

### Paul and Israel

Matthew Thiessen and Paula Fredriksen

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*Edited by Matthew V. Novenson and R. Barry Matlock*

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### Abstract and Keywords

When Paul says ‘Israel’, what or whom does he have in mind? Christian theological tradition has long answered that by ‘Israel’, a universalist Paul means ethnically non-specific ‘Christians’. But a great deal of evidence in Paul’s letters weighs against such an idea. This chapter examines, in turn, the modern myth of a post-ethnic Paul, ancient ideas about divine and human ethnicity, Paul’s language about Jewish and gentile ‘natures’, Paul’s language about Jewish and Gentile kinds of sins, Paul’s application of different Jewish laws to Jews and Gentiles, respectively, and finally Paul’s actual usage of the ethnonyms ‘Jