cor. 1.22; Eph. 1.14.

[730](#) The importance of unity and holiness as the reconfiguration of second-Temple themes was explored particularly by Newton 1985.

[731](#) [See ch. 14 below](#). It is remarkable, looking back, to see how strong the ‘gnostic hypothesis’ was in the years of Bultmannian dominance (notably in the works of W. Schmithals). Its demise marks a victory for sheer history.

[732](#) On 1 Cor. 4 see Hays 2005, 19–21.

[733](#) Hopkins, ‘God’s Grandeur’.

集中 *ShūChū*

Concentration

Collection at a middle point.
Mindful concentration
As our flights of fancy converge,
Vagaries homing in,
Ruffled feathers of distraction,
Flocks of unruly birds
Beating their wings around the bush
Now gather into one... .

A rallied psyche
Nestles down. Zeroing in.
Density of thought.

Statio Benedict once named
The pause between two tasks;
A habit to break a habit,
An action brought to mind,
The moment we collect ourselves
In from the blurred edges.
Patience of filter and focus.
Screening out. Zooming in.

Bird perched and ready.
Concentred and gathered.
Our utmost presence.

Micheal O'Siadhail

PART IV

PAUL IN HISTORY

INTRODUCTION TO PART IV

This Part of the book began life, partly in my head and partly in rough draft, as the concluding sections of each of the three chapters that now form Part III. A glance back at the size of those three chapters, especially chapter 10, will explain why I decided against that earlier plan, but it may help if the reader remembers the original intention in what follows. The point was simply this: I wanted to explore the ways in which the main emphases of Paul's theology, his revised monotheism, election and eschatology, would relate to the three worlds in which he lived, those of the Jews, the Greeks and the Romans. Having explored those worlds in (I hope) their own terms in Part I, and having now set out Paul's worldview and theology as best I can, I return to those worlds in order to complete the essentially historical task of placing Paul within this complex and multi-dimensional map. Mindful, too, of the need to help the reader maintain a sense of location within a complex book, I have set these out here in the reverse order to that in which we met them in Part I. Here at least the book has a deliberately chiasmic structure, with the chapters in this section balancing those in Part I, as set out in the diagram in the Preface.

The third of Micheal O'Siadhail's poems explains what is going on in this final section. We saw the birds hovering overhead, symbolic of the divine presence watching over Israel and its history, in chapter 2; we then studied Athene's owl in chapter 3, the cock which Socrates owed to Asclepius in chapter 4, and the Roman eagle in chapter 5. Philosophy, religion and empire were three of the main themes of the greco-roman world to which Paul believed himself called to go as the apostle of Israel's God and his Messiah. I then suggested, in Parts II and III, that Paul saw Jesus himself as the mid-point of the world – of all creation, all space, time and matter. As with the Japanese characters *Shū*, 'collection', and *Chū*, 'medium', so with their combination into *ShūChū*, 'concentration': the birds on the tree are now brought together, gathered into one. The density of Paul's thought – the fact that so many themes converge, home in, and nestle

down at this point – is what makes him both fascinating and frustrating as a subject of study. I hope that by laying out these different elements in this way, and attempting to show the way they belonged together in Paul’s own mind and (not least) in his actual life and work, we may be able to collect ourselves in from the blurred edges and arrive at some preliminary conclusions about where Paul belonged as a figure of first-century history.

We have long left behind the false antithesis of trying to place him, historically, as either a ‘Jewish’ thinker or a ‘Greek’ one. That either/or reflected nineteenth-century Hegelian Protestantism far too closely to be of much use as a historical tool. It lacked, in any case, important nuancing in terms of widely differing Jewish positions and equally wide divergencies in Paul’s Greek, and indeed Roman, worlds. I hope this final Part of the book will serve as a pointer to the far more complex and interesting task of fresh exploration which now awaits.

But only a pointer; because, if we are not to write another five hundred pages by way of conclusion, we must ourselves now do quite a lot of filtering and focusing, of screening out and zooming in. It would be possible, on the basis of Parts II and III, to set off on a much larger exploration of where Paul belongs in relation to empire, religion, philosophy and ultimately to his own original Jewish context. Possible, perhaps, but not desirable or practical in the present setting. What I offer instead is some sharply focused proposals, in brief dialogue with selected debating partners, designed to stimulate further reflections, whether historical, philosophical, theological, exegetical or practical.

Changing the metaphor (the reader may perhaps be relieved to know that the birds will be migrating elsewhere from now on), the aim is to set up four spotlights, each trained on the apostle but from significantly different angles. Spotlights sometimes distort, sometimes cast peculiar shadows, and sometimes dazzle both subject and viewer. But it is better to have four of them than the single bright light, from whichever angle, that has all too often been fashionable. Having placed them in position in chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15, we will hope in the final chapter to see Paul more clearly as he goes about his apostolic tasks.

Chapter Twelve

THE LION AND THE EAGLE: PAUL IN CAESAR'S EMPIRE

1. Introduction

Every step Paul took, he walked on land ruled by Caesar. Every letter he wrote was sent to people who lived within Caesar's domain, who paid taxes to Caesar and whose civic leaders were eager to impress on them how lucky they were to enjoy the peace and prosperity that the Caesars had brought to their region. Paul himself declared that he had long wanted to visit Rome, Caesar's capital city; according to Acts, the way he got there was as a prisoner under guard, being looked after by Caesar's soldiers until Caesar himself would hear his case.¹ Was Caesar insignificant for Paul? Hardly.

But was that 'significance' merely a matter of trivial outward circumstances, or of inner meaning? One could claim that the internal combustion engine and the invention of tarmac have been 'significant' for Christian work in the western world over the last century, in that most ministers drive cars to get to church, to visit parishioners and even, in some cases, to attend remedial courses on the Bible and theology. But that is hardly 'significant' in the same way that it would be if the same ministers came to believe that their cars were polluting the planet, that covering acres of countryside with tarmac was destroying the natural habitats of other species and that the gospel of Jesus demanded a campaign against cars and roads as we know them.

So what sort of 'significance' might Caesar have for Paul? Was Caesar's world merely the backdrop, the assumed and taken-for-granted setting in which Paul went about telling everyone within earshot about Jesus? Or did that message, the communities it generated and the worldview that Paul inculcated within them, have at least an implicit 'significance' of the second sort? Might there be other options? As we noted before, the wave of enthusiastic Caesar-investigation which swept up the surprised beach of

New Testament Studies in the 1990s may perhaps have overreached itself, as scholarly enthusiasms sometimes do, and it is time for a sober appraisal.² Was it a freak, or was it rather a sign that the tide is coming in?

This is not, to be sure, the way in which scholars used to approach the possible relationship between Paul's gospel and Caesar's world. In earlier days of history-of-religions research, it was sometimes suggested that the reason Paul used titles like 'son of god' and (occasionally) 'saviour' for Jesus, and the reason he spoke of a 'gospel' at all, was because these were the categories familiar to his audience, precisely because of the various Caesar-cults which had been spreading around the Mediterranean world, particularly in the eastern provinces where Paul travelled and worked. Paul, according to this theory, quickly abandoned any Jewish categories as being irrelevant to his pagan audience, and borrowed themes and ideas from their own culture in order to make Jesus relevant. Some still assume that any suggestion of 'significance', of an overlap of meaning between Paul's language about Jesus and first-century Roman language about Caesar, must mean *derivation* of that kind. But, as I have argued in various places, there is all the difference in the world between *derivation* and *confrontation*. It will be clear by this stage in the book that I do not think for a moment that what Paul said about Jesus and his gospel was *derived* from popular language about Caesar, or indeed about the many 'gods' and 'lords' of popular religion (on which, see the next chapter). If we are talking about derivation, it ought to be clear that Paul's fundamental ideas came from his native Jewish world, radically rethought around the crucified and risen Messiah and the gift of the spirit. But that leaves the question wide open as to whether he sometimes shaped his language and expressions deliberately in such a way as to *confront* the claims that one might hear in popular pagan culture with the very different claim that he himself was making. ('Confrontation' can of course cover many things, from friendly engagement to downright rejection, with all stages in between.)³

To the question of possible confrontation between Paul and the Roman empire there have been, broadly, three different kinds of reply. First, some have argued that Paul was actually an enthusiast for the Roman empire. If

one starts from the most obviously relevant passage, Romans 13.1–7, where Paul declares that ‘the powers that be are ordained of God’, it is possible to suggest that Paul saw the Roman empire as not only essentially benign, but as actually serving to advance the gospel, by its good government, its new roads, its proper concern for justice and so on. From this perspective Paul, himself a Roman citizen, was quite happy with the civic and imperial structures the way they were, and sought only to use them appropriately in his otherwise completely different work of telling people about Jesus and encouraging the faithful in their discipleship.⁴

The mirror-image of this is the view made popular recently by Richard Horsley and others, who have suggested that Paul’s essential message was one of social and political protest in which the arrogance and brutality of ‘empire’ was the main target. Horsley himself sometimes writes as though Paul was not even really interested in ‘theology’ as such, but was rather seeking to subvert the rule of Rome and challenge its claim to hegemony.⁵ Anyone advocating a position like this will find Romans 13.1–7 to be an embarrassing counter-example; some have regarded it as a mere *ad hoc* comment about the rulers of whom Paul was aware at the time when he wrote the letter, others have boldly declared the passage to be a later insertion into the text, and other similar strategies have been attempted.⁶ Some of us have tried to offer a modified and nuanced version of Horsley’s position, in which an implicit critique of Rome and Caesar would be integrated within (rather than set over against) Paul’s ‘theology’, and to point out that in Paul’s Jewish world there is no necessary incompatibility between (a) the affirmation that the creator God intends there to be human authorities and (b) the sharp critique of what those authorities actually do. But the polarizations of our own day, both between ‘theology’ and ‘politics’ on the one hand and between pre-packaged ‘left-wing’ and ‘right-wing’ political assumptions on the other, have made it difficult for this even to be heard, let alone understood.⁷

A third answer is to suggest that the only ‘significance’ that Rome and Caesar had for Paul was like the ‘significance’ of the cars and the road for those who use them without asking awkward questions. Paul, on this

account, had bigger fish to fry. He was indeed concerned to turn people away from the idols of their world, but the battles he was fighting at that level had to do with supernatural and ‘spiritual’ forces, not with the political realities which would, in any case, come and go from one culture to another. Today it was Rome; yesterday it might have been Babylon, Greece, Egypt or Syria; tomorrow it might be somebody else; but the gospel of Jesus was the same, and its cosmic reach and power made the petty princelings of this world about as significant as the pebbles in the road to one who drives over them on urgent, perhaps divine, business.⁸

The material I set out in chapters 2 and 5 above offers, I believe, some fresh ways forward towards a more nuanced view of the whole topic. Three factors in particular emerge which must be taken seriously in any ongoing discussion.

1. First, Paul draws explicitly on the rich Jewish tradition we studied in chapter 2, going back deep into scripture but finding various fresh expressions in his own period, in which Israel celebrated the belief that one day it would, as a nation, rule over the nations of the world.⁹ This belief was sometimes, though not always, focused on the coming king who would embody that national vocation in himself. Even in Paul’s own day, when the power of Rome must have appeared all but unconquerable to most of its subjects, this ancient Israelite belief found expression in sources as diverse as Philo and 1 Maccabees, joining up with the widespread aspiration for eventual freedom, a liberty in which the long years of ‘continuing exile’ would be over at last, and the dispersed tribes eventually regathered.

Within this Jewish world we find, in fact, precisely the two strands that have regularly been perceived in Paul. On the one hand, there is a tradition going back at least as far as Jeremiah according to which the present exile and slavery is the result of Israel’s own covenant-breaking, idolatry and sin, and the present pagan rulers are therefore doing the will of Israel’s God, even though they themselves would not see it like that.¹⁰ The proper response, therefore, is for God’s people to be good citizens under the pagan rulers in the present time, only standing out against the regime when fundamental principles are at stake.¹¹ This is the position of Daniel 1—6:

Daniel and his companions were high-ranking civil servants, working for the king, and the only fault that could be found in them was that they continued to give unique allegiance to their own God.¹² They reminded emperors of the sovereignty of ‘the God of heaven’, and warned them of impending judgment, which then came to pass.¹³ But, just as Jeremiah urged the exiles to seek the welfare of the pagan city, Daniel and his friends continued to work, as we would say, ‘within the system’.

On the other hand, the warnings of judgment can escalate until they result in a different kind of narrative, where pagan empire reaches its arrogant height and is finally overthrown by the one true God in an act of judgment which will, *ipso facto*, bring his own people not only into freedom at last after their exile, but into their own long-promised world sovereignty. This results in a very different message from the command to settle down and seek the welfare of Babylon. Instead, in a diverse range of texts, the people are commanded to leave Babylon in a hurry and to avoid contracting uncleanness as they do so;¹⁴ the final world-empire becomes ever more shrill and monstrous until its sudden overthrow;¹⁵ and, in the terrifying sustained oracle in Jeremiah 50 and 51, we find an unrelenting prophecy of Babylon’s destruction, which even suggests that Israel itself will become the weapon through which the true God will smash nations and kingdoms.¹⁶

This widespread double-effect picture, held together in the same books (not least in Daniel itself), is not inconsistent. It is not as though the prophets were unable to make up their minds whether they thought the pagan empires were good, requiring unquestioning submission, or bad, requiring implacable opposition. That is the kind of sterile antithesis common in contemporary political (and theopolitical) discussions, as though one had to be either an out-and-out Constantinian or an out-and-out Anabaptist (I know that Constantine was more complicated than people normally imagine, and that Anabaptism, too, is far from monochrome; but the stereotypes will serve for the moment). The two biblical positions belong in fact within the same *narrative*: (i) at the moment, God has given the pagan rulers sovereignty, and Israel must navigate its way to a seeking of the welfare of the city which does not compromise its ultimate loyalty,

but (ii) the time will come when God will overthrow the wicked pagans, not only rescuing Israel but setting it up as the new, alternative world kingdom. Eschatology is all: the key question is, ‘what time is it?’ As we saw in chapter 7, once you understand the story, the apparently different positions make sense.

A classic expression of this twofold belief is found in the Wisdom of Solomon, roughly contemporary with Paul:

Listen therefore, O kings, and understand;
learn, O judges of the ends of the earth.
Give ear, you that rule over multitudes,
and boast of many nations.
For your dominion was given you from the Lord,
and your sovereignty from the Most High;
he will search out your works and inquire into your plans.
Because as servants of his kingdom you did not rule rightly, or keep the law,
or walk according to the purpose of God,
he will come upon you terribly and swiftly,
because severe judgment falls on those in high places.¹⁷

This particular complex Jewish narrative is where we should start if we are to understand Paul’s vision of pagan empire – or rather, Paul’s vision of the divine purpose in relation to pagan empire.

2. Second, we must emphasize once more the point made in chapter 5 above: the remarkable growth of the complex and variegated phenomena which we loosely summarize as ‘imperial cult’ in precisely the places where Paul was working.¹⁸ When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about ‘many gods, many lords’ (8.5), he could not have forgotten, and would not expect them to forget, the imperial temple that had recently been built at the west end of the forum.¹⁹ When he reminded the Thessalonians that they had ‘turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his son from heaven’, he no doubt had plenty of pagan divinities in mind, but would hardly have been able to ignore the claims of divine sonship which, echoing the beliefs about Hercules on the one hand and the claims made by Alexander on the other,²⁰ were now being advanced energetically by the one who claimed to be *divi filius*. We shall come back to this presently.

However various and differentiated the local cults may have been by which Greece and Asia Minor gave honour to Rome and to its chief citizen in particular, such cults had burgeoned in the decades immediately before Paul's work, and were continuing to do so in his own day, not least in the cities where he preached and taught. This is the context in which we may remind ourselves of the famous words of Adolf Deissmann a century or so ago:

It must not be supposed that St. Paul and his fellow-believers went through the world blindfolded, unaffected by what was then moving the minds of men in great cities. These pages [of his book, *Light from the Ancient East*], I think, have already shown by many examples how much the New Testament is a book of the Imperial age. We may certainly take it for granted that the Christians of the early Imperial period were familiar with the institutions and customs that the Empire had brought with it ... [Deissmann then adds some examples of small and recondite points, and concludes] If such superficial details were known among the people, how much more so the deification of the emperor, with its glittering and gorgeous store of the very loftiest terms employed in worship, compelling every monotheistic conscience to most powerful reaction! ... Thus there arises a polemical parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Christ, which makes itself felt where ancient words derived by Christianity from the treasury of the Septuagint and the Gospels happen to coincide with solemn concepts of the Imperial cult which sounded the same or similar.²¹

Though we shall see that this last judgment needs to be nuanced, the overall picture should not be doubted.

3. Third, we must note – as an antidote to the easy-going assumptions of post-Enlightenment western thought! – that there are many varieties of 'political' comment and action. The increasing polarization of American social, political and cultural life, on the one hand, and the continuing implicit class-based polarization of British politics, on the other, easily deceive English-speaking readers into supposing that one must be entirely 'for' this party and 'against' that one, and that anyone who is serious about such matters must hold the party line on all debated issues. But, as postcolonial studies have repeatedly shown, there are all kinds of options open to subject peoples. They can go along with the regime that is oppressing them; they may find that it does indeed bring some benefits to them and their families. Things are frequently complex, and by no means always polarized. But this does not mean that subject peoples do not retain

some deep awareness that the foreign regime remains foreign, ultimately oppressive and undesirable. Equally, those who are passionately opposed to an oppressive regime may be divided in terms of how to express and embody that opposition. The notion of ‘hidden transcripts’ has become popular: one can say a good deal without actually saying it. The trouble with this, of course, is that, as with conspiracy theories, the more something is hidden the more one begins to suspect its presence, putting the historian in the awkward situation of treating the absence of evidence as itself constituting evidence. However, such an argument need not be entirely speculative. If a text gives at least some indications of a subversive approach, then other related passages can be brought into play, with due caution and without allowing political imagination to run riot.²²

The task before us, then, is to take someone like Paul, with his background as a Pharisaic Jew as described in chapter 2 above, to imagine him facing the world described in chapter 5 above, and then to develop that picture in the light of his new worldview and theology as set out in Parts II and III above. That will form the context for a fresh examination of the key texts, and for a brief debate with one current controversialist.

[2. Empire in Relation to Paul’s Worldview and Theology.](#)

What, then, must be said as we think back through Parts II and III of the present book with the question of ‘Paul and Empire’ before our minds? The first and most obvious point, coming straight out of chapters 6 and 10, is that for Paul the gospel of Jesus the Messiah created and sustained a particular *community*. For Paul, those who were *en Christō* constituted a ‘people’, a family of ‘brothers and sisters’, with mutual ties and obligations indicated by the word *koinōnia*. Their allegiance to Jesus as *Christos* and *kyrios*, and to one another within this ‘fellowship’, was their primary identity. This community, astonishingly in the ancient world as in the modern, was by its very nature composed of people of all sorts on an even footing: Jews and non-Jews, rich and poor, slave and free, male and female.

This remarkable unity across otherwise universal dividing-lines was balanced by an equally remarkable insistence on firm boundaries to do with belief and behaviour. There were plenty of questions as to where precisely those boundaries were to be located (much of 1 Corinthians deals with questions of that sort), but nobody doubted that such boundaries existed. Paul assumed, then, as a matter of worldview, sustained by his detailed theology, that those *en Christō* were a distinct family, and were to live as such.

This already constituted a challenge to most social and cultural groups in the ancient world, and not least to the assumptions which sustained the Roman empire itself. Groups of people gathering in unusual combinations, binding themselves in allegiance to a god, a cause, an ideal, were already regarded as a threat to the established social, cultural and political order. We have our own contemporary examples: after September 11, 2001, many airlines adopted a policy of forbidding passengers to cluster together at one point in the cabin. The risk of sudden terrorist action meant that three or four old friends, sitting for long hours at different points in the plane, were not allowed to meet up for a drink by the galley. That regulation is understandable, however apparently absurd in its actual operation. So, too, it is understandable that in many cities of the ancient world the authorities would look with suspicion on any groups who met together behind closed doors, especially when the people concerned did not in other respects belong to the same segments of society. What, people would wonder, might they be up to? And when the empire itself was attempting to unite people in allegiance to Caesar and Rome across ethnic divisions (though not across the divisions between slave and free or male and female), we should not be surprised that the early Christians encountered suspicion and hostility not only from local and transnational authorities but also from neighbours.

The central symbol of Paul's worldview, therefore (the united and holy community), already constituted a challenge both to the implicit assumptions of communities in the ancient world and, more specifically, to the empire of Rome. While Paul's churches remained small – we have frustratingly little information about actual numbers, but in most cases we

can safely assume communities of a few dozen at most in towns and cities which numbered in the tens or hundreds of thousands – the impact will have been marginal, and the consequent threat small.²³ But by the end of Paul's life, which we assume to have been in the 60s under Nero, the Christians in Rome at least were sufficient in number to be used as scapegoats for civic disaster. Though other reasons may have been given as well (non-worship of traditional gods being the obvious one), the fact that they were known as a group with its own strong and non-traditional identity will have meant that from the very beginning the Christians, simply by being what Paul believed they were, will have raised eyebrows, then hackles, then suspicions. Before we even mention state cults, emperor-worship and the like, we should reckon that what Paul assumed as a matter of worldview about the followers of Jesus, and what he taught about the redefinition of the Jewish doctrine of election, set him and his communities on a collision course not only with the empire but with many deep-rooted assumptions in the normal civic life of the ancient world.

If that was so in relation to the central symbol of Paul's worldview, it was even more so in relation to the central narrative. As we saw in chapter 7, Paul's narrative world, the story he assumed and which he wanted his communities to assume as their own, was consciously global and cosmic. It spoke of the one creator God, of a single human race and of the focusing of that human race on to Abraham and his family. This essentially Jewish narrative – already a challenge to other visions of the human project! – carried with it the ambiguities we noticed a moment ago in relation to the nations and empires of the world. On the one hand, Jews in exile and/or dispersion were to accept that the rulers of the world were *both* appointed to their tasks by the one creator God *and* accountable to that God for the way they carried them out. The calling of the people who gave allegiance to that God was therefore to work for the good of the people and nation where they found themselves. On the other hand (as we saw, you need a narrative worldview in order to understand how these two things fit together), precisely because that God would call the nations to account, there would come a time when the arrogant pagan rulers would finally be judged, and

when the people of the one God would themselves receive global sovereignty instead. The Jewish story which Paul assumed as basic thus carried with it *both* the injunction to patience and civic virtue in the present *and* the hope for a very different future in which the present rulers would be called to account – and would be replaced with God’s own people.

But when Paul told that story, and assumed it at the core of his worldview, it took a new form. Something fresh, totally unexpected, had happened. At the worldview level, as we saw in chapters 7 and 8, he believed that with the Messiah’s death and resurrection the new reality for which Israel had longed had at last dawned, even though it did not look like what he, or anyone else, had expected. To the question ‘what time is it?’, he assumed at the level of worldview, and argued at the level of theology (chapter 11 above), that the long-awaited eschaton had arrived. ‘The resurrection of the dead’ had already happened – in the person of the Messiah. For Paul this could only mean that Jesus himself was already enthroned as the world’s true lord. The tension of ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ which has regularly been seen as characteristic of his vision of Christian living is if anything even more important in terms of his vision of Jesus as world ruler. Obviously there was still a ‘not yet’, and Paul was aware of it with every beating he endured, every minute he spent in prison, every time he looked out on a world still full of idolatry, tyranny, wickedness and death. But, equally obviously from his writings, there was a ‘now’ that had not been there before. ‘The Messiah has to go on ruling, you see,’ he wrote to the Corinthians, ‘until “he has put all his enemies under his feet”.’ Jesus was, in other words, *already* ruling the world, as the Psalmist had promised, even though that rule still awaited its final triumph.²⁴ As with everything else to do with the future Jewish hope, Paul believed *both* that it had already arrived *and* that it was yet to arrive. If this was true for his view, say, of resurrection itself, it was every bit as true for his vision of the divine purpose for the pagan empires of the world. As a Pharisaic Jew, he had believed *both* that the nations were already under the strange providential rule of the one God (so that one should live peacefully under pagan rule for the time being), *and* that the one God would sooner or later bring about the

great cosmic change through which his people would be ruling the world instead. The tension between the two halves of this belief constituted, broadly, the dividing-line between what can loosely be called the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai, with the Hillelites content to live at peace under the rule of pagan empire, and to practise their *halakah* in private, and the Shammaites convinced that it was time for the great revolution. After 135, of course, the Hillelite option was the only viable one left, the narrative of hope having died what seemed to be a final death.²⁵

Paul the apostle now told the story differently. The great revolution *had already occurred* in the death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah. But precisely because there was a 'not yet' about this, as well as the obvious 'now', elements of what we may heuristically call the Hillelite position still remained. Jesus was already the world's true lord; but 'the powers that be' were still ordained by God. The apparent tension between 1 Corinthians 15.20–8 and Romans 13.1–7, which we shall explore in a minute, is the necessary eschatological tension generated by the way Israel's story had reached its unexpected climax with the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah. The narrative of Paul's worldview, then, and the answers to the worldview questions, particularly 'what time is it?', placed him at a new point on the worldview-map in relation to the old challenges of pagan empire and what to do about it. This new point did not correspond to anything we know from the post-135 rabbis, who had in effect given up the struggle for the kingdom of heaven and, with it, the idea of an ongoing narrative that would lead to the overthrow of pagan power. (If anything, Paul's viewpoint is closer, though still with many significant differences, to the inaugurated eschatologies of Qumran on the one hand and bar-Kochba on the other.) Nor does this new Pauline position correspond to anything we know in the normal church-and-society discussions of the post-Enlightenment western world, where left-wing Christians are eager to subpoena Paul in favour of their Marxist agendas and right-wing Christians are eager to quote Romans 13 in favour of governments doing whatever they think they need to do (dropping bombs on people, for instance). For Paul, inaugurated eschatology precipitated a new mode of the

Pharisaic/Jewish political challenge. And if the ‘not yet’ indicated that there was still a sense of ‘living peacefully under the world’s rulers’, the ‘now’ indicated that something new had none the less happened. The Messiah ‘rises up to rule the nations’; it had already happened, and Paul was there to announce it and to make it a reality.²⁶ This cannot be other than politically subversive, even though the nature of that subversion will not map on to the models we have assumed. But of one thing we can be sure. Daniel 7 had spoken of a sequence of four monsters. Everyone in the 160s BC would have identified the fourth monster as Syria. Everyone in the first century AD would have identified it as Rome. For someone steeped in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, as Paul was, it would have been impossible to imagine that Rome was ‘insignificant’.²⁷

There is a second way in which the narrative Paul believed himself and his communities to be inhabiting produced a clash with Rome and its empire. This took place at the level both of worldview and of theology. Paul understood the nascent church to be living within a long story, that of Israel itself. After many apparent disasters and wrong turns, this story had finally been brought, by a massive (‘apocalyptic’!) act of fresh divine grace, to the decisive and climactic fulfilment which had been envisaged from the beginning and which, despite ongoing disappointments, had been promised repeatedly thereafter. Israel’s long history had at last reached its royal conclusion, even though nobody had imagined that the Messiah would himself be crucified and raised from the dead to attain his enthronement. But, as we saw in chapter 5, at exactly the same point in time the Roman world was being taught to understand its own history in a new way, which corresponds uncannily to this strange, and now strangely fulfilled, Jewish narrative. Horace, Livy and above all Virgil had celebrated the rise of Augustus as the unexpected royal climax to the long history of republican Rome, producing a new world order of peace, justice and prosperity.²⁸ The clash of narratives already visible in the book of Daniel, and in works dependent on it such as *4 Ezra*, developed in the late 60s and early 130s into actual open warfare. But it also developed in another direction, in the writings of Paul, into a theological account in which the decisive battle had

already been fought and won.²⁹ There cannot, in the last analysis, be two parallel eschatological narratives of world domination. Either the history of Rome provides the true story, with Christian faith content to shelter, as a 'permitted religion', under its banner. Or the history of Israel, climaxing in the crucified and risen Messiah, must be seen as the true story, with that of Rome, however much under the overarching divine providence, as at best a distorted parody of the truth. As Nebuchadnezzar had learned the hard way, human kingdoms are indeed the gift of heaven's God, but heaven's God will judge human rulers for exercising their delegated rule with arrogance and self-aggrandisement. As Paul told and retold the long story of the creator God and his chosen people, reaching its shocking climax in the crucified Messiah, he can hardly have been unaware, in a world where Virgil at least had already become a school-text, of the powerful alternative narrative that Rome was offering to the world. For someone who believed what Paul believed, Rome could never simply be the insignificant backdrop for his work, a kind of socio-cultural wallpaper. Rome offered a long and powerful story of a divinely appointed city, nation and culture from which had emerged the *divi filius* himself, bringing peace and justice and world domination. Paul told the long and evocative story of a divinely appointed people from whom, despite their many failures and tragedies, there had emerged the *theou hyios* himself, bringing peace and justice and claiming worldwide allegiance. When it came to long stories which eventually arrived at a surprising but world-transforming royal conclusion, Paul's story of Israel and its Messiah had only one competitor. Thus, while in terms of Daniel 7 Rome would be seen as the fourth monster, in terms of its own imperial narrative it would appear as the sole rival to the story of Israel. Either way, Rome could hardly be insignificant for Paul. It was not simply the present vehicle for the kind of dark powers that were always, from the Jewish point of view, active through pagan empires. It offered such a stark set of parallels to the narrative of Paul's gospel that it was bound to appear not just as one empire among many – the one which happened to be around at the time, so to speak – but as a strikingly specific parody of the message of Jesus and the community of his followers.

Of course, for Paul as for Jesus himself, the very notion of empire, of ‘world domination’, had itself been deconstructed by the cross and remade, in a quite different form, in the resurrection. Jesus was indeed to be hailed as the world’s true sovereign, even though the mode of that sovereignty was now revealed as the sovereignty of love. This means, too, that the holy war which formed the ‘now’ of bar-Kochba’s inaugurated eschatology, and might have been seen as the imminent future at Qumran, was replaced for Paul by the ‘warfare’ he describes in Ephesians 6. That, too, we must explore more fully in a moment, together with the new kind of paradoxes which then result.³⁰

It is inevitable, then, that the worldview through which Paul looked at all of reality, with its central symbol of the people of God renewed *en Christō*, its central Israel- and Messiah-shaped narrative and its decisive inaugurated eschatology, would come into conflict with the worldview of empire as expressed by Roman writers, architects, tax-collectors and military commanders. Neither was making limited claims which would allow for the free operation of the other. Sooner or later they would be forced into a direct confrontation for which, perhaps, the strange incident which caused Claudius to expel Jews from Rome may have been at least a foretaste.³¹ But there remains one element of Paul’s theology which we have not yet considered. Paul was, at least in his own estimation, a monotheist of the Jewish variety. His remarkably mature proto-trinitarian vision of the one God, which we explored in chapter 9, was itself bound to come into conflict with the claims of the new civic and imperial cults. There are, he wrote, many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’, but ‘for us’ – and the ‘us’ is hugely significant as an ecclesial marker both against the pagan world and against the Jewish world that did not accept Jesus as Messiah – there is ‘one God, the father ... and one lord, Jesus the Messiah.’ As we saw, this was a deliberate rewriting of the central Jewish confessional prayer, the *Shema*, and it carried with it not only the stunning christological redefinition of the one God – discovering Jesus himself to be at the heart of monotheism! – but also the clear intent of upstaging all other ‘gods’ and ‘lords’ who might claim the attention of the Corinthians. And in Corinth, a city proud to be

Roman, sporting new imperial shrines, celebrating Rome and Caesar with games and festivals, Rome could not have been insignificant. Of course there were plenty of other ‘gods’ and ‘lords’ as well. But nobody in Corinth would have missed the point. Those who followed the one God, one lord were to regard all other claimants to those words as a sham. Historically speaking, that must have included Rome and Caesar, not as an insignificant addition to a much larger pantheon, nor as merely the present holders of an imperial power whose real significance lay in the dark forces which it happened, for the moment, to embody, but as a central target of Paul’s implied polemic.³²

I suggest therefore that the inner logic of Paul’s own worldview and theology, seen as the messianic redefinition of his second-Temple Jewish worldview, cannot but have brought him into conflict, whether implicit or explicit, with the claims, the narrative and the policies of the Roman empire. It remains vital, however, to see all this within the framework of Paul’s distinctive (and, again, messianic) *eschatology*, with its all-important ‘now/not yet’ shape and balance. It will not do to ask simply whether Paul was ‘for’ or ‘against’ either the generalized idea of ‘empire’ or the Roman empire in particular. Like other Jews, he believed that the one God had appointed human authorities and intended that they should be obeyed. Like other Jews, he believed that the one God would hold such authorities to account. Unlike most other Jews,³³ *he believed that this holding-to-account had already happened, and that Israel’s Messiah was already installed as the true ruler of the world.* As in other areas of his thinking, he was therefore precipitated into a new, unmapped territory in which it would be easy to be misunderstood, in his world as indeed in ours. If, as I believe, Paul was articulating a deeply counter-imperial theology, it was not of the type with which, as a hard-line Pharisee, he would previously have been familiar. If, as I believe, he was articulating a deeply monotheistic belief in the divine appointment of human rulers, frail and fallible though they remained, this was not simply identical with the view that had led Jeremiah to tell the exiles to seek the welfare of Babylon. Both sides of his previous

Jewish belief about politics and empire had been radically rethought around the Messiah.

Up to this point I have been content with an outline argumentative strategy. I have suggested that there is a massive *prima facie* probability that, granted what Paul believed and granted what Rome claimed, the two would necessarily come into conflict. But history cannot work with ‘must-have-been’s alone. What has been said so far has been necessary in order that we may attune our ears to the overtones of what Paul actually says. Without these chambers of resonance, we might easily miss the point. So, then, with the echo chamber properly and historically constructed, we turn to the texts themselves.

3. Jesus Is Lord, and Therefore ...

(i) Who Are the ‘Rulers’, and What Has Happened to Them?

The rulers, as I said, had already been called to account. They had been judged, found wanting and held up to public ridicule:

[God] blotted out the handwriting that was against us, opposing us with its legal demands. He took it right out of the way, by nailing it to the cross. He stripped the rulers and authorities of their armour, and displayed them contemptuously to public view, celebrating his triumph over them in him.³⁴

This is, of course, part of a letter written from prison. Paul was in no danger of an over-realized eschatology, of imagining that the rulers and authorities had been rendered actually harmless. He was still chained up (4.3).

Nevertheless, the remarkable statement in the second sentence above (verse 15) is framed within a larger discourse in which the new world has come to pass and the old one is to be regarded as irrelevant. Human traditions and ‘the elements of the world’ are things that threaten to take you captive, declares Paul, but if you are in the Messiah you are already fulfilled in him, because he is ‘the head of all rule and authority’ (2.10). His death and resurrection, and your incorporation into those events through baptism,

mean in particular that neither the commands nor the accusations of the Jewish law have any claim upon you (2.13, 16–19, 20–3). But, though the warnings seem to be slanted against the dangers of being lured into some kind of Jewish way of life, at bottom they are rooted in the cosmic vision of chapter 1. It was not simply the demands of the Jewish law that had been nailed to the cross. It was the rulers and authorities themselves, the powers that, by crucifying Jesus, had supposed they were getting rid of such a nuisance, only to find that they had signed their own death warrant:

We do, however, speak wisdom among the mature. But this isn't a wisdom of this present world, or of the rulers of this present world – those same rulers who are being done away with. No: we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery. This is the wisdom God prepared ahead of time, before the world began, for our glory.

None of the rulers of this present age knew about this wisdom. If they had, you see, they wouldn't have crucified the lord of glory.³⁵

That passage makes it impossible to imagine that when Paul speaks of 'powers' or 'rulers' he is referring *only* to so-called 'spiritual' forces. We might draw the same conclusion from a tiny phrase often overlooked in this connection: when Paul speaks contemptuously of 'so-called "gods", whether in heaven or on earth', the latter phrase, 'on earth', can only in his day refer to the Caesars.³⁶ Paul can think of the Olympians on the one hand, and know that they are a fiction; of Caesar on the other hand, and know that his theological claims are false. (His political claims were as strong as his legions.) To this extent, the very ordinary human who hides within the apparently divine status is parallel to the unpleasant little demons who hide behind the imposing facade of the fictitious pagan pantheon.³⁷ This is not the place to enter into the complex debates about the apparent interplay between human 'powers' and non-human 'powers', except to note that, like many in his world, Paul would not have made the sharp and absolute distinction between them that we are inclined to do. Just as he sees *daimonia* at work behind and within the official pagan 'deities',³⁸ so he recognizes the presence and power of unseen forces behind and within the actual humans who wield power in the obvious and immediate sense.³⁹

Three of his great, sweeping panoramas indicate that he bundles them all up together:

I am persuaded, you see, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor the present, nor the future, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in King Jesus our lord.⁴⁰

This was the power at work in the king when God raised him from the dead and sat him at his right hand in the heavenly places, above all rule and authority and power and lordship, and above every name that is invoked, both in the present age and also in the age to come. Yes: God has ‘put all things under his feet’, and has given him to the church as the head over all.⁴¹

He is the image of God, the invisible one,
the firstborn of all creation.
For in him all things were created,
in the heavens and here on the earth.

Things we can see and things we cannot,
– thrones and lordships and rulers and powers –
all things were created both through him and for him.⁴²

Two points emerge here of relevance for our question. First, as to the *identity* of the ‘rulers’. They clearly *include* all human authorities, from Caesar on his throne, giving himself ‘divine’ status, right down to the lowliest local administrator. But precisely by including them in a much larger array of ‘powers’ this way of speaking thereby *relativizes* all such rulers. ‘Every name that is invoked’: in eastern Asia Minor there was one name in particular that was invoked in Paul’s day, and he knew it and so did his readers. Of course, by implicitly placing Caesar within a long list of other types of ruler and power Paul is demoting him, cutting him down to size. He is one among many. But this was itself a polemical point. In a world where an absolute monarch was busy drawing all other powers to himself, where statues and coins dressed him up as Zeus, Poseidon or some other lofty Olympian, to place Caesar by implication as one among many was already a calculated snub. It is much the same – ironically, in view of the way the passage has often been read – with Romans 13.1–7. When Caesar is being granted divine honours, to say that ‘there is no authority

except from God, and those that exist have been put in place by God' is to deny the very claim that Caesar is making.⁴³ The creator, who has made humans in his image so that they might reflect his authority into the world, intends that there should be human authorities, but insists that they should hold office only at his behest and subject to his scrutiny. This is, so far, the classic Jewish position we observed earlier.

Second, however, we note what Paul is saying *about* these authorities, including the most powerful human ones. They are now, whether they know it or not, subject not only to the instituting and judging authority of the one God, but also to the rule of the Messiah. That which was promised in Psalms 2 and 110, and many other Jewish texts, has already come to pass. Everything has already been 'put under his feet'. That which was created through him and for him, as in Colossians, has been placed in subjection under him, as in Ephesians. If we ask how this has happened, Colossians highlights the cross as the moment when the rulers and authorities were cut down to size, publicly shamed for their arrogance, and Ephesians highlights the resurrection and ascension as the means by which Jesus has been installed as the one and only human to whom all things are now subject. If we ask why this was necessary – why, granted the goodness of the original creation, including all authorities, the 'powers' would then need to be 'reconciled', as in Colossians 1.20, or defeated in the Messiah's triumph, as in 2.15 – Paul gives no direct answer, but he clearly believes that the created powers have rebelled against the creator, and have arrogated to themselves powers which they have now been eager to use against the creator's will. That is why, in another relativizing move, he insists that the real, ultimate enemy is not any human being or structure, but the dark anti-creational forces that stand behind them and use them as puppets in their nefarious purposes:

The warfare we're engaged in, you see, isn't against flesh and blood. It's against the leaders, against the authorities, against the powers that rule the world in this dark age, against the wicked spiritual elements in the heavenly places.⁴⁴

That is why the battle to which the apostle and his congregations are called is not a matter of ordinary human resistance or revolution, as in the violent insurgency which formed one Jewish tradition all the way from the Maccabees to bar-Kochba. Paul believed in a different kind of warfare, requiring a different kind of armour: truth as a belt, justice as a breastplate, the gospel of peace for shoes, faith for a shield, salvation as a helmet and God's word as a sword.⁴⁵ This corresponds closely to another passage in which, as we shall see, Paul dismisses the arrogant claims of empire as so much empty boasting, and goes on to insist that followers of the Messiah live already in the new day which is dawning:

We daytime people should be self-controlled, clothing ourselves with the breastplate of faith and love, and with the helmet of the hope of salvation; because God has not placed us on the road to fury, but to gaining salvation through our lord Jesus the Messiah.⁴⁶

This shift in perspective – the cutting down to size of pompous imperial pretensions, and the insistence on a different kind of battle altogether – is entirely consonant with the classic 'apocalyptic' passage in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul stresses that the 'last enemies' over whom the Messiah must win the final victory are not (shall we say) Babylon, or Syria, or even Rome, but 'sin' and 'death' themselves:

He has to go on ruling, you see, until 'he has put all his enemies under his feet'. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed ...

The 'sting' of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thank God! He gives us the victory, through our lord Jesus the Messiah.⁴⁷

And this in turn points to the redefinition of the messianic battle which we find in the gospels. To allow Rome, or any other empire, to set the agenda so firmly that it becomes 'the' enemy is to fail to see the real enemies hiding behind the glitter of armour and the point of a spear. 'Don't be afraid', says Jesus, 'of those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do'. Instead, 'fear the one who starts by killing and then has the right to throw people into Gehenna'.⁴⁸

The trouble is, of course, that in the split-level worldview of western modernism it is difficult to make this point without people getting the (other) wrong end of the stick. Oh, we will be told, so you're saying that Paul isn't interested in Caesar after all, but only in 'spiritual' forces? Some will be eager to 'hear' something like this, others disappointed; but it is not at all what I am saying – and, more to the point, not at all what Paul is saying. If I can risk an analogy which will itself be anathema to some, we are told from time to time that 'it isn't guns that kill people, it's people that kill people'; but that sharp antithesis is called into question by the statistics which suggest that in a country with many guns more people will kill one another than in a country with few. In the same way, it would be wrong to say that it isn't empires that destroy human life, it's the demons that stand behind them. Yes, we may want to say: in the last analysis, empires may indeed become stupid puppets operated by demonic forces; but it remains the case that dark forces operate *through* arrogant tyranny – just as, Paul would be quick to add, they operate also through chaotic anarchy. That is the problem of politics, ancient and modern.⁴⁹ And it is not resolved by one-sided analyses.

Where does this leave us? With a sharper and clearer understanding of how the two-sided Jewish vision of political reality – rulers created by the one God and called to account before him – was given new depth, focus and above all chronological timing by Paul as a result of what he believed about the Messiah. Ancient Israel sang of the enthronement of the Messiah over the warring and squabbling kings of the earth; Paul believed that this enthronement had already happened. The prophets (and even, in some readings, the Pentateuch) had spoken of the coming king who would rule the nations; Paul believed that the king had come, and was already ruling. This cannot be 'spiritualized', as some might wish to do, without making a mockery – almost a gnostic mockery! – of the entire Jewish framework of thought. There is, however, a radical difference. The victory which Paul believes has already taken place has been effected not through the Messiah leading a military operation, as in the line from Judas Maccabaeus to Simon bar-Kochba, but through his paradoxical and shameful death on a Roman

cross, and his subsequent resurrection and exaltation. Because of this, Paul recognizes that the victory which the Messiah's followers must now implement is not the transfer of ordinary political and military power from one group to another, but the transformation of that power itself into something different altogether, something in fact much more powerful. The greatest power in and beyond all creation, as he says at the end of his greatest chapter, has now been unveiled in action, and it remains the one thing that can withstand all other powers. For Paul, its nature and its name was Love.

(ii) The Apocalyptic, and Therefore Political, Triumph of God

With all this in mind, we turn to the two letters where the case for an implicit anti-Roman polemic is clearest. It may or may not be significant that, Romans itself excepted, they are the two letters addressed to cities geographically closest to the capital: Thessalonica and Philippi.⁵⁰

The two letters to the Thessalonians are, of course, known for their 'apocalyptic' mode of expression. This is sharpest in the second letter, causing those who wanted to keep Paul and 'apocalyptic' at arm's length from one another to assign it to a different hand. But with the proper re-emphasis on 'apocalyptic' as part of Paul's context – for all the misunderstandings which have swirled around that term! – it ought to be time for a reconsideration. And with the equally proper emphasis in recent studies on the essentially 'political' meaning of 'apocalyptic' language in the Jewish world of the second-Temple period, we ought to be able to say, of both the Thessalonian letters, not only that they belong firmly within the overall Pauline corpus but that we ought to expect them to be engaged, at some level or other, precisely with the 'political' world of the day. Just as we learn, as a matter of genre, that in the poetry of the Psalms a reference to smoke coming out of God's nostrils does not intend a flat, literal meaning; that when Jesus says he is a 'door' he does not mean he is made of wood; and that when Genesis says the world was made in six days it is not referring to six periods of twenty-four hours, so we have learned (or we

should have done), as a matter of genre, that ‘apocalyptic’ language in Paul’s world was regularly employed as a coded way of speaking about the rise and fall of great world powers. Daniel, after all, is the book which stands most obviously at or near the head of the genre, and when Daniel wrote about four monsters coming up out of the sea he was not writing a script for a fantasy horror movie. We know how Daniel was being read in the first century, and it is clear that he was talking about actual empires, and the actual overthrow of the last and most terrible of them.⁵¹

So when we read 2 Thessalonians 2, we ought not to imagine that this is simply a wild ‘apocalyptic’ fantasy about some great coming event, totally discontinuous with present socio-political reality. As I have often said, it is clear that ‘the day of the lord’ in this passage cannot be ‘the end of the world’; if it were, neither Paul nor the Thessalonians would expect to be informed of such a thing by letter. Rather, we seem to be in the realm (a) of major and important socio-political events which (b) can best be referred to through ‘apocalyptic’ language:

Now concerning the royal presence of our lord Jesus the Messiah, and our gathering together around him, this is our request, my dear family. Please don’t be suddenly blown off course in your thinking, or be unsettled, either through spiritual influence, or through a word, or through a letter supposedly from us, telling you that the day of the lord has already arrived.

Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way. You see, it can’t happen unless first the rebellion takes place, and the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, is revealed. He is the one who sets himself against every so-called god or cult object, and usurps their role, so that he installs himself in God’s temple, and makes himself out to be a god.⁵²

It is ironic that this passage has played less of a role in discussions of ‘Paul and politics’ than it should have done – no doubt because of the prejudice against Pauline authorship which, as I said, was based almost entirely on an older anti-apocalyptic viewpoint which, like Marcion (and Bultmann!) with Romans 8.18–26, wanted to cut out or marginalize all such traces of ‘Jewish’ thought-forms. But once we have recognized Paul as a thoroughly ‘apocalyptic’ thinker, and once we recapture the sense that ‘apocalyptic’ itself was a major carrier of social and political critique, then there should be no question as to what is going on here.⁵³ Paul is reminding the

Thessalonians that for evil finally to be eradicated from God's world it must be brought to full height, must be concentrated at one point and must be dealt with there. In the world of the first century, to speak of someone who insists on his own superiority to other gods and cult objects, installs himself in their place in temples and particularly in the Temple in Jerusalem, and gives himself out to be a god, is clearly to refer to the Roman emperor. This, of course, creates other puzzles, since the obvious candidate for someone doing what is here described is Gaius Caligula, whose failed attempt to have his statue installed in the Jerusalem Temple took place in AD 40, shortly before his death in 41 – long before, on any credible chronology, Paul the apostle ever visited northern Greece. The best guess, then, is that Paul, keenly aware (like the whole Jewish world) of that crisis and what it meant, was peering into the foggy future with the aid of apocalyptic imagery, and using Gaius and his megalomaniac plan as an image, a template, for what would surely come one day. Some other tyrant would try the same trick, or at least another grab at divine power for which Gaius's crazy plan would serve as an appropriate metaphor. Just as it would be silly to insist that this passage must be taken as an exact literal prediction of what will take place (think of the wings and the claws on *4 Ezra's* eagle!), so it would be equally silly to think that the passage can therefore be 'spiritualized', and bear no relation to actual empires and their actual blasphemies, or to Rome in particular. A wise first-century reader of this text would know both that it certainly referred to Rome, and to Caesar, and also that it was seeing Rome, and Caesar, as the lens through which 'the mystery of lawlessness' itself (verse 7) could be glimpsed, working itself up to full height and thus being fully fitted for the judgment to come. Behind Rome, then, to be sure, stands the satan (verse 9); but this, though again relativizing Rome (Rome/Caesar is not divine, and Rome/Caesar is not the satan), nevertheless provides as sharp a political critique of Rome/Caesar as any Jew could imagine. The point where Rome/Caesar takes on divine status is the point where Rome/Caesar is most obviously acting as satan's puppet.⁵⁴

This clear and ‘apocalyptic’ reference to Rome sends us back to 1 Thessalonians with a sense that the strong implications we observed earlier in the present chapter might well find expression here too. It has often been pointed out that Paul’s references to the *parousia* of Jesus can themselves be seen as an upstaging of the *parousia* of Caesar, either arriving for a state visit to a colony or returning home after a victorious campaign.⁵⁵ But the more explicit reference to the boasting of Rome here comes in 1 Thessalonians 5.3:

When people say, ‘Peace and security!’, then swift ruin will arrive at their doorstep, like the pains that come over a woman in labour, and they won’t have a chance of escape.

That will be ‘the day of the lord’, coming like a midnight robber; but those who belong to Jesus are living by a different clock, and for them the sun is already up.⁵⁶ But who is it that proclaims ‘peace and security’? A wealth of evidence, including coins, points in one rather obvious direction: this was a standard boast of the Roman empire.⁵⁷ Again, Paul is doing two things simultaneously. First, he is cutting the boasters down to size, as though one might say ‘I gather there are some people going about saying “peace and security”...’ He will not dignify them with a full and explicit attack, but there should be no doubt in our minds, as there was none in the Thessalonians’, as to the identity of ‘some people’ here. Second, then, he is declaring that in any case the proud tyrants of this world, with their global protection rackets (‘do what we say and you’ll be nice and safe’), are part of the old order of things, the night-time world which will be swept away when the new day, which has already dawned in Jesus, bursts at last upon the drunk and sleepy citizens of darkness.⁵⁸ This is obviously the same picture we found in 1 Corinthians 2, where ‘the rulers of this world’, who all unknowingly had crucified the lord of glory, are ‘being done away with’, destined to be abolished. Both pictures look back to the older Jewish visions of great world kingdoms whose power is taken from them when the one God judges the world and exalts his own people to sovereignty instead.⁵⁹

We can be sure that 2 Thessalonians 2 is referring, ‘apocalyptically’ and politically, to the blasphemous boasts of the Roman emperors. We can be

morally sure that 1 Thessalonians 5 is referring, dismissively and thereby all the more powerfully, to the imperial boast of ‘protection’ which the inhabitants of northern Greece would know only too well. What about the other letter to northern Greece, the short and stunning letter to Philippi?

We need once more to remember the context as we set it out in chapter 5, and to recall that Philippi had been the site of one of the key battles in the civil war from which Augustus had eventually emerged as the winner. Augustus had claimed to bring peace and prosperity to the whole Roman world, rescuing it from its apparent slide into chaos; his accession was hailed as ‘good news’; his successors were acclaimed variously as ‘saviour’ and ‘lord’.⁶⁰ This language would be, quite literally, common coin in northern Greece, and especially in a city some of whose members at least were Roman citizens, part of the old colonial families. Whether citizens or not, all residents of Philippi and the surrounding areas would be reminded on a regular basis, by festivals and games, by statues and temples, by coins, inscriptions and public proclamations, just how fortunate they were to be living in Caesar’s world.

That is the echo chamber within which we should try to ‘hear’ Paul’s climactic warning and triumphant statement of hope:

You see, there are several people who behave as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. I told you about them often enough, and now I’m weeping as I say it again. They are on the road to destruction; their stomach is their god, and they find glory in their own shame. All they ever think about is what’s on the earth.

We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we’re eagerly waiting for the saviour, the lord, King Jesus, who is going to come from there. Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he’s going to transform it so that it’s just like his glorious body. And he’s going to do this by the power which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority.⁶¹

We leave to one side the question as to who Paul is describing, and weeping over, in verses 18 and 19. The point is that, even if they might actually be Jews, or people claiming to be Christians, Paul is describing them in language a first-century Jew might regularly use of pagans. Their horizon is bounded by *ta epigeia*, ‘what’s on the earth’. This sets him up for the contrast with the Christian identity: ‘We are citizens of heaven’, *hēmōn gar*

to *politeuma en ouranois*. As I have argued elsewhere, this does *not* mean ‘so we are looking forward to leaving earth behind and going to heaven itself’. The language of citizenship does not work that way, as anyone in Philippi could have told you; to be a citizen of Rome did not mean that one day you would leave Philippi and go back to live in Rome itself. A colony of citizens constituted a centripetal movement, not a centrifugal one. And if the language of citizenship, of belonging to a *politeuma*, already suggests a contrast between the ultimate loyalties of the Christian and the ultimate loyalties of the Roman, this is sharpened to a point by Paul’s description of Jesus in this passage. Instead of Caesar coming from Rome to rescue a beleaguered colony, Jesus will come from heaven to transform the world, and particularly to give new bodies to his own people. He is the *sōtēr*, the saviour; he is the *kyrios*, the lord; he is *Christos*, the Messiah, the Jewish king destined to be lord of the whole world.⁶²

Paul rubs this in by echoing Psalm 8.7, as he does in 1 Corinthians 15. The psalm, read by both Paul, Hebrews and some of their Jewish contemporaries in a messianic sense, spoke of the destiny of the human being, the ‘son of man’, as a kind of extension of the mandate of Genesis 1:

You have made him a little lower than God, and crowned him with glory and honour.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.⁶³

Paul thus contrasts the true *politeuma*, destined to come into being on earth as in heaven, with the merely earthly one; he hails Jesus as the Messiah promised in scripture, destined to rule the whole world; he gives him the titles ‘saviour’ and ‘lord’.⁶⁴ He speaks of his coming from heaven, as he did in 1 and 2 Thessalonians in the passages just studied. It requires, I suggest, a particular sort of deafness to suggest that he intends no allusion to Caesar.⁶⁵

This conclusion is powerfully supported by the passage which some see as the very heart of all Paul’s theology, and which on any showing is one of the most remarkable pieces of early Christian writing. Philippians 2.6–11

has of course been studied intensively, and we do not need to do more than allude to the work of others.⁶⁶ Three points only need to be made here.

First, we observe particularly the overall *narrative* of the passage. It is not simply a matter of Paul declaring that Jesus is to receive the homage from every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth – though that already makes its own powerful statement.⁶⁷ It is a matter of Jesus coming to that universal sovereignty by a particular route. And the pattern of the narrative, with the Messiah setting off on a dark and horrible task, accomplishing it, and therefore receiving supreme exaltation, is the pattern by which, since at least the time of Alexander the Great, kings and emperors caused their own stories to be told. Though it may be doubted whether verses 6–8, the story of incarnation, servanthood and death, would remind anyone of the stories of people coming to imperial power by means of great trials, there should be no question about the force of the ‘therefore’ in verse 9: this is a narrative of imperial legitimation, and would be readily recognized as such. *This* is how Jesus has attained the position of *kyrios*. Powerful and detailed arguments have been advanced that most Philippian hearers of this letter would hear echoes of Caesar more strongly than echoes of any other possible contender.⁶⁸ The parallels with 3.20–1 are strong, meaning that at least on a second hearing of the letter people would pick up the even clearer Caesar-reference here as well. The passage speaks of universal authority being granted for a specific and narratable reason, by the proper authority. It is this narrative, telling the story of Jesus so that it echoes and upstages the story of Caesar, that lies at the heart of the claim to detect a subversive echo of Caesar in this passage.

But there is more. In verse 9 Jesus is given ‘the name which is over all names’. As Peter Oakes has pointed out,

The giving of the names *Augustus* and *Pater Patriae* was a vital part of the process of accession of an emperor. These names were exclusive to the Emperor in this period, clearly distinguishing him from any co-regent ... In Roman political terms, in the Julio-Claudian period, the ‘name above every name’ could only belong to the Emperor himself.⁶⁹

This ‘name’ was, of course, *kyrios*, which in Paul’s world (as we saw in chapter 9) was the regular Septuagintal rendering for the untranslatable YHWH. As with some of Paul’s other key terms – *euangelion* comes to mind – we find a remarkable confluence between a biblical allusion and an imperial one.⁷⁰ We should not imagine that only one ‘side’ of this double allusion was intended, or would be heard. Here, as in 3.20, *kyrios* was a Caesar-title now applied to Jesus.

Third, in particular, we note the quotation from Isaiah 45.23 in verse 10. It is taken from a passage where the prophet is issuing one of his scathing denunciations of the great pagan empire of Babylon. Beside the imperial idols, who are incapable of saving anyone or anything, YHWH announces himself as the only God, ‘a righteous God and saviour’ (LXX *dikaios kai sōtēr*), to whom all the ends of the earth should turn to be saved.⁷¹ This ties 2.9–11 more tightly still to 3.20–1, and indicates that Paul is consciously drawing on the scriptural themes not just of YHWH’s universal sovereignty but also of him as the true God, the one and only ‘saviour’, in explicit contrast to the idolatrous pretensions of pagan empire. Once again – to put the point negatively – if Paul had wanted not to draw the Philippians’ attention to the possible parallels between the Messiah and the emperor, he went about it in a very strange way. His echoes are as strong as they would be for someone in Germany in the 1930s who referred to the leader of a new movement – or indeed to Jesus! – as ‘Der Führer’. (The Nazis actually forbade the use of the word, unless in compounds, except in reference to Hitler himself.) It would not have been much of a defence to claim that when you used the word you heard rather different sounds.

There is an interesting tail-piece to this brief consideration of Philippians 2.6–11. In the immediate sequel, Paul urges his hearers to ‘work at bringing about your own salvation’, since ‘God himself is the one who’s at work among you’.⁷² This talk of working at one’s own salvation has naturally sent shivers down many a protestant spine, since at first glance it appears to undermine ‘justification by faith alone’. But that is not at all what Paul is talking about. ‘Salvation’, *sōtēria*, was what Caesar offered to those who gave him allegiance. The Philippians, believing that Jesus was the only one

at whose name every knee should bow, were faced with the task of working out, in the practical details of everyday life within Caesar's world, what it would mean, what it would look like and feel like, to explore the *sōtēria* which Jesus offered instead.⁷³ Paul gives them some pointers, but in a short letter he can hardly do more than provide suggestions. He is, however, confident that the one true God is at work among them, so that they will be able to understand their own variety of 'salvation', just as they must learn the meaning of their own variety of *politeuma*, 'citizenship'.

Before assessing the overall contribution of the Thessalonian and Philippian letters, we should at least raise again the question I raised some years ago in relation to Philippians 3. When Paul in 3.18 urges his hearers to 'join together in imitating me' (*symmimētai mou ginesthe*), following the 'pattern of behaviour' which he has laid down, what exactly does he have in mind? It could of course be a general command, more or less identical in content to what he says in 4.9 ('these are the things you should do: what you learned, received, heard and saw in and through me'). It could simply be a reference to the specific contrast he then draws between verses 18–19 and verses 20–1: instead of living for the belly, and for earthly things, one should live as a citizen of heaven, knowing that the present body will be transformed to be like the Messiah's glorious body. That exhortation – remember the future resurrection, so treat your body accordingly! – corresponds quite closely to 1 Corinthians 6.12–14. But it is interesting that, in another parallel with 1 Corinthians, Paul's command to imitate him comes after a long section in which he has been describing his own pattern of life: 'Copy me', he says, 'just as I'm copying the Messiah' (1 Corinthians 11.1), though he has not there been speaking of the Messiah as an example. The specific aspect of his own behaviour which he wants the Corinthians to copy is the fact that he is 'not seeking his own advantage, but that of the many' (10.33), in other words, his giving up of his own rights, as the Messiah had done, for the sake of the gospel (9.1–27). In that whole section (1 Corinthians 8.1—11.1) he applies that principle in detail to the challenges faced by the church in relation to idol-temples and the sacrificial meat which made its way from them into the open market: the 'strong' are

to be prepared to give up their ‘rights’ if exercising them would cause the ‘weak’ to ‘stumble’ (8.13; 10.24, 28).⁷⁴ We might conclude from this parallel between Philippians 3.17 and 1 Corinthians 11.1 that, in addition to the obvious behavioural questions indicated by a surface reading of Philippians 3.18–21, Paul may have something else in mind.

In particular, I have wondered – it is hard to make this more than a question, and the point would only work if everything I have said about Philippians so far in this chapter were to be accepted – whether Paul has in mind more specifically the example he is setting in his autobiographical story (3.4–11, with verses 12–16 as a development of that). Here, as in 1 Corinthians 9, he is talking about the fact that he has given up his own ‘rights’; only, whereas in that case it was his ‘rights’ as an apostle, in the present case it concerns his advantages as a Jew. He lists his Jewish privileges, and then declares that he has reckoned all this gain to be loss because of the Messiah. He is, he declares, choosing the fellowship of the Messiah’s sufferings, including conformity to his death, so that he may eventually attain to the resurrection of the dead.

It has often been noticed that this section exhibits parallels to the poem of 2.6–11, with the difference that now it is Paul who is, as it were, not regarding his Jewish privileges as something to exploit.⁷⁵ The parallel extends in quite a rich way: the Messiah, in not regarding his equality with God as something to exploit, did not give it up; he merely did the totally unexpected thing, and became obedient unto death. That is why he has been exalted. Now Paul, reckoning his Jewish privileges as something not to be exploited, nevertheless clings to the Jewish Messiah, and embraces that very Jewish belief in suffering as the way to vindication, in the hope of the very specifically Jewish (and indeed Pharisaic) blessing of resurrection. This passage, in fact, looks in two directions: back to 2.6–11 and on to 3.20–1.

For that reason I have come to see it as possible – no more than that, but no less – that when Paul urges his hearers to join in imitating him he has something more in mind than simply the avoidance of sensuality (3.18–19). What I have proposed in the past, and mention again as a possibility worth

exploring, is that we should read chapter 3 as a kind of sustained hint. His hearers are not Jews. They cannot ‘imitate him’ in abandoning, or radically reinterpreting, Jewish privileges in the way he has done. They do, however, have certain civic privileges. We do not know how many of them, if any, were Roman citizens, but the city as a whole (like many in Paul’s day) took pride in its Roman culture. Paul is not telling them they should not do that. He goes on in the next chapter to say that they are to ponder ‘whatever is true, holy, upright, pure, attractive, of good reputation, virtuous, praiseworthy’. He is not (in that sense) a dualist. As with the crowds in Lystra, who switched in an instant from worshipping Paul to stoning him, and as with the bystanders on Malta, who switched the other way by seeing him first as a dangerous criminal and then as a god, some readers of Paul have tended to make him either entirely ‘pro-Roman’ or entirely ‘anti-Roman’. This, as I have said many times (to the dismay of readers on either side of our modern political spectrums, and to the deaf ears of some critics who have assumed that when I say Paul had a counter-imperial gospel I mean that he was a modern Marxist or anarchist born out of due time), is shallow. There are many varieties of qualified support, and many varieties of qualified critique.⁷⁶ What we might suggest in Philippians 3 is precisely that: qualified critique. Paul’s hearers must work out ‘their own salvation’ for themselves, but as they do so he will give them his own example of giving up rights and privileges as a model, and let them work it out from there. It may, after all, be safer to make such a hint than to write a letter explaining in detail precisely what he thinks about the blasphemous claims of Caesar.⁷⁷

What then might we conclude from this brief look at the Thessalonian and Philippian letters, in the light of our earlier consideration of 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians? That Paul warned his hearers against the blasphemous claims that Rome and its chief citizen had made and were still making: certainly. That he constantly relativized all human claims to absolute power, and ascribed that to Jesus instead: of course. That, like Daniel or the Wisdom of Solomon, he spoke both of the divine appointment of pagan rulers and also of the divine judgment they would

have to face: naturally. So far, this corresponds to what many second-Temple Jews might have said, with the sole exception of the name of Jesus. But for Paul there was something different, something which generates what we can only call a primitive Christian theopolitics, a radical mutation of the Jewish view of pagan empire exactly in line with Paul's radical mutation of Jewish theology as a whole. For Paul, the long-awaited new day had dawned. Judgment had already been passed and executed; the rulers and authorities had already been mocked and humiliated on the cross. Death itself, the last weapon of the tyrant, had been defeated. The 'rulers of this age' were therefore to be seen as part of the night which was now coming to an end, part of the old world order which was already in process of being dismantled, its power defeated by the superior power of divine love.

Paul was therefore advocating something much more subtle than either a 'pro-Roman' or an 'anti-Roman' stance as commonly imagined (not least, today, by those who hope he will be 'anti-Roman' in order that he may be 'anti-empire' in the way they want to be 'anti-empire'). His Jesus-based eschatology has modified both halves of the traditional Jewish stance. In line with Jeremiah's 'seek the welfare of the city' (and the top-flight civil service jobs of Daniel and his friends), Paul urges his hearers to be good citizens, to make sure that their public behaviour matches up to the gospel, to be good neighbours, to do good to all.⁷⁸ In particular, as we shall see, he urges them to obey the governing authorities, to submit to the law, to pay their taxes.⁷⁹ But there is a difference. In Jeremiah's Babylon, the Babylonian authorities reigned supreme. Jews in exile believed that their one God was somehow still in charge, but they also believed – at any rate, those who listened to Jeremiah or who read Deuteronomy believed – that they were there in exile precisely because of their sin, and that only when the redemption arrived would their situation be alleviated. Paul believed that this new moment had already come. As far as Jeremiah is concerned, there might be many hours of darkness still to come. Paul balances his command to obey the authorities with a reminder that the night is far gone and the day is already dawning.⁸⁰

The second half of the traditional Jewish stance was the promise that one day YHWH would call pagan rulers (and Jewish rulers as well, of course) to account. That had happened from time to time in history, and the book of Daniel sees the madness of Nebuchadnezzar and the fall of Belshazzar as examples of it, looking back like all such events to the judgment on Pharaoh and Egypt at the time of the original redemption.⁸¹ But the Jews of the second-Temple period still looked for a greater day, for the moment when the Fourth Beast itself would be judged and condemned once and for all. The scheme (in Daniel 2 and 7) of four kingdoms followed by God's own kingdom does not envisage that there will then be another decline, and a further sequence of four, or five, on and on for ever. This will be a once-for-all event. For the second-Temple Jews, that event lay in the future. *For Paul, it lay in the past.* The claim is unmistakable. God, he says, even now leads us in his triumphal procession in the Messiah; this God has celebrated his victory over the rulers of this age, and whatever they may do in the meantime, 'in all these things we are completely victorious through the one who loved us'.⁸² For Paul, as for the gospels, the Messiah is *already* reigning – and it is the unity and holiness of the church that demonstrates that fact to the puzzled and possibly angry continuing rulers and authorities.⁸³ This, he says, is the sign that signifies the coming final destruction of the arrogant powers of the world, but the sign to the Messiah's followers that their ultimate rescue is at hand. The apostle's sufferings, in particular, are the sign that the new world is being born; they are like a smell which some perceive as the smell of death and others as the smell of life.⁸⁴

What we find in Paul, therefore, is *the new form of the Jewish political paradox*. Instead of being in exile and seeking the welfare of the city, he is already living in the new day that has dawned with the Messiah. Instead of the long wait for the one God to judge sin, death and all human wickedness, judgment has already been passed. There is, as it were, a lightness of step about Paul's political critique: Jesus is already in charge, and every knee is to bow at his name. As we saw when examining Paul's worldview, he might have said: We are no longer in exile. We are members of the newly

inaugurated family of renewed humans, looking for the day when the King will return and transform the world. In the meantime we must not make the mistake of giving credence to the blasphemous claims of Rome. The one God is sweeping away the rulers of the present age, not least (according to Daniel 7) the last great empire of the sequence of four, which Paul of course takes to be Rome. When that empire tells its own story in a way which parodies the true story of the one God, his people and his world, we cannot regard it as irrelevant or insignificant. There is much more to the gospel than opposition to empire, whether Rome's or anyone else's. But if Rome is at the moment giving every appearance of taking over the world, including its religion, it is Rome that will be the implicit target of the Pauline version of the ancient Jewish critique.

(iii) Rising to Rule the Nations

Paul's teaching and theology cannot, then, be reduced to some kind of 'anti-imperial' rhetoric. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that when he writes a letter to Rome itself he draws explicitly on biblical traditions, at key points in the letter, which together stake out the vital claim, at the very centre of his 'gospel', that the crucified and risen Jesus is the lord who claims the allegiance of the whole world. These biblical traditions go back to ancient Israelite polemic against paganism, and set out the hope that one day the people of the one God would themselves become the rulers of the world. In some cases they focus this hope on the coming king, who will draw together the promises of Psalm 2, Isaiah 11 and similar passages. The negative corollary of this is, of course, that any pagan king who launches a similar claim is being straightforwardly outflanked. Anyone writing a letter to Rome in the mid-50s AD must have known that there was indeed an emperor there whose predecessors had made that kind of claim (especially the arch-predecessor, Augustus, with his claims to bring peace, justice and prosperity to the whole world), and that the present emperor was well on the way to making that sort of claim himself, with the eager-to-please

colonies and provinces in the very areas where Paul had worked being only too ready to support him.

Once again we must say it: if Paul had wanted not to make this point, he went about composing his greatest letter in a strange way. The opening of the letter, and the dramatic conclusion of its theological exposition, make claims about Jesus which must have raised eyebrows among its first hearers, perhaps even making some of them anxious or nervous:

Paul, a slave of King Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for God's good news, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the sacred writings – the good news about his son, who was descended from David's seed in terms of flesh, and who was marked out powerfully as God's son in terms of the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead: Jesus, the king, our lord!

Through him we have received grace and apostleship to bring about believing obedience among all the nations for the sake of his name. That includes you, too, who are called by Jesus the king.

This letter comes to all in Rome who love God, all who are called to be his holy people. Grace and peace to you from God our father, and King Jesus, the lord.⁸⁵

Welcome one another, therefore, as the Messiah has welcomed you, to God's glory. Let me tell you why: the Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy. As the Bible says:

That is why I will praise you among the nations, and will sing to your name.

And again it says,

Rejoice, you nations, with his people.

And again,

Praise the Lord, all nations,
and let all the peoples sing his praise.

And Isaiah says once more:

There shall be the root of Jesse,
the one who rises up to rule the nations;
the nations shall hope in him.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy spirit.⁸⁶

God's gospel; God's son; supreme power; worldwide allegiance from all nations; the ancient Israelite dream of all nations coming to worship the one God, and the more focused ancient vision of a coming king from David's line who would 'rise up to rule the nations'. From ancient times this

Israelite hope was not just a vague dream of better times to come. It was the stubbornly maintained belief that, despite everything, Israel's God, the creator, would bring the nations under his rule. More often than not this belief involved the consequent belief that Israel's God would overthrow the present wicked rulers of those nations. Paul draws on exactly those aspirations in order to declare that it has happened at last. Jesus has been raised, and he is the true ruler of the nations, the one to whom Israel's God has promised that he would inherit the world. There is, of course, far more to Romans than this, but not less.

Nor are these passages merely rhetorical bookends at either side of a letter whose principal subject-matter is quite different. The great claims of Rome, especially under Augustus, to have brought salvation to the world and thereby to have instantiated justice and peace (and, indeed, to have discovered those two as divinities), inaugurating a golden age of prosperity – all this finds an echo in Romans, as Paul announces and develops his main theme. The 'gospel' of the 'son of God' provides the apocalyptic unveiling of the divine justice, through which salvation comes to all who believe (1.16–17); this results in 'peace' (5.1), and in the ultimate new world when the whole creation will be set free from its slavery to corruption (8.19–21). There is no need to develop this theme further. Either the point is made with these passages or it will never be heard at all. It is not, to repeat, that Paul is writing Romans simply to say 'anything Caesar can do, Jesus can do better'. But, on the way to saying all the other things he wants to say, he is cheerfully and, I suggest, quite deliberately outflanking the 'gospel' of the emperor with the gospel of Jesus. There is nothing implausible or outrageous in such a suggestion. Paul, by this stage, was a master of rhetorical possibilities, and it was not difficult for him to phrase what he wanted to say in such a way that it would serve several functions at the same time. Even journalists and preachers can do such things; why not an apostle?

In particular, I think it quite plausible that among the rhetorical goals Paul has in writing Romans 9 and 10 he may aim at a further outflanking move. As I argued in chapter 11, Romans 9.6–10.21 consists of a massive

and spectacular retelling of the entire story of Israel, from Abraham to the present day – and, from another point of view, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, since Paul sees the promise of Deuteronomy 30 and the warning of Deuteronomy 32 both fulfilled in his own day. The strange, dark story of Israel – Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Pharaoh, the prophets, the exile, the remnant ... and the Messiah, the *telos nomou*, the ‘goal of the Torah’, the one through whom ‘the righteousness of God’ was at last fulfilled: that is the story. A millennium-long narrative with a surprising and royal conclusion, leading to a new kind of empire in which the heralds of the king go off to tell the nations what has happened, to summon their allegiance (*pistis*), and, as Isaiah says, to welcome them in even though they were not expecting such a thing:⁸⁷ is it just coincidence that this mirrors rather exactly, in outline at least, the long story told by the writers of Augustus’s day, starting with the founding fathers (not least the twins, Romulus and Remus), and leading through many strange episodes to the sudden new day in which the emperor would spread his realm far and wide, welcoming subjects and even new citizens from the ends of the earth?

Perhaps it is coincidence, though a very strange one. In any case, Romans 9—11 is of course ‘about’ much more than a coded upstaging of the great imperial narrative. But, even if one were to see this simply as a reflex, a side-swipe at an obvious but essentially trivial alternative narrative, one might pause; it is hardly so trivial in a letter to Rome itself. We do not know the precise causes of Nero’s persecution of the Christians, a decade or so after Paul wrote this letter. We do not know whether Paul was killed as part of that crack-down, or at some other point. Nor was there systematic persecution of Christians for some generations after this point. But we do know that the Christians had acquired a reputation for being anti-social. And, granted the fact that many of them did not observe the Jewish taboos which sometimes occasioned pagan sneers, and worse, we must hypothesize that there was something about the small Roman church which would make people suspicious. In a world where loyalty to Caesar had become one of the major features of life, it could be that the Christians were ‘working out

their own salvation with fear and trembling’, and coming to realize that, somehow or other, if Jesus was lord Caesar was not.

What then did Paul mean in the famous passage in Romans 13?

Every person must be subject to the ruling authorities. There is no authority, you see, except from God, and those that exist have been put in place by God. As a result, anyone who rebels against authority is resisting what God has set up, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terrors for people who do good, but only for people who do evil.

If you want to have no fear of the ruling power, do what is good, and it will praise you. It is God’s servant, you see, for you and your good. But if you do evil, be afraid; the sword it carries is no empty gesture. It is God’s servant, you see: an agent of justice to bring his anger on evildoers. That is why it is necessary to submit, not only to avoid punishment but because of conscience.

That, too, is why you pay taxes. The officials in question are God’s ministers, attending to this very thing. So pay each of them what is owed: tribute to those who collect it, revenue to those who collect it. Respect those who should be respected. Honour the people one ought to honour.⁸⁸

By now it should be clear. This passage is not a comment on specifically Roman rule, either in general or at the time Paul was writing. It is not a way of saying, ‘I have had a good look at the way the Romans are currently running the world, and it has my stamp of approval.’ It is not, in other words, an *ad hoc* message which Paul might have altered in other circumstances.⁸⁹ It is a classic piece of Jewish writing about how to live wisely under alien rule. It does not imply that the present system of government is perfect, any more than Jesus’ response to Pilate in John 19.11 implies that Caesar and his minions are doing the right thing in sending him to his death. It merely states that the one God wants human authorities to run his world, and that the people of the one God should respect such authorities. However, as we see in Acts (which, whatever its actual historical value, certainly reflects this classic Jewish double-edged position), respect for authorities goes hand in hand with believing that they will be called to account by the one God – and with plenty of anticipated eschatology as the people of the one God do some calling to account in advance. The early church was clear that they should obey the true God rather than human authorities.⁹⁰ They were, however, prepared not only to obey those authorities under normal circumstances but also, when necessary, to remind them of their proper vocation.⁹¹

Romans 13.1–7 cannot therefore be pressed into service, as has so often been done, to make the point that Paul had no critique of empire in general or of Rome in particular. Certainly one could not make the parallel point about John’s gospel on the basis of 19.11. There are three things, however, we should notice about the passage. The first is that the command to obey the authorities balances the command to avoid private vengeance in 12.19–21 (Romans 13.1–7 has often suffered from being detached from its context, but it means what it means precisely here). When Paul says in 12.19 (quoting Deuteronomy 32.35) that vengeance belongs to the one God, and then so soon afterwards that this creator God has given civic authorities the task of exercising vengeance (the same word) on wrongdoers, it is clear that the two go together. Anarchy encourages vigilante movements, as people take the law into their own hands, either from a general fear or from anger against perceived and unpunished offence or attack. The alternative is some kind of structure of authority; whether or not the authorities are doing their job, it is vital for normal human life, and particularly normal Christian life, that they are there and carry that responsibility. And, as with Daniel 6, the people of the one God must be found without blame except for that unique allegiance.

Second, in a world where rulers have been accustomed to claim divine honours, the statement that they hold their office as a vocation from the one God (13.1) constitutes a major demotion. We have already made this point, but it bears repetition.

Third, Paul’s essentially Jewish, almost Jeremiah-like, exposition of how to live under alien rule is radically transformed, here as elsewhere, by his eschatology. When he says in 13.11–14 (as in 1 Thessalonians 5) that the night is almost done and the day is at hand, this does not mean that one can or should therefore sit light to ordinary social life, as in 12.14–18, or to civic obligations, as in 13.1–7. If what is coming to birth in the God-given new day is a world of love and justice, then it behoves followers of Jesus to live by, and in accordance with, that love and justice in the present, so as to be ready for the day when it comes. And, just as 13.1–7 needs chapter 12 as one part of its proper context, so it also needs chapters 14 and 15. Paul

declares emphatically in 14.4, 7–12 that all will stand before the divine throne of judgment, and in 15.7–13 that the risen Messiah is the rightful ruler of the nations. It is when 13.1–7 is detached from its context and elevated into being a complete statement of ‘Paul’s view of earthly rulers’ or ‘Paul’s political philosophy’ or some such that problems arise.⁹² Within the framework of chapters 12—15 as a whole it plays its limited role, just as it articulates the limited and temporary role of earthly rulers within the creator’s purposes.

There remains one letter to be considered.⁹³ Galatians has become controversial recently because of three different, but possibly convergent, proposals about the previously unimagined importance of Rome for the situation and for Paul’s argument. Now that it is becoming more widely accepted, on the basis of archaeology and topography in particular, that Galatians was written to churches in the south of the Roman province, where there were substantial Jewish communities,⁹⁴ the possibility emerges that one element in ‘the problem of Galatia’ may have been the social pressure of the newly burgeoning imperial ideology, including various cults. It is at least conceivable

- (a) that ex-pagan Christians had been claiming the right accorded to the Jews not to take part in festivals or cult relating to Rome or Caesar;
- (b) that questions had been asked, whether by suspicious neighbours or by local officials, as to whether these ex-pagan Christians could legitimately make such a claim;
- (c) that local non-Christian Jews were anxious about their own status being in jeopardy if it was suspected that others were claiming it on different grounds;
- (d) that pressure was being brought to bear on ex-pagan Christians to get circumcised in order to be ‘legitimated’ as ‘proper Jews’ and hence to be exempt from Roman ceremonies;
- (e) that Paul regarded the attempt to have ex-pagan Christians circumcised as a step back to the ‘old age’ in terms of the Mosaic dispensation which had run its course with the arrival of the Messiah, and

- (f) that he regarded facing persecution (in this case, most likely of pagan origin, for not joining in imperial celebrations) as part of the inevitable result of following the crucified Messiah;
- (g) that at least part of his polemic against ‘another gospel’ had to do with the ‘gospel’ of Caesar, then being assiduously propagated.⁹⁵

This, obviously, would provide a radically different vision of the Galatian problem than any of the accounts that have been current in mainline scholarship, or for that matter the pre-scholarly readings of the letter going back to patristic times. It is not for that reason to be ignored. The fact that the suggestion can be made, and that attention has been drawn to the widespread local Roman cults and culture, at least opens up possibilities that must be considered. And for Galatians to acquire this kind of ‘political’ edge would sit well with the recent attempts to read the letter in terms of an ‘apocalyptic’ context – though, ironically, those who advocate such a thing, wishing to make a good show in the scholarly flesh, do not themselves observe the terms of first-century ‘apocalyptic’ by recognizing its political meaning.

This is not the place to enter into either an account of the varieties within this ‘new look’ on Galatians, or an exegetical, historical or theological investigation of their various possibilities. The whole thing may prove to be a red herring; or new modifications may be introduced, not least through fresh archaeological and similar investigations. The question seems to me at least worth serious consideration. For the moment we need only say this: it would not be surprising if one critical feature of life in Paul’s churches was the question of how far one could go in taking part in Roman festivities and/or cult. In Corinth, the attempt by Jewish leaders to have Paul tried was dismissed by Gallio as a mere question of in-house Jewish law, thus effectively legitimating Christian practice and mission (and presumably granting the Christians the same religious exemptions as the Jews) in the province of Achaea.⁹⁶ We have no reason to suppose that similar judgments were made elsewhere, and every reason to imagine that the question of public allegiance to Rome and Caesar remained a smouldering ember for

the Christians up to the time when it burst into full flame at the trial of Polycarp.⁹⁷

4. Paul and Caesar: Conclusion

This, then, is my provisional conclusion – recognizing that this angle of vision on Paul is in comparative infancy in contemporary scholarship, and that a lot of work still needs to be done at every level from archaeology to exegesis, not least to integrate political ideas with philosophical and theological paradigms. Even without embracing the various proposals currently on the table for reading Paul as a ‘counter-imperial’ theologian, there is enough evidence to make a *prima facie* case, not indeed that he was a modern Marxist born out of due time, but that he saw the gospel of Jesus the Messiah as upstaging, outflanking, delegitimizing and generally subverting the ‘gospel’ of Caesar and Rome. ‘When they say, “peace and security” ...’: Paul could see that the increasingly grandiose claims of Rome were departing from the sphere of appropriate governmental authority, which, granted the second-Temple Jewish models for living under alien rule, he might be expected to affirm. The Roman imperial rhetoric was entering instead the sphere of inappropriate and idolatrous claims. Those claims supported and undergirded a regime which, for all its mechanisms of justice, its roads, its postal service and other amenities, more than earned the right to be seen as the vicious eagle that, in *4 Ezra*, played the part of Daniel’s Fourth Monster. Rome was the pagan empire on whose watch, and by whose command, ‘the lord of glory’ had been crucified. Rome was the city that told its own story in what must have seemed, to Paul, a remarkable parody of the gospel story of Abraham’s family now fulfilled in David’s risen son. Rome was not just one empire among others. It brought into concrete and climactic expression the many-sided phenomenon (which is after all an updated and demythologized way of saying ‘the many-headed monster’) of arrogant human rebellion against the creator, and of arrogant human construction of systems and cities that claimed to rule the creator’s

world. The builders of the new Babel had been thwarted, and Abraham's seed had accomplished what they could not.

Paul did not, however, advocate the normal sort of revolution. There can be little doubt that Saul of Tarsus would have done so, had he stayed in Jerusalem as a hard-line right-wing Pharisee through the 50s and on into the 60s and its disastrous war. The biggest revolution in his own political thought happened not simply because he believed that the Messiah had now come. That by itself might simply have meant, as bar-Kochba's followers believed, 'So the revolution has begun!' The much larger transformation came with the apocalyptic unveiling of the saving plan of Israel's God in the form of the *crucified* Messiah. The eschaton had not simply been inaugurated; it had been *reshaped*. A different fulfilment; a different kind of victory; a different kind of political theology.

This did not mean, for Paul, a backing off from confrontation and challenge. Far from it. It simply meant that the confrontation now took a different mode, corresponding to the cross by which the powers had already been judged and held up to contempt:

We put no obstacles in anybody's way, so that nobody will say abusive things about our ministry. Instead, we recommend ourselves as God's servants: with much patience, with sufferings, difficulties, hardships, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, going without food, with purity, knowledge, great-heartedness, kindness, the holy spirit, genuine love, by speaking the truth, by God's power, with weapons for God's faithful work in left and right hand alike, through glory and shame, through slander and praise; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, yet very well known; as dying, and look – we are alive; as punished, yet not killed; as sad, yet always celebrating; as poor, yet bringing riches to many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.⁹⁸

Yes, we are mere humans, but we don't fight the war in a merely human way. The weapons we use for the fight ... are not merely human; they carry a power from God that can tear down fortresses! We tear down clever arguments, and every proud notion that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah ...⁹⁹

A different kind of revolution. A different kind of 'subversion' – and, Paul would have said, a more powerful and effective one.

This was not, then, an escape into pietism, as today's eager quasi-Marxists might allege. That is the route taken by the second-century

gnostics; Paul would not have faced riots, imprisonment and the threat of death if all he had been doing was teaching people an apolitical and dehistoricized spirituality.¹⁰⁰ Paul's vision of the kingdom, its present reality and future consummation, remained emphatically this-worldly. It was not about humans escaping the life and rule of earth by being taken away to heaven in the future, or by anticipating that with a detached spirituality in the present. It was about the transformation, not the abandonment, of present reality.

The problem for today's interpreter is, of course, the difficulty of conceiving of a Christian political standpoint which is neither compromised nor dualist. Too often we have seen churches affirm 'the powers that be' in a way which effectively muzzles the church's witness; too often we have seen churches so afraid of all worldly power that they retreat into private huddles. The post-Enlightenment world has squashed all options into the two boxes of a 'Constantinian' compromise and an 'Anabaptist' detachment – not that the historical settlement under, and after, Constantine was the kind of thing people often imagine, any more than the historic Anabaptist position was so straightforward, either. Just as Paul's soteriology does not fit into the easy either/or of sixteenth-century antitheses, so his vision of the powers of the world and the power of the risen Messiah does not fit easily into the political categories of western modernity. As with questions of justification, so with questions of Paul and politics: we need twenty-first-century answers to first-century questions, not nineteenth-century answers to sixteenth-century questions.

This is in fact one of the major points on which John Barclay and I agree, though one might not instantly realize that from his account of my work. Since he has done me the honour of detailed exposition and critique, it may be appropriate here to sketch briefly some of the key points at issue.¹⁰¹

First, Barclay and I agree that whatever Paul may or may not have thought about the Roman empire, and its cults of 'Rome' and the imperial family, any such reflections will have been located within the wider world of pagan religion and society, not as an isolated or independent entity.¹⁰² It was partly to make this point that I wrote chapters 4 and 5 above in the way

I did. Insofar as New Testament scholarship (including some of my own earlier and shorter writings) has not made this point, no doubt out of over-enthusiasm for a possible ‘imperial critique’ in early Christianity, the balance clearly needs to be restored, and this can now be done. It is also good to see Barclay’s acknowledgment that, until the recent burst of enthusiasm, New Testament scholars had ‘generally underestimated the importance of specifically Roman politico-religious features for the life of the first Christians’.¹⁰³

Second, Barclay and I agree that whatever Paul may have thought about Rome, it does him no justice at all to place him on a flattened-out scale of being ‘for’ or ‘against’ Roman rule.¹⁰⁴ This is precisely what I have tried to argue in all my previous essays on the topic, doing my best (perhaps not always successfully) to show how the typically Jewish ‘positive’ understanding of human authorities as created and intended by the one God (Romans 13.1–7; Colossians 1.15–17) can sit perfectly well alongside a sharp, and equally typically Jewish, critique of actual authorities, especially if they move towards some kind of self-divinization.¹⁰⁵ Barclay himself is happy to propose ‘highly differentiated evaluations of Roman power’ in the juxtaposition of Romans 8.31–9 and 13.1–7, which is more or less what I meant by suggesting that Romans 13 carries an implicit ‘nevertheless’ in its apparent and superficial contrast with what I see as the implied subversion in Romans 1.3–7, 15.7–13, and elsewhere.¹⁰⁶ The assumption that we might be able to map Paul’s implicit engagement (or lack thereof) with Rome by using modern political categories, resulting in ‘supportive’ passages like Romans 13 (or Colossians 1) which might then appear to be at loggerheads with other more apparently ‘critical’ passages (such as Philippians, or Colossians 2!), is precisely what I have tried to resist.

Third, Barclay and I emphatically agree that, whatever Paul may or may not have said about Rome, his entire worldview stood over against the entire ancient pagan system of religion and power, resulting in ‘a thorough rejection of the mental and practical fabric of these symbolic structures’ and predicating instead ‘a new reality which has restructured the co-ordinates of existence’.¹⁰⁷ Barclay describes this in sharp, almost strident, language:

It is this radical, totalising stance which made Christianity so ‘intolerant’ of alternative perspectives, since the ‘truth’, centred on Christ, exposed every alternative as at best an illusion, at worst a demonic insurgency ... This new ideology did not just challenge Caesar’s divine claims, it offered a radical alternative to the structures of Roman religion and thus of Roman civilisation as a whole. In the words of Keith Hopkins, ‘Christianity subverted the whole priestly calendar of civic rituals and public festivals on which Roman rule in the provinces rested. Christianity was a revolutionary movement.’ Paul has a good claim to be the founding ideologue of that revolution ... [108](#)

Ironically, of course, one might take this paragraph to indicate a fairly dualistic account of Paul’s worldview, which I do not think Barclay intends. Use of language like ‘totalising’, ‘intolerant’, ‘ideology’ and ‘ideologue’ does run the risk of appearing to locate Paul within a thoroughly late-modern framework. This simply shows how difficult it is to think into the thought-forms of other cultures and, as Barclay says later, to show how Paul was able ‘to traverse the political conditions of the Roman world at a “diagonal” ’. [109](#) But this is clearly what he and I are both trying to do.

What then of Barclay’s specific criticisms? He reframes the issues into four, beginning with what he calls ‘Pauline Epistemology’, by which he seems to mean something quite like what I mean by ‘worldview’. [110](#) Here he claims that whereas we, looking at the ancient world, perceive the imperial cult ‘as an insidious expression of Roman hegemony’, Paul’s interpretative frame ‘may have been different from our late-modern modes of historical interpretation and ideological analysis’. [111](#) Indeed it may, but it is hardly our current modes of interpretation and analysis that placed new imperial temples at visually strategic points in the cities of Paul’s world, or displayed Caesar on coins and statues in the guise of one or other of the ancient pantheon. The more we think precisely into Paul’s world, rather than our own, and the more we locate Paul (as we have tried to do in the main Parts of this book) within his own transformed-Jewish world, the more these things loom large, rather than fading quietly into the general background of pagan culture. We remind ourselves of Deissmann’s line, quoted earlier, about Paul and his colleagues not going about blindfold. Barclay seems to me to be here following Martyn into the trap of supposing that ‘apocalyptic’ means the sweeping away of all previous visions of

reality, including that of second-Temple Judaism, whereas as I argued in chapter 2, and then in Parts II and III in relation to Paul himself, we should really see ‘apocalyptic’, in both its Jewish and Pauline contexts, as all about the fresh revelation of Israel’s God and particularly the exposé of the folly and blasphemy of pagan power.¹¹² The more we study Paul’s worldview – including his ‘apocalyptic epistemology’ – the more we should expect *both* (as Barclay suggests) that ‘the political is for [Paul] enmeshed in an all-encompassing power-struggle which covers every domain of life’,¹¹³ *and* that, from within that ‘apocalyptic’ worldview, he would point specifically to the last great pagan empire, the final ‘monster’ to arise, now to be confronted by Israel’s Messiah, as (for instance) in *4 Ezra*’s reading of Daniel 7. I agree that Paul might not wish to dignify Rome by responding to its grandiose claims in its own terms. This may be one reason why he does not name it specifically when making the critical and subversive comments we have already examined. But this points on to the question of coded language, to which we shall return presently.

It is from within Barclay’s first main point that we must understand what he means by saying that the Roman empire was ‘insignificant’ to Paul. He denies that Paul’s theology was ‘apolitical’ or ‘spiritualized’. Rather, he sees Paul bundling up the ‘powers’, envisaging them as ‘encompassing, permeating, enmeshing, infiltrating, and corrupting the political’ arena.¹¹⁴ Thus

for him the ‘political’ is fused with other realities whose identity is clarified and named from the epistemological standpoint of the Christ-event. In this sense the Roman empire is not significant to Paul *qua the Roman empire*: it certainly features on his map, but under different auspices and as subservient to more significant powers.¹¹⁵

I agree with the premise (the ‘powers’ as penetrating the ‘political’ sphere, which is ‘enmeshed in larger and more comprehensive force-fields’¹¹⁶), but not the conclusion. But this brings us to Barclay’s fuller statement:

Paul ... reframes reality, including political reality, mapping the world in ways that reduce the claims of the imperial cult and of the Roman empire to comparative insignificance ... From Paul’s perspective, the Roman empire never was and never would be a significant actor in the drama of history: its agency was derived and dependent, co-opted by powers (divine or Satanic) far more

powerful that [*sic*] itself. There was nothing significant about it being Roman – nothing new, nothing different, and nothing epoch-making ... Rome did not rule the world, or write the script of history, or constitute anything unique.¹¹⁷

It is this proposal that I am challenging.

I agree that for Paul what ultimately mattered were the ‘powers’ which operated in and through all kinds of organizations and systems. I agree that he saw them as a defeated rabble, led in the Messiah’s triumphal procession. I agree that when he saw Roman temples, statues and coins he did not simply see Rome, but rather the powers, of whatever sort (but particularly ‘death’) that were at work through Rome. But I contend that he nevertheless saw these powers coming together and doing their worst precisely in and through Rome itself. I believe that he (like Josephus, at the very point where he, too, cleverly conceals this meaning) almost certainly saw Rome as the final great empire prophesied by Daniel. I submit that the way Paul lines up his arguments in several key passages indicates that he saw in the claims of Rome, and particularly of its emperor, an extraordinary parallel to, and parody of, the claims of Jesus. In no previous empire, after all, had ‘gospel’, ‘son of god’ and so on come together at the climax of a centuries-long narrative which now claimed world rulership and the possession of, and distribution rights over, freedom, justice and peace. Paul undoubtedly believed that ‘the powers’, however we describe them, were at work in Rome, providing the real energy and identity behind statues and soldiers, armies and temples, and even Caesar himself. But that simply shows just how *significant* Rome itself, uniquely and shockingly, really was for Paul. To use the language of Revelation, when Paul looked at the Roman empire he glimpsed the face of the Monster.

Rome did indeed constitute something unique, and importantly so. It was in Rome, and its imperial pretensions, that the ‘powers’ came together and did their worst. And that ‘worst’ was reflected directly in the almost uncanny parallels not only between Roman imperial language and the (biblically based) language of Paul’s gospel, but also between the Roman imperial *narrative* and the (biblically based) narrative which Paul believed had reached its climax in Jesus. Here, it seems, we meet yet another

moment in the ongoing struggle between ‘apocalyptic’, in the sense proposed by J. L. Martyn and others, and what I have argued is the true first-century Jewish meaning of the term. Barclay, offering a skilfully nuanced and modified version of Martyn, envisages an ‘apocalyptic’ event in which all previous ‘powers’ are simply set aside. I am following what I take to be a first-century understanding in which all previous narratives – the story of ‘the powers’ as well as of Israel! – come to their shattering and transformative climax. And just as Jesus is no mere cipher for Israel’s narrative, but the very son of the covenant God, so Rome is no mere irrelevant or insignificant political entity, but the final Monster in whom precisely the power of ‘death’ itself has been unleashed on to that ‘son of God’. The cross is at the centre of it all. Mark highlights this by having a *Roman* centurion, at the foot of the *Roman* cross, declaring that Jesus is ‘son of God’.¹¹⁸ Paul highlights the same thing, I have argued, by deliberately allowing his biblically based statements of Jesus and his gospel to resonate with, and so to subvert, the climactically blasphemous claims of Rome and Caesar.

My disagreement here with John Barclay is in one sense oblique. We agree about a great deal. We are much closer to one another than either of us is to those out on the flanks: those, on the one hand, who envisage Paul’s gospel as being entirely ‘apolitical’, and those on the other who think his message consisted of a non-theological call to revolution. To that extent I wonder, from time to time, whether (like Käsemann attacking Stendahl when his real target was perhaps Cullmann!) Barclay’s actual target might be writers like Richard Horsley or Neil Elliott – not to mention Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan – who often give the appearance of offering a more explicitly non-theological counter-imperial analysis. No matter: I am happy to soak up the attack and, I hope, neutralize it.¹¹⁹

Barclay’s second point concerns Paul’s supposedly ‘political’ vocabulary. He is quite right, of course, to say that using similar vocabulary for Jesus to that which was in use for Caesar does not necessarily imply a direct critique. By itself, the use of a word like *basileus*, ‘king’, for earthly rulers and for Jesus, or even for God the father, does not imply a direct conflict.¹²⁰

The question arises, however, not so much from isolated technical terms as from the things which are said about them in their various contexts. By itself the word *kyrios* could mean all sorts of things, but when Paul speaks of Jesus as the one who claims worldwide allegiance for the sake of his name we have moved into a different area. The word ‘president’ is used in the United States of America not only for the elected head of state but for the senior official in thousands of businesses, colleges, golf clubs and other organizations. This causes neither confusion nor confrontation. But if a new group were to arise, claiming that they were the rightful heirs of the whole country and that their leader was its true ruler, and referring to that leader as ‘President’, the word would spring to life in a rather different way.

In particular, Barclay seems to me to ignore completely the point about the *narrative* in, for instance, Philippians 2.6–11. This has to do, not with a mere single word, but with the entire story about the way in which Jesus has attained to world sovereignty, with every knee bending at his name. Barclay’s reading of Philippians as a whole proceeds by picking off individual verses and declaring that this or that word or phrase does not necessarily indicate an opposition to Rome. But it is the actual argument of the letter, and the way in which the terms both about civic life and about Jesus himself build up and reach their climaxes in 2.10–11 and 3.20–1, that force the implicit antithesis upon our attention. The idea that it is modern scholars who are reading an echo of Rome into the text because ‘the noise of “the Roman empire” [is] dominating their sensory perception’ is remarkable.¹²¹ The Roman empire has done anything but dominate scholars’ sensory perceptions until very recently, and the extent to which it is now making a come-back is due, not to an ideological desire to invent such things, but to the archaeological and historical evidence.

Nor will it do to contrast my reading of Paul here with the second-century evidence. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the crunch comes not so much with a general charge of ‘atheism’, but with the question of whether or not he will say ‘Caesar is lord’ (*Kyrios Kaisar*), or swear by his ‘genius’ (*tychē*).¹²² The proconsul then tries it the other way round: will Polycarp ‘revile Christ’? No, comes the famous reply:

For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong; so how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?¹²³

Kirsopp Lake is correct: ‘the antithesis to Caesar is clearly implied’.¹²⁴ A *basileus* who is also a *sōtēr*: this is what Caesar claimed, and this is what the Christians claimed about Jesus. This does not of course prove of itself that when Paul, writing to a highly Romanized city, spoke of Jesus as *sōtēr*, as *kyrios* and as *Christos*, and declared that he had the power to submit all things to himself in line with ancient messianic prophecy, he intended a similar antithesis, but it certainly strengthens what was already, in my judgment, a high probability.¹²⁵

As always, individual words mean what they mean within the wider context, and the context of the key passages in Paul’s letters points strongly, I have argued, in the direction of implicit confrontation.¹²⁶ To Barclay’s point that the main charge against the early Christians was failure to worship any of the regular gods, and that the question of imperial worship was secondary, one must reply that though of course worshipping Caesar (or not) was a special case of the more general refusal, it is obvious that the trials of people like Polycarp do not pick out any other specific divinities, for instance the gods peculiar to the town or city in question. Yes, the Christian refusal to worship the gods in general mattered; but Caesar was always the particular case.¹²⁷

This brings us to Barclay’s third challenge, the question of ‘coded language’ and ‘reading between the lines’. Barclay is right that I have not until recently used the category of ‘hidden transcripts’ as set out by James Scott and picked up by Richard Horsley and others.¹²⁸ It is of course extremely difficult to track, let alone to map, the question of hidden meanings of whatever sort, even in contemporary texts, never mind ancient ones – though I note that Barclay himself clearly thinks he can do this in relation to Josephus, tracking not only what he meant in his overt statements (no reticence about authorial intent there!) but also his allusions, his differences of tone, his backing off from possible bluntness:

He never attacks Roman religion directly, and what he says in criticism of the Greeks is safely allied to that Roman perception which contrasted Greek 'decadence' to their own 'frugality'. Perhaps Josephus could not afford to be as blunt as his Christian successors, but perhaps he did not wish to be. The result is a finely-composed apologetic, in which ears differently attuned may hear – or may entirely miss – some of its subtler polemical undertones.¹²⁹

If Barclay can make this sort of statement about Josephus, I do not see why others should not in principle offer the same kind of analysis of Paul. Nor will it do for someone who can see so clearly into the inner workings of Josephus's mind to raise an eyebrow at the attempt to discern 'authorial intent' in Paul, as though we all knew such a thing to be forbidden by the not-so-hidden transcripts of postmodern ideology.¹³⁰ In particular, Barclay's fine-tuned analysis of Josephus's clever avoidance of direct criticism of Roman religion provides quite a close model for what I think was going on with Paul, and demonstrates that there is more than one context in which one might wish to hint at things, to be guarded in what was said explicitly. That is why Barclay's question about Paul being able to speak quite openly of Rome when necessary (in Romans 1.7, 15, and in reference to 'Caesar's household' in Philippians 4.22) is beside the point: Paul was not there making any particular criticism.¹³¹ That brings us back again to the nature of coded critique, which Barclay is so good at recognizing in Josephus but so unwilling to recognize in Paul. His general point, that Paul would not wish to elevate Rome to the position of being *the* target of gospel polemic, is I think correct; but that accords well with my point, that Paul does seem to be clearly implying a reference to Roman imperial rhetoric in the passages we studied above. Perhaps it is worth making the point, albeit necessarily anecdotally and autobiographically, that there are many occasions when people in public life have to make speeches or give lectures on politically sensitive topics, and have to make a decision as to whether to go into great detail or just send a signal. Sometimes you have to choose: either you must lay out the whole topic at length, carefully ruling out misunderstandings and being sure to strike the right balance, or you must say something short and necessarily cryptic, which those with ears to hear

may take away and ponder. I think Paul was good at both, but often employed the latter.

The parallels Barclay draws with Philo, Josephus and especially Tacitus will hardly stand up as counter-evidence to this.¹³² Yes, Philo could openly challenge Caligula's divine claims; Josephus could declare the imperial cult to be useful neither to the one God nor to human beings, and could criticize Roman governors; Tacitus could be scathing in his denunciation (in the mouth of a British leader) of what Rome got up to in the name of 'peace'.¹³³ The nuanced and historically sensitive reading for which Barclay rightly pleads elsewhere seems suddenly to have deserted him: neither Philo, Josephus nor Tacitus are in a position anything like that of the ragamuffin apostle, a strange, wandering Jewish jailbird, writing to small and quite possibly muddled groups of people. Some of his hearers might well take fright at a direct and frank statement of everything Paul believed about Caesar and Rome. Some might waver in their allegiance and find themselves reporting to the authorities that Paul and his communities believed that there was 'another king, namely Jesus'. Better to be oblique; not necessarily (as I have suggested on other occasions) in case his letters were detected by the authorities, but perhaps because he was anxious, as a pastor writing or speaking to his flock might well be anxious, about people getting the wrong end of the stick, and either seizing too enthusiastically upon, or taking fright at, what to the wrong ears might sound like a literal call to arms.¹³⁴ If Barclay can say 'perhaps' in relation to Josephus's subtle intentions, perhaps we can say it too in relation to Paul – and indeed, despite his and others' objections, in relation to Philo, who was himself capable, when he judged occasion demanded it (which was not all the time), of coded critique.¹³⁵

Josephus, of course, supplies another interesting example, at exactly the point where I have suggested that Paul, too, might be expected to single out the Roman empire not just as one miscellaneous bit of pagan nonsense among others but as the highly significant 'fourth empire' within Daniel's scheme. Josephus recounts in considerable detail Daniel's interpretation of

the great statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but when he comes to the punch-line he suddenly draws back:

And Daniel also revealed to the king the meaning of the stone, but I have not thought it proper to relate this, since I am expected to write of what is past and done and not of what is to be; if, however, there is anyone who has so keen a desire for exact information that he will not stop short of inquiring more closely but wishes to learn about the hidden things that are to come, let him take the trouble to read the Book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings.¹³⁶

The excuse is plainly a smokescreen. As Marcus notes in the Loeb edition,

Josephus's evasiveness about the meaning of the stone which destroyed the kingdom of iron ... is due to the fact that the Jewish interpretation of it current in his day took it as a symbol of the Messiah or Messianic kingdom which would make an end of the Roman empire.¹³⁷

In case there is any doubt on the matter, we find Josephus doing exactly the same thing when we come to the climax of the book, Daniel chapter 7. Having retold in considerable detail the splendid tale of Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6), he turns aside, first to describe Daniel's wonderful fortress at Ecbatana, and second to hail Daniel as unique among the prophets in that he not only prophesied the future but fixed the time at which these things would come to pass.¹³⁸ Then, without any explanation, he skips over Daniel 7 entirely and begins his exposition of chapter 8 and, more briefly, of the rest of the book (including the prophecy of the Roman empire and its laying waste of the Temple in Jerusalem).¹³⁹ To have expounded Daniel 7 at all would, of course, have led Josephus into the same problem he so carefully avoided in relation to chapter 2, since as we know from various texts, not least *4 Ezra*, the passage was being read in the first century in terms of the divine overthrow of the last great pagan kingdom and its replacement with the sovereignty of the chosen people, led by the Messiah. If Josephus can be reticent about such things in his context, having in mind no doubt one part at least of his wide intended audience; if he can be blunt when he wants and cryptic when he wants; then, *mutatis mutandis* – and there are of course plenty of *mutanda* – so can Paul.

The most obvious example of a coded, apocalyptic work which almost everyone now thinks was intended as a direct subversion of Rome and its

blasphemous claims is the book of Revelation. And, like Paul, Revelation never once names Rome explicitly. The signs are obvious: the city set upon seven hills, ruling the kings of the earth and welcoming merchants from around the world, leaves no choice.¹⁴⁰ But the word ‘Rome’ does not appear. And Revelation provides another interesting point, too. The book never cites scripture explicitly; there are no quotation-formulae, no references to ‘as it says in the prophet Isaiah’. But the book is soaked in Israel’s scriptures from start to finish, and it makes excellent sense to study these quotations and allusions as such. This provides at least a partial answer to Barclay’s comment about my use of Hays’s criteria for detecting allusion and echo.¹⁴¹ He is right of course that since Paul does quote the scriptures explicitly it makes sense to look for other allusions and echoes as well. But Revelation shows that this can be done even in the absence of explicit quotations. And in my view the hints in Paul about the pretensions and claims of Rome and Caesar are sufficiently strong to justify, again *mutatis mutandis*, a similar investigation.

Barclay’s fourth and final point is his own exposition of Paul’s political theology. As I have indicated, I agree with him that we must avoid modernizing analyses; that Paul allowed (what I see as) his implicit critique of the claims of Rome and Caesar to remain on the edge, as a strong implication of what he was saying, rather than according those claims the respect and dignity of a full-on treatment on their own ground. ‘At the deepest level’, writes Barclay, ‘Paul undermines Augustus and his successors not by confronting them in their own terms, but by reducing them to bit-part players in a drama scripted by the cross and resurrection of Jesus.’¹⁴² Up to a point, yes; and that is partly, I think, why Paul does not name his target specifically. I am glad that Barclay does at least agree that ‘Paul undermines Augustus and his successors’. But I do not think this means that, as in Barclay’s title, ‘the Roman Empire was Insignificant for Paul’, even if Barclay modifies this to ‘comparative insignificance’.¹⁴³ Granted, in Paul’s retrieval and reframing of Jewish apocalyptic language and imagery, as for instance in Romans 5—8 and 1 Corinthians 15, the ultimate powers that are ranged against the creator and his creation are ‘sin’

and ‘death’, the latter being the ‘final enemy’ to be destroyed at the conclusion of the Messiah’s already-inaugurated reign. But the fact that the Messiah in Revelation already possesses ‘the keys of death and hell’ does not prevent John the Seer from placing Messiah and Caesar, gospel and empire, in antithetic parallelism for much of his book, greatly of course to the detriment of the latter.¹⁴⁴ Just because pretensions of empire are radically cut down to size in the Christian versions of Jewish apocalyptic, that does not mean that they are unimportant or insignificant.

On the contrary, Rome appeared as the specific and focused instantiation of what ‘the powers’ were all about. Only Rome could claim a worldwide ‘obedient allegiance’ at the time of Paul’s writing. Only of Caesar did people tell the glowing narrative of how he had come to be hailed as *kyrios* or *sōtēr*. Only of Augustus’s empire did poets sing of a story hundreds of years old now arriving at its royal climax and bringing justice, peace and prosperity to the world. These were the claims that were etched in marble, stamped on coins and celebrated in public festivals in precisely the world where Paul announced Jesus as lord, where he spoke of the gospel-shaped and gospel-revealed new world of justice and peace. However much Paul believed that Caesar’s claims had been overturned in the fresh apocalypse of the cross, they remained the public and powerful manifestation of the powers that had ruled the world. Herodotus told the story of the Greeks’ triumph over the Persians, which created space for the remarkable flowering of fifth-century Athenian culture. But no Greek of the time would say, in any sense, that the Persian empire was therefore ‘insignificant’.

The key to it all, then, as to so much else, is to understand the Jewish context from which Paul came, and then to understand the nature of the change in Paul’s Jewish understanding caused by his belief in the crucified and risen Messiah. In terms of the present book, this means starting with chapter 2 above, and rethinking the questions of power and politics in the light of Parts II and III.

I have argued above that Paul’s context will have given him the classic Jewish view. First, earthly powers, not themselves divine, were nevertheless instituted by the one God who intended that his world should be governed

by humans. Second, all such earthly powers would one day be called to account, and judged strictly for their frequent arrogance, blasphemy and tyranny. I have then argued that we can see in Paul a decisive eschatological modification of both halves of this position. First, he reaffirmed (in line with most other Jews of his day) that all earthly powers were indeed created by the one God, and he added (as the specifically Christian modification of this) that they were created in, through and for the Messiah himself; they were, that is, intended to serve *his* purposes. Paul did not follow this through in the explicitly revolutionary way some might like, at least in his extant writings, but the position was a coherent modification of his starting-point. Second, he saw that the coming judgment of the one God *had already taken place*, with the result that ‘the powers’ had already been led in shame behind the Messiah in his triumph (however paradoxical this must have seemed, as Paul wrote from prison!). The Messiah himself was already ruling the world, and would go on reigning until the ‘last enemy’, death itself, was defeated. [145](#)

When Paul places Rome and Caesar on this cosmic map he is indeed cutting them down to size. He is mocking their own global and cosmic boasts. But this does not mean they are insignificant, either to him or to his hearers. Just as Paul has given, in his major theological expositions, the foundation for what later became known as Christian theology, so he has given, by clear implication, the foundation for what might be called a Christian political vision: neither Marxist nor neo-conservative, neither Constantinian nor Anabaptist, neither ‘left’ nor ‘right’ in our shallow modern categorizations, but nuanced and differentiated in quite other (and still very Jewish) modes. In a world where many were eagerly worshipping Caesar and Rome, Paul not only reaffirmed the Jewish monotheism which undermined all such self-serving and tyranny-supporting blasphemies, but also offered repeated hints that the specific claims of this emperor and this empire fell significantly within those larger categories. In a world where many, not least many pious and zealous Jews, were eager for military revolution and rebellion against Rome, Paul insisted that the crucial victory had already been won, and that the victory in question was a victory won

not *by* violence but *over* violence itself. Perhaps the only way one can keep that balance is by strong hints, by poetry, by language all the more powerful because, like some modern plays, it leaves the relevant character just a little off stage. ‘Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers . . . nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in King Jesus our lord.’ The power and pretensions of Rome are downgraded, outflanked, subverted and rendered impotent by the power of love: the love of the one God revealed in the crucified and risen Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Caesar’s lord.

¹ Rom. 1.9–15; Ac. 25.11f.; 27.1—28.16.

² See my earlier essays, now in *Perspectives* chs. 12, 16 and 27; and, among recent discussions, that of Barclay 2011, chs. 18, 19. Since Barclay critiques my own work directly, arguing that the Roman empire was ‘insignificant’ to Paul, I take him here as my main conversation partner. The most recent vol. of *New Documents* (Llewelyn and Harrison 2012, esp. 25–9, 55–86) contains some important documents and discussions in this whole area; I am grateful to Peter Rodgers for alerting me to this. Among recent works, Fantin 2011 is closer to my perspective, and Harrill 2012 closer to Barclay’s.

³ See my early statement in Wright 1997 [*What St Paul*], ch. 5, esp. 79f.

⁴ See e.g. Blumenfeld 2001: Paul celebrates the unity which Rome has brought to the world, and seeks to preserve and enhance it. This view has at least some echoes in the approach of e.g. Tertullian (e.g. *Apol.* 30–2; in *Ad Scap.* 2 he suggests that the Roman empire will last as long as the world), though Tertullian is also clear that the emperor remains firmly subordinate to the one God (e.g. *Apol.* 33.3). In the modern period a version of this was expressed by Ramsay n.d., 124–7, 130–41; there is a hint of it, though significantly qualified, in Dodd 1958 [1920], 44–50.

⁵ See e.g. Horsley and Silberman 1997; Horsley 2004a; 2004b; Elliott 1994; 2008; Crossan and Reed 2004; Kahl 2010, etc. This movement shades off into various postmodern and postcolonial readings: cf. e.g. Stanley 2011; Marchal 2012.

⁶ See the outline of options, and discussion, in Jewett 2007, 780–803.

⁷ See *Perspectives* ch. 12, e.g. 188–200; and Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 716–23.

⁸ See now e.g. Bryan 2005; Kim 2008. The position of Barclay 2011, ch. 19, is more nuanced (despite its title, ‘Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul’), and will be discussed below (1307–19). The suggestion (Miller 2010) that the imperial cult was less important than is sometimes thought in Paul’s world seems to me insupportable ([see ch. 5 above](#)).

⁹ The word ‘nation’ itself is tricky because of modern assumptions about what constitutes such a thing. We use the word heuristically to denote that which is spoken of in the Psalms and prophets in terms of ‘the nations’ on the one hand and the people of the one God on the other.

¹⁰ cf. e.g. Isa. 45.1–13.

¹¹ Jer. 29.4–7. Cp. *Mt. Pol.*, where at one moment Polycarp is refusing to swear by the ‘genius’ of Caesar (9.3) and at the next is offering to discuss the faith with the proconsul, since, he says, ‘we have been taught to render honour . . . to princes and authorities appointed by God’ (10.2).

¹² cf. esp. Dan. 6.5.

¹³ e.g. Dan. 4.19–27; 5.17–28.

¹⁴ Isa. 48.20; 52.11; cf. Zech. 2.6–13; Rev. 18.4.

¹⁵ Dan. 7.8, 11, 19–22.

¹⁶ cf. esp. Jer. 51.20–3, with echoes of the Messiah’s role in Pss. 2.9; 110.5f.

¹⁷ Wis. 6.1–5. The whole book expounds this point, not least through the retelling of the exodus-narrative in chs. 10–19.

¹⁸ Against the minimalist reading of Miller 2010.

¹⁹ On the counter-imperial relevance of this passage see Fantin 2011, 225–31.

²⁰ Alexander originally claimed distant descent from Hercules, and hence from Zeus, but by 331 BC he had begun to claim direct sonship, through a kind of dual parentage (so Bosworth in *OCD* 59).

²¹ Deissmann 1978 [1908], 340–2.

²² On ‘hidden transcripts’ see the seminal work, now widely discussed, of Scott 1990.

²³ Population estimates for the ancient world are notoriously problematic. It is normally regarded as plausible to reckon on between 100,000 and 300,000 for cities like Antioch and Ephesus, and roughly a million for Rome, not counting slaves who might have numbered about the same again. A similarly plausible guess for the whole Roman empire at the death of Augustus, remaining relatively stable for at least a century thereafter, puts the figure at about 54 million (again, not including slaves). As for the church, even if we give Luke the benefit of the doubt for the 3000 converted at Pentecost, the 5000 shortly after that, and many more thereafter (Ac. 2.41; 4.4; cf. 5.14; 6.7; 9.35; 11.21; 13.48), we might still conclude that by the time of Paul’s death the total number of Christians in the Roman empire might be at most between 10,000 and 20,000, mostly concentrated in Palestine and Syria, with cities like Ephesus having churches of a few dozen, and Rome itself a scattering of house-churches with, at the most, a total of one or two hundred members (as reflected in Rom. 16). See M. H. Crawford in *OCD* 1223; Stark 1996; 2006, 64–70. Jewett (2007, 61f.) disagrees, suggesting that the Roman church might have numbered several thousand in Rome by 64, spread over ‘dozens of groups’ of which Paul (in Rom. 16) identifies only five.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 15.25, quoting Ps. 110.1. On the idea of a rule which is firmly inaugurated but awaiting consummation see esp. *JVG* 467–72, and Wright 2011a [*Simply Jesus*], ch. 9.

²⁵ See above, ch. 2, on Hillel and Shammai. For the situation after 135, cf. *NTPG* 199f.

²⁶ Rom. 15.12.

²⁷ On Barclay’s comments about ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘politics’ in relation to 2 Thess. 2 [see below, 1290 and esp. n. 53](#).

²⁸ [See above, 219–312](#).

²⁹ 1 Cor. 2.8; Col. 2.15; see below.

³⁰ Protests are sometimes lodged against any idea of universal dominion, as though Paul ought really to have embraced a kind of radical egalitarian anarchy (e.g. Marchal 2012). One may of course take that view, but it is impossible to find it in Paul’s texts.

³¹ cf. *NTPG* 354f., on Suet. *Claud.* 25.4.

³² On the well-known question of ‘Jesus as lord’ as against ‘Caesar as lord’ see now Fantin 2011.

³³ Again, we might make an exception here for the short-lived bar-Kochba revolt.

³⁴ Col. 2.14–15.

³⁵ 1 Cor. 2.6–8.

³⁶ 1 Cor. 8.5.

³⁷ 1 Cor. 10.20f.

³⁸ As in 1 Cor. 10.20.

³⁹ To this extent I agree with the careful analysis offered by Barclay 2011, 384f.; see below. On this whole topic the major work is still that of Wink 1984.

⁴⁰ Rom. 8.38f.

⁴¹ Eph. 1.20–2.

⁴² Col. 1.15f.

⁴³ Rom. 13.1. We might compare the remarkable Jn. 19.11. See again the nuanced statement in Tert. *Apol.* 30–3.

⁴⁴ Eph. 6.12.

⁴⁵ Eph. 6.14–17.

⁴⁶ 1 Thess. 5.8.

⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 15.25f., 56.

⁴⁸ Lk. 12.4f. (par. Mt. 10.28f.). See *JVG* 454f., and the larger discussion of 446–63.

⁴⁹ A classic example is the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas, advising Augustus, in Dio Cassius *Hist.* 52.

⁵⁰ On Roman presence and influence in northern Greece cf. [above, 330–3](#).

⁵¹ See once more [above, 117–39](#).

⁵² 2 Thess. 2.1–5.

⁵³ Against e.g. Barclay 2011, 380 n. 58, who admits that 2 Thess. 2 appears to be an exception to his case, but says that the passage’s register ‘is very different from the undisputed Pauline texts’ and that it ‘appears to refer to a future apocalyptic event, not a present political reality’. The latter antithesis is puzzling, revealing a surprisingly unhistorical usage of ‘apocalyptic’ (see e.g. Portier-Young 2011). The point about a different register is dubious in the light of the numerous ‘apocalyptic’ passages in other letters; and, in any case, every single Pauline letter has many unique elements (think, for instance, of the ‘allegory’ in Gal. 4, with its contrast of the heavenly and earthly Jerusalems).

⁵⁴ On 2 Thess. 2 see now esp. J. R. Harrison in Llewelyn and Harrison 2012, 73–5.

⁵⁵ [See above, 1082–5](#); and *RSG* 213–19.

⁵⁶ 1 Thess. 5.2, 4f.

⁵⁷ See, recently, Weima 2012.

⁵⁸ 5.4–7.

⁵⁹ 1 Cor. 2.6; cf. e.g. Ps. 2; Dan. 7; Wis. 6.1–8.

⁶⁰ On the language of ‘saviour’ and ‘salvation’ from Augustus to Hadrian, see now B. Bitner in Llewelyn and Harrison 2012, 76–85.

⁶¹ Phil. 3.18–21.

⁶² On *kyrios* as an imperial title used by e.g. Tiberius and Nero see Foerster in *TDNT* 3.1054f., with Oakes 2001, 171f.; Fantin 2011, 193, 196–202.

⁶³ Ps. 8.5f., keeping the singular ‘him’ and ‘his’ (for NRSV ‘them’ and ‘their’), which is how Paul, following the LXX, evidently took it. Cp. 1 Cor. 15.27; Heb. 2.6–8. Did Paul, here and in 1 Cor. 15, intend also an allusion to Dan. 7?

⁶⁴ See not least Oakes 2001, 138–47, 160–5; e.g. 141: ‘the link between saving and power was a central element in Roman Imperial ideology’.

⁶⁵ Barclay 2011, 379 suggests that ‘modern hearers may find an echo of “Rome” in this text, with the noise of “the Roman empire” dominating their sensory perception’. He suggests that when Paul listened to his world ‘he heard rather different sounds’. We should perhaps turn the point around: (a) the Philippians would undoubtedly have their sensory perceptions well attuned to the rhetoric of

Rome and its empire (see Oakes 2001, 174: ‘Imperial ideology was all around’); (b) if Paul had wanted them not to think of those well-known realities he would have done well not to use the language he did in fact use when speaking here of Jesus and his present and future reign.

⁶⁶ And, indeed, to my own previous expositions – though in the major one, that of *Climax* ch. 4, I managed to ignore the Caesar-overtones entirely.

⁶⁷ Phil. 2.10 (not 2.11 as in Barclay 2011, 379).

⁶⁸ See esp. Oakes 2001, 147–74.

⁶⁹ Oakes 2001, 170.

⁷⁰ See my essay in *Perspectives* ch. 6. See also Bauckham 2008/9, 197 n. 37: ‘Paul’s christological monotheism must have had anti-imperial force and this is a key passage for recognizing that’ (citing also Bockmuehl 1998; A. Y. Collins 1999; Hellerman 2005). See too Bauckham 2008/9, 145f., tracing the counter-imperial force of christological monotheism through into subsequent centuries.

⁷¹ Isa. 45.21f. The idea of YHWH as ‘saviour’ is prominent in Isa.: e.g. 43.3, 11; 45.15; 49.26; 60.16; 63.8.

⁷² Phil. 2.12f.

⁷³ cf. 1.28.

⁷⁴ cf. Rom. 14.13–21.

⁷⁵ For this reading of 2.6, see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 4, now accepted by many commentaries.

⁷⁶ As Barclay 2011, 378 n. 55 rightly points out – though I resist his suggestion there that I have offered a ‘flat reading of vocabulary parallels’.

⁷⁷ I have suggested before that this could be the meaning of the otherwise strange ‘safe for you’ (*hymn de asphales*) in 3.2. The widely varying meanings of *asphalēs* make it impossible to be sure. Barclay’s objection, that no commentary takes the line I have done (2011, 380 n. 59) is curious: if exegetes were only allowed to recycle ideas already available, biblical research would be pointless. Nor do I think that my suggestion here would mean that Paul is ‘shading the gospel’ (381). It is true, as Barclay points out, that plenty of people, including Philo and Josephus, spoke out against various aspects of imperial rule, up to and including emperor-worship (Barclay 381f.), but that does not mean that Paul, writing to a small congregation already suffering persecution, might not decide to use hints rather than direct statements. Tacitus’s harsh remarks about Roman rule (*Agric.* 30.1—32.4, in the speech of Calgacus) are hardly a precedent for what someone like Paul might have thought he could get away with or what might be safe for his hearers. Barclay’s suggestion (382 n. 63) that under Roman rule one could always appeal to superior magistrates, and ultimately to the emperor himself, and then to the example of previous emperors, seems impossibly naive precisely in the light of Tacitus’s attack. The fact that Paul and others did sometimes do this hardly implies that there was a smooth-running and carefully impartial system which he could confidently recommend to his hearers: Paul was himself a high-profile case and he may have gambled on that ensuring him a safe passage (though cf. Ac. 27.42f.). Warning people that a time may come to abandon civic status or privilege does not necessarily mean that the entire system is already as bad as it could be.

⁷⁸ Phil. 1.27; Rom. 12.14–18; Gal. 6.10 (cf. Eph. 4.28); 1 Thess. 5.15; cf. 1 Tim. 6.18.

⁷⁹ Rom. 13.1–7; see below.

⁸⁰ Rom. 13.11–14; 1 Thess. 5.1–11.

⁸¹ Nebuchadnezzar: Dan. 4; Belshazzar: Dan. 5; Pharaoh: Ex. 14—15, cp. Wis. 10—19. The exodus remains the model in Revelation’s vision of the coming judgment on Rome.

⁸² 2 Cor. 2.14; Col. 2.15; Rom. 8.37.

⁸³ Eph. 3.10.

⁸⁴ Phil. 1.28; 2 Cor. 2.16.

⁸⁵ Rom. 1.1–7; see, recently, Harrison 2011, 146–50.

⁸⁶ Rom. 15.7–13, quoting Ps. 18 [LXX 17].50; Dt. 32.43; Ps. 117.1; and, climactically, Isa. 11.10 in the LXX version (on this, see *RSG* 266f.). After this Paul turns to travel plans and final greetings.

⁸⁷ Rom. 10.20 (cf. 9.30f.), quoting Isa. 65.1.

⁸⁸ Rom. 13.1–7. See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 716–23. See recently Fantin 2011, 261–5.

⁸⁹ See e.g. Cassidy 2001, suggesting that by the time Paul writes Philippians he had changed his mind.

⁹⁰ Ac. 4.19; 5.29.

⁹¹ cf. e.g. Ac. 16.35–9; 23.1–11; 25.6–12; cp. 18.12–17; 19.35–41.

⁹² So, rightly, Jewett 2007, 786. Something similar might be said about the way people have treated the famous ‘render unto Caesar’ passage in Mk. 12.13–17 par. It means what it means within the overall proclamation of God’s kingdom.

⁹³ I leave 1 Cor. out of consideration here, though a case has been made for a Roman cultic background to 1 Cor. 8—10: see Winter 2001, ch. 12; Fantin 2011, 225–31, 244–6.

⁹⁴ See above e.g. 808 with n. 109.

⁹⁵ For different varieties of this hypothesis see e.g. Winter 1994, ch. 7; 2002a; Hardin 2008; Kahl 2010. The proposals of Mark Nanos (e.g. Nanos 2002a) have some analogy to this line of thought, as does the brief analysis by Griffith-Jones 2004, 222–4, of the situation in Antioch. The early versions of this proposal are helpfully discussed by Witherington 1998, 447–9.

⁹⁶ Ac. 18.12–17; see e.g. Winter 1999; see discussion in e.g. Haenchen 1971, 540f.; Schnabel 2012, 763f.

⁹⁷ See *NTPG* 346–8.

⁹⁸ 2 Cor. 6.3–10.

⁹⁹ 2 Cor. 10.3–5.

¹⁰⁰ On which, see *RSG* 534–51 and esp. 548–50; and Wright 2006b [*Judas*], 41–53.

¹⁰¹ Barclay 2011, ch. 19; ch. 18 is also relevant, setting out the ground of Roman religion and the emperor, much as in my chs. 4 and 5 above. Refs. to Barclay in what follows are to this book. I am grateful to Christoph Heilig for discussion of the following points.

¹⁰² Barclay notes (370) that, unlike some other recent writers, I have tried to make this point clear.

¹⁰³ Barclay 366.

¹⁰⁴ Barclay 367, 374, 376, 378 n. 55 (the alternatives of ‘support’ or ‘subversion’), 384 (the danger of superimposing a modern political analysis), 386 (‘neither simple opposition nor obedience’).

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, a strong case can be made for seeing Col. 1.15–20 as encoding just such a critique: see e.g. Walsh and Keesmaat 2004, 79–95.

¹⁰⁶ Barclay 385. It is good to find that Barclay is happy to see these passages as expressing an evaluation of *Roman* power, despite the fact that the word ‘Rome’ does not occur in them.

¹⁰⁷ Barclay 361.

¹⁰⁸ Barclay 362, quoting Hopkins 1999, 78. This ‘totalising stance’ is naturally resisted by those who hope to find Paul an ally in the project of postmodern pluralism (e.g. Marchal 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Barclay 385.

¹¹⁰ ‘Epistemology’ properly denotes the study of, or a theory about, the nature or grounds of knowledge, but what Barclay is talking about here is ‘the terms in which [Paul] viewed [his world]’ (Barclay 375), which is a subtly but significantly different thing. Barclay here follows a famous article by Martyn 1997b, 89–110.

[111](#) Barclay 374.

[112](#) Barclay 384 n. 70 indicates that he does indeed follow Martyn up to a point, though in a more nuanced fashion: over against what he sees as my placing of Paul ‘in ideological continuity with the biblical/Jewish tradition of monotheistic critique of paganism’, he says ‘I would place stronger emphasis on the new division of the cosmos created by the Christ-event ... which strongly reshapes and reapplies the biblical categories themselves.’ This supports his statement in the text that ‘Paul sees no significant differences between Romans and Greeks, only a categorical distinction between the *kosmos* and the *kainē ktisis* which was created by the cross.’ I have, however, argued not just for ‘ideological continuity’ but for radical modification; and I have suggested that there are good reasons to think that Paul, while certainly lumping Romans, Greeks and everybody else together as part of the *kosmos* which is challenged by the new creation, still sees Rome as playing a specific role precisely at the moment of eschatological and apocalyptic crisis. [See below](#).

[113](#) Barclay 376.

[114](#) Barclay, in private correspondence dated 9 September 2012: see his pp. 374, 376, 379, 386.

[115](#) Barclay 385.

[116](#) Barclay 384.

[117](#) Barclay 386.

[118](#) Mk. 15.39.

[119](#) Whether such a judgment would do justice to any of those just named is another matter. Horsley at least has frequently written dismissively about ‘theology’ as the thing from which a post-Stendahl socio-cultural reading of Paul would free us. See Horsley 2004b, etc.; Crossan and Reed 2004; Elliott 2008; Borg and Crossan 2009.

[120](#) As e.g. 1 Tim. 2.2 with 6.15 (Barclay 378, quoting the use of this in Tert. *Apol.* 30—3). Barclay also refers (377) to Ac. 17.7 (‘another king’), and says, rightly, that this is Luke’s construction of how some people were hearing ‘Paul’; though why he thinks that Luke considers this a mistaken construction, in view of Ac. 1.1–11 and 28.31, is not clear to me. Nor is the language of *basileus* foreign to Paul: Barclay notes the cognate terms in 1 Cor. 15.24f., and we should add the use of similar language in Rom. 5.17–21, as well as the fresh evaluation of ‘royal’ significance in *Christos* itself (above, ch. 10: and cf. e.g. Rom. 15.12).

[121](#) Barclay 379.

[122](#) *Mt. Pol.* 8.2; 9.2.

[123](#) *Mt. Pol.* 9.3 (my tr.).

[124](#) Loeb ad loc.

[125](#) Phil. 3.20f.; see above.

[126](#) It is interesting that in *The Acts of Paul*, cited by Barclay 377, Nero’s cupbearer Patroclus, whom Paul had raised from death after the manner of the story of Eutychus in Ac. 20.9–12, declares before Nero that Christ Jesus is ‘the king of the ages’, who will ‘destroy all kingdoms under heaven’ (Elliott 1993, 386). This is the language of apocalyptic, specifically of Daniel. Assuming the work to be a second-century fiction, the passage nevertheless bears witness to the persistence of a Daniel-based vision of Jesus’ worldwide and counter-imperial kingdom.

[127](#) This tells also against Kim 2008, 60–4.

[128](#) Barclay 382, citing Horsley 2004a; Elliott 2008; Kahl 2010.

[129](#) Barclay 344 (the conclusion of his ch. 17, ‘Snarling Sweetly: A Study of Josephus on Idolatry’).

[130](#) Barclay 370, 378: I see the raised eyebrow, and the implicit claim to the high ground of postmodern uncertainty, when he says ‘Wright ... is confident that he can detect not only what “must

have been heard” in Paul’s letters, but also what Paul himself intended,’ and contrasts this by speaking of ‘those hermeneutically less committed to (or confident about) authorial intention ...’. Barclay does not include himself in the latter group, but the way the sentence is framed strongly implies an authorial intent to raise doubts in the reader’s mind about my apparent over-confidence. To this I reply that, like everyone proposing an hypothesis, I am stating it as clearly as I can while testing it against the evidence. To Barclay’s positive point there, that even those who question the search for ‘intention’ may look at the larger literary context, I reply, Precisely: it is, again and again, the larger literary context (e.g. the whole narrative of Phil. 2) which establishes the meaning of the otherwise isolated terms in question.

¹³¹ Barclay 375.

¹³² Barclay 381.

¹³³ Philo *Leg.* 357; *Jos. Ap.* 2.75; *Tac. Agric.* 30.5 (the full speech is at 30.1—32.4, not 30.3—31.2 as Barclay 382). There is a good deal more going on in the Tacitus passage than meets the eye.

¹³⁴ It will not do, then, to draw attention to the reference to believers from Caesar’s household (Phil. 4.22) as though this disproved the theory about coded messages. In any case, the believers in question are not of course in Philippi, but in the city from which the letter is being written (which I think was Ephesus). What is more, though Paul was not assuming, as was Josephus, a wide and diverse public audience (so, rightly, Barclay 382f.), there may well have been potential diversity of different sorts even in the small groups he would envisage listening to the letters. I know the difference between a radio broadcast and a private meeting; but even in a private meeting there are plenty of occasions when one chooses one’s words carefully and settles on coded language as the best option. Paul’s letters were not straightforwardly ‘public discourse’, but nor were they exactly ‘private’. Outsiders could and did come into Christian assemblies (cf. 1 Cor. 14.23). A letter designed to be read in different assemblies, and no doubt read aloud several times in the same assembly, becomes potentially more ‘public’ with each reading.

¹³⁵ See Goodenough 1967, 21–41. Barclay 381 n. 62 cites Barraclough 1980, 491–506 as a refutation of Goodenough. Barraclough, however, is more nuanced than Barclay implies. He agrees (492) that Philo in the relevant text (*Somn.* 2.90–109) ‘views the Romans critically’, though like Barclay on Paul Barraclough ascribes this to a more general ‘anti-Gentile’ feeling. He concedes (492f.) that *Somn.* 2.48, 53, 55, 57, 62 does indeed ‘suggest Roman practice and claims’, allowing that this may be an instance (in his view, a rare one), where ‘the Romans are clearly indicated in a context generally aimed at Gentile arrogance’. He admits that *Jos.* 79 would take on a deeper meaning when read the way Goodenough proposes (496), though offering a nuanced argument for an alternative reading. He agrees with Goodenough’s conclusion that Philo presents Joseph as according with the hellenistic ideal of kingship (499), though he offers contextual and linguistic arguments against a coded allusion to the Roman prefect of Alexandria (500). In particular, he concedes (501f.) that the *De Somniis* ‘contains the criticism of Flaccus that came to full expression in his express work on that figure’, though Flaccus is not named in *Somn.* We might compare *Somn.* 2.123, where Philo mentions knowing ‘one of the ruling class’ (*andra tina oida tōn hēgemonikōn*) who had tried to stop the Jews keeping the sabbath; the fact that commentators disagree over who this was shows well enough that Philo, though on other occasions capable of being blunt, could sometimes also be oblique, and no doubt with good reason. Goodenough may well have overstated his case, but when modified his underlying point remains valid. Barclay’s implied either/or, in which people must always be *either* blunt *or* oblique but never both, does not fit Philo, or Josephus; or Paul.

¹³⁶ *Ant.* 10.210.

¹³⁷ Loeb ad loc.

¹³⁸ *Ant.* 10.264–7.

¹³⁹ *Ant.* 10.276; there are textual problems at this point but Marcus, in the Loeb ad loc., is happy to support this reading.

¹⁴⁰ Rev. 17.9, 18; 18.11–13.

¹⁴¹ Barclay 380.

¹⁴² Barclay 386f.

¹⁴³ Barclay 386 ([see the discussion above](#)).

¹⁴⁴ See Rev. 1.18; and the implicit but generally acknowledged contrast in chs. 5, 12—14, 19.

¹⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 15.26.

Chapter Thirteen

A DIFFERENT SACRIFICE: PAUL AND 'RELIGION'

1. Introduction

My first visit to Germany was in the spring of 1976. I was there for the initial meeting of the joint seminar organized by the Theology Faculty in Oxford and the Faculty for Protestant Theology in Bonn. Among the many insights which that week provided me, one has particular relevance to the present chapter.

The opening paper, given by Antonius Gunneweg, a senior Old Testament scholar from the Bonn faculty, was entitled 'Religion oder Offenbarung: Zum hermeneutischen Problem des Alten Testaments', i.e. 'Religion or Revelation? Concerning the Hermeneutical Problem of the Old Testament'.¹ The question was posed in terms of the standard protestant assumption, strengthened through the theology of Karl Barth: 'religion' was something humans did to try to gain favour with God, whereas 'revelation' was what happened when God, as an act of free grace, chose to unveil his love or his purposes to humans.² Seen from this point of view, Christianity was not a 'religion' at all, since it was about divine grace rather than human effort, and the question was whether the Old Testament shared this character, or whether it had to be seen as the Jewish version of the human effort to please God, or even to know him.

It would be interesting to map this discussion on to the larger German debates of the twentieth century: for instance, Deissmann's insistence that Paul himself was an archetypal *homo religiosus* against Käsemann's insistence that it was precisely against *homo religiosus* that Paul's ultimate polemic was directed. That remains a task for another time. The particular insight came with the response by Professor James Barr, who had recently moved to Oxford from Manchester. He pointed out that in England the word 'religion' carried few if any of the negative connotations presupposed in the

German title of the paper. In England, 'religion' meant, more or less, 'what some people do on Sunday mornings', with a penumbra of assumptions about ethical standards and personal piety (perhaps with a dash of what might be called 'mysticism'). People might not wish to join in, but neither they nor the worshippers perceived 'religion' as a bad or dangerous thing (unless the mysticism got out of hand).

Times have changed, of course. We have more recently had Richard Dawkins and his ilk telling us that 'religions' are bad both for their practitioners and for society as a whole; a kind of turbo-charged and politicized version of the continental protestant position.³ There has also grown up in some evangelical, fundamentalist and similar circles a sense that 'religion' is what happens in boring mainline churches while they themselves are enjoying something quite different: a living relationship with God, perhaps, rather than an outward form. Those, too, are issues to be addressed elsewhere, but they locate the subject of the present chapter in relation to the varied uses of the word in contemporary thought, with a warning against importing into a historical study the assumptions and prejudices of a much later age. This chapter addresses the question, in parallel with the previous chapter: what happens when we try to locate the Paul we have studied in Parts II and III within the picture we sketched in chapter 4? I intend, in other words, to investigate here the relation of Paul to *first-century* 'religion', as discussed in that earlier chapter, rather than to 'religion' as that term has been understood since at least the eighteenth century.

This is all the more complicated in that several works which have discussed Paul in terms of 'religion' have not made this distinction clear. Locating the study of early Christianity within university and college 'Departments of Religion' has had a massive, if mostly hidden, impact on the way in which the subject is perceived, carrying the implication that we all know what 'religion' is – and that, for instance, it has little or nothing to do with politics or 'real life'. When the traditional subject-matter of early Christianity is put into the box we now call 'religion', various things happen.⁴

A classic example is Ed Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, whose telling subtitle was 'A Comparison of Patterns of Religion'. Sanders's work constituted a quantum leap forward in method as well as content, but by firmly labelling his project as a study of 'patterns of religion' he did three things which I believe are together responsible for what seem to me significant distortion.⁵

1. Sanders used, without any discussion, an implicit definition of 'religion' which belongs in the eighteenth rather than in the first century. He treats 'religion' as denoting the entire system of what something like 'Christianity' or 'Judaism' is, how it functions and what it claims to accomplish. Though he screens out certain questions,⁶ he nevertheless includes within 'religion' all sorts of things which in the ancient world would have been seen as part of 'philosophy' or even 'theology'. This – as, indeed, with Deissmann – distorts the evidence. The rather basic telescope of 'religion', in this sense, is incapable of seeing some of the most important stars in the Pauline sky.⁷

2. Sanders nevertheless imports 'Christian' categories into his analysis. Though he declares that his aim is 'to compare an entire religion, parts and all, with an entire religion, parts and all', 'considered and defined on their own merits and in their own terms', he sets up his categories on surprisingly 'Christian' grounds. Even his general statement that 'the term "pattern" points toward the question of how one moves from the logical starting point to the logical conclusion of the religion'⁸ implies that a 'religion' is about the making of such a journey, which might perhaps be seen as an essentially Jewish perception (grounded in the patriarchal wanderings, the exodus and the return from exile) and may also translate into Christianity in terms of a 'journey' from sin to salvation. But most ancient 'religion' did not have such a 'logical starting point' or 'logical conclusion' – or, if one could see such a thing, it was an abstract reflection, the sort of thing a Cicero might go home and write a book about, rather than part of the religion itself. In particular, Sanders subsumes 'soteriology' under the larger category of 'religion'.⁹ He rightly sees that some religions, including at least some branches of ancient Judaism, are not concerned with 'soteriology' and its

correlated doctrines (sin, a future life and so on) in the way that he takes early Christianity to be, but he goes ahead anyway with his basic categories of ‘getting in and staying in’: ‘the way in which a religion is understood to admit and retain members’, he says, ‘is considered to be the way it “functions” ’.¹⁰

This, I suspect, is what lies at the root of the radical rejection of Sanders in much conservative Protestantism, and to this extent at least the protest is justified. This is not because Sanders has ‘got Judaism wrong’; no doubt he has oversimplified, as we all do, but his basic perception of Jewish practice as a response to the grace implicitly embodied in the covenant is substantially correct. Rather, the protest is justified for two reasons, one which the critics of the ‘new perspective’ have glimpsed and one which, I think, they have not.

The one they have glimpsed is that, despite his insistence that Judaism is a religion of grace (that too, of course, may be seen to be a ‘Christianizing’ judgment; who said ‘grace’ was that important, if not the early Christians, especially Paul?), he has by his very categories made ‘Christianity’ into a kind of ‘religion’, at the very moment when conservative Protestants were eagerly distancing themselves, after the manner of Antonius Gunneweg or even Karl Barth, from any such thing. The knee-jerk reaction against the ‘new perspective’ thus assumes that Sanders (like others, such as the present writer), so far from discovering that Judaism was a religion of grace, was sneakily transforming Christianity into a religion of works – indeed, into a ‘religion’, which in those terms must *ex hypothesi* be about ‘works’. Sanders’s attempt to rescue Judaism from that charge has thus rebounded. Instead of making Judaism much more like Christianity, he has (some people suppose) made Christianity much more like Judaism, or at least the ‘Judaism’ of standard protestant polemic. Though the terms here are inexact, there is an important point trying to get out: the category ‘religion’, as used by Sanders, necessarily distorts the actual subject-matter of Paul’s letters. And also, perhaps, second-Temple Judaism itself – though not in the ways Sanders’s conservative critics have usually imagined.

The second reason why the protest is justified, one not glimpsed by the opponents of the 'new perspective', is not simply because this analysis may well distort Paul himself, and perhaps also ancient Judaism, but also because it is simply not true that the way a religion 'functions' has to do with the way in which it 'is understood to admit and retain members'. For most 'religions' in the eighteenth-century sense, and certainly most 'religion' in the first-century sense, the 'functioning' of the religion in question had little if anything to do with the way in which members were admitted and retained. Even the ancient mysteries, with their elaborate initiation rituals, were about a lot more than that. It looks as though Sanders has assumed, no doubt from a Christian and even Pauline standpoint, that something like 'conversion' ('getting in') looms large on the one hand, and that one may justifiably think of the ordinary daily practice of 'religion' in terms of 'staying in'. But most 'religion' in the ancient world was not about 'conversion', and most practitioners of ancient 'religion' were not concerned with 'staying in' anything very much, except, in a loose sense, in the *polis* whose gods were being worshipped or invoked.¹¹ Israel's scriptures do indeed issue stringent warnings about individuals being 'cut off from among their people' for certain behaviour, and equally stringent warnings about the nation as a whole being sent into exile for persistently breaking the covenant. The idea of 'staying in' may thus be seen as a Jewish category, though not I think one which many first-century Jews (Qumran perhaps excepted) sat about discussing at length or in detail. But in the wider pagan world, though we have evidence of people being ejected from this or that city (especially Rome) because they were trying to import an alien religion or a dangerous philosophy, the idea of 'staying in' is not a category that would naturally suggest itself within the world of first-century 'religion'.

There is a further irony in Sanders's account. By focusing his study of Paul on 'getting in and staying in', he all but ignored the elements of Paul's thought, and more important his actual life and the lives of his churches, which might properly have been investigated under the heading of 'religion': for instance, baptism and the Lord's Supper, neither of which

does he treat in any detail. Sanders has, in fact, tried to discuss Paul's *theology* as though it were *religion*, and has left 'religion' itself to one side. The present chapter is in part an attempt to remedy this deficiency.

3. Again as a result of all this, Sanders screens out eschatology from his account of both Judaism and Christianity, except insofar as both hold a view about the ultimate end. (Even that, he says, 'need not be a decisive point for the pattern of religion'.)¹² Eschatology, in the early Christian sense of the belief in a single purpose of the one God which, long awaited, had now been fulfilled or at least inaugurated, is precisely one of the things which the eighteenth-century analysis of 'religion' screened out (perhaps because the Enlightenment had its own eschatology, in which world history was reaching its great climax with the work of Voltaire, Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson). By *comparing* Paul and Judaism in terms of 'patterns of religion', he makes it impossible to see that the early Christians, like at least the Qumran sect in one way and the followers of bar-Kochba in another, were claiming that Israel's God had inaugurated or was inaugurating his long-promised purposes and that they themselves were in the vanguard of this new movement. Since placing Paul in that world of first-century Jewish eschatology is arguably one of the most important things one should do with the apostle, it is not surprising that subsequent scholarship has found Sanders's account of Paul significantly lop-sided. Indeed we might paraphrase Sanders's own famous summary of Paul's position *vis-à-vis* Judaism: *this is what we find wrong in Sanders's account of Paul: it is not Christianity*.¹³ Or not quite.

My criticisms of Sanders are parallel to those offered by John Ashton, a Johannine scholar who in retirement has turned his attention to Paul.¹⁴ Ashton's own account of 'the religion of Paul the Apostle' is not (as he and I both take Sanders's account to be, in practice if not in theory) an attempt to do theology by other means. Ashton firmly pushes to one side the long tradition in which Paul has been mined for answers to the questions of Christian systematic theology, not least post-Reformation protestant dogmatics, and proposes instead that Paul can be explained in terms of his 'religious experience'.

One might suppose that this was another way of turning back to Schweitzer, but Ashton includes Schweitzer in his critique, suggesting that though Schweitzer was in theory writing about Paul's 'mysticism' he was in fact still portraying Paul as a thinker following a logical train of thought rather than a mystic struggling to put the ineffable into words.¹⁵ The latter is the route Ashton himself takes. He proposes that the apostle should be seen in terms of the cross-cultural religious category of 'shaman', and that what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus involved him in a kind of death-and-rebirth experience out of which the most important features of his writings can be explained.¹⁶ Ashton is aware that calling Paul a 'shaman' will not be to everyone's taste, and suggests that such people might think of it as a metaphor.¹⁷

There is much to admire in Ashton's bold and innovative proposal, not least his polymathic range of cultural reference. But there are two serious problems with it in terms of a first-century historical account. First, the category of 'religious experience' to which Ashton appeals, though it does indeed have some purchase on certain 'shamanistic' traditions ancient and modern, does not have very much to do with what the first-century world thought of as 'religion'. Apart, that is, from the mystery religions; and it is no surprise that Ashton, though submitting to the scholarly consensus that Paul did not derive his ideas from there, nevertheless tries to hold the category open as having 'convergent resemblances', 'coincidental' features which, though they may not provide geneological parentage for Paul's experience, offer significant parallels.¹⁸ The category of 'religious experience' itself, however, as expounded by Ashton (and as played off against 'theology'), cannot but strike the reader as a re-run of Schleiermacher's project, to exalt 'feeling' over dogma. It is no surprise that Ashton comes down very hard on Karl Barth.¹⁹

This may simply mean that once again the post-Enlightenment category of 'religion' includes things which first-century *religio* did not, and vice versa. Ashton is clear that he is reading Paul against the apparent grain of what he himself says. He does not accuse the apostle of 'rationalizing' his

feelings into a theological argument, as Räsänen and others have done, but his study amounts to the same thing.²⁰

Second, though Ashton claims to be offering a key to explain Paul, he never in fact deals with most of Paul's major themes, such as the righteousness of God, justification by faith, Messiahship, incarnational christology and so forth. When offering exegesis of particular passages, he never attempts to show how they fit within the larger context of a letter or chapter. Thus, for instance, to present Romans 8.23–30 as though it were not the climax of a lengthy, sustained and essentially *theological* argument is simply to misread it.²¹ In particular, he declares from the outset that it is impossible to understand what Paul says simply in terms of modifications of Jewish belief, and that this justifies one in looking elsewhere – without ever showing that he has grasped the way in which second-Temple Jews, of any variety, actually thought and acted.²² His treatment of the spirit, clearly central to his thesis, remains flawed by his failure to give attention to the specifically biblical and Jewish context through which Paul interpreted his remarkable 'experiences'. All this means that when Paul does give a vivid statement of 'dying and rising', as in Romans 6 or Galatians 2.19–20, Ashton does not see how the passages in question actually work. However vivid the statement in the latter passage ('through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. I am, however, alive – but it isn't me any longer, it's the Messiah who lives in me'), it cannot be an appeal to a unique experience which Paul alone has had, since his whole point is to say that this 'dying and rising' is what has happened to all Jews who have come to be 'in the Messiah'. If Peter in Antioch, or the 'agitators' in Galatia, had been able to say, 'Well, Paul, you have indeed had remarkable shamanistic experiences, but you mustn't expect us to have had them too, so what you say is irrelevant,' Paul would have been wasting his breath.²³

Ashton's project thus remains frustrating, however fascinating in some respects. As an attempt to 'explain' Paul, it clearly fails. As an attempt to explore his 'religious experience', in the basically modern sense of that phrase (however many ancient shamanistic parallels one might find – not

that Ashton finds very many), it belongs more within an account of ‘psychology’, or even ‘psychology of religion’, rather than ‘religion’ itself in any first-century sense.²⁴

The ‘inner’ or ‘experiential’ side of things is doubtless important in its own way. When Paul speaks about the ‘heart’, its secrets and its beliefs, he is indeed referring to the deep wellsprings of human imagination, intention and intuition in a way that cannot be reduced to terms of a process of rational thought moving from first intellectual principles to final intellectual conclusions. However, Ashton’s polemic against ‘theology’ is unconvincing (and might cause some to turn the author’s own analytic method back on him).²⁵ The point for which I have been arguing throughout this book is that Paul did indeed think through, articulate and teach a coherent *theology*, which was indeed ‘a modification of Jewish belief’ in the light of the crucified and risen Messiah and the gift of the spirit; and that Paul urged his communities to learn how to think these things through, not as a displacement activity when faced with ineffable experiences, but as their grasping of the reality of Israel’s God and his purposes, the reality within which they would be able to live. Without ‘theology’ in the sense we have explored it in Part III of this book, Paul had reason to suppose that the new worldview he was doing his best to inculcate would not be able to stand firm. As we shall see in a moment, Paul’s own revised and rethought ‘religion’ had the same goal in mind.

The need for ‘theology’, not just as a set of dogmas to be taught and learned but as a task for the whole church, is the reason why Paul speaks in various places of the *mind* being renewed, as well as the heart. There is no good historical, theological or indeed religious reason to reduce the former to the latter, to say that what may appear to be theological argument is in fact the complex and contradictory musings of someone who has had a profound and largely ineffable religious experience. Ashton’s account is, not least, highly individual-centred; one would scarcely guess, reading him, just how important for Paul was the unity, and the common life, of the community of the Messiah’s people. We may agree that Paul’s whole life, including all his ‘experiences’ of whatever kind, was part of a seamless

whole from which his intellectual arguments cannot be split off. But this does not justify privileging these ‘experiences’ over his actual arguments. Nor, in particular, does this help us very much in locating Paul within his own world, where ‘religion’ meant something very different from that aspect of nineteenth-century thought to which Ashton implicitly appeals.

A very different account of primitive Christian religion has been offered by Gerd Theissen. Theissen is much more alert than Sanders to the question of what ‘religion’ actually is, though he, writing with one eye on the contemporary world of interested agnosticism, produces a definition which tries to include both the eighteenth century and the first: ‘Religion’, he writes, ‘is a cultural sign language which promises a gain in life by corresponding to an ultimate reality’.²⁶ Theissen’s exposition of the first element of this, the ‘cultural sign language’, is perhaps the most important part for our purposes. Religion, he says, is a *semiotic* phenomenon: it operates with a system of ‘signs’ which ‘guide our attention, bring our impressions together coherently, and link them with our actions’. Humans cannot survive without such systems: ‘only in a world interpreted in this way’, he declares, ‘can we live and breathe.’²⁷ This sign-system characteristically tells stories, often now referred to as ‘myths’ (whether or not they are deemed to have historical value); it engages in ‘rites’, patterns of behaviour which ‘take on symbolic surplus value’; and it assumes some kind of ‘ethics’. A sign-system will develop its own semiotic grammar in which its characteristic motifs are woven together in a more or less organized way, providing the unique character which differentiates it from other sign-systems. Such systems, Theissen points out (as we have done in Part I), are part of a larger culture. ‘Religions are socio-cultural sign systems,’ he says. ‘Therefore they are historical: they come into being and pass away, split up and get mixed up. They are closely bound up with the history of those groups which hand them down.’²⁸ Quite so. Theissen then suggests that changes within the system are brought about above all by ‘charismatics’, with Jesus as the obvious example.

Much of this analysis, in these general terms, applies to what the first century understood by ‘religion’, and indeed offers an analysis which

implicitly challenges the shrunken use of that word in modern western thought. We might question the inclusion of ‘ethics’, however, which in the first century (except for the Jewish world) was the province, not of ‘religion’, but of ‘philosophy’. Similar points could be made about Theissen’s analysis of religion as something ‘which promises a gain in life’; here he, like Sanders, does seem to be leaning, though more gently, in the direction of a very generalized soteriology which may not in fact be true to the first century (again, with the possible exception of the mystery religions).

Throughout his book, Theissen uses a powerful and evocative running metaphor. His initial exposition of it alerts us to the two purposes of his book. Primitive Christian religion, he says,

is a sign language – a ‘semiotic cathedral’ – which has been erected in the midst of history: not out of stones but out of signs of various kinds. Like all churches and cathedrals, it too has been designed throughout by human beings, built by human beings, and is used and preserved by human beings. But just as one cannot understand the Gothic cathedrals unless one hears and sees them as a hymn of praise to God in stone, so too one cannot understand this semiotic cathedral if one forgets that those who built it once erected it as a great hymn of praise and thanks for the irruption of a transcendent reality.²⁹

He then imagines ‘secularized visitors’ to such a ‘cathedral’ having a conversation with those who want to join in the hymn of praise. What is there, he asks, to stop both sets of visitors talking to one another about their points of view, and entering into a rational conversation about the cathedral? Here is Theissen’s apologetic hope:

The sketches of a theory of primitive religion presented here seek to make such a conversation possible – a conversation about the mysterious sign world of primitive Christian religion. For some, this is part of looking after monuments, and looking after monuments is a very noble affair. But I should add that for me, a concern with primitive Christian religion involves more than being curator of a monument.³⁰

His book, then, is both a historical analysis of ‘primitive Christian religion’, including obviously that of Paul, and an attempt to engage with the ‘secularized visitors’ who may be looking around this ‘semiotic cathedral’ as curious tourists. From my perspective, I can only applaud the attempt to

bring these two purposes together, though I worry that it may have caused Theissen, like Sanders, to push too much ‘theology’, and indeed ‘ethics’, into ‘religion’, and thus to make harder any real attempt to locate the early Christians, not least Paul, within the actual ‘religious’ world of their day.

Theissen’s specific proposals, as they relate to Paul (his book covers ‘primitive Christianity’ as a whole), form a good introduction to the similar though not identical proposals that I shall advance in the present chapter. Anyone who studies the history of primitive Christian religion, he says, picking up his controlling metaphor once more,

can follow the origin of a new religious sign system or, to use another image, the building of a semiotic cathedral. Its building material consists of signs in three different forms: a narrative sign language consisting of myth and history; a prescriptive sign language consisting of imperatives and evaluations; and a ritual sign language consisting of the primitive Christian sacraments of baptism and eucharist ... [The ritual sign language] is often underestimated, because only a few texts in the New Testament relate to the primitive Christian rites. But it is of great importance: the whole sign system of a religion is concentrated in its rites.³¹

This seems to me correct, as does Theissen’s observation that the ‘rites’ in question are independent of space and time, giving a means by which ordinary space and time can be structured and hence by which humans can experience them as a different sort of time; they are freed from everyday purposes; they serve to ward off chaos and anxiety.³² And his exposition of the ‘rites’ in question, both the central ones and the other peripheral elements which we shall also examine below, leads to his final conclusion, which is where he comes closest (though without saying so) to what we saw in chapter 4 to be true of ‘religion’ in the ancient pagan world: ‘the sign world of primitive Christianity was plausible to its inhabitants because its axioms contributed towards forming a community’.³³ He returns at the end to his controlling image: this semiotic ‘cathedral’ can still be visited by secular tourists who would leave without saying a prayer, but he would be delighted if such visitors could at least understand why prayer was the main purpose of constructing the cathedral in the first place.³⁴ This is a moving apologia, all the more so for the way it determinedly puts everything into

language which makes no unnecessary 'Christian' demands upon the hypothetical secularized reader.

My purpose is rather different. I want now, with these two recent forays into the study of Paul's 'religion' in mind, to offer an alternative one, overlapping much more with Theissen than with Sanders. But I want to go considerably further than Theissen in two or three particulars, and to propose a way of understanding Paul within the 'religious' world of his day which shows how the implicit clash of *political* allegiance and culture we studied in the previous chapter was, hardly surprisingly, focused in and symbolized by an implicit clash of *religious* allegiance and culture. This will, of course, prepare for the third element, in which we shall study, in the next chapter, the implicit engagement of Paul with the wider world of *philosophy*.

[2. Paul among the Religions](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

We saw in chapter 4 that, according to Cicero at least, the religion of the Roman world was divided up principally into (a) ritual (especially sacrifice, but also the various festivals according to the various sacred calendars), (b) the taking of auguries and (c) the searching of sacred books such as the Sibylline Oracles. The ancient myths, contained in Homer and the great poets, contributed to these as a backdrop, providing occasional aitiological explanations and reminding this or that city of its ancient heritage and traditions. The purpose of *religio*, watched over carefully by the various orders of priesthood who overlapped considerably with the magistrates and other civic hierarchy, was to bind the gods and the city together, to consolidate the *pax deorum* and, in one memorable phrase, to continue social policy by other means. The culture was soaked in divinities, and 'religion' was the way of bringing that to tangible and effective expression. 'Religion', we remind ourselves, was not a way of teaching people how to

behave; for that you might go to the philosophers. It was not in itself a way of deciding actual policy, except for the occasional intervention from augury or oracles, though it frequently guided the ways in which policies reached on other grounds were carried out (for instance, in the timing of a battle). It was innately conservative, in that it emphasized the ultimate good of civic peace and harmony and offered the means by which that could be maintained, since the gods were themselves deemed to be part of the overall social fabric. Within this, as we saw, the ‘mystery’ religions offered a more individualized deepening of personal spirituality and a more focused and definite future hope.

At first sight, and especially for those wearing protestant spectacles, it might appear that Paul had nothing whatever to do with any of this.³⁵ As we saw in the earlier chapter, the early Christians did not offer animal sacrifice (or, if some still did in the Jerusalem Temple, it was never seen as part of Christian obligation); there was no developed must-get-it-right liturgy (consider the different early forms of Last Supper traditions and even of the Lord’s Prayer itself!); there was no equivalent of the ancient sacred calendars. The early Christians did not inspect the entrails of birds, or observe them in flight, with a view to discerning divine purpose or favour; they did not consult books of oracles. Their use of Israel’s scriptures was of quite a different order from the way their pagan neighbours ‘used’, or at least presupposed, Homer and the poets. They did not order their lives around the harmony of the local *polis*, or take any responsibility for it. They had no priestly hierarchy. They did not believe that ‘the gods’ had any real existence, and so took no trouble to learn their names and be sure they pronounced them properly when they prayed. When Paul knew that Epaphroditus had been healed, he regarded it as a sign of the mercy of the one God, not as meaning that he now owed a cock to Asclepius. When he used the language of ‘mystery’, it was to speak of something which used to be hidden but was now in principle revealed to all the world. This is, broadly speaking, the reason for the verdict that many have reached, that earliest Christianity, including that of Paul, was in first-century terms not a ‘religion’. That verdict was shared by their contemporaries, who saw them

as ‘atheists’ – a term which now, to some, indicates a tough-minded resolve not to be taken in by religious superstition, but which then carried a profound anti-social stigma. ‘Atheists’ were, by definition, people who were not playing their part in keeping the gods and the city together, in sustaining the multi-faceted social and civic harmony upon which all else depended. They posed an implicit threat to social stability and security.

And yet. When we put together the question raised by chapter 4 above with the worldview-analysis we offered in Part II, we find a significantly different picture, which does in my view justify the use of the word ‘religion’, albeit in a sense redefined, as everything else was for Paul, around Jesus himself. Paul used the *language* of sacrifice, to correspond to a reality which, though it did not involve the killing of animals, certainly involved realities of space, time and matter. He believed in divine guidance, though he did not go to Delphi or anywhere similar to seek it. He used Israel’s sacred scriptures, not in the way Cicero and his colleagues might have used the Sibylline Oracles, nor in the way they thought of Homer and the poets, but nevertheless in a way which spoke of the ancient sources and traditions of life upon which he was drawing afresh and with which he intended to stand in at least some continuity. Certain ancient narratives in particular – we shall look at the role of the exodus-story presently – were foundational not only for his thinking but for certain things which he and his communities *did*. And, in particular (here this chapter links arms closely with the previous one), there were various things that Paul and his followers did which he regarded as binding them closely not only to one another but to the one God, one lord whom they worshipped. If a ‘religion’ in the ancient world was the system of signs, including myths and rites, by which people were ‘bound’ together (assuming the link of *religio* with *religare*)³⁶ as a civic unity in which gods and humans both shared, the whole of Part II above provides evidence that Paul saw the common life of those *en Christō* as precisely that: a united community, whose *politeuma* was in the heavenly places, and whose complex unity was both expressed in and powerfully reinforced by the radically new kind of sacrifice, the very different kind of

celebration, the attention to ancient scriptures, the prayers and particularly the special and symbolic 'rites' of baptism and eucharist.

From this binding together all kinds of other results followed. These showed that, for Paul at least, those who belonged to the Messiah were a new kind of *polis*, a non-geographical and non-ethnic *polis* to be sure, but nevertheless a real community of actual human beings stretching across space and, it seems, back through time as far as those Paul refers to as 'our fathers', the exodus generation, and 'our father' Abraham himself. When, in other words, we put the eighteenth-century definitions of 'religion' firmly to one side and ask ourselves about the first-century definition instead, we find that Paul was indeed teaching, operating and living within something we might very well call *religio*, however much it had been redefined. This *religio* was bound to appear as a radical variation on that of his Jewish contemporaries. We find, in particular, this *religio* was the means by which Paul believed that the one God who had made himself known in and through the one lord, and was active by the one spirit, was 'binding' this single community to himself, much as the *religio* of Rome was supposed to bind gods and mortals together in a single theopolitical harmony. When we look at Paul and his communities with first-century eyes, these conclusions are, I submit, unavoidable.

This, for instance, is part of what the remarkable appeal to unity in Philippians 2.1–4 is all about. The appeal is, of course, backed up by a succinct statement of what others might call (though Paul did not) the Christians' foundation 'myth', namely the story of Jesus himself. And it issues in what, again, others might call an 'ethic'. Religion by another name?

[\(ii\) Baptism: the Jesus-Shaped Exodus](#)

My main quarrel with Theissen's stimulating account of primitive Christian religion is that he does not give nearly enough space to exploring the exodus-story as the key backdrop to several features of Paul's implied 'religion'. He is aware of it, of course, but ironically it seems to function for

him more as Homer might have functioned for an educated Roman, as a distant source of themes and imagery rather than the founding ‘myth’ in a fuller sense. But perhaps the best place to begin a brief treatment of baptism as ‘religion’, complementing what was said earlier in other contexts, is with the passage where Paul most obviously sees it in relation to the binding together of the single community in fellowship with the one God, one lord and one spirit:

Now about things relating to the spirit’s work, my brothers and sisters, I don’t want you to remain ignorant. You know that when you were still pagans you were led off, carried away again and again, after speechless idols. So I want to make it clear to you that nobody who is speaking by God’s spirit ever says ‘Jesus be cursed!’; and nobody can say ‘Jesus is lord!’, except by the holy spirit.

There are different types of spiritual gifts, but the same spirit; there are different types of service, but the same lord; and there are different types of activity, but it is the same God who operates all of them in everyone. The point of the spirit being revealed in each one is so that all may benefit ...

Let me explain. Just as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is the Messiah. For we all were baptized into one body, by one spirit – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and we were all given one spirit to drink.³⁷

‘When you were still pagans’: the word here is *ethnē*, ‘nations’, but the context (a description of ‘pagan’ worship) makes it clear that Paul is giving the word a ‘religious’ colouring – and contrasting that with something similar but different. Instead of the ecstatic utterance of pagan worship, there is an ecstatic utterance of Christian worship, and you can tell the difference because the one will reject Jesus and the other will hail him as *kyrios*, lord. The work of the holy spirit is precisely to bind the worshipper to the Messiah in glad allegiance. The one God, spoken of as we saw before in three different ways, shares in the common life of this new community, and the community shares in the life of the divine: the same spirit, the same lord, the same God, operating all these things in everyone. This is precisely what *religio* meant in the ancient world of Paul’s day – except that it is now all reorganized around Jesus.

The whole passage is of course about the *unity* of the ‘body’, where the ‘body’ consists of all the baptized. The frequently observed parallel

between Paul's use of 'body' metaphors and the same imagery in Stoic political thought is likely to have been at least in the back of Paul's mind, and with similar intent.³⁸ He is talking, however, about a new 'body', a new kind of civic community, in which precisely the normal distinctions by which civic life was marked – ethnic and social groupings – were now irrelevant. But in the front of Paul's mind, as we can see from a similar train of thought two chapters earlier, is the ancient narrative of the exodus, the 'myth' (in that sense) by which the 'religious' act of baptism means what it means:

I don't want you to be ignorant, my brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all went through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank, you see, from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Messiah.³⁹

The double use of water in this passage – the water of the Red Sea through which the Israelites passed and the water which flowed from the rock for them to drink in the desert – is easily the best explanation for the otherwise initially puzzling double reference in chapter 12 (we were all baptized ... and given one spirit to drink). The Messiah's people, for Paul, are thus the *new-exodus* people, formed as was ancient Israel into 'a people' by the *redeeming action* of the one God on their behalf and by the *sovereign and holy presence* of the one God in their midst, leading them in the pillar of cloud and fire and sustaining them on their journey. And baptism, it here becomes clear, is indeed (to use the old theological language) the 'outward and visible' sign of entry into the Messiah's people, defining them just as surely as the crossing of the Red Sea defined the people whom Abraham's God brought out of Egypt. The emphasis on differentiated unity in the rest of the chapter merely underscores the basic point: that the 'religious' act of baptism, resonating with the ancient 'myth' of exodus now reworked around Jesus and the spirit, 'binds' the baptized to the one God and constitutes them as an actual, not merely a theoretical or 'invisible', community. Paul is already aware, as later ecclesiastical theorists would be aware, of the sharp problems, both theological and pastoral, which follow

from that affirmation. That is (one of the reasons) why he writes 1 Corinthians 10. But already, even with this one short passage, we find his ‘religion’ taking shape.

It is, however, a religion into which one *enters*, in a way that was basically not true for Roman religion, with the mysteries as the obvious exception. The ancient Romans had various ceremonies marking the entry of a young citizen upon adult life and responsibilities, but so far as I am aware there was no rite that a native-born Roman needed to go through in order to ‘belong’ to the divine-and-human solidarity of the community, or that a foreigner coming in needed to submit to before being able to join in the ‘religious’ festivals in which the civic life of the city was celebrated and sustained. The *polis* was not a ‘mystery’. One can see, from this absence of any formal parallel, how easily earlier generations of scholars were led to postulate that there must therefore have been ‘derivation’ at this point, not from civic religion, but from the mystery religions themselves. They, after all, specialized in ‘initiation’ ceremonies, leading to membership in a kind of inner family which shared sacred meals and gave mutual encouragement to follow a particular way of life. But, despite the continuing sense among some that the ‘disproofs’ of such derivation – which have been substantial – cannot really have meant quite what they said, there are in fact no links between Paul’s view of baptism and the actual ‘mystery religions’ for which we have evidence.⁴⁰

Has Paul then ‘derived’ his view of baptism from Jewish ‘washings’ such as proselyte baptism? Not obviously. Does he indicate an analogy between baptism and circumcision? Yes, to some extent; Paul makes that point in Colossians 2.11–12, though it does not appear loadbearing for any large elements of his argument, and Paul develops the idea of baptism there in terms of the death and resurrection of Jesus (as in Romans 6, for which see below), whereas circumcision has only a tenuous link to such ideas.⁴¹ Does it trace back to John the Baptist? Yes, certainly. But John the Baptist himself was looking back to a much more obvious derivation, to which Paul alludes over and over again: the exodus.

John's baptism symbolically evoked the exodus. That cannot have been accidental. Israel's God, he believed, was calling out a new, renewed people, and he would himself shortly appear in person in their midst. Baptism, most obviously, involves going through water; that is the link Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 10.1. Baptism involves setting the slaves free; that is the link he makes in Romans 6, where it takes its place as part of a much larger redrawn exodus-narrative. Baptism invokes the gift and the presence of the spirit, as in the exodus the living presence of YHWH accompanied the people out of Egypt and came to dwell in the tabernacle, the forerunner of the Jerusalem Temple. Only when we bring the Exodus-story out from the shadows of a mythological background and place it in the full spotlight can we understand where Paul's idea of 'initiation', of *entering* the community, comes from. Jews and gentiles, slave and free, and (as in Galatians 3.28) male and female: all alike need to be baptized if they are to belong, to be part of *Christos*. They are to become people in whom the spirit now dwells: living temples. The reason the first Christians, Paul included, needed a rite of initiation, which the mainstream pagan *religio* lacked, was not because they were inventing a new mystery religion, but because they believed that the new exodus had occurred, and with it *kainē ktisis*, new creation. Sanders was right to see that 'getting in' was hugely important for Paul and his churches, and indeed right to see that the model for this in the Jewish world was the mighty covenantal act of the one God in the exodus. Ironically, he failed to draw out the fact that the reason Paul needed to highlight 'getting in', not only with baptism but with his whole theology of justification, was not that he was constructing a new religion as it were in parallel with Judaism, but because he believed that the one God had at last done the new thing he had promised, and that the radical nature of this new thing demanded a fresh start for all. The difference between Paul and his own native context had to do with eschatology, not with a critique of, or a parallel attempt at, 'religion'. What Paul believed about the people of God, on the basis of what he believed about Jesus, demanded that he teach and practise the rite of baptism; not that Paul, if his Corinthian disclaimer is any indication, seems to have done much baptizing himself.⁴²

‘Getting in’, then, was not a general religious category for which Paul had his own local variation. It was not even a category that first-century Jews were much bothered about. The cases of proselytes, and of converts like Aseneth in the famous novella, are much discussed by scholars because they seem to offer partial parallels to the idea of Christian ‘conversion’, but in the last analysis they are a blind alley. To judge both from second-Temple literature and from the rabbis, ‘getting in’ was not a big question. They did not even view the exodus that way; why should they have? If Paul went back to it, as clearly he did, it was because *the idea of ‘getting in’, in the form we know it in Paul, including its significant place among other ideas, was itself a Christian innovation*, necessitated by the unexpected and shocking unveiling of God’s age-old plan in the death and resurrection of the Messiah. As with Paul’s use of biblical expressions which just happened to have Caesar-resonances, so here it is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that when Paul, developing his exodus-based theology, spoke of people ‘entering into’ *Christos*, and so on, he may have had a sense of confrontation. He may, also, have had a sense that the transformation of character which he believed happened by the work of the spirit through the gospel had some analogies with the soul-struggles described by some philosophers. But he derived his theology of ‘getting in’, as symbolized in baptism, from his reinterpretation of the exodus in the light of Jesus.

The essentially ‘religious’ character of the rite is highlighted earlier in 1 Corinthians by Paul’s emphasis on the *name* of Jesus the Messiah. (We recall the vital importance, in pagan religion, of getting the name right when addressing or invoking a god.)

Well! Has the Messiah been cut up into pieces? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into Paul’s name? I’m grateful to God that I didn’t baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that none of you could say that you were baptized into *my* name.⁴³

And the point of being baptized into this name is intimately linked with the Messiah’s cross:

This is the point, you see: the Messiah didn’t send me to baptize; he sent me to announce the gospel! Not with words of wisdom, either, otherwise the Messiah’s cross would lose its power.⁴⁴

This is further linked to the new sense of community identity – again, founded on the holiness expected of exodus-people – which for the Corinthians was so difficult to understand and for Paul so necessary to emphasize:

But you were washed clean; you were made holy; you were put back to rights – in the name of the lord, King Jesus, and in the spirit of our God.⁴⁵

The close analogies with the other passages noted above make it highly likely that this is indeed a reference to baptism, drawing out its implications, as one might expect from an exodus-concept, in terms of holiness on the one hand and ‘justification’ on the other, and all in the ‘name’ of Jesus. And this connection helps, I suggest, to understand why Paul came to regard baptism as a ‘washing’.⁴⁶ Here too there is a biblical background,⁴⁷ and the likelihood is that Paul is not so much thinking of specific second-Temple Jewish ‘washings’, but rather (a) of the exodus itself as a passage through water and (b) of the prophetic promise of personal and covenantal renewal, bringing these two together to form a powerful symbol of leaving behind the old life of slavery and sin and being renewed by the spirit.

Behind it all, of course, stand the strange words of Jesus himself, subsequently interpreted by the earliest church in the light of the events which swiftly followed. He had spoken cryptically of ‘a baptism’ with which he had to be baptized, and it was obvious with hindsight that this referred to his death.⁴⁸ The confluence of those words, and those events, with the dramatic work of John the Baptist by which the start of Jesus’ public career had been signalled, and with the fact that Jesus’ death and resurrection had taken place precisely at the time of the Passover, meant that myth, history and prophetic symbolism rushed together with explosive force. In the new world that Jesus’ followers believed had been launched by his resurrection and the gift of his spirit, baptism retained the meaning it seems already to have had during Jesus’ public career – identification with his kingdom-movement – and to have deepened its resonance with the exodus on the one hand and with his death on the other. Already by the time

Paul was writing to Corinth, less than twenty-five years after those events, he could let down the pail of this or that argument into that overflowing, over-determined well of meaning and draw out whatever he needed. And what he mostly needed were ways of reminding his congregations of the two things which we saw in Part II to be central to the entire symbolic system of his worldview: the *unity* of the *ekklēsia*, and its *holiness*.

This is, one might say, the rebirth not just of a community, not just of the individuals within it, but of the very notion of ‘religion’ itself. Paul had no time for, no truck with, the pagan religion all around him. But he practised, and explained, a rite by which, he believed, people of every sort were brought into solidarity with the one God through the one lord, and were made temples of the one Spirit; a rite with its meaning derived from a millennium-old narrative and having the effect of binding together a particular community and shaping its communal life. Any intelligent Roman, hearing all this, would say: this is *religio* all right, though it is quite different from anything we have imagined or experienced in our world.

Exactly this sense of exodus-shaped freedom from slavery, and of solidarity with the Messiah in his new life, is what we find in the other classic Pauline passage on baptism:

Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into the Messiah, Jesus, were baptized into his death? That means that we were buried with him, through baptism, into death, so that, just as the Messiah was raised from the dead through the father’s glory, we too might behave with a new quality of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection ...

... So don’t allow sin to rule in your mortal body, to make you obey its desires. Nor should you present your limbs and organs to sin to be used for its wicked purposes. Rather present yourselves to God, as people alive from the dead, and your limbs and organs to God, to be used for the righteous purposes of his covenant. Sin won’t actually rule over you, you see, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Don’t you know that if you present yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you really are slaves of the one you obey, whether that happens to be sin, which leads to death, or obedience, which leads to final vindication? Thank God that, though you were once slaves to sin, you have become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were committed. You were freed from sin, and now you have been enslaved to God’s covenant justice ...⁴⁹

The passage goes on, exploring the ‘slave/free’ contrast further and further, and pointing forwards to the classic ‘exodus’-passage in Romans 8.12–25, which we studied at some length earlier. We should be in no doubt that, for Paul, baptism gained its meaning from two primary poles around which it revolved: the exodus on the one hand, and the death and resurrection of Jesus on the other. Paul regarded it as the God-given means by which people would ‘get in’ to the new solidarity, the new humanity whose primary characteristic was that it had been freed from sin by death and resurrection, and whose primary obligations therefore now included holiness and, as in 1 Corinthians and elsewhere, unity. This is *religio*. Paul’s version.

(iii) The Living Sacrifice

The language Paul uses in Romans 6 points to another feature which again we are bound to see as a kind of *religio* manqué. The Christians offered no animal sacrifices. But Paul was not shy of using the language of sacrifice, and even priesthood, to express the primary obligation of those *en Christō*, namely, the obligation to ‘present’ one’s body, one’s whole self to the one God. This primary obligation was the principal thing that had to be done over and over again, just as animal sacrifice was done in both the pagan and the Jewish worlds as the means by which the gods and humans could live together in harmony, solidarity and in community, and in particular the means by which the normal agricultural basis for human life would be blessed and assured of continuity and fruitfulness. The word ‘present’, *paristēmi/parastanō*, used in the passage just quoted from Romans 6 when Paul is speaking of ‘presenting’ one’s body to God for his purposes, has a wide range of meaning. But it can also be used much more specifically as a technical term for the ‘presenting’ of a sacrifice.⁵⁰ That is just what we find a few chapters later:

So, my dear family, this is my appeal to you by the mercies of God: offer [*parastēsai*] your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Worship like this brings your mind into line with God’s.⁵¹ What’s more, don’t let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age.

Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God's will is, what is good, acceptable and complete.

Through the grace which was given to me, I have this to say to each one of you: don't think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think. Rather, think soberly, in line with faith, the true standard which God has marked out for each of you. As in one body we have many limbs and organs, you see, and all the parts have different functions, so we, many as we are, are one body in the Messiah, and individually we belong to one another.⁵²

This passage, set at the head of the final section of Paul's most carefully planned and carefully balanced letter, underlines precisely the points that have been made already in relation to baptism. This is 'religion' all right – sacrifice, worship and the knitting together thereby of the single community in fellowship one with another and not least with the God who is being worshipped. We in the modern west, most of whom have seldom seen an animal being killed, let alone killed within a religious ritual, let alone had to do such a thing ourselves, will no doubt find it as difficult to think our way into the shock and drama of Paul's opening metaphor here as we do to appreciate the enormity of his telling the Corinthian Christians that they were the temple of the living God. Sacrifice happened all the time in Paul's day, in every city in the greco-roman world. One was never far away either from an animal about to be killed or from the smell of a recently sacrificed animal being cooked and eaten. The *polis* was bound together by such things, just as individuals were bound thereby to the specific gods with whom they were hoping to do business.

The business of those *en Christō* was the business of the new age, of the new creation for which the mind needed to be renewed; and for that the body, the whole public person, had to be offered to the one God. The death that had taken place in baptism, as in Romans 6, had been matched by the resurrection to new life. The newly alive body belonged to God, was to be offered to God, was to be available for worship and work in the new projects that were now beginning. Once again Paul emphasizes the unity of the family, both in the passage quoted and in the more specific exhortations which follow. That is what *religio* is meant to generate, as much now in the new creation, *mutatis mutandis*, as was supposed to be the case in the cities and towns of the old.

It is perhaps worth saying, as well, that just as we in the modern west do not instantly resonate to the metaphor of animal sacrifice, so those of us who belong to churches of the Reformation may need to distance ourselves, in reading Paul, from one of that movement's key assumptions: that 'sacrifice' was itself 'something humans did to earn favour with God' – in other words, part of the 'works-righteousness' which Luther assumed to be the target of Paul's polemic. In particular, as a special case and second-order problem within that, the Reformers stressed in their eucharistic theology what Paul and the author to the Hebrews both stress, that the death of Jesus was a single, unrepeatable event,⁵³ so that any attempt to make it happen again, through 'the sacrifice of the Mass', ran the immediate risk of humans trying to do all over again what Jesus had already done uniquely, offering a blasphemous insult to 'the finished work of Christ'. The eucharistic liturgy many of us Anglicans knew from childhood spoke of the 'one, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction', making it clear beyond cavil that, whatever the officiant was doing in presiding at the service, he was *not* attempting to sacrifice Christ all over again.⁵⁴ Our concern here is not with the accuracy of those assessments of late medieval Catholicism, but with the legacy of such polemics within the protestant movements that have shaped contemporary biblical scholarship. Paul seems blithely innocent of any problem at this point. Of course, the 'sacrifice' of which he speaks in Romans 12.1 is to take place in the context of 'the mercies of God'; but he would almost certainly have said that about the entire Jewish sacrificial system. He would, I think, have made a Sanders-like response to the whole question: everything the scriptures commanded in terms of sacrificial cult, as indeed lawkeeping in general, was a matter of response to the covenant love and mercy of the one God. True, pagans spoke and wrote as though their sacrifices might bend the ear of this god, or twist the arm of that one; but that was not Paul's view of Israel's cult, and in using the language of 'religion' in the way he did he gave no hostages to the fickle fortunes of later theological debates.

Once you let a metaphor out of its hutch, of course, it can meet other metaphors and do what metaphors do best, at least in Paul: get together in

new formations and generate further offspring. We noted in an earlier chapter Paul's fresh use of temple-imagery in relation to the church, and to individual Christians. That is obviously another spoke from the same wheel. But Paul can also speak of his own work in explicitly sacrificial terms:

I have written to you very boldly at some points, calling things to your mind through the grace which God has given me to enable me to be a minister of King Jesus for the nations, working in the priestly service of God's good news, so that the offering of the nations may be acceptable, sanctified in the holy spirit.⁵⁵

Yes, even if I am to be poured out like a drink-offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I shall celebrate, and celebrate jointly with you all. In the same way, you should celebrate, yes, and celebrate with me.⁵⁶

We should not miss the point of the last line in that second passage – in the letter to Philippi especially, where as we saw in the previous chapter Paul seems to be specially conscious of the Roman imperial context. 'Celebrate' in Paul's world did not just mean 'feel happy', or 'open a bottle of champagne when you pass the exam'. Celebration meant festivals; it meant processions; it meant garlands of flowers, street parties, games and athletic contests (Paul has just referred in the previous verse to the 'race' that he has been running). And celebration meant, above all, sacrifice: at the height of the event the participants would end up in the temple of whichever god was playing host to the festivities, and there animals would be slaughtered and offered up, with all the trimmings, including libations of wine poured on top of the sacrifice. Paul sees the active faith of the Philippian Christians as being like that. There is a celebration going on (he says it again and again in this letter), and at the heart of it their Jesus-shaped *pistis* is both the sacrifice (*thysia*) and service (*leitourgia*, the word from which we get 'liturgy'). This is what the Jesus-festival looks like. If he, Paul, is called to face martyrdom right now, his death will be like the drink-offering poured out on top of it all, and that should simply increase the level of celebration. The lavish nature of Paul's developed metaphor reflects the lavish way in which he had taken the most central event of daily, weekly and annual pagan *religio* and made it serve the cause of the Messiah.

In particular, the metaphor does what it does within the strong and repeated call in Philippians for the unity and solidarity of the church. Philippians 2.1–4, as we saw earlier, is one of the most remarkable appeals for unity, resonating back into chapter 1.27–30 and on into 2.12–18 as a whole. This sacrifice is part of what happens when the little community, facing persecution, is learning to ‘work out its own salvation’, to realize (as a pagan community might believe about its own divinities, not least at times of festival and sacrifice) that ‘God himself is the one who’s at work among you’ (2.13). Even in what appears at first glance to be a random metaphor, then, Paul is still working with the assumption that ‘religion’ is what strengthens and unites the *polis* – with the difference that the *polis* in question consists of the Messiah’s people, those whose *politeuma* is ‘in the heavens’ against the day when heaven and earth are brought together at last (3.20–1). Exactly the same effect is created when he returns to the metaphor in the closing of the letter, as he thanks the Philippians for the gift they had sent him. ‘It’s like a sacrifice’, he says, ‘with a beautiful smell, a worthy offering, giving pleasure to God.’⁵⁷ Mutual generosity within the *koinōnia* of the Messiah’s people, in other words, functions as part of the God-given means by which the community is bound together (in this case, the apostle and this particular church) with God himself both taking the initiative and being delighted with the result. This is the emphatically Christian version of the *religio* by which, through sacrifices, a community in the Roman world would have hoped to strengthen the bonds, both human and divine, that held them together.⁵⁸

The first of the two passages quoted above, from Romans 15, has a slightly different flavour. Its primary allusion is not to pagan festivities, but to the regular procession of Jews from the far-off lands of the Diaspora, coming to Jerusalem for the great Jewish festivals. Here, in other words, Paul is adapting *Jewish* ‘religion’, exactly in line with the eschatological vision which he already articulated in (among other passages) Romans 10. Now that we are living in the moment of covenant renewal promised in Deuteronomy 30, the passage is saying, it is time for people (such as Paul himself) to be sent out to tell the world about Israel’s Messiah, in fulfilment

of Isaiah's prophecies. And, just as in those same prophecies people would stream into Jerusalem from all directions to worship the one God, so Paul is now heading for Jerusalem with the money that he has collected to help the impoverished believers there. Paul seems to see this particular ministry, which has involved a good deal of labour and (as we see in 2 Corinthians) heart-searching and careful explanation, within the metaphor of priesthood and sacrifice. If in Philippians 2 he is to be the drink-offering on the sacrifice, here the gentile Christians are the sacrifice and he is the priest who is presenting them at the altar. This whole picture, we should remind ourselves, is a *metaphor*. Paul has not reinscribed Jerusalem as the centre of the earth, and the basic movement of his mission is centrifugal, not centripetal, as the systematic exposition of Romans 10 indicates. But the metaphor is too good to pass up.

Once again we are witnessing what we might call *religion reborn*. If this metaphor of 'birth' reminds us of babies, it is perhaps appropriate to think of the old rule about not throwing babies out with the bathwater. Paul has rejected pagan religion in all its works and ways. But 'religion' itself – centred upon the celebratory offering of sacrifice, through which humans and the divine presence are bound together in the solidarity of one community and its consequent fruitfulness – is something Paul sees fulfilled and transformed in and through Jesus. Jewish 'religion' was, for him, a signpost pointing forwards to this new reality. Pagan 'religion' was a parody of it, distorting it in line with the distorted and dehumanizing pseudo-divinities of the pagan pantheon. But 'religion' itself: if Paul had wanted to warn his hearers against it, he would have done better not to speak in these ways of the true sacrifice, the new priesthood, the drink-offering poured out on top of the celebratory sacrifice.

All depended, of course, on the one sacrifice which Paul believed had been offered when Jesus gave up his life in obedience to the Father's will. The sacrificial nature of Jesus' death, itself related initially (it seems) to the fact that Jesus died at Passover-time and spoke of his death in relation to that Passover and to the 'new covenant' promised by Jeremiah, does not fall neatly into an easy systematic package of ideas, either in Paul or in other

early Christian writers (though many of them know it and use related notions).⁵⁹ Faced with corruption in the church, Paul uses the Passover theme as a way of saying that the corrupting element is like yeast which works its way through the lump of dough. Being Passover-people, they must get rid of the yeast:

Don't you know that a little yeast works its way through the whole lump of dough? Cleanse out the old yeast, so that you can be a new lump, the yeast-free lump you really are. It's Passover-time, you see, and the Passover lamb – the Messiah, I mean – has already been sacrificed! What we now have to do is to keep the festival properly: none of the yeast of the old life, and none of the yeast of depravity and wickedness, either. What we need is yeast-free bread, and that means sincerity and truth.⁶⁰

The Messiah, then, is the Passover sacrifice, and his followers must think through what that means for their whole life. That, we may suspect, is the original and controlling sacrificial image for the death of Jesus, but it is by no means the only one. Paul refers to Jesus as the sin-offering;⁶¹ as the *hilastērion*, the place and means of propitiation;⁶² and, in a memorable passage, an offering with which God is properly delighted:

So you should be imitators of God, like dear children. Conduct yourselves in love, just as the Messiah loved us, and gave himself for us, as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice to God.⁶³

That passage, too, grows out of the command to unity, and goes on at once to speak of the need for holiness. 'Religion' in general was all about the unity of the community; first-century Jewish 'religion', always with exodus and Temple in mind, was all about holiness. Paul scoops up the whole package, reshapes it around the Messiah, and sets the lively metaphors scampering around in celebration.

[\(iv\) The Breaking of Bread](#)

Everything we have said so far about exodus, baptism and sacrifice comes into new focus when Paul speaks of the 'breaking of bread', the eucharist. The intense little passages in which he addresses two particular problems associated with the church's regular celebratory meal are scarcely enough to

provide a full ‘Pauline theology of the eucharist’. They nevertheless tell us enough to see that, for Paul, this shared meal was (a) anchored firmly in the exodus-story, the Passover-narrative, which had found a strange new fulfilment in Jesus, (b) understood as the intimate sharing of life and presence between the lord and his people and (c) designed to express the unity, solidarity and holiness of the community. This is a classic piece of Pauline rethinking and reworking of *religio*. It is a Jewish tradition focused on Jesus, resulting in a rite which upstages the sacrificial meals of pagan worship, and must not be confused with them – and certainly must not imitate the social hierarchy embodied in such pagan meals – but yet can be spoken of by analogy with them. This is a subtle but vital point.

The first element here – the exodus-context – we have already noted. Paul, warning the Corinthians not to behave like the Israelites in the wilderness, aligns the crossing of the Red Sea with baptism, and the wilderness feedings with the eucharist. ‘They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,’ he says. ‘They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink.’⁶⁴ This then sets up the argument against the immoral behaviour which characterized the wilderness generation and which threatens to characterize the Corinthians as well (10.6–13). It is not least for that reason that, despite allowing Christians to eat any meat sold in the market-place (8.8; 10.25–7), Paul insists that they must not go into idol-temples and share in the meals that take place there. This, he says, is to put the sharing of the Messiah’s life in direct competition with the sharing of the life of the *daimonia* who hide out within the hollow sham of idolatry, like petty criminals squatting in an empty but echoing mansion.

The fact that he can make this parallel speaks volumes for what he thinks is actually taking place at the eucharist:

Therefore, my dear people, run away from idolatry. I’m speaking as to intelligent people: you yourselves must weigh my words. The cup of blessing which we bless is a sharing in the Messiah’s blood, isn’t it? The bread we break is a sharing in the Messiah’s body, isn’t it? There is one loaf; well, then, there may be several of us, but we are one body, because we all share the one loaf.⁶⁵

This ‘sharing’ in the Messiah’s body and blood is conceived not only on the model of the ‘sharing’ which was taking place at pagan meals, but also on the model of the ‘sharing’ which Israel, from the time of the exodus through to Paul’s own day, believed was happening ‘in the altar’, a reverent periphrasis for the one God himself:

Consider ethnic Israel. Those who eat from the sacrifices share in the altar, don’t they? So what am I saying? That idol-food is real, or that an idol is a real being? No: but when they offer sacrifices, they offer them to demons, not to God. And *I don’t want you to be table-partners with demons*. You can’t drink the cup of the lord and the cup of demons. You can’t share in the table of the lord and the table of demons. Surely you don’t want to provoke the lord to jealousy? We aren’t stronger than him, are we?⁶⁶

Here, as often in Paul, ‘sharing’ can be expressed as *koinōnia*. Those who ‘share in the altar’ in ethnic Israel are *koinōnoi tou thysiastēriou*, ‘sharers of the altar’; being ‘table-partners with demons’ is *koinōnoi tōn daimoniōn*, ‘sharers of demons’. Alternatively, in speaking of ‘sharing in the table’, whether of the lord or of demons, Paul uses *metechein*, which points in much the same direction. The point in either case has to do with *a sharing of common life*. As in ethnic Israel those who eat the sacrificial meat offered in the Temple are sharing in the very life of Israel’s God, who has promised to meet with his people at that altar; as in pagan sacrificial meals those who eat the sacrifices suppose themselves to be sharing in the very life of Zeus, Athene or whoever (whereas, in Paul’s analysis, they are actually sharing in the sordid and squalid life of the *daimonia*); so those who share ‘the table of the lord’ are actually sharing the lord’s own life. If this were not so, there would be no competition, no provoking to jealousy.⁶⁷ The first element we noted (the exodus-context) thus leads Paul directly and naturally to the second element (the intimate sharing of life and presence between the lord and his people). That is the context within which Paul makes his appeal for the third element, the unity, solidarity and holiness of the community. Not only are idol-temples themselves off limits for Paul’s churches. The meat itself is part of God’s good creation, and can be eaten without any problem by those who know it to be just that; but if a fellow Christian is going to be

wounded in conscience at the sight of a believer eating idol-food, that believer must abstain.⁶⁸

This discussion of the eucharist, brought into 1 Corinthians 10 almost incidentally as part of Paul's distinction between giving permission to eat idol-meat and warning against going into idol-temples, prepares the way for the direct discussion of the meal itself in chapter 11. All this takes place, of course, within the sequence of arguments for the unity of the church which stretches back to the opening of the letter and leads on to the great climax in chapters 12 (the 'body of the Messiah'), 13 (the poem about love) and 14 (order, rather than chaos, in public worship). This time the particular aspect of unity that seems under threat is the unity of rich and poor within the one fellowship. There may be more than that going on in the rather dense introduction (11.17–22), but not less, and it is beside our present purpose to enquire further.⁶⁹ When the *ekklēsia* assembles to celebrate the Lord's Supper, everyone seems to be bringing their own food, which means that those with plenty are well fed while those who have nothing are shamed (11.22). The similarity between this situation and many social occasions in the ancient world, at which distinctions of class and wealth were strongly marked, is all too obvious, and flies in the face of Paul's entire vision of the one church, the central symbol of its own worldview.

The crucial verse for our purposes is 11.29, where Paul declares that if people eat and drink 'without recognizing the body' they are eating and drinking judgment on themselves. What is this 'body', and what does it mean to recognize it? The context provides a strong argument in favour of taking the 'body' as the united community, the Messiah's single family. The introduction in 11.17–22 highlights the inappropriate social divisions that were tarnishing the gatherings, and the conclusion to the chapter in 11.33–4 addresses the same point ('treat one another as honoured guests by waiting for each other'). It is not unimportant, as well, that the next chapter focuses on the *ekklēsia* as 'the body of the Messiah' in the sense of the single unity containing many different 'members'. All this strongly suggests that in the crucial verse 11.29 Paul has in mind the importance of 'recognizing the body' in the sense of 'recognizing that we who eat and drink this meal are a

single body’, as he had already said in 10.17 (‘there may be several of us, but we are one body, because we all share the one loaf’). The ‘unworthiness’ of which he speaks in verse 27 (‘anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the lord’) must then refer, in the present instance, to the kind of selfish or snobbish behaviour described in verses 17–22, though no doubt Paul would have said the same about any other kind of ‘unworthiness’.

As often, however, Paul says slightly more by way of grounding for this point than might at first be thought necessary. As he does so, he gives us a window right into the heart of the ‘religion’, in the firmly first-century sense, which he took for granted:

This, you see, is what I received from the lord, and handed on to you. On the night when the lord Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, ‘This is my body; it’s for you! Do this as a memorial of me.’ He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink the cup, you are announcing the lord’s death until he comes.⁷⁰

This gives further content to what we already noted in relation to 1 Corinthians 10, where the exodus-context provides a strong indication that Paul sees the Lord’s Supper, if not exactly as a Passover meal, nevertheless closely related to it.⁷¹ As with everything else in Paul, this has been reframed by, and rethought around, the death of Jesus; the theme of *koinōnia* in the previous chapter, where the eating and drinking was seen as a real participation in the life of the lord, may indicate that the ‘memorial’ (*amamnēsis*) here is much more than simply an aid to the memory. Paul sees the eucharistic action as part of inaugurated eschatology, looking both back and forwards. You are announcing the lord’s death, he says, until he comes (verse 26). The present time, given its particular meaning by being the ‘present’ which follows from *this* ‘past’ and anticipates *this* ‘future’, is the time of the lord’s ‘presence’, the time when he is ‘announced’. As in the argument of the previous chapter, where the reality of sharing with the lord would precipitate a direct conflict if one were also to share with *daimonia*,

so here the reality of the ‘memorial’ and the ‘announcement’ are what give special force to the warning which follows:

It follows from this that anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the lord. Everyone should test themselves; that’s how you should eat the bread and drink the cup. You see, if you eat and drink without recognizing the body, you eat and drink judgment on yourself. That’s why several of you are weak and sick, and some have died. But if we learned how to judge ourselves, we would not incur judgment. But when we are judged by the lord, we are punished, so that we won’t be condemned along with the world.⁷²

Here again Paul has said somewhat more than he needs for his central argument. His main point is that if the eucharist is a real sharing in the lord and his death, then anything which fragments the unity of the lord’s single ‘body’ is a crime against the lord himself.⁷³ But once again he frames this within a larger eschatological picture. There is a final judgment coming, but just as for Christians the verdict has already been announced in the death of the Messiah, so any ‘judgment’ that is still to happen because of the continuing sin even of Christians must be brought forward from the future into the present. This is part of Paul’s larger picture of eschatology and judgment, and it reminds us that for Paul the element of *religio* was always framed within such a picture.⁷⁴

The eucharist thus clearly functions for Paul as a *rite*, complete with traditional words; as *a rite in which a ‘founding myth’ was rehearsed*, though in this case the ‘founding myth’ was an actual event which had occurred not long before; as *a rite in which the worshippers share the life of the divinity being worshipped*, though the divinity in question is a human being of recent memory; as *a rite dependent on a prior sacrifice*, albeit the very strange one of the crucifixion of that same human being; as *a rite which should bind the community together*, so that signs of disunity during the rite are a contradiction of its inner meaning; as *a rite which, if thus performed in the wrong way, will have bad consequences for that community*. Once again: any pagan who heard and grasped what Paul was saying here would conclude from each of these components, and particularly from their striking and dense combination, that this was indeed

part of a *religio*, even though it was quite unlike anything that had been imagined before. In the same way, any Jewish onlooker would see that the traditions of Israel, particularly the narrative of the exodus, had provided the framework for Paul's understanding. But, again, no Jew before the time of Jesus had imagined anything quite like this.⁷⁵

The truly remarkable thing, for anyone disposed to object to this argument (perhaps on the grounds that we had assumed that Paul had rejected 'religion' outright), is that as we saw with his astonishing christology he can clearly take these foundational points for granted. He assumes not only that the eucharist is central to the worshipping life of the Corinthians, but that it already has all these features. It has included from the beginning the narrative framework both of the events which led to Jesus' death ('on the night when [he] was betrayed'), of the meal he celebrated at that moment and of the words he spoke. Paul 'received' this 'from the lord', and he 'handed it on' to the Corinthians (11.23). This, as in 15.3, is the language of 'tradition', which once again has been deeply suspect in protestant circles but seems to be no problem to Paul. The theological and cultural sensitivities of the sixteenth century on the one hand and the modern period on the other should not prevent us from drawing the strictly historical conclusion that, in terms of the first century, what Paul was describing was a new, surprising but still recognizable type of *religio*.

(v) Prayer

Paul's description of the eucharist provides a rare glimpse of how his churches might have prayed. This is not the place to go into the early history of eucharistic liturgies. But it does seem likely that the public rehearsal of Jesus' last meal, and of the words he spoke on that occasion, already formed part of their public worship. The fact that other early eucharistic liturgies may be significantly different (we naturally think of *Didache* 9—10) is neither here nor there. What matters for our purposes is that Paul assumed that his communities would have a common life in which

prayer played a central role. In his world, communities which prayed together were bound together, and binding together was what *religio* meant and did.

The other signs of formal or semi-formal words of prayer in Paul are well known. We have already referred to the apparent revision of the *Shema* in 1 Corinthians 8.6, and I have suggested that Paul's new wording was in use not just as a theological formulation but, like its prototype, as a regular prayer: an invocation of the one God, one lord and a statement of exclusive personal loyalty to this divinity. There is also the fascinating, if to us frustrating, Aramaic cry of *Marana tha*, 'Our lord, come!', best explained as an already traditional element among Jesus' first followers in Palestine and remaining, untranslated, in the worshipping life of otherwise Greek-speaking churches.⁷⁶ This is paralleled by the cry of *Abba* which, again, Paul assumes to be normal among those in whom the Spirit has been at work through the gospel of Jesus.⁷⁷ This is obviously far too tiny a sample to admit of any generalizations, but we are bound to notice that the prayers in question consist of words, names or titles of God or Jesus. Perhaps one of the reasons for the preservation of the Aramaic form was that sense, common to religion in antiquity, that it was after all important to be accurate in the words with which one invoked the deity. Once again, even though Paul's *religio* was quite unlike anything else of the time, a *religio* it remained.

The glorious and potentially chaotic worshipping life of the church as we suddenly glimpse it in 1 Corinthians 14 makes the same ultimate point from a different angle. Paul was well aware that the phenomenon of ecstatic speech, 'glossolalia' (speaking in tongues) and related experiences, were common in the 'religious' world of his day. That is why he needs to issue a warning about apparently ecstatic speech which ends up cursing Jesus.⁷⁸ Thus, whereas in some circles today 'speaking in tongues' is regarded as something which marks Christians off from other religions, perhaps even something which marks off specially mature Christians from other members of the church, for Paul it was something which was paralleled and well known in very different settings. Like the eating and drinking in the

eucharist, at that level of generality the Christians were doing the same thing as their neighbours, up to the point at which one might ask what it all meant.

That is why, again, when Paul is discussing this particular ‘religious’ phenomenon of tongues, and the related phenomena of interpretation, prophecy and so on, the emphasis is on *unity*. The whole church must be ‘built up’ by what is said.⁷⁹ ‘God is the God, not of chaos, but of peace,’ he declares; so ‘everything should be done in a seemly fashion, and in proper order’.⁸⁰ Not for Paul the romantic protestant dream of a holy anarchy with the worshippers simply doing and saying what comes naturally or spontaneously. That retrojection of a much later cultural imperative is every bit as anachronistic as the retrojection into Paul’s day of elaborate liturgies or ecclesial hierarchies. Paul, in any case, expects public worship to include psalm-singing and ‘teaching’, as well as ‘revelations’, ‘tongues’ and ‘interpretations’.⁸¹ There are to be formal moments as well as informal, and the latter are not to lapse into chaos. Again, we do not need to pursue this in any detail, but just to note the point: anyone in Paul’s wider cultural context who read 1 Corinthians 14 would know that Paul was talking about one aspect of what they would call *religio*. Paul and his communities would know it too. Worship and invocation were part of the first thing for which Cicero used that word.

(vi) Discerning the Way

The other two things for which Cicero used the word *religio* are also paralleled in Paul, though again in radically different mode. For Cicero, the other two aspects were the taking of auguries and the consultation of ancient oracular texts. Paul did not, of course, use divination, or consult the entrails (or the flight-paths) of birds. He did not expect to be guided, or warned, by a sudden clap of thunder. But he believed that the divinity he invoked guided him, at least when he particularly needed it. Whatever we think of the historical value of Acts, it is noticeable that there are several moments when specific words from the lord give order and direction to

Paul's life, from his conversion itself through to the angelic encouragement he received shortly before the shipwreck.⁸² It is equally noticeable that there are several moments when we might have expected such things but none appear. Paul, Silas and Timothy go wandering off northwards through Asia Minor without knowing quite where they are going. The only guidance, for a while, is negative: they are forbidden to preach here, prevented from going there.⁸³ Many of Paul's decisions about where to go next, and when to move on, seem to have been taken on what we might think of as purely pragmatic or common-sense grounds, not least when he was being physically threatened or attacked and deemed it prudent to leave town in a hurry. If Paul urged his hearers to learn how to think things through, to develop a wise Christian mind, it was something he had had to do himself.⁸⁴ Certainly Luke has made no attempt to portray the apostolic mission in terms of constant 'supernatural' guidance, though that kind of 'intervention' does happen from time to time.

In Paul's own writings this kind of guidance seems at best oblique. He has long been intending to go to Rome, but things have got in the way. His journeyings have been planned on the basis of his overall understanding of God's work in and through him, not *ad hoc* because of particular sudden impulses – even if some might accuse him of such a thing.⁸⁵ God would use combinations of circumstances both to encourage him and to nudge him in a particular direction.⁸⁶ There might be occasional moments of 'revelation', but these are conspicuously rare.⁸⁷ As often as not, Paul sees the divine hand only in retrospect.⁸⁸ For the present, the attempt to discern divine intent carries a 'maybe' about with it. *Maybe*, he writes to Philemon about Onesimus, *this is the reason he was separated from you*. To believe in providence often means saying 'perhaps'.⁸⁹

All this might seem to lead to the paradoxical conclusion that Paul was less certain of the divine will, on a day-to-day basis, than his pagan counterparts. No doubt he would have said 'than his pagan counterparts *thought they were*', but the contrast is still interesting. This is balanced, however, not only by the sense that those who 'present their bodies' and

have their minds renewed, as in Romans 12.1–2, are in fact being led by the spirit, even though it may not seem so clear at the time, but also in particular by the solid grounding Paul claims both in Israel's scriptures and in the events concerning Jesus. We shall look at Paul's relation to the scriptures in chapter 15; for him, they were far more than any oracle, Sibylline or otherwise. True, he once describes them as 'God's oracles', but that has a special connotation in the context of one particular argument.⁹⁰ True, his own writings sometimes give hints of an 'oracular' style, though in my judgment the passages sometimes described as fresh oracles, unattached by any reasoning to the rest of the surrounding argument, are nothing of the kind.⁹¹ He saw the scriptures as much more than a rag-bag of sayings and cryptic wisdom, 'oracles' waiting to be decoded and applied randomly to this or that situation. They told the story of the one God, his world and his people, in such a way (Paul believed) as to lead the eye not only up to Jesus but on beyond, all the way to the expanding apostolic mission. What Paul thus loses by comparison with his pagan contemporaries in terms of augury, he more than makes up through the scriptures.

In particular, the recent events concerning Jesus provided Paul with a clear sense of how his own life and calling were to be shaped. This is evident from his extended apostolic apologia, and from his regular invocation of the Jesus-story in one way or another.⁹² The scriptures, together with the (usually implicit) story of Jesus as their proper if shocking fulfilment, thus take the place, within his *religio*, of the combination of augury, oracles and sacred books.⁹³ Once again, they are radically different sorts of things. But if an intelligent pagan, talking to Paul about his life, his thought and his worldview, were to hear him speaking about the things we have just listed, the conclusion might be reached that, though this was a very odd sort of *religio*, that was none the less what it was.

[3. Paul and 'Religion': Conclusion](#)

The point is now made and can be summed up briefly. When we look at Paul's worldview (Part II) and theology (Part III) in the light of the world of 'religion' we studied in chapter 4, we see both radical dissimilarity and perhaps surprising similarity. The differences are obvious, and would have been obvious to Paul's communities and their neighbours. Not only did the Christians not join in with the pagan religious customs, they did not have their own version (as did the Jews) of the most central 'religious' activity, namely animal sacrifice. But Paul was not shy about using the language and thought-forms of the *religio* of his day in relation to the activities which, as we saw, formed central elements of his praxis. Once we back off from the debates of the last two centuries in which the word 'religion' in its modern sense has played such a key role, often being muddled up with protestant fears about 'works-righteousness', and locate Paul instead within his own world, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain by recognizing that he, his communities and their neighbours would have seen the central praxis of the early Christians as itself a form of *religio*. All the marks are there.

Above all, we have noticed that the things which Paul's communities most characteristically did as part of their worship were seen by Paul, just as Jewish and pagan *religio* was seen by those who took part in it, as underlining and strengthening the unity of the community in question. Pagan *religio* bound together the *polis* and the gods in a single family. Paul believed in the one God, one lord of his revised Jewish monotheism, with the one spirit being poured out on all who shared this faith; and the 'religious' things he and his communities did, especially baptism and eucharist, constituted a similar binding together of the community both in itself and within the life of this single divinity. This was not, of course, a subtle attempt by Paul or his communities to put the one God in their debt, as anxious theologians have sometimes imagined. Part of what Paul believed about this one God was that, in Jesus, he had put the whole world in his debt, completely and for ever. That is why one of Paul's central motifs is gratitude. It is also why he seems to have turned the whole notion of debt on its head: the debt of love is the only form he permits.⁹⁴

All this opens up the possibility of future scholarly projects in relation to the historical comparison between the *religio* (in the first-century sense) of Paul and his communities and that of other first-century communities. Such a project would need to be clear, however, as the projects we discussed at the start of the present chapter were not entirely clear, about two things. First, *religio* in this sense stands in relation to ‘theology’ somewhat as the steering wheel of a car stands in relation to the map. They are not the same thing, and cannot be collapsed into one another. But they need each other. Without theology, *religio* might wander aimlessly all over the place. Without *religio*, theology might remain an abstract exercise. Second, if we were to study Paul’s *religio* in more detail, not least as a ‘comparative’ exercise, we would need to be clear that a vital part of his ‘theology’, built into his *religio* at every point, is *eschatology*. Paul did not see himself as setting up, founding, or taking part in a ‘religion’ which was in itself ‘superior’ to other ‘religions’. Seeing things that way, ironically, often begins in relativism and ends in supersessionism. Paul believed that the one God who had made the world had acted in a radical new way, in fulfilment of his promises to Israel. That, as we have seen – over against those who assume that ‘apocalyptic’ automatically means the death of all ‘religion’ – resulted in a new world, a new worldview and a new theology, which were expressed in what we might call *eschatological religion*: communal and personal activities which celebrated the radically new action of the one God, and which bound together the community of his worshippers with one another and with that God himself.

That multiple binding together is all-important, and Paul refers to it with one of his most important words. At the heart of the eschatological religion, both in its sense of the presence of the one God and in its innermost response to that one God, and working itself out immediately in the mutual bonding of Jesus’ followers, was what he called *agapē*, love. That, as we saw in our previous chapter, was part of what constituted the implicit challenge of the Christian gospel to the powers that ruled the world, not least through their own types of ‘religion’ and their own offers of

‘salvation’. It was also closely bound up with the other vital engagement between Paul and his wider environment: the question of philosophy.

¹ Subsequently published as Gunneweg 1977.

² On Barth’s polemic against ‘religion’, and the following of this by Martyn 1997a and b, see on the one hand the sharp comments of Ashton 2000, 23–5 (on Ashton’s own larger construct see below) and, on the other hand, Griffiths 2005, 674f. Griffiths’s conclusion (‘it may reasonably be doubted that a concept of religion usable for Christian thought can be salvaged’) refers to the modern concept of ‘religion’, not to the first-century *religio* which is my theme in the present chapter.

³ e.g. Dawkins 2006.

⁴ Most discussions of ‘religion’ in relation to Paul bypass the question of actual terminology, since Paul seldom, even including Acts and the Pastorals, uses Greek words which correspond to the Latin *religio*: cf. *deisidaimōn/-monia* (Ac. 25.19; 17.22); *eusebeia/-beō/-bēs* (1 Tim. 2.2; 3.16; 4.7, 8; 6.3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Tim. 3.5; Tit. 1.1 / Ac. 17.23; 1 Tim. 5.4 / Ac. 10.2, 7); *thrēskeia* (Ac. 26.5; Col. 2.18). What follows is therefore not an attempt to exegete things Paul himself says about ‘religion’, even in C1 terms, but an attempt to place him on the map of what the greco-roman world of his day meant by *religio*.

⁵ I use the word ‘Judaism’ in this discussion because it is the term Sanders (like most others) uses, despite the caveats I discussed above at [xxif.](#), [82](#), [89](#). Ashton 2000, 27 offers some critical comments on Sanders which dovetail with what I say here.

⁶ Such as ‘speculative questions as how the world was created; when the end will come; what will be the nature of the afterlife; the identity of the Messiah; and the like’ (Sanders 1977, 17).

⁷ e.g. the failure, in both Deissmann and Sanders, to see the difference between ‘someone being in Christ’ and ‘Christ being in someone’ – a distinction important to Paul but inconsequential from the point of view of ‘religion’. Sanders tellingly admits that how the experience of ‘being in Christ’ related to the experience of ‘being in Israel’ ‘is more opaque to research than is thought’, and concedes that the method of his book is not up to the task: ‘we must be content with analyzing how religion appears in Jewish and Pauline thought’ (549).

⁸ Sanders 1977, 17.

⁹ *ibid.*: ‘A pattern of religion thus has largely to do with the items which a systematic theology classifies under “soteriology”.’

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ See Stowers 2001, 91f.: ‘an Egyptian who became a citizen of a Greek *polis* changed religious practices and adopted a whole range of cultural and social relations, but we do not call this “conversion”.’ Something like ‘conversion’, Stowers notes, was sometimes envisaged in relation to the struggles of the soul after virtue. But this was (a) about philosophy, not ‘religion’, and (b) about the individual’s own progress, not about ‘getting into’ or ‘staying in’ a community.

¹² Sanders 1977, 17. This is perhaps the biggest single difference between Sanders and Schweitzer, to whom he is in many other ways very close.

¹³ See Sanders 1977, 552. I hasten to add that there is much in Sanders’s account, not least his conclusion (543–56), which is admirable and helpful. His final sentence (555f.) is not only exactly right but calls into question any suggestion that his project could be a complete account of Paul: ‘In his letters Paul appears as one who bases the explanations of his gospel, his theology, on the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus, not as one who has fitted the death and resurrection into a pre-existing scheme, where they take the place of other motifs with similar functions.’

¹⁴ Ashton 2000 (subsequent refs. to Ashton are to this work); on Schweitzer and Sanders cf. 149–51.

¹⁵ Ashton 144, 149.

¹⁶ Ashton 10f., 135, etc.

¹⁷ Ashton 39f., 59, 214. I am reminded of a cartoon in which a bishop, consoling a Mother Superior about the death-watch beetle in the convent roof, suggests that ‘it may help to think of it as a metaphor’.

¹⁸ Ashton 14–16, 244.

¹⁹ Ashton 24f., 60, including some hard words too about Martyn 1997a and his (ab)use of the category ‘apocalyptic’ as a stark alternative to ‘religion’.

²⁰ e.g. Ashton 28, 138, where he declares, of 2 Cor. 3.18 and related passages, that ‘most of this is, strictly speaking, nonsense’; 216–24, where he deconstructs Rom. 7.13–25 on the grounds that as it stands it is self-contradictory. It is one thing for Ashton to say that he finds bodily resurrection incredible (82), but any historical account of Paul’s thought must factor in, as a central element, the fact that Paul firmly believed it. Cf. too Räisänen 1986 [1983]; 2008.

²¹ Ashton 138–41.

²² Ashton 10f.

²³ [See above, 852f., 858f.](#)

²⁴ Ashton claims (4f.) that his interest is slightly different from this, which explains why he only has one passing reference to Theissen 1987 [1983]; but it seems to me that this is where his project more naturally belongs.

²⁵ See the refrain of ‘religion therefore not theology’: Ashton 25–8; 45; 121, 125, 126, 162f., 213, 234, 244. To say that ‘“salvation”, like “grace”, is a word that has had all the blood drained out of it by theology’, so that ‘the religious concept of salvation is – can only be – a metaphor’ (158f.) makes one wonder what ‘theology’ Ashton has been reading. To say that ‘people are not turned into converts by theological arguments, certainly not by arguments hurled precipitately at them by a stranger from abroad’ (163) may have some truth in it, but seems a gross caricature of Luke’s (or anybody’s) picture of Paul.

²⁶ Theissen 1999, 2.

²⁷ *ibid.* Theissen refers to Cassirer 1944 for the argument that a human is *animal symbolicum*, an animal that transforms the world into a home by a system of interpreted signs.

²⁸ Theissen 1999, 6.

²⁹ Theissen 1999, 17f. ‘Irruption of transcendent reality’ sounds like a demythologized reference to a Jewish-apocalyptic, or perhaps even Barthian, belief. Many religions build ‘semiotic cathedrals’ which have little to do with ‘transcendent reality’, let alone the idea of its ‘irruption’ into the present world.

³⁰ Theissen 1999, 18.

³¹ Theissen 1999, 121.

³² Theissen 1999, 121f. He says ‘the eternal’ where I would say ‘a different sort of time’.

³³ Theissen 1999, 303. This is then expounded at 303–5.

³⁴ Theissen 1999, 306f.

³⁵ For what follows, cp. the similar account in Stowers 2001, 85–7. Stowers emphasizes the way in which ‘normal’ religion was bound up with agricultural productivity and hence the prosperity of the community. For the normal ‘protestant’ position, cp. the work of E. A. Judge, discussed in [ch. 4 above](#).

³⁶ [See above, 247 n. 5.](#)

³⁷ 1 Cor. 12.1–7, 12–13.

³⁸ See Lee 2006.

³⁹ 1 Cor. 10.1–4.

⁴⁰ Theissen 1999, 129, 344f. is a good example: see below. For the standard ‘disproofs’, see e.g. Wedderburn 1987a; 1987b; Wagner 1967 [1962]. See not least Betz 1994, proposing that there are analogies between Pauline baptism and the hellenistic world, but that Pauline baptism is ultimately derived, in a complicated way, from Judaism (though Betz does not see the underlying exodus-narrative and its significance).

⁴¹ On circumcision see e.g. Bernat 2010; Thiessen 2011.

⁴² 1 Cor. 1.13–17.

⁴³ 1 Cor. 1.13–15.

⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 1.17.

⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 6.11.

⁴⁶ cf. Eph. 5.26; Tit. 3.5; 2 Pet. 1.9.

⁴⁷ e.g. Ezek. 36.25, in a context with which Paul is very familiar (e.g. Rom. 2.25–9), and which also involves the promise of the spirit.

⁴⁸ Mk. 10.38; Lk. 12.50. See *JVG* 572f., with Hengel’s comment about the extreme improbability of such obscure sayings being invented by the post-Easter church, which was not reticent or oblique in speaking of and interpreting Jesus’ death.

⁴⁹ Rom. 6.2–5; 12–18.

⁵⁰ e.g. Diod. Sic. 3.72; Jos. *War* 2.89; *Ant.* 4.113.

⁵¹ The tr. here is an attempt at the controversial *logikē latreia*, on which see e.g. Jewett 2007, 729f.: the phrase ‘signals the desire to set claim to a broad tradition of Greco-Roman as well as Jewish philosophy of religion. In place of the *latreia* of the Jewish cult (9.4) or the worship of finite images in Greco-Roman cults (1.23), Paul presents the bodily service of a community ... as the fulfilment of the vision of worship that would be truly reasonable.’

⁵² Rom. 12.1–5.

⁵³ cf. e.g. Rom. 6.9f.; Heb. 9.26–8; 10.12–14.

⁵⁴ It was always ‘he’ in the Church of England, until the first women priests were ordained in 1994.

⁵⁵ Rom. 15.15f.

⁵⁶ Phil. 2.17f.

⁵⁷ Phil. 4.18.

⁵⁸ See the careful and subtle way in which 2 Cor. 8 and 9 indicate the same stitching together of divine and human ‘gifts’ for the good of the whole community.

⁵⁹ cf. e.g. Heb. 9.11–10.18; 1 Pet. 1.19; 1 Jn. 2.2; 4.10; Rev. 5.6, 9f.

⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 5.6–8.

⁶¹ Rom. 8.3 (see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], ch. 11); perhaps 2 Cor. 5.21. [See above, 898, 900.](#)

⁶² Rom. 3.24–6.

⁶³ Eph. 5.1f.

⁶⁴ 1 Cor. 10.2f.

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 10.14–17.

⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 10.18–22.

⁶⁷ The theme of ‘provoking to jealousy’ is a further exodus-reference, picking up Dt. 32.21 as in Rom. 10.19. The whole passage (Dt. 32 in general, and 32.10–21 in particular), is significant: it recounts the tale of the wilderness wandering, as Paul does in 1 Cor. 10, and accuses the Israelites of provoking YHWH to jealousy by worshipping *daimonia*. See Hays 1989a, 94.

⁶⁸ 10.28f.; cf. 8.7–13.

⁶⁹ [See above, ch. 6, esp. 427–9.](#)

⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 11.23–6.

⁷¹ cf. also of course 1 Cor. 5.7.

⁷² 1 Cor. 11.27–32.

⁷³ cp. 1 Cor. 8.12.

⁷⁴ On present and future ‘judgment’ [see above, e.g. 1049f., 1080f.](#) On this point cf. 1 Cor. 4.1–5.

⁷⁵ cf. 1QSa 2.20f., where the Messiah will bless the bread and wine; but there is of course no sense there that the community would be sharing in his life and death.

⁷⁶ 1 Cor. 16.22, on which see Thiselton 2000, 1347–52.

⁷⁷ Rom. 8.15; Gal. 4.6. Whether or not this is a hint at the use of the Lord’s Prayer is impossible to say.

⁷⁸ 1 Cor. 12.2f.

⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 14.4, 5, 12, 26.

⁸⁰ 1 Cor. 14.33, 40.

⁸¹ 1 Cor. 14.26.

⁸² cf. Ac. 9.3–6 (cf. 22.6–11; 26.13–20), 12, 15–17; 11.27–30; 13.1–3; 16.7–10; 18.9–11; 19.21; 21.10–14; 23.11; 27.23–6.

⁸³ Ac. 16.6f.

⁸⁴ [See above, 1095–1128.](#)

⁸⁵ Rom. 1.13; 15.14–33; 1 Cor. 16.5–9; 2 Cor. 1.23–2.4. For the accusation: 2 Cor. 1.17–22.

⁸⁶ 2 Cor. 7.5–16; 1 Thess. 2.17–3.10.

⁸⁷ Gal. 2.1f. (cf. Ac. 11.27–30); cf. e.g. Ac. 16.8.

⁸⁸ e.g. Phil. 1.12–18.

⁸⁹ Philem. 15.

⁹⁰ Rom. 3.2; cf. *Perspectives*, ch. 30.

⁹¹ See Aune 1983, discussed by Ashton 2000, 189. The best known example is Paul’s statement about ‘all Israel’ in Rom. 11.25–7 (see Ashton 2000, 192f.), on which [see above, 1231–52.](#)

⁹² 2 Cor. 2.14–6.13; Phil. 2.6–11; cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 11.1.

⁹³ We may compare and contrast Josephus, who (as part of his explanation for his own changing sides during the war) claims that he had been given special insight, through dreams, into the contemporary fulfilment of ancient scriptural prophecies (*War* 3.350–4). For Paul, the crucial fulfilment had already happened in the events concerning Jesus. Both cases involved a claim about the fulfilment of scriptural prophecies of universal sovereignty. For Josephus, at least on the face of his account, this was now passing to Rome. For Paul, it had already passed to Israel’s Messiah.

⁹⁴ Rom. 13.8. This whole topic needs further consideration for which the present volume, sadly, leaves no room.

Chapter Fourteen

THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD: PAUL AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS

1. Introduction

Somewhere among historical novels waiting to be written is a fresh account of the fictitious but potentially illuminating meeting between Paul and Seneca.¹ The distinguished Roman is slightly senior in age. But the wandering apostle, with his endless travels, imprisonments, beatings and sleepless nights, might be mistaken for the older man. It is the year 63. Nero has been on the throne for nine years. Seneca, whose relationship with his former pupil has cooled to the point of mutual disfavour, has left the court and is devoting himself to philosophical contemplation in such time as remains, knowing full well what normally happens to ex-courtiers. Paul, meanwhile, has arrived in Rome as a prisoner and is awaiting trial. He, too, does not expect to live very long. He had earlier invited the Jewish elders in Rome to hear his account of the gospel, and has now, while still under house arrest, taken to inviting non-Jewish intellectuals to discuss their views with him.² Seneca, intrigued, decides to accept, and the two men spend the day explaining their own beliefs and exploring one another's. It is the kind of scenario that Seneca himself, or indeed Cicero, might easily have written up as a dialogue, following the Socratic model to which all ancient philosophy looked back.

Fiction can sometimes function as a microscope, enabling us to see some of the undoubted facts of the day in three dimensions. But the 'facts' of Paul's engagement with the philosophical world of his day are themselves elusive, at least initially. When we ask, as we must in this chapter, how the Paul we have come to know might have responded to the philosophical world of his day, we might be forgiven for thinking that he would sweep it all away with a single wave of the hand:

The word of the cross, you see, is madness to people who are being destroyed. But to us – those who are being saved – it is God’s power. This is what the Bible says, after all:

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the shrewdness of the clever I’ll abolish.

Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the debater of this present age? Don’t you see that God has turned the world’s wisdom into folly? This is how it’s happened: in God’s wisdom, the world didn’t know God through wisdom, so it gave God pleasure, through the folly of our proclamation, to save those who believe. Jews look for signs, you see, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we announce the crucified Messiah, a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, the Messiah – God’s power and God’s wisdom. God’s folly is wiser than humans, you see, and God’s weakness is stronger than humans.³

Another fine rhetorical flourish announcing the folly of all human rhetoric! Perhaps, though, this is more than a simple dismissal; as usual, Paul writes at more than one level. God’s folly, he goes on to say, creates its own new genres of ‘wisdom’:

We do, however, speak wisdom among the mature. But this isn’t a wisdom of this present world, or of the rulers of this present world – those same rulers who are being done away with. No: we speak God’s hidden wisdom in a mystery. This is the wisdom God prepared ahead of time, before the world began, for our glory.⁴

That, in a measure, is the story of the two letters to Corinth: a firm denial that Paul’s gospel owes anything to human wisdom, coupled with a careful construction of an alternative ‘wisdom’ which, hidden for long ages, has now been revealed. We see the same thing in one of his central discussions, when he dismisses ‘knowledge’ of the merely human sort. It puffs you up, he says, but love builds you up. Thus:

If anybody thinks they ‘know’ something, they don’t yet ‘know’ in the way they ought to know. But if anybody loves God, they are ‘known’ – by him.⁵

This trumping of human knowledge by divine knowledge, and by the ‘love’ that is the proper name for the latter, recurs as a theme in the exquisite poem of chapter 13:

Love never fails. But prophecies will be
abolished; tongues will stop; and knowledge, too,
be done away. We know, you see, in part;
we prophesy in part; but, with perfection,

the partial is abolished ...
For at the moment all that we can see
are puzzling reflections in a mirror;
then, face to face. I know in part, for now;
but then I'll know completely, through and through,
even as I'm completely known. So, now,
faith, hope, and love remain, these three; and, of them,
love is the greatest.⁶

There is, then, an *epistemological* revolution at the heart of Paul's worldview and theology. It isn't just that he now knows things he did not before; it is, rather, that *the act of knowing* has itself been transformed. This has been an important sub-theme in some recent writing on Paul, but it has not always, in my judgment, been explored to the full, or necessarily helpfully.⁷ Ordinary human wisdom, ordinary human knowledge, is not just cancelled. It is taken up into something at one level similar and at another level radically different. Paul's name for the new 'something' is *agapē*, love.⁸

The warnings against ordinary human wisdom – again, perhaps Paul is here saying more than one thing at a time – are repeated in Colossians 2:

Watch out that nobody uses philosophy and hollow trickery to take you captive! These are in line with human tradition, and with the 'elements of the world' – not the king. In him, you see, all the full measure of divinity has taken up bodily residence. What's more, you are fulfilled in him, since he's the head of all rule and authority.⁹

And the new wisdom is once again spelled out in terms both of Jesus and of *agapē*:

I want their hearts to be encouraged as they're brought together in love. I want them to experience all the wealth of definite understanding, and to come to the knowledge of God's mystery – the Messiah, the king! He's the place where you'll find all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I'm saying this so that nobody will deceive you with plausible words ...¹⁰

Colossians, indeed, is where we find the fullest exposition anywhere in Paul of a cosmic vision, shaped out of the 'wisdom' traditions of scripture on the one hand and around Jesus himself on the other. To this we shall return.

Has Paul then rejected all the wisdom, understanding and insight of the pagan world? Not at all. Just as the person with true ‘knowledge’ is able to eat any meat sold in the market, whatever its provenance,¹¹ so those who belong to the Messiah are able to recognize, celebrate and learn from all kinds of good qualities in the wider world:

For the rest, my dear family, these are the things you should think through: whatever is true, whatever is holy, whatever is upright, whatever is pure, whatever is attractive, whatever has a good reputation; anything virtuous, anything praiseworthy.¹²

Paul can say much the same thing, when in more combative mood, by using the metaphor of military strategy. The intellectual weapons that are used against him are not simply to be broken and thrown away. They can be turned to positive use:

Yes, we are mere humans, but we don’t fight the war in a merely human way. The weapons we use for the fight, you see, are not merely human; they carry a power from God that can tear down fortresses! We tear down clever arguments, and every proud notion that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah.¹³

Paul is not, in other words, speaking about an accidental or unreflective use of this or that motif taken from his surrounding culture. He is well aware of ideas and worldviews ‘out there’, of their present ambiguous status and of how they might relate to his own beliefs. Even if in his letters we do not see the head-on confrontation with philosophical teachers and their arguments that we might surmise had often taken place, Paul had clearly thought through the issues involved, both the specific questions and topics and the meta-question of what his overall approach should be. The purpose of the present chapter is to probe cautiously forward into the things he does say in the letters, looking for signs of that wider engagement which, from these hints, we may guess stands behind them. We are, in fact, inching our way towards the kind of discussion which Paul might have had with Seneca.

As we do so, we leave behind, hopefully for ever, the sterile antithesis which has dogged the footsteps of Pauline scholarship ever since F. C. Baur squashed Paul, and the rest of early Christianity, into the two boxes demanded by his Hegelian ideology. Not only are the labels ‘Judaism’ and

‘hellenism’ dangerously anachronistic, as we saw earlier. Not only do we now know that Paul’s ‘Jewish’ world was firmly and irrevocably part of wider ‘hellenistic’ culture, which itself was anything but monolithic. Much scholarship is now well aware that ignoring these problems produces gross and distorting historical oversimplification. The deeper problem is that those two labels, with their apparent but pseudo-historical validation, have been used to designate two competing ideologies, setting up a Procrustean bed on which different thinkers can be placed and to whose shape they can be fitted by a process of philosophical, cultural and not least historical torture. The protests against all this have increased in recent years, though even those who have voiced them have not, I think, seen all the ramifications of following through a genuinely historical investigation.¹⁴

However, just because we reject the ideologically shaped antithesis proposed by Baur and his followers, we are not at liberty to ignore the historically grounded evidence for the *real* antithesis which manifested itself at the time. We cannot, for instance, simply ignore the Maccabean literature, or *4 Ezra*. We cannot pretend that the Roman–Jewish war of 66–70, or the great revolt of 132–5, were simply outbreaks of ordinary anti-imperial revolution, though of course they were that as well. As we have seen, most Jews in the first century thought of themselves as significantly different from their non-Jewish neighbours; most non-Jews recognized this significant difference, which showed up in a variety of ways; and many Jewish thinkers and writers of the time brought this to articulation in a range of writings, in a variety of different genres and styles, expressing and urging what they saw as a specifically Jewish worldview. Of course these matters are complex, and these writings are part of a multi-faceted culture, interwoven with ideas from ‘outside’. The antithesis that many Jews perceived, and that many non-Jews recognized as well, bears little relation to the Hegelian pair of ‘isms’ that have dominated scholarship for so long. All this can be seen in Philo and Josephus, or indeed in the Wisdom of Solomon, which we looked at in this connection at the end of chapter 3. It will not do to recognize and reject the nineteenth-century distortions and then to pretend that the first century was simply a flat landscape on which

various odd people did various odd and interlocking things. To go in that direction would, in fact, be to impose another ideology – that of late-modern or postmodern relativism – in place of the Hegelian one. As usual, it is the Jewish evidence that will suffer most on that new Procrustean bed.

In particular, what will be lost is the sense of a *narrative*: the story of ‘freedom’, Jewish style, going back (as in the Wisdom of Solomon) to the exodus but stretching forward towards the real ‘return from exile’.¹⁵ This sense of belonging within an immense and liberating story can be seen across much second-Temple literature, with its *only* significant non-Jewish parallel being, as we saw, the imperial narrative told by Horace, Livy and above all Virgil.¹⁶ It is history, not ideology or theology, that will protest against any treatment of Paul and his world that fails to take account of this irreducible, and irreducibly Jewish, element of the picture.

Since Paul, as we have seen, shared this story and the typical Jewish self-perceptions that went with it (seeing them transformed around the Messiah but not abandoned), we should expect to understand his engagement with the wider world of his day by loose analogy with books like the Wisdom of Solomon, with the significant differences occasioned by his particular messianic belief. Thus, just as we saw the engagement of Wisdom with many varieties of contemporary philosophy, borrowing from Plato, rejecting Epicureanism, parallel in some respects with Stoicism, but underneath it all continuing to tell the story of Israel’s God, his people and his world, so – *mutatis mutandis*, of course – we might expect to find Paul doing something similar.

How might we expect to map such engagement? Obviously one can start by noting similarities and parallels of all sorts. There is nothing wrong with that. But in a book such as the present one we have the chance to stand back and look at the larger picture. When we do, it is hard to suppose that Paul himself would not have had great respect for some of the thinkers we studied in chapter 3. It is too easy to assume that, as a zealous Pharisaic Jew, he would simply sweep them all away as so much *skybala*, trash. Certainly that is not what he seems to be saying in some of the key passages: *whatever* is true, holy and so on is what one should think about,

wherever it may be found. Paul of course believed that he had been given insight into all things, all wisdom, through the divine *pneuma*, the spirit of the Messiah.¹⁷ This kind of wisdom already made the ‘wisdom of the world’ look like foolishness to him.¹⁸ But precisely because this spirit was the spirit of the one God who had made the whole world Paul expected that there might be points of overlap, of congruence.¹⁹ He would indeed regard it as his right and calling to ‘take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah’, but there were plenty of thoughts out there which, he might have judged, would be ready servants if only they were bought up and employed within the right household. Not only thoughts; methods. How this plays out we must explore presently.

The parallels and similarities, then, matter. They have been surveyed reasonably thoroughly, in articles and monographs with particular focus, especially and naturally in the area of ethics, in relation to Paul’s pastoral language and so forth.²⁰ But what is required, on a loose analogy to the programme Sanders articulated in relation to the task of comparing ‘patterns of religion’, is to look at one entire picture in its own terms, and compare it with another entire picture again in its own terms. (I suggested in the previous chapter that Sanders did not in fact achieve this goal, but the aim is laudable.) We must now, therefore, attempt to place the Paul we observed in Parts II and III alongside the philosophical world we sketched in chapter 3, and see what happens – and how, if at all, the implicit engagement between the two pictures came to actual expression in his letters. We are thus using the ‘logic’ of scientific method to work from the known (the worlds of the philosophers and of Paul) to the unknown (the potential engagement between them), in order to form hypotheses which will then be tested against the actual evidence of the letters themselves.

[2. Paul’s Questions to the Philosophers](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

There are, naturally, two ways of approaching this challenging task. One can set out the philosophers' agenda in their own terms and see what Paul might have said to them. Or one might set out Paul's worldview and theology, and see what the philosophers might have said to him. I shall go by the first road, starting with the first-century philosophy we examined in chapter 3, and asking, in the light of Parts II and III, what Paul might have said in response. Some of the second possibility will be glimpsed as well on the way, and will lead us to certain questions that arise from within the dominant traditions of Paul's time. It is a matter of some surprise that even those who have written on, say, Paul and the Stoics in recent years have not approached the subject in this holistic way.²¹

The philosophers, as we saw, divided their investigations into three: physics, ethics and logic. 'Theology', already named as a topic by the time of Plato, was subsumed under 'physics'; it was part of 'what there was', what the 'nature' of the whole world might be. The three topics were closely related: the question of how to behave, individually and socially ('ethics'), was directly related to the analysis of the world, which included an analysis of what it meant to be human ('physics'). 'Logic' was a matter of understanding and employing an epistemology that was coherent with the results of both 'physics' and 'ethics'. These three topics formed the playing-fields on which the different schools did battle over particular issues.

If we are to give Paul free rein to address the philosophers, everything we know about him suggests that before getting into details, either on the three main topics or the proposals of the different schools, he would want to challenge the basic tripartite scheme itself. He himself does indeed have a view about 'what there is' and how it has come to be, and about the nature and role of humans within that. But for him the crucial question of 'theology' is not one sub-topic of investigation within that, but forms the much larger world within which 'physics' itself (not that he calls it that) ought to be located. Paul, in other words, remains a traditional Jew, believing that the one God of Abraham is not an item within the cosmos to be investigated like everything else, but the one 'from whom, through

whom, and to whom are all things'.²² He would, in other words, want to take the idea of 'god' out of the category of 'physics' in which pagan philosophy had placed it, seeing such placing as itself a failure to realize who the one God actually was. This single move already implies a radical change not only in 'physics', where 'the gods' had been located, but in 'ethics' and 'logic' as well, which were closely integrated with that basic analysis. Unless Paul was to break with his Jewish tradition entirely, 'ethics' would never be, for him, simply a matter of discerning the 'nature' either of the world, or of humans, and trying to live in accordance with it, though it would always involve that as well. It would always involve a direct address, a command, from the one God who is not *part* of the cosmos, nor yet detached from it, but remains in sovereign and dynamic relation with it.

Nor will Paul agree with the philosophers about 'logic'. For him, epistemology would never be simply a matter of learning how to translate the miscellany of information that arrives through the senses into a coherent and wise account of the world. The one God of Abraham is a god of *revelation* – not that 'revelation' ('apocalypse' in Greek) is antithetical to knowledge gained by observation of the world, since the one god is also the world's creator. Like God himself, Jesus is not simply one person about whom one might know certain things. He is the one in whom the very treasures of knowledge itself are hidden.

So Paul, after the manner of the annoying student who starts asking awkward questions before the lecture has properly begun, would almost certainly want to raise a question about the initial three-part division of the subject itself. He would want to privilege 'theology', in the sense we described earlier in the book, ahead of all the other topics, and to revise the meaning of the questions themselves, let alone the answers one might give, in that light.

I have said all this as a hypothesis: what Paul 'would have done', working outwards from what we know of his worldview and theology towards what we know of the philosophy of his day. But this is not merely imagination or guesswork. The supporting evidence is close at hand:

... We know that 'We all have knowledge'. Knowledge puffs you up, but love builds you up! If anybody thinks they 'know' something, they don't yet 'know' in the way they ought to know. But if anybody loves God, they are 'known' – by him.²³

However, at that stage you didn't know God, and so you were enslaved to beings that, in their proper nature, are not gods. But now that you've come to know God – or, better, to be known by God – how can you turn back again to that weak and poverty-stricken line-up of elements that you want to serve all over again?²⁴

This is precisely a revision of the *epistemological* order: instead of humans acquiring knowledge of a variety of things within the whole cosmos, gods included, there is 'one God' who takes the initiative. God's 'knowing' creates the context for human 'knowing'; and the result is not a 'knowledge' such as one might have of a detached object (a tree, say, or a distant star). The result, to say it again, is love, *agapē*.

This suggests strongly that Paul would want to line up the three subjects of the philosophers with 'logic' (suitably reworked) at the head. Granted, 'how we know things' is a function of 'that which is known'. When we 'know' a musical theme, or a sibling, or a street in the town, we mean something different by the word 'know' in each case, and the means by which we gain that knowledge will be different, too. But if the overriding 'knowledge' is the knowledge which the one God has of the world, and of all its inhabitants, everything else will be seen in a new light as a result.

All this might have been said by a devout Jew (say, the author of the Wisdom of Solomon), though I am not aware that anyone said it quite that sharply before Paul. But there is a second element to the implicit challenge he would throw down to the philosophers. What has happened in and through Jesus the Messiah has resulted in a new sort of *knowledge* commensurate with the new *world* that has now been launched:

From this moment on, therefore, we don't regard anybody from a merely human point of view. Even if we once regarded the Messiah that way, we don't do so any longer. Thus, if anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation! Old things have gone, and look – everything has become new!²⁵

This passage has frequently been invoked in the service of various programmes, from Rudolf Bultmann's rejection of 'the historical Jesus' to J. Louis Martyn's 'apocalyptic'.²⁶ Paul is clearly revising the question of 'how we are to know anything or anyone at all' in the light of the 'new creation' which he believes has come about through the death and resurrection of the Messiah. (The specific point at issue in the larger context is how Paul's apostleship is to be understood; the Corinthians are assessing him in terms of the old creation, and Paul is insisting that everything must now be looked at in the light of the new one.) There is therefore a double epistemological shift which Paul would bring to the fore, prior to any discussion of specific points. Everything – 'physics', 'ethics' and even 'logic' itself – is to be seen in the light of the one God and of the new creation ushered in by the risen Messiah.

We must therefore look more closely, first, at the question of epistemology. What might Paul say on the topic designated by the philosophers as 'logic'?

(ii) 'Logic' and Epistemology.

The wise owls of Athens were adept at peering into the darkness and seeing what others could not. But Paul was aware, partly because of Israel's scriptures and their vision of the one God, and partly because of what he believed about the Messiah, both that the darkness was deeper than had been thought and that a new day had already dawned which enabled one to see things that were previously invisible – including, remarkably, the one God himself, revealed in his 'image'.²⁷ Both of these – the deeper darkness and the new dawn – are important if we are to understand his epistemology and the way it related to, and in some respects challenged, the views of his contemporaries.

First, the deeper darkness. For Paul, this was not simply a matter of being led astray either by sense-perceptions or by the surface-level whims and passions of ordinary human life. It was a blindness of a different sort:

However, if our gospel still remains ‘veiled’, it is veiled for people who are perishing. What’s happening there is that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they won’t see the light of the gospel of the glory of the Messiah, who is God’s image.²⁸

You must no longer behave like the Gentiles, foolish-minded as they are. Their understanding is darkened; they are cut off from God’s life because of their deep-seated ignorance, which springs from the fact that their hearts are hard. They have lost all moral sensitivity, and have given themselves over to whatever takes their fancy ...²⁹

There was a time when you were excluded! You were enemies in your thinking, and in wicked behaviour.³⁰

And, in the fullest statement of this type:

The anger of God is unveiled from heaven against all the ungodliness and injustice performed by people who use injustice to suppress the truth. What can be known of God, you see, is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. Ever since the world was made, his eternal power and deity have been seen and known in the things he made. As a result, they have no excuse: they knew God, but didn’t honour him as God or thank him. Instead, they learned to think in useless ways, and their unwise heart grew dark. They declared themselves to be wise, but in fact they became foolish. They swapped the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of the image of mortal humans – and of birds, animals and reptiles ... They swapped God’s truth for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen ... Moreover, just as they did not see fit to hold on to knowledge of God, God gave them up to an unfit mind, so that they would behave inappropriately ...³¹

This last passage introduces more complications. Paul is not simply stating that unbelievers have ‘darkened’ or blinded minds. He is providing a kind of historical aetiology for that condition, dependent for its full force on echoes of Genesis 3. Nor is he saying that the first humans knew God by observation of the created world but that since the Fall this has not been the case. He seems to be saying *both* that people still do have a basic knowledge of God *and* that everybody covers this up and learns distorted patterns of thought which result in, and are then in turn intensified by, distorted patterns of behaviour. It is no part of our purpose here to unravel all the mysteries of this paragraph in Romans 1. We have looked at those elsewhere.³² What matters is Paul’s overall point, throughout these various passages: the problem of true knowledge is not merely that appearances deceive, or that people make wrong inferences, but rather that human

rebellion against the one God has resulted in a distortion and a darkening of the knowledge that humans have, or still ought to have. Paul would want to say to the philosophers that wisdom is not simply a matter of learning to see, like the owls, in ordinary darkness. It is a matter of the one God piercing the darkness and bringing new light, the light of new creation, and at the same time opening the eyes that have been blinded by ‘the god of this world’ so that they can see that light.

That is why his basic exhortation in Romans 12, balancing the devastating analysis in chapter 1 of the distorted mind and behaviour, has to do with eschatological renewal: ‘Don’t let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age’, he says.

Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God’s will is, what is good, acceptable and complete.³³

This in turn is cognate with what he says about the ‘mind of the flesh’ and the ‘mind of the spirit’ in Romans 8:

People whose lives are determined by human flesh focus their minds on matters to do with the flesh, but people whose lives are determined by the spirit focus their minds on matters to do with the spirit. Focus the mind on the flesh, and you’ll die; but focus it on the spirit, and you’ll have life, and peace. The mind focused on the flesh, you see, is hostile to God. It doesn’t submit to God’s law; in fact, it can’t. Those who are determined by the flesh can’t please God.

But you’re not people of flesh; you’re people of the spirit ...³⁴

If the problem has to do with the unrenewed ‘mind’, the ‘mind of the flesh’, then the solution – the way to see again after all this darkness – is for the spirit to perform a work in the mind as much as in the heart or the body:

The spirit, you see, searches everything, yes, even the depths of God. Think of it this way: who knows what is really going on inside a person, except the spirit of the person which is inside them? Well, it’s like that with God. Nobody knows what is going on inside God except God’s spirit. And we haven’t received the spirit of the world, but the spirit that comes from God, so that we can know the things that have been given to us by God.

That, then, is what we speak. We don’t use words we’ve been taught by human wisdom, but words we’ve been taught by the spirit, interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people.

Someone living at the merely human level doesn’t accept the things of God’s spirit. They are foolishness to such people, you see, and they can’t understand them because they need to be discerned spiritually. But spiritual people discern everything, while nobody else can discern the

truth about them! For ‘Who has known the mind of the lord, so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of the Messiah.³⁵

This is of course an extraordinary claim: to have privileged access to the mind of the one God himself, through the Messiah. But it might appear to raise a further problem for Paul, which we must examine briefly.

The claim in 1 Corinthians 2 might appear to create a kind of private epistemological world. Paul might be taken to be referring to an inner sanctum of spirit-given ‘knowledge’, which would cut off the possessor from all ordinary human knowledge, and also cut off the non-possessor from any access to the gospel. Paul, however, clearly does not believe this. In fact, he sees it the other way round: as far as he is concerned, *the closed, private world is the dark and dangerous ‘natural world’ where most people live*. To this extent, and to this extent only, his epistemology could be seen on the analogy with Plato’s famous picture of the Cave.³⁶ The people in the cave are restricted in their knowledge because all they can see is a distorted set of shadows and reflections. The ones who turn to the light and come out of the cave can then see everything clearly, including the things that were producing the flickering images they could see before. Paul believed that when his powerful gospel was proclaimed it opened people’s eyes to the reality not only of the one God and his Messiah but also to the realities of the rest of the world, including those areas where they would have obligations and duties. Precisely because the God in whom Paul believed was the one God of creation, as we shall see in more detail in a moment, he believed that knowledge of this God – or rather, as he himself puts it, being known by this God – opened a person’s eyes to see *the whole world* as it truly was.

No doubt Paul would recognize that the people he calls ‘unspiritual’ or ‘merely human’ would think that it was they who were seeing the world truly. Paul would expect them to repay his compliment and suggest that it was actually Paul and others like him who were living in a world of private fantasy. That might, as well, be Paul’s own verdict on (for instance) the adherents of the mystery religions. But what Paul believed about what the

philosophers called ‘physics’ – namely, that there was one God who had made the whole world through his second self, the one whom Paul knew as Jesus the Messiah – meant that knowledge of this one God and one lord, in a mind renewed by the one true spirit, provided an unrivalled knowledge of the world as it really was. Just as the philosophers linked logic to physics, and both to ethics, so Paul’s epistemology reflected exactly his vision of divinely created reality.

This accords completely with the position we find in Israel’s scriptures; and indeed Paul regarded those scriptures, when read properly in the light of the Messiah,³⁷ as a major source of real knowledge. Of course, his way of reading them was controversial in his day and is controversial still today. But few will question that he regarded scripture, rightly interpreted, as giving him the solid basis from which to work. And scripture itself spoke of the creator God as knowable through his creation. Thus, even though Paul undoubtedly accorded a special status to scripture, we should not see that as standing over against the revelation in creation, but actually as pointing to it, intertwined with it, and celebrating its fulfilment and redemption.³⁸ That is how Paul’s creational monotheism worked.

Once the premises of knowledge are established, however, Paul was only too ready to engage in the kind of logical argument which characterized the philosophers of his day. Within that new knowledge, and as a clear sign that it did not cancel out ordinary knowledge of the world but rather took it up within itself, Paul could and did use some of the regular rhetorical tools that were employed as ways of poking and prodding at ideas and themes to be sure they were in good order. Ever since Socrates engaged in ‘dialogues’ whose aim was to probe deeper into the things people said and make them clarify or modify what they meant, the various schools had used the tools of logic to move from the things that could be taken as known to other things that might follow from them. As we saw, the ‘diatribe’ style, reproducing the kind of question-and-answer format of public disputation, was one such tool, designed to make sure that a subject was being thought through thoroughly. Paul used it sparingly, but it is noticeable that he employed it particularly when, for instance in parts of Romans, he was probing deeper

into some of the densest areas of his theology – particularly the question of the fate of Israel.³⁹

I would not myself build too much on this one way or another. Paul's use of the 'diatribe' does not mean, on the one hand, that he was smuggling in Stoic logic by the back door or, on the other hand, that he was simply being inconsistent, leaning on a stick he had himself declared to be broken. His claim to understand – indeed to possess! – 'the mind of the Messiah' was not a claim that he and his congregations now knew everything there was to know, and had no need to think things through. Rather, his claim was that his, and their, human minds were being transformed by the spirit so that they were able at last to understand the full, deep truths about the world. But for that one needed to think clearly, which is where the 'diatribe' could help.

This is not the place to follow up the point in any detail. Suffice it to say that his deployment of this tool serves as a reminder of how he understood knowledge itself. Someone who has access to privileged and incontrovertible information, fresh from a divine source, does not argue. The Pythia at Delphi spoke in hexameters; she did not normally use words like *gar*, *oun*, *dioti* and the other regular connectives by which logicians mounted their case. Argument is what happens when, starting from a given point, one wishes not simply to inform one's hearers of divine truth but to convince them of other truths, other aspects of truth, which follow from those first premises. Paul is quite capable of appealing to basic truths that do not need arguing – the gospel events of Jesus' death and resurrection, for instance, and their unveiling of the *dikaiosynē* and *sophia* of the one God. His regular use of the tools of argument shows that, for him, the understanding and wisdom he wishes his hearers to possess must mesh with their understanding of everything else. He is not inviting them to share a small, private world. He is helping them to think through public truth.

Paul would therefore wish to say to the philosophers of his day that, though their aim of thinking everything through and proceeding by logical steps from the known to the unknown was right and proper, they were always in danger of being trapped in the darkness from which they claimed

to be able to free others. Above all, his *eschatological* vision meant that as far as he was concerned the night was already nearly over, and those who belonged to the Messiah were able to see clearly things which were still puzzling to everybody else. The owls of Athens might claim to see in the dark, but once the new day was dawning a new kind of seeing would be available.

(iii) 'What There Is': Paul's Comments on 'Physics'

The second category of ancient philosophical investigation is the large and many-sided topic of 'physics': what there is in *physis*, nature. As we saw in the introductory remarks to this chapter, for Paul this did not include 'god' or 'the gods', because the one God was the creator of the world, not part of it. Though he never discusses head on the question of how the world came to be, every time he gets near the question, in pursuit of a different theme, it is clear what his answer would be. He assumes the ancient Jewish view that the world is the creation of the one God, and that therefore it is not to be identified with that God (as in pantheism) nor to be seen as the disastrous handiwork either of blind chance (the Epicurean view) or of a malevolent subsidiary deity (as in some gnostic systems). But Paul has gone a step further than this Jewish view. He has taken the ancient scriptural theme of 'wisdom' as the divine assistant in creation, and has construed this dramatically in terms of Jesus himself – or rather, we should say, in terms of the mysterious one, the second self of the one God, who became human *in and as* Jesus of Nazareth. We have already explored this in chapter 9, and need only refer to the two most obvious texts in which Paul does not advance a theory about *how* the one God made the world except to say that he did it in, through and for his image-bearing son:

There is one God, the father,
from whom are all things, and we live to him and for him;
and one lord, Jesus the Messiah,
through whom are all things, and we live through him.⁴⁰

Through whom are all things; that is the point, the thing that marks out Paul from his Jewish neighbours on the one hand (who, even if they thought of ‘wisdom’ as the handmaid of the one God, did not think of this figure as an actual human being) and his pagan conversation partners on the other. This is then amplified dramatically in the great poem of Colossians 1:

He is the image of God, the invisible one,
the firstborn of all creation.
For in him all things were created,
in the heavens and here on the earth.
Things we can see and things we cannot,
– thrones and lordships and rulers and powers –
all things were created both through him and for him.⁴¹

This is dramatic enough as an account of creation and its purpose. But there is more: Paul believes that in this same Jesus the *new* creation has now come into being:

He is the start of it all,
firstborn from realms of the dead;
so in all things he might be the chief.
For in him all the Fullness was glad to dwell
and through him to reconcile all to himself,
making peace through the blood of his cross,
through him – yes, things on the earth,
and also the things in the heavens.⁴²

It is this robust version of the Jewish monotheistic doctrine of creation that underlies Paul’s equally robust affirmation that the present world of space, time and matter is itself good. That is why marital union is good in itself (1 Corinthians 7), why all meat is good in itself, even if offered to an idol (1 Corinthians 8, 10), why all time, all days, are basically the same in the sight of the one God (Romans 14.5). Here we see the *creational* element of Paul’s inaugurated eschatology. One might have imagined that, if the new creation had already been launched, everything about the old one would become not only irrelevant but somehow shabby, tarnished, shown up as in some sense actually evil, so that Paul would be advocating escape. Not at all. For Paul the old creation has, of course, been relativized. It no longer

assumes cultural, or even cultic, significance. But it remains good, and can be enjoyed if received with thanksgiving.⁴³ The new world, already launched with Jesus' resurrection, reaffirms the essential goodness of the old one even as it relativizes its ultimate significance. As with the biblical texts on which he drew, Paul understood the entire created order not as a static entity to be observed but as part of a *narrative*, a narrative which had now, he believed, entered its long-awaited new phase.

His pagan interlocutors might well not have understood this point. The Stoics, of course, believed in a great coming conflagration after which the world would start up all over again; but, as we shall see later, that is not at all the same as what Paul was talking about in his vision of new creation. And it was this vision that, I suggest, would have been at the heart of what he might have wanted to say to them when discussing 'physics'.

This *eschatological* version of *creational monotheism* was deeply embedded in Paul's thinking, emerging in various classic passages such as Romans 8 or 1 Corinthians 15. It frames the account he gives of two of the major topics of philosophy, and of ancient 'physics': what it means to be human, and what account we should give of death. Clearly, he believes that humans are made in the image of the creator, and that this like everything else is to be *renewed* through the action of Messiah and spirit.⁴⁴ This gives a more precise focus, and again a narrative framework, to the widespread ancient belief that humans stood in some close relationship to the divine. As for death, Paul would firmly have agreed with the Wisdom of Solomon, which opposed the Epicurean proposal, and insisted that death was not after all the end of the person concerned, but that the creator looked after the souls of the dead (or at least the righteous dead) until the time of his fresh 'visitation'.⁴⁵ And Paul's vision of new creation, including bodily resurrection, was of course significantly different from the various other ancient visions, whether Platonic or Stoic or whatever, of what might happen at individual death.⁴⁶ Death as we know it was for Paul an intruder into the good creation, and it had now been defeated.

All this means that Paul conceived of the relationship between the world and the divine – one of the most significant features of any worldview! – in

a significantly different way from any of his non-Jewish philosophical contemporaries. He might have had some sympathy for Plato's belief that one ought to look through and beyond the material world to the transcendent truths that might be glimpsed there as if behind a veil, but he would have had none at all for the way some of his contemporaries were interpreting the Platonic tradition to the effect that the material world was essentially a bad place from which one ought to long to escape. He might have recognized in Aristotle's argument for a 'prime mover' an analogy at least to his own view that creation provided a good reason to believe in a creator, but would certainly have rejected the dry, impersonal vision of this creator in favour of the personal and compassionate divinity of Israel's scriptures, the God of Exodus, of Isaiah, of the Psalms, who had now been made known more specifically in and as Jesus the Messiah. He would have insisted, against the Epicureans, that the one God was not far removed from the world, but was present and active within it. He would certainly have made the point that, though the world was indeed on a journey, so that one could tell its story, that story was destined to end not in the ultimate dissolution of its entire atomic structure but in the complete new creation, which would put all wrongs to right at last. But the presence and activity of the one God within creation was not, as in Stoicism, a matter of a divine *pneuma* or fiery presence animating everything, so that 'the divine' was present everywhere because everything was already 'divine'. The God in whom Paul believed was present to and within the world, and especially to and within human beings, but was not contained within the world or humans. Rather, he was present *alongside*, and in a sense *over against*, the world and humans, guiding, calling to account, challenging and enabling. He was present, supremely and shockingly, in Jesus himself, a human of recent memory; and he was present in a special way, different on the one hand from his presence in Jesus but different on the other hand from his presence everywhere else, in those who were now indwelt by 'the spirit of Jesus'. Such people were *pneumatikoi*, 'spirit-animated' people, as opposed to the merely *psychikoi*, humans whose inner principle was the *psychē*, the ordinary human life rather than the Jesus-shaped divine life.⁴⁷

To say all this clearly was, we may suppose, as hard for Paul as it is for us. To approach the frontier between the human and the divine is also to approach the borders of language. This problem emerges, for instance, when he talks about ‘the divine spirit bearing witness with our spirit’,⁴⁸ and the problem is only slightly alleviated when he talks instead about the divine spirit residing in a person’s ‘heart’.⁴⁹ The questions English-language exegetes sometimes ask, as to whether ‘spirit’ should have a capital letter or not, indicating the divine spirit rather than the human one, shows well enough that there is fluidity of thought at this point. And this fluidity is found not only at the interrelation, in specifically Christian terms, between the divine spirit (or the spirit of Jesus) and the human spirit. It is found at the interrelation between this very specific and restricted use of *pneuma* and the one that was popular in the world of Paul’s Stoic contemporaries, for whom the fiery divine ‘breath’ indwelt everything and everyone, irrespective of their beliefs or style of life.⁵⁰ If we ask why Paul would choose such a well-known word and give it a significantly different meaning, we may suspect that the answer would lie in the scriptural explanations that had been given, from the earliest days of the Christian movement, for the strange phenomenon of people finding themselves given new energy, a new sense of direction and above all a strong sense of the personal presence of Jesus, experienced in the way one might expect to experience the presence of the one God himself. Paul seems to have chosen to go on using this potentially confusing word because of these roots, believing that what he and the other followers of Jesus were experiencing was the inauguration of the promised new covenant.⁵¹

Paul believed, in particular, that the whole world was being called to account by the one God. It was neither moving ahead randomly towards dissolution, nor was it heading for a cosmic conflagration in which the fiery *pneuma* already operative within it would transform everything else into fire and then start it all up once more. Paul’s eschatology, in other words, was quite different from the vision both of the Epicurean and of the Stoic. His worldview at this point, as elsewhere, was basically Jewish, assuming that the one God who had made the world was responsible, as creator, for

putting it right – that is, for judging and remaking it. This God had promised, in the scriptures, to do exactly that. And, as we saw in chapter 11, and in line with the rest of his worldview and theology, Paul had rethought this vision of eschatological judgment around Jesus himself, Israel’s Messiah and hence the one through whom, as in Psalm 2, the One God would call the nations to account. If Jesus’ resurrection thus declared to the world that he was indeed Israel’s Messiah, it also, *ipso facto*, announced him as judge.⁵²

Paul’s implicit engagement with the philosophers on the question of ‘physics’ was therefore, unsurprisingly, a variation on the position that might have been taken by some of his Jewish contemporaries. It is, in this respect, not unlike that of the Wisdom of Solomon. There, too, the rulers of the world were to be held to account before the one God. There, too, the ancient story of God’s rescue of his people from Egypt was retold both as foundation myth and as paradigm. Paul had thought through, and was both arguing and living, a specifically Christian variation on this: in Jesus, the rulers had already been judged; the new exodus had already taken place; and a family had been brought into being indwelt by the divine ‘wisdom’ that had been active in creation and in the story of Israel, and that had now come to dwell fully in Jesus and in his spirit-led people. This is how he puts it in Colossians:

We are instructing everybody and teaching everybody in every kind of wisdom, so that we can present everybody grown up, complete, in the king ... I want their hearts to be encouraged as they’re brought together in love. I want them to experience all the wealth of definite understanding, and to come to the knowledge of God’s mystery – the Messiah, the king! He is the place where you’ll find all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge.⁵³

His vision of the cosmos, therefore – his answer to the philosophical debates about ‘physics’ – was characterized through and through by *agapē*: the outflowing love which led the creator God to make a world in the first place, the radical love which led the Messiah to die and now the uniting love which bound together all those who had embraced the Messiah in faith

and hope. This vision of reality led naturally, as did the ‘physics’ of his contemporaries, to the third question: how then should humans behave?

(iv) ‘Ethics’

The difference between Paul’s ethics and those of his philosophical contemporaries can be summed up easily. They believed that once one had discovered and understood (‘logic’) what the world was, how it worked and what human beings actually were (‘physics’), it was the task of humans to live in accordance with that, rather than against its grain (‘ethics’). Paul believed that *the world had been renewed in the Messiah*; that those who were themselves ‘in the Messiah’ had also been renewed as image-bearing human beings; and that the task of such people was to live in accordance with the *new* world, rather than against *its* grain. Since for Paul, as we saw, this renewal did not mean the abolition of the good creation but rather its transformation and fulfilment (that, of course, is part of the meaning of the resurrection), and since the renewal had been *inaugurated within the ongoing flow of history* rather than arriving complete all at once, there is a natural and considerable overlap between what Paul saw as living in accordance with the new creation and what his contemporaries saw as living in accordance with the world as they knew it. For Paul, the renewal of *the existing creation* was just as important as *the renewal* of the existing creation. Without the second, one would be trapped in a world of inevitable entropy. Without the first, the idea of new creation would collapse into some kind of gnosticism. We should not therefore be surprised to find all kinds of parallels between Paul’s ‘ethics’ and those of his contemporaries, even though again and again Paul has *framed* his account of proper Christian behaviour in a quite different way. Any account of Paul and his philosophical contemporaries will want to clarify both the differences and the similarities.⁵⁴

1. First, the differences. This is how Paul makes his characteristic appeal: on the basis of the new identity of the Christian, who has in baptism shared

the dying and rising of the Messiah, and must live in accordance with the new world which has broken in already upon the continuing old one:

We died to sin; how can we still live in it? Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into the Messiah, Jesus, were baptized into his death? That means that we were buried with him, through baptism, into death, so that, just as the Messiah was raised from the dead through the father's glory, we too might behave with a new quality of life ... So don't allow sin to rule in your mortal body, to make you obey its desires. Nor should you present your limbs and organs to sin to be used for its wicked purposes. Rather, present yourselves to God, as people alive from the dead, and your limbs and organs to God, to be used for the righteous purposes of his covenant.⁵⁵

Don't let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can work out what God's will is, what is good, acceptable and complete.⁵⁶

The body is not meant for immorality, but for the lord, and the lord for the body. What's more, God raised the lord; and he will raise us, too, through his power ...

Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit within you, the spirit God gave you, so that you don't belong to yourselves? You were quite an expensive purchase! So glorify God in your body.⁵⁷

There are several people who behave as enemies of the cross of the Messiah ... They are on the road to destruction; their stomach is their god, and they find glory in their own shame. All they ever think about is what's on the earth.

We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we're eagerly waiting for the saviour, the lord, King Jesus, who is going to come from there. Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he's going to transform it so that it's just like his glorious body ...⁵⁸

That [old] way of life is decaying, as a result of deceitful lusts. Instead, you must be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and you must put on the new humanity, which is being created the way God intended it, displaying justice and genuine holiness.⁵⁹

So if you were raised to life with the king, search for the things that are above, where the king is seated at God's right hand! Think about the things that are above, not the things that belong on the earth. Don't you see: you died, and your life has been hidden with the king, in God! When the king is revealed (and he is your life, remember), then you too will be revealed with him in glory.

So, then, you must kill off the parts of you that belong on the earth ... [there follows a double list, of sexual sins on the one hand and sins of the tongue on the other] ... You have stripped off the old human nature, complete with its patterns of behaviour, and you have put on the new one – which is being renewed in the image of the creator, bringing you into possession of new knowledge.⁶⁰

... you should continue more and more to behave in the manner that you received from us as the appropriate way of behaving and of pleasing God. You know, of course, what instructions we gave you through the lord Jesus. This is God's will, you see: he wants you to be holy, to keep well away from fornication. Each of you should know how to control your own body in holiness and honour, not in the madness of lust like Gentiles who don't know God ... Anyone who rejects this, then, is not rejecting a human command, but the God who gives his holy spirit to you.⁶¹

This is only the small tip of a large iceberg. Passage after passage in Paul gives evidence of the same frame of reference: the creator God has renewed the world through Jesus, and is renewing you by his spirit, so your bodies in the present must be brought into line with their future resurrected identity – not as an effort after the impossible, but as the making real of the new identity already given in baptism.⁶² The people who have experienced the new exodus must learn, as the people of the first exodus did not entirely learn, what it means to be both free from Egypt and the dwelling-place of the living God.⁶³ That combination of rescue from slavery and new-temple theology characterizes Paul's thinking at point after point, providing the strong narrative framework which underlies and gives direction to the general standards on which he insists and the particular commands he addresses to the young churches. Paul has a rich, complex but coherent vision of what has happened in the Messiah, both cosmically (generating a whole new world which now sits uncomfortably alongside the continuing old one) and personally for those who belong to him. That, for instance, is why suffering is so important for Paul: it is the sign that one is indeed living at that dangerous fault-line. At point after point what he says about personal life ('ethics') reflects exactly what he says or implies about the cosmos ('physics'). He knows about both, and so do the young churches, because their understanding has been enlightened by the spirit so that they can see what remains opaque to the rest of the world, and can think clearly and appropriately about it all ('logic').

We might expect that Paul and his churches, as exodus-people, would set themselves to keep Torah; and the answer is that they do and they don't. We shall come to that in the next chapter. There is a sense in which Messiah and spirit together accomplish, in and through believers, 'what the Torah

could not do', producing the same result – the transformation of character into a genuine God-reflecting humanness and the 'life' which results – but by a different route. That is what Paul hints at in various passages, such as Romans 2 and 2 Corinthians 3.⁶⁴ But the implicit difference between him and his philosophical contemporaries is not that he has a particular lawcode to follow, given by the God of Israel, and they do not. Nor is the difference to be found in any suggestion that Paul believed in a more or less instantaneous conversion while those in the philosophical tradition looked for a steady process of moral transformation. That, actually, represents a point of similarity, as we shall see in a moment. The implicit difference is both in his *framing perspective*, which as we saw is that of a new-creation eschatology that has been fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah and is now being energized by the divine *pneuma*, and more specifically in the *character* which has been glimpsed in Jesus, both in himself and particularly in his dying and rising.⁶⁵ As I have argued elsewhere, Paul does indeed teach what we may call a virtue ethic. He believes in moral progress, and in the hard work required to make it happen. He has, as it were, taken the classical tradition of 'virtue', all the way from Plato and Aristotle to Cicero and beyond, and has reworked it into a Christian key.⁶⁶ But at the head of his list of virtues he regularly places *agapē*, the 'love' which he has seen revealed in the Messiah. Like other early Christian moralists he adds three other virtues which, like *agapē* itself, were more or less unknown in the world of paganism: patience, chastity and humility. About these things we do not need here to speak in any detail, except to draw attention to these as striking differences of content, corresponding to the radical differences of framing, between Paul and his pagan philosophical contemporaries.⁶⁷

2. Second, then, the similarities. As we have noted, because for Paul the new creation is the renewal of the existing world, not its abandonment and replacement, there is a good deal of overlap between the behaviour he expects of Jesus' followers and the behaviour that many pagan moralists would have urged. We noted at the start of the chapter Paul's positive and encouraging exhortation to think about anything that is true, holy, upright, pure, attractive, of good reputation, virtuous or praiseworthy. True, he

balances this with the command to copy *him* (as opposed to copying the world around) in matters of specific behaviour. But the open invitation to contemplate all that is good or worthwhile in the wider non-Christian environment is a clear hint that we should expect overlap; and this is what we find. He can appeal to general and widely known beliefs of what is 'good' or 'evil'. Christian standards are by no means purely discontinuous with those of everyone else.⁶⁸ In the same passage, he urges the Roman Christians to celebrate with those who are celebrating, and to mourn with the mourners. There may be some celebrations from which the Christians will hold back, but Paul wants to emphasize the call to be, basically, good neighbours.⁶⁹

In particular, Paul anticipates the second-century apologists in wanting the followers of Jesus to make a good impression on the society around them. They are not to be awkward or snooty; they must not give the appearance of thinking themselves superior.⁷⁰ 'Think through', he says, 'what will seem good to everyone who is watching', and if possible live at peace with everyone.⁷¹ They are to 'behave wisely towards outsiders', or 'in a way that outsiders will respect', buying up every opportunity to do good to all, and to speak a fresh, clear word in answer to any challenge. They are to give no occasion for sneers or grumbles, for instance by not paying bills on time.⁷² Though their primary obligation of care is to fellow Christians, if they get the chance to be of benefit to others they should take it eagerly.⁷³

This, I suggest, is the context within which we should understand the 'household codes', lists of guidelines for husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves.⁷⁴ These are emphatically for a community which is living out an eschatology inaugurated but not yet consummated. Paul treads a fine line (some would say he loses his balance here, and/or that the passages in question thereby demonstrate a non-Pauline authorship) between challenging followers of Jesus to live counter-culturally, being radically different from those around, and merely accommodating to the prevailing cultural mores.⁷⁵ Paul is well aware of likely charges that might

be brought against followers of Jesus: people might well say that they were socially, culturally or politically subversive in ways which were not in fact a reflection of the gospel. He is determined that his communities will order their common lives, not least their family lives, in such a way that the only things people will find to say against them will be to do with their basic allegiance to Jesus. Many writers today seem to expect that all morality will be reduced to the liberal ideals of western society in the early years of the twenty-first century, and then to complain that the early Christians ought to have said this more clearly than they seem to have done. This has made it harder for us to understand, let alone to appreciate, Paul's agenda. It is, however, often noted that he significantly modifies the expectations of his day, not least by emphasizing the obligations of husbands to wives, parents to children and masters to slaves (not just the subservience of those wives, children and slaves), by adding 'in the lord' at various points, and, in the case of Ephesians 5, building a remarkable theology of marriage on the model of the Messiah himself and his death. Even when Paul is saying things which are similar to what one might have heard in the moralism of his day, he regularly adds another dimension which subtly and profoundly changes the whole mood and impact.⁷⁶

The point seems to be, above all, that he believes in the *rehumanizing* power of the gospel of Jesus. The gospel is not meant to make people odd or less than fully human; it is meant to renew them in their genuine, image-bearing humanness. We should expect, then, to find that standards emphasized in the finest contemporary philosophers would be echoed by Paul. We can find plenty of shrewd and wise words about drunkenness, sexual misbehaviour, anger and violence, lying and deceit, honesty and hard work in Cicero, Seneca or Epictetus, as well as in Paul. The many parallels here would only be surprising to someone who supposed that Paul derived everything from Torah on the one hand and the teaching of Jesus on the other, and indeed that those two sources would themselves be completely discontinuous with pagan moralism. Such assumptions would be straightforwardly invalid. But, as with 'parallelomania' in other spheres, so here: it will not do simply to amass a list of places where Paul can be

matched in his moral teaching by Epictetus, Musonius Rufus or whoever. (Or indeed the other way round, first expounding the Stoics and then finding parallels in Paul!⁷⁷) The point is that Paul thinks he has found a way to the genuine humanness which the philosophers have glimpsed but cannot actually attain. One might highlight, for example, his insistence towards the end of Philippians that he has learned how to be *autarkēs*, ‘content’ in the sense of being self-sufficient. The state of *autarkeia* was a favourite virtue with Cynics and Stoics as well as (perhaps more obviously) Epicureans. The latter sought that state through retiring from the world and learning to be content, like the gods as they imagined them, in a quiet and happy detachment.⁷⁸ The Cynics and Stoics sought this same state through training themselves not to need the usual pleasures of life and to make do with whatever circumstances came their way.⁷⁹ Paul is at this point closer to the Stoics, but again the claim to have arrived at this particular goal is framed in a specifically Christian way:

I’m not talking about lacking anything. I’ve learnt to be content [*autarkēs*] with what I have. I know how to do without, and I know how to cope with plenty. In every possible situation I’ve learned the hidden secret of being full and hungry, of having plenty and going without, and it’s this: I have strength for everything in the one who gives me power.⁸⁰

Paul is affirming the goal; but he is also claiming that the best way to arrive at it is through following Jesus, hard though that road will be. He does not, however, affirm either the Epicurean goal of *ataraxia*, an untroubled life, or the Stoic/Cynic goal of *apatheia*, the state in which one no longer feels suffering. Paul has plenty of troubles, and plenty of suffering, and accepts them not only as the natural and necessary concomitant of his calling, and indeed of following the crucified Jesus, but also as the lens through which true knowledge is glimpsed. The philosophers suppose one may come to true knowledge by avoiding suffering; Paul, by embracing it. There are places where his road enables him to link arms with the philosophers, but their respective journeys began in different places, and they will eventually come to a parting of their ways. They are, after all, heading for the city of *eudaimonia*, and he for the city of the crucified and risen Messiah.⁸¹ Once

again, Paul's underlying theology of *renewed humanity in the Messiah* explains this easily. He has not derived his moral framework from the surrounding philosophies, but he is happy to recognize that at many points the Christian is called to walk the path of genuine humanness that others have sketched before – and perhaps to do so more effectively.

All this demands, I think, that we read certain Pauline texts in at least a bifocal fashion. One obvious passage in which Paul appears to be echoing several pagan moralists is Romans 7, where Paul joins a long line from Aristotle onwards in complaining (through the medium of the first person singular, the 'I', which like many exegetes I understand as a rhetorical ploy rather than actual autobiography) that 'I don't do the good thing I want to do, but I end up doing the evil thing I don't want to do.'⁸² This is the classic problem of *akrasia*, 'weakness of will'.⁸³ It has been proposed that Paul, here and perhaps elsewhere, is claiming as a major point that being 'in Christ' enables one to attain the self-mastery at which the philosophical schools, especially Stoicism, were aiming. There is a sense in which I agree with this, but only in the following way.

Romans 7.7–25, and indeed on into 8.1–11, is primarily an argument about Israel's Torah; that, as I have argued elsewhere, is the referent of *nomos* throughout, puzzling though that may initially seem in some passages. As part of Paul's large-scale retelling of the exodus-story, between the slaves going through the water to find freedom in chapter 6 and their 'inheriting' of the promised new creation in chapter 8, the Passover-people must come to Mount Sinai, where they discover the strange truth about Torah, as we set it out in our chapters 7, 10 and 11 above: Torah was given with a deliberately negative intent, to highlight 'sin' and make it appear 'very sinful indeed'.⁸⁴ Paul will then go on to show that 'God has done what the law ... was incapable of doing' (8.3): that in the Messiah and by the spirit the one God has given the 'life' which Torah could not, because it was 'weak because of human flesh' – in other words, because the raw material the Torah was working on, namely the people of Israel, was, like everyone else, incapable of obedience and so of finding the life which Torah promised (7.10).

But that larger framework of argument is just that, a framework. Simply to offer that analysis of the passage would be almost (though not quite) as inadequate as identifying it as part of Paul's spiritual autobiography and leaving it at that. I do think that there is a sense in which the passage as I have outlined it functions as a kind of autobiography, but *not* because 'that's how it felt at the time'. Philippians 3.4–6, as has often been pointed out, makes it clear that it was not at all how it felt for Paul the 'zealous' Jew. Rather, this is a *retrospective theological* autobiography: this is how Paul, as a man 'in the Messiah', now analyzes *what in fact was going on*, even though at the time he neither felt it like this nor saw it like this. But this, too, is only part of the complete analysis that must be offered. Paul, like the mature Mozart, was quite capable of writing several different musical lines to be sung at the same time, and we must not be put off by the spiritual heirs of the Austrian Emperor who complained that there were 'too many notes'.⁸⁵ The crucial point for the present chapter is that Paul has carefully and deliberately set out his retrospective theological analysis of the plight of the devout Jew under Torah *in terms of the well-known dilemma of the pagan moralists*.

This is, if you like, the negative corollary of the positive point made a moment ago, that when Paul saw what life in the Messiah was really like in terms of renewed humanity it was bound to overlap with what non-Christian moralists had glimpsed as the way to behave. This was entailed by Paul's belief in creational (and now eschatological) monotheism: if humanity was really being restored in and through Messiah and spirit, one would not expect the result to be out of step at every point with the best that the rest of the human race had seen. So now, as the negative side of the same point, Paul is making it clear, as he does at many points in Romans, that *the Jew is also in Adam*; that when Torah arrives in Israel, Israel recapitulates the sin which is common to all humankind (5.20; 7.7–12); and that, as a result, the state of Israel under Torah is simply the Jewish version (heightened, made more ironic, sharpened up to the point of great lament) of the plight of an Aristotle complaining of *akrasia* (and analyzing it microscopically), or an Ovid observing wryly that *video meliora proboque*,

deteriora sequor.⁸⁶ This is itself, to be sure, part of Paul's argument about the state of Israel under Torah, but it indicates well enough that Paul is fully aware of the pagan tradition in question, and that his overall argument is designed to deal with that problem as well. He is, after all, describing 'all' in Romans 5.12–21, from which the whole of the rest of chapters 5—8 grows; the salvation highlighted in chapter 8 is not specific to ethnic Israel. We cannot flatten out Paul's argument into simply a coded way of speaking about self-mastery, promising that the Christian will be able to attain it where the pagan could not, but nor can we ignore the fact that this dimension is contained within his larger argument, as the journey from Durham to York is contained within the journey from Edinburgh to London.

Much of Romans is in fact multi-dimensional, which is what makes that letter so inexhaustible in both reference and resonance. But there is one other passage in particular which comes up for discussion in a similar way to chapter 7. In Romans 2, Paul speaks twice of non-Jews who, somehow or other, 'keep the law'. I have argued elsewhere that in these passages Paul has non-Jewish *Christians* in mind; the echoes of other passages where that is the case, combined with the actual drift of the argument, make that in my view overwhelmingly likely. But what I may have missed before is the possibility, again, of multiple resonance.⁸⁷

Take, first, the well-known passage at the end of the chapter, which we have discussed more than once before, and which most agree is a cryptic reference to non-Jewish Christians:

Meanwhile, if uncircumcised people keep the law's requirements [*dikaiōmata*], their uncircumcision will be regarded as circumcision, won't it? So people who are by nature uncircumcised [*hē ek physeōs akrobustia*, literally 'the by nature uncircumcision'], but who fulfil the law, will pass judgment on people like you who possess the letter of the law and circumcision but who break the law ... The 'Jew' is the one in secret; and 'circumcision is a matter of the heart, in the spirit rather than the letter. Such a person gets 'praise', not from humans, but from God.⁸⁸

The last two verses are echoed in Romans 7.4–6 and 2 Corinthians 3.6, where it is clear that Paul is talking about Christians, calling to mind as well the 'new covenant' theme in which the law is written on the heart by the spirit.⁸⁹ This in turn links up with the 'circumcision of the heart', itself a

new-covenant blessing, promised in Deuteronomy 30 and elsewhere.⁹⁰ There should be no doubt that the ‘uncircumcised lawkeepers’ of Romans 2.26–9, who are nevertheless ‘circumcised in heart’, are gentile Christians as described more fully later in the letter and elsewhere.⁹¹

It is at first sight harder to make the same case for Romans 2.12–16, but I persist in thinking that it should be done:

Everyone who sinned outside the law, you see, will perish outside the law – and those who sinned from within the law will be judged by means of the law. After all, it isn’t those who *hear* the law who are in the right before God. It’s those who *do* the law who will be declared to be in the right!

This is how it works out. Gentiles don’t possess the law as their birthright; but whenever they do what the law says, they are a law for themselves, despite not possessing the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their conscience bears witness as well, and their thoughts will run this way and that, sometimes accusing them and sometimes excusing, on the day when (according to the gospel I proclaim) God judges all human secrets through King Jesus.⁹²

Paul has been addressing the pagan moralist in 2.1: ‘anyone, whoever you are, who sits in judgment’. This is someone who hears the tale of moral disintegration Paul has outlined in 1.18–32 and joins Paul in condemning such behaviour. Not so fast, says Paul: you are in fact doing all this yourself, in one way or another. The Jewish moralist may be included here as well – the point is arguable either way, which probably means that Paul is being deliberately ambiguous – but certainly the pagan moralist is an obvious target. Paul’s main point, the climax to which the first ten verses of the chapter lead and from which the next five verses (quoted above) then follow as an explanation, is that ‘God shows no partiality’ (2.11). The way this will work out, he says here, is that the Jewish law will be the standard for Jews, while non-Jews will perish (Paul does not even say ‘will be judged’) ‘outside the law’. What counts – this is the point here – is ‘doing the law’: *hoi poiētai nomou dikaiōthēsontai*, ‘the doers of the law will be justified’.⁹³

This leaves Paul with an obvious question. If ‘doing the law’ is what counts, how can any gentiles do it, since they, being gentiles by birth (as they are ‘uncircumcised by birth’ in 2.27), do not possess it? His answer is

cryptic, and the reason for this is similar to the reason for the complexity of chapter 7: he is saying two things at once.

First, he is anticipating what he says in 2.26–9. There will come a time when gentiles will be incorporated into the ‘new covenant’ promised in scripture, and as a result they will have ‘the work of the law written on their hearts’. The echoes of 2 Corinthians 3.3, and behind that of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, are clear, and the close similarity of Romans 2.26–9 makes this highly likely. Though by ‘nature’ (*physei*) they do not possess the law,⁹⁴ they ‘do the things of the law’.⁹⁵

Second, however, he is indicating by sidelong reference that *this new covenant fulfilment of the law by gentiles will be the true fulfilment of the proper aspirations of the pagan moralist*. The way Paul has described this strange ‘lawkeeping’ is such as to send echoes out into the world of philosophical moralism, especially that of the Stoics, which spoke of a doing of law ‘by nature’, and of people being ‘a law to themselves’.⁹⁶ Paul is saying, in effect, Very well: you, the pagan moralist whom I have been addressing since 2.1, may well believe that it is possible for someone like yourself to keep the law ‘by nature’, and to ‘be a law to yourself’. I agree – but the way in which you will accomplish that will be, as I will explain later, through your coming to have the divine law written on your heart. That is the only way you will really be ‘a law to yourself’.

If this double-edged interpretation of a tricky passage is accepted, we might reach the following conclusion. Paul, as well as being a clever writer (Romans reminds us of that on every page), is well aware of the theories, aspirations and expressions of the moral world of first-century paganism. He will not declare this world bankrupt; only impotent. As in chapter 7, with which chapter 2 has some interesting links, he picks up the highest aspirations of the moralist, the ‘unknown gods’ of their ethical worlds, and proposes to announce to them the thing after which they had been ignorantly aspiring. The clear echoes of Stoicism in the present passage, then, are not a sign that Paul has simply scooped up some Stoic language and incorporated it without much reflection into an argument about something else. They are certainly not an indication that he supposes

(against the grain of 1.18—3.20 as a whole) that there are actually some pagan moralists out there who, without faith in Jesus or new-covenant membership, really do ‘keep the law’ in such a way as to be ‘justified’.⁹⁷ The echoes of Stoicism are there because Paul is addressing the pagan moralist in his own terms, almost teasingly. Your ideal of being a law to yourself, he says, is, as it stands, a mirage; but it can become a reality. Follow the Ariadne’s thread of this letter and you’ll find the way out into the light.

I have argued in this section that if we imagine Paul posing questions, and alternative interpretations, to the three main categories of pagan philosophy, logic, physics and ethics, he would do so not in a head-on fashion, declaring it all to be worthless, but in the oblique fashion of someone seeing a genuine striving after accuracy and clarity of thought, truth of description of the world, and uprightness of life. With these, Paul has no quarrel. His quarrel is with the fact that the aspiration always fails to meet its goal – and that he believes that the one God, the creator, who has made himself known through Jesus the Messiah, has opened eyes and minds, has unveiled his complex but coherent truth in a way never before imagined and has given a quite new *pneuma* into the hearts of his people so that, in fulfilling his ancient promises of covenant renewal, he would also fulfil the deepest and highest aspirations of all human hearts. Paul has expressed this belief in a variety of ways, but particularly in those lists of virtues (and they really *are* ‘virtues’, in the sense that they must be intentionally chosen, practised and perfected in the power of the spirit; they will not ‘happen automatically’, bypassing the will, choice and effort of those concerned) where we recognize a good deal from the wider world of late antiquity but still notice key elements that are unique. I have already mentioned them: patience, humility, chastity and above all *agapē*, love. ‘Of them all, love is the greatest.’

There was a good reason why no pagan moralist had ever said that, and it was the same reason why it was central for Paul. It had to do with Jesus. Ultimately, Paul does not have a quarrel with pagan philosophy, just as one does not have a quarrel with a jigsaw that is hard to do because fifty or

more pieces are missing, so that those attempting the puzzle are reduced to joining together pieces that do not really belong. Just as Paul is not trying to invent a new 'religion', so he is not trying to 'construct a philosophy' as such, though as we have seen his version of early Christianity is in some ways more like a philosophical school than anything else known at the time. Paul is proclaiming Jesus himself, and discovering as he does so that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge find their key in him. Put him in the middle of the picture, he is saying, and all your aspirations after wisdom and right living will fit together at last. In the course of expounding, teaching and defending the message of the crucified and risen Messiah of Israel, the lord of the world, he is aware that if this message is true it will catch up within itself all other glimpses of truth from whatever source, and sometimes his language reflects that.

He therefore provides, in terms of a 'logic', a 'physics' and an 'ethic' reshaped around the gospel of Jesus, the larger framework within which what he says about 'politics' and 'religion' make the sense they do. Like the Wisdom of Solomon, he confronts the sceptics and the Epicureans with the news of Psalm 2: the one God will judge the wicked nations through his Messiah. Unlike Wisdom, Paul knows who the Messiah is, and his death and resurrection has reshaped the confrontation itself. Like Wisdom, Paul tells again the story of the world, and of Israel, in terms of 'wisdom' as the secret power by which it all happened, leading at last to the great exodus through which God's people are rescued and the wicked pagan empire overthrown. The all-powerful Word has leapt down from heaven, not now to deal out death but to take on death itself in single combat and to emerge victorious.⁹⁸ Paul's Jesus-shaped rethinking of the exodus-narrative enables him to radicalize the message of Wisdom, transforming its confrontation into an invitation, its portrait of 'wisdom' personified into an actual person and its engagement with the philosophies of its day into a new synthesis. The one God is the creator of heaven and earth, not simply a divine element within everything. Stoic pantheism will not do. But the one God is not far from any one of us, and 'we are also his offspring': no room for Epicureanism, then, and meanwhile the highest 'religious' aspirations of the

Stoic may find a new home.⁹⁹ One may indeed suppose, with the Academic or the Sceptic, that there isn't enough evidence to go on; but the one God has called the world to account, as the Psalms and prophets always said he would, through his appointed agent, the Messiah; and of this he has given assurance to all, by raising him from the dead.

They mocked in Athens, and they mock still. Take away the resurrection, and the picture falls apart. Paul knew that as well as they did. But the power of Paul's gospel, then and now, to change lives, to fulfil the aspirations of ancient philosophy as well as the dreams of Israel, provides at least in part the sign that this was indeed a 'wisdom' that could be imparted to the 'mature', even though it might appear folly to everyone else:

My speech and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in transparent proof brought home powerfully by the spirit, so that your faith might not be in human wisdom but in God's power.¹⁰⁰

This was Paul's answer to the philosophies of his day. You could not fit the Jewish worldview into the non-Jewish, let alone the Jewish-but-scandalous message of Jesus into the pagan systems. The danger with announcing that one is going to transcend the Judaism/Hellenism divide is that it sounds like a typical Enlightenment attempt to gain a god's-eye view from which all differences cease to be noticeable, whereas for Paul the scriptures of Israel, and the God of Israel, could not thus be flattened out. But do it the other way – allow the gospel to state the terms, and let everything else find a home within it – and there will be not only wisdom but also power:

Jews look for signs, you see, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we announce the crucified Messiah, a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, the Messiah – God's power and God's wisdom. God's folly is wiser than humans, you see, and God's weakness is stronger than humans.¹⁰¹

[3. Paul and the Stoics in Recent Study](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

As we saw in chapter 3, no single philosophical tradition dominated Paul's world. As in our own day, when bits and pieces of various ideas swirl around in popular culture, clashing, combining or simply co-existing in cheerful incoherence, so there is no reason to suppose that Paul's audience, even in a single city, let alone across the Mediterranean world, would be monochrome in its assumptions about how to think clearly, what the world consisted of, and how humans should behave. The same small town might easily include adherents of any or all of the four major schools (Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, the Stoics and the Epicureans), or who held in their minds an unsorted amalgamation of different elements from all of them. There might also be serious Sceptics, denying that any certainty was possible about such matters, or others who simply shrugged their shoulders and didn't bother with hard questions. As we have seen, this variety of thought and belief was mapped loosely on to the two equally overlapping worlds of 'politics' and 'religion'. A confused and confusing world.

We can nevertheless be reasonably confident that a popular-level Stoicism was widespread in the worlds which Paul visited and to which he wrote. As we saw when looking at characters like Epictetus, the 'official' pantheism of the school left plenty of room for people to continue worshipping the gods and praying to them as though they were in some sense 'other' than themselves, not simply the ultimate form of the fiery *pneuma* which pervaded all things and all people. At the popular level, Stoicism provided a conveniently flexible way of viewing the world, giving plenty of good advice on how to behave in a wide variety of situations (first-century Stoics were nothing if not practical) and offering encouragement and fortitude to face the problems and troubles of ordinary life. Seneca himself, Paul's great contemporary, was among other things a popularizer determined to make the guidance of philosophy available to ordinary people.¹⁰² It was in any case harder to be an Epicurean: to do it properly, you had to have the means to escape to your peaceful haven and to live a quiet life without having to work too hard. Stoicism, by contrast, seemed to have something for everybody (though it tended to be the upper classes who studied and tried to practise it). It is fair to assume, therefore,

that when Paul was writing to a city like Corinth or Ephesus, and quite possibly the smaller towns as well, he would expect his hearers to be familiar with some of the basic concepts of Stoicism, and to ‘hear’ things that he said within that context – much as today, with western culture still basically Epicurean or at least Deist, people ‘hear’ the word ‘god’ as referring to a distant, detached being, and ‘ethics’ or ‘morality’ as ‘a set of rules designed to stop us having fun’.

The possibility of ‘hearing’ what Paul was saying with first-century Stoic ears has been explored by various recent writers. Paul’s ethics, obviously, are a natural place to look.¹⁰³ His language about the divine *pneuma* is another obvious place. We may in the end conclude that the main sources for what he says about the spirit are (a) the scriptures and (b) the actual experience of the first Christians, but he must have known that for many of his hearers the word *pneuma* denoted the ultimately divine identity at the heart of all things, the hot breath that would eventually consume all things.¹⁰⁴ When he speaks of the church as the body of the Messiah, he was almost certainly aware that this was an image used by some Stoics to talk about the universal family of humankind, as well as by others to refer to what we still sometimes call the ‘body politic’ of a particular civic community.¹⁰⁵ Some have suggested that Paul’s vision of the eschaton, particularly the great scene in Romans 8.18–25, might have been heard on analogy with the Stoic vision of the coming great conflagration, after which all things would start up once more.¹⁰⁶ Whether Paul himself would have intended such echoes, granted the sources of his language in the Jewish apocalyptic traditions and their reshaping around the Messiah and his resurrection, we may doubt, but it is always possible that some of his hearers might have seen what he was doing as in some ways parallel to that well-known Stoic theme.

Some of Paul’s own main themes, of course, cut right across the founding principles of all the main philosophies, Stoicism included. His vision of joy is radically different from the Epicurean vision of pleasure, and his embrace of suffering constitutes a major difference between him and both Epicureanism and Stoicism. His belief in the God of Israel as both radically

other than the world and yet intimately involved with it cannot be caught in the categories either of the Porch or of the Garden. And his vision of the ultimate goal of human life is also radically different from theirs, both in its actual content and in the fact that it is not a vision of self-discovery or self-improvement at all. It is, rather, a matter of displacing the 'self' from the centre of the picture and placing the Messiah, and his death and resurrection, there instead:

... so that my profit may be the Messiah, and that I may be discovered in him, not having my own covenant status defined by Torah, but the status which comes through the Messiah's faithfulness: the covenant status from God which is given to faith. This means knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, and knowing the partnership of his sufferings. It means sharing the form and pattern of his death, so that somehow I may arrive at the final resurrection from the dead.¹⁰⁷

Likewise, Paul's vision of the living presence of the one God, one lord, resulting in him seeing the church and the individual Christian to be 'temples' on the shocking analogy with the Jerusalem Temple itself, might be thought to have some analogies with the Stoic doctrine of the indwelling of the *pneuma* or the *logos*. But for Paul there are radical differences in both source (the biblical view of God's tabernacling presence), content (the *pneuma* as a divine gift, not an automatic human possession) and goal (holiness and unity in the present, resurrection in the future). And the ultimate scandal remained the cross itself. Any self-respecting Greek or Roman with even a smattering of the noble philosophical traditions would be horrified at the idea that the ultimate revelation of the one true God might be the ugly judicial lynching of a young Jew. Any attempt to bring Paul together with his philosophical contemporaries must factor in these stumbling-blocks from the start. Paul was not a first-century moralizing philosopher who happened to hold, on the side as it were, a few strange views about Jesus, and about the meaning and effect of his death and resurrection. These were, for him, the very centre. If we are to compare different schemes of thought with one another we must compare centres with centres, not one person's centre with another person's periphery.

(ii) Beyond the Engberg-Pedersen Divide?

(a) Exposition

When we think of present scholarship on Paul and the Stoics, one name emerges from the pack like a marathon runner out in the lead. The lively and engaging style of the Danish scholar Troels Engberg-Pedersen has opened up apparent new possibilities in an area which many in the previous generation had all but ignored. Even those who had worked in this field may well sense that Engberg-Pedersen's proposals go far beyond their more modest offerings. One recent commentator calls him 'one of the very best Pauline scholars in the world', claiming that his most recent book is 'intellectually exciting, timely and controversial'.¹⁰⁸ Those claims will themselves be controversial, but there is no doubt that Engberg-Pedersen has at the very least raised questions with which any serious historical account of Paul must come to terms. That is the justification for including a detailed discussion of his work at this point, now that we have laid the ground for it with our own exposition of Paul in relation to his philosophical contemporaries.

Out of Engberg-Pedersen's many works, the central statements of his thesis about Paul are found in his 2000 book, *Paul and the Stoics*, and in the follow-up volume, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul*, whose subtitle *The Material Spirit* tells its own story.¹⁰⁹ Engberg-Pedersen comes to Paul as a lifelong student of ancient philosophy; if there is a danger of 'parallelomania' for him, it is that he reads Paul looking for parallels to the Stoics, rather than (like many New Testament scholars) the other way round. I hope that my own treatment of the sources, in chapter 3 and here, will enable us to keep a proper balance.

Engberg-Pedersen emphasizes that Paul is not a philosopher, nor particularly a Stoic. He argues, however, that Paul drew freely on the philosophical traditions of his time, not least the Stoic traditions, in commending to his congregations the way of life he believed was best. He states at the outset of *Paul and the Stoics* that he intends to explore Paul's

‘worldview’ within a social-historical context, aiming (as we said just now) to see Paul as a whole and Stoicism as a whole, not just to examine detached motifs.¹¹⁰ He intends, he says, to build up a picture of Paul’s entire ‘form of life and symbolic world’.¹¹¹ This sounds much like the aim we set ourselves in Part II of the present book, though Engberg-Pedersen goes about it in a very different way. He says that his work stands in line with the ‘new perspective’ of Ed Sanders and Heikki Räisänen, and one can see some similarities while observing considerable differences, not least with Sanders’s detailed analysis of Jewish thought, which Engberg-Pedersen does not attempt. He claims to be part of a movement which is rescuing Paul from the ‘protestant’ tradition,¹¹² and indeed from ‘theology’ as a whole.¹¹³ His approach, he emphasizes, is ‘naturalistic and not theological’, because to read with theological intent is to lose ‘the historical-critical edge’.¹¹⁴ There is a sense, reading him, that he is doing to the European theological tradition what the ancient Cynics did to the establishments of their day: as self-styled ‘dogs’, they barked and yapped at the hollow pretensions of the rich and the respectable.¹¹⁵ I don’t know that the theological traditions themselves are either rich or respectable these days, but reading Engberg-Pedersen reminds one of the sharp critique and calculated disdain of a Diogenes, barking at the theological interpretations of Paul which he perceives as irrelevant to the real issues.

In particular, and in line with a collection of essays he himself edited, Engberg-Pedersen claims repeatedly that it is time to go, and that he himself is going, ‘Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide’. This means rescuing Paul from the sterile pseudo-antitheses of nineteenth-century ideologically driven scholarship, and presenting the apostle as someone who was able to draw freely on both Jewish and non-Jewish traditions, combining his ‘apocalyptic’ worldview, which remained important, with major themes and motifs from the non-Jewish world, and particularly from the world of Stoicism. Engberg-Pedersen allows that Paul did thus still have a double source of ideas, but denies that we have to choose between them, as though trying to make Paul *either* a ‘Jewish’ *or* a ‘hellenistic’ thinker. His basic argument in the earlier volume, amplified from a different angle in the later

one, is that Paul is basically operating within the essential structure of Stoic ethics, so that even if Paul speaks of 'God' and 'Christ' where the Stoic speaks of rationality and reason, 'it is the same basic structure that holds together Stoic ethics and Paul's comprehensive theologizing'.¹¹⁶

There are two tools of thought which Engberg-Pedersen himself uses throughout and which deserve comment because of their radical influence on his whole project. The first is what he calls 'philosophical exegesis', which means that 'the interpreter applies categories of interpretation that make sense philosophically, whether in an ancient or a modern context'.¹¹⁷ As philosophers themselves might say, it all depends what you mean by 'making sense'; to judge from Engberg-Pedersen's actual practice, what this means is that categories of interpretation which do not 'make sense' include much of Paul's 'apocalyptic' Jewish context. Instead, he brings to the text the categories he has culled from ancient Stoicism on the one hand and from contemporary cultural analysts, particularly Foucault and Bourdieu, on the other. The question of whether this itself 'makes sense' in terms of an historical analysis of Paul is one to which we must return.

The second tool of thought, which works closely with this, is the category developed by the late Bernard Williams, that of ideas and beliefs which constitute 'a real option for us'.¹¹⁸ This, to be frank, is more of a problem. It is not simply that the question of what constitutes 'a real option for us' might conceivably be more open than Engberg-Pedersen allows (see below). It is not even a question of who 'we' or 'us' might actually be. He says at one point that 'scholars ought to ... make clear to themselves and their readers exactly where and how their own existential interest is involved in their professional scholarly work', and he claims to have done this himself. But he also says, in a blunt footnote, 'Of course, very much hangs on who the "we" are.' It does indeed, thinks the reader; but Engberg-Pedersen's note then concludes, 'I shall not address that question.'¹¹⁹

But these confusions, and the perception even of a certain subterfuge, is still not the deepest problem. The deepest problem is this: what is this notion of a 'real option' doing within an *historical* analysis of Paul and the *historical* relation he might or might not have had to *historical* Stoicism? It

hardly makes sense for Engberg-Pedersen, in the name of historical criticism, to strain out the gnat of theological readings and then swallow the camel of a loosely formulated ‘real option for us’. Unless I am much mistaken, it is the task of the historian to get inside the mind of, and be able to expound the thought of, people whose worldviews, mindsets, aims, motivations, imaginations, likes and dislikes are significantly different from our own at, potentially, every point. I have a feeling that Aristotle said something just like that. Indeed, when characters in history look similar to ourselves, we may be in danger of then projecting our own worldviews on to them, so that all we hear is the echo of our own voices bouncing back off the distant historical wall. This has demonstrably happened in the discipline, as for instance in Barth’s claim that, when the Reformers were reading Paul, the barrier between the sixteenth and the first centuries disappeared, leaving Paul speaking directly to the new situation.¹²⁰ A similar problem occurred when the great Ronald Syme envisaged the rise and rule of Augustus by analogy with the great tyrannies of the mid-twentieth century. Analogies may help, but they may also deceive us into thinking we ‘know’ more than we do.¹²¹

In the present case, what seems to be driving Engberg-Pedersen’s adoption of this method is a sort of missionary accommodation, which I suspect he would shun if it were attempted in other directions. He seems to envisage the kind of Procrustean slimming-down of New Testament proclamation that we associate with some aspects of early twentieth-century scholarship:

We may think, indeed we should think, that Paul’s belief in the story of the Christ event, in the direct form in which he understood it, was false. But we may let ourselves be stimulated by the *kind* of ‘theologizing’ that we find in Paul to think that we should ourselves adopt the same kind: one that attempts to tease out the meaning for human beings of the Christ event in a manner that makes immediate sense philosophically and in that way presents the special shape of the Christ-believing form of life as a real option to one’s contemporaries.¹²²

It gradually becomes clear, of course, what the criterion is for deciding whether something is a ‘real option’ for us or not: philosophical analysis will insert the surgeon’s knife between the bits of Paul that we want to keep

and the bits we do not – the latter being precisely ‘theology’, which we must avoid lest we lose our historical-critical edge! What must be stripped away, it seems, is the full-on ‘apocalyptic’ understanding of Paul’s gospel. ‘Anthropology’ and ‘ethics’, then, are fine, and can be liberated from ‘theology’ and even (despite the second book) ‘cosmology’.

This, as Engberg-Pedersen recognizes, is very close to Bultmann’s ‘demythologizing’ programme, and though he distances himself from Bultmann in some ways it is not clear to me that he has dealt with the problems this parallel inevitably raises.¹²³ In fact, Engberg-Pedersen’s statement of his misgivings at treating as ‘historical’ something which seems strange to us looks to me like an abandonment of historical method altogether:

Scholars often speak of Paul’s idea here [he is discussing ‘participation in Christ’] as if it made immediate sense and indeed was more or less readily acceptable to us. But it is not. On the contrary, it looks as if it is very far from constituting a real option for us. That also means, however, that it is very difficult to develop, *even as part of doing one’s existentially neutral, historical work*, what it at all meant to Paul. Since it appears so strange to us, one really cannot feel sure that one has got it sufficiently right for it to be possible to develop it further and combine it with other similar ideas. A shared level of discourse is lacking. But that is just another way of saying that one cannot recur to a shared field of ‘phenomena’ to fill it in. By contrast, with the ‘anthropological’ and ‘ethical’ ideas with which we shall be centrally concerned, there is far more of an initial likelihood that we do share Paul’s level of discourse. And so the road is open to a ‘phenomenological’ reading that presupposes that, at least tentatively.¹²⁴

We might comment that this use of ‘philosophical exegesis’ in search of things that might be a ‘real option’ for us already seems to be a lot more ‘critical’ than ‘historical’: more bark than bite, perhaps. It constitutes a radical application of the method known as *Sachkritik*, by which the expositor claims to be able to ‘correct’ certain strands of someone’s thoughts in line with ‘more central’ elements. This already presupposes that the interpreter understands how a train of thought ‘ought to work’ better than the person, two thousand years ago, who was thinking it – something which in other fields, with less at stake, one might regard as far-fetched. It is one thing to ponder the question of how to communicate – and, it seems, to commend – first-century ideas to one’s contemporaries. But it is strange

to find someone whose basic discipline is ancient philosophy complaining that if certain ancient ideas are not ‘real options’ for us we ought to be anxious as to whether we can even describe them properly. That is certainly not what Bernard Williams had in mind. It would make it hard to write about any ideas other than those with which we already felt sympathy. This is the dilemma, of course, of dyed-in-the-wool ‘method actors’, who can only play particular parts by identifying themselves completely with the characters concerned and then ‘acting naturally’, as opposed to the traditional acting in which one thinks through how such a person would behave and then behaves in that way.

Engberg-Pedersen seems, in fact, to be making a historiographical mistake: treating the distinction between ideas that are a ‘real option’ for us, and ideas that are not, as an index to the *historical* analysis of Paul’s mind. He believes (it seems) that Paul’s anthropological and ethical ideas are a ‘real option’, whereas his theological and ‘apocalyptic’ ones are not; therefore *Paul’s anthropological and ethical ideas are deemed to constitute the real centre of his thought*. ‘I like this, or at least I can resonate with it, therefore it must be what Paul really meant.’ Of course, Engberg-Pedersen never puts it as baldly as that, though he sometimes comes quite close; and he does say, repeatedly, that ‘apocalyptic’ ideas continued to be important for Paul. But again and again he claims to have uncovered, and to be expounding, that which was *actually* central for the apostle. There are thus serious questions to be asked, even before we get to the subject-matter itself.

Engberg-Pedersen’s two books, ten years apart, present different but, we are assured, complementary aspects of Paul’s thought. That thought is, in both cases, expounded in the light of Stoic parallels, and with the underlying thesis that, in getting ‘beyond the Judaism/Hellenism divide’, Paul’s most fundamental ideas were derived from ... Stoicism.

The first book, *Paul and the Stoics*, concentrates on the pattern of conversion, for which Engberg-Pedersen has an elaborate model. He offers a ‘cognitive’ or ‘ethical’ reading of this conversion-model: what counts is what one *knows* or *thinks*, and how one then behaves as a result. The model

indicates a conversion from an initial state of self-centredness, via a call or fresh vision, whether of ‘God’ or the *logos* or ‘reason’. This conversion results in a new state of being in which one is open to others and ready for ‘altruism’.¹²⁵ Such a conversion, whether in Paul or in the philosophical tradition, is a complete change, with no turning back; once it has happened, it is ‘all or nothing’, with no dithering half measures, no ‘already/not yet’.¹²⁶ Paul has already left the fleshly body behind; he is ‘disengaged from the body’, perhaps because something – we do not know what – had ‘happened in his body’ when he was converted.¹²⁷ Engberg-Pedersen applies this model first to the Stoics (using Cicero’s *Ends* Book III as the key text) and then to Philipians, Romans and Galatians. ‘It may be hoped’, he says, ‘that readers of Paul will intuitively feel that the ... model captures something that is reasonably central in Paul’s thought world.’¹²⁸ One may be surprised that a philosopher would appeal to intuitive feelings rather than to argument. As the two books proceed one learns not to be so surprised.

The second book, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul*, expounds what Engberg-Pedersen takes to be the ‘physical pattern’ which corresponds to, and underlies, the cognitive and ethical themes explored in the first book. Here, following Dale Martin (to whom the book is dedicated), he emphasizes the ‘physical’ nature of the *pneuma* of which Paul speaks so frequently. Whereas in Platonism the word *pneuma* denoted a non-material reality, in Stoicism all reality was in some sense or other ‘physical’ or ‘material’, and the *pneuma*, as we saw in chapter 3, was thought of as the fiery divine substance which indwelt all reality, all persons, and the cosmos itself. Engberg-Pedersen expounds several themes in Paul in terms of this ‘material’ rather than ‘immaterial’ *pneuma*, producing striking and challenging results. Again and again he insists that what Paul is saying is not ‘metaphorical’, but ‘literal’. When, for instance, Paul was preaching, or even writing letters, he believed that this ‘material *pneuma*’ was being passed from him to his hearers. We may be puzzled by the word ‘cosmology’ as it appears in the title of the book, and frequently inside it, since Engberg-Pedersen is not talking about Paul’s view of the *kosmos*, but about his overall theory of human life. This is where the focus

is placed on the 'self', since as with the previous volume Engberg-Pedersen is concerned with the vision of 'self' in both Paul and Stoicism, which comes to the fore in a striking chapter comparing Epictetus with Paul. This is in my view one of the most successful of Engberg-Pedersen's analyses, and should be factored in to subsequent studies of this important area.

The book's final flourish is an exposition, and application to Paul and the Stoics, of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which attempts, after the manner of Clifford Geertz or Charles Taylor, to provide a larger concept which will include the multiple aspects of social and material culture – what I have continued to refer to as 'worldview'. Whether or not we are convinced by Engberg-Pedersen's application of this to Paul, it remains in my judgment a potentially fruitful route to explore.

(b) Critique

I have already commented on some of the issues raised by Engberg-Pedersen's own explanation of his method. We may begin this critique by pointing out some quite serious peculiarities – the more serious because, as a philosopher, Engberg-Pedersen might be expected to be clear in his use of key terms and sharp in his mounting of arguments. Sadly, he is neither. To begin with, his more recent book is marred by the constant use of 'metaphorical' and 'literal' to mean 'abstract' and 'concrete'. However common this is in popular discourse, it is bound to breed confusion in a serious discussion, especially when there is also discussion of actual metaphors. One hesitates to make the point again, but it seems necessary: the fact that a word is used 'metaphorically' tells us nothing whatever about whether the entity to which it refers is 'material' or 'non-material', and the fact that a word is used 'literally' likewise tells us nothing about the physicality or otherwise of its referent. One can use a metaphor to refer to a concrete object, and one can speak literally about abstract, non-material entities.¹²⁹ It would have been much clearer to use 'concrete' and 'abstract', allowing 'metaphorical' and 'literal' to do their proper job of explaining

how particular words refer to things rather than what sort of things they are referring to.

One may more readily excuse an idiosyncratic use of ‘worldview’ and ‘cosmology’, since these terms are both in use today in a variety of senses. But it would have been good to see some recognition that there is a lively debate about ‘worldview’, going back to Geertz (who is cited but not engaged with) and continuing through Taylor and others, and to know where Engberg-Pedersen would situate himself in terms of the ‘worldview elements’ which I and others have highlighted.¹³⁰ These are after all cognate with his stated (but as yet unfulfilled) aim of mapping the symbolic world of Paul and his contemporaries. As for ‘cosmology’, it is strange to find it used like this:

On the one hand, there is a basically metaphorical or, if not metaphorical, then at least cognitive way of understanding Paul’s language. On the other hand, there is a non-metaphorical, concrete and basically physical – or as I shall call it, cosmological – way of understanding that language.¹³¹

Engberg-Pedersen also speaks of Paul ‘drawing on his cosmology of the *pneuma*’, and speaks of his belief in various stages in Christian identity being ‘thoroughly cosmological’.¹³² Since none of these uses have anything directly to do with ‘cosmology’ as normally understood, one is bound to wonder whether a better term might have been found.

This brings us to two old friends: ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘salvation history’. In both cases Engberg-Pedersen’s usage is idiosyncratic. As regards ‘apocalyptic’, he shares with some other New Testament scholars today the (bad) habit of using the word without regard for the actual ‘apocalyptic’ traditions from Daniel through to *4 Ezra*, which as we saw in chapter 2 have little to do with the kind of ‘end-of-the-world’ fantasy imagined by some, and plenty to do with the *metaphorical* investing of space–time events with their *theological* significance.¹³³ He speaks, as some scholars of second-Temple Judaism used to do, of the ‘pessimism’ of ‘apocalyptic’ (as opposed to the supposed ‘optimism’ of the Stoics), and can talk of a fresh reading of 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 which ‘removes it fairly drastically from the level of operation of ordinary “apocalyptic” writings’.¹³⁴ He gives no sign,

however, that he understands the traditions that emerge in these ‘apocalyptic’ writings, or the theological and political freight they carry, as set out for instance in chapter 2 above.

When it comes to ‘salvation history’, Engberg-Pedersen first uses the phrase to refer to the ‘history’ which moves *forward* from the time of Jesus to the ultimate end, a use which so far as I know is unique to himself; and he then uses the same phrase to refer (is this, too, unique?) to the Stoic sense of time moving forwards towards the final conflagration.¹³⁵ When he subsequently uses the term in the more normal sense – to denote some kind of historical sequence between the divine promise to the patriarchs and the coming of the Messiah – he suggests that Paul ‘felt forced to try to construct a picture also of God’s dealings with mankind (or at least with the Jews) *before* Christ, as these dealings were witnessed to in the Jewish scripture’.¹³⁶ Nobody who understands the place of Adam, Abraham, Moses and so on within the Jewish world of Paul’s day could speak of Paul ‘constructing’ such a thing as though *de novo*, or indeed of him being ‘forced’ to do so.

These all place road-blocks in the way of an easy understanding, not to mention appropriation, of Engberg-Pedersen’s main theses. There is a particular theological (or perhaps even ‘cosmological’) irony which emerges from these verbal peculiarities: the very thing that, we may surmise, compels him to say that Paul’s ‘apocalyptic’ thought does not constitute a ‘real option’ for us is its concrete vision of the future; but he replaces it with the ‘material *pneuma*’, which then offers a remarkably concrete vision of baptism, preaching and so on, which many will find equally hard to understand, let alone adopt for themselves. If ‘real options’ are what count, we may wonder what has happened, in the second of Engberg-Pedersen’s books, to the central criterion by which the first was organized.

As for exegesis itself, Engberg-Pedersen’s marginalization of Paul’s subtle and complex Jewish world leaves him at a considerable disadvantage. He is reduced to forcing ideas and themes into texts and then making them central, as with his insistence that Philippians 3.4–11 is really

all about the *pneuma* even though the word never occurs.¹³⁷ Despite saying that it is important ‘to stay closer to the immediate level of the text itself’ in respect of Galatians 2, one would never know from his discussion what the chapter was basically about.¹³⁸ If one is going to bark at the tradition, it helps to know your target. To say, of Romans 7, that ‘the whole point of Paul’s account seems to lie in making his readers themselves experience the experiences of the self that he is recounting’, and that ‘Paul is, as it were, trying to make his readers convert in exactly the self-generating and pneumatic way that he has elsewhere described for his own case’ is simply to fail to read the text. However controversial Romans 7 may be, this can hardly be its ‘whole point’. Engberg-Pedersen, perhaps realizing this, resorts to breathtaking subjectivism:

I can imagine that this reading will be roundly rejected by scholars. I can only reply that I have a strong sense that exactly here we are extremely close to Paul’s own understanding of what is going on in this text. If he were present, he would have nodded.¹³⁹

This is neither exegesis nor history.

What, then, of Engberg-Pedersen’s main proposals? His account (in the first volume) of conversion in Paul and the Stoics is, frankly, so generalized that it is hardly of any use in understanding either Paul or Cicero (his main source for Stoicism at this point), let alone comparing them. It would not be difficult to apply exactly the same model to the appeal of the Wisdom of Solomon (building on Proverbs and elsewhere), where the rulers of the world lack the true wisdom, and persecute the righteous, but are urged to acquire this divine wisdom so that they can learn the ways of the creator. One could apply it to the teaching of Torah in numerous works from the second-Temple period and then from the rabbis. One could certainly apply it to texts from Qumran. Further afield, I am no expert in Buddhism, but I see no reason why it might not be applied to the transition from being unenlightened to a state of enlightenment. It is hard to see, then, that it adds much to our grasp of what Paul, or the Stoics, were all about.

There is another problem with the model. How do we know it applied to the Stoicism with which Paul was familiar? Cicero’s book *De Finibus* is

Engberg-Pedersen's primary source here; but Cicero elsewhere portrays himself as an Academic, not a Stoic, and when he puts Stoic arguments into someone else's mouth in dialogues (in this case, 'Cato') we may, or we may not, be hearing what a Stoic of the first century BC would actually have said. We would hardly trust a report by Josephus of someone else's position to be an accurate view of 'what Jews believed' even in his own day; and Cicero was writing a century before Paul, half a world away, and putting words into someone else's mouth. Even granted all that, we may note that 'conversion', in the sense that Engberg-Pedersen wants to find it, is hardly the central topic of discussion in the *De Finibus* itself, just as one may read hundreds of pages in Seneca, Paul's contemporary who certainly was a Stoic, without finding a passage to which Engberg-Pedersen's model actually applies.

In fact, Cicero and Seneca themselves undermine one of Engberg-Pedersen's central claims, that both for Paul and for Stoicism 'conversion' is an 'all or nothing' moment in which one leaves the old life behind for ever.¹⁴⁰ To be sure, someone wanting to become a philosopher would have to turn away from previous worldviews and commitments and take up the new challenge. Such a moment – as we see, for instance, with Dio Chrysostom – would indeed be like a conversion. But though the challenge to such a transformation is always there underneath the writings of those we have studied in chapter 3, it is not a major feature. Rather, we find on every page of Cicero and Seneca, and the others, advice about how to move forwards, how to deal with this moral problem or that bad habit, how to deepen the commitment one already has. That, of course, is what 'virtue', whether in the Platonist or the Aristotelian tradition, was all about. To be sure, one had to make a start. But habits, by definition, are not acquired overnight; and virtue is, by definition, a habit. That is why, as Engberg-Pedersen sees, a certain amount of Paul (not as much as he imagines, but a certain amount) and a good deal of Stoic writing consists of *paraenesis*, exhortation. Those who have made a start need to make progress, to move forwards beyond the level they have already attained. It is not, then, all in place at conversion.

Faced with all this, it comes as no surprise to find a leading expert on ancient Stoicism describing Engberg-Pedersen's project as 'impressive but ... wholly misguided'.¹⁴¹ Perhaps this is why Engberg-Pedersen issues an appeal to 'enlightened' modern scholars and philosophers: they, he supposes, are the ones who will understand his point.¹⁴²

In the same way, though of course Paul does describe in more than one place the change that happened in his own life (Galatians 1 and 2 and Philippians 3 come to mind, and one might also invoke the account of rescue from sin and death in Ephesians 2.1–10), it is by no means clear that this is *the* major theme of his writing and teaching. Of course, he believes in conversion, in people 'turning from idols to serve a living and true God'.¹⁴³ But that is as it were the starting-point which he can then take for granted, rather than the main focus of his theology. In addition, whenever Paul does speak of that transition, in his own life or that of others, the point is never that everyone ought to have some such transition for (as it were) its own sake. The point is always *Jesus*: 'I calculate everything as a loss, because knowing Messiah Jesus as my lord is worth far more than everything else put together!'¹⁴⁴ Whether Paul would have recognized a Stoic 'conversion' (even supposing that the Stoics he knew were prepared to think or speak in such a way) as the same kind of thing as having one's life revolutionized by the powerful message of the Jesus-gospel we may well doubt.

In any case – and here is one of the most curious things about Engberg-Pedersen's account of 'conversion' – it is not at all the case that the transition in Paul's life was from a life centred upon self alone to a life opened out to others. Yes, of course, as 'a man in the Messiah' he believed in and experienced the primary quality of *agapē* (which is not the same as 'altruism', the word Engberg-Pedersen prefers). But he began, as he tells us in the same 'conversion' passages in Galatians and Philippians, very much within the solidarity of ethnic Israel. His whole pre-conversion identity was, in that sense, *corporate*. In fact, as with Qumran, even though it would be wrong to see the transition as being from 'corporate' to 'individual' there was nevertheless something 'individual' about the process of one person leaving that old 'corporate' identity in order then to be joined to a different

one (however much, as again in both Qumran and Paul, the subsequent ‘different one’ was held to be the true identity to which the old one had pointed). And, on the other pole of the supposed comparison, Engberg-Pedersen admits that the Stoics, once thoroughly ‘converted’ to their new way of life, were actually thoroughgoing individualists. As we know from the whole Aristotelian tradition which they had adapted, ‘virtue’ in ancient philosophy was basically an individual pursuit.¹⁴⁵ Engberg-Pedersen claims that Stoics were just as ‘community-oriented’ as Paul, but when he faces the question directly he has to admit that this was at best skin deep:

None of these Stoics [Seneca, Epictetus, Musonius Rufus, Dio Chrysostom], however, went so far as ever to consider practising Stoicism as a communitarian project. Their Stoicism remained more or less ‘individualistic’. Some of them, it is true, had contact with the group of senators in Ist-century Rome who constituted a ‘Stoic opposition’ to the emperors. Here we do see some reflection of the political potential in Stoicism. But to speak of a communitarian project of the kind envisaged directly by Zeno and indirectly by Chrysippus would be wrong.¹⁴⁶

Engberg-Pedersen explains this on the basis that all these Stoics were from the upper class. They would not have been prepared to leave that level of society to live a common life in accordance with their philosophy. This alone speaks volumes for the difference between Paul and the Stoics: ‘Not many of you’, writes the apostle to the Corinthians, ‘were nobly born’.¹⁴⁷ But then, casting about for an exception to his rule about Stoic individualism, Engberg-Pedersen alights on – Paul himself:

Do we not find any attempt in Paul’s day to practise Stoicism as a communitarian project? Yes. With all the necessary qualifications: Paul’s own community-creating project is just such an attempt.¹⁴⁸

Once again the reader – never mind the historian or the exegete – has a sharp intake of breath. According to the model of ‘conversion’ which is supposedly the pattern that unites Paul and the Stoics, one begins with an isolated self and ends with a community. Paul, for certain, began with one sort of community and ended with another. The Stoics began as members of the upper classes, a strong and tightly knit community if ever there was one, and ended as individualists. How can this ‘model’ make any sense? And

how can we cite Paul, in the middle of an argument such as this book is advancing, as an example of the other pole of comparison?

Engberg-Pedersen's more recent book focuses on the 'material *pneuma*'. He attempts to understand Paul's many references to it (and hints about it) in terms of a strict Stoic 'materiality' as opposed to the Platonic 'non-material' understanding which he rightly sees has been characteristic of much later Christian understanding.¹⁴⁹ Despite the word 'cosmology' in the book's title, he never discusses Paul's major theme of 'new creation', or indeed the creational theology underlying it. Nor does he ever address – astonishingly in two books about Paul and the Stoics – the difference between a scripturally based Jewish monotheism (and Paul's variations on that theme) and the flexible pantheism of first-century Stoicism. These, one might have thought, would be basic to any project such as the one proposed. Instead, he turns at once, in his more recent book, to a topic which was undoubtedly central for Paul: resurrection.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps the most startling thing in the whole book is the phrase 'Paul's Stoic resurrection'.¹⁵¹ Stoics, like all other ancient non-Jews known to us, did not believe in 'resurrection', that is, in the possibility that someone who was bodily dead might become bodily alive again. All sorts of other post-mortem possibilities were canvassed across the ancient world, but, as many writers in many traditions (including Stoics) declared whenever the question came up, 'resurrection' as such was not among them.¹⁵² What then does Engberg-Pedersen mean by suggesting that Paul's resurrection is 'Stoic' in its basic orientation?

His principal move is to align two passages in 1 Corinthians 15, and to read the latter in the light of the former. First we find Paul describing different sorts of bodies which are to be found in the cosmos as a whole:

Not all physical objects have the same kind of physicality. There is one kind of physicality for humans, another kind for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. Some bodies belong in the heavens (*sōmata epourania*), and some on the earth (*sōmata epigeia*); and the kind of glory appropriate for the ones in the heavens is different from the kind of glory appropriate for the ones on the earth. There is one kind of glory for the sun, another for the moon, and another for the stars, since the stars themselves vary, with different degrees of glory.¹⁵³

The key phrase here is *sōmata epourania*, ‘heavenly bodies’. In context, this clearly refers to astral objects (sun, moon and stars, with the stars then further distinguished from one another) as opposed to objects on the earth. But Engberg-Pedersen seizes upon this and uses it as the key to interpret the second member of Paul’s next pairing:

That’s what it’s like with the resurrection of the dead. It is sown decaying, and raised undecaying. It is sown in shame, and raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, and raised in power. It is sown as the embodiment of ordinary nature (*sōma psychikon*), and raised as the embodiment of the spirit (*sōma pneumatikon*). If ordinary nature has its embodiment (*ei estin sōma psychikon*), then the spirit too has its embodiment (*estin kai pneumatikon*).¹⁵⁴

Engberg-Pedersen thus brings these together:

... human beings are ‘sown’, that is, lead their lives to begin with ... as physical and sensible beings of ‘flesh and blood’ ... ; eventually, however, they will be raised to a glorious state of eternal life that is connected with heaven and, one suspects, with the heavenly *bodies*. Basically, then, Paul is relying on a single, straightforward contrast between an earthly kind of body connected with death and a heavenly kind of body connected with eternal life.¹⁵⁵

Note the tell-tale ‘one suspects’. This is precisely what Paul does *not* say, and what the flow of his thought neither requires nor implies. Indeed, the passage as a whole, and the meaning of ‘resurrection’ as a whole, positively rule out this move. As Engberg-Pedersen sees, the contrast of the *psychikos* person with the *pneumatikos* goes back to an earlier passage in the letter, where both categories of persons are just that, persons, not one category of ordinary people and another of stars in the sky.¹⁵⁶ But what Engberg-Pedersen is eager – too eager – to affirm is that when Paul said ‘resurrection’ he did not mean what everyone else, Jew and non-Jew alike, meant by that term in the first century. He meant ‘a body dwelling in heaven’:

It seems that [Paul] must have had a more precise idea in mind when he contrasts a ‘psychic body’ with a ‘pneumatic’ one. This suggests that the contrast was *already* contained in the basic contrast he drew in the second set of premisses between ‘earthly bodies’ and ‘heavenly bodies’. A ‘psychic’ body belongs *on earth* as exemplified by the ‘earthly bodies’ mentioned in 15:39; and a ‘pneumatic’ one belongs *in heaven* as exemplified by the ‘heavenly bodies’ mentioned in 15:41. Or to be even more precise: a ‘pneumatic body’ is a heavenly body like the sun, moon and stars.¹⁵⁷

This is precisely what Paul is not saying in this passage, but this reading enables Engberg-Pedersen then to claim (a) that Paul is following ‘apocalyptic’ literature in seeing ‘those who are being saved’ as stars in heaven, and (b) that the reason he describes these people, in this future state, as ‘pneumatic’ is because he is thinking of the specifically Stoic *pneuma*, through which ‘heavenly bodies that are situated at the top of the hierarchical *scala naturae* are distinctly made up of pneuma’.¹⁵⁸ Both of these claims are groundless. First, though some Jewish writers (taking the simile in Daniel 12.2–3 as a literal prediction) did imagine the righteous after death to be like stars in the sky, this was not the mainstream Jewish (Pharisaic) ‘resurrection’ view, and it is specifically not what any early Christians, especially Paul, understood by ‘resurrection’.¹⁵⁹ Second, and crucially, *Paul does not envisage ‘resurrection’ as meaning ‘being in heaven’*. Engberg-Pedersen is here simply repeating a view which, however widespread in contemporary western Christianity, is none the less a radical misunderstanding of first-century beliefs. The word ‘resurrection’, for Paul and all other early Christians, was never a fancy way of speaking of ‘going to heaven’. It was always and only about the renewal of actual bodily life – which meant bodily life in a recreated cosmos (see below).¹⁶⁰ Paul never, in fact, actually speaks of the dead ‘going to heaven’. The closest he comes is when he says that his desire is ‘to leave all this and be with the Messiah’.¹⁶¹ When he speaks of heavenly citizenship, it is not because he is looking forward to going to heaven. He is looking forward to the Messiah coming *from* heaven to change the present body into a glorious body like his own.¹⁶² Missing this point leads Engberg-Pedersen into a whole stream of misunderstandings which we do not need to describe in detail.¹⁶³

There are two crucial points which Engberg-Pedersen misses in this account of 1 Corinthians 15, which is the foundation of his whole second volume.¹⁶⁴ First, throughout this chapter Paul is building on Genesis 1, 2 and 3, in order to give an account of *new creation*, rooted in Jewish-style creational monotheism. This is where some genuine ‘cosmology’ would have helped: there is all the difference in the world between Paul’s retrieval

of Jewish creational monotheism and the pantheistic vision of the Stoics. As elsewhere in such comparisons, two views may keep one another company for part of the journey. Paul's allusion to the *pnoē zōēs* ('breath of life') from Genesis 2.7 is a case in point, alongside the Stoic *pneuma* which is itself the 'divine' force in all things. It is perfectly possible that Paul, expounding a biblically rooted vision of new creation, is deliberately picking up ideas from other worldviews and making them serve his purpose, or showing how their best insights point beyond themselves to a fuller reality than they had envisaged. That kind of tactic is what he declares as his regular practice in his programmatic statement in 2 Corinthians 10.4–5. But all the signs are that in this chapter, as elsewhere, he is consciously and deliberately expounding scripture in the light of Jesus, not expounding Stoicism in the light of some vague background 'apocalyptic' ideas.

The second crucial point is noted by Engberg-Pedersen, but he waves it away in a strange footnote.¹⁶⁵ The distinction Paul makes between *sōma psychikon* and *sōma pneumatikon* is specifically not a distinction between what the two 'bodies' are *composed of* – *psychē* on the one hand, *pneuma* on the other. It is a distinction between what the two 'bodies' are *animated by*: again, either *psychē* or *pneuma*. This vital distinction between *composition* and *animation* has been badly obscured in the popular mind by translations in the RSV tradition, which have, astonishingly, rendered *sōma psychikon* by 'physical body' and *sōma pneumatikon* by 'spiritual body', thus strongly evoking a Platonic dualism between a 'material' body and a 'non-material' body, feeding a widespread misconception that Paul, the earliest Christian writer, did not believe in bodily resurrection. At least Engberg-Pedersen and I can agree that such a reading is totally unwarranted. For a start, *psychē* is normally translated 'soul'; it is a word one might use, or echo, within Platonism if one wanted to stress that something was *non-material*, not that it was 'physical'. But does the Stoic version of 'physical' really help – help, I mean, in terms of understanding what Paul is saying?

The argument now goes much deeper. I have set out this point elsewhere, but since it is so often misunderstood (or, as in this case, waved away airily) it is important to repeat the historical basis.¹⁶⁶

First, philology. As the grammarians have pointed out, Greek adjectives ending in *-ikos* tend to refer to ethical or functional meanings. If you want adjectives that refer to the stuff of which something is made, they tend to be the ones that end in *-inos*.¹⁶⁷

Second, parallel usage, not least among philosophers and doctors. Aristotle, speaking of wombs that are ‘swollen with air’, uses the phrase *hysterai pneumatikai*, and nobody supposes that he thought the wombs were *made of* something called *pneuma*.¹⁶⁸ Galen quotes the third-century BC writer Erasistratus who uses *pneumatikē* to refer to the left ventricle of the heart, the one that *conveys* the *pneuma*, not one that is *composed* of it.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the first-century BC writer Vitruvius speaks of a machine that is ‘moved by wind’, a *pneumatikon organon*, and we do not imagine that he took the machines to be *made of* wind.¹⁷⁰ Following the Aristotle reference, the word can be active, referring for instance, almost as a transferred epithet, to *pneumatikos* wine, i.e. wine that causes the stomach to fill with flatulence.¹⁷¹ The adverb *pneumatikōs* can be used in the sense of ‘in one breath’.¹⁷² There are no uses in Liddell and Scott which support the meaning which Engberg-Pedersen (in company with many over the last century) wants to find in 1 Corinthians 15.¹⁷³

Third, classic exegesis. The International Critical Commentary on 1 Corinthians declares that

Evidently, *psychikon* does not mean that the body is made of *psychē*, consists entirely of *psychē*: and *pneumatikon* does not mean it is made and consists entirely of *pneuma*. The adjectives mean ‘congenital with,’ ‘formed to be the organ of’ ... The *pneuma* ... is ... the future body’s principle of life.¹⁷⁴

In my earlier treatment I quoted other commentaries, too, both German and English, to the same effect.¹⁷⁵ To these should be added the careful and thorough treatment of Thiselton, who after laying out several different options argues forcefully that Paul is simply not here talking about the

composition of the new body, but ‘the transformation of character or pattern of existence effected by the Holy Spirit’.¹⁷⁶ All this simply rules out Engberg-Pedersen’s view of resurrection in Paul, and with it all talk of believers being ‘torn out of the world’ in order to be situated ‘in a cosmologically imagined heaven of pneumatic, heavenly bodies’.¹⁷⁷ This is an idea found nowhere in Paul. It is deeply inimical to his thought.

Engberg-Pedersen’s treatment of the resurrection leads directly to a similar treatment of Paul’s vision of new creation. This, he declares, is to be understood on the basis of the Stoic doctrine of *ekpyrōsis*, the coming ‘conflagration’. Though he professes that he is not making Paul out to be a Stoic, he certainly makes him sound like one:

... the physical *pneuma* ... will also eventually *literally* make believers gain ‘victory’ over any opposing cosmological forces whether on earth or in the sublunary sphere of heaven. They will be transformed and carried away from the earth, which will itself be transformed at the conflagration by God’s powerful love.¹⁷⁸

This, it seems, is the result of Engberg-Pedersen’s much-heralded ‘dissolution’ of the contrast between Jewish (or ‘apocalyptic’) ideas and Stoic ones: the Stoic ones win every time.¹⁷⁹ He argues that to understand Paul’s vision of the ultimate end we should put together the cosmic vision of Romans 8 with the warning about ‘fire’ in 1 Corinthians 3. But this is radically mistaken. Both passages have their origins in Paul’s own language and imagery, taken from his biblical sources.

Romans 8, in particular, belongs where it does not as a detached statement about some future cosmic transformation but as the carefully planned climax of the entire sequence of thought from chapter 1 onwards, looking back particularly to Romans 4 (where Abraham is promised that he will ‘inherit the world’), Romans 5.12–21 (where the rule of sin and death is replaced by the worldwide rule of grace, of righteousness and even of God’s people) and Romans 8.12–17 (where the people are described in terms reminiscent of the exodus journey towards the ‘inheritance’, which now turns out to be the renewed cosmos that is set free from its ‘slavery to decay’). In particular, the passage turns on the messianic promise of Psalm

2, that the coming king would have the nations for his ‘inheritance’. This is a million miles away from anything to do with the pantheistic doctrine of *ekpyrōsis*, in which the inner divine fire eventually takes over all the other elements to purify them so that the world may begin all over again. It is radically different not only in content, but also in its sense of chronology: for the Stoic, the ‘conflagration’ will happen again and again in an endless cycle, while for Paul the one God is moving his creation towards its one and only goal. This relates directly to the radical difference, which Engberg-Pedersen never discusses, between Stoic pantheism (which is itself of course a form of monotheism) and the Jewish-style *creational* monotheism which Paul has developed in the light of the Messiah and the spirit.

As for 1 Corinthians 3.10–17, and the image of a coming fire which will burn up rubbish and purify what is left, the loose analogy with the Stoic conflagration is only skin deep. The Stoic theory is of the fiery *pneuma* that already inhabits everything and that will eventually work its way outwards to consume all other elements. This seems to be taken ‘literally’ by the Stoics, certainly if we are to believe Engberg-Pedersen’s repeated, and repeatedly italicized, use of that word. Paul’s image, however, is clearly a metaphor, and makes use of the idea of a building, specifically a temple, which will be destroyed by fire, leaving its precious metal and jewels purified and intact. Yes, Paul could at this point have been glancing across the market-place to where a group of Stoic philosophers was arguing about this or that. He could have been saying ‘Fire, is it? All right, let me tell you about the true divine fire that is coming one day.’ But his type of fire comes from somewhere else (it does not start out as an inner fiery substance, but is sent upon the ‘building’ from elsewhere); it performs a different function (it does not reduce all other elements to fire, but destroys some and purifies others); and it reaches a different goal (it does not leave the world ready to begin all over again, but provides the condition of salvation, by destroying that which cannot last and by enhancing that which can and will). A different fire; a different purpose.

I have spent considerable time on these two books by Engberg-Pedersen because they address a question which seems to me of central importance

for our whole subject: how did the Apostle to the Gentiles relate to the dominant philosophy of his day? Because of their industry and learning these works may already be seen as benchmarks for addressing this topic. But they proceed in such a misleading fashion that a marker needs to be put down, instead, to the effect that though the issues are important this is not the way to find the answers. It is important that from time to time the theological traditions submit themselves to sharp critique, to hearing the point the barking dogs are making. But they need to be on target.

We could, no doubt, say much more. It would be important, for instance, to note that whereas Engberg-Pedersen constantly speaks of cognitive awareness, of knowledge, as the centre of what Paul thinks is important, Paul himself explicitly deconstructs that notion by saying that (a) what matters is God's knowledge of us, not ours of him, and (b) knowledge will puff you up, but love builds you up.¹⁸⁰ That same motif characterizes Paul's radical revision of Aristotelian virtue-theory: the goal is not *eudaimonia*, but the Messiah himself, and the primary character-strength required in the present if one is stretching forward to that future is again *agapē*, love. All this is basic to Paul's actual and implicit engagement with the philosophical world of his day, but there is no sign that Engberg-Pedersen has got inside such questions.

Nor is there any sign that he has really understood the world of first-century Jews, their stories, their symbols, their political realities and aspirations and the way their literature addressed such matters. He works with a one-dimensional cardboard cut-out called 'apocalyptic' which bears little relation to the texts or movements we actually know, let alone the way they were reworked in early Christianity. Nor has he really understood some of the key issues at stake in current Pauline scholarship. He claims to have followed Sanders and Schweitzer in overcoming the divide between 'justification' and 'participation', but since he never discusses the former and only briefly treats the latter, and since in any case Sanders and Schweitzer did not overcome that divide at all but rather set it all the more firmly in stone, we are no further forward.¹⁸¹

In particular, his claim throughout, in these books and elsewhere, to have gone beyond ‘the Judaism/Hellenism divide’, is not made good. Yes, the nineteenth-century constructs which used those labels were damaging to scholarship (and to wider culture and European civilization), and we must avoid all that. But this does not mean that there was no difference in the first century between Jews and non-Jews, or between their respective symbolic worlds, characteristic narratives and so on. Of course, each side of that ‘divide’ could be further subdivided, the Jews into different strands and parties, fluid and flexible but producing variations on some central themes, and the non-Jews into different philosophical, religious, political and many other strands, schools, cultures and sub-cultures. No doubt, as with Philo in one way and the Wisdom of Solomon in another, there were many points, probably many more than we know, at which the Jewish worlds and the non-Jewish worlds bumped into one another, coming away like two cars after a brief encounter in the parking lot, with someone else’s paint still showing. Sometimes it undoubtedly went far deeper than that. I have myself suggested, earlier in this chapter, that Paul, at various points in his writings, may well have done quite deliberately what he says in 2 Corinthians 10, that is, pick up ideas from outside the Jewish world and make them serve the gospel. But to collapse the Jewish world, in all its rich variety, into the word ‘apocalyptic’, as Engberg-Pedersen does, and then at every point to subsume it, in Paul’s thought and writing, under a reinscribed Stoicism, is without historical or exegetical warrant.

Nor, therefore, does he get near the heart of Paul. Despite his claim to ‘cover all of it’, to make Paul coherent, to expound ‘the heart of Paul’s worldview’ and so on,¹⁸² what we have here, ironically, is Hamlet without the prince; or perhaps one should say the Prince of Denmark without the king, the queen and the travelling players. What else can we say when someone, setting out ostensibly to expound and explain what Paul was really all about, sweeps aside the notion of ‘salvation’ as irrelevant, because it belongs to Paul’s theological discourse and is therefore not a matter of direct concern in a supposed analysis of what was really central for him?¹⁸³ And what about the cheerful and cavalier Cynic-style dismissal of most of

the major *topoi* of Pauline studies? When trying to solve the problem of one of Paul's key terms, says Engberg-Pedersen,

One may wonder ... whether there is any likelihood of progress until one decides to place in parenthesis to begin with the whole gamut of traditional theological concepts: soteriology, christology, justification, grace, works, etc.¹⁸⁴

This is, of course, exactly what he said he would do at the start of his first book: investigate Paul while bracketing out 'theology', concentrating instead on his 'worldview', 'cosmology' and so on. And his two books really do carry out this agenda: the topics he lists in that remarkable quotation never come on stage, except to make brief guest appearances in the extended (but idiosyncratic) exegesis in *Paul and the Stoics*. It is as risky to reconstruct the train of thought of a contemporary as it is of an ancient writer, but a plausible hypothesis might run as follows: (a) that Engberg-Pedersen, coming (one imagines) from a tradition of Danish Lutheranism, has supposed from the start that what really matters to Paul is conversion, while sensing that the theological structures that have been built around that have failed in some way (coherence?); (b) that he has studied ancient and modern philosophy and found that it offers 'real options' which Paul, as he stands, did not; (c) that he has constructed a conversion-model which he can then 'find' in Stoic writers on the one hand and in Paul on the other; then, (d) that, armed with the Stoic notion of the 'material *pneuma*', he has done his best to re-read Paul in that light, again bracketing out most of his central theological concepts: *et voilà*, we have passed beyond the Judaism/Hellenism divide. What has actually happened, however, is that we have passed beyond a divide which Engberg-Pedersen has himself invented and operated: the divide between what he finds to be a 'real option', which is a version of Stoic anthropology, ethics and *pneuma* and which, with a little help from modern philosophy and cultural studies as well, he attempts to read into Paul, and what he finds to be not a 'real option', which is most of the things that most readers of Paul have supposed, on good exegetical and historical grounds, to constitute the very heart of his thought. Yes, we need to do worldview-studies. Yes, we need to put Paul in his wider social,

cultural, political contexts (what happened to the political in Engberg-Pedersen's treatment, I wonder?). Yes, we may well have a lot to learn from people like Bourdieu about how to understand humans in their full cultural environment. I have tried in the present book to do all or at least most of that. But I have concluded, on the basis of the worldview-studies of Part II, that Paul *needed to rethink his theology* if the worldview he was developing and inculcating was to remain stable and coherent. Hence Part III. And that exposition of both worldview and theology, I submit, is still waiting to be explored in terms of the hypothetical meeting between Paul and Seneca, or between Paul and Epictetus,¹⁸⁵ or between Paul and Dio Chryostom or anyone else for that matter. The present chapter is only the beginning of that kind of hypothetical engagement. I hope it will stimulate others to take matters further.

4. Conclusion

We have now examined the three overlapping and interlocking worlds to which the Apostle to the Gentiles found himself sent at the behest of the God of Israel and his crucified and risen Messiah. These worlds did not, of course, present themselves as tidy wholes, any more than the politics, religion and philosophy of our own day appear in neat packages. The combination of long hindsight on the one hand and scarcity of source material on the other enables us to imagine that we 'see' a more coherent picture than would have appeared to the apostle as he trudged into yet another bustling city and set about finding a place to ply his trade. There is however some value, at least heuristically, in setting out his hypothetical and perhaps actual engagement with these three 'worlds', if only because much scholarship has tended to concentrate on one to the exclusion of the others, or has confused them in some way. I hope that these three chapters have at least set up signposts towards more work that could and should be done.

I note in particular, as something I might have hoped to cover had there been more space, that though I have delved a little way into the overlap between ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ – specifically, in relation to the phenomena we think of as imperial cults – and though I have tried to insist that the ‘religious’ element in ancient philosophy (including what the philosophers would have called ‘theology’) matters in both those worlds, I have not tried to do the same between philosophy and politics. It would be a task well worth doing to plot out the ways in which the various philosophies of Paul’s day generated and sustained political systems and regimes, both formally and informally, and also movements of opposition or revolution, and to enquire whether we might learn anything at that level about how Paul might have engaged with those worlds – or whether, as some have suggested, he would rise above it all and concentrate on higher things. I shall try, in the final chapter of this book, at least to sketch some ways in which the total project to which he was called involved a freshly conceived integration of things that, to his contemporaries, might have been thought of as ‘political’, ‘religious’ and ‘philosophical’, but which for Paul will have appeared as parts of a coherent, and Messiah-shaped, whole.

Paul did not, then, derive his key ideas from his non-Jewish environment, but nor can his relationship with that environment be labelled simply ‘confrontation’. It is far more subtle. He did not, indeed, take over his main themes from the worlds of non-Jewish politics, religion or philosophy, but nor did he march through those worlds resolutely looking the other way and regarding them as irrelevant. Nor did he say they were all completely wrong from top to bottom. When he says that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in the Messiah, he does not mean, as did some who believed that all truth was contained in the Bible, that one could throw all other books away. Tracking, plotting and assessing the many lines and levels of his engagement with his complex non-Jewish world is a task awaiting further attention.

The logic of this Part of the book, mirroring that of the first Part, ought now I hope to be clear. Paul began as a Jew, and went out from there into the world of non-Jewish ideas, religions and political systems. He firmly

believed that he was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles; and, with that historical starting-point in mind, we have gone back through those systems, practices and ideas, looking for the ways in which the Paul we have come to know in Parts II and III would have engaged, and did in fact engage, with those aspects of non-Jewish culture.

He was not, however, Apostle to the Jews. Any effect his ministry might have on his own ‘kinsfolk according to the flesh’ he saw simply as a reflex of his primary task.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, it was an important reflex, resulting in some of his sharpest arguments. So, having sketched briefly some of the ways in which his primary ministry might have worked out on the ground, we come back to the question which inevitably haunts all studies of Paul’s theology, not least the kind of argument we mounted in Part III of the present book. What were the main lines of Paul’s reflex engagement – if we may call it that – with his own flesh and blood?

¹ As we saw [in ch. 3](#), a collection of short letters between the two men, now regarded as spurious, was known by the time of Jerome and Augustine; [see 220 above](#).

² Ac. 28.17–28 describes the meeting with Jewish leaders; the invitation to pagans is part of my hypothetical fiction.

³ 1 Cor. 1.18–25.

⁴ 1 Cor. 2.6f.

⁵ 1 Cor. 8.1–3.

⁶ 1 Cor. 13.8–13.

⁷ The famous article of J. L. Martyn on ‘Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages’, now in Martyn 1997b, 89–110, raises important questions but should not be deemed to have settled them for ever.

⁸ On the idea of an epistemology of love cf. *NTPG* 62–4, and the development of the theme in e.g. Middleton and Walsh 1998, ch. 7; Walsh and Keesmaat 2004, ch. 7.

⁹ Col. 2.8–10. For the complex meanings in this passage [see above, 992–5](#).

¹⁰ Col. 2.2–4.

¹¹ 1 Cor. 10.23–6. In 8.7–10 Paul describes this ‘knowledge’ (spelled out in 8.4–6) as *gnōsis*.

¹² Phil. 4.8.

¹³ 2 Cor. 10.3–5.

¹⁴ See esp. Meeks 2001 and Martin 2001.

¹⁵ [See above, 139–63](#).

¹⁶ [See above, 298–311](#).

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 2.15f.

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 1.18–2.16.

¹⁹ See the point made by Udo Schnelle, quoted [above at 1116, esp. n. 307](#).

²⁰ See e.g. Malherbe 1987; 1989a and b.

²¹ For the work of T. Engberg-Pedersen see below.

²² Rom. 11.36. Yes, some philosophers said things like that too, but Paul understood that statement, and followed through its implications, in a typically Jewish way.

²³ 1 Cor. 8.1–3, leading to Paul's 'revised *Shema*' ([above, 661–70](#)).

²⁴ Gal. 4.8f.

²⁵ 2 Cor. 5.16f.

²⁶ See Martyn's article ([above, n. 7](#)).

²⁷ 2 Cor. 4.1–6; Col. 1.15f.

²⁸ 2 Cor. 4.3f.

²⁹ Eph. 4.17–19.

³⁰ Col. 1.21.

³¹ Rom. 1.18–23, 25, 28.

³² [Above, 764–71](#); and see Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 428–36.

³³ Rom. 12.2.

³⁴ Rom. 8.5–9.

³⁵ 1 Cor. 2.10–16.

³⁶ Plato, *Rep.* bk. VII.

³⁷ As opposed to the blindfolded reading of those 'whose minds are hardened' as in 2 Cor. 3.14f.; [see above, 980–4](#).

³⁸ e.g. Ps. 19 etc., quoted by Paul in Rom. 10.18. On the fulfilment and redemption of creation cf. of course Rom. 8.18–25.

³⁹ On the 'diatribe' [see above, 222, 224, 453, 458](#).

⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 8.6; [see above, 661–70](#).

⁴¹ Col. 1.15f.

⁴² Col. 1.18–20.

⁴³ Rom. 14.6; 1 Cor. 10.30.

⁴⁴ Rom. 8.29; Col. 3.10; cf. 2. Cor. 4.4–6.

⁴⁵ Wis. 3.7; [see above, 241](#), and RSG 167f.

⁴⁶ See RSG ch. 2.

⁴⁷ cf. esp. 1 Cor. 2.14f. On the meaning of *pneumatikos* [see below](#).

⁴⁸ Rom. 8.16.

⁴⁹ e.g. Gal. 4.6; cf. Rom. 2.29 etc.

⁵⁰ This, indeed, may be the explanation of why, from early on, Christians referred to the 'spirit' of which they were speaking as 'the *holy spirit*'.

⁵¹ For the biblical and Jewish roots of Paul's spirit-language [see above, 709–28](#).

⁵² All this, of course, corresponds very well to the short summary of what Luke supposed Paul might have said in Athens: Ac. 17.22–31 (on which see Rowe 2011).

⁵³ Col. 1.28; 2.2f.

⁵⁴ On Paul's 'ethics' within his eschatology [see 1101–28](#).

⁵⁵ Rom. 6.2–4, 12–13.

⁵⁶ Rom. 12.2.

⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 6.13f., 19f.

⁵⁸ Phil. 3.18–21.

⁵⁹ Eph. 4.22–4.

⁶⁰ Col. 3.1–10.

⁶¹ 1 Thess. 4.1–8.

⁶² It is commonly supposed that Rom. 6 does not share the vision of Eph. 1 and Col. 2–3, according to which the baptized are *already* ‘raised with the Messiah’; but this is a misapprehension. See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 538.

⁶³ 1 Cor. 10.1–10; Rom. 8.12–17.

⁶⁴ Rom. 2.25–9; 2 Cor. 3.3–18.

⁶⁵ cf. Eph. 4.21 and Phil. 2.6–11, with the discussion [above, 1097f., 1115–20](#).

⁶⁶ See Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*], *passim*. On ‘moral formation’ in Paul see now Thompson 2011.

⁶⁷ See *Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*, esp. chs. 5, 6, 7. On the four early Christian ‘virtues’ unknown to the ancient pagan world (patience, chastity, humility and love) see Blackburn 2008 [1994], 381, discussed in *Virtue Reborn* 114, 214–20 (= *After You Believe* 131f., 248–55).

⁶⁸ Rom. 12.9.

⁶⁹ Rom. 12.15.

⁷⁰ Rom. 12.16.

⁷¹ Rom. 12.17f.

⁷² Col. 4.5f.; 1 Thess. 4.11f.

⁷³ Gal. 6.10; 1 Thess. 3.12; 5.15; this is probably part of the meaning, too, of Eph. 2.10.

⁷⁴ [See too above, 1108](#).

⁷⁵ The key passages are Eph. 5.21–6.9; Col. 3.18–4.1.

⁷⁶ For suggestions down this line cf. e.g. Maier 2005.

⁷⁷ e.g. Engberg-Pedersen, on whom [see below](#).

⁷⁸ See Epicurus in Diog. Laert. 10.130.

⁷⁹ e.g. SVF 3.67.3; 3.68.5. Socrates was seen as *autarkēs*: Diog. Laert. 2.24.

⁸⁰ Phil. 4.11–13.

⁸¹ Paul is not interested in *eudaimonia* as such, and the attempt to suggest he is is one of the many ways in which Engberg-Pedersen misunderstands him: [see below](#).

⁸² Rom. 7.19.

⁸³ See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 549–72; and e.g. Keener 2009, 93f. with classical references.

⁸⁴ Rom. 5.20; 7.13; cp. Gal. 3.19, 21f.

⁸⁵ Shaffer 1985 [1980], 37. To be fair to Emperor Joseph, the words are put into his mouth by the scheming Count Orsini-Rosenberg.

⁸⁶ Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 7; Ovid *Met.* 7.20f. (‘I see the better, and I approve it, but I follow the worse’).

⁸⁷ See Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 440–3, 448–50; and *Perspectives*, ch. 9.

⁸⁸ Rom. 2.26–9.

⁸⁹ 2 Cor. 3.3, echoing Ezek. 11.19; 36.26.

⁹⁰ Dt. 30.6 (cf. 10.16); cf. Jer. 31.33; Ezek. 36.26f. (in 36.27 one of the results is that the people concerned will walk in God’s *dikaiōmata*).

⁹¹ It is no argument against this to suggest that in ch. 2 Paul is only concerned to prove all humans sinful. His argument is much more many-sided than that: see again *Perspectives*, chs. 9 and 30.

⁹² Rom. 2.12–16.

⁹³ 2.13, a verse which understandably startles those who have been taught from the cradle that Paul believes one cannot be ‘justified’ by doing the law.

- ⁹⁴ 2.14, similar to *hē ek physeōs akrobustia* in 2.27.
- ⁹⁵ *ta tou nomou poiouein*, parallel to *ta dikaiōmata tou nomou phylasseō* in 2.26 and *ton nomon telousa* in 2.27.
- ⁹⁶ See Jewett 2007, 213f.; and e.g. Gathercole 2002b.
- ⁹⁷ Against e.g. Dodd 1959 [1932], 61f.
- ⁹⁸ cf. Wis. 18.15.
- ⁹⁹ We might compare, for instance, the ‘Hymn of Cleanthes’; or indeed the noble prayer of Epictetus (above, 226f.).
- ¹⁰⁰ 1 Cor. 2.4f.
- ¹⁰¹ 1 Cor. 1.22–5.
- ¹⁰² See Ross 1974, 117. I owe this reference to Lee 2006, 200.
- ¹⁰³ See e.g. Thorsteinsson 2010. The most important recent contribution in this area is that of Rabens 2010.
- ¹⁰⁴ See e.g. Martin 1995. For Engberg-Pedersen [see below](#).
- ¹⁰⁵ See e.g. Lee 2006.
- ¹⁰⁶ See below for this view in Engberg-Pedersen; and [above, 215f.](#)
- ¹⁰⁷ Phil. 3.8–11.
- ¹⁰⁸ J. Barclay, quoted on the cover of Engberg-Pedersen 2010.
- ¹⁰⁹ In what follows I shall refer to *Paul and the Stoics* (Engberg-Pedersen 2000) as *PS*, and to *Cosmology and the Self* (Engberg-Pedersen 2010) as *CS*.
- ¹¹⁰ *PS* 1f.
- ¹¹¹ *PS* 21.
- ¹¹² *PS* ix.
- ¹¹³ *PS* 1: his work will be ‘from a different perspective than the traditional, theological one’. The comma seems just as important here as the famous comma at the end of 1 Thess. 2.14 ([see above, 1152f.](#)).
- ¹¹⁴ *PS* 2; cf. 29, 30, 43.
- ¹¹⁵ [See above, 229f.](#); and *JVG* 66–74.
- ¹¹⁶ *PS* 47.
- ¹¹⁷ From the blurb on the back cover of *CS*.
- ¹¹⁸ *PS* 16f., referring to Williams 1985, 160f. He emphasizes the idea throughout 17–24 and returns to it at various stages, developing it in *CS* in terms of things which are ‘defensible’ (e.g. 2f. 6, 193) though again without explaining what his grounds are for wanting to ‘defend’ a first-century idea rather than simply, as a historian, to expound it, or indeed what one might be ‘defending’ it against.
- ¹¹⁹ *PS* 26, 309 n. 35.
- ¹²⁰ Barth 1968 [1933], 7.
- ¹²¹ [Above, ch. 5](#), on Syme and Augustus. I note again ([as above, ch. 7 n. 28](#)) Lewis 1964, vii: when we meet a word we don’t recognize, we look it up, but when we meet one we recognize whose meaning has in fact changed, we wrongly imagine we know what the author was talking about.
- ¹²² *PS* 304 (the last paragraph of the book). The previous two pages build up to this, with the argument that ‘one type of language that Paul uses, the substantive one, does not constitute a real option for us, whereas the other, cognitive one does’ (303).
- ¹²³ See *PS* 18f., and frequently.
- ¹²⁴ *PS* 27f.: my italics.

¹²⁵ The model is expounded in *PS* ch. 2, and summarized at 175f. and in *CS* 176–8. ‘Altruism’: e.g. *PS* 56 and frequently.

¹²⁶ *PS* 8, 70f., and frequently.

¹²⁷ *CS* 2f., 121f., 144.

¹²⁸ *PS* 40.

¹²⁹ Random examples of worrying passages: ‘the author [of Wisdom of Solomon] starts out thinking in Stoic terms, [but] he aims to add a Platonist perspective – meaning an immaterial one – literally on top of the Stoic picture’ (23); ‘baptism and pneuma hang intrinsically together and they generate the one physical body to which all baptized believers belong when in a wholly literal sense they are “in Christ” ’ (69); also 96f., 174f. and frequently. Speaking of Paul’s language of having died with Christ, he says ‘But try to take it literally. What it then means is that Paul now lives as being filled up by Christ ... who is both literally dead and literally alive (in heaven)’ (162). Paul would be surprised to know that Christ was ‘literally dead’.

¹³⁰ e.g. *NTPG* Part II, applied in *JVG*; and [in the present vol., Part II.](#)

¹³¹ *CS* 1.

¹³² *CS* 156, 164.

¹³³ Unsurprisingly, Engberg-Pedersen (*CS* 248 n. 5) is enthusiastic about Adams 2007, which enables him to hold on to his ‘literal’ reading of ‘apocalyptic’, which in turn facilitates his judgment that such material is not a ‘real option’ for us. See the discussion [above, 163–75.](#)

¹³⁴ *CS* 94f., 50.

¹³⁵ *CS* 21.

¹³⁶ *CS* 12. Paul then, he says, ‘added Adam to his salvation historical scheme’ (*CS* 13).

¹³⁷ *CS* 41–5, 147, 151. I agree of course that the spirit, mentioned in Phil. 3.2, is implicit in the passage thereafter: see above, 1164 for the same phenomenon in Rom. 10.13. When it comes to words, one simply cannot treat Paul’s *gar* (normally translated ‘for’, i.e. introducing an explanation) as if it were ‘contrastive’ (*CS* 245 n. 41). Precisely if Paul is the careful philosophical thinker Engberg-Pedersen wants him to be, he would not use key logical terms to mean their opposite.

¹³⁸ *CS* 157–62 (qu. from 161). ‘A process of Foucauldian subjectification’ (159) cannot compensate for a clarification of why Paul and Peter were disagreeing at Antioch.

¹³⁹ *CS* 168f.

¹⁴⁰ *PS* 8f., 38, 70f., etc.

¹⁴¹ Brennan 2005, 231, quoted modestly by Engberg-Pedersen at *CS* 249 n. 10.

¹⁴² *PS* 26.

¹⁴³ 1 Thess. 1.9.

¹⁴⁴ Phil. 3.8.

¹⁴⁵ See the discussion in Wright 2010 [*Virtue Reborn/After You Believe*] 176f./204f.

¹⁴⁶ *PS* 78.

¹⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 1.26.

¹⁴⁸ *PS* 78.

¹⁴⁹ See *CS* 14–19. Here, as elsewhere, Engberg-Pedersen notes that other scholars contrast Paul’s Jewish and ‘apocalyptic’ context for understanding the *pneuma* with a ‘philosophical’ one (on Martin: 16–18; on Barclay, 208f. n. 12), but says that one should not regard this as a dichotomy, after the manner of earlier ‘pro-Jewish, ... pro-Christian, anti-philosophical’ treatments (16). His response is that ‘a Stoic-like, philosophical understanding of the Pauline pneuma is what fits the evidence best’ (18), and that ‘there is no intrinsic contrast between such a picture and Hebrew Bible and

“apocalyptic” understandings of God and eschatology’ (18f.). This claim stands or falls with Engberg-Pedersen’s exposition of resurrection, on which [see below](#).

[150](#) CS ch. 1 (8–38).

[151](#) CS 98.

[152](#) For full details, both of the meaning of ‘resurrection’ and of ancient non-Jewish views of life beyond death, see *RSG*, esp. ch. 2 (32–84); on Seneca’s view of death, 54 (with refs.).

[153](#) 1 Cor. 15.39–41.

[154](#) 1 Cor. 15.42–4.

[155](#) CS 27 (italics original).

[156](#) 1 Cor. 2.14f.; CS 28.

[157](#) CS 28 (italics original).

[158](#) CS 20. He adds ‘as we saw in the texts from Cicero’; but *de Nat. De.* 2, which he discussed at CS 20, does not mention ‘spirit’, but rather ‘aether’. He discusses the relationship between *pneuma* and ‘aether’ at 213 n. 39, but despite his best efforts to align the two they seem to remain subtly different.

[159](#) cf. *RSG* 110–12, 344–6. Cp. 2 *Bar.*, on which cf. *RSG* 161f.

[160](#) See *RSG passim*, and e.g. *Surprised by Hope* chs. 1–3 and 10.

[161](#) Phil. 1.23.

[162](#) Phil. 3.20f. Engberg-Pedersen CS 56 fails to see this point in expounding the passage.

[163](#) See e.g. CS 12, 43, 46, 50, 147, 162f., 181. At 88, discussing 2 Cor. 12.1–5, he suggests that the ‘third heaven’ was the highest, but this is very unlikely (see Gooder 2006).

[164](#) On 1 Cor. 15 see the full account in *RSG* 312–61.

[165](#) CS 217 n. 73, where he (a) says correctly that I read ‘pneumatic’ as meaning ‘animated by’ and not ‘composed of’ [spirit], (b) says that this reminds him of an article by Crouzel 1976 and then (c) comments ‘This is pure Bultmann.’ Crouzel must speak for himself; the question is not who else has said this. The meaning of *pneumatikos* has nothing to do with Bultmann, but with lexicography, and my reading of the passage can hardly be said to be Bultmannian.

[166](#) See *RSG* 347–56, esp. 350–2.

[167](#) Moulton and Turner 1908–76, 2.359, 378. Generalizations across ancient Greek usage are risky, but this one seems to be backed up by the lexicographical detail (below).

[168](#) Arist. *Hist. An.* 584b22.

[169](#) Gal., *On the Usefulness of Parts* 6.12; cp. *Placita Philosophorum* 4.5.7.

[170](#) Vitruvius 10.1.1; cp. Gal. *Anim. Pass.* 2.3, *pneumatika mēchanēma*.

[171](#) Arist. *Pr.* 955a35.

[172](#) Hermogenes *Inv.* 4.1.

[173](#) An exception might be Philo *Abr.* 113; but there *pneumatikē* (modifying *ousia*, ‘nature’) is linked, not contrasted, with *psychoeidous*, ‘soul-like’.

[174](#) Robertson and Plummer 1914 [1911], 372.

[175](#) Conzelmann 1975 [1969], 283; Witherington 1995, 308f.

[176](#) Thiselton 2000, 1275–81, here at 1279. Thiselton (1278) also quotes Barrett 1971a [1968], 372 (‘the new body animated by the Spirit of God’) and Wolff 1996, 407 (‘a body under the control of the divine Spirit’).

[177](#) CS 97.

[178](#) CS 96 (italics original).

[179](#) cf. CS 212 n. 35.

[180](#) cf. e.g. PS 62.

[181](#) See CS 150, with 242f. n. 27.

[182](#) CS 75f., 139, 89f., 137.

[183](#) PS 39.

[184](#) CS 245 n. 42. We note in particular the total absence of the cross, so central for Paul, from the books under discussion.

[185](#) Engberg-Pedersen's chapter (CS ch. 4, 106–38) is an interesting start, granted all the caveats of my present discussion. See too e.g. Huttunen 2009.

[186](#) Rom. 11.11–16: [see above, 1206–22](#).

Chapter Fifteen

TO KNOW THE PLACE FOR THE FIRST TIME: PAUL AND HIS JEWISH CONTEXT

1. Introduction

As we retrace our explorations through Paul's world, we return at last to the place where it all began, namely the first-century Jewish world. There is, however, an inevitable asymmetry between this chapter and the previous three. When we looked at Paul and the Roman empire in chapter 12, at Paul and the late-antique religious world in chapter 13 and at Paul and the pagan philosophers in chapter 14, we were examining how the Paul whose worldview and theology we had explored in Parts II and III related to the worlds in and to which he was, by his own account, a missionary. His call was to be the apostle to the non-Jewish nations. He came with a Jewish message and a Jewish way of life for the non-Jewish world. He did not see himself as founding or establishing a new, non-Jewish movement. He believed that the message and life he proclaimed and inculcated was, in some sense, the fulfilment of all he had believed as a strict Pharisaic Jew. He understood himself to be taking his native way of life, admittedly in a radically transformed version, into the wider world. He was not, then, the apostle *to* the Jews, however much time he spent in Jewish contexts. He was, in his own eyes at least, the apostle *from* the Jews to the rest of the world. His engagement with his own contemporary Jewish world was therefore of a different order from his engagement with the other worlds where we have tried to locate him.

One of the central arguments of this whole book, after all, is that Paul remained stubbornly and intentionally a deeply Jewish thinker. That claim might be challenged, both in his day and in ours. But I have argued that the full sweep of his theological understanding can best be understood, not as a random or pragmatic amalgamation of bits and pieces from his native

heritage and his hellenistic culture, strung together with whatever string would hold it firm while he pressed home a particular point, but as the structurally and scripturally coherent reworking of the central themes of the Jewish heritage, monotheism, election and eschatology, articulated in such a way as to make and sustain the claim that this is the way to a full and genuine human life. There is no point trying, at this late stage, to develop these arguments once again; Parts II and III of the book must speak for themselves. Nor is there any point, therefore, in trying to structure the present chapter on the rough model of the previous three. The question of 'Paul and the Jewish world', or however we want to phrase it, remains a different *sort* of question from 'Paul and empire', 'Paul and religion' or 'Paul and philosophy'. As far as Paul was concerned, he had a mission *to* those worlds, a mission which (to repeat) had come *from* the world of the first-century Jews.¹ All that he had to say in relation to the latter world was therefore, as it were, by way of reflex from his primary task.

I have argued that all this has little to do with 'religion' and a great deal to do with 'eschatology'. To say this might appear to have a superficial analogy with the generalized Barthian and indeed protestant protest against 'religion' as such, which drives the analyses of Käsemann, Martyn and others; but actually my point is different and deeper. It is *not* the case that Paul opposes something called 'Judaism' because it is a 'religion', whereas he was advocating something different (whether 'eschatology', 'faith' or anything else). That is a classic form of western supersessionism: 'the Jews were clinging to "religion", but Paul was offering something different and better'. Nor is it the case, despite regular suggestions in contemporary writing (not least that which has followed E. P. Sanders in comparing 'patterns of religion' in Paul and 'Judaism'), that Paul was advocating or modelling a new sort of 'religion' which he considered (for some reason) superior to other forms of 'religion', especially Judaism. Paul was simply not concerned very much with 'religion' as such, whether for or against. That is a distraction. That very lining-up of the question, either in terms of 'religion versus eschatology' or in terms of 'one sort of religion against another', *is itself part of the problem introduced by modern western*

scholarship, determined as it has been to make ‘religion’ central by some means or other. Paul’s critique of his fellow Jews was not centrally or primarily a critique of either their ‘religion’ in general or any features of it in particular.

What mattered, rather, was his belief that *Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s Messiah*. More precisely and importantly, that *the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s Messiah and the world’s true lord*. Every single thing we know about Paul, particularly from his own writings, makes the sense it makes on the basic Jewish assumption that when the Messiah appeared he would bring about the fulfilment of God’s ancient promises to Israel. And the clash with those of his fellow Jews who did not believe that Jesus was Israel’s Messiah came precisely on the level not of ‘religion’ but of *messianic eschatology*: he believed that the Messiah had come, and had inaugurated the long-awaited new age, and they did not. At this point, and to this extent, Paul was standing on exactly the same ground as Akiba a century later, confronting the critics who told him he was wrong to suppose that Simeon ben-Kosiba was ‘the son of the star’. To this we shall return.

The shock to the system, of course, came not simply with a clash of claims about a particular messianic claimant, but with the claim that a *crucified* man was the Messiah. The otherwise unthinkable notion of a crucified Messiah was forced on Paul and the other early Jesus-followers by Jesus’ resurrection, which compelled them to take seriously the messianic claim which otherwise the crucifixion would have falsified. Jesus had neither defeated the pagans in battle, nor rebuilt the Temple, nor established a visible new empire of justice and peace; on the contrary, he seemed not only to have failed in any such messianic tasks but to have been cursed by God in the process. The resurrection transformed this perception, offering divine confirmation of the title Pilate had placed above Jesus’ head on the cross, and awakening echoes in Israel’s scriptures to which implicit appeal was made in some of the earliest Christian confessions.² The resurrection confirmed what Pilate had caused to be written about Jesus’ head on the cross: King of the Jews. However paradoxical, however shocking, however previously unthinkable, this was what Paul firmly believed, and this belief

generated the entire shape and content of his life's work. When we place Paul within his own Jewish context, this is what stands out far above everything else.

Insofar as Paul would have had anything much to say about comparing one ancient 'religion' with another (as opposed to our modern attempts to compare the things we call 'religions'), he would undoubtedly have regarded the basic comparison as being between the Jewish 'religion' and the multiple varieties of pagan 'religion'. On that question he would have had no choice. If Paul had been asked to 'compare' the two, he would undoubtedly have noted the pure Jewish monotheism; the underpinning covenantal narrative; the single sanctuary; the high valuation of humans and hence of moral standards; and, not least, the extraordinary and still unsurpassed Jewish hymn-book. All these, he would have said, showed up the complex and messy life of ancient paganism as a shabby muddle. But the point of course was not that Paul had looked out at the world of 'religions' and chosen one of them. That, again, is a very modern idea. Paul was born a Jew, and believed that the Jewish way of life and view of life were above all *true*. There was indeed one creator God, the God of Abraham, of the exodus, of the Psalms, of the prophets, of the long-awaited future hope. And there was one true way to be human, the way of faithful and wise obedience to this one God. Had Paul wished to 'compare religions', then – even supposing he would have understood the question! – he would have regarded it as a no-brainer. The Jewish way of life and worship would win every time.

But Paul was not 'comparing religions', either before or after what happened to him on the Damascus Road. When he began to speak in the synagogues and elsewhere about the Jesus who had appeared to him on the road, he was not 'advocating' a new 'religion'. Nor was he saying, 'Up to now you've had a "religion", but I've got something different to offer.' He was declaring that the God whom the Jews had worshipped all along, the God made known in their scriptures, had done at last what he had promised, and that with that divine action a new world order had come into being. Paul's theology and mission were rooted in and defined by this

christologically inaugurated eschatology. In Jesus, the End had arrived in the Middle, and everything was different as a result. But it was a difference – and Paul insisted on this strongly and fiercely – which (with hindsight of course) one ought to see as having been intended all along. The one God had not suddenly changed his mind, his plans or his ultimate purposes. The one God had acted suddenly, shockingly and unexpectedly – just as he had always said he would. And just as, again with hindsight, Paul could see made sense if this God really was righteous in his dealings with the whole world.

This meant, inevitably, that Paul stood in a complex and ambiguous relation to those of his Jewish contemporaries who did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead, and who therefore had no reason to believe that he was Israel's Messiah. To tell such people about Jesus was not Paul's primary task, though the evidence, from his letters as well as Acts, strongly suggests that in Asia and Greece he normally began in synagogues and only moved out into lecture-halls or near equivalents when he had to.³ No: his main message, as he reminds the Thessalonians, was the deeply Jewish one, that pagans should turn from idols to worship the true and living God.⁴ Anything he might have to say to his Jewish contemporaries who did not believe in Jesus he would say by way of reflex from that primary vocation. Anything he might say *about* such people, when addressing pagan converts, he would say (as in Galatians, Philippians and Colossians) by way of explanation and warning. Much of what has often been considered central to Paul's theology, especially his teaching on justification and the law, comes into these categories: when Paul spoke to pagans, as he did most of the time, he spoke, not about justification, but about the one God and his son, Jesus. 'Justification' came in as and when he had to explain to converts that they were indeed full members of the single family God had promised to Abraham, irrespective of circumcision and the other traditional marks of Jewish identity.⁵ And the critique of his compatriots who refused to believe in Jesus – a critique whose obverse was heart-stopping grief – grew directly out of the same eschatology. The tide

had turned in the affairs of Israel; Paul was taking it at the flood. Those who omitted to do so would for ever remain in shallows and in miseries.

Paul understood, from his own earlier life, the motivations and intentions that drove non-Jesus-believing Jews to oppose the message altogether. From his experience of early debates among Jesus-believing Jews – not least the incident at Antioch and the conference at Jerusalem – he understood, too, the intentions and motivations of those Jesus-believing Jews who took the view that converted pagans should take on full Jewish identity by becoming circumcised. All these we have discussed already, at some length. We must now probe a little deeper into this particular interface, into some of the key questions that have swirled around the question of ‘Paul and the Jews’ – itself, of course, a potentially misleading way of putting it, granted that Paul spoke of himself as a Jew, an Israelite, a Hebrew of Hebrews and so on.⁶ Hence the subtitle of this chapter: Paul and *his* Jewish context.

We must stress again, being aware of today’s political and cultural pressures, that Paul had no intention of ‘founding a new religion’.⁷ He did not see himself as setting up something called ‘Christianity’ as opposed to something called ‘Judaism’. The field of ‘ity’s and ‘ism’s belongs in the ideologically slanted world of western modernity, not in the world of second-Temple Jews and their pagan neighbours. Paul knew only of the God of Israel and his promised return to set his people free and claim the nations as his own. As we saw in chapter 2, Paul had been living in the great multi-faceted narrative shaped by Israel’s scriptures, longing for the moment of covenant renewal, of ‘return from exile’, of the fulfilment of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, the Psalms and so much besides. He believed that all this had been accomplished in and through Jesus; that it was coming true, and would come fully true, through the spirit. What else could he do but obey? How else would he see himself and other believers but as members of Abraham’s single, renewed family?

This means that we must recognize some recent slogans for what they are. When people talk, as they often do these days, of ‘replacement’ theologies in which something called ‘the church’ *replaces* something

called ‘the Jews’, or ‘Israel’;⁸ when people talk, as they sometimes do, of ‘substitution’ theologies, in which ‘the church’ (again!) has *substituted* for ‘Israel’ or ‘the Jews’ in the divine plan;⁹ when they refer to a position in which ‘the church’ has *displaced* ‘Israel’; when they talk, above all, of that unfortunate word ‘supersession’, in which ‘the church’ – and often the *gentile* church at that – has *superseded* ‘the Jews’ or ‘Israel’¹⁰ – there we are witnessing something which, while it may have been true of much later generations, was not and could not have been true for Paul. For Paul it was dazzlingly clear. Either Jesus was Israel’s Messiah or he was not. *Tertium non datur*. There was no suggestion of Jesus being a ‘Christian Messiah’ as opposed to a ‘Jewish’ one – a strange modern notion, accidentally encouraged by Christians themselves deJudaizing their message and with it their christology.¹¹ But if Jesus really was Israel’s Messiah, then no first-century Jew could have supposed for a minute that following him was an *option* that one might take up or not. There would be no room for saying, ‘Well, some of us think Jesus is Messiah and some of us don’t, so let’s not worry about it.’ To reject the Davidic king would be to follow Jeroboam the son of Nebat into drastic and dangerous rebellion.

What has happened, I think, is that modern historians have looked back on Paul and his teaching through a complex set of spectacles. We have looked at him, first, in the light of the second, third and fourth centuries, where ‘the church’, though still incorporating many Jews, became, and was sometimes seen as, a mostly non-Jewish phenomenon.¹² We have looked at those centuries themselves not only through the tearful misted-up spectacles of post-holocaust western thinkers, but through the distorting lenses of post-Enlightenment historians of something called ‘religion’. We have then relentlessly substituted sociological/religious categories for eschatological ones, Christian eschatology being one of the things the Enlightenment wanted to ignore. The question has then become: was Paul a ‘supersessionist’ – that nasty, dangerous thing which the modern western ‘church’ has supposedly endorsed – or was he something else, and if so what? But this is a false perception. The ‘s’-word, and the other terms that sometimes do duty for it, arise only when we allow the modernist

displacement of first-century eschatological belief to lure us into imagining that first-century Jewish rejection of claims about Jesus was basically a clash of ‘religions’. That itself, ironically enough, constitutes a capitulation to an essentially paganizing movement, denying the original *Jewish* perception (of God’s kingdom coming on earth as in heaven) and allowing it to be ‘superseded’ by the all-too-easy pagan assumption that what was ‘really’ going on was a choice between systems; between societies; between ‘religions’. Many of the great Jewish writers on Paul of earlier generations rejected this way of looking at things: much as they continued to disagree with Paul’s basic claims, they realized that in his own mind he was following the consistent, and in itself deeply Jewish, line of ‘fulfilment’.¹³ But to suppose, as many writers now do, that because we can prove that Paul said ‘lots of positive things about Judaism’ he cannot therefore have held any critique of his own former position, or advanced any claim about a recent and transformative messianic fulfilment, is to fail to understand how Judaism itself – to risk the generalization! – normally operates.¹⁴

At the same time, the polemic in question has borrowed unwarranted energy from the sneering negativity of contemporary western anti-ecclesiasticalism. Particularly in the world of academic biblical studies, in which contempt for the institutional church is a recurring epidemic (and in some Anabaptist circles, in which rejection of a supposedly ‘Constantinian’ church is a badge of honour), the phrase ‘the church’ regularly connotes power and privilege, arrogant self-importance and a disregard for minorities. And, of course, non-Jewish membership. (This is reinforced, with further irony, in the modernist assumption that conversion is undesirable, thus making evangelism among Jews politically incorrect, despite Romans 11.11–24, and leaving ‘messianic Jews’ high and dry as an embarrassment to both ‘sides’.) That then skews the terms of the debate: either Paul did, or he did not, substitute ‘the church’, with all those overtones, for ‘Israel’! Now, of course, nothing that we would even begin to recognize as ‘the church’ of today’s western world was thinkable in Paul’s day, or indeed for several generations afterwards. Scholars who would be

quick to spot anachronisms in other contexts often seem curiously blind to an obvious one here.

This is not, of course, to deny that churches of all sorts, in the last half-millennium at least, have indeed had a rotten track record as regards ‘the Jews’, and on many other questions too. Just as military generals are the people most likely to say what a horrible and disgusting thing war is, so those who have been leaders in institutional churches are the most likely to agree with the charges of folly, corruption, arrogance and sin. Within that, of course, some foolish or wicked would-be Christian rhetoric has fuelled the fires, literal as well as metaphorical, of what was basically and always an essentially *pagan* rejection of the Jewish way of life, its monotheism, its Torah, its sense of community. But if we allow this proper awareness and perception of ecclesial mistakes to cloud our historical judgment of what Paul thought he was doing, or if we allow it to force us into the false polarization of different ‘types of religion’ in our modern sense or even in Paul’s ancient one, we are guilty of just as much anachronism as the so-called ‘old perspective’ was when it projected its rejection of medieval Catholicism back on to Paul’s rejection of the ‘works of Torah’.

What has happened, in short, is this. We have looked back through post-Enlightenment and post-holocaust spectacles at teachers like Chrystostom in the fourth century or indeed Luther in the sixteenth. We have then looked at Paul in the light of them. Then we have tried to decide whether Paul was, or was not, guilty of the sins which the modern west has come to associate with ‘the church’ and its elbowing of ‘the Jews’ out of the picture. This is not a recipe for doing history. And history is what this book is basically about.

When we approach the question historically, everything looks remarkably different. Take the movements a century or more either side of Paul. Think of Qumran, where the scrolls bear witness to a sect which saw itself as ‘Israel’ while ‘Israel’ as a whole was apostate. The covenant had been renewed! This was what the prophets had foretold! The exile was over – at least in principle, with this group as the advance guard of the coming new day. All that, uncontroversially, is what the leaders and members of the sect

believed.¹⁵ Was this ‘replacement theology’? Was it ‘substitution’? Was it even ‘supersession’? One could use words like that, but that was not of course how the sect saw itself, and the words would carry none of today’s negative overtones. Such words evoke, and belong within, static, non-eschatological systems. The whole point, for the Damascus Document, 4QMMT and many other scrolls, was that the long narrative of Israel’s strange and often tragic history had reached its appointed goal. Torah and prophets had foretold a coming time of renewal, a righteous remnant ... was it unJewish, or anti-Jewish, to claim that this was now happening? Of course not. It might be wrong. It might be a false hope. Time would tell. But it was not, in any sense we should consider meaningful today, ‘supersessionist’.¹⁶ How could claiming that Israel’s God had finally kept his promises be anything other than a cause for Jewish celebration?

Or consider the rise of bar-Kochba, a century after Paul’s day. Once again, the dark forces of paganism closed in. The new emperor forbade Jewish practices and threatened to obliterate the nation and its historic, theologically central capital.¹⁷ What was a loyal Jew to do? Some were calculating that the renewed ‘exile’ following Jerusalem’s destruction (starting with AD 70) had lasted nearly seventy years. Perhaps *this*, after all, would be the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s well-known prophecy?¹⁸ Some believed that the emerging young leader, Simeon ben-Kosiba, really was Israel’s Messiah, the son of the star. Others sharply disagreed, either because their calculations were different or because they had already decided, following the earlier disaster, that piety was now superseding politics. What was to be done? Those who, like Akiba himself, seen by many as the greatest rabbi of the time or perhaps ever, believed that ben-Kosiba was the Messiah, had no choice. They had to follow him and try to make the revolution happen – facing down the sceptics and scoffers with the challenge to faith and hope and military revolt. If Israel’s God was at last sending his promised deliverer, it would hardly be ‘supersessionist’ to rally to his cause and to scorn the Hillelite rabbis who now wanted to study Torah rather than work for the kingdom. This was not a matter of ‘replacing’ or ‘displacing’ something called ‘Israel’ and substituting

something else. If ben-Kosiba was the Messiah, then his followers constituted the renewed Israel. That was Akiba's position, and he died for it.¹⁹

Paul belongs exactly on this map. He believed that Israel's God had renewed the covenant through the Messiah, Jesus. He might, of course, have been wrong. He would no doubt have said that the Qumran sectarians had been wrong to suppose that covenant renewal was taking place with them. The post-135 rabbis declared that Akiba and his colleagues had been wrong to back bar-Kochba. They all might have been wrong; but not unJewish, or anti-Jewish. Or 'supersessionist' – except in an historical sense shorn of all its pejorative overtones. All of them, Paul included, believed in the divine purpose according to which God would act in judgment and mercy. Isaiah had spoken of trees being cut down, and a new shoot springing up in their place. John the Baptist had spoken of the axe being laid to the roots of the tree, of God creating children for Abraham from the very stones.²⁰ This is the prophetic language of judgment and renewal. It is the kind of thing that second-Temple Jews believed in and hoped for.

Of course any such claim would be contentious. Different groups might well accuse one another of disloyalty, of misreading the signs and the scriptures. That is what the writers of the Scrolls thought about the Pharisees.²¹ The Pharisees may well have returned the compliment. It is certainly what the Pharisees' putative successors, the rabbis, thought about the Sadducees, and continued to think about them long after the last Sadducee perished in Jerusalem's great disaster. It is certainly what many Jewish groups thought about one another during those last tragic years of AD 66–70: rival parties, each supposing themselves to be the chosen few, anathematized and even killed one another. When revolution is in the air, fuelled by scriptural promises on the one hand and social problems on the other, you will always get competing claims, and they will often couch themselves in the language of 'true Israel', like the many 'true Marxist' groups of the last hundred years and the small but dangerous 'Real Irish Republican Army' of our own day. The Jewish world that was ready to

explode in that way was the world in which Saul of Tarsus had gone off to Damascus to stop the blaspheming Jesus-followers in their tracks – and the world in which Paul the apostle went about claiming that Israel’s God had raised Jesus from the dead.

Ah but, say the self-styled anti-supersessionists (not to mention the ‘post-supersessionists’): Paul’s message was different. He was bringing in uncircumcized gentiles, so by creating a non-Jewish ‘church’ he was doing something no other Jewish groups had done. Neither Qumran, nor Akiba, nor anyone in between, had envisaged a ‘renewed covenant’ which would include non-Jews and thereby displace Jews. Paul, of course, never speaks about ‘displacement’. The closest he gets to it – in Romans 11.17 – is a debating point which he uses to warn precisely against gentile arrogance.²² What he says – and he is careful always to ground this in some of the most fundamental biblical texts – is that Israel’s God always intended and promised that when he fulfilled his promises to Israel then the rest of the world would be renewed as well, and that this is what was now happening through the gentile mission. *The extension to non-Jews of renewed-covenant membership was itself, Paul insisted, one part of deep-rooted Jewish eschatology.*

Of course, Paul knew where the real stumbling-block lay. Any suggestion that the Jewish people could simply continue as they were without any transformation, that the one God would vindicate them as they stood, came face to face with the fact of the crucified Messiah. The cross, for Paul, was not simply an isolated incident, the mechanism of a detached ‘atonement’. It was where the whole narrative had been going all along. It spoke volumes to him, personally and (so he believed) representatively, about the way in which the Israel-shaped divine purpose was to be understood. This is where Paul’s view of the ‘remnant’ is significantly different from anything we find in Qumran. For the Damascus Document, the ‘remnant’ was the small group from within Israel who remained faithful, who embraced an ultra-strict observance of Torah, while the remaining Jews were outside. For Paul, his own position and that of other Jesus-believing Jews was not that they had somehow clung on, not that through their ‘zeal’ they were the last

remaining genuine Israelites, but that they had ‘died’ with the Messiah and come through to a new life the other side of that ‘death’. And in the new world of that ‘resurrection’ they found themselves sharing this messianic life with all those marked out by Messiah-faith. That, Paul insisted, was what God had all along promised to Abraham. The Qumran community saw itself as the *yahad*, the ‘one community’. That is how Paul saw the single community of Jews and gentiles who shared Messiah-faith.

Paul was not shy of explaining all this by referring to himself. That is why the study of what happened to him on the road to Damascus – or rather, of what he said about what happened to him on the road to Damascus – is of theological, and not merely biographical, interest.

[2. Conversion, Call or Transformation?](#)

We might, I suppose, have discussed this question right at the start. But it is really only now, with a fuller understanding of Paul’s theology, that we can appreciate what he says about the Damascus Road event. This might lead us into many complex by-paths, not least of the psychology of Paul’s ‘religious experience’, about which many unproveable theories have been advanced.²³ But our focus here must be on Paul’s own view of what happened.

The current controversy over how to describe or label the Damascus Road event was begun by Krister Stendahl as part of his protest against envisaging Paul in modern western Christian categories.²⁴ His point, in retrospect, was obvious: that the word ‘conversion’, which the church for many centuries has used to describe the Damascus Road event, carries seriously anachronistic connotations. All the regular contemporary meanings of the word take us in wrong directions.²⁵ There are many recent studies of the issue; this is not the place to review them, and for our present purposes I offer my own tripartite reflections on how the word is used.²⁶

The word ‘conversion’ can be used, first, to denote the moment when an adherent of one ‘religion’ (in the modern sense) abandons it and embraces

another: as, say, if a Muslim were to become a Buddhist, or vice versa. That usage is almost unknown in the ancient world, because ‘religions’ in our modern sense were themselves, as we have seen, unknown, with the exception of those who joined one or other of the ‘mystery religions’, and even that should not, perhaps, be thought of as ‘converting’, since one did not *abandon* any of the regular divinities in order to add Mithras, or Isis, to one’s personal portfolio.²⁷ The closest to ‘conversion’ one might come, ironically, is the phenomenon of a non-Jew ‘converting’, abandoning pagan deities, and embracing the Jewish life.

To imagine that this change of ‘religions’ was what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus is not only anachronistic. It implies that he moved, quite consciously, from something we might call ‘Judaism’ to something we might call ‘Christianity’. Not only did Paul not put it like that. We can say firmly that he *would not have* put it like that.²⁸ For him, as we have seen throughout this book, belonging to the Messiah’s people meant what it meant within a thoroughly Jewish frame of reference. That was Stendahl’s main point, and the evidence is strongly on his side.²⁹

The large-scale abandonment of ‘religion’ in the modern western world has given rise to a second meaning of ‘conversion’ (the one given in the Merriam-Webster *Collegiate Dictionary*³⁰). In this case, an atheist or agnostic, for whom the world of ‘religion’ as a whole has been a closed book, enters a believing and practising community, often through a personal experience of the sudden disclosure of previously unimagined non-material realities. Various stock phrases, which should not be pressed for precise meaning, are used to denote such a moment (I use the ‘Christian’ phrases, because they are well known; equivalent terms no doubt exist for someone who becomes, say, a Muslim): ‘coming to faith’; ‘getting religion’; ‘discovering Jesus as one’s personal saviour’; ‘being born again’; ‘accepting Christ into one’s heart and life’; ‘joining the church’, and so on. Such a moment is often characterized by a sense of inner renewal, an awareness of the presence and love of God and the living person of Jesus, and the birth of desires for prayer, scripture, Christian fellowship and a transformed life. When people have spoken of the ‘conversion’ of Paul, this

is the kind of image that has often been conjured up. Clearly there are problems here, since such previously non-religious ‘converts’ hardly provide a model for the devout Pharisee Saul of Tarsus.

This then leads to a third current meaning. Many modern western ‘converts’ to Christianity have had some background in what they then come to regard as the ‘formal religion’ of official Christianity. Then, like Martin Luther and many others, they have had a new experience of God’s grace and personal love which they contrast sharply with all they had known before. ‘Conversion’ then carries the connotations of moving from ‘religion’ to ‘faith’, from formal membership and outward ritual observance to a living inner reality. This experience has sustained the fiction that Paul himself moved from ‘religion’ to ‘faith’, and that he looked ‘back’ on something called ‘Judaism’ as the former – ‘the wrong kind of thing’ – because he had discovered the latter. Not only has our entire exposition of his thought called this framework (and with it the recent variation that calls itself an ‘apocalyptic’ reading) into question. Had Paul thought in this way, we would not have expected to see him practising and teaching what look very like the elements of a ‘religion’ within his Jesus-and-spirit framework (chapter 13 above). But this (mis)reading has provided the context for a standard ‘old perspective’ view not only of what happened on the Damascus Road but of ‘justification by faith’ itself. Such modern western converts, having previously assumed that ‘religion’ was a matter of impressing God by good works, have discovered through ‘conversion’ that what mattered was not their work for God but God’s loving rescue of them. It has then been easy and natural for people to imagine that this was how it was for Saul of Tarsus: trying to earn God’s favour by good deeds, and then coming to realize that what mattered was divine grace and answering faith. All this is well known, and has formed the staple diet of many a sermon, many a system. This meaning of ‘conversion’, however, is severely anachronistic in Paul’s case. That, too, was part of Stendahl’s point, and it stands near the heart of the so-called ‘new perspective’: Saul of Tarsus was not trying to earn his own salvation by hard moral effort and needing to

learn about previously unknown quantities called ‘grace’ and ‘faith’. As we have seen, something very different was going on.³¹

Stendahl basically pointed out that these essentially modern visions of ‘conversion’ implied a deep devaluation of second-Temple Judaism, and of Pharisaism in particular. They caricature Saul of Tarsus as a cross between a Deist and a Pelagian, trying to please a distant deity by unaided moral effort – a picture which does no justice to the theology, or the piety, of a devout Pharisee. That is why, instead of ‘conversion’, Stendahl proposed ‘call’: what happened to Paul on the Damascus Road was not so much (he said) a matter of turning, or being turned, away from one ‘religion’, or indeed from one particular god, and embracing, or being embraced by, another one. It was a matter of a fresh, and admittedly surprising, ‘call’, in the sense of ‘vocation’, from the one God whom Paul continued to worship, and who was now commissioning him to tell the non-Jewish peoples about him. Stendahl thus put a high value on *continuity* between Saul of Tarsus and Paul the apostle: the same God, the same ‘religion’, the same overall narrative, but just a new task.

Paul does indeed speak of God’s ‘call’ in this connection:

But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, was pleased to unveil his son in me, so that I might announce the good news about him among the nations – immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me ...³²

Since this is, on my reckoning, the only time Paul refers explicitly to what *happened to him or in him* on the Damascus Road (as opposed to his simply ‘seeing’ Jesus), it is all we have to go on.³³ There is nothing about repentance and faith; nothing about finding his heart strangely warmed; nothing about replacing ‘works’ with ‘faith’. There is a ‘call’, like that of the ancient prophets; the one God is ‘unveiling his son’ not ‘to me’ but ‘in me’, which is explained in terms of what this God wanted to do *through* Paul, namely, to send the good news to the nations. There is the tell-tale hint, mentioning ‘those who were apostles before me’: what happened to Paul, by this unique account, was his call and commission to be an apostle,

or rather *the* ‘apostle to the nations’. One sort of activity stopped (persecuting the church); another began (announcing God’s son to the nations).

The two passages in which he refers briefly to the same event in terms of his own seeing of the risen Jesus also relate directly to his apostolic vocation. ‘I’ve seen Jesus our lord, haven’t I?’ he asks rhetorically, by way of reminding the Corinthians of his apostolic qualification (1 Corinthians 9.1). ‘Last of all’, he says, adding his own recollection to the church’s official Easter tradition, ‘he appeared even to me’ (1 Corinthians 15.8). And this, as he goes on to say, is what has constituted him as an ‘apostle’.

In the latter passage, however, he does speak as well about the radical transformation which this ‘appearing’ had effected in him:

Last of all, as to one ripped from the womb, he appeared even to me.

I’m the least of the apostles, you see. In fact, I don’t really deserve to be called ‘apostle’ at all, because I persecuted God’s church! But I am what I am because of God’s grace, and his grace to me wasn’t wasted. On the contrary, I worked harder than all of them – though it wasn’t me, but God’s grace which was with me.³⁴

Here we see the note which Paul emphasizes in Galatians, again and again: grace. ‘God called me by his grace’ (Galatians 1.15). Stendahl was right to this extent: when Paul speaks of Jesus appearing to him, the result is the particular commission he received, the particular task that was laid upon him. To that extent, ‘grace’ might be thought of in terms of a fresh divine power at work, not so much *upon* him (as in the normal ‘conversion’ model) as *through* him. Paul, after all, speaks elsewhere of the divine ‘grace’ not simply in connection with justification or salvation but in connection with his apostolic vocation.³⁵ But the context (the ripping from the womb, the previous persecution, the fact that ‘I am what I am because of God’s grace’) implies that there was more to it than simply the life of Jewish devotion taking a new and unexpected vocational turn. Paul did not regard his previous self as a *tabula rasa*, waiting in faith and hope and then being given an important new task. (One might think of the mother of Jesus in such a fashion, but the song which Luke puts on her lips indicates that

she, too, came to her vocation with a clear agenda already in place.³⁶) Paul was actively – zealously, he says in Galatians 1.14 and Philippians 3.6 – persecuting the new messianic movement. And he seems to have seen this not simply as something which he then profoundly regrets in the light of his subsequent beliefs. He speaks of it as a kind of quintessential sin, acting in direct opposition to what the one God of Israel had now done. It was not simply ‘religion’. It was full-scale rebellion. It represented, from Paul’s Messiah-and-spirit perspective, a radical misconstrual of Israel’s God, Israel’s scriptures and Israel’s purpose. This, as we saw towards the end of chapter 9, was part of his gospel-driven awareness of just how bad and profound ‘the problem of evil’ actually was.

What then about the larger context of his statement in Galatians? Does this not imply that he had formerly belonged to something called ‘Judaism’, but was now part of something else? The answer is ‘yes’ and ‘no’, but mostly ‘no’:

You heard, didn’t you, the way I behaved when I was still within ‘Judaism’. I persecuted the church of God violently, and ravaged it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age and people; I was extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

But when God ...³⁷

Another classic case of deceptive words – which is why I put the first occurrence of ‘Judaism’ in inverted commas. Our inclination is to hear such words as denoting ‘religions’ in our modern sense. But the word *ioudaismos*, like other such formations in Paul’s day, points in a different direction. Such words denoted, not the life and practice of a ‘religion’, but the active and energetic defence and promotion of a way of life.³⁸ That was what Paul had been doing: not simply ‘being a Jew’, but violently defending the Jewish way of life against what he saw as apostasy and paganization. He has not abandoned his Jewish roots and meanings, but simply gained a radical new insight into them. As far as he was concerned, the ‘God’ of whom he spoke in verse 15 is the same as the ‘God’ he thought he was serving all along. The subtle way he explains what had happened to him stresses the continuity, not the discontinuity, between the person he had

now become and the rich and deep ancestral traditions for which he had formerly been ‘zealous’:

But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, was pleased to unveil his son in me, so that I might announce the good news about him among the nations – immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. No; I went away to Arabia, and afterwards returned to Damascus.³⁹

The way he explains what had happened to him makes the point. His ‘call’ echoes those of the prophets, and particularly that of the ‘servant’ in Isaiah 49.1. And his reaction – to go off to ‘Arabia’ before returning to Damascus – resonates with the reaction of the prophet Elijah after he, too, had been stopped in his ‘zealous’ tracks.⁴⁰ If Paul had wanted to say that what had happened on the road to Damascus had turned him away from his Jewish heritage and traditions, he went about it in a very strange way.

For Paul, then, what happened on that day was indeed his ‘call’. But this, too, may be heard anachronistically – a possibility which I think Stendahl did not take fully on board. Clearly, Paul had in mind the ‘call’ of the ancient prophets. But for him ‘call’ became almost a technical term, not just for ‘vocation’ in the sense of a divine summons to a particular task, but for the effect of *the gospel itself* on a person. ‘Those he marked out in advance, *he also called; those he called he also justified*’ (Romans 8.29). Here the ‘call’ is the best shorthand Paul can find – at a moment of high and dramatic clarity, where he was not likely to choose words at random – to denote the complex event which he elsewhere describes in terms of the transformational work of gospel and spirit.⁴¹ To be sure, this language, too, cannot be reduced to terms of ‘conversion’ in either of the two senses noted above. It regularly has to do with the purpose *for which* someone is ‘called’.⁴² But for Paul it clearly *includes* the sense, which he elsewhere explores in more detail, of a fresh and transformative divine work in which the person concerned is not merely redirected but revolutionized.

That is clearly what happened to Paul. The late Alan Segal, perhaps the most thorough and sensitive Jewish writer on Paul in modern times, allows

for Stendahl's point but insists that both in ancient and even in modern terms 'Paul was both converted and called'.⁴³ Thus

The primary fact of Paul's personal experience as a Christian is his enormous transformation, his conversion from a persecutor of Christianity to a persecuted advocate of it. To read Paul properly, I maintain, one must recognize that Paul was a Pharisaic Jew who converted to a new apocalyptic, Jewish sect and then lived in a Hellenistic, gentile Christian community as a Jew among gentiles. Indeed, conversion is a decisive and deliberate change in religious community, even when the convert nominally affirms the same religion.⁴⁴

Segal here correctly identifies what I see as the least unhelpful category in this context: 'transformation'. Nor was this simply a matter of a gradual change. It came about, for Paul, through something he describes in the vivid terms of death and resurrection. When he states dramatically in Romans 6.2–11 that baptism means dying and rising with the Messiah, we cannot suppose that this was, for him personally, a mere abstract idea or ideal. And when he sets out in Philippians 3 the stark contrast between his present and former life it does indeed look for all the world like the kind of change we might want to call 'conversion'.⁴⁵ Segal uses, though Paul himself does not, the language of 'rebirth' to describe this, insisting that Paul is here describing his own 'experience' in order then to 'generalize' this in application to the whole Christian community. This is consonant with Segal's emphasis all through: Paul, having himself been 'converted' in a dramatic and convulsive way, came to believe that this was how the whole new movement should be defined.⁴⁶

There is more than a grain of truth in this, but also I believe a mistake. For Paul what mattered was not that he, Paul, had had a particular kind of 'experience', but that *Israel's Messiah had been crucified and been raised*. Paul was not the kind of evangelist who insists that everyone should 'experience' things in the same way that he or she has done.⁴⁷ He was the kind of teacher who wanted people to work out, to think through and then to live out, what had *in fact* happened to the Messiah and what therefore had *in fact* happened to them through baptism into the Messiah. 'Calculate yourselves', he says, 'as being dead to sin, and alive to God in the Messiah, Jesus.'⁴⁸ Segal gently but regularly implies that some Jews might have

come to faith in Jesus as Messiah in less convulsive ways. Paul, however, insists on the non-negotiable ‘transformation’ which consisted of the cross itself, not as a private spiritual experience but as the public messianic event to which one was joined in baptism.

This comes to a head at the conclusion of the long introduction to Galatians. The drama of the ‘Antioch incident’ in 2.11–14, and the high rhetoric of Paul’s reported rebuke to Peter in 2.15–21, can obliterate for the modern reader the sense of continuity with the earlier material, and particularly with Paul’s brief account of his ‘call’ in 1.15–16. But I think we should see 2.19–20 as in a sense forming a ‘circle’ with that earlier passage and indeed a conclusion to one of the main themes of the first two chapters. The subtext of those chapters is that Paul’s own character and apostolate have been challenged and undermined. From the very first verse (‘My apostleship doesn’t derive from human sources! Nor did it come through a human being. It came through Jesus the Messiah, and God the father who raised him from the dead’) he is telling his own story in order to explain in no uncertain terms that his apostleship and gospel are the real thing. I suggest that the cleverly crafted rhetorical transition to the first person singular in 2.18 is designed to round off his own story and simultaneously to focus on what will be a main emphasis in the body of the letter.

He is, after all, about to make the Messiah’s crucifixion the backbone of the letter (Galatians 3.1, 13; 4.5; 5.24; 6.12, 14). Thus, when he speaks in 2.19–20 of his own co-crucifixion, and his own messianic new ‘life’ the other side of that, he is not saying ‘I have had this experience; you should have it too’. He is saying, rather, ‘this is what it means *for everyone* that Israel’s Messiah was crucified and raised’. He will not speak about such things in the third person, as though detaching himself clinically from the drastic thing that has happened to the Messiah and therefore to Israel. But nor should we mistake his first-person description for a mere ‘record of his own experience’. That would have been useless in the implied rhetorical situation. Peter could have responded, as I think Alan Segal might like him to have done, ‘Well, Paul, that’s how it was for you, but of course for many of us believing in Jesus as Messiah hasn’t been like that,’ and the

conversation would have been at a shoulder-shrugging impasse. The whole point of what Paul says, even though he switches from first person plural in verses 15 and 16 ('We are Jews by birth, not "Gentile sinners". But we know that a person is not declared "righteous" by works of the Jewish law ... that is why we too believed in the Messiah ...') to the first person singular in verse 18 ('If I build up once more the things which I tore down, I demonstrate that I am a lawbreaker'), is that *all this is true for Peter as well, and for all other Jewish Messiah-believers*. The 'I' makes this vivid, and has the function in the larger unit of completing the explanation of Paul's own apostolic call that he began in 1.13, but the underlying point is to do with the Messiah himself, whose death and resurrection are the effective signals for the 'transformation' which is both 'call' and 'conversion' and much besides:

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. I am, however, alive – but it isn't me any longer, it's the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live within the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.⁴⁹

The Messiah's cross; the Messiah's faithfulness; the Messiah's life; the Messiah's love. For Paul, the divine 'call' on the road to Damascus meant being grasped by and incorporated into all of those Israel-redefining realities. And those messianic events, as far as Paul was concerned, meant the same thing for Peter and Barnabas and the 'certain persons' who 'came from James' (2.12), if only they would realize it. Paul was not projecting his own 'experience'. He was unpacking the meaning of the messianic events.

When we look into the depths of what Paul has said in this sharp and dramatic passage we realize that several aspects even of our modern meanings of 'conversion' are in fact contained within it, albeit themselves in a transformed sense. Paul has not switched from one 'religion' to another; rather, the Messiah's death and resurrection have redefined, in a moment of unveiled truth, the goal and meaning of the whole Jewish way of life. Paul has not stopped believing in the one God whose 'grace' is

proclaimed right across Israel's scriptures; he has seen that grace in personal action in the Messiah, and now sees those scriptures in an entirely new light. He has always invoked the one God in personal prayer, and he continues to do so; he has not (that is) been 'converted' in some modern sense, from having no belief in or awareness of a supreme deity to having such a thing for the first time. But he now knows this one God as the one who sent the son, and the one who sends the spirit of the son (Galatians 4.4–7). At the heart of all this, however, is the theme which millions of 'conversions' ancient and modern have in common: a sense of overwhelming love. That is why, for Paul, the deepest and most intimate element in 'conversion' led directly to 'call':

If we are beside ourselves, you see, it's for God; and if we are in our right mind, it's for you. For the Messiah's love makes us press on. We have come to the conviction that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all in order that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised on their behalf.⁵⁰

We might want to call this messianic love the 'objective reality' to which Paul appeals, again and again. Certainly he resists all attempts to reduce matters to his own subjective interiority. But of course the notion of 'love' itself resists precisely this objective/subjective alternative.⁵¹ What happened to Paul on the road to Damascus contained at its core, he insists, a *personal meeting* involving a real 'seeing' of the risen Jesus; a *cognitive awareness* that the resurrection had declared Jesus to be Israel's Messiah, and that his death and resurrection were the Israel-redefining and world-claiming events for which Israel had longed; and a *personal transformation* such as love regularly effects, in which the heart itself was, in biblical language, 'circumcised', enabled at last to love the one God with a spirit-given love, and thus to keep the *Shema* itself.⁵² A call: in a sense. A conversion: in a sense. What happened to Paul, personally and convulsively, was what through the Messiah's death and resurrection had happened to the world as a whole, as he says in Galatians 6.14, and more specifically to Israel as a whole, resulting in the mission to the nations. God's Israel-purpose was fulfilled, and was transformed in fulfilment. Paul believed that this

transformation, and this fulfilment, had been effected *in* him and was being effected *through* him. And all this happened through the revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus.

3. Paul and Jewish 'Identity'

(i) Introduction: the Question of 'Identity'

All this brings us back, from a new angle and with considerably more weight of exegesis behind us, to a question which surfaced as far back as chapters 6 and 8. The question to which I refer, that of Paul's 'identity', has acquired an air of sharp and sometimes unpleasant controversy, not least because contemporary discussions of 'identity' have become central in several areas of public discourse. Discussing 'who Paul was' or 'who Paul thought he was' thus becomes a way of addressing these matters from another angle, just as discussing his doctrine of justification becomes a way of addressing other issues in some parts of today's church. Much is at stake as a result, and as usual it is often historical exegesis that comes off worst.

The question, anyway, can be put like this: in what sense, if any, did Paul still think of himself, or describe himself, as 'a Jew'?⁵³ Did he embrace that 'identity', try to modify it, distance himself from it, or what? And, as part of that, did he continue to do what 'a Jew' might be expected to do, namely keep Torah? If so, granted there were many views in his day on what 'keeping Torah' actually involved, in what way and to what extent did he do this? Did he perhaps still *claim* to keep Torah but with less strictness than in his previous life as a Pharisee? Did he do things himself, and teach others to do them, which some or most Jews of his day would have regarded as either compromising Torah-observance or abandoning it altogether? Or what?

At first sight the answer might be obvious. Paul was still, physically, the same person he had always been. His parents were still his parents, even if (one of many things on which we have no information) they had disowned him. Among those over whom he grieves bitterly in Romans 9.1–5 are

undoubtedly people near and dear to him. He was still a Hebrew, an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham and the tribe of Benjamin, as he insists in a couple of passages.⁵⁴ If in Galatians he could use himself as an example of what happens to every person who is baptized into the death and resurrection of the Messiah, in Romans he can still use himself as an example of someone of Israelite stock who is firmly and solidly a member of the 'remnant', one of Abraham's physical family who also belongs to Abraham's 'family of promise'.⁵⁵ In one interesting little passage he appears to speak of himself as part of the 'we' which constitutes the Jewish people insofar as they are 'in the wrong'.⁵⁶ And in one famous passage, reporting his sharp exchange with Peter at Antioch, he declares, 'We are Jews by birth, not "Gentile sinners".'⁵⁷ All this seems fairly conclusive at first glance.⁵⁸

But then the doubts begin. Would Paul's Jewish contemporaries have considered him a 'Jew'? This is not just about things that he believed. Many Jews no doubt believed many strange things, including the identification of strange people as 'Messiahs'. But Jews then as now have seldom made niceties of 'belief' the main criterion. The question would have been, what was he *doing*, or perhaps not doing? Paul admitted people to Abraham's family without requiring the covenant sign of circumcision. Paul spoke of the 'temple', referring not now to the shrine in Jerusalem but to the fellowship of Jesus-followers and even to individuals among them. Paul treated the Messiah-faith 'family' as an extended family, insisting on people 'marrying within' that family in the way he would previously have insisted on Jewish endogamy. Paul does not seem to have bothered about the sabbath, regarding it as something that Messiah-followers could observe or not as they chose.⁵⁹ All this must have raised not only eyebrows but also hackles among the Jewish populations in the Diaspora.

Notoriously, Paul went further. He shared table-fellowship with non-Jews who were Messiah-believers. If that caused problems even for Peter and Barnabas, as it seems to have done (we can hardly suppose that Paul invented the awkward 'Antioch incident' out of thin air), we can be sure

that it would have caused serious problems for the young Saul of Tarsus.⁶⁰ He advised the Messiah-people in Corinth to accept dinner invitations from anyone and everyone, and to eat unquestioningly what was provided, the only exception being if someone's conscience was still 'weak' at the thought of eating idol-meat.⁶¹ Not only, then, did he advocate eating with uncircumcised and even with unbelieving gentiles, but on an apparently straightforward reading of the relevant passages (we shall discuss them further in a moment) he advocated, in principle, eating their non-kosher food, on the scriptural grounds that 'the earth and its fullness belong to the lord'.⁶² Since it is clear from the discussions in both 1 Corinthians 8—10 and Romans 14—15 that Paul considered himself emphatically among the 'strong' who were happy to see the world this way, as opposed to the 'weak' who still had scruples (to whom he none the less deferred where appropriate), it would appear not only that Paul was advising gentile Christians in Corinth to eat non-kosher food but that he was happy to do so himself, and that he was happy to see other 'Jewish Christians' following this pattern. And at this point some today might say, as some of his contemporaries certainly did, that he had stopped being a 'Jew' altogether. He had abandoned the most basic markers of Jewish identity.⁶³

So is that how he saw himself, too? Once more there are signals pointing in this direction. However we punctuate 1 Thessalonians 2.14–15, Paul is certainly distancing himself from 'the Judaeans' he there describes.⁶⁴ However we read Romans 10.1–3, Paul is certainly grieving over, and praying for, those of his kinsfolk who 'have a zeal for God' which is 'not based on knowledge'. He recognizes, as one who has known it from both sides, that the gospel of the crucified Messiah is 'a scandal to Jews'.⁶⁵ He lists all the remarkable privileges and symbols of status which he had as a devout and zealous Pharisaic Jew, and then declares that they are all *skybala*, a word whose more polite translations include 'dung'.⁶⁶

Above all, there is Galatians 2. Right after saying 'We are Jews by birth, not "Gentile sinners"', Paul proceeds with a radical *but* of redefinition: 'But we know that a person is not declared "righteous" by works of the

Jewish law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah.’⁶⁷ Then, in the most dramatic of redefinitions (in a passage we have studied many times already but which remains strangely absent from the discussions of those who want to claim that Paul remained a ‘Torah-observant’ Jew), he says, ‘Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God,’ explaining that this has come about through his co-crucifixion with the Messiah. How much clearer do things need to be?

I can understand people who are rightly concerned for Christian–Jewish relations today struggling with this text. I can understand people trying to imagine that it was maybe a rhetorical overstatement.⁶⁸ What I cannot understand is people trying to make an argument that Paul was in some sense a Torah-observant Jew but not even mentioning this major piece of counter-evidence.⁶⁹ Nor can I understand someone suggesting that for Paul to recognize Jesus as Messiah ‘did not mean any repudiation of the Torah’.⁷⁰ If ‘dying to something’ is not repudiating it, Paul’s words have no meaning.⁷¹

What Paul says in the rhetorically charged ‘I’ of Galatians 2.19–20, he repeats in the second person plural in the massively significant Romans 7.4–6. ‘You too died to the law through the body of the Messiah ... now we have been cut loose from the law; we have died to the thing in which we were held tightly.’⁷² Rather than dodge the implications of Philippians 3 and the *skandalon* texts, then, we are bound, as historical exegetes, to see them within a framework which can include passages from Galatians and Romans whose central role in key arguments can hardly be gainsaid.

I have argued above that the central reason for Paul’s sharp statements about no longer being under Torah were not to do with comparative religion, but with *messianic eschatology*: the Messiah had come, had died and been raised, and the whole world had been transformed, ‘Israel’ included. That is more or less exactly what Paul says in Galatians 6.14. I suggested in chapter 9 that this gave Paul the basis not just for an eschatological deduction (‘we are now in a new time in which Torah is no longer relevant’) but for an actual critique: Israel under Torah turned out to be just as ‘Adamic’ as the rest of humanity. Within this again we may now

glimpse a further level of critique, which for Paul was more specifically autobiographical.

Paul seems to have seen the violent actions of his earlier days not just as a case of mistaken ‘zeal’, though it was that as well. He seems to have seen those actions as embodying something quintessential about the way a would-be Torah-observant Pharisaism, and beyond that perhaps Israel as a whole, had taken a drastically wrong turn. To repeat: this did not mean, for Paul, that there was anything wrong *with being Jewish*, or with God’s call to Israel.⁷³ Paul saw his earlier persecution of the Jesus-followers not simply as a bit of misguided youthful exuberance but as a symptom of a drastically wrong construal of what it meant to be genuinely Jewish. His renewed-Jewish self rejected, on the basis of the Jewish Messiah and the fresh reading of Israel’s scriptures which his death and resurrection evoked, the praxis which as a young Pharisee he had believed to be required by his Jewish Torah-faithfulness. Thus the critique of Israel in Romans 2.17–24, 7.7–25 and 9.30—10.21 does not imply that there is ‘anything wrong with being Jewish’. Paul rules that out explicitly, again and again. What is ‘wrong’ is that Paul’s kinsfolk according to the flesh ‘have a zeal for God’ which, he says, ‘is not based on knowledge’ (10.2). Granted the reference to ‘zeal’, linking this passage to Galatians 1.13–14 and Philippians 3.6, this looks very much like an autobiographical hint, which joins up with reflections elsewhere on his persecuting activity.⁷⁴

This critique of violent ‘zeal’, we may note, would place Paul on the same page, in this respect, as Josephus. Josephus attributes the disaster of AD 66–70 to the hotheaded violence of the ‘zealots’.⁷⁵ He accuses the violent rebels of other things, too: breaking the law and defiling the Temple, which is different from anything Paul says about his former self (though it reflects the charges brought against him in Acts⁷⁶). But the general point is still important. If Josephus could point the finger at violent ‘zeal’ as a dramatic distortion of true Jewish loyalty, it is hardly making Paul ‘anti-Jewish’ to point out that he does the same. This would then strengthen the view that in Galatians, Philippians and Colossians, as we noted in chapter 10, Paul can use ironic language to say that a would-be Jewish life which

refuses to recognize Jesus as Messiah is turning itself into the same kind of ‘religion’ as was evident in the world around.

What then did Paul say about himself in relation to ‘Jewishness’ and connected topics? The evidence is set out earlier in this book, and here we can simply summarize. Of first importance, as I have argued all through, was Paul’s solid and carefully worked out belief that, in the messianic events concerning Jesus, Israel’s God had been faithful to the covenant promises to Abraham. This is of course routinely denied by the modern traditions (mostly German and American) that see Galatians as *opposing* an Abraham-based covenant theology. That position really does sail close to the wind of saying that Paul is rejecting something called ‘Judaism’. But I believe there should be no doubt that Paul was indeed affirming that what God had promised to Abraham he had fulfilled in the Messiah. Of course, Paul did what many other Jewish groups of the time were doing, namely, redrawing the boundaries of Abraham’s family.⁷⁷ But making Abraham and his family central was about as Jewish-affirming a thing to do as Paul could have done, and redrawing the boundaries simply meant that Paul was, to that extent, just another typical second-Temple Jew.

In particular, Paul insists – it is the main theme of Galatians 3 – that Abraham has *one* family, not two or more. This is a radically Jewish thing to say, and it completely rules out any suggestion that Abraham might have a ‘covenant’ family consisting of Jews (whether Christian or not) and another one of those ‘in Christ’.⁷⁸ We have seen the same, again and again, in relation to Romans 2.25–9, where Paul insists on the goodness and God-giveness of circumcision and ‘the commandments’ and then insists, in line with Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, that the place where these things really matter is the heart. So far, so Jewish – though of course Paul then opens things up so that the physically ‘uncircumcised’ can be part of this ‘renewed-heart’ people too, exactly as in Romans 4, Romans 10 or Galatians 3.⁷⁹ Similar things could be said about 2 Corinthians 3 and Philippians 3.2–11, which as we have seen elsewhere are deeply and radically *Jewish* in what they say and how they say it, *including* the sharp

internal critique which is such a regular feature of Jewish life in the modern as in the ancient world.⁸⁰

We have seen the results of all this in chapter 11 above. Paul can refer to spirit-led, Messiah-believing gentiles and Jews together as ‘the Jew’; ‘the circumcision’; and even on occasion as ‘Israel’ (suitably redefined: ‘Israel of God’ in Galatians, ‘all Israel’ in Romans).⁸¹ In particular, as again we have seen in plenty of places, he develops an explicitly Deuteronomic vision of what it means, granted the renewal of the covenant and the end of exile, to ‘fulfil Torah’, to ‘do the law’, to ‘observe the commandments’. He can speak of ‘the law of faith’. One of the most decisive moments in the whole of Romans is where he expounds Deuteronomy 30 in terms of confessing Jesus as lord and believing that God raised him from the dead, and this draws together, as we have seen, a large number of other passages in which he hints, this way and that, at the same thing. Again and again the point is that *gentiles can do this as well, while remaining uncircumcised*. And the upshot of it all is that if one were to accuse Paul of no longer observing Torah, he would roundly declare that though he had come out from under the rule of Torah, ‘dying to it’ by being co-crucified with the Messiah, the spirit-driven life in the Messiah *was in fact the true Torah-observance*, the thing towards which Deuteronomy had been pointing all along. It led, not least, to the deep and heart-felt keeping of the *Shema*: one God, therefore one people of God.⁸² It was vital to Paul to see the Messiah’s cross blocking the way to any perpetuation of the world of Torah-observance in which he had grown up and been active. But, as he suggests in Romans 8.1–11, with resurrection and spirit a new form of Torah-observance had emerged to which he was utterly committed and in which he believed uncircumcised gentile believers had a full share. To speak of this, as some want to, as the ‘erasure’ of something called ‘Jewish identity’ would have made no sense to Paul. If the Messiah has come, and if in and through him Israel’s God has acted dramatically to fulfil his promises to Abraham and to do for Israel and the world what they could not do for themselves, then to cling to the old ways of Torah-observance and to something called ‘Jewish identity’ as though it had value in itself quite

apart from the purposes and promises of Israel's God (an idea the more popular today because of the postmodern imperative to celebrate 'identity', 'difference' and so on) would be, from Paul's point of view, like the young son insisting on staying immature rather than growing up (Galatians 4.1–7). It would be like the bridegroom returning from the wars to find that the bride preferred the careful life of distant engagement to the prospect of actual marriage. It would be like keeping the candles burning and the curtains tight shut even though the sun was coming up on a spring morning. Paul might have added, as Josephus effectively did, that to do that was to risk burning the house down. Eschatological messianism (or if you prefer messianic eschatology) is what counts, a vision rooted in the Jewish world, only comprehensible as a scripturally based variation on first-century visions of what it meant to be a loyal Israelite. How could it be 'anti-Jewish' to claim that the Messiah had been raised from the dead and was the lord of the world? Paul would have scorned all attempts to construct, or to cling to, something called 'Jewish identity' apart from the one 'identity' which mattered: that of being Messiah-people. That is what all the key discussions are about, whether in Romans or Galatians, in Philippians or Ephesians.

(ii) 'Like a Jew to the Jews'?

But what about 1 Corinthians? Is it not there that he speaks of a 'rule in all the churches' according to which Jews must stay as observant Jews while gentiles must observe such commandments as pertain to them? And might that not blow the lid off the whole argument I have presented?

The passage in question comes within the discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul is arguing that in the present time of urgency or distress one should not rush to change one's social or cultural circumstances. His main point, to which he will return, is to advise for the present against either hasty marriage or hasty divorce (7.26–8). This is the particular application of a more general principle:

This is the overriding rule: everyone should conduct their lives as the lord appointed, as God has called them. This is what I lay down in all the churches. If someone was circumcised when he was called, he shouldn't try to remove the marks. If someone was uncircumcised when he was called, he shouldn't get circumcised. Circumcision is nothing; uncircumcision is nothing; what matters is keeping God's commandments!⁸³

Like most exegetes, I have in the past taken verse 19 as a deliberate irony.⁸⁴ Paul knew as well as anyone that circumcision was itself one of the 'commandments', and here he was saying that it was irrelevant! Put this together with Romans 2.26–9 or Romans 10.5–13 and it makes excellent rhetorical sense: Paul has a larger vision of 'keeping God's commandments', which now transcends the questions of 'Torah-observance' as seen through the eyes of the zealous Pharisee. The verbal flourish reminds me of that great Christian leader James Houston banging on the table and saying, 'We must forget "evangelicalism" and concentrate on the gospel!' Forget circumcision – and keep the commandments!

A case has, however, been made for quite a different reading. Some have insisted that here Paul establishes a universal rule: that Jesus-believing Jews *should continue to be completely Torah-observant*, and that Jesus-believing gentiles should observe the Noachide commandments which some later rabbis regarded as the gentiles' equivalent of Torah. Peter Tomson, in particular, has set up this interpretation as the yardstick by which to interpret other passages, notably 1 Corinthians 9.19–23 (to which we shall come presently).⁸⁵ But this is gross over-exegesis. Granted that Paul can use the words 'circumcision' and 'uncircumcision' to refer metonymically to 'Jews' and 'gentiles' respectively, he is here talking quite literally about the state of the male member. What he says to a Jewish Messiah-believer is not 'you must observe Torah exactly as you always have done', but 'you shouldn't even think about having the operation to reverse your circumcision' (as some hellenizers had done in the Maccabaeen period⁸⁶), just as he says to gentile Messiah-believers what he says in Galatians: 'don't even think about getting circumcised'. For someone to 'remain in the state in which they were called' (his summary of the 'rule' in verse 24) has nothing to do with 'continuing to observe Torah in the same way', or indeed

with gentiles taking upon themselves the Noachide commands. Paul firmly expects gentile converts to live ‘no longer like the gentiles’ in relation, particularly, to sexual morality; that is, he does not insist that *they* should continue to follow their previous practices!⁸⁷ Paul does not say, in other words, what some dearly wish he had said, namely that ‘Jews and gentiles should each stick to their respective ways of life.’ Nor does he say, more specifically, that ‘Jews are to remain practising Jews and not live as gentiles.’⁸⁸ Indeed, when Paul said to Peter that he had been ‘living like a gentile’ in Galatians 2.14, this was not a criticism. It was, for Paul, part of ‘the truth of the gospel’. To take 1 Corinthians 7.19 as an injunction to keep the whole law in a ‘normal’ pre-gospel Jewish way is to fly in the face of Paul’s major statements about the law elsewhere, and to risk building up once more things that had been torn down.

All this brings us to the passage which has proved particularly contentious in these discussions:

I am indeed free from everyone; but I have enslaved myself to everyone, so that I can win all the more. I became like a Jew to the Jews, to win Jews. I became like someone under the law to the people who are under the law, even though I’m not myself under the law, so that I could win those under the law. To the lawless I became like someone lawless (even though I’m not lawless before God, but under the Messiah’s law), so that I could win the lawless. I became weak to the weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that in all ways I might save some. I do it all because of the gospel, so that I can be a partner in its benefits.⁸⁹

There are not too many Pauline passages where we can say, without hesitation, what the ‘natural’ meaning is, but here I believe it is clear. Paul understood himself to possess what in our jargon we might call a new ‘identity’ – the word is slippery, but it is hard to think of a better one – in which his previous ‘identity’ as a ‘Jew’, as one ‘under the law’, had been, to say the least, drastically modified. It no longer defined who he was, and what he could and could not do. For the sake of his missionary strategy, and that alone, he ‘became like a Jew to the Jews’.

The ‘like’ is missing in a few manuscripts, but whether or not it is present the point remains stark. *Being a ‘Jew’ was no longer Paul’s basic identity.* He backs it up: for the sake of his mission ‘to the people who are under the

law’, that is, the Jewish people, he became *like* someone under the law, even though that was not now ‘who he was’ at the deepest level.⁹⁰ This fits completely with what he says elsewhere: ‘you died to the law’; ‘now we have been cut loose from the law’; ‘through the law I died to the law’; ‘now that faithfulness has come, we are no longer *hypo paigagōgon*, under the “pedagogue”, the “babysitter” ’ – in other words, the ‘law’ that looked after Abraham’s family during its period of minority.⁹¹

This reading of 1 Corinthians 9 has come under sustained attack. Peter Tomson applied drastic textual surgery to the whole passage, eliminating the ‘like’ (*hōs*) in ‘like a Jew’, on the flimsiest of manuscript evidence, and cutting out the entire phrase ‘even though I’m not myself under the law’ on almost equally shaky grounds.⁹² David Rudolph has drawn back from such blatant attempts to force the passage not to say what it clearly does say, but he too avoids what most have seen as its basic thrust.⁹³ His tactic is to suggest that there were different levels of Jewish lawkeeping in Paul’s day, as there are today; that Paul knew very well that the strict way he himself had kept the Torah as a Pharisee was not the way many of his Jewish contemporaries ‘kept Torah’; that he was content to use various tactics of accommodation and compromise which would still have been regarded as in some sense faithful Torah-observance; and that this is reflected in Paul’s language:

The expression *tois hypo nomon* (‘those under the law’) would thus refer to ‘Pharisees’... It follows that Paul’s statement ‘I myself am not under the law’ need not imply that Paul ceased to be a Torah-observant Jew. It would only mean that he stopped living according to Pharisaic or particularly strict standards of Torah observance as a consistent lifestyle.⁹⁴

It should be remembered that in a society where it was normative for Jews to be law observant, *if a Jew referred to other Jews as ‘under the law’, it would have likely had the connotation ‘under the law in a particularly fervent way’, perhaps comparable in meaning to ‘zealous for the law’ ...*⁹⁵

This seems to me fantastically unlikely in view of Paul’s other uses of ‘under the law’, not least in Galatians and Romans.⁹⁶ There is no evidence that Paul was using coded language to make an *inner-Jewish* distinction at this point. One can hardly imagine such a reading even being dreamed of

except when the text in question presents such an apparently solid block – a stumbling-block, one might say – in the path of the Pauline reinterpretation many seem determined to press upon us.

Another writer to explore alternative ways of reading 1 Corinthians 9 is Mark Nanos. He too seeks to avoid what I have seen as the ‘natural’ meaning of the text, though he goes about it in a quite different way from Rudolph. In a recent article, he sets up something he calls ‘the traditional conceptualization of Paulinism’, which he explains as ‘privileging of gentleness, freedom from Torah and Jewish identity’, and proceeds to castigate the ‘Paul’ of this model.⁹⁷ Such a Paul, according to Nanos’s reading of this passage, ‘adopts a highly questionable way of life’, ‘is deceitful and hypocritical’, ‘subverts his own teaching’, thereby adopts ‘an ineffective bait and switch strategy’, follows ‘absolutely contrary behaviour’ involving ‘flip-flopping’, demonstrates ‘moral bankruptcy’ and reveals a Paulinism (and thus a Christianity) which has ‘a serpent-like guile at its very heart’.⁹⁸ Any converts that result, Nanos declares,

will adopt this chameleon-like expedient behaviour thereafter on the same terms, that is, only in order to trick other Jews. That creates a spiral of duplicity, with long-range deleterious results for their psychological and spiritual as well as social well-being should they remain ‘Christians’ after finding out the truth.⁹⁹

All this leads to a peroration where Nanos’s description of the supposed ‘Paulinism’ begins to remind me of Richard Dawkins’s description of the God of the Bible. The charges against this ‘Paul’, he says, are:

moral dishonesty, hypocrisy, misrepresentation, trickery, inconsistency, subversion of principles for expedience, and practical shortsightedness.¹⁰⁰

All these Nanos undertakes to eliminate with his own theory as to what the text means. Paul was not, he says, talking about what he *did*, but only what he *said*. This is a ‘rhetorical adaptability’ which ‘did not include the adoption of conduct representing his various audiences’ convictional propositions, but not his own’.¹⁰¹ Thus

I propose that instead of ‘behaving like’ according to the model of lifestyle adaptability, this language [i.e. 1 Corinthians 9.19–23] signifies how Paul *reasons like* and *relates* his convictions *like*, how he *engages like*, how he rhetorically meets people where they are, according to their own world-views and premises. Paul *reasons* with, *relates* to, or *engages* Jews as/like (in the manner of) a Jew, and so on. In this rhetorical, discursive sense Paul could actually *become like* – or even *become – everything to everyone*.¹⁰²

This means knowing how to communicate effectively and respectfully. It provides, says Nanos, the right approach for today’s Jewish–Christian dialogue. Such a dialogue

seeks to understand the other on their own terms, and to successfully explain one’s own premises and world-view in cross-culturally intelligible terms in order to advance mutual respect and beneficial relationships going forward. These are goals to which one can hardly object.¹⁰³

Even those undisturbed by split infinitives may nevertheless feel uneasy at this sentence. Was Paul *really* modelling and advocating such a remarkably postmodern agenda? If that was all Paul was doing, and was known to be doing, why (as Nanos himself sees) would anyone object? As Paul himself said in a different context, ‘if I were still pleasing people, I wouldn’t be a slave of the Messiah’, or ‘If I am still announcing circumcision, why are people still persecuting me? If I were, the scandal of the cross would have been neutralized.’¹⁰⁴ But object they did; we can hardly suppose that Paul received the ‘forty lashes less one’ over and over again for speaking (as many Jews were able to do) in cross-culturally intelligible terms.¹⁰⁵ In any case, Nanos seems to forget, in looking at these five verses in 1 Corinthians 9, the role they play in the discourse as a whole (the unit in question is commonly agreed to run from 1 Corinthians 8.1 to 11.1). Paul’s whole point is that he is modelling behaviour in which one *gives up one’s rights* for the sake of others. He has enslaved himself, he says. In what way does Nanos’s Paul ‘enslave himself’ by engaging in cross-culturally intelligible dialogue? How would that provide a model for the larger appeal Paul is making, that though the Christian of whatever background is free to eat food of whatever sort, this is a ‘right’ which must be given up if it causes someone else to stumble? The ultimate model for this, as with the similar argument in Philippians 2.1–11, is of course Jesus himself, which is why Paul concludes

the whole section by urging them to ‘copy me, just as I’m copying the Messiah’.¹⁰⁶ Nanos’s rhetorically adaptable Paul is not giving up anything. He is just behaving like a civilized modern western dialogue partner.

Paul’s overriding concern, throughout the section, does of course include the desire to avoid giving offence. ‘Be blameless’, he says, ‘before Jews and Greeks and the church of God, just as I try to please everybody in everything, not pursuing my own advantage, but that of the great majority, so that they may be saved.’¹⁰⁷ This actually looks like a further summing up of exactly what he had said in 9.19–23, and the claim of ‘trying to please everybody’ is clearly an old habit, since it had occasioned the slur to which he responded in Galatians 1.10. So must we after all say that Paul was either wicked (in the way Nanos has so graphically described) or just stupid, unable to realize that people would see through his ‘flip-flopping’ behaviour?

Emphatically not. Nanos, like many others, has simply misrepresented the case. He seems to have no idea of what the thrust of Paul’s gospel actually was. He describes Paul as ‘seeking to convince fellow Jews as well as Gentiles to turn to Jesus as the one representing the ideals and promises of Torah’, who would naturally therefore ‘uphold the quintessential basis of that message, that is, he would observe Torah’.¹⁰⁸ But where did this idea come from, that the point of Jesus was that he represented Torah? Yes, Paul does say in Romans 10 that the Messiah is the *telos nomou*, the ‘goal of Torah’, and he expounds Deuteronomy 30 to exactly this effect. But Paul does not see Torah simply as a set of commands, a lifestyle. He sees it, as Josephus saw it, as Daniel saw it, as Qumran saw it, as a *narrative*; a narrative that was straining forward to an explosive *dénouement*; a narrative that, in Paul’s case, had reached that *dénouement* in the Messiah. And with the Messiah all things are different, not least because ‘through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God’. Paul was not, as Nanos’s hypothetical Paul seems to have been, trying to persuade people to adopt ‘propositional values which he believes to be superior’.¹⁰⁹ He was telling them that the crucified and risen Jewish Messiah was the lord of the world – an essentially Jewish message, a message incomprehensible except in

solidly biblical and Jewish terms, and yet a message whose explosive quality transcended polite cross-cultural dialogue by as much as a Shakespeare soliloquy transcends ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star’. Nanos has tried to put the wind of Paul’s gospel into the bottle of postmodern morality, and it will not fit. The true Paul was not offering ‘superior’ propositions or a ‘better’ way of life, to be argued for within a ‘comparative religion’ framework. He was offering eschatological messianism.

Nanos, in fact, has carefully bracketed out the apocalyptic and eschatological claim which alone makes sense of Paul’s behaviour and of his claim in this passage. Of course, if Paul was teaching a lifestyle, or inculcating a series of propositions, he might well be accused of such gross inconsistency as to constitute a moral failure.¹¹⁰ But if he believed that Jesus was Israel’s Messiah through whom ‘the world has been crucified to me and I to the world’, how was he supposed to live?

If he simply went on keeping Torah, insisting that continuing Torah-observance was mandatory for Jewish converts, he could not have said what he did to Peter in Galatians 2.14. Peter, like Paul himself, had been ‘living like a gentile’ in the sense of sharing open table-fellowship; that was demanded, Paul believed, by ‘gospel truth’. But if Paul, ‘living like a gentile’ (in other words, sharing table-fellowship with non-Jews and also sharing their food, including meat that might have been offered to idols), then went into a new town and visited the synagogue community, he would of course be tactful. If he refused to behave Jewishly in that context, on the grounds that he believed in a new kind of Torah-fulfilment altogether, the message he would have communicated would have been that he was teaching a totally non-Jewish faith and practice. That, of course, was the garbled news that, according to Acts, had made its way back to Jerusalem.¹¹¹ But for Paul this was a travesty. His message, and the life of his communities (to say it yet again) remained essentially Jewish, making claims which only made the sense they made within a Jewish worldview, as a new dramatic variation on themes common in much second-Temple Jewish life. He believed that in Jesus Israel’s Messiah had arrived, ushering in the new age for which Torah and prophets had longed, fulfilling God’s

promises to Abraham. One would hardly make that point to one's fellow Jews by openly flouting what was seen as normal Torah-observance. Hence: 'to the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews'. Of course, Paul believed that the radical fulfilment of the promises had resulted in a new kind of Torah-obedience in which, though some things had been intensified (praying the *Shema*, for instance!), others were set aside.¹¹² But one would not even gain a hearing for the essentially Jewish 'good news' about the Messiah if one began by openly flouting Torah. Could he explain, at a first meeting, all that he had in his head, which eventually came out in the subtle but deeply satisfying exposition in Romans? Of course not – any more than he was going to be able to explain it to the angry crowd in Jerusalem, who had heard rumours about him that corresponded more than a little to the unpleasant charges which Nanos heaps on the head of what he sees as traditional 'Paulinism'.¹¹³ So he would 'become like a Jew to the Jews', with the 'like' indicating behaviour, presumably in relation to food and probably sabbath. The potential charge of inconsistency only works *from within a framework that has bracketed out eschatological messianism before it starts*. Of course, a synagogue member might say to Paul, 'But didn't I hear that in your last town you were eating all kinds of food – and with uncircumcised gentiles, too?' Faced with that question, Paul could no doubt explain himself, perhaps in language we would recognize from Galatians. Or if Paul were in Corinth, regularly sharing in the common meals of the church, and a Jewish family invited him to dinner, he would eat kosher food with them. Would they at once accuse him of hypocrisy? Would he have done better to have brought his own pork sandwiches? What good would that have done? Ironically, Nanos is precisely failing 'to understand the other on their own terms'. He is insisting on putting things in *his* own terms, producing the alternative of either a grossly caricatured and culpable 'Paulinism' or the equally spurious 'Paul' of a neutered cross-cultural dialogue. If Nanos's picture of the apostle were correct, the paragraph might have finished 'I've become some things to some people, so that by some means I may be inoffensive and inclusive to all.' Much more

satisfactory for the early twenty-first century, perhaps. But a lot less like Paul.¹¹⁴

The details may then be cleared up. There is a sense, of course, in which Paul is indeed a ‘Jew’. But he has already declared in Galatians 2.15–21 that this is not his basic ‘identity’ (if we must use that language). There should be no problem as to what he means here. When he goes to the synagogues, as he seems to have done in city after city, of course he behaves in accordance with normal Jewish practice. (We should not dismiss the account in Acts; had Paul not gone to synagogues he would not have received the synagogue punishment, and the fact that he received it more than once shows that he continued to regard himself as in some sense ‘belonging’.) Nothing in the gospel tells him not to follow Jewish practice in these circumstances. If he doesn’t, he might as well not show up at all – thereby undermining ‘to the Jew first’. Likewise, he then behaves as though (despite Galatians 2.19 and Romans 7.4) he is after all ‘under the law’; again, that seems to include synagogue discipline.¹¹⁵ How easy it would have been simply never to turn up, to be regarded as if anything an *apikoros*, a traitor, an ex-Jew. But the gospel is ‘to the Jew first and also equally to the Greek’. I suspect all this would be second nature to real cross-cultural missionaries. Charges of inconsistency are bound to arise, but the inconsistency here is in the eye of the beholder. Paul is claiming to be consistent to the *nomos Christou*, the ‘Messiah’s law’ of Galatians 6.2 according to which one must ‘carry each other’s burdens’; this, I think, is the meaning of *ennomos Christou*, ‘under the Messiah’s law’, in this passage as well.¹¹⁶ Here, as in 1 Corinthians 7.19 (and in other passages like Galatians 4.21), we should undoubtedly hear a gentle irony: if you want to be under a ‘law’, try this one! Nor should we try to bend the unusual phrase Paul uses when he says ‘even though I’m not lawless before God’ to make it an affirmation of full Torah-observance. The Greek is literally ‘not being lawless of God’, *anomos theou*, and does not naturally cash out as a direct reference to the ‘law of God’.¹¹⁷

Paul’s statement that he ‘became weak’ to the ‘weak’ is easily explained in terms of 1 Corinthians 8.9–13, and here we come upon an interesting

point: the ‘winning’ of which he speaks here cannot simply be to do with primary evangelism.¹¹⁸ ‘The weak’, here and in Romans 14—15, are Christians who still harbour scruples on certain issues, and whose consciences must be respected.¹¹⁹ Paul is speaking not only as an evangelist but as a pastor. His task is not only to evangelize but to bring people to what we might call messianic maturity.¹²⁰ The strategy he here outlines is part of that larger whole.

Like the dog that refused to bark in the night, there is one category missing in Paul’s list.¹²¹ He does not say ‘to the strong I became strong, that I might win the strong’. Perhaps he thought that four categories were enough (the Jews, those under the law, the lawless and the ‘weak’). Perhaps he subsumed the ‘strong’ under the ‘lawless’, though this seems unlikely. Perhaps, then, the answer is that Paul saw himself firmly as already among the ‘strong’. The position he is articulating is in fact precisely *the ‘strong’ position*, as he would have seen it. And the ‘strength’ in question has nothing to do with moral courage or a tough personal character. It has everything to do with the firmness of the conviction that in Jesus the crucified Messiah Israel’s God had made himself fully and finally known. Paul could not *become* ‘strong’; he was ‘strong’ already. That indicates clearly enough that the other categories he mentions, even the category ‘Jew’ in its normal sense of a synagogue-obedient, Torah-observant people, are ‘identities’ he could ‘identify with’ as need arose, without being defined by them. This was not, we may be sure, an easy position, or one lightly espoused. Romans 9.1–5 makes it clear that this cannot be the case, and Acts 21 shows how easy it was for things to go horribly wrong. But that, too, is the point of 1 Corinthians 9 as a whole. Paul is asking the Corinthians to be prepared to abandon their ‘rights’ for the sake of the gospel. That is what he does on a regular basis. And ‘becoming a Jew’ means, for him, putting on hold his ‘right’ to live in a new way, not indeed *anomos theou* but definitely *ennomos Christou*. What neither Tomson nor Rudolph nor Nanos seem able to grasp is that for Paul something radically new had happened, something which was at the same time the radical fulfilment of Israel’s ancient hopes. Paul would only appear inconsistent to

one who was looking, not through the spectacles of eschatological messianism, but through the distorting lens of comparative religion; or perhaps, one who was looking from the point of view of this or that faction, when Paul's carefully considered pattern of behaviour corresponded to the tactics well known in the ancient world for those who, like Paul, were determined to avoid such factionalism.¹²² His consistency was that of announcing and following the crucified Messiah, knowing him to be 'a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles'.¹²³ That earlier statement in 1 Corinthians, in fact, foreshadows the controversial passage we have been discussing, and in doing so points on to the final question of this section. Did Paul then think of 'belonging to the Messiah' as constituting a different sort of reality or 'identity', distinct from 'Jews' and 'gentiles' alike?

(iii) A 'Third Race'?

Among the other buzz-words which the debate about Paul's Jewish 'identity' has generated, the notion of a 'third race' – the followers of Jesus as a new corporate entity, distinct from both 'Jews' and 'gentiles' – has been both canvassed and attacked in the last generation. This brings the discussion of 'identity' into sharp focus.

Some, like Ed Sanders, have seen it as obvious that Paul viewed 'the church' as a 'third entity'. Sanders denies that Paul would have been happy with the phrase 'third race' itself, but what he affirms comes close to the same thing:

In very important ways the church was, in Paul's view and even more in his practice, a third entity. It was not established by admitting Gentiles to Israel according to the flesh ... but by admitting all, whether Jew or Greek, into the body of Christ by faith in him. Admission was sealed by baptism, most emphatically not by circumcision and acceptance of the law ... The rules governing behaviour were partly Jewish [Sanders has especially sexual ethics in mind here], but not entirely, and thus in this way too Paul's Gentile churches were a third entity. Gentile converts definitely had to separate themselves from important aspects acceptable to observant Jews, whether Christian or non-Christian. Christian Jews would have to give up aspects of the law if they were to associate with Gentile Christians. Paul's view of the church, supported by his practice, against his own conscious intention [Sanders seems here to be referring to his earlier suggestion that Paul would have been horrified at the idea of a 'third race'], was substantially that it was a third entity, not just

because it was composed of both Jew and Greek, but also because it was in important ways neither Jewish nor Greek.¹²⁴

This is a fascinating and seminal passage. Three comments are necessary. First, it should be clear from the rest of the passage that when Sanders refers to 'Paul's Gentile churches' he does not mean 'gentile-only' churches, but 'churches composed of both Jews and non-Jews but on gentile territory'. Second, I find Sanders's argument here so strong that it is not clear to me why he then doubts that Paul would have thought of a 'third race' (especially when we define 'race' carefully: see below). Third, however, I do think Paul would have objected to the bald statement that the new entity was in important ways 'neither Jewish nor Greek'. It depends, of course, what you mean by 'Jewish', but our old friend Romans 2.29 would indicate that for Paul anyone who was 'in the Messiah' and indwelt by the spirit could be called *Ioudaios*. Such people were worshipping Israel's God, and at least some aspects of their behaviour (avoiding idolatry and *porneia*) were to be ordered accordingly. If there is such a thing as a 'third race', the genetic link it possesses with one of its contributory components is quite different from the link it has with the other one.

The suggestion of a 'third race' has provoked strong reactions. The editors of a recent collection of essays on 'Paul and Judaism', discovering that one of their contributors actually believes more or less what Sanders had argued thirty years ago, describe this in the shocked tones of an elegant lady discovering that her favourite nephew is going to marry a chorus girl. 'Bird', they say, 'actually thinks that the new group of Jesus believers could be conceived of as a third race.'¹²⁵ In the same vein, Rudolph declares that what he calls 'the consensus reading', according to which Paul belonged to 'the "third entity" church', reinforces the view that Pauline Christianity 'was an anti-Jewish movement', leading 'to the delegitimation of Jewish existence and to the erasure, or displacement, of Jews from the church'.¹²⁶ This kind of rhetorical overplaying of the hand does historical exegesis no good. Rudolph, Nanos and many others are reacting obviously and naturally to the bitter experience of Jewish people in Europe and elsewhere for many

generations, but one cannot decide first-century meanings that way, any more than one can force Paul to adjudicate a debate between Luther and Calvin. This so-called ‘post-supersessionist’ position, however, is itself well on the way to becoming a new ‘consensus’. The protests that have been raised against it (pointing out that when Paul faced potential anti-Judaism in Rome he did it by arguing that Jewish people *could and would* return, in faith, to ‘their own olive tree’, in other words, that the real ‘anti-Judaism’ would be to *deny* Jews a place in the messianic company of Abraham’s worldwide family) have fallen on deaf ears. This is not what people want to hear.¹²⁷ But, as with questions of Pauline doctrinal teaching, it will not do to highlight features of a much later, and totally different, world and use them as Procrustean beds to force Paul into shape. That merely reproduces the worst features of a former ecclesiastical control to which historical exegesis rightly objected. History matters.

The phrase ‘third race’ is not of course found in the New Testament. The nearest we get is 1 Peter 2.9 (‘you are a chosen race [*genos eklekton*], a royal priesthood; a holy nation; a people for God’s possession’). ‘Third race’ itself first appears in the second-century writers Clement of Alexandria and Aristides.¹²⁸ Actually, in the Syriac texts of Aristides, which some consider superior to the Greek one, the Christians are a *fourth* group, after ‘barbarians, Greeks and Jews’.¹²⁹ The point being made in these and similar texts has to do primarily with *worship*: the Christians worship in a different manner from Jews and Greeks alike.¹³⁰ The idea of the Christians as a different kind of entity then becomes a familiar theme as the second century progresses towards the third. By the time the Pseudo-Cyprianic *De Pascha* was written, some time in the 240s, it can simply state that ‘we Christians are the third race’. The tone and context suggest that by then the phrase was well known.¹³¹ Tertullian records it being used contemptuously by an angry crowd.¹³² We should note that the idea emerged when it was bound to be seen as ridiculous and counter-intuitive, as this tiny group of mostly uneducated people presumed to behave, and particularly to worship, in a unique way. At that level, the claim was clearly true: nobody else in the ancient world was doing it that way.

A strong case can be made, following Sanders and others, for seeing Paul himself as advocating, if not the phrase ‘third race’ itself, nevertheless something approaching it. Sechrest concludes ‘that Pauline theology constructs a change in religious belief and practice as a change in ethno-racial identity’.¹³³ The evidence for this is scattered across several sections of the present book. It is already present when Paul speaks in Galatians 3 of Abraham’s single family, his ‘heirs’, marked out by Messiah-faith. A good deal of what we argued in chapter 10, and in the last section of chapter 11, is heading in this direction. But the notion comes into full view, quite sharply, in two or three key passages. The first is the one with which we closed the previous sub-section:

Jews look for signs, you see, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we announce the crucified Messiah, a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, the Messiah – God’s power and God’s wisdom. God’s folly is wiser than humans, you see, and God’s weakness is stronger than humans.¹³⁴

This spectacular little passage compresses a great deal into epigrammatic form. Above all it emphasizes something often neglected in the relevant discussions: that the focus of Paul’s life and work is not a ‘system’, not a ‘religion’, not an attempt to forge a new social reality in and of itself, but a *person*: the crucified Messiah. All else is defined in relation to him. Any attempt to water down the ‘scandal’ that this posed for Jews, or the ‘folly’ that it presented to Greeks, is a large step away from Paul.

This opening statement in 1 Corinthians already means that those who belong to the Messiah are defined, are given an ‘identity’ if we must use the term, that is (a) rooted in Israel’s Messiah, and hence in that sense inalienably ‘Jewish’, but (b) *redefined* around the *crucified and risen* Messiah and hence in that sense inalienably ‘scandalous’ to Jews. Rooted and redefined: continuity and discontinuity. Those are the classic marks of Paul’s thought and life. And those are the ways in which he thought of the Messiah’s people. They remain Abraham’s family: ‘our fathers’, he says to the mostly gentile Corinthian Christians, came out of Egypt with Moses. The Corinthians used to be ‘Gentiles’ but are now no longer (12.2). But for

Jews, like Paul, the rule is: ‘I am crucified with the Messiah’. Scandalous. A third entity.

That is why we should not be surprised at the cognate language used, almost artlessly, at the end of the long discussion of chapters 8—10:

So, then, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything to God’s glory. Be blameless before Jews and Greeks and the church of God, just as I try to please everybody in everything, not pursuing my own advantage, but that of the great majority, so that they may be saved. Copy me, just as I’m copying the Messiah.¹³⁵

This is reflected precisely in the sharp conclusion to Galatians:

God forbid that I should boast – except in the cross of our lord Jesus the Messiah, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Circumcision, you see, is nothing; neither is uncircumcision! What matters is new creation. Peace and mercy on everyone who lines up by that standard – yes, on God’s Israel.¹³⁶

We discussed the last phrase at length in chapter 11. The point here is the combination of elements found in the two passages from 1 Corinthians: a tripartite division (circumcision, uncircumcision, new creation), rooted in the Messiah and his cross (rather than in any ‘inclusive’ sociological experimentation for its own sake). And Paul’s claim throughout Galatians is that this is what Israel’s scriptures always promised, even though nobody had seen it like this until the messianic events burst in upon the unready world, including the unready Jewish world.

There is then no reason to resist the ‘natural’ reading of 1 Corinthians 10: Jews, Greeks and the church of God, a threefold reality.¹³⁷ Paul has prepared for this tripartite understanding of humanity, as we saw, by identifying the Corinthian church with the exodus generation (10.1) and by insisting that they are the people who pray the *Shema* in its new form (8.6). At the same time he can speak of ‘ethnic Israel’ in 10.18, drawing an analogy from ‘their’ practice to what is true of the Messiah’s people, and thus necessarily differentiating between the two groups. I submit that it is only the extreme Post-holocaust reluctance to say anything like this that has prevented writers on Paul from drawing the obvious conclusion: he saw the people of the crucified Messiah as having a Messiah-shaped identity which

marked them off from Jew and Greek alike. Thiselton catches the balance of Paul's thought:

In 10:1–22 Paul has stressed the continuity of the Church with Israel; the phrase **the Church of God** in this context calls attention at the same time to a discontinuity, as if to imply that 'the people of God' are partly redefined, although not in exclusivist terms since their roots and basis of divine promise and covenant remain in continuity with Israel's history.¹³⁸

We should note – a point usually missed – that the very idea of a 'third race' *itself presupposes a deeply Jewish way of looking at the world*. Nobody else divided the world into 'Jew' and 'gentile', or 'Jew' and 'Greek' (for Paul, 'Greek' of course often did duty for 'gentile'). You only say 'third race' if you are starting with, and in a measure reinscribing as well as transcending, that basic duality. The idea of a messianically formed and shaped new entity cannot therefore be seen as a non- or anti-Jewish idea, however much inevitable tension there would be between those Jews who did not believe in Jesus and those who did. Qumran itself held an embryonic 'third entity' view of itself, marked out against the wicked world of paganism but also, necessarily, against the majority of Jews. I submit, therefore, that though Paul himself does not use the phrase 'third race', and though we have to be careful to anchor 'race' to its ancient rather than its modern use and connotations, something like that idea is not only Pauline but retains a quintessential, if characteristically paradoxical, Jewish character and flavour.¹³⁹

Of course, the Greeks themselves also regularly divided the world into 'Greeks' and 'barbarians'. Paul reflects that usage on more than one occasion.¹⁴⁰ We should not be surprised, then, that the Syriac version of Aristides sees the Christians as a *fourth* race, after barbarians, Greeks and Jews. To that extent, an originally if paradoxically Jewish idea was being extended into new contexts. But its Jewish DNA is still clearly visible.

Paul makes it clear, in fact, that though this strange new thing – is it a religion? is it a social grouping? is it a philosophy? is it a sect? – is significantly and explicably different from both 'Jews' and 'Greeks', its character remains fundamentally Jewish. Hence the *Ioudaios* in Romans

2.29 and the *peritomē* in Philippians 3.3. Hence the creational ethic, especially in relation to sexual behaviour. Hence, above all, the fulfilment of the promises in Torah itself. And hence, particularly, the ‘olive tree’ in Romans 11.

Here I part company with Sechrest, who in other respects I have found helpful. She suggests that for Paul the church is a ‘*completely new* ethno-social particularity’.¹⁴¹ Sechrest is here reacting against Caroline Johnson Hodge, who uses a different kind of tree, that of the Jewish ‘family tree’ into which gentiles are grafted as a subordinate bough.¹⁴² But the reaction goes, I think, a shade too far. Paul insists that even when (Jewish) branches are cut off from the olive tree it remains ‘their own olive tree’.¹⁴³ Once any branches, whether Jewish or gentile, are firmly in the tree, they are, for Paul, on an absolutely equal footing, and must learn to live as such. That is part of the point of Romans 14 and 15. But the way they get there, and the account that one must give of that process, retains an important differentiation, which finally gives the lie to all the slurs about ‘supersession’, ‘erasure’ and the rest. Abraham is the father of uncircumcised believers, says Paul, and also of the circumcised ‘who are not merely circumcised but who follow the steps of the faith which Abraham possessed while still uncircumcised’.¹⁴⁴ All this has come about, making Abraham the father of a single multi-national family, because of the God in whom he believed, ‘the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist’.¹⁴⁵ I have said it before, and emphasize it here: for Paul, when a Jew believes in ‘the one who raised from the dead Jesus our lord’ (Romans 4.24) this constitutes an act of ‘resurrection’, whereas when a gentile believes Paul sees that event as an act of ‘new creation’.¹⁴⁶ True, the ‘ethno-social particularity’ which results from this double miracle is new. No such community had existed before, but this one does now. But it is part of Paul’s constant argument, particularly in Romans 9—11, that the new particularity *is the very thing God promised to Abraham in the first place*. It may be ‘completely new’ in terms of actual space–time–matter reality. But Paul insists that it is not a novelty in the divine purposes. The olive tree has existed ever since Abraham; God

always intended to include gentiles within it. That was part of the original promise.¹⁴⁷ The real radical discontinuity, for Paul, was between the ‘former life’ of the gentiles and their new membership. For the Jew, like himself, what mattered was ‘I am crucified with the Messiah; I am, however, alive’. This may seem like splitting hairs, but for Paul it was vital. The discontinuity is essential. But so is the continuity. Without that, as Paul saw clearly, a high road would be open to gentile arrogance.

But Paul’s answer to that problem, as we saw in Romans 9—11, was not to say that ‘Jews are all right as they are’. It was to insist that, when a gentile believes the gospel, that person is incorporated into the same *essentially Jewish* olive tree; and that presently disbelieving Jews could be brought back into ‘their own olive tree’ – ‘if they do not remain in unbelief’.¹⁴⁸ For Paul, there was only one olive tree, because there was only one God; and the divine purposes, though wise beyond human imaginings, were fully revealed in Israel’s Messiah, the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. The ‘identity’ of the Messiah’s people was thus grounded, like everything else in Paul’s thought, in the faithfulness of Israel’s God.

[4. Paul and Israel’s Scriptures](#)

[\(i\) Introduction](#)

This brings us at last to a question which hovers over all discussions of Paul, and which in the last generation has surfaced in several new ways. (This was only to be expected, granted all the different ‘perspectives’ that have appeared: the way we understand Paul’s use of scripture is always directly linked to the way we understand the larger contours of his writing.) As with all the topics in this final Part of the present book, there is no space for the substantial discussion that might draw together all the threads from our previous discussion. But we must at least give a brief summary.¹⁴⁹

Hardly anyone will doubt that Paul knew Israel’s scriptures well, and that he used them freely and frequently in some (though not all) of his letters.

But there the ways divide. Did he know them by heart, or did he have to look up texts when he needed to quote something? Did he think of them in the Hebrew, or in the Septuagint, or both? If so, in which form(s) of the text(s)? Did he care about accuracy, or was he content to quote freely and give a general sense? Was he aware of the larger context of the passages he quoted, or was he just, in the modern sense, proof-texting?¹⁵⁰ How does his use of scripture compare with the complex uses we find in the very diverse Jewish literature of the second-Temple period and on into the rabbis? Large monographs have been devoted to detailed exploration of one or more of these questions. There is no sign of consensus, but rather of a healthy if confused multi-layered discussion.¹⁵¹

This is not the place for a history of research. But we may note that some of the older discussions were relentlessly left-brain in their analytic method, studying the precise formulae with which Paul introduced quotations, the exact text-forms he was using and the microscopic details of syntax and vocabulary.¹⁵² As the greatest first-century teacher himself said, however, ‘you should have done these, without neglecting the others’.¹⁵³ And the ‘others’ in this case have been making a come-back in the last thirty years, with a sweeping initial victory for a right-brain analysis, followed – as is usual in such debates, whether about philosophy, physics or pharmaceutical engineering – by an alarmed left-brain reaction, and a continuing, but not always mutually attentive, dialogue.¹⁵⁴

The right-brain come-back was the work of Richard B. Hays. In *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Hays took several key Pauline texts and argued that when Paul quoted scripture he intended to evoke, and hoped his listeners would pick up, the larger context of the often very short quotations.¹⁵⁵ Hays built on contemporary work in the field of intertextuality, exploring ways in which one may attain methodological control not just when studying actual quotations but when listening for ‘echoes’. Hays, who had already written a powerful and provocative monograph on the implicit narratives underlying some key Pauline texts, came to Paul’s use of scripture from a totally different angle from that of the

earlier atomistic studies.¹⁵⁶ He insisted not only on reading individual verses in the light of their own larger Pauline contexts, but on reading the passages Paul quotes in the light of theirs – and understanding both these larger wholes, Paul’s entire arguments and the entire arguments of biblical passages, within a sophisticated theological and narrational framework. Much earlier study of Paul’s use of scripture assumed a more or less standard (and often protestant) shape and content to Paul’s theology, only questioning how Paul had gone about backing this up, or trying to ‘prove’ it, with scriptural quotations – as though Paul was really, after all, writing an older version of the Westminster Confession, replete with biblical references as ‘scripture proofs’. Hays offered instead a big picture in which Paul was working with whole books and sections of books, scooping up the narrative theology of Israel’s scriptures, reshaping it around Jesus and the spirit and retelling it as the undergirding narrative for the nascent church. The difference between Hays and much that had gone before is the difference between Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* and the balance-sheet of a manufacturing company.

Maybe, replied the critics, but you still have to balance the books, and when you do so you may find that Smith got some things significantly wrong. Among those who have challenged Hays’s reading, Christopher Stanley has developed an alternative and effectively ‘minimalist’ account of Paul’s use of scripture.¹⁵⁷ According to Stanley, Paul’s audiences, being composed largely of gentiles, and not well-educated ones at that, would have been very unlikely to pick up what we may think we discern as biblical ‘echoes’. This means that we must assume Paul’s purpose in quoting scripture to be quite different from the sophisticated and often quite subtle intertextual meanings proposed by Hays. Instead, we should conclude that his quotations were mainly for rhetorical effect, demonstrating to his audience that he knew ancient texts which, so he claimed, supported his position. In a world where such an appeal might carry weight, that is all, for the most part, that we should suppose Paul to be doing. In fact, says Stanley at one point, Paul was relying on the fact that his audience did not know the texts; otherwise they would have spotted the

points at which he was playing fast and loose with them.¹⁵⁸ Stanley is not the only one to make that kind of suggestion.¹⁵⁹

This is not the place to engage with Stanley in any detail, or indeed with the many other writers whose diverse work fills the symposia he has edited or co-edited. The idea of Paul adding rhetorical verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing theological narrative might seem appealing for a short while. But closer study of what he is actually saying in the letters, where (as we have seen throughout this book) his whole case is that the one God of Israel has acted freshly and decisively in Jesus, gives it the lie. Scripture is *part of this story*, not merely the ‘authoritative’ witness to, or proof of, ideas or exhortations which are otherwise freestanding. In any case, if I may quote my recent article on the subject, ‘reducing Paul’s compositional options to the limits of hypothetical reader-incompetence is an example of that left-brain rationalism, allied to a hermeneutic of suspicion, from which biblical studies has suffered for too long’.¹⁶⁰ Most writers, like artists in other fields, put a good deal more into a composition than the first audience will pick up. In any case, Paul’s letters were hardly meant to be read once and once only; and the context for further readings would inevitably have included discussion between audience, reader and local leadership, and above all teaching, in which the teaching of the scriptures must have been prominent if not central. Paul certainly assumed that his letters would be read within the context of local church life, to which they would contribute and from which further readings of them would gain. Local scripture-teaching would help people begin to grasp what was going on; the letters themselves would direct the development of that local teaching, as new converts, eager to discover more both about Jesus and about their own new ‘identity’, realized they needed to spend time with Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the rest.¹⁶¹

This relates, too, to the smaller-scale but important point about individual words and the resonances they might produce. Ernst Käsemann, famously, questioned whether Paul could have intended a bilingual pun in Romans 2.29, where he describes someone as *Ioudaios* and declares that such a person gains ‘praise’ from God. ‘Praise’ is *epainos* in Greek, but Paul

would know that the name *Judah* was the Hebrew word for ‘praise’. This, says Käsemann, ‘would hardly have been intelligible to the Roman community’.¹⁶² But even if we suppose the Roman church(es) to be composed almost entirely of gentile converts with no synagogue background, one might still suppose that someone would point out, sooner or later, what Paul was doing. If even this is challenged (though it should not be), the point still stands: writers often put things in their works simply because they feel like it, whether or not anyone will get the point. The recent discovery of a hidden but powerful meaning within C. S. Lewis’s *Narnia* stories is a case in point.¹⁶³ Paul would have been quite capable of allowing a particular resonance to sit patiently, like an unopened letter, waiting to be discovered. Martin McNamara, a Targumic expert, has it right: ‘At times, particularly in moments of heightened tension, Paul seems to have written from the abundance of his own mind rather than from what his readers would be expected to know.’¹⁶⁴

My case, here as elsewhere, is simple in outline. First, as to method: we should assume, unless strong evidence to the contrary is provided, that Paul’s *use* of Israel’s scriptures was at least broadly consonant with what he believed about the *relation* of ancient Israel to the Messiah and his people. The older ‘proof-text’ view, and the more recent ‘rhetorical effect’ view, have regularly assumed that for Paul the scriptures were simply a repository of supposedly authoritative divine oracles from which one could draw support *for an exposition which was basically about something else*, or something at least significantly different. These views are part of a view of Paul’s gospel in which he sees Jesus as the solution to the generalized plight of humanity, with the story and the scriptures of Israel as simply a detached backdrop. The further one goes down that road (the road that leads to Marcion), the more one might come to see the scriptures as part of the problem rather than part of the solution, so that one might suppose that Paul only delved back into them when forced to do so by his opponents. What one says about Paul’s use of scripture thus regularly reflects a larger picture of Paul’s relation to ancient Israel as a whole. This is why,

methodologically, the present brief discussion comes where it does in the book: one can only get at this question in the light of an overall account.

Granted this principle, and the account I have given of Paul in Parts II and III of this book, I propose that Paul's understanding of Israel's scriptures should have as its basic framework the *covenant narrative of Israel* as we explored it in chapter 2 and again, in relation to Paul himself, in chapter 7. Paul does a thousand different things with scripture, but the broad base from which one ought to start is his belief, expounded throughout the present book, that in Jesus and in the fresh work of the divine spirit Israel's God had brought to its climax the extraordinary, and often dark and disastrous, story of Abraham and his family. God had made solemn covenantal promises to Abraham; Paul believed they were now fulfilled. God had promised Abraham a single worldwide family, inheriting not just the land but the whole world; that was now being accomplished in the reign of Israel's Messiah and the spirit-driven mission of his followers. What was more, God had brought his people out of Egypt, rescuing them from slavery, and the prophets had promised over and over that he would do it again, rescuing his people from the continuing 'exile' from which Daniel 9 and many other texts had prayed to be released. Paul believed God had now accomplished those promises. The entire 'Book of the Twelve', the powerful shorter prophetic texts upon which Paul drew for some of his key themes, was, like the great narrative from Genesis to 2 Kings, a story in search of an ending:

In spite of the historical realities of exile and return, the post-exilic writings in the collection are testimonies precisely to the deferral of a fulfilment which so often seems near at hand but never actually arrives. [165](#)

In particular, I believe that we can see, far above the normal wrangling about 'Paul and the Torah' (did Paul think the law was a good thing or a bad thing – as if one could expect a sensible answer from such a question!), a reading of Torah itself, the 'Five Books' and particularly the first and last of them, which maps on to other second-Temple 'readings' such as that, implicitly at least, of Josephus. The more we leave behind the dreamland of

an atomized reading of Torah, dividing it into sources and strata, and wake up instead to a holistic account in which we might discern a larger narrative line from the start of Genesis to the close of Deuteronomy, the more we find Paul there ahead of us, up and about and retelling the story so that the close of Deuteronomy – the great covenant renewal of chapter 30, followed by the dark warning of chapter 32 – does indeed show us the place to which the story of Abraham had been pointing all along. That is what is going on in Romans 9.6—10.21. Not to glimpse that Torah-shaped narrative line is to miss the full force of Paul’s statement that the Messiah is the *telos nomou*, the goal, aim, ultimate fulfilment, of Torah.¹⁶⁶

Similarly, if we fail to spot the way in which Paul is working with key texts from the Psalms and prophets, filling in the single narrative line with multiple hints of messianic fulfilment, we are actually deJudaizing as well as dehistoricizing his view of his own work and the vocation of his churches. When he declares that ‘we are heirs of God, and fellow heirs (*klēronomoi*) with the Messiah’ (Romans 8.17), we should cast our minds back to Psalm 2, evoked already in Paul’s affirmation of Jesus as the Davidic ‘son of God’ in 1.4, and reflect on the promise made to this ‘son’, the promise which gave specific focus to the initial promise to Abraham: ‘Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage (*klēronomia*), and the ends of the earth your possession.’ The line which begins with Abraham thus reaches forward to the Messiah, and thence out to embrace the world:

The Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy. As the Bible says:

That is why I will praise you among the nations,
and will sing to your name.

And again it says,

Rejoice, you nations, with his people.

And again,

Praise the Lord, all nations,
and let all the peoples sing his praise.

And Isaiah says once more:

There shall be the root of Jesse,
the one who rises up to rule the nations;
the nations shall hope in him.¹⁶⁷

Torah, prophets and writings combine to tell *the single story* which, despite all its disasters and disappointments, has reached its fulfilment.

If the story stretches forwards from Abraham to David, to the promised return from exile and the ‘new exodus’, and ultimately not only to the Messiah himself but to the extension of his rule across the world, then it also stretches back behind Abraham to Adam himself. Romans 5.12–21 is of course the classic passage, but we should not miss the point. Adam is not merely an example, or (as it were) a detached primal sinner. Genesis itself links Adam to Abraham through the words of command to the former and vocation to the latter.¹⁶⁸ The Psalms, by implication at least, link Adam to the Messiah, through Psalm 8 in which the image-bearing vocation of Genesis 1 is repeated in relation to the ‘son of man’, a phrase whose residual indeterminacy cannot mask its use, in the first century at least, in relation to the long-awaited king.¹⁶⁹ So when Paul strings together Adam and the Messiah in 1 Corinthians 15.20–8, drawing in Psalm 110.1 as well by means of its own echo of Psalm 8.6 (‘he has put all his enemies under his feet’ being picked up by ‘he has put all things in order under his feet’), these are not just ‘proof-texts’. Nor can one say that, because of the unsophistication of the Corinthian audience (a point which could itself be challenged), Paul cannot actually intend to shower them with Genesis and the Psalms, and perhaps Daniel as well, in quite this way.¹⁷⁰ Paul is expounding his central *messianic eschatology*, the point of which is precisely that the scriptural narrative is fulfilled in the new creation which *has* happened in Jesus’ resurrection and *will* happen through his messianic reign.

The main problem with ‘Paul and scripture’ comes, of course, as one subset of the question of ‘Paul and the law’. That, too, as I argued towards the end of chapter 10, can only be understood within the narrative framework of Paul’s reading of Israel’s story and the strange way that story was brought to its conclusion in the Messiah.¹⁷¹ But it still, of course, leaves all kinds of loose ends awaiting further attention. These need to be addressed properly in a commentary, or a string of articles, but as a starting-point for such a larger exercise I offer here a brief encounter with what, on

anyone's assessment, must count as one of the most creative and innovative books ever written about Paul and scripture: Francis Watson's *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*.¹⁷²

(ii) Hermeneutics, Faith and the Faithfulness of God

Watson's book, which deserves full and careful study, is a brilliant attempt to do three things. First, he is determined to understand Paul as a subtle and intelligent reader of scripture. The apostle is not a purveyor of proof-texts or random references. He sees scripture, particularly the Five Books of Moses, as an entirety with which one must wrestle. Watson recognizes that one cannot simply dismiss Paul's exegesis by saying that he reads like a rabbi, not like a modern historically conscious exegete. Nor can one say that Paul only dives into scripture when forced to by his opponents.¹⁷³ Paul believes that it is a central part of Christian faith to be not only a reader of scripture but one who is *changed* by that reading.¹⁷⁴

Second, Watson provides a rich historical context for Paul by comparing his reading of key texts with other readings of the same texts from the same second-Temple period: Wisdom, *Jubilees*, Philo, Josephus, Baruch, *4 Ezra* and not least Qumran. He thus brings Paul into critical dialogue with several other readings and styles of reading – not that Paul knew any of those texts, except perhaps the Wisdom of Solomon, but that they were so to speak theological cousins, tracing their lineage to the same stock though now expressing it differently.

Third, Watson has a particular case to argue about the way Paul read Torah in particular. Paul, he argues, discerned a 'duality' within Torah itself, hearing two 'voices' and trying to do them both justice.¹⁷⁵ He eschews older expressions of a similar polarity, as though Paul were opposing two abstract 'systems' such as 'promise' on the one hand and 'law' on the other. The two 'voices' Paul hears are in the text of Torah itself, and Paul does his best, according to Watson, to honour both of them in their proper way:

In reading the Torah, Paul chooses to highlight two major tensions that he finds within it: the tension between the unconditional promise and the Sinai legislation, and the tension between the

law's offer of life and its curse. These are tensions between *books*: Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.¹⁷⁶

... there does appear to be a distinction between a reading of the Torah that lays all possible emphasis on the promise to Abraham of unconditional divine saving action, worldwide in its scope, and a reading centred upon the demand emanating from Sinai for specific forms of human action and abstention.¹⁷⁷

Paul's antithetical hermeneutic claims to have uncovered a deep tension within the law itself, between an 'optimistic' voice that assumes that its commandments can and should be obeyed, and a 'pessimistic' voice that holds that this project of bringing righteousness into human life is doomed to failure.¹⁷⁸

Texts that Paul has cited – 'there is no one righteous, not even one', 'the one who is righteous by faith shall live' – encapsulate the double-edged testimony of scripture as a whole.¹⁷⁹

Watson's underlying purpose in all this is clear. Over against any suggestion that Paul first came to believe in something called 'righteousness by faith' and then went looking for scriptural texts to prove it, he is claiming 'that Paul's doctrine ... is an exercise in scriptural interpretation and hermeneutics':

Paul seeks to persuade his readers that this language and conceptuality is generated by scripture, which thereby bears witness to its own fundamental duality. In its prophetic voice, scripture speaks of the (positive) outcome of God's future saving action; in the voice of the law, it speaks of the (negative) outcome of the human action that the law itself had previously promoted. This dual scriptural testimony is fundamental to the Pauline hermeneutics of faith.¹⁸⁰

There is thus 'a deep faultline within scripture itself', an 'inner-scriptural antithesis'. Scripture contains 'darkness and light', though these are not to be located at the point where Paul's hypothetical interlocutors would have seen them, in other words at the border between Israel and the gentiles, but rather 'at the border between God and humankind'.¹⁸¹ Paul 'heard two voices ... contending with one another like Esau and Jacob in their mother's womb'.¹⁸²

In all this, Watson is advancing a variety of claims. He proposes that the 'works/faith' antithesis is, in its original context, a shorthand for a disagreement between Paul and other Jews (including some Messiah-believers) as to what their shared scriptures were 'really' about. He maps

this disagreement on to the larger disagreements, among pre-Christian second-Temple Jews in general, as to how one should (scripturally) understand the relationship of divine and human agency.

The question that occurs to a contemporary reader at this point is whether, and to what extent, Watson is saying something so very different from the older protestant exegesis of which he himself has been critical in the past but to (some aspects of) which he seems to have returned. He is rightly critical of elements within, and some exponents of, the so-called and pluriform ‘new perspective’, but this certainly does not mean that he is merely offering an exegetically and historically sophisticated version of the old one.¹⁸³ He can sometimes appear to speak cavalierly of the post-Sanders mood in which, he says, ‘a veto has been imposed on the supposition that the commandments could have been understood as the way to life in Second Temple Judaism’.¹⁸⁴ (It all depends whether one is talking of present justification or final justification ... as we saw in chapters 2 and 10 above.)¹⁸⁵ The question is focused for me by the memory of C. H. Dodd’s comment on Romans 10.5 and 6. Dodd, patronizing as ever, congratulates Paul on having anticipated the nineteenth-century higher criticism in separating out the ‘prophetic spirit’ of Deuteronomy from the ‘hard and mechanical’ ceremonial righteousness of Leviticus.¹⁸⁶ Dodd’s breathtaking arrogance is a million miles from Watson’s careful and historically sensitive reading. But some might wonder whether Watson has done enough to explain how, in the last analysis, his reading of what Paul actually meant is significantly different.

Before Watson gets to the Torah proper, he offers a detailed and complex analysis of Paul’s use of Habakkuk 2.4, a text I might have discussed much earlier in the present book but have saved for this moment. Habakkuk, argues Watson, and this text in particular, were far from being a random selection on Paul’s part. Indeed, he makes a strong case that this book, and this text, were already being regarded in Paul’s Jewish world as in some sense a summary of the entire message of the ‘Book of the Twelve’ prophets.¹⁸⁷ Watson argues in particular that Paul’s quotation of this text at the end of Romans 1.17 must be seen as controlling the meaning of the

whole verse, over against commentators who, he says, are misled by the method of sequential exposition and fail to realize that what Paul means by ‘the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith’ in the first half of the verse must be determined by ‘the righteous by faith shall live’ in the second half.¹⁸⁸ The Habakkuk quotation thus functions as a test: unless we expound ‘the righteousness of God’ in such a way that the prophetic quotation will support it, we are misreading Paul.

Put like that, it is hard to disagree. But when we get to specifics, I think disagreement is inevitable. Before we get there, however, I want to raise some questions about Watson’s overall argument, not least in relation to his major thesis about Paul finding ‘two voices’ within Torah itself.

Watson has I think raised exactly the right question in exactly the right way. Until it is proved to the contrary, we should assume that Paul’s reading of Israel’s scriptures belongs on the map of second-Temple readings as a whole, albeit with significant variations because of the specifics of his own theological standpoint. And until it is proved to the contrary we should indeed regard Paul as a sophisticated and nuanced reader of Torah, prophets and Psalms, able to work with the larger wholes of entire books and groupings of books, not simply with isolated texts. Watson’s thinking through of these two issues ought to shift future discussions, both of ‘Paul and scripture’ and of ‘Paul and Torah’, on to entirely new levels. Reviewers are too ready with the phrase ‘ground-breaking’, but Watson’s book richly deserves it.

It will come as no surprise, though, that I find Watson’s account focused far too much on scripture as ‘normative’ and far too little on scripture as ‘narrative’. When Watson speaks of scripture as ‘normative’ for Paul he regularly seems to move to abstractions: it is ‘normative saving truth’, speaking of a ‘proper relationship to God’ or an ‘ordained way to salvation’.¹⁸⁹ There are times when the summaries of Paul’s message sound almost Bultmannian, which it seems is less of a problem for Watson than it would be for me: ‘In the light of God’s life-giving action in Christ’, he writes, ‘the law discloses the limits and limitations of a human action that intends the life that the law itself conditionally offers.’¹⁹⁰ What I miss here

is the sense of all scripture, including Torah, as Israel's historical and prophetic *narrative*, the story which Saul of Tarsus and his contemporaries believed ought to have been continuing but which seemed to have ground to a frightening, and theologically challenging, halt.

My puzzle here is that at several points Watson does recognize this (despite his denial of an essentially narrative element in Paul, as we saw in chapter 7).¹⁹¹ He sees that the Book of the Twelve implied an ongoing narrative which was not getting anywhere.¹⁹² He sees, in line with Richard Hays, that Paul has a sense of the scriptural narrative as a whole, not simply of disconnected fragments upon which one might draw – though he then says that ‘the construal of scripture that will emerge [from his treatment] is less smoothly linear, more fractured, than Hays’ reference to unflinching divine faithfulness might suggest’¹⁹³ – an echo, there, of the normal so-called ‘apocalyptic’ critique of anything approaching ‘salvation history’, though I do not recognize in Hays’s work, any more than in my own, anything that might be called smooth or linear. He speaks of ‘the unfolding narrative of the Pentateuch’, later glossed in terms of the unfolding of ‘the story of God’s covenant with Israel’, as standing over against any idea of a ‘canon within the canon’ or ‘a proto-Marcionite rejection of the law’.¹⁹⁴ He notices, in particular, the so-called Deuteronomistic view of history, according to which the covenant set out in Deuteronomy 27—30 is inscribed in Israel’s history right through to Paul’s own day (though he never, perhaps surprisingly, tackles what might be thought to be the clearest example, that of 4QMMT).¹⁹⁵ But none of these points about an underlying narrative is allowed to influence the overall reading. Perhaps it is going too far to say that I find in Watson, as Watson finds in Paul’s reading of Torah, two voices in unresolved tension with one another: the dominant one, which is of two principles which stand side by side in unresolved opposition, and the recognized but undeveloped one, which is of a narrative in which, as I shall presently suggest, that opposition is not only resolved but strangely fulfilled. Just as I suspect that Watson has missed a trick by not seeing how Paul integrates these themes (so that, for instance, the unfinished narrative of the Twelve Prophets is in fact held within the still-unfinished prophetic

narrative of Torah itself), it is possible that I have missed one in my reading of Watson himself. But I simply do not see how the covenantal narrative, which he acknowledges, fits in with the sharp and abiding antithesis which is his central theme.¹⁹⁶ In particular, Watson never deals head on with Paul's reading of texts which seem, to me at least, to speak clearly not of a 'second chance', but of *covenant renewal*. Without explicit narrative, eschatology itself collapses into different abstract schemes.¹⁹⁷

The other thing, cognate with this, which I miss at a general level in Watson's account is a sense of the fuller socio-political second-Temple context. Watson knows very well that second-Temple Jews were not simply sitting around discussing abstract systems of 'salvation'. He sees that 'there is no incompatibility between "national" and "transcendent" eschatologies'.¹⁹⁸ But we never get the sense that the texts he is studying, including the letters of Paul, emerge from a politically turbulent and dangerous world in which the overriding questions were not, in the modern sense, 'how will we be saved', but rather, 'What is going on?' 'What is Israel's God up to?' 'How is he going to rescue us from our present plight?' 'What are we waiting for and how can we help it come about?' and 'What should we be doing in the mean time?'¹⁹⁹ Watson is right to criticize others for ignoring 'the theological ferment of Second Temple Judaism', with all its different 'competing claims to articulate authentic Jewish scriptural tradition'.²⁰⁰ But one might be forgiven for drawing the conclusion that this theological ferment was really 'about' different systems of 'salvation' in a modern western sense (complete with abstract discussions of 'divine and human agency'), rather than the very this-worldly 'rescue' for which, demonstrably, many of Paul's contemporaries were looking. The multiple readings of scripture in Paul's day were not merely part of a theological ferment but also part of what we might, with equally dangerous anachronism, call religious, philosophical and especially political ferment. And all this pushes us back to the question, raised sharply by *4 Ezra* and many others: what about the divine *righteousness*? How is Israel's God going to be faithful to his promises?

I have argued at length, earlier in this book, that Paul was well aware of the complex but coherent controlling narratives of second-Temple Judaism (as explored in chapter 2), and that he made fresh and creative use of them (as set out in chapter 7). My point now is that this is reflected exactly, and again coherently, in his use of scripture. He reads the early chapters of Genesis, as did some others, in terms of something going wrong early on which the call of Abraham would (somehow) put right. That is why, having expounded the covenant with Abraham in Romans 4, he can stand back and sum up the picture in terms of Adam and the Messiah in Romans 5. And as for Abraham himself, any ‘exemplary’ role he may have for Paul – one can see at least something of that in Romans 4.18–25 – is subsumed under the far more important theme, that of the establishment in Genesis 15 of the covenant to which God has now been faithful. Here Watson is absolutely right, I believe, to oppose atomistic readings of Paul’s quotations. Paul is not just grabbing texts at random.²⁰¹ But he never sees the underlying covenantal theme which provides Paul’s real framework. When he says that, for Paul, ‘the crucial question is whether his thesis about righteousness by faith can produce a plausible and persuasive reading of scripture’,²⁰² I sense this to be the wrong way round. Paul is digging deeper and deeper underneath the headlines of his argument and demonstrating that what he has said about justification is itself the product of the covenant God made with Abraham. Thus, though Watson is right to show that Paul avoids the regular ploy of treating Abraham as a ‘pious example’, the patriarch still remains an ‘example’, only this time of ‘faith’.²⁰³ Again, Watson also recognizes that Paul sees Abraham as the one to whom the worldwide promise was made. ‘Both God and Abraham are understood in terms of the universal future that is entailed in their relationship.’²⁰⁴ But, as before, I do not see this insight woven into the main fabric of Watson’s argument.

When it comes to Leviticus and Numbers, Watson makes a fascinating case for seeing the famous Leviticus 18.5 (‘the one who does these things shall live in them’) as a summary of this entire strand of Torah.²⁰⁵ He also proposes, interestingly, that Numbers, though not quoted directly, stands behind Romans 7, with its account of the judgment of death brought by

Torah on the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness.²⁰⁶ Yet I cannot resist pointing out that if we were looking for passages which come close to Watson's proposal that Paul finds 'two voices' in the Torah, Romans 7 is *the* obvious candidate. Here is the *nomos tou theou*, the 'law of God', in which 'I' delight; and here is another *nomos*, at war with the first one, leading me captive to the *nomos* of sin and death. Might this not be the quintessential statement of Watson's point? The 'other law' of Romans 7.23, whatever it is, is doing what Paul says Torah itself was doing, or rather what 'sin' was doing *through* Torah, in 7.7–12 and especially 7.13. Might this not be the point where Paul agrees, however ironically, with Watson's 'two voices' theory?²⁰⁷

But the point is then, of course, that this tension is *resolved* – in the renewal of the covenant. One cannot criticize a book as rich and dense as Watson's for the passages it misses out; but I was surprised none the less by the absence of Romans 8.1–11. There, explicitly resolving the problem of Romans 7, Paul speaks of the *dikaiōma* of the law being fulfilled, and contrasts 'the mind of the flesh', which does not and cannot submit to God's law, with 'the mind of the spirit', which presumably can and does. This is exactly cognate with our old friend Romans 2.25–9, where Paul speaks of a 'fulfilment of the law' on the part of uncircumcised gentiles.²⁰⁸

All this comes to a head in the treatment of Deuteronomy. Watson, as I said before, sees from time to time that the book offers, and was seen by some second-Temple thinkers to offer, a large-scale narrative which was used to interpret Israel's ongoing life right up to Paul's day and beyond. The sequence of exile and restoration, with a *continuing* exile as in Daniel 9, is firmly inscribed in various second-Temple readings of the 'covenantal' chapters of Deuteronomy 27–30. Here as elsewhere the implicit *narrative* is the vital thing: Moses warns that, after an initial period of blessing, Israel will commit sin and be punished with exile (27–9). The promise that after that there will come a dramatic renewal and restoration is not, as Watson says, a 'second chance'.²⁰⁹ Paul, drawing on this passage and referring to the speaker not as Moses but as 'the righteousness of faith', is not correcting 'Moses' over-optimistic claim' about such a 'second chance',²¹⁰

an idea not found in the text but only in Watson's reading (from which the themes of covenant, exile, restoration and renewal have at this point been all but eliminated). He is speaking of a new moment, picked up later by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in which God will at last circumcise the hearts of his people so that they will love him from the heart. The transformation at that point will not only be in the people, however, but in the effect of their hearts being renewed: they will now be able, in some sense or other, to keep Torah.

This is not 'optimistic'. Indeed, as I said earlier, it seems to me that such categories are fundamentally misleading (as though Leviticus 18.5 were after all representing a kind of proto-Pelagianism). Deuteronomy 30 has no sense of 'perhaps things will turn out all right after all'. It is all about a fresh divine action, resulting in a radical change in human character, which in turn results in a new sort of Torah-fulfilment. And that, as I have argued in chapter 11 above, is exactly what Paul is talking about in Romans 10.

Here, I believe, is the deepest clue to Paul's reading of Torah. As in Watson's summary of Baruch, 'the entire history of Israel is already contained *in nuce* within the Torah itself'.²¹¹ When we add Deuteronomy 32 into the picture, as Paul does in Romans 10.19, the same point must be made. Just as Josephus spoke of Deuteronomy 32 as a prophecy of events, some of which had come to pass and some of which were coming to pass in his own day, so Paul saw this climactic chapter not simply as a poem from the distant past but as a prediction of the reality he was himself facing in the unbelief of his fellow Jews.²¹² It will not do to say simply that Deuteronomy's central section (chapters 5—26) contains laws to guide Israel's life within the land, while according to chapters 27—34 'Israel's future under the law is a future under the law's curse'.²¹³ As the parallels in 4QMMT and Baruch make clear, resonating with the many other sources which indicate belief in a continuing exile according to a Deuteronomic scheme, the ultimate curse of the law is exile itself, and exile is to be undone in the great renewal of Deuteronomy 30.

Thus Romans 9.6—10.21, which presents a strong claim to be considered as the central point of Paul's reading of Israel's scriptures, demands to be

understood as a messianically reshaped reading of Torah itself, into which the prophets and Psalms have also been woven. The narrative runs from Genesis to Deuteronomy, from Abraham (9.7) to the Song of Moses (10.19), taking in the events of the exodus on the one hand and the central command of Leviticus on the other. Its central claim is *telos nomou Christos*, the Messiah is the goal of the law.²¹⁴ The Messiah is the point to which the long-drawn-out narrative of Torah (including the covenantal exile) had been heading all along; through him, Deuteronomy 30 has been fulfilled at last. And with that a new kind of Torah-fulfilment, hinted at throughout Romans, has been opened up. I have expounded all this elsewhere.²¹⁵ As with many other points in this short review of Watson's remarkable book, I am in full agreement with him that for Paul Deuteronomy makes it clear that Israel will indeed go into exile.²¹⁶ But Watson never sees, or at least never develops, the equally important point, that for Paul *the renewal spoken of in Deuteronomy 30 has already happened through the Messiah*. This is precisely what gives Romans 9—11 the combined sense of celebration and tragedy: Deuteronomy 30 has happened, but Deuteronomy 32 is still true of unbelieving Israel. One way or another, the point remains: this is a reading of the whole of Torah. Watson's invitation, to join him in an exploration of Paul's reading of entire books and sequences of books, and to do so in implicit dialogue with other second-Temple Jewish readers of the same texts, is right on target. This ought indeed to be the agenda. But I believe it will result in a very different reading of Paul's use of scripture from that which he offers.

What then happens to the demand of Leviticus? Is it swallowed entirely in the fulfilment of Deuteronomy 30, so that Romans 10.6–8 catches up Leviticus 18.5 and says 'and this is how it's done'? In a sense, yes. But in another sense, no. Precisely because Deuteronomy 32 is still true of Paul's unbelieving contemporaries, we must link it with the earlier statements of the failure of Israel in Romans 9.30—10.4. In that tricky passage 9.31 Paul declares, not that Israel did not attain 'righteousness' because she pursued it by 'law', but that Israel did not attain 'the law' because she pursued it 'by works'.²¹⁷ And this is where our earlier exposition of the strange purpose of

Torah comes to our help. As in Romans 5.20 and 7.13, and perhaps especially Galatians 3.22, *the divinely planned negative role of Torah was itself one moment in the larger narrative*. Here is my alternative proposal to Watson's 'two voices in the text': what Paul discerns are *two moments in Israel's covenantal narrative*, two moments which have now strangely, but as Paul believes providentially, overlapped. The Messiah has inaugurated Deuteronomy 30, the covenant renewal, and with it a kind of 'attaining to Torah' of which Saul of Tarsus had never dreamed.²¹⁸ But unbelieving Israel was still attempting to 'attain Torah' by the route of 'works', by – in other words – an inevitable reading of Leviticus 18.5. This is part of what Paul means when he says that they have 'stumbled over the stumbling stone', placed there by God himself. The 'two voices' are not two alternative ways of operating, two competing systems of salvation. They are – insofar as Paul would be happy with this language at all – the voice that says 'Israel is my servant, in whom I will be glorified', and the voice that says 'Israel too is in Adam'. Paul believed that the two strands met in the Messiah's cross – which, strangely, seems not to feature much in Watson's analysis. This is why, as Watson sees so clearly, one cannot give an account of 'Paul's use of scripture' as though it were an incidental side-feature, a decorative motif on the outside of his thought and expression. How Paul reads scripture is both a symptom of and a signpost towards the deepest realities of his understanding of the gospel, indeed of God himself.

In particular, Paul's reading of Torah, so far from being either arbitrary or atomistic, reflects a widespread second-Temple sense that after the long 'exile' Deuteronomy 30 would at last come true, even if (as in 4QMMT) most Israelites remained oblivious to it. The sharp antithesis which Watson sees in Paul's reading is there, but it is held within the partly resolved and partly unresolved covenant narrative. It is not the case that Paul wants his contemporaries to 'keep reading', on past Deuteronomy 30, seen as a 'second chance' which remains unattainable, to the new moment of Deuteronomy 32.²¹⁹ The point is not, as Watson suggests, to move 'beyond the conditional logic of the blessing and the curse to a final insight into the unconditional basis of divine saving action'.²²⁰ That is to swap Paul's

specific messianic claim for a general and abstract theological principle, and here of all places that is inappropriate. Paul's claim is that, in the Messiah, the goal of Torah, the point towards which the entire narrative from Genesis had been straining, has after all been reached, and that with the Messiah the great covenant renewal predicted in Deuteronomy 30 has come about (and, yes, this is in fact a matter of unconditional divine saving action; you get the general principle within the specific historical action). It is not simply that 'God has chosen to act differently', as though God might arbitrarily decide to change course in midstream. The whole of Romans 9—11 argues against that idea. What God has done in the Messiah, however shocking or surprising, and whatever puzzles and problems arise as a result, is what (Paul now believes) God had always intended to do. This, indeed, is part of what Paul understands by the righteousness, or the covenant faithfulness, of God.

All of which brings us back to Romans 1.16–17, and to the quotation from Habakkuk 2.4. This is clearly a key text for Paul. He quotes it not only at this strategic junction but also at the heart of one of the densest bits of Galatians (3.11). It may function as a further index of his way of reading scripture:

I'm not ashamed of the good news; it's God's power, bringing salvation to everyone who believes – to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek. This is because God's covenant justice is unveiled in it, from faithfulness to faithfulness. As it says in the Bible, 'the just shall live by faith.'

A tendentious translation, of course, as all attempts are. These two verses offer a headline for what is to come; and, as journalists know, headlines are often compressed beyond comprehensibility, and need to be understood in the light of the smaller print below. Thus I have translated *dikaiosynē theou* as 'God's covenant justice', but many, including Francis Watson, read it, as Luther did, as denoting the righteous status which counts before God, the 'righteousness' which consists of faith. Likewise, I have translated *ek pisteōs eis pistin* as 'from faithfulness to faithfulness', but many, including Watson, regard this as a double reference to the 'faith' of the believer, not (as I suppose) to the faithfulness of God on the one hand and of the believer

on the other. And I have translated the quotation of Habakkuk 2.4, *ho de dikaios ek pisteōs zēsetai*, as ‘the just shall live by faith’, whereas a long tradition, discussed in considerable detail by Watson, takes ‘by faith’ to modify ‘the just’, rendering the phrase as ‘the one who is righteous by faith shall have life’, or some such. About these things, as someone has said, we do not now need to speak in detail.²²¹

The point we do need to pick up here, however, is Watson’s bold claim that the meaning of *dikaiosynē theou apokalyptetai ek pisteōs eis pistin* is to be calibrated according to the meaning of the Habakkuk quotation which follows it immediately. As he rightly says, we should prefer a reading of the whole verse which can make sense of the interdependence of its parts.²²² But can we be so sure that any of the ‘parts’ are as secure as Watson supposes – even granted that his discussion of the Habakkuk passage, as used in Paul and Qumran in particular, runs to well over a hundred pages?²²³

I think not. For a start, I pick up clues in Watson’s own reading of the original context of Habakkuk. As he rightly says,

While Habakkuk is also concerned with a specific enemy, the book focuses not on the Chaldeans *per se* but on the theological problem that they exemplify: the problem of the continuing non-occurrence of divine saving action. That alone is the issue which the prophet hopes to resolve as he awaits the divine word upon his watchtower.²²⁴

Quite so. But what Watson does not appear to see is that this issue of the apparent non-occurrence of divine saving action is precisely what is often referred to in terms of the question of God’s *faithfulness* and/or *righteousness*. The two English terms ‘faithfulness’ and ‘righteousness’ overlap at this point, neither catching all the nuances of the various possible Hebrew and Greek terms they try to represent, but this hardly matters: the whole point is, *what is God up to at this time of crisis?* How and when will he act, as we know he must, in faithfulness to his covenanted promises to his people? And – a further wrinkle, but an important one – at this time of waiting, who are to be accounted the true people of God? If the whole world is being shaken to bits, how can we tell who God’s people really are?

²²⁵ This is the question of ‘God’s righteousness’, whether in Isaiah 40—55, Daniel 9, *4 Ezra* or elsewhere.

Watson, however, frames the discussion of *dikaiosynē theou* in terms, more or less, of the older debate between Bultmann, who saw ‘the righteousness of God’ as the ‘righteousness’ of the believer, and Käsemann, who saw it as ‘God’s salvation-creating power’.²²⁶ He rightly notes the strong points of Käsemann’s theory, particularly the parallels between ‘the righteousness of God’ in Romans 1.17 and ‘the power of God’ in verse 16 and ‘the wrath of God’ in verse 18, and points out that Käsemann was then at a loss as to how to read *ek pisteōs eis pistin*. If ‘God’s righteousness’ really did mean ‘God’s saving power’, Watson comments, it would have been better for Paul to clinch the sentence by quoting a passage like Psalm 98.2, where the revelation of God’s own ‘righteousness’ before the nations is placed in direct parallel to the making known of his salvation.²²⁷ Watson, however, insists that ‘the righteousness of God’ must be attached tightly to ‘by faith’, *ek pisteōs*, since otherwise the Habakkuk quotation is making the wrong point. But Käsemann’s reading of *dikaiosynē theou* is not in fact the only, or even the most (biblically) natural, alternative to that of Luther, Bultmann or indeed Watson himself. The meaning Käsemann was anxious to screen out – anything to do with God’s covenant with Israel, and his faithfulness to that covenant – is precisely the centre of concern for Habakkuk, for *4 Ezra*, and as I have argued at length above, for Paul himself. Faced with catastrophic events in which it appeared that God’s faithfulness was called radically into question, how was God in fact going to be faithful – and who were to be regarded as his faithful people at such a time? It is this *double* question to which the prophet is given an answer in 2.4, and it is this *double* answer which Paul is evoking in Romans 1.17 – as also in 3.21—4.25, and climactically in 9.6—10.21.

In fact, the complex textual evidence suggests that God’s own ‘righteousness’ or ‘faithfulness’ may have been the more natural subject of Habakkuk 2.4 in the first place. The Septuagint, translating Habakkuk 2.4, renders the Hebrew *be’emunathō* (‘in/by his faith/faithfulness’) as *ek pisteōs mou* (‘on the basis of my faithfulness’). This either shows that the

original Hebrew text itself read *be'emunathi* ('by/in my faith/faithfulness'), an easy orthographic slippage, or that the Greek translator found that to be in any case the more natural meaning.²²⁸ Certainly there is no reason, faced with the last clause of Romans 1.17, (a) to insist that one can take it only as a reference to human faith, and then (b) to insist in consequence upon a hitherto unheard-of meaning for the well-known biblical phrase *dikaiosynē theou*. To reverse the kind of argument Watson uses here: if when Paul wrote 'the righteousness of God' he was referring to a human quality which counted as 'righteousness' in God's sight, he would have done better not to back it up with a verse which, in the Greek Bible at least, was seen as referring to God's own 'faithfulness'.

In any case, the wider context in Habakkuk is not only about the theological and practical confusion of ignorant armies clashing by night. It contains a particular question to which 2.4 might be thought to be the answer. In 1.13, the prophet appeals to YHWH as the judge who ought to be settling a lawsuit:

Your eyes are too pure to behold evil,
and you cannot look on wrongdoing;
why do you look on the treacherous,
and are silent when the wicked swallow
those more righteous than they?

As with other 'more righteous than ...' phrases in the Hebrew scriptures, the proper way to read this is not as a moral contrast *per se* ('these people have more credit in the moral bank than those ones') but as an implied lawcourt scenario: these people are in the right, and those ones are in the wrong!²²⁹ God is supposed to be the judge, and if the case came to court he would – he must! – find in favour of us, the beleaguered and oppressed, and hence against the treacherous and wicked. We confidently expect a positive verdict; they can be sure of a negative one. That is a key element in the prophet's complaint. He wants *justice*; he wants justification – that is, he wants the case to be decided in Israel's favour (and in favour of the true Israelites, perhaps, as against the 'proud' of 2.4a). The righteous judge is under obligation to settle the case that way; Israel's covenant God is under

obligation to settle the case *Israel's* way. If and when God acts in covenant faithfulness, then, his people will be vindicated: the 'righteousness' of God will result in the 'righteousness' of his people.²³⁰ That, together with the *eschatological* use of Habakkuk in the second-Temple period, is the larger context in which Habakkuk 2.4 must be read in Paul.²³¹ And it shows, among other things, that references to God's righteousness and human righteousness, so far from cancelling one another out, belong firmly together. God is the righteous judge, the faithful covenant-maker: his people will be declared 'righteous', covenant members, at the last, and this is anticipated in the present. Ironically, so far from Habakkuk providing a solid fixed point from which one can reason back to a historically surprising and innovatory meaning of *dikaiosynē theou* earlier in the verse, the normal historical meaning of that phrase enables the potential ambiguities present in the Habakkuk passage to point forward to Paul's fuller exposition of *both* the faithfulness of God *and* the faith of humans in 3.21—4.25.

This then underscores a reading of Paul's references to *dikaiosynē theou*, in 1.17a and elsewhere, in terms of God's own 'righteousness', his faithfulness to the covenant, as I expounded it in chapter 10 above. As Richard Hays argued many years ago, this is in any case strongly supported by Paul's use of Psalm 143 (LXX 142) in Romans 3.20 and Galatians 2.16. Granted, Paul only quotes 143.2 ('no one living is righteous before you'), but that verse depends directly on verse 1 ('answer me in your righteousness') which in turn looks on to verse 11 ('in your righteousness bring me out of trouble').²³² When, immediately afterwards, Paul declares that the divine *dikaiosynē* has been unveiled (3.21), and goes on to explain this in unambiguous terms to do with God's own 'righteousness' (3.25–6), we should be in no doubt that he has this theme in mind. Once more, the righteousness of Israel's God is correlated with human righteousness (or the lack thereof).²³³ The verse Paul quotes, coming poignantly at the end of 1.18—3.20, functions both as a plea against the judgment that might by now be supposed inevitable and, by its echo of verse 1, as a plea for God's covenant faithfulness to bring about the desired rescue. The whole thought is once more very close to that of Daniel 9.

That in turn then offers a natural way of understanding the otherwise troublesome *ek pisteōs eis pistin* in 1.17. As the opening verses of chapter 3 make clear, Paul is working with the whole notion of the divine faithfulness, truthfulness, righteousness and justice, just as he is in Romans 9 and 10.²³⁴ These terms are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually defining and interlocking. I have argued elsewhere that Paul sees the covenant plan, to which Israel's God will remain faithful, as requiring a faithful Israelite, and that in 3.21–6 that is what is provided – in the 'faithfulness' of the Messiah (anticipating the theme of the Messiah's 'obedience' in 5.12–21).²³⁵ This provides a natural, if rich, understanding of 3.22: God's covenant faithfulness is revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah for the benefit of all who believe/are faithful (*dia pisteōs ... eis pantas tous pisteuontas*). This in turn looks back easily enough to the dense, headlining phrase in 1.17: God's righteousness is revealed, on the basis of the faithfulness of God, for the benefit of those who have faith.²³⁶ Whichever option we then choose for the interpretation of Habakkuk 2.4 as read by Paul, the whole prophetic context as set out above will support the entire range of Paul's theme as he explains how Israel's God has been faithful to the covenant by establishing, through the Messiah, an Abrahamic people whose only defining characteristic is *pistis*.

In answer to the question some might then ask, whether Paul in quoting Habakkuk 2.4 sees Jesus himself as 'the righteous one', my answer – at this point like Watson! – is that this is probably a bridge too far.²³⁷ Certainly nobody could guess that from the context of Romans 1.1–17. When Paul does eventually unveil 'the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of the Messiah' in 3.22 the latter is, as it were, subsumed under the former: the point is (3.25) that 'God put Jesus forth'. The Messiah's faithfulness is the living embodiment of the divine covenant faithfulness. But it is that divine faithfulness, called into question for Habakkuk by the Chaldean invasion (and for 4 *Ezra* by the destruction of Jerusalem), and for Paul's contemporaries by the shocking events of the gospel itself, to which the apostle is referring in 1.17.²³⁸

I thus end up almost diametrically opposite to Francis Watson when it comes to Paul's use of Habakkuk – though paying warm tribute to him for the creative and helpful way in which he has raised both this question and that of Paul's overall reading of Torah itself. I do not think that Habakkuk 2.4 must be read in terms of a human 'righteousness' which consists in, or comes by, faith; I do not think that this or any other reading of the verse must be allowed to determine how we read Romans 1.17a. So far from the prophet providing a fixed point around which the meaning of *dikaiosynē theou* must be reconfigured, the wider usage of the phrase and its cognates, and associated ideas in Romans, creates a massive presumption in favour of taking it to refer to the divine 'righteousness' in the sense of 'faithfulness to the covenant'. When we return to Habakkuk with this in mind we find a close match both in the prophet's own situation and in the re-reading of his work in the second-Temple period.²³⁹ Israel's God is in the right, and through the gospel he has brought into being a covenant people as he always promised to Abraham. Paul reads Israel's scriptures as a vast and complex narrative, the story of the faithful creator, the faithful covenant God, the God who in Israel's Messiah kept his ancient promises and thereby created a people marked out by their *pistis*, their own gospel-generated faith or faithfulness. The scriptures do not so much bear witness, for Paul, to an abstract truth ('the one God is faithful'). They *narrate* that faithfulness, and, in doing so, invite the whole world into the faithful family whose source and focus is the crucified and risen Messiah.

5. Conclusion

A Jew like no other. Yes, perhaps. An anomalous Jew: from one point of view, yes. A renegade Jew? Not if you believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. An Israelite indeed – though with enough rhetorical guile to harangue the Galatians one minute, tease the Corinthians the next, and set before the Romans a *text* like no other, a document only comprehensible as coming from the very heart of the Jewish world and yet opening up vistas

never before imagined there or anywhere else. Paul insisted that his primary self-definition was not, in fact, simply that of being Jewish. His primary self-understanding was that he was a Messiah-man. He was *en Christō*, and conversely the Messiah lived in him, so that Paul and all other Messiah-people had ‘the Messiah’s mind’. These extraordinary claims, only comprehensible from within the Jewish world, nevertheless split that world open at the seams. They are those of a man who has burnt his boats. Like those who followed David to Adullam’s cave, there was no way back to the court of Saul. Like those who hailed bar-Kochba as Messiah, you could not then say that you were actually a Hillelite at heart, so please could you just study and practise Torah in private and let the Romans have Jerusalem and run the world if that’s what they wanted. Either this man is the king, in which case Israel, and in a measure the world, is now to be seen and defined in terms of his reign. Or we are of all people most to be pitied.

But the ‘identity’ of which Paul was aware, and the project to which he found himself called and compelled – for which the phrase ‘apostle to the nations’ was his own shorthand – was then inevitably more than simply ‘religious’. It was more than ‘having a faith’, or indeed a hope. At every point in the present Part of this book we have seen that Paul has something important to say to the worlds of politics, ‘religion’, philosophy and now the multi-faceted first-century Jewish world as well. This is not a mere accidental by-product of a ‘mission’ which was really ‘about’ something else. The fulfilled-Jewish identity of Paul, which we have tried in this chapter to map, requires all the categories we have explored so far – theology, worldview, culture, politics, religion, philosophy, the Jewish world itself – and perhaps more again. I suspect, in fact, that our late-modern discourse will struggle to provide us with categories adequate to express what Paul thought he was doing. But in our final chapter, to which we now turn, we must do our best to find some.

¹ This is to make a similar point, at this level of generality, to Nanos 2010b, though our perspectives then naturally diverge. The essay of Frey 2007 brings the German discussion of the topic forward from an older polarization, and an essentially non- or anti-Jewish Paul, towards the more complex but historically coherent position of Paul as still emphatically Jewish – which then simply sets the stage for the real questions to begin.

² e.g. Rom. 1.3–4; 1 Cor. 15.3–8: [see above, e.g. 518, 525, 555](#).

³ [See below, 1484–1504](#) on Paul's missionary strategy.

⁴ 1 Thess. 1.9f.

⁵ 'Justification' could of course be mentioned in passing, as in e.g. 1 Cor. 6.11.

⁶ A 'Jew': Ac. 21.39; 22.3; Gal. 2.15; 'Israelite': Rom. 11.1; 2 Cor. 11.22; 'of the race of Israel': Phil. 3.5; 'Hebrew': 2 Cor. 11.22; Phil. 3.5. On Rom. 2.28f.; 1 Cor. 9.20 see below.

⁷ Against e.g. Betz 1979, 320, who sees Paul announcing 'the establishment of a new religion'. Correctly e.g. Bird 2012, 23: 'Paul never intended to set up a new religious entity.'

⁸ Nanos 2010a and elsewhere.

⁹ See the various discussions in Bell 1994; 2005.

¹⁰ Harink 2003, ch. 4; W. S. Campbell 2008 (see below). We are now even offered something called a 'post-supersessionist interpretation' of one Pauline passage: see Rudolph 2011 (the phrase occurs, as a description of the book, on the back cover). The implicit claim to a new periodization of scholarship begs a good many questions. A different, and arguably more helpful, line is taken by Longenecker 2007, who argues for what we might call a 'benign' Pauline 'supersessionism' over against the toxic alternatives of 'replacement' and the increasingly discredited 'two-covenant' theory. But I suspect that the 's'-word will retain its pejorative overtones, as e.g. in Rudolph 2011, 211. On the whole set of questions see the survey in Zetterholm 2009, 129–63.

¹¹ See Novenson 2014. Once one realizes that for Paul messianic belief and christological belief are one and the same (see above, 643–709 with 815–36), it becomes very strange to say that there might be a future 'messianic' event which Jews would not have to acknowledge 'in expressly christological terms' (Pawlikowski 2012, 172).

¹² Jews continued, however, to be a fertile source of new believers in Jesus as Messiah: see Stark 1996, ch. 3.

¹³ See e.g. Klausner 1943, 591: Paul 'considered his teaching as true Judaism, as the fulfilment of the promises and assurances of authentic Judaism'; so too Sandmel 1978, 336; Schoeps 1961 [1959], 237.

¹⁴ This criticism applies to several of the essays in Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2012a.

¹⁵ As an obvious example: CD 2.14—4.12.

¹⁶ Thus, though I see the point made by Levenson (1993, x) in saying that early Christian 'supersessionism' is simply a variation within what was happening in the Jewish world anyway, I prefer not to use the word. It is more appropriate for the kind of schemes proposed in the middle and late C20 by those who see 'Judaism' as a 'religion', and Paul as the 'apocalyptic' thinker who opposed all 'religion' as such.

¹⁷ See further *NTPG* 165f.; [and above, 619f](#).

¹⁸ Jer. 25.11; [see above, 142](#).

¹⁹ As with almost everything else in the period, doubt has been cast on the historical value of the (much later) traditions about Akiba; but the point I am making, about the shape and effect of a disputed claim about messianic eschatology, remains valid even if the 'history' were to be disproved. See now e.g. Friedman 2004; Yadin 2010.

²⁰ Isa. 6.13; 10.33—11.3; Mt. 3.9f./Lk. 3.8f.

²¹ [See above, 81](#).

²² [See above, 1217](#), on Rom. 11.17.

²³ See the account in e.g. Segal 1990, 285–300; on wider psychological issues in Paul, Theissen 1987 [1983].

²⁴ See Stendahl 1976.

²⁵ Dictionary definitions, in any case, only take us so far. The 10th edition of Merriam-Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* (1998) gives, as the meaning relevant to present discussion, 'an experience associated with a definite and decisive adoption of religion', which tells us more about the basically secular stance of the dictionary than about actual usage, since many modern Christians would describe their conversion as a move *from* 'religion' to something else, e.g. 'faith'. The 3rd edition of Merriam-Webster's *New International Dictionary* (1993) offers the general 'change from one belief, view, course, party, or principle to another', and then, more specifically, 'the bringing over or persuasion of a person to the Christian faith', followed by another general meaning ('a change of one's feelings or one's point of view from a state marked by indifference or opposition to one of zealous acceptance') and then, more specifically again, 'such a change in one's religious orientation marked also by a concomitant change in belief', which is still quite vague. The relevant section in the *Oxford English Dictionary* has 'the bringing of anyone over to a specified religious faith, profession, or party, esp. to one regarded as true, from what is regarded as falsehood or error', and then more specifically 'the turning of sinners to God; a spiritual change from sinfulness, ungodliness, or worldliness to love of God and pursuit of holiness'. These are all very blunt instruments when it comes to describing first-century phenomena, including Paul's moment on the Damascus Road.

²⁶ See the important discussion in Chester 2003, 3–42; Bird 2010, 17–43 (esp. 18–24 on the problem of definition); also Dickson 2003, 8f. and elsewhere, and e.g. McClendon and Conniry 2000.

²⁷ The classic study remains that of Nock 1961 [1933]. Nock also discusses the quasi-'conversion' of those who embraced a particular philosophy. Fredriksen 2010, 239f. rightly insists that where 'religion' was an innate, not a detachable, aspect of identity, 'conversion' was 'tantamount to changing one's ethnicity'. Conversion to Judaism, she says, 'was understood by ancient contemporaries as forging a political alliance, entering the Jewish *politeia*, and ... assuming foreign laws and traditions'. Such people turned their backs on the local gods, disrupting the fundamental relations between gods and humans.

²⁸ See e.g. Roetzel 2009, 407: 'Neither [Paul] nor Acts ... refers to this radical turning in Paul's behaviour as a repudiation of one religion for another, which for a 1st-cent. Jew like Paul would imply turning away from the true God to idolatry.'

²⁹ Stendahl himself, however, is rightly criticized by e.g. Peace 1999, 29 (cited in Chester 2003, 155) on the grounds that his rejection of 'conversion' as a description of what happened to Paul depends on a modern western notion of 'conversion', when his whole point was to warn against modern western conceptions.

³⁰ [cf. n. 25 above.](#)

³¹ The debate on these matters can be seen to advantage in the dialogue between e.g. Kim 2002; Dunn 2008 [2005], ch. 15 (orig. 1997).

³² Gal. 1.15–17.

³³ I have argued elsewhere that, despite strong advocacy, we should not see 2 Cor. 4.1–6 or 12.1–5 as references to that event: cf. *RSG* 384–8. Few now regard Rom. 7.7–8.11 as a description of Paul's conversion, though it still has its place as a retrospective analysis of the transition from being 'under the law' when 'in the flesh' to being 'in the spirit' and finding thereby a new fulfilment: [see above, 892–902.](#)

³⁴ 1 Cor. 15.8–10. See *RSG* 382–4.

³⁵ Rom. 1.5; 15.15f.; perhaps also 12.3; 1 Cor. 3.10; Gal. 2.9; Eph. 3.2, 7; cf. Col. 1.25.

³⁶ Lk. 1.46–55.

³⁷ Gal. 1.13–15; we discuss the sequel immediately below.

³⁸ See Mason 2007; and the notes on this topic above, [xxif.](#), [82](#), [89](#).

³⁹ Gal. 1.15–17.

⁴⁰ See 1 Kgs. 19.1–18, which Paul echoes again at Rom. 11.3f.; cf. *Perspectives*, ch. 10. On Paul's echoes of Isa. here see esp. Ciampa 1998.

⁴¹ See above, 952f. We might compare e.g. 1 Cor. 1.9; 7.15–24; Gal. 1.6; 1 Thess. 2.12; 2 Thess. 2.14; and cp. *klēsis*, the cognate noun ('call') in e.g. 1 Cor. 1.26.

⁴² e.g. Rom. 9.12; Gal. 5.13; Eph. 4.1, 4; Col. 3.15; 1 Thess. 4.7; 2 Thess. 1.11.

⁴³ Segal 1990, 6.

⁴⁴ Segal 1990, 6f. The idea that Paul 'converted' from one type of Judaism to another is firmly endorsed by e.g. Frey 2007, 321.

⁴⁵ On Phil. 3 [see above, 984–92](#).

⁴⁶ Segal 1990, 141; cf. e.g. 129.

⁴⁷ Gaston 1987, 139f. suggests that Paul's problems arose because others had not shared 'his revelation in Damascus'.

⁴⁸ Rom. 6.11.

⁴⁹ Gal. 2.19f.

⁵⁰ 2 Cor. 5.13–15.

⁵¹ [See above, 1356](#) on the 'epistemology of love'.

⁵² Rom. 2.29; 5.5; 8.28.

⁵³ On the fashionable language of 'identity' see the remarks of Dunn 1999, 176, pointing out the danger of anachronism – dangers not avoided in my view by e.g. W. S. Campbell 2008. Considerable nuancing on 'identity' in Paul's world is now provided by the detailed analysis of Sechrest 2009, 21–109 (and e.g. 141, 163, pointing out that the notion of 'identity' is itself in flux), though the word 'race' and its cognates, used throughout, might themselves be thought loaded. The question of Paul's Jewish identity in current debate received a solid foundation in Niebuhr 1992. The work of Johnson Hodge 2007 makes a further significant contribution, though she ends up opting for the largely discredited view of Gaston and Gager.

⁵⁴ Rom. 11.1; 2 Cor. 11.22; cf. Sechrest 2009, 41–5.

⁵⁵ Rom. 9.8.

⁵⁶ Rom. 3.5; some, however, dispute whether the 'we' here means 'we Jews', or is a more general statement. Cf. Sechrest 2009, 151f. The point emerges again, with similar puzzles, at 3.9.

⁵⁷ Gal. 2.15. The word here translated 'by birth' is *physei*: literally 'by nature'. This was his and Peter's 'given', their starting-point.

⁵⁸ So e.g. Nanos 2012, 106, 129.

⁵⁹ The question of whether he continued to 'observe' the Jewish calendar, and if so in what sense, remains a moot point in view of discussions of Gal. 4.9 and e.g. 1 Cor. 16.8f.: see Hardin 2008, 120f. (against e.g. Thiselton 2000, 1329f.). Hardin's caution here, allied to his reading of the letter as a warning against Roman imperial celebrations, scarcely warrants Rudolph's claiming him as an ally (2011, 211, referring to Zetterholm 2009, 127–63, who however never mentions Hardin). Paul's reference to Pentecost in 1 Cor. 16 proves little: a modern atheist might well say 'I will see you after Easter' with no implication that they believed in Jesus' resurrection or that they would be in church to celebrate it.

⁶⁰ See above, 93f.; 854. When people scratch around for counter-examples (i.e. Jews content to eat with gentiles) they have to make do with strange possibilities: Rudolph 2011, 127 offers the story of

Judith (Jdth. 12.17–19), which is bizarre. Judith brought her own food to the meal she shared with Holofernes, the Assyrian general she was planning to kill. Perhaps Judith would have said, if asked, ‘To the Assyrians I became as an Assyrian (though not eating their food), that I might kill an Assyrian.’ The other example regularly cited, *Let. Arist.* 128–69 (Rudolph 127–9), does indeed show that exceptional circumstances might permit eating together, provided the food was kosher, but this remains, and was seen to be at the time, an exception to the normal rule. Undoubtedly there was a wide range of actual practice in the Diaspora, but the evidence for *amixia*, a taboo on commensality, is not confined to pagan slurs (*pace* e.g. Fredriksen 2010, 249).

⁶¹ 1 Cor. 10.25–30.

⁶² 1 Cor. 10.26, quoting Ps. 24.1.

⁶³ On the nature of intra-Jewish polemic see Rudolph 2011, 38f., 52.

⁶⁴ See above, 1151–3.

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 1.23; Gal. 5.11. It is interesting that neither of these texts is even mentioned by W. S. Campbell 2008 or Rudolph 2011. Tomson 1990 mentions Gal. 5.11 but does not discuss this specific point.

⁶⁶ Phil. 3.4–6, 8. For Rudolph 2011, 45f. to say that Paul here ‘indirectly points up the importance of Jewishness’, while obviously true at one level, is bizarre: (a) Paul is saying, as strongly as possible, that these identity-markers no longer matter; (b) in his list of previous status-markers Paul includes his zealous church-persecution, which presumably he now regarded not simply as ‘less important’ than his new faith but as something horrible and shameful (despite Dunn 2008 [2005], 481); (c) Rudolph appears to think that if we can somehow say that Jewishness is still ‘important’ this will enable his thesis of a Torah-observant Paul to be salvaged. Campbell 2012, 45 n. 25 (and see his other writings cited by Rudolph 2011, 45f.) suggests that in using *skybala* ‘Paul does not intend to “trash” his Jewish attributes’, which is odd considering that ‘trash’ would be another possible, if mild, translation of the word. He is disingenuous in quoting Bockmuehl 1998, 207f. in support of the interpretation of ‘food scraps for dogs’, an interpretation Bockmuehl discusses and rejects on the grounds that ‘the reference is to that which is thrown away because it is filthy and objectionable’.

⁶⁷ Gal. 2.16 (see above, 856f.). For the avoidance of doubt, in the previous sentence there is no Greek verb corresponding to ‘are’: Paul wrote *hēmeis physei Ioudaioi*, ‘we by-nature Jews’. The question is therefore open as to whether the subsequent passage implies ‘but no longer’, or ‘no longer in the same sense’. See Sechrest 2009, 168f. (Paul leaves this identity behind; cf. too 141); Hays 2000, 236 (Paul affirms the continuing ‘Jewish’ identity in order to build differently upon it).

⁶⁸ See e.g. Nanos 2002a, 321: the Galatians ‘knew the character of the speaker and the nature of the subject to be out of keeping with his words, and thus the intentions of the writer to be other than what he actually said’. Paul is certainly capable of irony, but claims like this are skating complex pirouettes on very thin historical ice.

⁶⁹ Gal. 2.19 is not in the index of Tomson 1990; W. S. Campbell 2008; Rudolph 2011. As W. S. Campbell himself says (2008, 133), ‘we cannot bypass those passages where there is a clear witness to the contrary’.

⁷⁰ Pawlikowski 2012, 170.

⁷¹ See Sanders 1983, 177: ‘dying to the law’ is ‘the language of conversion in the sense of abandonment ... One gives something up in order to accept something else.’

⁷² Rom. 7.4–6, too, is missing from the treatments of Tomson, Campbell and Rudolph.

⁷³ W. S. Campbell 2008, 149–51, suggests that I have projected a modern conversion-scheme back on to Paul, thus ignoring the ‘continuity’ between Paul and his Jewish world and creating instead a sort of anti-Judaism. This is a bizarre misrepresentation. Campbell himself projects contemporary

categories ('difference', 'otherness', 'diversity', etc.) back on to Paul, which is why he is forced to ignore several key passages in the letters in order to try to make his case.

⁷⁴ 1 Cor. 15.9, reflected further in Eph. 3.8; 1 Tim. 1.13, 15.

⁷⁵ See *NTPG* 170–81; and e.g. Jos. *JW* 5.442f., with e.g. Hengel 1989 [1961], 16, 183–6, citing many other passages. I am grateful to Jessiah Nickel for discussion of these.

⁷⁶ cf. Ac. 21.21, 28; 24.5f.

⁷⁷ Rom. 4 and Gal. 3 make it very difficult to say, as does Fredriksen 2010, 244, that gentile Jesus-believers 'are adopted not into Israel's family, but into God's' so that 'God, not Abraham, is their "Abba", and so while Jewish and gentile Jesus-believers share the same heavenly father *kata pneuma* they remain distinct *kata sarka*. This, it seems to me, is exactly what Paul is denying.

⁷⁸ e.g. Campbell 2012, 53, claiming that 'Paul does not argue for a single family of Abraham's descendants but for a plurality of families' – precisely the opposite of what Paul says in Gal. 3.16–29! Campbell seems to find this hard to sustain, however (49f., suggesting that 'whilst the covenant in the NT in relation to the inclusion of gentiles is necessarily a christological category, it cannot be used ecclesiological'; what happened to *en Christō* and similar ecclesiological formulations, which Paul uses in exactly this connection?). He refers to Beker 1980, 96; but though Beker does suggest (wrongly) that Paul refers to a twofold 'seed' in Rom. 4.13, 16, 18 (*sperma* is in fact always singular here) he also rightly insists that Paul's emphasis in Rom. 4 is on 'the unity of Jew and Gentile in the one church' and that in Gal. 'Christ as the singular seed is the one in whom all are one'.

⁷⁹ I am surprised that Sechrest 2009, 152 n. 3 resists the idea that 2.25–9 refers to gentile Christians. Her suggestion that because in 2.26 Paul uses *phyllassō* for 'keeping' the law he must be referring to 'Jewish obedience' (a) rests on far too slight an exegetical base, Paul's only other use of the verb being Gal. 6.13 and (b) seems to ignore the fact that the subject of the verb here is precisely *uncircumcised* people. She cites Moo 1996, 170 n. 21, but Moo's main point is to stress the vague generality of most of the relevant words. Moo's own attempt (171) to have his cake and eat it at this point demonstrates the difficulties of Sechrest's position here, as also that of Rudolph 2011, 54. Rudolph's suggestion (73f.) that Rom. 2.25–7 shows that the distinction of 'circumcision' and 'foreskin', and hence of 'Jew' and 'Gentile', even 'in Christ', remains 'fundamental in Paul's thought' is breathtaking, granted that the whole point of the passage is that 'their uncircumcision will be counted as circumcision' (2.26) and that the *Ioudaios* is not the one with outward circumcision but the one 'in secret', 'in spirit not letter' (2.28f.). So far from this passage supporting a view of Paul as Torah-observant in Rudolph's sense, it counts heavily against it.

⁸⁰ cf. again Rudolph 2011, 38f., discussing contemporary differences between 'orthodox' and 'ultra-orthodox' Jews; cf. 52: 'Intra-Jewish sectarian polemic ... abounds in modern times', often using sharp and overstated rhetoric.

⁸¹ Rom. 2.29; Phil. 3.3; Gal. 6.16; Rom. 11.26.

⁸² Rom. 3.30; Gal. 3.16–20.

⁸³ 1 Cor. 7.17–19.

⁸⁴ See e.g. Dunn 2008 [2005], 336f.

⁸⁵ Tomson 1990, 270–4; cf. too Tomson 1996, 267–9. Tomson is followed once more by Rudolph (2011, 205, 210) (appealing to Bockmuehl 2000, 170f.) and declaring that 'this *rule* serves as a principal literary context for interpreting Paul's nomistic language in 1 Cor 9:19–23' (205, italics original).

⁸⁶ 1 Macc. 1.15; cf. Jos. *Ant.* 12.241.

⁸⁷ Eph. 4.17; 1 Thess. 4.5; cf. 1 Cor. 6.11. This may overlap with the Noachide commands, but I see no evidence that this was Paul's reason for insisting on this dramatic change.

⁸⁸ Tomson 1996, 267; Rudolph 2011, 210.

⁸⁹ 1 Cor. 9.19–23. The classic treatment remains that of Chadwick 1954–5, who describes v. 22 (‘all things to all people’) as ‘perhaps as serious as any passage in the Pauline corpus’ (274). For recent discussions cf. e.g. Schnabel 2004, 953–60; Sandnes 2011.

⁹⁰ See e.g. Hays 1997, 153: Paul is now ‘transcending all cultural allegiances’.

⁹¹ Rom. 4.4, 6; Gal. 2.19; 3.25.

⁹² Tomson 1990, 277–9, using (among other things) the tenuous argument that as the church became more anti-Jewish such things were more likely to be added. The anti-Jewish textual surgery for which we have evidence (i.e. that of Marcion) tended to cut things out rather than put things in; and in any case, as Metzger points out (1994 [1971], 493), it is easy to see how a copyist’s eye might have skipped from one occurrence of *hypo nomon* to the other. See too Thiselton 2000, 701.

⁹³ Rudolph 2011, 153 (against Tomson’s surgery); but cf. the title of Rudolph’s monograph, *A Jew to the Jews*, which does imply something similar.

⁹⁴ Rudolph 2011, 158f., cf. 198–200.

⁹⁵ Rudolph 2011, 196 (italics original). Rudolph draws the parallel with contemporary Jewish language for the ‘ultra-orthodox’ (the *haredim* or *frum*) as opposed to the *masorti* (‘traditional’). He proposes (197) that Paul either coined or borrowed the phrase ‘under the law’ to refer ‘to the *haredim* or *frum* of his day’. Rudolph supports this with a reference to Paul’s comment about ‘the “extremely religious” ... among the Gentiles he sought to win’ (Ac. 17.22), but this is hardly to the point: Paul was not distinguishing particularly scrupulous Athenian pagans from any others, but making a (sarcastic?) comment about pagan religiosity as a whole.

⁹⁶ So e.g. Sechrest 2009, 156: this is the basis of her monograph’s title, *A Former Jew*.

⁹⁷ Nanos 2012, 108.

⁹⁸ Nanos 2012, 108f., 114f. This is the potential charge to which Chadwick 1954–5 responds.

⁹⁹ Nanos 2012, 120.

¹⁰⁰ Nanos 2012, 139.

¹⁰¹ Nanos 2012, 123.

¹⁰² Nanos 2012, 130 (italics – and everything else – original).

¹⁰³ Nanos 2012, 139.

¹⁰⁴ Gal. 1.10; 5.11.

¹⁰⁵ 2 Cor. 11.24 (cf. Dt. 25.3). Rudolph 2011, 204 n. 128 discusses the reasons for this punishment, concluding that we cannot be certain (on later rabbinic traditions relating to such floggings see mMakk. 3.1–8).

¹⁰⁶ 1 Cor. 11.1.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Cor. 10.32f.

¹⁰⁸ Nanos 2012, 106f. In a footnote he tries again: ‘How much sense would it make for Paul to proclaim Jesus to demonstrate the righteous ideals of Torah and to be its goal ... if at the same time Paul ... degraded Torah ...?’

¹⁰⁹ Nanos 2012, 119.

¹¹⁰ Ancient pagan philosophers, not least Cynics, were sometimes accused of being too flexible: see Mitchell 1991/2, 133–6, citing esp. Plut. *Mor.* 96F–97; Keener 2005, 80f.

¹¹¹ Ac. 21.21, 28.

¹¹² The continuities are rightly stressed by Fredriksen 2010, 251f.: ‘the insistence that none other than the god of Israel be worshiped’ was ‘defining; it was non-negotiable; it was uniquely Jewish’. To this extent she is correct to say that Paul’s gospel was not ‘Law-free’.

¹¹³ On the relevant Acts passages see e.g. Barrett 1998, 1012f. Barrett sees the ambiguity of the situation, not least of Paul's vow in Ac. 21.20–6. But he too, like Nanos, raises questions of consistency (though he ascribes the problem to Luke rather than Paul), suggesting that, by taking the vow, Luke's 'Paul' was trying 'to suggest something that was not true, namely that he too ... was regularly observant of the Law as understood within Judaism', a point which Barrett suggests is not covered in 1 Cor. 9. This I think subtly misrepresents the point. In Ac. 21.24 James says that if Paul performs the vow everyone will know that the accusations against him (that he teaches Jews to abandon Moses, etc., as in v. 21) are false, and 'that you too are behaving as a law-observant Jew should'. What should have been the response from one who believed that the gospel was 'for the Jew first'? 'Do this and we will know you are loyal to Torah; don't do it and everyone will believe you have torn up the scriptures!' Faced with that loaded and dangerous alternative, Paul would unhesitatingly choose the former, since everything he believed was predicated on the assumption that the law and the prophets were fulfilled in the Messiah. Let those who have never faced tricky and potentially life-threatening political/religious situations, abounding in distorted questions and false alternatives, refrain from casting the first stone.

¹¹⁴ On Paul's dilemma here see esp. Hays 1997, 179: 'Paul's policy of accommodating himself to the standards of various reference groups will work only so long as those groups are not actually trying to live together. Alternatively, this strategy might work if everyone else within the church would adopt Paul's policy of evangelical flexibility so that all were willing to adapt themselves to one another and to the needs of the church's mission. That ... is precisely the goal of Paul's exhortation.'

¹¹⁵ If there is a distinction between 'Jews' and 'those under the law', it might be natural to assume that the latter phrase refers to God-fearers or proselytes (see e.g. Witherington 1995, 212; Hays 1997, 153f., suggesting also that the category might have been introduced for the sake of being able to clarify his own position of not being himself 'under the law'); or that the *Ioudaioi* were Judaeans, while 'those under the law' were Diaspora Jews (e.g. Horsley 1998, 131).

¹¹⁶ See e.g. Stanton 2003, 173f.: 'under Christ's jurisdiction'; Fitzmyer 2008, 371: 'Christian love, which springs from faith ... constitutes "the law of Christ" ... but it is only "law" in a wholly analogous sense. It is the way Christ exercises his lordship over those who are called to him.'

¹¹⁷ Rudolph 2011, 160 is disingenuous in asking what *nomos theou* means here, since that is not the phrase Paul uses. He backs up his interpretation (that Paul is clarifying that his evangelistic association with gentile sinners 'should not be interpreted as a neglect or abandonment of "God's law"') with a reference to Thiselton 2000, 704. But, while Thiselton agrees that Paul is guarding against antinomianism, he is also clear that Paul is opposed to the 'misuse' of the law 'as a means of establishing a false security which distracts people from God's grace in Christ', and cannot therefore be said to support Rudolph's point at all.

¹¹⁸ See Witherington 1995, 204 n. 4 *ad fin.*

¹¹⁹ The attempt of Nanos in his various writings to suggest that the 'weak' are in fact Jews who do not believe in Jesus has met with little success.

[120](#) Col. 1.28, etc.; cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 14.20.

[121](#) Actually, there are others too: he does not say ‘to the Greeks I became a Greek’, and despite Chadwick 1954–5, 261, 263 he does not say ‘a Gentile to the Gentiles’.

[122](#) See esp. Mitchell 1991/2, 147–9.

[123](#) 1 Cor. 1.23.

[124](#) Sanders 1983, 178f. The reference to Paul’s supposed rejection of ‘third race’ is at 173.

[125](#) Bieringer and Pollefeyt 2012b, 10. The implication seems to be: How did that man get in here without a postmodern wedding garment?

[126](#) Rudolph 2011, 211.

[127](#) See Bird 2012, 20f.

[128](#) Clem. *Strom.* 6.5.41.6; Aristides *Apol.* 2.2. See the discussion in Sechrest 2009, 13f.

[129](#) See D. F. Wright 2003, 134. In the Syriac the ref. is to Arist. *Apol.* 15. See further Richardson 1969, 22f.

[130](#) So D. F. Wright 2003, 135f. The wider issues are discussed further in Buell 2005, arguing that early Christians ‘used ethnic reasoning’, with ‘the vocabulary of peoplehood and human difference’, to legitimize ‘various forms of Christianness as the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity’ (2).

[131](#) Ps-Cyprian *De Pascha Computus* 17 [= Ogg 1955, 16], qu. in D. F. Wright 2003, 136. According to *Ep. Diog.* 1.1, Christians are ‘a new breed [*genos*] of humans’, who neither worship the gods of the Greeks nor follow the superstition [*deisidaimonia*] of the Jews. In 5.17 it states that Christians are attacked as ‘foreigners’ (*allophyloi*, which in the LXX denotes ‘Philistines’) by Jews and persecuted by Greeks. *Mt. Pol.* speaks of the Christians as a ‘race’, though not a ‘third’ one (3.2; cf. 14.1; 17.1). Cf. Sechrest 2009, 14.

[132](#) Tert. *Scorp.* 10.

[133](#) Sechrest 2009, 15.

[134](#) 1 Cor. 1.22–5.

[135](#) 1 Cor. 10.31—11.1.

[136](#) Gal 6.14–16. The connection is made by Sechrest 2009, 156.

[137](#) Fitzmyer 2008, 403 (following Lindemann) points out that this is the earliest instance of ‘the church of God’ seen as an entity over against Jews and Greeks.

[138](#) Thiselton 2000, 795 (bold type original). See too e.g. Mitchell 1991/2, 258: ‘As in 1:18–31, Jews and Greeks should be understood as separate from the church – which is now the primary identity of all Christians.’

[139](#) The modern and ancient views of ethnic identity are carefully and distinctly analysed by Sechrest 2009, chs. 2 and 3.

[140](#) e.g. Rom. 1.14; cf. too esp. Col. 3.11, where he sets aside no fewer than four antithetical pairs (Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free) in order to say once more that the Messiah is what matters, ‘everything and in everything’.

[141](#) Sechrest 2009, 210 (my italics).

[142](#) Johnson Hodge 2007, 143.

[143](#) Rom. 11.24.

[144](#) Rom. 4.12.

[145](#) Rom. 4.17.

[146](#) Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 498.

¹⁴⁷ To this extent I agree with Fredriksen 2010, 251 n. 52: ‘Precisely in and through its ineradicable Jewishness, Paul’s gospel brings the good news of universal redemption’ – even if she and I would disagree as to how that general statement plays out in practice.

¹⁴⁸ See above, [1161](#), [1213–21](#), [1236](#), [1245](#).

¹⁴⁹ See too *Perspectives*, ch. 32. The recent vol. of essays edited by Porter and Stanley (2008) contains some important work, e.g. DiMattei 2008 (though I think my study of Jewish narratives in ch. 2 above would challenge some of what he says); Fisk 2008, who concludes (185) that ‘it does not appear unreasonable to think that many of those who first read or heard [Romans] would have enjoyed considerable prior, and ongoing, exposure to a number of the scriptural passages Paul cites’.

¹⁵⁰ This, famously, is Sanders’s view of two of Paul’s key quotations on ‘righteousness’ and ‘faith’, i.e. Gen. 15.6 and Hab. 2.4 (see e.g. Sanders 1978, 483f.). I have heard Sanders say, more than once, that Paul, wanting to link ‘righteousness’ and ‘faith’, ran through his mental concordance to find passages that made the connection, came up with two of them, and dropped them into the arguments of Galatians and Romans. This is one of several points where, I believe, Sanders failed to carry through his own programme of reading Paul in the light of second-Temple Judaism.

¹⁵¹ Among the most impressive: Wilk 1998; Wagner 2002; Watson 2004. Since my name, too, begins with ‘W’ I hope that the present section can contribute, however briefly, to the further development of their work.

¹⁵² e.g. Ellis 1957.

¹⁵³ Mt. 23.23.

¹⁵⁴ On the ‘right-brain’ and ‘left-brain’ methods, see above all McGilchrist 2009; in relation to NT studies: Wright 2012b [‘Imagining the Kingdom’], 396–8.

¹⁵⁵ Hays 1989a.

¹⁵⁶ Hays 2002 [1983]: this work also ignited the continuing debate on *pistis Christou*, arguing strongly for ‘faith[fulness] of Christ’ rather than ‘faith in Christ’ as the Pauline meaning.

¹⁵⁷ Stanley 1992 and 2004. Stanley has energetically co-ordinated continuing study and debate, collected now in two volumes: Porter and Stanley 2008; Stanley 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Stanley 2004, 135.

¹⁵⁹ cf. e.g. Dunn 1993, 185, on Gal. 3.16f.: ‘Paul could just about hope to get away with it.’

¹⁶⁰ *Perspectives*, 549.

¹⁶¹ So e.g. Watson 2004, 43 n. 30: (‘audience recognition is desirable but not essential’); 127f. n. 1.

¹⁶² Käsemann 1980 [1973], 77.

¹⁶³ See the remarkable, and utterly convincing, work of Ward 2008, demonstrating that the seven *Narnia* books deliberately embody the seven characteristic moods associated in the medieval period with the seven ‘planets’ – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the sun and the moon.

¹⁶⁴ McNamara 1978, 36.

¹⁶⁵ Watson 2004, 137; the whole section (129–48) is full of suggestive insight.

¹⁶⁶ See above, 704, 1179; and my earlier statement of this position in Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 241–4.

¹⁶⁷ Rom. 15.8–12 (the summing up of the whole letter), quoting Ps. 18.49/2 Sam. 22.50; Dt. 32.43; Ps. 117.1; and, climactically, Isa. 11.10.

¹⁶⁸ See above, [783–95](#).

¹⁶⁹ See Ps. 8.4; cf. 80.17 [MT 80.18], where ‘the son of man you made so strong for yourself’ seems to refer to the king.

¹⁷⁰ An echo of Dan. 2.44 is detected by some (e.g. Fitzmyer 2008, 572) in 15.24.

¹⁷¹ On the ‘narrative roles’ of Torah cf. Hays 2005, 85–100 (orig. 1996a); and [above, ch. 7](#).

¹⁷² Watson 2004. Subsequent references are to this book unless otherwise noted. As the reader will detect (Watson, xii, 376 n. 34), the present remarks are part of a much more long-running conversation.

¹⁷³ Watson 17.

¹⁷⁴ Watson ix.

¹⁷⁵ Watson 54f.

¹⁷⁶ Watson 22 (*italics original*). (Already a note of generalization creeps in: the first half of Exodus is in fact about God's action in liberating his people in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise.) Cf. 524: 'Paul's reading and the others all register the discrepancy between the patriarchal narratives of Genesis and the Sinai revelation narrated in Exodus. The discrepancy can be overcome by projecting the law back into Genesis, or it can be used to assert the absolute significance of the promise: in either case, it is the same textual phenomenon that generates the divergent readings.'

¹⁷⁷ Watson 29: Watson is careful here to affirm also a double reading of Luther, right on some things and wrong on others.

¹⁷⁸ Watson 66. I find this use of 'optimism' and 'pessimism' unhelpful: the readings in question have nothing to do with the prior attitude of the reader.

¹⁷⁹ Watson 73.

¹⁸⁰ Watson 76.

¹⁸¹ Watson 162, 331, 168.

¹⁸² Watson 341. At 520 these have become 'a plurality of voices'.

¹⁸³ See his remarks on Sanders at e.g. Watson 13, 16. I believe he is wrong, however, to speak of the gulf between the Reformers and Paul as the 'fundamental dogma' of the 'new perspective': that perceived gulf was the result, not the foundation, of early 'new perspective' work.

¹⁸⁴ Watson 323.

¹⁸⁵ cf. Watson 329: 'The Leviticus text makes life conditional on law observance. This is fully compatible with assumptions about the covenant, the divine mercy, and Israel's separation from the nations.' This is, I think, more or less what Sanders meant by 'covenantal nomism'. When therefore Watson concludes that 'The dichotomies that have been set up in this area should be dismantled,' it seems to me we need more nuancing: which dichotomies, and set up by whom?

¹⁸⁶ Dodd 1959 [1932], 177: 'It shows real insight on Paul's part that he should have recognized (without the aid of modern criticism) that there is a *stratum* in the Pentateuch which goes deeper than the bald legalism of other parts, and comes very near in spirit to Christianity' (*italics original*).

¹⁸⁷ Watson 87, 101, 120.

¹⁸⁸ Watson 53.

¹⁸⁹ Watson 26, 179 n. 14, 124, 163, 189.

¹⁹⁰ Watson 465.

¹⁹¹ [See above, 462.](#)

¹⁹² Watson 137, 140f.

¹⁹³ Watson 23.

¹⁹⁴ Watson 163 n. 61; 185.

¹⁹⁵ Watson 433, 455–60; for the whole theme, [see above, 124–6](#), and *Perspectives* ch. 21.

¹⁹⁶ On the covenant narrative see e.g. Watson 433, 455, 460f.

¹⁹⁷ See e.g. Watson 335, where Rom. 10.5–8 is discussed in terms of 'the law's project', 'the continuing practice of the law as the way to righteousness and life', 'Moses' principle' which 'places a specific human praxis in the foreground' as opposed to 'the divine praxis' and so on. Granted, the

point for Watson here is that God has acted in Christ to bring the law to an end and so to inaugurate something new, and to that extent he is postulating some kind of eschatological narrative (rather like that of Sanders: God has acted in Christ, so the law must be wrong). What the second-Temple texts that use Dt. 30 emphasize, however, is not a different system but the renewal of the covenant.

[198](#) Watson 484.

[199](#) I have suggested elsewhere that Josephus's celebrated account of the different Jewish 'philosophies' was in fact a translation into abstract categories (predestination, free will and so on) of realities which were much more politically focused (will we be passive in God's coming action, or will he act *through us*?). See e.g. *NTPG* 181f., 200f.; *RSG* 175–81.

[200](#) Watson 26 n. 52.

[201](#) See e.g. Watson 40–2. At 72 he says that Paul 'gradually assimilates the language of Genesis 15.6 into his own discourse'; if I am right, Rom. 4 as a whole is an exposition of Gen. 15 as a whole, with 15.6 as its centre and key.

[202](#) Watson 42.

[203](#) See Watson 218: 'Abraham exemplifies the way of life enabled by a divine speech-act in which unconditional divine saving action is announced'; 220: 'Abraham exemplifies a righteousness without works ...'.

[204](#) Watson 269.

[205](#) Watson 315–29.

[206](#) Watson 356–80.

[207](#) Watson 376 expresses regret that something like this view, expounded by him in an undergraduate essay, 'continues to mislead' his former tutor (see Wright 1991 [*Climax*], 198). I can set his mind at rest: I changed my mind completely about the entire drift of Rom. 7 in the late 1970s, and any resonances of my, or indeed his, earlier views are undesigned coincidences.

[208](#) Watson 352f., n. 57 wrestles with the problem (for his view) that 2.27–9 uses 'distinctively Christian terminology', appearing to describe 'his anonymous righteous Gentiles as though they were Christians', whereas for Watson it would be more appropriate if one could show that 'these obedient Gentiles retrospectively turn out to be an unreal hypothesis'. This is, I think, an unnecessary problem, as the resolution of the narrative in 10.5–8 will show ([see below](#)).

[209](#) Watson 433, 438f., 471.

[210](#) Watson 439.

[211](#) Watson 463.

[212](#) *Jos. Ant.* 4.303, not discussed by Watson ([see above, 130f.](#)).

[213](#) Watson 426.

[214](#) Against Watson 332.

[215](#) [Above, chs. 10, 11.](#)

[216](#) Watson 415.

[217](#) Watson 333 suggests that it would have been clearer if Paul had written 'did not attain to righteousness', though he concedes that Paul was also making a subtly different point.

[218](#) Against Watson 505, who suggests that Paul is fundamentally rewriting Dt. 30 and in effect neutralizing the fact that otherwise it would stand alongside (the normal reading of) Lev. 18.5. To see what is going on here we urgently need the whole of Rom. 7.1—8.11.

[219](#) Against Watson 473.

[220](#) Watson 473.

[221](#) I have, of course, discussed them all in Wright 2002 [*Romans*], 424–6.

²²² Watson 52. At 43 he goes further: the citation, he says, ‘actually *generates* its antecedent. This prophetic text is the matrix from which Paul’s own assertion derives’ (italics original). This bold thesis, about the origin of Paul’s doctrine of justification itself, deserves much fuller discussion.

²²³ Watson 33–163 (three substantial chapters).

²²⁴ Watson 141f.

²²⁵ As I said in Wright 2009 [*Justification*], 157 [UK edn.], 182 [US edn.], my first hint of trying to understand Hab. 2.4 in its larger context came as a gift from my friend Peter Rodgers, for whose continuing support I remain grateful.

²²⁶ Watson 49f.

²²⁷ D. A. Campbell 2008, in a characteristically brilliant and provocative piece, argues that Paul does in fact echo this psalm here.

²²⁸ See the discussion in Watson 153f., allowing that the notion of divine faithfulness is indeed a plausible meaning though eventually deciding that the reference is to human faithfulness. As is well known, the verse is also quoted in Heb. 10.38, where the mss vary between *ho de dikaios mou ek pisteōs zēsetai*, the same without the *mou*, and the same with *ek pisteōs mou* instead of *mou ek pisteōs*. If this adds anything (apart from confusion) to the debate about Rom. 1, it may be the point that for some scribes at least the notion of God’s own faithfulness was a natural way to read *pistis* here.

²²⁹ Against Watson 150; [see above, 796–9](#), on e.g. Gen. 37.26; 1 Sam. 24.17.

²³⁰ The LXX translator of Hab. 1.13 omitted the closing *mimmennu*, ‘rather than they’, flattening the idiom into a straight moral contrast; but the answer of 2.4 indicates that the word was original, and was intended in this sense.

²³¹ For what it is worth, the Qumran commentary on Hab. 1.13 provides an explicit lawcourt scenario, though a human one rather than God’s: ‘Its interpretation concerns the House of Absalom and the members of their council, who kept silent when the Teacher of Righteousness was rebuked, and did not help him against the Man of the Lie, who rejected the Law in the midst of their whole Council’ (1QpHab. 5.9–12, tr. García Martínez and Tigchelaar).

²³² Hays 1980, reprinted in Hays 2005, 50–60. Watson, in his sole discussion (67) of this psalm, does not in my view succeed in his attempt to avoid the implications which Hays draws. He sees that in the psalm God’s righteousness is identified with God’s mercy, and that in Rom. 3.4f. God’s own righteousness is in question. But he is wrong (except at the merely grammatical level) to say that Hays’s argument demonstrates Käsemann’s understanding: Käsemann, as we saw, screens out the vital theme of covenant faithfulness, which is precisely what Hays highlights as the proper meaning of the subjective genitive reading on which, against Bultmann (and Watson) they agree. Watson’s plea, that we must understand ‘the righteousness of God’ by way of texts *actually cited* in Rom. (his italics), prompts the reflection that the whole of Rom. 1–4 is heading for the discussion of Gen. 15 in ch. 4, where the covenant is established, the covenant to which God (so Paul argues) has now been faithful. Watson finds himself compelled to see Paul’s use of ‘righteousness of God’ as a fresh coinage, a gloss on Hab. 2.4, referring to the human righteousness which is valid before God. We are not then entirely surprised when (71, 75f.) he gives in my view a less than adequate account of Rom. 3.25f., where God’s own righteousness is clearly the central topic.

²³³ One might also compare *Pss. Sol.*, e.g. 2.6–21; 8.4–8, 23–32; 9.1–7; 10.5.

²³⁴ See *Perspectives* ch. 30. See too Rom. 15.8.

²³⁵ See again *Perspectives* ch. 30.

²³⁶ This double use is paralleled in Philo *Abr.* 273, where God is faithful to faithful Abraham.

²³⁷ See the earlier arguments of Hays 1989b (reworked in Hays 2005, 119–42); Campbell 1994; and Watson 50–2.

²³⁸ There is no space here for what would naturally follow at this point, namely a discussion of the use of Hab. 2.4 in Gal. 3.11. That must wait for a future commentary.

²³⁹ Still important here is the work of Strobel 1961, not discussed by Watson.

Chapter Sixteen

SIGNS OF THE NEW CREATION: PAUL'S AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Introduction

It was a turbulent and dangerous century. Imperial power had once again reared its frightening head. People looked this way and that for help, only to discover that pragmatists and ideologues alike could change sides, and change shape, overnight. Some were content to keep their heads down and hope for the best. Those who cherished the ancient longing for a new time, a new and redemptive *kind* of time, were losing faith in historical 'progress', and searched fiercely not just for a hope to which they could cling but for a course of action to which they could commit themselves and summon others. For many Jewish people, trapped as so often between warring powers, the question was not so much how to think about it all (though that was vital too) but rather, what was to be *done*? Marx, though partly discredited, could still be invoked: the point was not simply to interpret the world, but to change it.

For one such thinker and doer, who like Saul of Tarsus claimed the historic tribal name of Benjamin, this meant not only some version of the ancient messianic hope, but a hope which would redeem the past as well as the present:

In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.¹

It is not enough, in other words, simply to tell the old stories and to rely on 'progress' to take us where we need to go. We look for a different sort of

moment, a transformation not only *in* time but *of* time itself.

That was the vision of Walter Benjamin, who wrote those words as the Nazis closed in on him in his unsafe Parisian exile in 1940.² Disgusted at the way Stalin's Russia had made peace with Hitler's Germany, calling into question the whole Marxist project he had earlier embraced, he escaped to Spain, but it was no good. Terrified that the Gestapo were hard on his heels, he committed suicide. In an eerie parallel with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from whom in other respects he was so different, this seminal thinker bequeathed words with a peculiar, haunting poignancy. Even when modernist Jews give up believing in God, they may still find themselves hoping for a coming moment that might redeem even the past:

We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogenous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which Messiah might enter.³

This is not the moment to embark on a detailed discussion of one of the most fascinating minds of the twentieth century. But Benjamin offers a reminder that the ancient Jewish vision, in which the Messiah and the redemption of history have played such an important role, has to do not simply with 'spirituality' or 'religion', not with an escapist salvation in which the rest of the world ceases to matter, but with the challenge to action in the world itself. As Benjamin's friend Hannah Arendt put it,

We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain.⁴

Arendt and Benjamin, in the extreme conditions of the mid-century crisis, understood the urgency of present action. One can neither wait to let 'progress' take care of things, nor escape into an alternative world.

Something has to be *done*, and done *now*. What we need, declared Arendt, is

a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities.⁵

One does not have to fill in too many gaps to see that this is essentially a *Jewish* vision: a world at one, with human authorities necessary but firmly under limitation. The ‘newly defined territorial entities’ are beside the point here. One only has to think of the Balkans or the middle east, two generations on, to shudder at the implications. But the point is, for Benjamin as well as Arendt, that one cannot go on as before. This is the moment for action. Now is the acceptable time. Now is, or might be, the day of salvation.

This reminder, and its obvious echoes of that earlier representative of the tribe of Benjamin, sends us back from the twentieth century to the equally turbulent and dangerous first century. What happens when we stand back from the last four chapters, from (that is) our account of Paul’s explicit and implicit engagement with the worlds of politics, religion and philosophy, and with the Jewish world of his own upbringing?

Many books on Paul’s thought conclude with an account of his eschatology, or ecclesiology, or ethics. We have located each of these elsewhere, but it is not for that reason alone that the normal endings are inappropriate here. I have argued that Paul’s theology is what it is, and means what it means, not only in relation to his wider social, philosophical, cultural/religious and political worlds, and especially that of ancient Judaism, but more particularly in relation to the worldview through which he had come to see all of reality. The symbols, praxis and stories which formed the spectacles he wore and which he taught his churches to wear, together with the strongly implicit answers he gave to the key worldview questions, all point to an integration of life, thought, work, prayer and not least the building and maintaining of communities. That integrated whole, his many-sided life-project, is what we must now try briefly to describe.

Paul's theology itself plays its own role within that integration. This 'theology' was not simply the elegant organization of the central elements of Jewish belief, reworked around Messiah and spirit. It was the beating heart which ensured that the lifeblood of prayer and God-given energy was animating the whole project. What a recent writer has described in terms of the relationship between political power and the philosophical enterprise can and should be said, *mutatis mutandis*, about the still more complex relationship in Paul between worldview and theology on the one hand, and between that worldview/theology combination itself and the wider contexts, Jewish and non-Jewish, on the other:

Whether despotic or populist, political rulers have sought to conscript philosophical voices in order to claim ideological validation, solicit prestige or adorn propaganda. Reciprocally, academic mandarins, speculative thinkers and intellectual publicists have felt drawn to charismatic leaders ... [Thinkers may possess] a deeply entrenched nostalgia for enactment, for the realization of otherwise inert doctrines and proposals, the translation of word into deed. Aspirations to performative fulfilment haunt the thinker; the plaudits of the sage flatter the tyrant. Seneca is close to Nero; Machiavelli is fascinated by Cesare Borgia; Sartre is an apologist for the barbarism of Mao.⁶

To see Paul as the philosopher who provided the ideological validation for the worldwide rule of Jesus would hardly capture the whole of his thought, but it would possess more than a grain of truth, and one regularly screened out. Paul was precisely not an isolated, detached thinker. That is why the isolated thinkers in the western academic tradition have had such difficulty with him, seeing confusion in his pastoral skill and contradiction in his subtle paradoxes. He was a man of action, of performative fulfilment. He was both thinker and doer, regarding his thinking as itself a form of worship, and his doing, too, as a sacrificial offering through which to implement the already-accomplished achievement of the Messiah. He was an integrated whole: razor-sharp mind and passionate heart working together.

If in the present chapter, then, we turn at last to his 'doing', this is not to replace theory with practice, still less ideology with pragmatism. For Paul, the 'doing' was the ultimately important thing, precisely because at the

heart of his thinking lay the goal of new *creation*. Since Paul believed that this new creation had already begun in the resurrection of the Messiah, this could not, by definition, remain a mere idea. If it was true, it had to become what we might call a historical reality. Hence the preaching of the gospel, the planting and pastoring of churches, the confrontation with authorities and not least the writing of letters. I want in this chapter to argue that Paul's practical aim was the creation and maintenance of particular kinds of communities; that the means to their creation and maintenance was the key notion of reconciliation; and that these communities, which he regarded as the spirit-inhabited Messiah-people, constituted at least in his mind and perhaps also in historical truth a new kind of reality, embodying a new kind of philosophy, of religion and of politics, and a new kind of combination of those; and all of this within the reality we studied in the previous chapter, a new kind of Jewishness, a community of new covenant, a community rooted in a new kind of prayer. Call this practical ecclesiology, or indeed missiology, if you like; but whereas those phrases might be taken today to imply the mere pragmatics of a theory already thought through, for Paul there was always a complex give-and-take between the impulse and imperative of the gospel and the stubborn realities of communities and individuals.

That is why it matters, providentially he might have said, that what we have from him are precisely letters, not treatises. His writings, from Romans to Philemon, embody in their own situational purposes the overall aim, not of communication merely, but of community. The authority the lord had given him, he said, was for building up, not for tearing down.⁷ His writing was a form of *doing*: he was concerned, not to explain the world or indeed the church, but to change it. Central to his whole life was the word 'now', often preceded with the contrast-sharpening 'but'. *But now ...*

This integrative vision, as the previous chapter and indeed the whole book has made clear, was an essentially Jewish perception of reality. It is no accident that, in the book whose review I quoted a moment ago, the particular place where the attempted confluence of politics and philosophy was happening was the German Third Reich. When the Nazis were

constructing a newly integrated form of would-be philosophically grounded community, they found anti-semitism to be an ideological necessity, not merely a pragmatic desideratum. There could not be two chosen peoples. There could not, in particular, be two *histories*: the Jewish history had to be erased, by the burning of the Torah as well as by the killing of its devotees, in order that the fresh Nazi story of Germany could stand on its own new feet.⁸ Hence the anguished discussion, in twentieth-century continental philosophy and consequent debates to this day, on the question of just how deeply committed to the Nazi cause was the towering philosopher of the day, Martin Heidegger.

Indeed, part of the task of New Testament scholarship in the twenty-first century, it seems to me, is the long overdue liberation of exegesis and theology, and actually of early Christian history itself, from the dark gravitational pull of the whole post-Enlightenment European philosophical and political matrix, of which Heidegger was and is a central symbol, and which has sucked the past – including the New Testament! – into its orbit and forced it to reflect its flickering ideological ‘light’ rather than shining with its own proper beams. History – to state the obvious, but sometimes the obvious things get ignored – ought always to be liberating, freeing the past from the tyranny of the present. And for that one needs always to *think in different ways*. As fully fledged historians have long been aware, if the past is indeed a ‘foreign country’ where ‘they do things differently’,⁹ the historian is by definition one who learns to live there as a respectful guest, rather than insisting on speaking loudly in his own language to drown out the strange local babble and behaving according to his own customs irrespective of local tradition and taboo. To say this is not of course to revert to a naive realism, but to grapple, as I argued in an earlier book, with the application to historical method of a properly *critical* realism, fully aware of the postmodern critique of all external knowledge but equally aware that to cut off that access is to collapse into a clever-sounding solipsism.¹⁰

The historical study of Paul, which I have attempted in this book, will therefore in itself constitute a move towards liberation from at least three

paradigms that have arguably continued to pull historical exegesis out of shape. F. C. Baur forced upon the material his rigid and anachronistic analysis of the two 'isms', *Judaism* and *Hellenism*, the latter to be preferred over the former. Bultmann took this forward; his geographical and ideological proximity to Heidegger himself showed themselves in developing a previously implicit ideological commitment (interpreting the core of early Christianity in essentially non- or even anti-Jewish ways on the pretext of a supposedly 'Pauline' gospel with 'Judaism' as its foil). The would-be and self-styled 'apocalyptic' school (which, despite its ideological opposition to historical progression, is now rather proud of its three-generational lineage) has superimposed upon Paul, the apostle of hope, the despairing negativity of his twentieth-century Benjaminite cousin. All these – to revert to the image I used in the opening chapter – are forms of *slavery*, captivity, in which words, thoughts and documents from the first century have been compelled to make ideological bricks with less and less historical straw. Like other forms of liberation, of exodus, the task of freeing a genuinely historical exegesis from these and other forms of captivity is itself pregnant with Jewish narrative and hope, which Baur, Bultmann and the neo-'apocalyptists' have routinely marginalized. Among many ironies here, the self-description of the slave-masters has been that of 'historical criticism', supposedly seeking to use history to awaken Christianity from its pre-Enlightenment dogmatic slumbers. But in reality, again and again, not least in the present fad for a supposedly Benjaminite 'apocalyptic' of sheer negativity towards the past, it is 'theology', in the form of post-Enlightenment ideologies of one kind or another, that has kept its boot firmly on the neck of an enslaved history.

Part of the irony of all this is that Walter Benjamin's own frustrated denunciation of various types of mid-twentieth-century Marxism itself constituted a form precisely of inner-*Jewish* debate. Marx himself, of course, had offered a secularized, Hegelian version of the Jewish story of liberation. That story, with its two basic elements, is seen in the truly 'apocalyptic' early Jewish books like *Daniel*, *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*, for all their various differences. First there is the long and dark historical

sequence, to be understood within the Deuteronomic and Danielic framework as the time of covenant disaster but also, in consequence, as the time of divine patience and providence, inviting an answering patience from those who clung to promises that showed no present sign of coming true. Second, there is the sudden (messianic) moment when the God of Israel would act in fresh and shocking ways to turn everything upside down and introduce the new era of liberation, whether through the exaltation of ‘one like a son of man’, the arrival of a great white bull or the emergence from the forest of the Lion of Judah, confronting the horrible pagan eagle. This new ‘apocalypse’ would happen, not like a slow dawn eventually reaching full day, but as a shockingly new and radical event. It would, nevertheless, be the true and long-awaited fulfilment of the ancient scriptural and covenantal promises.

If we bring that picture forward nineteen centuries or so, but take God out of it, we find Karl Marx. For Marx, the rejection of God necessarily put more weight (as one would expect from the Enlightenment’s latent Epicureanism) on the *process* itself. The revolution, when it came, would not be the result of a new irruption from outside (there being no *deus ex machina* to perform such a trick) but the sudden eruption from within of a social volcano whose pressure had been building up below the surface. Marx therefore had a much higher view of the long historical sequence, the historical process, than was held by his first-century apocalyptic ancestors. Their belief in an overall divine providence, and in ancient promises that had yet to be fulfilled, did not lead, as some today imagine such beliefs would necessarily lead, to a Hegelian theory of immanent progress in which history would arrive, under its own steam and without human agency, at the liberating or messianic conclusion. The ancient apocalyptists were not process theologians. Their God remained sovereign over, not contained within, the dark and puzzling years of waiting, of exile. And within that strange sovereignty human decisions and actions, for good or (more often) for ill, had a vital role to play.

But if Marx was thus significantly different from his ancient semi-predecessors, he was ironically on the same page as the very different (but

equally Epicurean) post-Enlightenment Social Darwinist thinkers who believed in a ‘progress’ through which ‘enlightenment’, in the form of gradual social amelioration, would spread throughout human society. The late nineteenth century saw liberal theologians offering a version of this narrative, bringing ‘God’ back into the picture (theology, like nature, abhors a vacuum) as the inner driving force within that ‘progress’. But, whether officially atheist or would-be theist, all such theories effectively deified the process itself. That, of course, is why they, like the Third Reich in its turn, were necessarily anti-Jewish. As Hegel had said, Judaism was the wrong *kind* of ‘religion’. From the Enlightenment perspective, it was a category mistake. ‘Religion’, as redefined in the eighteenth century, was not *supposed* to be about race and territory – which of course meant that the Nazi ideology would not be recognized as a false religion until it was too late. But Judaism continued to remind the world of a God who remained sovereign over, and different from, the world of creation, including the world of history. The power of Karl Barth’s protest against the ‘smoothly progressing’ liberal theology of the early 1900s came precisely from his retrieval of this essentially Jewish and biblical insight.

But to use Barth, as some have done, as a way of saying ‘No!’ to *all* pre-apocalyptic history is to be true neither to ancient Jewish theology, including that of the ‘apocalyptists’ themselves, nor to Jesus, nor to Paul, nor even (though this is not my present point) to Barth himself. And to invoke the tragic figure of Walter Benjamin to this effect, though appealing to those among today’s exegetes who make a virtue out of imposing modern categories on to ancient history,¹¹ is again to fail to understand the early Jewish world, or Paul as the exponent of its most remarkable mutation, or again Benjamin himself.

Benjamin, after all, was reacting against the perceived bankruptcy of various forms of mid-century Marxism. This is what happens (we might say with the temerity of comfortable hindsight!) when you put your faith in a different kind of god, in this case the god of Marxist ‘process’, and it lets you down. That was why Benjamin called for a plague on both the houses, the Marxist dream of ‘progress’ and the Nazi dream of an evolved super-

race. Their diabolical pact in 1940 destroyed all sense that ‘history’ might be ‘going somewhere’ in and of itself (as though Hitler and Stalin were just the unthinking tools of an invisible dialectical or mythological ‘process’!), that it might, without outside help, produce not only a new age of freedom and justice but a new world in which the wrongs of the past would somehow themselves be righted. Benjamin, clinging to the vestiges of Jewish hope as expressed in the Psalms and Isaiah, saw no chance of that hope arriving through the ways he, and many of his contemporaries, had imagined. The only hope then would be for a totally new ‘messianic moment’ – remembering that for Benjamin the Messiah was not to be a human individual, but a corporate identity, a people that would seize the moment and *act* to bring about the great redemption.

All this may seem remote from normal discussions of the apostle Paul. And yet it is very close to him – close in the way that two paths might be close, and even parallel, though separated by a high wall or a narrow but fast-flowing river. Paul must be contextualized, as we have tried to contextualize him, in the turbulent Jewish world of the mid-first century, where, as in the twentieth, the swirling currents of empire, history, hope and messianic redemption were sweeping people this way and that, shaping and reshaping culture as well as theory, action as well as thought. (To claim that we must contextualize someone is not to claim that they are the passive victim of their circumstances, that they are incapable of saying something startling and fresh!) That first-century Jewish world is where, for all their sharp differences, there lived people like Josephus and the author of *4 Ezra*. That is where we find the Scrolls. That is the world of Judas the Galilean in the generation before Paul, and of Simeon ben-Kosiba in the century after him. Unless we locate Paul on that map, we have snatched him out of his own world, like God snatching up Ezekiel by a lock of his hair, in order to relocate him in a very different one where, though he may still prophesy, he will not be at home. Those who have used Benjamin and other twentieth-century thinkers to interpret Paul ought at least to have this going for them, that they are trying to see him in three dimensions, not merely as the teacher of a timeless soteriology; though sometimes even there Benjamin has been

made to stand simply for apocalyptic discontinuity. What he (and Arendt) had given up, however, was not the ancient Jewish hope for the world-rectifying messianic moment. What they had given up was the Hegelian and Marxist caricature of that hope.

But Walter Benjamin stood on the other side of that deep river, of that high wall. First, he was trying to reconceive the question of Jewish existence, and of the Jewish (messianic?) vocation, *etsi Deus non daretur*. His proposal leant on pillars that could not sustain it. Even Saul of Tarsus, trusting in the God of Israel, was hoping that violent acts of ‘zeal’, purifying the holy people, would hasten the coming of the kingdom – a vision which Benjamin might have understood, even if he did not share its motivation. Equally, and decisively, Benjamin was still looking *ahead* to the messianic moment, the time when even the dead would find their ancient wrongs righted. Paul the apostle was looking *back* to what he believed was the true messianic moment, when the resurrection of the crucified Jesus demonstrated that the creator God had launched exactly that long-awaited project. The two Benjaminites are separated not only by nearly two millennia but by theology and eschatology. For Walter, all one could now hope for was a messianic moment of action, without visible antecedent. For Paul, the Messiah had come, fulfilling (however paradoxically) the long-deferred covenantal promise.

Paul was thus able to reclaim and retrieve Israel’s long history, not of course as a nineteenth-century story of an immanent progress, a smooth self-propelled upward journey into the light, but as the story of promises kept at last, of genuine anticipations of the coming kingdom, of a covenant faithfulness which would result, as Deuteronomy had warned and as Daniel had confessed, in devastating destruction and exile but also in the sudden and surprising covenant renewal spoken of by Moses and the prophets. The faithfulness of God had been displayed at last, and the whole argument of Romans depends on the fact that this revelation was *not* simply a blinding flash without a context. Yes: God’s covenant justice had been displayed ‘quite apart from the law’; but ‘the law and the prophets bore witness to it’. When Paul explained what he meant by that last phrase it became clear that

he was referring principally to the covenant which God had made with Abraham.¹² To deny this in Paul's day meant taking a large step towards Marcion. To deny it in the twentieth or twenty-first century means perpetuating the myth of a non- or even anti-Jewish 'Christianity', as we see abundantly in the flagship work of the new 'apocalyptic' movement, Martyn's commentary on Galatians.¹³

The entire enterprise of contemporary 'apocalyptic' readings of Paul got off on the wrong foot, in fact, when Käsemann picked up from the climate of the times (a further irony) the notion that perhaps 'apocalyptic' meant a totally new revelation which would take up all the hermeneutical space available, leaving no room for anything that went before. Benjamin's famous invoking of Klee's *Angelus Novus*, the angel that sees all previous 'history' as a heap of rubbish,¹⁴ might of course trigger some memories of the Paul of Philippians 3, gazing on his privileged past (including his Benjaminite tribal descent) and declaring it all to be *skybala*. But the analogy is only skin deep. Paul's whole point (Philippians 3.3) is that *we are the circumcision*, and that the ancient hope of Israel – the Messiah and resurrection itself, God's dealing with the fate even of the dead, the thing for which Walter Benjamin longed! – has now been accomplished. Paul is therefore living in the messianic moment, and urging his hearers to see themselves that way, too. 'The right time is now! The day of salvation is here!'¹⁵ Käsemann, determined for reasons of his Lutheran theology to rule out any notion of the covenant, lest it turn Paul's faith back into a Jewish work, or into a feature of bourgeois religiosity (which for Käsemann amounted to much the same thing), appealed to a notion of 'apocalyptic' which the ancient apocalyptists themselves would never have recognized but which has continued to be popular in the late-modern western world. In doing so he tacitly admitted, what we might have guessed from Benjamin himself, that his 'apocalyptic' was actually not so very different from the 'gnosticism' it had displaced in his reconfiguration of Bultmann's theory of Christian origins. For Bultmann, gnosticism had been at least the step-mother of early Christianity; for Käsemann 'apocalyptic' was the mother. This might, on the surface, have implied a welcome step towards a more

explicitly Jewish history-of-religions context. But Käsemann and his more recent followers have been careful to screen out precisely the themes where we see Paul's fulfilled-Jewish vision at its most obvious: Messiahship, the Abrahamic covenant, the faithfulness of the one God.

The answer to all this is not to abandon history but to do it better. Nor does this mean, of course, that whereas all others come with 'presuppositions', we British empiricists are simply reading 'history' with an uncluttered mind! This is why I spent some time at the start of this project articulating the method of 'critical realism' in relation to history itself. And this is why, in the first Part of this book, I spent considerably more time sketching out, not indeed a projection of my own time and culture on to Paul's world, but that world itself, as far as a critically realist historiography can glimpse it, in its own terms.

When we see Walter Benjamin in relation to the ancient Jewish world, he reminds me, not of Paul, but of those who found themselves in despair after the failure of the bar-Kochba revolt. They had calculated the times: nearly seventy years from the destruction of AD 70, and perhaps (who could tell?) nearly 490 years from whichever starting-point Daniel 9 might have had in mind. They had longed for the messianic moment, the great redemption, the time when the ancient martyrs would be raised from the dead to enjoy their long-awaited vindication. And it had come to nothing. This offers the best and most likely explanation for the rise of second-century Jewish gnosticism: everything that has gone before is worthless; history is a pile of rubble; scripture itself must be read upside down with the heroes and villains changing places; and the god of creation is a wicked and deceitful god, not to be trusted.¹⁶ Gnosticism believes in the failure, not the faithfulness, of Israel's God. The collapse of the bar-Kochba revolt was, of course, quite different from the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact which precipitated Benjamin's despair in 1940. But, *mutatis mutandis*, the apostle Paul would have looked at both of them, the disappointed Jews of the 130s and of the 1930s, and would have grieved that they could not recognize the true messianic moment as having already arrived in Jesus of Nazareth.

Ironically, it was the resurrection that made the difference. It is hard, sometimes, to probe beneath the surface of Benjamin's elusive writing and discern what exactly he had in mind in speaking of even the dead being at risk from the new tyrants, in hoping still for a redemption in which their ancient wrongs would be put right. The resurrection of Jesus, as the historical and transphysical new life of the crucified Jesus,¹⁷ had been screened out of much German theology long before Käsemann, and had long since come to function merely as a metaphor for the rise of faith in the crucified one. But this, as with Benjamin from his secular standpoint, pushed all the weight of expectation on to the future. And when that future failed to arrive on time (the secular echo of the 'delayed *parousia*'!), despair set in.¹⁸ The apostle Paul, from the tribe of Benjamin, spoke precisely of the messianic event which had *already* declared God's judgment against all the forces of evil and God's vindication of his suffering people. His kinsman, nearly two millennia later, was operating with the same overall set of questions, but with significant and quantifiable elements radically altered or even missing.

Walter Benjamin thus provides not only a highly illuminating partial analogy to the apostle, but also a highly illuminating partial explanation for the rise, and continuing recent popularity, of the so-called 'apocalyptic' school of interpretation. But the analogy to Paul remains only partial, and the parts that are omitted are the central features of Paul's own thought: the long-awaited return and continuing presence of Israel's God; resurrection; the inauguration of messianic time; the reappropriation of the now-fulfilled covenant promises. What both the Benjaminites do for us is to remind us that we cannot interpret these rich, dense and often dark themes without paying attention to their entire historical setting, however paradoxical it may be to say that of Walter Benjamin himself. We cannot, in other words, shrink them to debates about 'Paul and the law' or alternative readings of a disembodied, westernized 'soteriology'. They demand, at least, to be seen in their full political, religious, philosophical and cultural settings. That is what this book has been trying to do.

What I propose in this final chapter, then, is an outline of Paul's aims and indeed his achievements, but on a broader canvas than is normally allowed. I cherish the hope that the final volume in this series will deal more directly, in summary of the whole, with the question of early Christian missiology. One of the reasons I do not see the series as a 'New Testament Theology' is that theology itself, in the New Testament, is not an end in itself, but (as I argued in Part III) is the vital, non-negotiable and central ingredient in the healthy life of the community of Jesus' followers. Just as the principal and ultimate goal of all historical work on J. S. Bach ought to be a more sensitive and intelligent performance of his music, so the principal and ultimate goal of all historical work on the New Testament ought to be a more sensitive and intelligent practice of Christian mission and discipleship. It is clearly impossible to open up that huge topic at this stage of the present book. What we can and must do instead is to draw together the threads of the whole argument in such a way as to round off our picture of Paul and point on to the larger issues of early Christian mission, and indeed of theological and historical integration.

[2. Paul in Several Dimensions: the Ministry of Reconciliation](#)

The Benjaminite reflections offered above point us back to the larger context of Paul's life and work which we sketched in Part I and revisited in chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15. It is important now to insist that when we think about Paul's aims and intentions – the practical outflowing of his worldview, as in the theoretical model sketched in *NTPG* Part II and in chapter 6 above – we see them in this larger framework, resisting all attempts to squash them into something smaller.

I have in mind in particular the normal modern western meanings of words like 'mission' and 'evangelism'. There has of course been a good deal of discussion as to what these words mean, and no agreement is in sight. Both words are labels which different groups stick on different activities which for whatever reason they believe they ought to undertake

(or, in the case of some relativists, believe they ought not to undertake). The meanings shift with the activities. But the whole picture of ‘what Paul was doing’ has in my view been radically pulled out of shape by the two main drivers of modern western Christianity, and our study of Paul in his first-century context should go some way at least towards suggesting a larger and more integrated picture.¹⁹

First, there was the long period of the middle ages, in which Christian sights were firmly fixed on ‘going to heaven’ (with as little time as possible spent en route in purgatory). To be sure, there were many who believed in the importance of doing things in the present world too, whether like St Francis they wanted to transform the world from below or like some popes they wanted to impose a different sort of transformation from above. But even the Crusades, insofar as we can retrieve the motivation of those who organized or took part in them, had an eye towards an otherworldly reward. And – providing Marx with such legitimacy as his famous jibe possesses! – the promise of heavenly bliss was indeed, for the great majority, a drug to dull the pain of ordinary life.²⁰ This focus on an essentially Platonic ‘spiritual heaven’, discontinuous with this world and only related to it by the tangential mechanism of soul-saving and soul-making, has for a millennium radically distorted the western Christian hold on resurrection itself, the central claim and belief of the early Christians.²¹ Its effect on perceptions of Paul as ‘missionary’ or ‘evangelist’ has been to focus attention on Paul as a ‘soul-winner’. However disruptive the sixteenth-century Reformation may have been, and however many social, cultural and political factors must be taken into account in any proper account of it, its effect on the reading of Paul was not to change this basic perception of his ultimate aim (‘heaven’ as the goal, something which Paul never says, and ‘the soul’ as the thing that might or might not go there, another thing which Paul never says). The effect of the Reformation was, instead, simply to alter the terms and conditions on which this kind of ‘salvation’ might be found. Hence the stress on a particular reading of ‘justification’. Within such a context, to ask questions about Paul’s ‘mission’ or ‘evangelism’ would be to enquire how he went about collecting inhabitants for this future ‘heaven’.

And his missionary strategy would be seen as the way in which, whether deliberately or accidentally, he set about doing this.

To this western picture – which as anyone who has read this book to this point will be well aware does scant justice both to Paul and to ‘justification’! – the Enlightenment added its own extra spin. God and the world were to be sharply separated. Not only was the Christian destined for a completely different world; he or she had no business, *quā* Christian, trying to alter the course of the present one. A Platonist eschatology combined with an Epicurean polity: with God removed from the world, humans had to run it themselves, and any suggestion that the kingdom of God might have to do with theocracy, with things happening at God’s behest ‘on earth as in heaven’, was dangerous heresy. Many atheists insisted on this division in order to keep the rumour of God from spoiling the secular paradise; many Christians, to keep the filth of the present world from spoiling the spiritual one. Within this context, Paul’s ‘mission’ and ‘evangelism’ could not, by definition, have had anything to do with the rise and fall of empires, with speaking the truth to power or calling rulers to account. Any proposal along such lines would be countered with Jesus’ gnomic sayings, ‘Give Caesar back what belongs to Caesar’ and ‘My kingdom is not of this world’, and indeed with Paul’s brief point about civil obedience in Romans 13. The uncomfortable suggestion that ‘on earth as in heaven’ might mean what it said, or that when Matthew’s risen Jesus claimed to possess all authority on earth as well as in heaven he meant what he said, has been easily swatted away within the post-Enlightenment world, both Christian and non-Christian.²² Here we see the seed-bed of the various alternative modern ideas about ‘apocalyptic’. God is basically absent, certainly not providing a hidden hand for ‘history’. Anything he does will have to be a sudden ‘invasion’ from outside. This has little to do with first-century Jewish ideas, but plenty to do with modern philosophical and cultural strands.

Reformation and Enlightenment combine, too, to change the terms of Paul’s aims in relation to ‘religion’. As we saw in chapters 4 and 13, that slippery word has had various meanings, and it is today almost unusable

without constant explanation and qualification. Protestants have regularly regarded 'religion' as consisting of 'things humans do to please God' (often without noticing that 'pleasing God' is itself a Pauline category!), and so have played off 'religion' against the supposed higher reality of 'faith'. This has then been projected back on to 'Judaism', as though the ultimate target for Paul's polemic was *homo religiosus*; this ties up with the regular usage among atheists, who use 'religion' to mean 'superstition'. For tolerant post-Enlightenment thinkers, all 'religions' are good; for intolerant ones (and certain types of Protestant), bad. Within that framework, the question of Paul's aims looks different: was Paul trying to propagate 'religion', or to offer something else in its place? Confusion continues – worse confounded by contemporary muddles about 'religion and politics', and indeed *both* among those who see 'Judaism' as the 'wrong' type of religion and Christianity as the 'right' type *and* among those who see 'Judaism' as a 'religion' and therefore the wrong type of thing altogether.

All these divisions and confusions make it difficult to get back to Paul's aims and intentions, but this is where history itself comes into its own. In Part I we mapped the philosophical, religious and political world of Paul's day, and in the present Part we have been locating the Paul of Parts II and III within that larger, more confusing world. (Again we must insist: this has nothing to do with reducing Paul and his gospel to terms of their context, and everything to do with the fresh impact Paul had in proclaiming a gospel which was folly to Greeks and scandalous to Jews. To understand the folly, and the scandal, you have to understand the Greek and Jewish worlds of the day, rather than imagining that they correspond straightforwardly to elements in today's church or world.)

A further step, beyond the scope of the present volume, would have been to map, as well, the numerous ways in which the worlds of greco-roman philosophy, religion and politics impinged on one another. We have, of course, done a bit of that. We have noticed at various points the interplay of first-century 'religion' and 'politics', both Jewish and pagan. We have said less about the philosophical justifications for particular styles of government, or conversely the effect which living under various types of

polity may have had on philosophical thought. Nor have we explored very deeply the interplay between ‘religion’ and ‘philosophy’ themselves, though we may have said enough to indicate various ways forward. It would also have been good to delve more deeply into the multiple and complex ways in which other Jews in Paul’s day navigated the same larger worlds that he did, and the different proposals they came up with – proposals which of course included violent revolution, philosophical reflection, messianic movements and the formation of new communities, in addition to a proto-rabbinic withdrawal from the world into Torah-piety. First-century Jews, like twenty-first-century ones, were concerned with much more than just a set of ideas or theories. Once more: not just to interpret the world, but to change it.²³ All this must be taken, if not as read, at least as a set of signposts to tasks that demand more attention. But what we can do now, however briefly, is to sketch the equivalent complex integration in the case of Paul himself.

My proposal is that Paul’s aims and intentions were, from our point of view, multi-dimensional. When he engaged in ‘mission’ and ‘evangelism’; when he laboured as a pastor and teacher; when he worked with his hands to earn his own living; when he travelled restlessly, prayed without stopping, languished in prison; when, in particular, he wrote letters – what did he think he was doing? What, indeed, was he doing *without thinking about it*, since by now these ‘aims’ were part of his worldview, part of the spectacles through which he viewed the world? What were the aims and intentions about which, had he been challenged, Paul would have been momentarily puzzled in the way that a baseball player would be puzzled if asked why he had hit the ball and started running? What questions would have elicited the equivalent of the answer, ‘That’s just how the game is played’?

My proposal here is not entirely new, nor would it be credible if it were. But approaching it this way may reveal new aspects of a well-known perspective, and indeed bring us back to the task we set ourselves at the outset, that of drawing history and theology themselves closer together. My

proposal is that Paul's aims and intentions can be summarized under the word *katallagē*, 'reconciliation'. I mean this at several interlocking levels.²⁴

The risk with this proposal is that it will collapse back into one of the shrunken versions of Paul's task I mentioned earlier. 'Be reconciled to God; be reconciled to one another.' Paul did indeed say and do things that could be summarized like that, and at least once he used that kind of summary himself. But putting it like that might imply that his aims and intentions could be comfortably placed in the sedate living-room of late-modern western Christianity without moving any of the other furniture. And that, granted our argument so far, would be remarkable to the point of ridicule.

The danger is that one might quite easily speak about the 'reconciliation' of humans both with God and with one another in terms of the normal western 'gospel' and its immediate implications – that is, without regard either for Paul's insistence on the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham or for the larger impact his founding of messianic communities would have within the complex greco-roman world. That would leave chapters 2—5 and 12—15 of the present book simply as interesting decoration around the border, whereas my whole point, and I think Paul's whole point, is that his gospel left nothing on the outside. What we call 'philosophy', 'religion' and 'politics', and Paul's engagements with them, were not interesting side-effects, by-products spinning off the edge of his 'main' task like wood-shavings from a joiner's workshop which could then be used for kindling or animal bedding. For Paul, everything grew in the field of God's new world. His gospel was rooted in Jewish creational monotheism; his gospel proclaimed that in Jesus the Messiah a whole new creation, a new cosmos, had come to birth; his gospel (so he believed) articulated the truth about the world, about its creator, about all human life; those who believed this gospel formed the community in which that truth came to life. His gospel of reconciliation, in other words, was not 'about' something other than what we have separated out and labelled as 'politics', 'religion' and 'philosophy'. For him, 'reconciliation' *included* them all, indeed reconciled them all. His essentially Jewish, or if you like fulfilled-Jewish, way of looking at the whole world brought into a fresh unity that which, in non-Jewish eyes (then

and now!) might be seen as different or indeed competing aspects of life. Thus, reversing the movement of historical (and poetical) astronomy, what first we guessed as stars – separate spheres such as ‘philosophy’, ‘politics’ or ‘religion’ – Paul now knew as points, pinpricks in a dome behind which there shone a single, greater light, the light of the gospel itself. ‘New creation’ for him was not just an arm-waving phrase, a hyperbolic description of the radical change of life that happened when someone was ‘in the Messiah’. No:

If we are beside ourselves, you see, it’s for God; and if we are in our right mind, it’s for you. For the Messiah’s love makes us press on. We have come to the conviction that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all in order that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised on their behalf.

From this moment on, therefore, we don’t regard anybody from a merely human point of view. Even if we once regarded the Messiah that way, we don’t do so any longer. Thus, if anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation! Old things have gone, and look – everything has become new!

It all comes from God. He reconciled us to himself through the Messiah, and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. This is how it came about: God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors, speaking on behalf of the Messiah, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore people on the Messiah’s behalf to be reconciled to God. The Messiah did not know sin, but God made him to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might embody God’s faithfulness to the covenant.

So, as we work together with God, we appeal to you in particular: when you accept God’s grace, don’t let it go to waste! This is what he says:

I listened to you when the time was right,
I came to your aid on the day of salvation.

Look! The right time is now! Look! The day of salvation is here!²⁵

There are many passages in Paul that stake a claim to sum up what he thought he was doing, but this one trumps most of them – not least because in 2 Corinthians he has been forced to articulate afresh precisely ‘what he thought he was doing’, and this passage is one of its climaxes. Being ‘beside ourselves’ or ‘in our right mind’, being overmastered by a love which makes us act in a different way, seeing everything in a new light, claiming that a new world has been born, claiming even to be embodying

the divine covenant faithfulness – this sounds like someone who, challenged to the core by distressing and disconcerting opposition, whips off his worldview-spectacles and describes the lenses. *This is how I look at the world; this is how the things I do make sense within that worldview.* What I do is me; for that I came. This is one of Paul’s central statements, if not *the* central statement, of his aims and intentions.²⁶

The whole thing is framed in terms not of an escapist soteriology or piety but precisely of *new creation*. ‘If anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation’ – or, more literally (since as often Paul skips unnecessary words): ‘If anyone in Messiah, new creation.’ The newness is the messianic newness, that for which Walter Benjamin longed without realizing that his distant cousin had already proclaimed it. Paul believed himself to be standing on the threshold of new creation, the fresh reality for which the creation itself had been on tiptoe with expectation. But he was not just a spectator. He was called to do and say things through which new creation *was happening already*: each personal ‘new creation’, through Messiah-faith and baptism, was another signpost to the larger ‘new creation’ of which the Psalms and the prophets had spoken. Other passages in 2 Corinthians show that he was thinking in these terms, of a whole new world coming to birth with the arrival of renewed and transformed humans. He is jealous over the church and anxious that, like Eve, the bride may be tricked into a second fall:

I arranged to marry you off, like a pure virgin, to the one man I presented you to, namely the Messiah. But the serpent tricked Eve with its cunning, and in the same way I’m afraid that your minds may be corrupted from the single-mindedness and purity which the Messiah’s people should have.²⁷

Paul could only write like that if he really did believe that his apostolic work was an advance project for the ultimate new creation itself. He was in the business, not of rescuing souls from corrupting bodies and a doomed world, but of transforming humans as wholes, to be both signs of that larger new creation and workers in its cause. That is one of the reasons why the church mattered to Paul: ecclesiology was a signpost to cosmology. New

covenant; new creation. That is the sequence of thought which underlies 2 Corinthians 3, 4 and 5.

In saying even this we meet at once an opposite danger to those we already noted. If Paul is seen as a practical new-creation man, one might then cast him simply in the role of a glorified social worker on the one hand or a global politician on the other. If we say that he was aiming to generate and sustain communities which would not only point to, but actually be an advance part of, the coming renewed world, nervous western theologians might imagine that we were moving away from ‘the gospel’, the message about the love of God, about vindication at the coming judgment and so on. Anything but. The key passage we quoted from 2 Corinthians 5 is rooted in the statement a few verses earlier that all will stand before the Messiah’s judgment seat (5.10), and begins as we saw with a glorious statement of ‘the Messiah’s love’ in dying for all (5.14–15). This results in the fundamental appeal that people should be ‘reconciled to God’ (5.20), which Paul spells out more fully in the summary statement of the whole gospel in Romans 5.6–11. All is based once more on the death of Jesus, dying for all (2 Corinthians 5.14–15), made ‘to be sin on our behalf’ (5.20). None of this is lost if we draw attention as well to the larger framework of the passage, and to Paul’s larger, and integrated, aims and intentions there expressed.

That larger framework includes, of course, Paul’s dramatic statement that in the Messiah ‘God was reconciling *the world* to himself’ (5.19). This is closely cognate not only with the negative statement in Galatians 6.14, that through the cross ‘the world has been crucified to me and I to the world’, but also with the positive statement of Colossians 1, that the entire cosmos which was made through God’s son in the first place has now been reconciled by his crucifixion.²⁸ Not for the first time, 2 Corinthians is very close to Colossians, and here both affirm the cosmic scope of what God did in the Messiah, within which of course the personal or ‘individual’ message of the gospel finds its full and proper place. As in Colossians 1.23, Paul believed that the gospel had, in some strange sense, already been preached to every *creature, ktisis*, under heaven. Every creature: nothing is left out. No wonder all creation groans, having heard this word and longing for its

fulfilment. This leads to another tell-tale, almost throwaway, line: Paul explains his vocation in terms of being the servant of this (cosmic) gospel.

It already appears, then, that Paul did not see himself as simply snatching souls out of the world's wreck in order to populate a Platonic heaven.²⁹ In the light of Paul's statements in various places about his hope for the whole creation, we should take seriously what he says about God reconciling 'the world' to himself. Paul does not mean by this the kind of easy-going universalism that has been popular in some theological circles. His letters make that quite clear. Nor does he suppose that through his gospel the world's rulers will suddenly come to their senses and – among many other things! – stop persecuting him. His 'cosmic' claims are made in the teeth of the apparent evidence, evidence he parades before the Corinthians on either side of the passage under present discussion.³⁰ The Messiah's victory is always deeply paradoxical during the present age. There is no suggestion that the world has started on a smooth and steady upward path to utopia, or that the church itself is now launched into a triumphant development. But nor will the churches which come into being through Paul's announcement of the Jesus-focused good news of the creator God be mere accidental and temporary collections of individuals each of whom happens to have responded to that gospel. They will be signs and foretastes of the new world that is to be, not least because of their unity across traditional boundaries, their holiness of life, their embracing of the *human* vocation to bear the divine image, and particularly their suffering. As in Romans 8, the renewal of humans is the prelude to, and the means of, the renewal of all creation.

Paul's work both as an evangelist and as a pastor and teacher was therefore in the service of the unity and holiness of the church, as we saw in Part II. But the unity and holiness of the church was itself in the service of this larger aim. 'If anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation!' And with that new creation, as we saw in chapter 14, there went a new mode of knowing:

From this moment on, therefore, we don't regard anybody from a merely human point of view. Even if we once regarded the Messiah that way, we don't do so any longer.³¹

As I argued in chapter 14, this did not mean that Paul lived in a private world, a fantasy-land where he and others might claim to see things with no public reality. For Paul, the point was that the new creation launched with Jesus' resurrection was the *renewal of creation*, not its abolition and replacement; so that the new-creation mode of knowing was a deeper, truer, richer mode of knowing *about the old creation as well*. And with that deeper knowing came all sorts of consequences, which we have tried to plot in the preceding chapters.

In particular, the communities which came into being through the gospel were to embody that new world in the ways which our disjointed categories have separated out. They were indeed to be a kind of philosophical school, teaching and modelling a new worldview, inculcating a new understanding, a new way of thinking. They were to train people not only to practise the virtues everyone already acknowledged but also to develop some new ones, and with all that to find a new way to virtue itself, the transformed mind and heart through which the creator's intention would at last be realized. They were indeed, despite their lack of priests, sacrifices and temples, to be a new kind of 'religion': to read and study their sacred texts and to weave them into the beginnings of a liturgical praxis. In that worship, they believed, heaven and earth came together, God's time and human time were fused and matter itself was transfigured to become heavy with meaning and possibility. These communities were indeed, despite their powerlessness or actually because of it, on the way to becoming a new kind of *polis*, a social and cultural community cutting across normal boundaries and barriers, obedient to a different *kyrios*, modelling a new way of being human and a new kind of power. There, too, the second letter to Corinth leads the way, though arguably all that Paul was doing in his famous power/weakness contrasts in that letter was picking up and developing what Jesus had already said. And done.³² If we do not recognize Paul's churches as in some sense philosophical communities, religious groups and political bodies it is perhaps because we have been thinking of the modern meanings of such terms rather than those which were known in Paul's world.

My point, anyway, is that the worldview we studied in Part II and the theology we examined in Part III were designed by Paul with this larger new creation in mind. He saw the church as a *microcosmos*, a little world, not simply as an alternative to the present one, an escapist's country cottage for those tired of city life, but as the prototype of what was to come. That is why, of course, unity and holiness mattered. And, because this *microcosmos* was there in the world it was designed to function like a beacon: a light in a dark place, as again Jesus had said. The new way of being human, the new way in which 'philosophy', 'religion' and 'politics' were all scooped up together and transcended in a renewed-Jewish messianic way of life, was bound to be threatening to those who lived by other philosophies, religions and political arrangements. Hence the inevitability of suffering. But it was also supposed in equal measure to be compellingly attractive. Paul was an evangelist, and he knew of others who were called to that task, but there is surprisingly little evidence that he wanted his communities to be energetically outgoing in their own propagation of the faith. Enough for the moment, it seemed, that they should be ... united, and holy.

Everything we have said so far points to one conclusion which is obvious as soon as you see it but perhaps surprising in the present context. A place of reconciliation between God and the world; a place where humans might be reconciled to one another; a *microcosmos* in which the world is contained in a nutshell as a sign of what God intends to do for the whole creation; a new sort of *polis* in which heaven and earth come together, where a quite new sort of 'religion' takes place, where the hidden springs of wisdom are at last laid bare; a community which celebrates its identity as the people of the new exodus: all this means – as we might have guessed from his various comments – that Paul's aims and intentions could be summed up as the vocation to build and maintain *the new temple*.³³ Some of Paul's Jewish contemporaries had seen the dispersal of Jews and their culture around the world as a sign of a new world order. Similarly, Paul saw the dispersed 'temple' – small groups meeting in villages and cities with the living presence of the creator God in their midst by the spirit – as the sign

of creation at last transformed. That, as I argued earlier, is one of the hidden but important themes within the rich, dense chapter we know as Romans 8.

It is also here in 2 Corinthians 5. *God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah* (5.19). This evocative clause might be taken as referring simply to what God was doing *through* the Messiah. But the near-parallel in Colossians 1.19 ('in him all the Fullness was glad to dwell, and through him to reconcile all to himself') suggests that this was part of Paul's larger temple-imagery, part of that theme of YHWH's return to Zion which we saw in chapter 9 to be at the heart of his view both of Jesus and of the spirit. (We recall, too, that in Colossians 1.27 he envisaged individual churches as places where the Messiah was in the midst as a signpost to the eventual glory of the new creation.³⁴) And of course 2 Corinthians 5 stands on the shoulders of 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, where Paul vigorously expounds the 'new covenant' of Jeremiah 31 in terms of an ultimate fulfilment of what happened after Moses' intercession over Israel towards the end of the book of Exodus. Exodus ends, despite the sin of the golden calf, with the Shekinah coming to dwell in the newly made wilderness tabernacle, thus completing a circle with the implicit 'temple' of all creation in Genesis 1, and anticipating the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem and its filling with the divine presence (1 Kings 8.10–13). Paul picks up that whole theme and sees the goal of the new exodus as being the arrival of the divine glory through the Messiah and the spirit:

All of us, without any veil on our faces, gaze at the glory of the lord as in a mirror, and so are being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as you'd expect from the lord, the spirit.

We don't proclaim ourselves, you see, but Jesus the Messiah as lord, and ourselves as your servants because of Jesus; because the God who said 'let light shine out of darkness' has shone in our hearts, to produce the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah.³⁵

For Paul, then, 'evangelism' was not just about soul-rescuing, and 'mission' was not just about the wider advancement of Christian understanding. Paul's apostolic task was, so to speak, tabernacle-construction, temple-

building. That is clear already in 1 Corinthians 3. In other words, he saw his vocation in terms of bringing into being ‘places’ – humans, one by one and collectively – in which heaven and earth would come together and be, yes, *reconciled*. ‘God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah’: the Messiah is the new temple where heaven and earth meet, reconciled through his sacrifice. Paul’s vocation was to announce that this had happened, to ‘name the Messiah’ after the manner of a herald proclaiming a new sovereign (see below) and so to extend this temple-shaped mission into the rest of the world. This was his equivalent of those sudden biblical glimpses of pagans flocking to Jerusalem to worship the true God.³⁶ This time, however, the Shekinah was going out into the world (this turning of the Jewish hope inside out explains Paul’s missionary strategy, as we shall see in a moment), so that in every place there would be a sign that heaven and earth had come together indeed, that the creator and the cosmos were reconciled at last.³⁷

Every single Christian would be a living example of this (‘if anyone is in the Messiah, there is a new creation’). But whereas much western understanding has seen the individual as the goal, Paul sees individual Christians as signs pointing to a larger reality. He describes his own mission vividly in verse 20: ‘We implore people on the Messiah’s behalf’, he writes, ‘to be reconciled to God.’ He longs to see the heaven-and-earth event, the temple-event, happening once more. The Messiah’s sacrificial death has already occurred (verse 21a), a gift of love for the whole world (verses 14–15), and the ‘temple’ can now be the place of reconciliation. Paul’s ‘aim’, the worldview-level understanding of his own role in the midst of it all, drawing on the servant-imagery from Isaiah, was that he was called, as an apostle, to embody God’s faithfulness to the covenant. ‘The faithfulness of God’ was not simply to be a main theme of Paul’s teaching. It was to be the hidden inner meaning of his life – and, as befits a follower of the crucified Messiah, particularly of his suffering.³⁸

The larger reality to which this points, the new creation itself, is to be symbolized by *the whole church, united and holy*. The new temple is to be the place to which all nations will come to worship the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob. That is Paul's vision in the theological climax to Romans (15.7–13, on which see below), and it was the practical state of affairs for which he worked tirelessly and about which he wrote in letter after letter. The reconciliation of Jew and Greek, particularly, was obviously near the heart of Paul's aim. Despite efforts that are still made to suggest that they remained quite separate in his mind (see chapter 15 above), the force of his repeated denials cannot be gainsaid: 'there is no distinction'; 'there is no distinction between Jew and Greek'; 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters'; 'there is no longer Jew or Greek'; 'circumcision is nothing; neither is uncircumcision'.³⁹ Yes, of course, Paul was aware that existing differences still had to be navigated with wisdom and humility. That is what he does from one angle in Romans 11, from another in Romans 14. But all this is in the service of the larger vision, from which he would not step back even for a moment. It was the vision of a new temple, a new house of praise, where songs originally sung in the shrine in Jerusalem would arise from hearts and mouths in every nation:

Welcome one another, therefore, as the Messiah has welcomed you, to God's glory. Let me tell you why: the Messiah became a servant of the circumcised people in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of God – that is, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and to bring the nations to praise God for his mercy. As the Bible says:

That is why I will praise you among the nations,
and will sing to your name.

And again it says,

Rejoice, you nations, with his people.

And again,

Praise the Lord, all nations,
and let all the peoples sing his praise.

And Isaiah says once more:

There shall be the root of Jesse
the one who rises up to rule the nations;
the nations shall hope in him.⁴⁰

All this creates a vantage point from which we can see, in a far more integrated fashion than normal, the various elements of Paul's work which belonged to the 'aims and intentions' at the heart of his worldview. 'The ministry of reconciliation', which includes 'the message of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5.18, 19), is his own shorthand for activities which we observe, both in his letters and in the pages of Acts, as characteristic symptoms of deeper motivations. When we understand them all in the light of the temple-vision we have just briefly expounded they attain a rich and multi-faceted coherence.

In particular, we may note various features which are often left isolated but which come together under this rubric. His teaching in 1 Corinthians 8—10 and Romans 14—15 about *adiaphora* and how to handle the questions related to that topic; his high-voltage polemic in Galatians about gentiles not needing to become physically Jewish; his cooler but no less effective argument in Romans about gentile Christians not despising the other 'branches'; his knocking of heads together in the faction-ridden church in Corinth; his constant plea in Philippians for a deep and rich unity – all these bespeak a settled aim, to bring about through teaching and example the single united family which God had promised to Abraham and had accomplished through the Messiah. The 'Collection' of money from gentile churches to take to impoverished Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judaea no doubt started as a bright idea, but once it had taken root it deserves to be seen, in worldview terms, at least as an 'intention', flowing from the 'aim' of Jew/gentile unity in the Messiah.

True, when he cautiously explains in 2 Corinthians the fact that on his forthcoming visit he will expect to find the money already collected, he does not go into any detail about what we might call the 'ecumenical' purpose of it all, except in the most general terms:

Through meeting the test of this service you will glorify God in two ways: first, because your confession of faith in the Messiah's gospel has brought you into proper order, and second, because you have entered into genuine and sincere partnership (*koinōnia*) with them and with everyone. What's more, they will then pray for you and long for you because of the surpassing grace God has given to you.⁴¹

Why he does not spell out more fully the underlying symbolic as well as practical reasons for the Collection, we can only guess. Perhaps it was because of the strained relationships with some Jerusalem-based Christians implied in 11.22 and the surrounding passages. Perhaps it was because of an earlier sense of implicit competition between the supporters of Paul and Peter, as reflected in 1 Corinthians 1—4. However, since Paul does not mention here, either, the fact of the Jerusalem Christians' impoverished state, but takes it for granted, perhaps he is also taking for granted the theological and symbolic significance which emerges in the fuller account in Romans 15:

Now, though, I am going to Jerusalem to render service to God's people there. Macedonia and Achaia, you see, have happily decided to enter into partnership (*koinōnia*) with the poor believers in Jerusalem. They were eager to do this, and indeed they owe them a debt. If the nations have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, it is right and proper that they should minister to their earthly needs. So when I have completed this, and tied up all the loose ends, I will come via you to Spain ...⁴²

Here again we have the theme of *koinōnia*, which we have seen ever since the start of this book to be a key term for Paul, flagging up his sense not only of a purpose pragmatically shared but also of an aim and goal on which the Messiah's people agree and for which they covenant to work together. And since what Paul here says about the theological and symbolical purpose of the Collection coheres so closely with the aim of reconciliation which we have already seen to run through so much of his writing, we can be sure that this was not an afterthought, an extra idea which had not previously occurred to Paul, but was rather deep within his own motivational pattern. If the goal of 'reconciliation' thus belongs in Paul's worldview as one of his key *aims*, we may suggest that the Collection, which by the time of 2 Corinthians is a project that Paul and his audience both take for granted, should itself be classified in worldview terms as an *intention*, something which, though in principle detachable from the 'aims', has now become so closely identified with one of those 'aims' as now itself to be taken for granted. The only remaining questions are then,

Will the money be ready when I come?⁴³ and, Will they accept it when I give it to them?⁴⁴

I have argued in chapter 11 against the suggestion that Paul was hoping to bring about, through delivering the Collection in Jerusalem, some kind of large-scale last-minute conversion of Jews, and perhaps even the *parousia* itself.⁴⁵ Had that been his expectation (showing how generous the gentiles were being and so ‘making my flesh jealous’, and so forth), he would hardly have been telling the Romans that once he had delivered the money he was coming to see them on the way to Spain. By the same token, I do not think that he regarded his proposed Spanish mission as a kind of final act of missionary work, completing some biblical itinerary so that *then*, perhaps by taking yet more money to Jerusalem, he would bring about either that large-scale Jewish conversion, or the *parousia*, or both.⁴⁶ Such suggestions stem partly from the continuing notion of an ‘imminent *parousia*’ itself, and partly from an attempt first to read between the lines both of Romans 11 and of Romans 15 and then to join up those imagined in-between lines. Granted that all essays in Pauline interpretation involve some reading between the lines of his dense and allusive prose, in this case both halves of the proposal are in my view unwarranted. Paul did not think the *parousia* would necessarily happen at once, and he certainly was not trying to provoke or hasten it by his missionary work.

So what was his strategy, then? Why did he go where he went? Why did he not go elsewhere? What did he mean by ‘finding myself with no more room in these regions’, that is, in the east (Romans 15.23)? Did he think that by going to Spain he was completing some biblical or prophetic trajectory, or was this simply a pragmatic decision?⁴⁷

There is no doubt that Paul did have ancient prophecy in mind when thinking about his journeys. ‘People who hadn’t been told about him will see,’ he says, quoting Isaiah 52.15 in Romans 15.21; ‘people who hadn’t heard will understand.’ He is making a very specific point here, namely that his ‘intention’ has been ‘to announce the good news in places where the Messiah has not been named, so that I can avoid building on anyone else’s foundation’.⁴⁸ A cryptic hint, of course; but we are almost certainly correct

to see this as a reference at least to Peter. If Peter has founded the church in Rome, Paul has tried to go elsewhere; and he is only really going to Rome now, it appears, in order to use it as the natural staging-post for Spain.⁴⁹

This suggests, incidentally but importantly, that by this time the division of labour agreed in Galatians 2.1–10 had broken down, if only for practical reasons. Peter had clearly not stuck to the agreement to go only to Jews, and all the signs are that Paul had regularly been speaking in synagogues in the Jewish Diaspora, not merely to non-Jews. Indeed, the message he insists on in writing to Rome is that the gospel is ‘to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek’.⁵⁰ Though it is undoubtedly the case that this advance statement is preparing the gentile audience for the dénouement in chapter 11 (the warning against gentile Christians presuming upon their new status and looking down on the ‘broken branches’ of unbelieving Jews), a good case can be made for seeing it as a statement of actual missionary policy. Paul is explaining to the Roman audience how his gospel actually works, not only so that they will apply it to their own situation but so that they will support him, presumably financially, in the next stage of his own mission in which this policy would be carried out once more.⁵¹ The picture in Acts, of course, is just this: Paul preaches first in synagogues and only then, having been thrown out, turns to gentile audiences.⁵² Older scholarship often rejected this as unhistorical on the basis, not least, of Galatians 2.1–10, and particularly on the ideological basis, latent still in the DNA of much scholarship, that Paul had ‘translated’ the original ‘Jewish’ message into a ‘gentile’ one, swapping the idea of a royal or scripturally warranted Messiah for a Jesus-shaped version of the *kyrios*-cults of the wider ancient world. Such a ‘Paul’ would have had no particular reason to go into a synagogue in the first place. We have said enough in chapter 9 and elsewhere, I trust, to refute that notion quite thoroughly. Paul’s gospel was a *Jewish* message for the *non-Jewish* world – something which classic history-of-religions analyses found difficult to grasp – for the very good reason that he believed the God of Israel to be the God of the whole world, and Israel’s Messiah to be the world’s true lord. If we allow our vision of his missionary methods and practice to be shaped by this foundational

theological insight we will see that there is no reason for doubting the basic pattern we find in Acts. Indeed, as Ed Sanders pointed out thirty years ago, if Paul had not gone on attending synagogues he would not have continued to receive the standard, and horrible, synagogue punishment of ‘forty lashes less one’.⁵³ He went on going to the synagogue; and, when he did, the things he said and did (or perhaps the things he was believed to have said and done elsewhere) provoked serious punishment. Had the older paradigm been correct, he could have spared himself the trouble. He saw his work being, as he says, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

We may safely assume, from the way Romans is structured, that he intended his audience to gather that this was to be his continuing practice in the ongoing mission to Spain as well. This raises an odd question. Older commentaries used to assume that since there were plentiful Roman settlements in Spain,⁵⁴ and since the Jewish Diaspora had spread alongside the Roman one, there were plenty of Jews there already. Josephus and others strongly imply that by this stage there were Jews in every possible place around the world, but this has not been verified by archaeological remains.⁵⁵ Jewett quotes Romans 1.14 to the effect that Paul declares his indebtedness to both Greeks and barbarians in order to link his missionary plans to a Spain which was, he says, ‘stubbornly resistant to greco-roman culture’, but if this was really the case why would Paul’s indebtedness to *Greeks* lead to a mission there?⁵⁶ And when, two verses later, summarizing his main theme, Paul speaks of the gospel being God’s power for salvation ‘to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek’ (1.16), we may reasonably wonder why he would speak thus, in a passage acknowledged to be thematic for the whole letter, if the purpose of that letter were to solicit support for a mission to a territory where no Jews were to be found. We may therefore take it that Paul at least believed that there were significant Jewish communities in Spain.

But why Spain itself? It was, of course, the limit of the known world – though we may suppose that Paul’s travel plans would be far more likely to take him towards the eastern shore of Spain in the first instance, rather than going on through the Pillars of Hercules and up the western side of the

peninsula. He might in any case have been planning to travel to Spain mostly on land, perhaps cutting corners by sea voyages but taking in the north-west coast of Italy and the southern coast of Gaul.⁵⁷ However, the voyage from Ostia, Rome's port, to Tarraco in north-eastern Spain was regularly accomplished in four days; with Spain as a highly important centre of Roman activity there was a regular brisk traffic, and Paul may well have hoped to make straight for Tarraco itself, where the massive new temple to Augustus dominated the city, easily visible to incoming ships.⁵⁸ But, to repeat, why Spain at all?

It is not easy to be sure how Paul's mental map might have worked, but Isaiah repeatedly mentions 'coastlands far away' and 'the ends of the earth' as places where the good news will be proclaimed, and it is a fair guess – especially considering that he quotes Isaiah when talking about these plans – that he had passages like this in mind.⁵⁹

One such passage appends a string of place-names:

For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. From them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put, and Lud – which draw the bow – to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. They shall bring all your kindred from all the nations as an offering to YHWH ... to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says YHWH.⁶⁰

These places are not all straightforward to locate, to say the least. We have no means of knowing whether Paul, reading Isaiah, would have been able to place them on a map either. Tarshish, famous in the Bible as the place to which Jonah was trying to flee instead of going obediently to Nineveh, has been located both in north Africa, on the coast of the Red Sea, and even as a synonym for 'Tarsus', Paul's birthplace; but a majority now see it as 'Tharsis' in southwestern Spain.⁶¹ Put seems to be in Africa; Josephus identifies it with Libya.⁶² Libya has also been suggested as the location of Lud, though it is now less favoured; an alternative would be to see it as a form of 'Lydia', on the west coast of Asia Minor, but yet another possibility is to place it on the east African coast south of Egypt.⁶³ Tubal is most likely to be found in eastern Asia Minor, perhaps in the area of Cilicia, Paul's own

home region. The word 'Javan' is probably cognate with 'Ionia', originally designating the coastlands and islands of western Asia Minor; by the time of Daniel 8.21 it means, more or less, 'Greece', which is how some modern translations render it.⁶⁴ Any attempt, therefore, to make Isaiah 66 correspond to Paul's travels has to stretch the point more than a little: even supposing 'Lud' to be Lydia, which would allow Paul's known journeys to intersect with three out of the five, hoping to add Tarshish in an eventual Spanish journey, it still leaves 'Put' unaccounted for, and also, if it is after all in Africa, 'Lud'. Isaiah 66 thus hardly matches what we know of either Paul's actual journeys or his future plans.⁶⁵

This raises, however, another major question when we are examining his 'aims': why did Paul not mention north Africa at all? Was he planning to return from Spain along the north African coast? If not, why not – granted that the whole coastline was dotted with greco-roman towns and cities, some of considerable culture and antiquity, many if not most with thriving Jewish populations? Did he suppose that someone else – not Peter presumably, but one of the other apostles – had already been travelling westwards from Egypt, founding churches as he went? We do not know. Nor do we have any idea what Paul would have thought about the lands to the east, regions for which his own starting-point, Antioch in Syria, would have been the gateway. If, as Richard Bauckham has argued, James in Jerusalem was seen as holding the geographical centre, not simply the eastern edge, of the new messianic movement, how did Paul view the other half of that missionary outreach?⁶⁶ Does it even matter?

It might do – if we supposed that Paul actually saw the world through spectacles in which his own call to action, the deep-rooted 'aim' in his worldview, was to convert the whole world, or at least representatives of the whole world, before the *parousia*. Certainly Paul sees the entire cosmos as already having heard, in some sense or other, the good news of the Messiah's resurrection and of the triumph of the creator God through him. Certainly he sees himself as the servant of that good news, not only of some small part of it. But the sweeping statement of a north-westerly trajectory, from Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum, tells a very different story from

the converting-the-world narrative.⁶⁷ This is Paul *on his way to Rome*, even if, as he finally plans his visit, he insists that Rome is actually a staging-post for Spain. Or at least, this is a Paul deliberately announcing the name of Jesus in places where the Roman empire and culture ran deep; but that would have been true, as well, in central north Africa, and as we have seen Paul never mentions that as a possible further missionary field. The closest we get is Titus in Crete, and that is an outpost of Greece, not an outcrop of Africa.⁶⁸

My proposal, then, is that in some of the scholarly discussion an imagined eschatology has ousted an actual political engagement. It is not the first time such a thing has happened. The suggestion that Paul was eager to get converts from ‘the ends of the earth’ in time for, and perhaps in order to hasten, the *parousia* has, as we have seen, serious problems of its own. But it does not in any case fit with Paul’s own actual statements of his present achievements and future intentions. If we add up the key sites of his mission: Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth, and add to that list Illyricum (Romans 15.19), Rome itself and the Roman cities of Spain, what we are looking at is not a trawl of the whole created order, but the establishment of messianic communities in the very places where Caesar’s power was strongest.⁶⁹ Granted, Caesar’s power was also strong in Alexandria (in Egypt) and in Carthage (in ‘Africa’ proper: roughly modern Tunisia). But a glance at the map indicates the priorities, even supposing that Paul imagined the north African seaboard still to be virgin territory. He had travelled the central heartlands of the Roman empire, and it was now time to head for the city at the very heart itself, and to go on from there to the key western outpost of Rome’s wide domains. If we want to understand Paul’s ‘aims’, this is where to look.⁷⁰

This strategy may, of course, have been partly pragmatic. Paul as a Roman citizen could travel freely in that world, or at least more freely than non-citizens, appealing where necessary to the Roman order and the local magistrates, even if they did not understand what he was talking about. But I propose, in the light of chapters 5 and 12 above, that Paul did indeed conceive of his mission and vocation, not simply, as he says tactfully to the

Romans, to announce the Messiah in places where he has not yet been named (Romans 15.20), but to do so in the places where another *kyrios*, another world ruler, another *basileus*, was being named and was being worshipped as the one and only sovereign. Those references to ‘above every name that is named’ are not there by accident.⁷¹ This in turn reinforces my view that the heart of Paul’s gospel is not ‘here’s how to be saved’, or ‘get on board before the *parousia*’, but *Jesus is lord*. The ends of the earth would hear this in due time. Perhaps it is a shame that nobody invented a legend in which one might say of Paul, rather than of Jesus, ‘And did those feet in ancient time walk upon England’s mountains green?’, even if the implied answer would again be, ‘No, actually.’ But the point was to name the Messiah, to announce him as lord, in the culture-forming places, the cities to and from which all local or international roads ran.

This explains, I think, the otherwise strange suggestion that Paul had ‘no room’ for further work in the east. Many had not heard the gospel; most had not responded to it in faith. But Jesus had been announced there as *kyrios*: Paul’s work was that of a herald, a *kēryx*, one who announces a *kērygma*.⁷² All this in turn reinforces my claim, throughout this book, that Paul’s theology and gospel remained fundamentally *Jewish*, a biblically rooted message about the Jewish Messiah who was the world’s true lord and who therefore had to be proclaimed as such to the non-Jewish world.⁷³

Why then did Paul concentrate on the Roman world in this really rather narrow sense? A second level of pragmatism suggests itself: not only could Paul travel relatively easily in the world where he could claim *civis Romanus sum*, but he knew that new ideas and beliefs would flow out along the trade routes from the great centres to the far-flung interior. The reason he could write to Philemon about Onesimus in Colosse is that he had met them both, and been responsible for the conversion of both, but not in the small inland town of Colosse itself, which he had not visited. Most likely he met them both in Ephesus. The wild northern lands of Moesia, Sarmatia and the rest might similarly be reached from Philippi and Thessalonica; Gaul, perhaps even Britain, from Italy and Spain. Stick to the Roman roads and cities, and the trade routes will do the rest. But I suggest another, more

obviously Jewish, exegetical and theological reason for his concentration on the Roman heartlands.

Paul, like his mid-century Jewish contemporaries, undoubtedly knew the great four-kingdom prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7. He would have had no difficulty in decoding the fourth kingdom as Rome. Like *4 Ezra*, though with a very different lion to stand against the eagle, he will have identified Rome as the leading edge of opposition to the suddenly inbreaking kingdom of God. If, according to Daniel 7, the vindication of the human figure, whom one must assume Paul would construe messianically, meant that ‘the people of the saints of the most high’ were now receiving the kingdom, there was no point in announcing that kingdom out in the deserts of Arabia or the far-off uplands of Scythia.⁷⁴ Whatever else we may think about the representation of Paul in Acts, here it is spot on: Paul ends up in Rome, boldly announcing the kingdom of God and the sovereignty of Jesus the Messiah, with no one stopping him.⁷⁵ If we are in any historically grounded sense to see Paul as an ‘apocalyptic’ thinker, this is what such a claim might mean: that with the sudden arrival (and crucifixion and resurrection) of Israel’s Messiah, the dark night of successive world empires was over and the new day had begun, the day in which that Messiah would call those empires, and particularly the final one, to account. If we understand this aright, we should actually have predicted that Paul, as the herald of the freshly revealed divine faithfulness in the Messiah, was most likely to concentrate his efforts on ‘naming the Messiah’ in the key places where a very different name had been ‘named’.⁷⁶

All this means that the ‘ministry of reconciliation’ which Paul cites as his central vocation is not simply about reconciling individuals to the one God, or about bringing such individuals together into the single family of the church. These tasks remain vital and central, but they are designed both to point beyond themselves and to be the means of that to which they point, namely, the reconciliation of the whole creation to its creator – which involves, as always, rescuing it from the rule of usurpers. This hypothesis points on to a wider thesis about the Pauline integration of themes, strands

and cultural overtones which theology and exegesis have often separated out but which, I suggest, Paul himself held firmly together.

3. Integration and Reconciliation

All we have said so far means that we must postulate a thorough integration, in the ‘aims and intentions’ section of Paul’s own mindset, between what we have seen as the Jewishly rooted gospel of the Messiah and what we have seen as the political engagement between Paul’s gospel and Caesar’s empire. An integration, in fact, which, granted the long years in which scholars have seen them as completely distinct, might even be seen as a ‘reconciliation’, though if I am right Paul would never have seen (what we call) ‘politics’ and (what we call) ‘theology’ as separable in the first place. The political engagement we have sketched in chapter 12, in other words, was not simply a distant or occasional ‘implication’ of a mission which was at its heart ‘about’ something else (either dehistoricized ‘conversions’ or a hasty pre-*parousia* collection of representative gentiles). As in the famous paragraph in Mark 10.35–45, where James and John are put in their place by Jesus’ radical redefinition of power itself, at the heart of which lies the claim that ‘the son of man didn’t come to be waited on; he came to be the servant, to give his life “as a ransom for many”’, we find the (Isaianic) good news of Jesus and his death at the heart of the (equally Isaianic) proclamation that Israel’s God is sovereign over the nations and their idols.⁷⁷ When Paul, summarizing his missionary strategy in Romans 15, quotes the same section of Isaiah, we may confidently propose that he has in mind the same complex integration. At the level of worldview or mindset, so deep that he now took it for granted, Paul aimed to announce Jesus as lord right across Caesar’s principal domains, to make it clear that the Messiah had been vindicated and that at his name every knee would bow – even if at the moment this was more or less bound to lead to persecution, prison and death.

Paul's aims have a kind of holy boldness about them, a *parrhēsia*, a freedom of speech. Just as he could confidently if cheekily remind the Philippian magistrates that they should have treated a Roman citizen like him very differently, so he could confidently speak and live for Jesus as the ultimate lord over against the now hugely overblown pretensions of Rome, and particularly of Caesar himself. The tension between those two appeals – the one capitalizing on Roman citizenship, the other challenging the pretensions of Caesar – is more apparent (especially on the two-dimensional spectrum of late-modern western politics) than real. No biblically literate Jew – think of the book of Daniel! – would have had any difficulty reconciling the two. The one sovereign God wants human rulers to establish order, but will hold them to account when they abuse that vocation and divinize themselves. Paul's double position – Roman citizen, apostle of the Messiah – fits exactly within the inaugurated-eschatological version of that complex belief. Placing Paul within his actual historical context, as we have tried to do in this book, enables us to make sense of his underlying aims in a way which an abstracted 'Paul', seeking only to save a few more souls or to precipitate the *parousia*, or indeed to announce an ahistorical 'apocalypse', cannot do.

This also helps us to integrate the other two dimensions of his wider context. The ultimate symbol of his worldview – the church itself, its unity and holiness – was to be expressed in an actual outward fashion which, though startlingly unlike anything the ancient world knew as 'religion' (no sacrifices, no stone-and-timber temples, no priestly hierarchy), nevertheless retained vestiges of something we may call 'religion'. As the old 'religions' reflected the old social order, with magistrates doubling as priests and vice versa, so this new quasi-religion, as we explored it in chapter 13, reflected the new social order in the Messiah, where neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female had any privilege, all being one in the Messiah. Navigating what that meant, managing the puzzles which arose and sorting out the chaos that sometimes resulted occupied a fair part of Paul's letters, much more in fact than is taken up with christology or justification, though each of those key 'doctrines' is of course umbilically linked to the central

symbol. Again, what Paul wanted to see as the result of all his labours was cross-culturally united *worship*; and unless we are to deny that ‘worship’ is in some sense a fundamentally ‘religious’ activity, which seems absurd, certainly in Paul’s world, we must conclude that he was indeed concerned not only to integrate his essentially Jewish gospel with his implicit subversion of the claims of Caesar but also to accomplish something to which Israel’s scriptures had pointed, and something which Caesar had tried to achieve in his way, namely a *cult* in which the one God would be worshipped by people of every kind and kin. ‘Religion’, in this rather severely redefined sense, is integrated with everything else Paul was trying to do.

We see this in a fleeting but significant moment in the same passage in Romans 15 where Paul gives us a glimpse of his mature missionary strategy. He is, he says,

a minister of King Jesus for the nations, working in the priestly service of God’s good news, so that the offering of the nations may be acceptable, sanctified in the holy spirit.⁷⁸

This sudden flash of sacerdotal language may well be linked to the passage in Isaiah we looked at before, where the prophet speaks of people from every nation flocking towards Jerusalem so that they may see the divine glory which will be revealed there:

I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them ... they shall bring all your kindred from all the nations as an offering to YHWH, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says YHWH, just as the Israelites bring a grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of YHWH. And I will also take some of them as priests and as Levites, says YHWH.⁷⁹

For Paul, of course, the divine glory had already been unveiled, not in the Jerusalem Temple but in Jesus and the spirit. The geographical focus has therefore shifted, resulting in a centrifugal mission rather than a centripetal one. This is a further aspect of his reworked, or indeed inside-out, Jewish eschatology. But the point remains: the nations will themselves constitute the new sacrifice, to be brought in worship to the one God.⁸⁰ We saw above that though Paul was probably not following the list of locations in the same

passage – Tarshish, Put, Lud, Tubal and Javan – as a blueprint for his own geographical strategy, he may well have had the underlying point in mind, modified by his sense that Rome, the last great world empire, had to be the focus of his messianic announcement. In the same way, he was not following Isaiah’s Jerusalem-centred agenda, but was transferring to the new eschatological situation the same idea of priestly service with non-Jewish nations as the offering.⁸¹ The passage in Isaiah goes on to speak of the new heavens and the new earth in which ‘all flesh shall come to worship before me, says YHWH’.⁸² Paul had established, earlier in Romans, that the entire world was now the ‘inheritance’ of the Messiah and his people, as indeed had been promised to Abraham.⁸³ He now drew together, in a fresh configuration, several elements of older Jewish worldwide hope: the message reaching to the coastlands, the nations coming in pilgrimage with sacrifices, financial contributions being sent to Jerusalem, the worldwide announcement of Israel’s God as the ultimate sovereign.⁸⁴ As with every other element of his theology, so it was with his mission strategy (at least as he articulated it in Romans; we have no means of knowing how long this idea had been forming in his mind, and his response to the charge of vacillation in 2 Corinthians 1.15–22 may indicate that the current plan was fairly recent). The crucified and risen Messiah, and the outpoured spirit, meant here as elsewhere a transformed and transforming fulfilment of the Isaianic promises. Paul clearly saw himself not only as a ‘herald’ but also as a ‘prophet’; but the ancient prophetic agenda had been transposed into the startling new key required by the gospel.

All this – the establishment and maintenance of communities in which this Jewish Messiah-message brought to birth a quasi-empire rivalling Caesar’s and a quasi-cult to give it expression – provided a fresh and previously unimagined coherence of gospel, politics and religion. In a world where *collegia* were carefully regulated, sometimes suppressed and often under suspicion, there is no way that the communities called into being by Paul’s gospel could have been seen as politically irrelevant.⁸⁵ But there is one final element. Paul also knew that he had to think through, and to teach, a coherent and integrated vision of the one God and his world

which would serve and sustain that already large and complex whole in the way that the great philosophies had served in relation to their wider world. Here again I regret that space has forbidden the study of integrative models in the greco-roman world itself. I would like to have explored more fully the ways in which someone like Cicero actually integrated, in thought as well as practice, the worlds of politics, religion and philosophy, in each of which he was a prominent participant. But we can at least see the way in which *Paul* integrated them. His implicit and sometimes explicit engagement with the great philosophical systems, particularly that of the Stoics, retaining his Jewish integrity but doing his best to ‘take every thought prisoner and make it obey the Messiah’, has been explored in chapter 14. What we now glimpse is that this engagement is itself part of a wider reconciliation or integration.

How did this work? The slogan ‘all truth is God’s truth’ is a modern coinage, but Paul would have agreed with it whole-heartedly, just as he was prepared to say that all food was God’s food: the earth and its fullness belong to the lord.⁸⁶ Paul’s vision of *physics*, as we saw, was of an integrated cosmos in which heaven and earth, meant to work together, had *come* together in Jesus the Messiah and were united afresh, through the spirit, in the lives and especially the worship of those who belonged to the Messiah. His understanding of *ethics*, rooted in Jewish creational monotheism, was that of a genuinely human existence in which the new creation was coming to birth. He affirmed the goodness of the original creation (hence the strong emphasis on classic Jewish sexual ethics, the key point where Paul insisted that gentile converts should renounce gentile ways) while insisting that the death and resurrection of the Messiah had dealt with the sin, corruption and death that was distorting and destroying the old creation. His understanding of *logic* itself, the basis and process of knowledge, was transformed into a new kind of knowing, a cross-and-resurrection-based knowledge in which the renewed and transformed mind of Romans 12.2, ‘the mind of the Messiah’ as in 1 Corinthians 2.16, could and should reach out and grasp the realities of the new world as well as understanding, from that perspective, the real truths about the old one. All

this we have explored quite fully already. Here we note that the categories into which scholarship has necessarily divided Paul's complex world are themselves reconciled and integrated in multiple and overlapping ways in his writings.

Much of this has not normally even been mentioned, far less investigated, in works on 'Pauline theology'. But unless we are to give a severely shrunken account of that great but elusive reality it is vital that we see the 'theology', escaping on Jewish wings from the category of 'physics' where it had previously belonged in the world of the non-Jewish philosophers, as itself proposing a new and larger category of understanding, an all-embracing vision of reality, incorporating but far transcending the philosophies even of a Cicero or a Seneca. We might suggest, in particular, that Paul's dramatic account of the reworking, through Messiah and spirit, of monotheism, election and eschatology enabled that Jewish framework to do at last what by itself it seemed incapable of doing: taking on the wider world, challenging its puzzled moralists and outflanking its wisest sages. What Paul says about the inability, and the surprising new fulfilment, of Torah in Romans 7 and 8 turns out to be true at a deeper and richer level in relation to the entire body of ancient Jewish thought about God, Israel and the future. Paul's vision in Romans 8 of creation renewed offers the reality to which the new-creation visions of Isaiah and the Psalms bore witness. One might even say that the Stoic hypothesis about the periodic world-renewing fire, though from Paul's perspective quite muddled and mistaken, nevertheless bore oblique witness to the same reality, much as the pagan moralists bore witness to the notion of a genuinely human existence, even though it remained beyond their reach.

Romans 8, as we said before, is from one angle all about *temple*-theology, and the temple is perhaps the most haunting symbol for Paul's underlying missionary aims. The spirit has come to 'indwell' God's people, to lead them, as the fire and cloud and the wilderness tabernacle led ancient Israel, to the inheritance. And the inheritance itself, the entire renewed creation, is the reality to which the original Temple pointed, just as the creation-story itself in Genesis 1 is in fact a 'temple'-vision, God making a

heaven-and-earth house for himself in which he would place, at its heart and as the climax of creation itself, the humans who would be his image-bearers, his royal priesthood, summing up the worship of creation and reflecting his wise order into his world. 'Those he called according to his purpose' are marked out 'to be shaped according to the model of the image of his son'. Paul's vision in Romans 8.17–30 of renewed humans as the stewards (under God) of renewed creation, the messianic 'inheritance', reflects both Psalm 2.8 and Romans 4.13. It speaks of the true inheritance both of Abraham and of the Davidic king, going far beyond the original 'garden', far beyond one piece of territory in the middle east, out and away along the roads that had appeared at Rome's behest when the time had fully come, now carrying the apostle from Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum, pointing him on to Rome itself and, beyond that again, to the farthest outposts of Caesar's empire. Paul's aim was to be the *temple-builder for the kingdom*, planting on non-Jewish soil little communities in which heaven and earth would come together at last, places where the returning glory of Israel's God would shine out, heralding and anticipating the day when God would be all in all.

To that end he announced Jesus as the crucified and risen lord. His evangelistic efforts fulfilled over and over the commission he could not escape even if he had wanted to (1 Corinthians 9.16–17). He saw the strange power of the gospel-announcement do its work again and again, even though it was obviously folly to Greeks and a stumbling-block to Jews. Lives were transformed by it: believing hearts, confessing lips, renewed minds. Much modern western Pauline theology has stopped there, but Paul did not. He saw, not least because of his utter rootedness in Israel's scriptures as well as his thorough immersion in the non-Jewish world of his day, that such transformed lives had to be transformed in relation to their entire culture, which we here have summarized under politics, religion and philosophy but which could have been extended into all possible categories of human life.⁸⁷

The lives that were thus to be transformed in relation to that wider culture would, in the nature of the case, in the nature of the 'image-bearing'

vocation now renewed in the Messiah, be *transforming*. They were to shine like lights in a dark place, indicating that there was a different way to be human, a renewed and renewing way, a way patterned upon the Messiah himself, empowered through his spirit. In particular, this new way of being human was to be modelled by the apostle. ‘Copy me, just as I’m copying the Messiah.’⁸⁸ With that we are touching bedrock. Among Paul’s deepest aims was to be someone who could say that with utter integrity.

When therefore we speak of Paul aiming to generate and sustain communities in the Messiah that were both united and holy, we are not intending to refer to the often disheartened ecumenism or embattled ethics that come to many minds when they hear such words today. We are speaking of a larger reality altogether, which Paul had at the back of his mind whether he was faced with Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi, with Philemon and Onesimus in Colosse, or – looking more widely – with the Paul-party, the Peter-party and perhaps the Christ-party in Corinth, the proto-Marcionite gentile Christians in Rome, or the would-be Jewish gentiles in Galatia. We are speaking about the foundation, through the spirit-empowered announcement of Jesus crucified and risen, of a community which from one point of view would be seen as a ‘philosophy’, from another as a *koinōnia*, a partnership, from another as a new if strange kind of ‘religion’, and from yet another as a new *polis*, a socio-cultural entity giving allegiance to a different *kyrios*. All these and more are encompassed in Paul’s (very Jewish) vision of the Messiah’s people. His worldview demanded no less; his theology sustained no less. All of these were, in his mind, truths which already existed in the Messiah and were to be brought about by the tireless labour of himself and his colleagues, the apostolic work in which he was privileged to share, the work through which the divine purpose for Israel itself was being fulfilled, taking the news of the one God, the creator, the covenant God, to the ends of the earth, and calling forth in every place the pure sacrifice of praise. It was because of that large vision, inadequately summed up in our modern language of unity and holiness, that Paul aimed to plant such churches in Caesar’s territory. It was because of that hope, inaugurated but very far indeed from realized,

that he went on teaching the young churches not only what to think but more importantly *how* to think. It was because of that purpose that he insisted (in 1 Corinthians 11) that corporate worship should not only be properly ordered but should model an integration, a reconciliation, which challenged the social and cultural divisions in the world outside. Only when we glimpse the way in which the new reality that was called into being by the gospel confronted the larger worlds in which Paul lived, and outflanked them at their own game with the essentially Jewish message about the crucified and risen Messiah, can we understand not only the coherence but the massive importance of his theology.

Paul's theology, after all, was not a matter of sorting out abstract categories, helpful though that can sometimes be for clarifying what is going on. It was not a matter of fine-tuning precisely what someone needed to believe *about* salvation in order to be saved. It was the larger reality to which all his scripture-soaked reflection was pointing and from which all his energetic missionary and pastoral activity – including letter-writing! – was directed: a reality in which hard thinking and glad worship were integrated, reconciled and united. This has been a book about Paul's theology, but it has been impossible to give a proper account of it without locating it firmly within, and showing its dynamic purposes in relation to, the multiple Jewish and greco-roman worlds in which Paul lived and worked and in which his gospel produced its dramatic and – to use the fashionable language! – 'apocalyptic' effects.

All of this brings us back at last to the way in which different categories have been imposed upon the apostle in our own day. It will surprise nobody that I want to suggest an integration, a reconciliation, here as well – precisely because I think Paul himself would not have recognized as separate 'categories' the various labels and headings, together with the texts which are said to embody them, into which his thought has been divided in the last few generations. This is where we return briefly to Paul's distant cousin and his friends in the embattled world of the mid-twentieth century.

What Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt and others were longing for in the dangerous and turbulent Europe of the 1930s and 1940s was a new

moment. A messianic moment: a ‘now’ time in which neither the shallow promises of ‘progress’ nor the equally shallow despair of ‘doom’ would hold sway. Arendt, as we saw, spoke explicitly of the need for ‘a new law on earth’, operating through strictly limited political powers. These longings, which grew directly out of a deeply Jewish vision of reality that had seen through the threadbare heresy of mainstream Marxism, can be mapped quite well on to the longings and aspirations of many in the world of second-Temple Judaism. The question, What is to be *done*, was every bit as vital and urgent then as in recent continental history. It was the question asked by Saul of Tarsus, and answered in zealous and violent action.

But it will not do – either as an account of Benjamin and his friends, or as an account of second-Temple Jewish hopes! – to abstract from such complex situations an idea called ‘apocalyptic’ in which one simply renounces ‘progress’ as a heap of rubble and announces the arrival of a new day unattached to anything that has preceded it. That, as we saw, is in fact what some were doing in the 1930s, saying a sharp *No* to the past, to the *religious* past, to the *specifically Jewish* religious past. When Benjamin and others longed for the messianic moment, and refused the false hopes of Hegelian or Marxist determinism, they were not rejecting the ancient Jewish vision of a world set right, of promises awaiting fulfilment. They were rejecting, rather, spurious routes to such a goal. It is therefore shallow and ultimately ridiculous to hold them up as bearing witness to something one might call ‘apocalyptic’ in the sense of a rejection of history, of ancient promises. No second-Temple Jews, so far as we know, held anything remotely like a Hegelian or a Marxist theory about the smooth progress of history to an eventually full-flowering goal. But that certainly did not mean that they rejected the idea of a covenant history, a Deuteronomic and Danielic narrative, in which the redemptive or messianic goal remained up ahead. Of course, part of the point of that biblical narrative, understood in the way we mapped it in chapter 2, was precisely that for much of the time the story was travelling through darkness. Exile, punishment, disaster and shame seemed to be the norm as the monsters came up out of the sea and made war against God’s holy people. To collapse an ancient

Heilsgeschichte into a modernist or determinist doctrine of ‘progress’, and then to reject it on those grounds, is like imagining that when Paul said ‘beware of dogs’ in Philippians 3.2 he was warning against four-footed canine companions. The fact that some people in the 1930s did indeed advocate a ‘salvation history’ which was really the totalitarian wolf dressed up in biblical sheep’s clothing cannot justify an equal and opposite (and equally shallow) reaction – especially from historical critics, which is what Käsemann, the apostle of the modern ‘apocalyptic’ movement, manifestly claimed to be.

But this means that the way stands open to a full and thorough reconciliation of a *genuine* ‘apocalyptic’, such as might be recognized in the first century, with a *genuine*, and equally recognizable, salvation history. Both are there in Deuteronomy 27—32. Both are there, retrieving Deuteronomy, in Daniel. Both are there, retrieving them both and much besides, in the New Testament and not least in Paul. And both come together in what I have called, using a relatively infrequent word as a shorthand (as indeed do those who speak of ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘salvation history’!), as Paul’s essentially *covenant* theology. The meaning and implications of all this are explained throughout the present book.⁸⁹ My point here is simply that, at every level, the study of Pauline theology ought to effect reconciliation, even between categories that he himself would not have recognized as distinct entities.

The covenantal framework goes further in its capacity to integrate. It easily incorporates both the sense of ancient promises and turbulent intermediate histories and the sense of a sudden irruptive and unexpected (and yet predicted) new messianic moment. It thereby gives birth to, and explains the mutual relationships between, what have been separated out as ‘justification’ (or ‘forensic’) categories and ‘participatory’ (or ‘incorporative’, or even ‘mystical’) categories. Here we are at the familiar fault-line with Schweitzer, Sanders and now Douglas Campbell on the one side and the continuing Lutheran and other protestant exegesis on the other. Again, however, the sharp division is unsustainable, whether on historical, exegetical or theological grounds. Both ‘juridical’ and ‘participatory’

categories depend entirely, in Paul, on a fresh messianic reading of scripture. Both have to do with the creation through the gospel of the single faith-characterized family whose identity is ‘in the Messiah’ and who already, in their baptism, hear the verdict ‘righteous’ that had been pronounced over Jesus himself in his resurrection. It is as unjustifiable to caricature ‘justification’ as a soteriological form of Arianism, and so to dismiss it in preference for some kind of incorporative and perhaps apocalyptic system, as it would be to caricature Paul’s incorporative language as a form of self-serving early catholic ecclesiasticism and so to privilege the message of free grace and justification instead. Such shadow-boxing may have considerable relevance to movements and debates in the western church over the last few hundred years, but they bear no relation to what Paul was talking about. (That sentence might itself be thought a form of shadow-boxing. The arguments in question are discussed elsewhere.⁹⁰)

In particular, there is no need to perpetuate the battle between things that call themselves the ‘new perspective’ or the ‘old perspective’ on Paul. Both were, in any case, misleading in their singularity: there are many ‘new perspectives’ on the loose by now, and a good many significantly different ‘old perspectives’ as well. Insofar as the ‘new perspective’ ran the risk of collapsing into ‘sociology’ or ‘comparative religion’, it of course needed to be rethought theologically to take account of, and to give the central place to, Paul’s emphases on the divine act in the cross of the Messiah and its appropriation by faith. Insofar as the ‘old perspective’ continued to base itself on a caricature of ancient Jewish beliefs, forcing old Jewish texts as well as Paul himself to give answers to questions they were not asking while ignoring the ones they were faced with, it of course needed to be rethought theologically to take account of, and give a central place to, the Jewish and Pauline emphases on the surprising and freshly revelatory divine act in fulfilling the covenant with Abraham and completing (balancing both meanings of *telos* in Romans 10.4!) the covenant with Moses. But I hope that the discussion in this book has given a quite new set of angles of vision – perspectives, I almost said – on the false either/or of the last generation. Protests are often necessary, even if sometimes

overstated. Reactions are sometimes appropriate, even if sometimes shrill or merely nostalgic. Fuller integration, fuller reconciliation, is always the Pauline aim, and I hope we have gone a good way towards achieving it.

Finally, I trust we have held in proper balance the historical analysis of Paul in relation to the complex worlds of his day. We have indeed gone way beyond an older, Hegelian, 'Judaism/Hellenism divide', though not in the way some others have tried to do. Indeed, I have insisted, with much recent scholarship, that the idea of those 'isms' themselves is deeply misleading: first, in describing them as quasi-religious movements; second, in suggesting or implying that they were not overlapping and interpenetrating; and particularly third, in attaching an evaluative scheme to them. The original nineteenth-century privileging of 'Hellenism' has of course naturally bred an equal and opposite reaction in a somewhat frantic philo-Judaism. Now the discussion is often reduced to postmodern and even moralistic confusion, as different schools scramble over one another to claim the last bit of high moral ground left in a rootless world, that of identifying with a supposed victim. This is no way to do history. That is why I have found myself compelled to provide a fresh multi-layered historical account in Part I, even though that account is itself of necessity short and insufficiently nuanced. And it is from within this fresh account that I believe we can see in proper perspective the true nature of Paul's theology as a fresh Messiah-and-spirit reworking of the central Jewish beliefs, and with that can reconcile the warring parties in the Pauline debates of the last generations.

I am conscious, in writing all this, that if I were to try to summarize what I have said in this chapter so far, and to do so in Pauline language, I might end up writing something like the letter to the Ephesians. I trust this will not be counted against me for unrighteousness. Even if, on other grounds, we were fully convinced that Paul did not and could not have written the letter, most agree that it was at least written by someone close to him, consciously developing and imitating him, drawing deeply on several aspects of his other writing to produce a general, overall summary of his teaching. The cosmic vision of chapter 1 frames the soteriological statement of 2.1–10

and the carefully matching ecclesiological statement of 2.11–22; these in turn give rise to the statement of Paul’s aims in 3.1–13. The unity and holiness of the church, which I have argued on other grounds lies at the heart of Paul’s version of the early Christian worldview, comprises 4.1—6.9, leaving only the striking statement of spiritual warfare and the concluding exhortation to prayer, to which, along with Paul’s own prayer in 3.14–21, I shall come presently. The ‘temple’-theme, explicit in 2.20–2, is arguably under the surface in much of the letter, already indicated by the plan for heaven and earth to come together (1.10); and the political and cultural aim of it all is explicit in 3.10, where the rulers and authorities are confronted with the new reality, an assembly composed of people from every nation. If the Paul who had already written Galatians and 1 Corinthians, and would shortly write Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, to be followed by 2 Corinthians and above all Romans, were in prison in Ephesus, and were to decide to write a circular to be sent to all the churches in the region, adopting the somewhat florid Asiatic style but incorporating much of his basic teaching in summary form, it is easy to imagine Ephesians as the result. If, having written Colossians as well, Paul were to send ‘Ephesians’ by the same messenger, to be delivered to the church in nearby Laodicea, he might well refer to ‘Ephesians’ as ‘the letter to Laodicea’.⁹¹ Like most things in ancient history, this hypothesis remains unprovable, putting six and six together and making fifteen. But twelve out of fifteen isn’t bad. A lot better than imposing a nineteenth-century liberal protestantism on Paul and then declaring that Ephesians doesn’t fit.

So where does this leave us? We have discussed the aims and intentions of Paul in relation both to his explicitly stated plans and his self-description as having been entrusted with the ‘ministry of reconciliation’. This, I have suggested, is ultimately a temple-vision: Paul believed that the one God was establishing his presence by his spirit in all the world, and that it was his vocation to call into being, through the gospel, communities where that would be a reality. But since that reality is all about reconciliation, between God and the world, God and humans, and not least humans with one another, the large-scale cosmic vision cannot help being earthed at every

point in the actual life, and the actual human tensions, of actual churches and individuals. That is where we began, with Paul's utter determination to bring Philemon and Onesimus together as brothers in the Messiah. That, in a sense, is where we should end.

We explored in chapter 1, in a bit of *sensus plenior* folly, the possibilities of seeing Philemon and Onesimus as playing the roles of History and Theology, first one way and then the other. My hope in bringing this book to a close is that I have said enough to hold Paul up as an excellent point of reference for exactly that larger reconciliation. History, and exegesis as a branch of history, have for too long been isolated from Theology, and the mutual suspicions and recriminations between the two are far-reaching and deeply damaging.

I have argued, in particular, that a *historical* study of Paul and his communities, and the worldview which Paul does his best to inculcate in his communities (Part II), necessarily required that Paul would develop what we must call his *theology*, as a quite new sort of discipline, consisting of scripture-based, communal and prayerful reflection and teaching on God, God's people and God's future. Without this theology, Paul believed, the central worldview-symbol of a united and holy church would be a far-off fantasy. Subsequent church history amply bears this out: when theology is distorted, or displaced altogether, unity and holiness are compromised, and sometimes are thought not even to matter. But to allow this theology to be detached from history, either in general or, in particular, from the actual historical exegesis of texts written by Paul and the other early Christians, is to alter quite radically the character of that theology itself. The present book has approached the task of this greater reconciliation from the side of history, attempting to place Paul in his actual (if complex) historical setting and offering a historical/exegetical account of his writings and especially of his newly minted 'theology' itself. I hope that 'theologians', accustomed to waiting a long time to see if any theologically useful crumbs might fall from the exegete's table – to see if any good thing might come out of an exegetical Nazareth! – might find, perhaps to their surprise, that this account of Paul is theologically fruitful, both in offering a new hypothesis

as to how and why the discipline of ‘Christian theology’ actually began and in proposing fresh lines of investigation about its central topics: christology, pneumatology, soteriology, eschatology and several other ‘ologies’ besides. All this is merely to say that the multiple reconciliations I have in mind point forward to all kinds of tasks, not least in relation to the still wider divisions between church and academy. The study of Paul has suffered because of these many divisions. It would be good if the process could be reversed, with the study of Paul becoming the instrument of their reconciliation.

[4. Conclusion: Exalted Manna](#)

All this suggests that we look, in conclusion, at ‘What St Paul Really Did’ in terms of the praxis which remained his deepest and most constant ‘aim’. If we are to paraphrase Paul’s very soul, to study his heart in its pilgrimage to the promised inheritance, to catch his deepest aims and intentions at the moment when, by his own account, the divine breath was groaning in him and the Heart-Searcher himself was listening to the resultant inarticulate desires, we must recognize in him a kind of tune which all things hear and fear, the deep and constant gospel-inspired activity which, in form as well as in substance, might have seemed folly to Greeks and a scandal to Jews. We have at several points noticed Paul’s prayers, not simply as pious attachments to the outside of his theological or practical teaching but as their very heart. This is the place to end, and perhaps to begin.

The breathtaking renewed *Shema* of 1 Corinthians 8.6 is the obvious first example. The christologically revised prayer of the Jewish people forms the theological heart of highly practical teaching: one God, the father; one lord, Jesus the Messiah, and all things coming *from* the father and *through* the lord.⁹² As Wayne Meeks saw thirty years ago, that revised monotheism – in the form, appropriately, of a prayer – stood at the heart of Paul’s socio-cultural vision.⁹³

The fulsome doxologies belong here as well, not simply as pious accessories to arguments that are ‘about’ something else, but as appropriate summaries of what the argument has been about all along. The natural example here is the framing of Romans 9—11 between the opening doxology of 9.5 and the closing one of 11.33–6, both of which shine their searchlights into the heart of that extraordinary passage, meeting and crossing at the centre where ‘if you profess with your mouth that Jesus is lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved ... for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same lord is lord of all, and is rich towards all who call upon him’, since ‘all who call upon the name of the lord will be saved’.⁹⁴ The prayerful invocation of the *kyrios*, who in the Septuagint is clearly YHWH and in Romans 10 is clearly Jesus, is the point where the painful prayer of 9.1–5, with its closing and initially puzzling doxology, meets the exultant celebration of 11.33–6. If you believe that the one God, the world’s creator, is in fact the faithful covenant God – and that is the whole point of Romans 9—11 and in a measure of everything Paul said and wrote – then the most appropriate way to write about this God is not in abstract discourse but in prayer and praise. Here Paul lets down the Christian plummet, sounding heaven and earth, bringing together the constant prayer life of ancient Israel with the renewed prayer life of the Messiah’s people, forming in his writing as well as in his church-planting a temple in which heaven appears in the ordinary world and humans made of dust are promised their well-dressed new life.

The same could be said of Ephesians 3.14–21, which delves deep into the gospel in which the divine *love* is the main theme and comes up with one of the most sustained and extraordinary invocations ever written:

Because of this, I am kneeling down before the father, the one who gives the name of ‘family’ to every family that there is, in heaven and on earth. My prayer is this: that he will lay out all the riches of his glory to give you strength and power, through his spirit, in your inner being; that the Messiah may make his home in your hearts, through faith; that love may be your root, your firm foundation; and that you may be strong enough (with all God’s holy ones) to grasp the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the Messiah’s love – though actually it’s so deep that nobody can really know it! So may God fill you with all his fullness.

So: to the one who is capable of doing far, far more than we can ask or imagine, granted the power which is working in us – to him be glory, in the church, and in the Messiah Jesus, to all generations, and to the ages of ages! Amen.

This is temple-language; it is (incipiently) trinitarian language; it is cosmic language; it is the language of faith and hope, and above all of love. It draws together monotheism, election and eschatology. It forms the beating heart of the united and holy community which is, for Paul, the central worldview-symbol, the sign to the powers that Jesus is lord (3.10–11). This, in the gentle language of later poetry, is softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss. When Paul tells his hearers to ‘pray constantly’, and says that he is doing so himself, it is this sort of constant celebration and intercession he seems to have in mind, reflecting of course the regular sacrifice and incense offered in the Temple itself.⁹⁵ As with so much Jewish prayer, it is the prayer of hope offered amid the ruins of the present: Paul in prison, struggling as in Ephesians 6.10–20 with the ‘principalities and powers’, aware as ever of ‘battles outside and fears inside’,⁹⁶ nevertheless reaches out in a prayer which expresses and encapsulates the centre of his richest thought. The inevitable sadness and frustration of the ‘not yet’, well known to all who work in the church, is always to be balanced, in prayer and hope, with the ‘already’, the ‘now’ of the gospel. For that to happen in prayer, there must be theology; for it to happen in theology, there must be prayer.

Not just any prayer, and not just any theology. At the heart of it all, shaping thought and firing devotion, there is ‘the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord’ (Romans 8.39). If the crucified and risen Messiah himself was, astonishingly, the place where heaven and earth met, the true temple, the start of the new creation; if those indwelt by the spirit were themselves enabled to keep the *Shema*, responding to the sovereign and self-giving love of God by loving him from the heart in return, fulfilling the ancient vision of Deuteronomy at the same time as discovering a depth of heaven-and-earth relation at which the most discerning of the pagan philosophers could only guess; if these things were so, then the glad celebration of that love provided the deepest ‘aim’ of all, the central act of

worship which for Paul had long ceased to be a matter of choice or decision and had become a matter of mindset, the deepest habit of the heart. ‘The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.’ ‘The Messiah’s love makes us press on.’ ‘The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us.’ ‘God demonstrates his own love for us: the Messiah died for us while we were still sinners.’ ‘Who shall separate us from the Messiah’s love?’ ‘Neither death nor life ... nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in the Messiah, Jesus our lord.’⁹⁷ The past is redeemed, as well as the present and the future; this messianic moment has to do neither with ‘progress’ nor with ‘doom’. New creation is here, to be glimpsed in praise and intercession, worked for in apostolic vocation, and above all known in love.

This is the language of prayer, and it is therefore also the language of theology: of the new thing we call ‘Christian theology’ which Paul fashioned out of ancient Jewish elements glimpsed anew through Messiah and spirit. Old praise dies unless you feed it, said Herbert. The renewed praise of Paul’s doxologies takes its place at the historically situated and theologically explosive fusion of worlds where Paul stood in the middle, between Athens and Jerusalem, between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world, between Philemon and Onesimus, between history and theology, between exegesis and the life of the church, between heaven and earth. Collection at a middle point. This is language forged and fashioned in the shape of the cross, *both* as the decisive apocalyptic event in which the covenant faithfulness of the creator God was unveiled once and for all *and* as the character-shaping truth which was now carved into world history and into the hearts and lives of all those ‘in the Messiah’, all those with Messiah-faith. For Paul, prayer and theology met in his personal history, as in the once-for-all history of the crucified and risen Messiah. Paul’s ‘aims’, his apostolic vocation, modelled the faithfulness of God. Centred and gathered. Prayer became theology, theology prayer. Something understood.

¹ Benjamin 1968 [1940], 255.

² The clearest commentary known to me is that of Löwy 2005.

³ Benjamin 1968 [1940], 264.

⁴ Arendt 1968 [1950], preface of 1950 (*ad fin.*). Earlier in the same preface she writes: ‘This book has been written against a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair. It holds that Progress and Doom are two sides of the same medal; that both are articles of superstition, not of faith.’

⁵ Arendt, *ibid.*

⁶ Steiner 2013.

⁷ 2 Cor. 13.10.

⁸ See particularly Confino 2012. The parallel between this and the proposals of today’s neo-‘apocalyptic’ interpreters of Paul is, or should be, a matter of concern.

⁹ cf. Hartley 1997 [1953], 5.

¹⁰ The subject is of course far more complex than this, and much discussed among contemporary historians (cf. e.g. Bentley 2006); see further *NTPG* ch. 4.

¹¹ An example of this is in Harink 2010. Harink begins by dismissing any attempt to see the gospel within its larger historical context, and perhaps not surprisingly ends by exalting Barth on Romans and dismissing commentaries such as those of Jewett and the present author, saying that ‘Wright, as much as Jewett, presents us with a contextualized gospel in Paul’ (295). This is part of Harink’s recurring accusation, that I articulate a ‘progressive salvation-history’ which enables people today to locate themselves within a further ongoing history, contrasting with his view of Barth, who (says Harink) writes his commentary ‘within that singular time of the gospel’ (299) – a very odd claim, in view of Barth’s clear and obvious contextualization within the world of early twentieth-century continental history and thought, and indeed in view of the partial parallel between Barth’s ‘No’ and the revolutionary programme of Marxism. Somehow, apparently, an ‘apocalyptic’ theologian can think Paul’s thoughts after him with no *historical* effort: rejecting ‘history’ as a dangerous irrelevance, corrupting the pure inbreaking ‘apocalypse’, such a person has privileged access to the inner meaning of ancient documents and is absolved from any need to engage in historical exegesis.

¹² Rom. 3.21 in the context of 3.21—4.25 as a whole.

¹³ Martyn 1997a: see *Interpreters*.

¹⁴ See Löwy 2005, 60–8, with the picture at 61.

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 6.2.

¹⁶ On gnostic origins see Smith 2005.

¹⁷ On ‘transphysical’ see *RSG* 477, 606f., 612, 678f.

¹⁸ Is it any wonder that the ‘myth of the delayed *parousia*’, and the equally mythical crisis it supposedly caused in the second-generation church (see *NTPG* 459–64), dominated German New Testament scholarship, and its offshoots, in the second half of the twentieth century?

¹⁹ The massive and important survey of Paul’s mission in Schnabel 2004, Part V remains a vital resource, even though he does not attempt to integrate the different dimensions of Paul’s multi-faceted work in the way I am proposing. Other recent bibliography on Paul’s missionary theology and message is given by Porter 2011, 171 n. 9.

²⁰ Marx 2012 [1843–4], 5: ‘Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.’

²¹ See *RSG*, *passim*; and Wright 2008 [*Surprised by Hope*]. For a similar protest in the Jewish world cf. Levenson 1993.

²² cf. Mt. 22.21 and par.; Jn. 18.36; Rom. 13.1–7; Mt. 6.10; and esp. 28.18.

²³ Marx 1932 [1845], no. 11.

²⁴ At the formal level, a focus on ‘reconciliation’ echoes the earlier proposal of e.g. Martin 1981; cf. too e.g. Stuhlmacher 1977, 1999, 320f.; Marshall 2007, 98–137 (I am grateful to Michael Bird for the latter references); Porter 2011. But the material content I propose [below](#) goes, I think, into wider territory.

²⁵ 2 Cor. 5.13—6.2.

²⁶ cf. too e.g. 1 Cor. 9.16f.: ‘Woe betide me if I *don’t* announce the gospel!’

²⁷ 2 Cor. 11.2f.; cp. the image of the ‘new husband’ in Rom. 7.1–6.

²⁸ Col. 1.15–20, on which see above, 670–7.

²⁹ I was surprised that Bockmuehl 2011 (in Perrin and Hays 2011) would suppose that when I have said this sort of thing before I meant to rule out any kind of ‘going to heaven’ at all. I have long held and taught that for Paul, as for other early Christians and for those Jews who believed in resurrection, some kind of intermediate state should be postulated between bodily death and bodily resurrection, which we can perfectly well call ‘heaven’ while noting that normally the early Christians did not use that term in that way. See my remarks in Perrin and Hays 2011, 231–4, and Wright 2008 [*Surprised by Hope*], *passim*.

³⁰ cf. 2 Cor. 4.7–12; 6.4–13; cf. 11.22–33.

³¹ 2 Cor. 5.16; [see above, 1361f.](#)

³² cf. e.g. 2 Cor. 12.9f.; 13.1–4; cf. e.g. Mk. 10.35–45.

³³ cf. 1 Cor. 3.10–17 ([see above, 355–7, 391f.](#)). I am grateful to Jamie Davies for the brainstorming session in which this point emerged.

³⁴ See *Perspectives* ch. 23.

³⁵ 2 Cor. 3.18; 4.5f.

³⁶ Isa. 2.2–4; 66.18; Mic. 4.1–3; Zech. 2.11; 8.20–3; 14.16.

³⁷ This, too, was seen in the early church as scripturally promised: cf. e.g. Mal. 1.5, 11, 14.

³⁸ 2 Cor. 5.21 ([see above, 874–85](#)), with 4.7–12 and 6.3–10.

³⁹ Rom. 3.22; 10.12; 1 Cor. 7.19; Gal. 3.28; 6.15.

⁴⁰ Rom. 15.7–12, quoting Ps. 18.49 (= 2 Sam. 22.50); Dt. 32.43; Ps. 117.1; Isa. 11.1, 10. Torah, prophets and writings round off the biblically rooted vision of the whole letter.

⁴¹ 2 Cor. 9.13f.

⁴² Rom. 15.25–8. The clause about ‘tying up the loose ends’ is one of the few places where I have indulged not just in paraphrase but in swapping a now incomprehensible ancient metaphor (‘sealed to them this fruit’ is what Paul wrote) for a modern one which performs a similar task in its context. See Jewett 2007, 932: ‘To seal the fruit of the Jerusalem offering is ... to guarantee its delivery against theft and embezzlement ... His explanation says in effect, “when I am completely finished with this matter,” I will be free to fulfill the long-standing plan to visit Rome.’

⁴³ cf. 1 Cor. 16.1–4 with 2 Cor. 8.10–12, 24; 9.3–5.

⁴⁴ cf. Rom. 15.31.

⁴⁵ See e.g. Munck 1959 [1954]. Munck’s view is given a fresh if modified airing by e.g. Kim 2011.

⁴⁶ e.g. Aus 1979, supported now by Jewett 2007, 924. Plenty of other scholars have taken a similar view: e.g. Sanders 1983, 193 and elsewhere.

⁴⁷ The question of Paul’s geographical strategy is raised by Schnabel 2004, 1320, but he remains cautious as to whether it can be answered; see too Schnabel, 1481. I find it strange that Kim 2011, 23 can gloss Rom. 15.19 as Paul having fully preached the gospel ‘in the Eastern hemisphere of the *oikumene*’: that would surely have meant at least Parthia, if not India and the lands beyond.

⁴⁸ Rom. 15.20.

⁴⁹ 15.23f.; there is an apparent tension between this statement and that in Rom. 1.8–15, where Paul ends up saying that he is eager to preach the gospel ‘to you, too, in Rome’. I take this latter phrase as a generic statement of Paul’s wider ministry; he has already explained, with slightly heavy-handed tact, that he hopes ‘to share with you some spiritual blessing to give you strength; that is, I want to encourage you, and be encouraged by you, in the faith you and I share’ (1.11f.). Jewett 2007, 134 is right: the apparent contradiction disappears on closer inspection, esp. of 1.13.

⁵⁰ Rom. 1.17; cf. 2.9, 10.

⁵¹ When Paul speaks of the Roman church ‘sending him on’ to Spain (15.24), the word he uses, *propemphthēnai*, almost certainly carries the connotation of support either in money or in kind: see Jewett 2007, 925f. This is without prejudice to Jewett’s own theory (see Jewett 1988).

⁵² e.g. Ac. 13.5; 13.14–52; 14.1–6; 17.1–5, 10–14; 18.4–7; 19.8–10.

⁵³ 2 Cor. 11.24; see Sanders 1983, 192: ‘He kept showing up, and obviously he submitted to the thirty-nine stripes. He undoubtedly thought that those who judged him deserving of punishment were wrong, but had he wished he could have withdrawn from Jewish society altogether and thus not have been punished.’ See too e.g. Frey 2007, 304.

⁵⁴ e.g. Käsemann 1980 [1973], 383; Black 1973, 177.

⁵⁵ cf. the general statements in Jos. *Ap.* 2.282; *War* 2.398; 7.43; *Ant.* 14.115 (citing Strabo to the same effect); see too Philo *Flacc.* 45f.; *Sib. Or.* 3.271, and Augustine’s citing of Seneca similarly in *Civ. Dei* 6.11. (Contrast Just. *Dial.* 117, claiming that Mal. 1.11 is not fulfilled by the Jews, because there are in fact nations where they have never dwelt, whereas Christians are already to be found in every possible location.) Cf. too Ac. 2.5, speaking of ‘devout Jews from every nation under heaven’ gathering in Jerusalem at Pentecost. A Jewish presence in Spain is challenged by Jewett 2007, 924, citing the eight-page article of Bowers 1975 and the single-page piece by Thornton 1975 under the rubric ‘as the recent studies have shown’. Thornton adds little on this point except to stress the paucity of archaeological evidence (see also e.g. Cranfield 1975, 1979, 769 n. 1). Bowers (396, 400) plays down the first-century evidence of a Palestinian amphora on Ibiza; even if this is evidence primarily of trade, such trade regularly, in the wider Mediterranean world, generated immigration. He also plays down Josephus’s report (*War* 2.183) that Caligula banished Herod Antipas to Spain, where he died (in *Ant.* 18.252 Jos. has changed this to Lyons in Gaul; this is sometimes resolved, e.g. by Hoehner 1980 [1972], 262, through postulating a different ‘Lyons’, Lugdunum Convenarum, on the Spain/Gaul frontier). Granted, banishing a Jewish king to a place does not necessarily mean that there was already a Jewish community there, but nor can this be ruled out. The testimony of Strabo and Seneca, as well as Josephus and Philo, though generalized, would make it strange to think there were no Jews in Spain at all. Bowers tries to clinch his case (402) by claiming that in Rom. 10.14–21 Paul says that the Jewish people have all now heard the good news, so that a Spanish mission cannot be aimed at any more Jews. This rests on a misunderstanding: (a) 10.14–18 is about *gentiles* hearing the gospel; (b) 10.18 is in any case an argument from the revelation in the natural world as in Ps. 19.4, not in the preaching of the gospel; (c) Paul does not mention Jewish reactions to the gospel until 10.19, and then only in terms of Isa. and Deut., not in terms of places where he himself has preached. This is not to deny (Bowers 400) that the later substantial Jewish population in Spain will have been the result of forced migrations after the disasters of 70 and 135.

⁵⁶ Jewett 2007, 924 (wrongly citing Rom. 1.15). Thornton 1975 stresses the paucity of Greek inscriptions in Spain at this period.

⁵⁷ This was the pattern, according to Ac. 20.1–16, of the last trip around the Aegean.

⁵⁸ On Tarraco cf. Schnabel 2004, 1277f., with other refs. The city, a Roman colony since 45 BC, was the capital of the province of Hispania Citerior. On Tiberius’s permission for the temple of

Augustus cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.78.

⁵⁹ Isa. 11.11, 12; 24.15; 41.1, 5; 42.4, 10, 12; 49.1; 51.5; 59.18; 60.9; 66.19.

⁶⁰ Isa. 66.18–20.

⁶¹ cf. Jon. 1.3; cp. Ps. 72.10; and cf. Elat 1982, with e.g. Hdt. 4.152.

⁶² Jos. *Ant.* 1.132f.

⁶³ cf. Jer. 46.9; Ezek. 30.5, both suggesting an African location; but the Akkadian *Luddu*, referring to Lydia, may be a better clue; so e.g. Walker 2000. But others, such as Sadler 2009, insist on an African location (though not Libya), possibly in the region of today's Somaliland.

⁶⁴ e.g. NRSV.

⁶⁵ Scott 1995 proposed, on the basis of this text and the 'table of nations' in Gen. 10, that Paul saw himself called to the 'sons of Japheth'. This has not found much favour in subsequent discussion (though cf. e.g. Frey 2007, 302f.; Rosner 2011, 161f. I agree with Rosner (161) that 'the glory of God informs the ambitious itinerary of Paul's missionary journeys', and that Paul clearly echoes Isa. 66.18–21 in Rom. 15, but I do not think that this means that he has retained a Jerusalem-centred view.

⁶⁶ Bauckham 1995b.

⁶⁷ This does not mean that Paul continued to regard Jerusalem (as he had probably done before) as the centre of the earth (e.g. Ezek. 5.5; 38.12; and cf. e.g. Frey 2007, 302f.). Jerusalem remains important, but not that important; and the idea of a circle from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Rom. 15.19) places Jerusalem on the rim of the circle, not at its centre.

⁶⁸ cf. Tit. 1.5. The global vision implied by Ps. 72.10 – Tarshish in the west, 'Sheba and Seba' in the south and east – seems to have played no role in Paul's strategy.

⁶⁹ This point is made from different angles by writers such as White 1999, 130–2 (132: 'the physical specificity of his obligation as Christ's ambassador was probably inspired by the boundaries of the Roman Empire'); Crossan and Reed 2004, 354–6; Magda 2009, 52f. The question of whether Paul did in fact reach Spain (as probably implied by *1 Clem.* 5.6) cannot be settled either way. 2 Tim. 4.9–21, sometimes cited as evidence of further travels after an initial arrival at Rome, provides very shaky foundations for any historical reconstruction.

⁷⁰ On the question of how to understand the 'political' dimension of Paul's thought and action, [see ch. 12 above](#).

⁷¹ Eph. 1.21; Phil. 2.9–11.

⁷² The noun *kēryx* is found in the Paulines only in 1 Tim. 2.7; 2 Tim. 1.11. The abstract *kērygma* is at Rom. 16.25 and, perhaps more importantly, 1 Cor. 1.21; 2.4; 15.14. But the verb *kēryssō* appears to be among Paul's favourite terms to describe the activity he saw as basic to his calling: Rom. 10.8, 14, 15; 1 Cor. 1.23; 9.27; 15.11, 12; 2 Cor. 1.19; 4.5; 11.4 (twice); Gal. 2.2; 5.11; Phil. 1.15; Col. 1.23; 1 Thess. 2.19, and 1 Tim. 3.16; 2 Tim. 4.2. Kim 2011 discusses Paul as 'herald' but not in the sense I am taking it.

⁷³ This proposal gives shape and depth to the much vaguer suggestions of Magda 2009, ch. 4. She argues, rightly in my view, that 'Paul works from Roman geography both incidentally and consciously' (82), but suggests that this is at least in part because, as a native of Tarsus and a student of Stoicism there he had been 'taught to be a cosmopolitan' (83). Nobody who drew on Ps. 2 or Isa. 11 needed a Stoic to teach them that Israel's God claimed the whole world through the anointed Davidic king.

⁷⁴ The widespread fashion for understanding Paul's reference to a journey to Arabia in Gal. 1.17 as an early evangelistic effort is I think unwarranted. As I have argued elsewhere (see *Perspectives* ch. 10), I see that trip as part of his role-modelling of Elijah in 1 Kgs. 19, not an early mission trip. The

reference to hostility from the Nabatean king (2 Cor. 11.32), often invoked in support, is irrelevant, relating to the city of Damascus itself rather than to lands further south (see e.g. Schnabel 2004, 1032–45; Magda 2009, 101).

⁷⁵ Ac. 28.31.

⁷⁶ cf. Rom. 15.20 with Eph. 1.21; Phil. 2.9–11.

⁷⁷ cf. Mk. 10.45, quoting Isa. 53.10–12.

⁷⁸ Rom. 15.16. The phrase ‘the offering of the nations’ means ‘the offering which consists of the nations’, not ‘the offering which the nations will offer’: see below. A recent study of the passage is that of Gibson 2011, though I want to go further than him in various ways.

⁷⁹ Isa. 66.18–21.

⁸⁰ For ‘the offering of the Gentiles’ as an objective genitive, ‘the offering which consists of the Gentiles’, rather than ‘the offering which the Gentiles are making’, see Fitzmyer 1993, 712; Moo 1996, 890.

⁸¹ For the possibility that Paul may have had some kind of Roman map in mind see Jewett 2007, 912f. I agree with Magda 2009, 82 that Paul was working consciously in terms of Roman geography, though her explanation for this in terms of philosophy (a cosmopolitan vision picked up from Stoics in Tarsus) rather than politics (the vocation to name Jesus as lord in Caesar’s domains) seems to miss the point. Paul knew the difference between the worldwide biblical vision of e.g. Isa. 11 and Ps. 2 on the one hand and pantheistic globalism on the other.

⁸² Isa. 66.22f.

⁸³ Rom. 8.17–30; 4.13.

⁸⁴ The ‘Collection’ was not a Christian version of the Jewish ‘temple tax’, or a levy imposed by the ‘mother church’: so, rightly, e.g. Fitzmyer 1993, 722. It owes much more to the needs of ‘the poor’ (cf. Gal. 2.10). However, Paul cannot have been ignorant of the ironic overtones of the plan he was now implementing.

⁸⁵ On ‘clubs’ in the Roman world, see e.g. Stevenson and Lintott 2003. Augustus passed a law regulating *collegia* (ILS 4966); Trajan forbade their formation in Bithynia (Pliny, *Ep.*, 10.34). This does not mean that Paul expected followers of Jesus to engage in what today would be called ‘political activity’ (see, of course, Rom. 13.1–7); the mere formation and maintenance of such associations constituted a challenge to all other social orders.

⁸⁶ 1 Cor. 10.26.

⁸⁷ One obvious area deserving of much fuller treatment is economics, on which see the important recent work of Longenecker 2010.

⁸⁸ 1 Cor. 11.1.

⁸⁹ It should not be necessary once more to say that a ‘covenant’ theology does not mean that Paul absolutized the *Mosaic* dispensation. The point of Gal. 3 is precisely that he appeals over the head of Moses to Abraham himself.

⁹⁰ See *Interpreters*.

⁹¹ As I suggested in Wright 1986b [*Col. and Philem.*], 160, following Lightfoot and Caird.

⁹² See above, 661–70.

⁹³ See Meeks 1983, 164–70.

⁹⁴ Rom. 10.9, 12f.

⁹⁵ 1 Thess. 5.17; cf. Rom. 1.9; 1 Thess. 1.3; 2.13; similarly, Rom. 12.12; Eph. 6.18; Phil. 4.6; Col. 4.2. On prayer as the equivalent of Temple-worship cf. e.g. Ps. 141.2; Dan. 9.21.

⁹⁶ 2 Cor. 7.5.

[97](#) Gal. 2.20; 2 Cor. 5.14; Rom. 5.5, 8; 8.35, 39.

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS REFERRED TO IN PARTS I– IV

Abbreviations

1. Stylistic Shorthands

ad fin.	at the end
ad loc.	at the [relevant] place
alt.	altered
b.	born
bib./bibliog.	bibliography
bk.	book
c.	circa
cf.	confer
ch(s).	chapter(s)
<i>Cn.</i>	<i>n</i> th century
com.	commentary
contra	against
cp.	compare
d.	died
ed(s).	edited by
edn(s).	edition(s)
e.g.	for example
esp.	especially
et al.	and others
etc.	et cetera
f.	and the following (verse, page or line)
fl.	flourished
foll.	following

fr./frag. fragment(s)
Gk. Greek
Heb. Hebrew
ib./ibid. the same place
id./idem the same person
introd. introduction/introduced by
ital. italics
loc. cit. in the place cited
mg. margin
MS(S) manuscript(s)
n. (foot/end)note
nb. note well
n.d. no date
orig. original/originally
pace with all due respect to different opinion
par(r). parallel(s) (in the synoptic tradition)
passim throughout
pt. part.
pub. published
qu. quoting/quoted
R. Rabbi
ref(s). reference(s)
rev. revision/revised by
sc. presumably
sic thus (acknowledging an error in original)
subsequ. subsequent
s.v(v). under the word(s)
tr. translation/translated by
v(v). verse(s)
vol(s). volume(s).

[2. Primary Sources](#)

ADPB *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth of Nations*, tr. S. Singer. New edn. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962.

Ael. Arist. Aelius Aristides (*Orat.*=*Oration*)

Aesch. Aeschylus (*Ag.*=*Agamemnon*; *Eumen.*=*Eumenides*; *Pers.*=*Persians*)

ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson et al. 10 vols. Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887.

Apuleius Apuleius (*Met.*=*Metamorphoses*)

Arist. Aristotle (*De An.*=*De Anima*; *Hist. An.*=*Historia Animalium*; *Nic. Eth.*=*Nichomachean Ethics*; *Pol.*=*Politics*; *Pr.*=*Problems*)

Aristides Aristides (*Apol.*=*Apology*)

Aristoph. Aristophanes (*Birds*=*The Birds*; *Ecclesiaz.*=*Ecclesiazousae*; *Frogs*=*The Frogs*)

Aug. Augustine (*Civ. Dei*=*City of God*)

Aulus Gellius Aulus Gellius (*Noct. Att.*=*Noctes Atticae*)

AV Authorized ['King James'] Version

Calpurnius Siculus Calpurnius Siculus (*Ecl.*=*Eclogues*)

Cic. Cicero (*Amic.*=*De Amicitia*; *Att.*=*Epistulae ad Atticum*; *De Div.*=*De Divinatione*; *De Leg.*=*De Legibus*; *De Nat. De.*=*De Natura Deorum*; *Ends*=*De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*; *Har. Resp.*=*De Haruspicum Responsis*; *Part. Or.*=*De Partitionibus Oratoriae*; *Phil.*=*Philippicae*)

Clem. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.*=*Stromata*)

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Dio Cassius Dio Cassius (*Hist.*=*Historia Romana*)

Dio Chrys. Dio Chrysostom (*Orat.*=*Oration*)

Diod. Sic. Diodorus Siculus
 Diog. Laert. Diogenes Laertius (*Lives/Vit. Philos.=Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*)
 Dionysius of (*Ant. Rom.=Roman Antiquities*)
 Halicarnassus
Ep. Diog. *Epistula ad Diognetum*
 Epict. Epictetus (*Disc.=Discourses; Ench.=Encheiridion*)
 Eurip. Euripides (*Hippol.=Hippolytus*)
 EV(V) English Version(s) of the Bible
 Gal. Galen (*Anim. Pass.=Passions of the Soul*)
 GM/T F. García Martínez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–8.
 Hdt. Herodotus
 Heraclit. Heraclitus (presocratic philosopher) (*Ep.=Epistles*)
 Hermog. Hermogenes (*Inv.=On Finding*)
 Hesiod Hesiod (*Op.=Works and Days*)
 Hippolytus Hippolytus (*Ref. Omn. Haer.=Refutation of All Heresies*)
 Homer Homer (*Il.=Iliad; Od.=Odyssey*)
 Hor. Horace (*Ep.=Epistles; Epod.=Epodes; Carm.=Carmen Saeculare; Od.=Odes; Sat.=Satires*)
 Ign. Ignatius of Antioch (*Eph.=To the Ephesians*)
Inscr. Cos. *The Inscriptions of Cos*, ed. W. R. Paton and E. L. Hicks. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1891.
 Iren. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.=Adversus Haereseis*)
 Jer. Jerome (*De Vir. Ill.=De Viris Illustribus*)
 Jos. Josephus (*Ap.=Against Apion; War=The Jewish War; Ant.=Jewish Antiquities*)
JosAs *Joseph and Aseneth*
 Just. Justin Martyr (*Apol.=Apology; Dial.=Dialogue with Trypho*)
 Juv. Juvenal (*Sat.=Satires*)
 LAB *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (=Pseudo-Philo)
 Livy T. Livy, *History of Rome* (*Praef.=‘Preface’*)
 Lucan Lucan (*Bell. Civ.=Bellum Civile*)

Lucr. Lucretius (*De Re. Nat.=De Rerum Natura*)
 LW *Luther's Works*. Minneapolis: Fortress; St Louis: Concordia. 1957–
 .
 LXX Septuagint version of the Old Testament
 Macrobius Macrobius (*Sat.=Saturnalia*)
 Martial Martial (*Epig.=Epigrams*)
 MT Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)
Mt. Pol. *Martyrdom of Polycarp*
 NH Nag Hammadi
NPNF *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. P. Schaff et al. 1st
 series: 14 vols; 2nd series: 13 vols. Buffalo: The Christian Literature
 Publishing Company, 1886–98.
 NT New Testament
NTA *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. E. Hennecke and W.
 Schneemelcher. 2 vols. London: SCM Press, 1963–5 [1959–64].
OGI *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, ed. W. Dittenberger. 2
 vols. Hildesheim: Olms, 1960 [orig.: Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903–5].
 Origen Origen (*De Princ.=De Principiis*)
 OT Old Testament
 Ovid Ovid (*(Ep. ex) Pont.=Epistulae ex Ponto; Fast.=Fasti; Met.=*
Metamorphoses; Trist.=Tristia)
 Paus. Pausanias (*Descr. Graec.=Description of Greece*)
 Philo Philo of Alexandria (*(De) Spec. Leg.=De Specialibus Legibus;*
Dec.=De Decalogo; Flacc.=In Flaccum; Fug.=De Profugis (or, De Fuga et
Inventione); Leg.=Legum Allegoriae; (Migr.) Abr.=De Migratione
Abrahami; De Mut. Nom.=De Mutatione Nominum; Omn. Prob.
Lib.=Quod omnis probus liber sit; (De) Praem.=De Praemiis et Poenis;
Post.=De posteritate Caini; Quaest. Gen.=Quaestiones in Genesin; Quis
rer.=Quis rerum; (De) Somn.=De Somniis; Spec.=De Specialibus Legibus;
Virt.=De Virtutibus; Vit. Cont.=De Vita Contemplativa; Vit. Mos.=De Vita
Mosis)
 Philostr. Philostratus (*Apoll.=Life of Apollonius of Tyana; VS=Vitae*
Sophistarum)

Pind. Pindar (*Ol.*=*Olympian Odes*; *Pyth.*=*Pythian Odes*)
 Plato Plato (*Apol.*=*Apology*; *Crat.*=*Cratylus*; *Phaedr.*=*Phaedrus*;
Protag.=*Protagoras*; *Rep.*=*Republic*; *Tim.*=*Timaeus*)
 Pliny Pliny the Elder (*NH*=*Natural History*)
 Pliny Pliny the Younger (*Ep.*=*Epistulae*)
 Plut. Plutarch (*Alex.*=*Life of Alexander*; *Ant.*=*Life of Antony*; *Comm.*
Not.=*de Communibus Notitiis*; *Mor.*=*Moralia*; *Peric.*=*Life of Pericles*;
Them.=*Themistocles*; *Tranq.*=*De Tranquillitate Animi*)
 Porphyry Porphyry (*De Antr. Nymph.*=*De Antrō Nympharum*)
 Ps-Phil. Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*
RG/Res Gest. *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*
 SB H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*
aus Talmud und Midrasch. 6 vols. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1926–56.
 Sen. Seneca the Younger (*Ben.*=*De Beneficiis*; *Clem.*=*De Clementia*;
De Prov.=*De Providentia*; *Ep.*=*Epistles*; *Ep. Mor.*=*Moral Epistles*;
N.Q.=*Naturales Quaestiones*)
 Suet. Suetonius (*Aug.*=*Augustus*; *Calig.*=*Caligula*; *Claud.*=*Claudius*;
Dom.=*Domitian*; *Gal.*=*Galba*; *Iul.*=*Julius Caesar*; *Ner.*=*Nero*;
Tib.=*Tiberius*; *Vesp.*=*Vespasian*)
 Tac. Tacitus (*Agric.*=*Agricola*; *Ann.*=*Annals*; *Dial.*=*Dialogue on*
Oratory; *Hist.*=*Histories*)
 Tert. Tertullian (*Ad Scap.*=*Ad Scapulam*; *Apol.*=*Apology*; *De*
Anim.=*De Anima*; *Scorp.*=*Scorpiace*)
 Val. Max. Valerius Maximus
 Vell. Pat. Velleius Paterculus (*Hist.*=*Compendium of Roman History*)
 Virg. Virgil (*Aen.*=*Aeneid*; *Ec.*=*Eclogues*; *Georg.*=*Georgics*)
 Vitruv. Vitruvius

[3. Secondary Sources, etc.](#)

AB Anchor Bible

- ABD* *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- ABRL* *Anchor Bible Reference Library*
- AGJU* *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums*
- BDAG* *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd edn., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, based on W. Bauer’s *Griechisch–Deutsch Wörterbuch*, 6th edn., and on previous English edns. by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1957].
- CD* Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [ET of *KD*]. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–69.
- DJD* *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*
- ESV* *English Standard Version*
- Exp. T.* *Expository Times*
- FS* *Festschrift*
- HGBK* N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*. San Francisco: HarperOne; London: SPCK, 2012.
- IBC* *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*
- ICC* *International Critical Commentary*
- IGR* *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*, ed. R. Cagnat et al. Paris, 1911–27.
- ILS* *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. H. Dessau. Berolini, 1892–1916.
- JB* *Jerusalem Bible*
- JSJSup* *Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements*
- JSNTSup* *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplements*
- JSOTSup* *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements*
- JSPL* *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters*
- JVG* N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*). London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- KD* Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*

KJV King James ['Authorized'] Version
 KNT N. T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011 [US edn. of NTE].
 KRS G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1957].
 LCL Loeb Classical Library (various publishers, currently Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press).
 LS C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996 [1879].
 LSJ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th edn. by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie, with suppl. by P. G. W. Glare and A. A. Thompson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 [1843].
 NA (25) Nestle–Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (25th edn.)
 NEB New English Bible
 NIB *The New Interpreter's Bible*. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2002.
 NIV New International Version
 NJB New Jerusalem Bible
 NovTSup *Novum Testamentum Supplements*
 NP 'new perspective' (on Paul)
 NRSV New Revised Standard Version
 NTE N. T. Wright *The New Testament for Everyone*. London: SPCK, 2011 [UK edn. of KNT].
 NTPG N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*). London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
 OCD *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, eds. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
 ODCC *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E. A. Livingstone. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
 OTP *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., ed. J. H. Charlesworth. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985.

REB Revised English Bible
RSG N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (vol. 3 of Christian Origins and the Question of God). London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.
RSV Revised Standard Version
RV Revised Version
SB H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*. 6 vols. Munich: C. H. Beck, 1926–56.
SBL Society of Biblical Literature
SVF *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–24.
TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76.
WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

A

PRIMARY SOURCES

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SEARCH ITEMS FOR ANCIENT SOURCES

1. Old Testament

Nb.: Where verse numbers of evv differ from MT or lxx, the ev is followed

Genesis

1

1—3

1—12

1.1

1.1–26

1.2

1.26

1.26–8

1.26–31

1.28

2

2.2

2.2f.

2.7

2.21

3

3.5

3.6

3.16

3.17

3.22

4.1–16

4.26

5.3

5.29

6

6.2

6.2-4

9.1-9

10

11

11.30

12

12.1

12.2f.

12.3

12.7

12.10-16

12.10-20

13

13.14

13.15

13.16

15

15.1

15.1-6

15.5

15.6

15.7-11

15.7-21

15.12

15.12-16

15.12-21

15.13

15.13-16

15.16

15.17-21

15.18
16.2f.
16.3
16.10
17
17.1–8
17.1–14
17.2
17.5
17.6
17.8
17.10f.
17.11
17.13
17.19
17.21
17.25f.
18
18.8
21.9
21.10
21.12
21.19
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22.1–3
22.7–18
22.16–18
24
24.7
26.3f.
26.4
26.24
28.3

28.10–22
28.13
28.14
34.1–31
35.11
35.11f.
35.12
37—50
37.26
38
38.26
41.37–43
41.38
47.27
48.3f.
49
49.1
49.10
49.24

Exodus

1.7
2
2.23f.
2.23–5
2.24
3
3.1–6
3.2
3.6–8
3.8
3.13–15
3.16f.

4
4.22
4.22f.
6
6.2–8
6.5
6.6
9.16
12.12f.
12.23–7
12.40
13.21f.
14—15
14.19
15
15.1–18
15.13
18.13–27
18.25
19.4–6
19.6
19.18
20.24
21
21.2–6
21.6
23.2
23.2f.
23.6
23.6–9
23.7
23.22
23.31

26.1
29.45
29.45f.
29.46
31.1–3
31.1–11
31.2
31.18
32
32—4
32—40
32.1–35
32.13
32.15
33
33—4
33.12–23
33.19
34.5–9
34.6
34.6f.
34.30
34.34
35.31
40
40.34f.
40.34–8
40.38f.

Leviticus

18
18.5
19.15

19.18
23f.
25
25.10
25.39–41
25.46
26
26.1–13
26.1–45
26.9
26.11
26.11f.
26.12
26.14–33
26.33
26.34f.
26.40–5
26.41
26.44f.

Numbers

5.3
11.17
11.25
14.1–4
14.20–3
14.21
15.30
15.30f.
15.37–41
16.41–50
24
24.7

24.14
24.17
25
25.1–18
25.6–8
25.7–13
25.11
25.12
25.12f.
25.13
27.18
35.34

Deuteronomy

1.1
1.6—3.29
1.10f.
1.17
3.15–20
4
4.7
4.7f.
4.25–31
4.29
4.30
4.37
5—26
5.1
6
6.3
6.4f.
6.6
6.9

6.10–25
6.15
7.8
7.12—8.20
7.13f.
7.21
8.1
8.7
8.17
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9.4
9.4–7
9.10f.
10.15
10.16
10.17
11.20
11.24
11.26–8
12.5
12.11
13.5
13.11
14.1f.
14.23
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15.6
15.12–18
15.15
15.17
16.2
16.18–20
17.8

17.12
18.6
21.8
21.23
23.3
24.17
24.18
25.1
25.3
26—9
26.2
26.5—9
26.16—28.68
26.19
27
27f.
27—9
27—30
27—32
27—34
27.19
27.26
28
28f.
28.1
28.4
28.10—13
28.13
28.15—68
28.25
28.33
28.37
28.43

28.45–68
28.49–52
28.51
28.63
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29.2
29.4
29.12
29.14
29.19
29.19–29
29.20–8
29.27
29.28
29.29
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30.1f.
30.1–3
30.1–5
30.1–20
30.2f.
30.3
30.3–5
30.5
30.6
30.7
30.11–14
30.12f.
30.12–14
30.14
30.15f.
30.15–20
30.16

30.19
30.19f.
31
31—3
31.11
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32.4
32.4—42
32.5
32.6—14
32.7—43
32.10f.
32.10—21
32.11
32.15—18
32.17
32.19—35
32.20
32.21
32.31
32.35
32.36
32.39
32.43
33
33f.
33.2
33.6—25
33.29
34.9
34.12

Joshua

3.7
10.12–14
18.1
19.51
21.2
22.9
24.2–13

Judges

3.10
6.34
11.29
13.25
14.6
14.19
15.14
18.31
20f.

1 Samuel

1.3
1.24
2.2
3.20
3.21
4.3
7.5
11.5–11
12.19–25
12.22
16.13
17
18.6–9

24.12–15

24.17

25.1

2 Samuel

7

7.1–17

7.2

7.5f.

7.8

7.10–14

7.12f.

7.12–14

7.12–17

7.14

8.15

19.43

20.1

21.17

22.2

22.29

22.50

23.3

1 Kings

3

3.5–14

3.9–12

3.15

3.16–28

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4.21

4.21–4

5
8
8.10f.
8.10–13
8.11
8.15–21
8.27
8.29
8.29f.
8.32
8.35
8.38
8.44
8.48f.
8.62
8.62–6
9.3
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10.24
11.13
11.30f.
11.36
12.1
12.16
14.2
14.21
15.4
17.1
18.17f.
18.19
18.20–40
19
19f.

19.1–18

19.10

19.11f.

19.14

2 Kings

6.15–19

8.19

17.7–20

23.12

1 Chronicles

5.19

9.1

16.8

16.18

17.13

18.14

22.1

28.1—29.22

28.2

29.10–12

29.21

30.1–12

2 Chronicles

1.7–13

2—7

2.6

2.12

2.13–16

5.14

6.20f.

7.1
7.12
9
9.23
12.1
12.13
19.6f.
19.7
20.7
21.7
26.16–21
29.24
36.21f.

Ezra

1.1–4
3.11
9
9.6–9
9.6–15

Nehemiah

1.8f.
1.9
9
9.6–38
9.8
9.17
9.20
9.36f.

Job

1.6

2.1
4.17
26
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29.14
32.2
34.11
34.19
38—41
38.4—39.30
38.7
40.8—41.26
41.4

Psalms

1.3
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2.1
2.1–6
2.1–11
2.2
2.6
2.6f.
2.7
2.7f.
2.7–9
2.8
2.8f.
2.9
2.9–12
2.10
2.12
3.4

5.7
7.9–10
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8.3
8.3–8
8.4
8.5
8.5f.
8.5–8
8.6
8.6f.
8.7
9.8f.
9.11
11.4
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18.6–9
18.7
18.10
18.43–9
18.49
18.50
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19.1
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19.5
20.2f.
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22.27

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24.1
24.3f.
24.3–6
24.5
24.7–10
26.1
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27.4
28.2
28.4
29.9
33.5
33.8f.
35.8
35.24
36.2
36.7
40.10–12
42f.
42.6
43.3
43.3f.
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44.20–2
44.23
44.24
44.26
46.4
46.4f.
48.1–3
48.9
50.2

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57.1
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61.4
62.2
62.12
63.2
63.7
65.1f.
65.3
66.4
67.3f.
67.4
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68.10
68.16–18
68.17
68.23–4
68.32
68.35
69.9
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72.8
72.8f.
72.8–11
72.10
72.13

72.19
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73.17
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74.1–11
74.2
74.18–23
76.2
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78.35
78.38
78.60
78.68
78.70–2
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79.1
79.8f.
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80.8–19
80.11
80.17
82.1–8
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83.6–8
83.7
84.1
84.1–12
84.11
86.9
87.2
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89.25
89.26f.
91.4
93.2
93.5
94.12f.
94.14
95.5
95.11
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96.6
96.10–13
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97.8
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98.2
98.7–9
99.2
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100.3
100.4
102.16
102.22
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104—7
104.27–33
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105.1
105.10f.
105.44
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106.20

106.30–1
106.31
106.47
107.43
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110.1
110.1f.
110.2
110.5–7
111.6
115.3–8
115.4–8
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116.4
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116.17
116.18f.
117.1
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118.20
118.22
118.22f.
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119.64
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124.5
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127.6
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132.8
132.13f.
132.13–18

132.14
132.17
134.3
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135.15–18
135.21
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138.2
138.8
139.6–9
141.2
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143.1
143.2
147.2
147.20
148.5f.
148.14
150.1

Proverbs

3.19
8
8.22
8.22–31
8.30
16.6
17.15
18.5
24.12
24.23f.
28.21

30.4

Ecclesiastes

5.8

12.14

Isaiah

1.9—4.2

2

2.2

2.2f.

2.2–4

2.3

2.5

2.10

2.12

2.19

2.21

5.1–7

5.23

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6.1–5

6.3

6.5

6.9f.

6.13

8.14

9.2–7

9.6f.

9.7

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10.2

10.5–19

10.13
10.22
10.33—11.3
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11.1
11.1–4
11.1–10
11.1–16
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11.6–9
11.8f.
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31.4–5
31.5
31.8
32.15
33.21
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34.4
37.18f.
38.7f.
39.1–7
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40—55
40—66
40.1
40.1–11
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40.12–26
40.13
40.19f.
40.28
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41.14

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42.1
42.1–4
42.1–9
42.3–6
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42.6f.
42.6–9
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42.18–20
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43.11
43.14f.
43.22
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44.9–20
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45.1–6
45.1–13
45.2
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45.15
45.20–5
45.21f.
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46.1—47.15
46.12–13
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49.1–6
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49.3–9
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49.5f.
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49.6f.
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51.1
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56.6–8

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59.15–21

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59.18

59.20f.

59.21

60.1f.

60.1–7

60.1–16

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66.18–21
66.18–23
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66.22
66.22f.

Jeremiah

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2.11
3.16

3.17
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4.4
4.23–8
4.27f.
5.28
7.12
9.22f.
9.24
9.25f.
9.26
10.1–5
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11.1–4
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25.11f.
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32.39f.
33.23–6
36.1–4
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46.10
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51.20–3
51.45

Lamentations

2.15

Ezekiel

1
5.5
7.7
7.10
8—11
10f.
10.1–22
10.4

11.19
11.22f.
12.23
13.5
18.30
20.5–44
20.34
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SEARCH NAMES FOR MODERN AUTHORS

Aageson, J. W.
Achte-meier, P. J.
Ackroyd, P. R.
Adams, E.
Agamben, G.
Agosto, E.
Alcock, S. E.
Aletti, J. N.
Alexander, P.
Algra, K.
Allen, L. C.
Allison, D. C.
Ando, C.
Arendt, H.
Arnold, C.
Arzt-Grabner, P.
Ashton, J.
Asurmendi, J. M.
Athanassiadi, P.
Atkins, R.
Audi, R.
Aune, D. E.
Aus, R.
Austin, J. L.
Avemarie, F.

Bachmann, M.
Badenas, R.
Badiou, A.

Baker, M.
Balzer, K.
Barclay, J. M. G.
Barker, M.
Barnett, P. W.
Barracclough, R.
Barram, M.
Barrett, A. A.
Barrett, C. K.
Barth, K.
Barton, J.
Barton, S. C.
Bassler, J. M.
Bauckham, R. J.
Baur, F. C.
Beacham, R.
Beale, G. K.
Beard, M.
Beckwith, R. T.
Beker, J. C.
Bekken, P. J.
Belayche, N.
Bell, R. H.
Benjamin, W.
Benko, S.
Bentley, M.
Berger, P. L.
Bernat, D. A.
Best, E.
Bett, R.
Betz, H.-D.
Bickerman, E. J.
Bieringer, R.

Billerbeck, P.
Bird, M. F.
Black, M.
Blackburn, S.
Blackwell, B. C.
Blaschke, A.
Bloom, J. J.
Blumenfeld, B.
Bock, D. L.
Bockmuehl, M. N. A.
Boer, R.
Bond, H. K.
Borg, M. J.
Boring, M. E.
Bornkamm, G.
Botha, P. J. J.
Bourdieu, P.
Bousset, W.
Bowers, W. P.
Bowersock, G.
Boyarin, D.
Boyce, M.
Bradshaw, P. F.
Brauch, M. T.
Brennan, T.
Brent, A.
Briggs, A.
Broadie, S.
Brolley, J. D.
Brooke, G. J.
Brown, C.
Brown, W. P.
Bruce, F. F.

Brunschwig, J.
Bryan, C.
Bryan, S. M.
Buell, D. K.
Bultmann, R.
Burke, T. J.
Burkert, W.
Burnett, A.
Burney, C. F.
Burrige, R. A.
Burton, E. de W.
Byrne, B.
Byron, J.

Cadwallader, A. H.
Caird, G. B.
Calduch-Benages, N.
Callahan, A. D.
Calvin, J.
Campbell, D. A.
Campbell, W. S.
Cancik, H.
Capes, D. B.
Carleton Paget, J.
Carroll, R. P.
Carson, D. A.
Casey, M. P.
Cassidy, R. J.
Cassirer, E.
Cassuto, U.
Catchpole, D.
Chadwick, H.
Champlin, E.

Chapman, D. W.
Charlesworth, J. H.
Chesnutt, R. D.
Chester, A.
Chester, S. J.
Childs, B. S.
Chilton, B. D.
Choksy, J. K.
Churchill, T. W. R.
Ciampa, R. E.
Clark, A. J.
Clements, R. E.
Cohen, S. J. D.
Cohick, L. H.
Coleiro, E.
Collins, A. Y.
Collins, C.
Collins, J. J.
Collins, K. J.
Collins, R. F.
Confino, A.
Conniry, C. J.
Conzelmann, H.
Cook, M.
Corley, J.
Cosgrove, C. H.
Countryman, L. W.
Cousar, C. B.
Cowan, J. A.
Cranfield, C. E. B.
Crofton, R. E.
Crook, J. A.
Crossan, J. D.

Crouzel, H.
Cullmann, O.
Cummins, S. A.
Cupitt, D.

Dahl, N. A.
Danby, H.
Danker, F. W.
Das, A. A.
Davies, G. I.
Davies, J. P.
Davies, P. R.
Davies, W. D.
Davis, C. J.
Dawkins, R.
de Boer, M. C.
de Vos, C. S.
DeConick, A. D.
Deines, R.
Deissmann, A.
Derrett, J. D. M.
di Lella, A. A.
Dickson, J. P.
Dillon, J. T.
DiMattei, S.
Dodd, B. J.
Dodd, C. H.
Donaldson, T. L.
Donfried, K. P.
Douthat, R.
Downing, F. G.
Downs, D. J.
Duff, T.

Dunn, J. D. G.

Dunne, J. A.

Eastman, S. G.

Eco, U.

Egger-Wenzel, R.

Ehrenberg, V.

Eisenbaum, P.

Elat, M.

Elliott, J. H.

Elliott, J. K.

Elliott, N.

Ellis, E. E.

Elsner, J.

Engberg-Pedersen, T.

Eshel, H.

Eskola, T.

Esler, P. F.

Evans, C. A.

Fantin, J. D.

Fatehi, M.

Fee, G. D.

Feeney, D.

Feldman, L. H.

Fine, S.

Fishbane, M.

Fishwick, D.

Fisk, B. N.

Fitzmyer, J. A.

Fletcher-Louis, C. H. T.

Flint, P. W.

Flusser, D.

Forbes, C.
Ford, D. F.
Fossum, J.
Fowden, G.
Fowl, S. E.
France, R. T.
Frede, M.
Fredriksen, P.
Frerichs, E.
Fretheim, T. E.
Frey, J.
Friedenreich, D. M.
Friedman, S.
Friesen, S. J.
Fuchs, E.
Fuller, M. E.
Funk, R. W.
Furnish, V. P.

Gager, J. G.
Galinsky, K.
García Martínez, F.
Garnet, P.
Gärtner, B.
Gasparro, G. S.
Gaston, L.
Gathercole, S. J.
Gaventa, B. R.
Gazda, E. K.
Geertz, C.
Getty, M. A.
Giblin, C. H.
Gibson, R. J.

Gignilliat, M.
Gilbert, M.
Gill, C.
Gilliard, F.
Ginzberg, L.
Glombitza, O.
Golding, W.
Goldingay, J.
Goldstein, J. A.
Gooch, P. W.
Goodenough, E. R.
Gooder, P. R.
Goodman, M.
Gordon, R.
Gorman, M. J.
Gosling, J. C. B.
Gowan, D. E.
Grabbe, L. L.
Gradel, I.
Grant, R. M.
Green, W. S.
Greenblatt, S.
Greimas, A. J.
Grieb, A. K.
Griffith-Jones, R.
Griffiths, P. J.
Grosby, S. E.
Gundry, R. H.
Gunneweg, A.
Günther, R.
Gurtner, D. M.

Haacker, K.

Haenchen, E.
Hafemann, S. J.
Hahn, S. W.
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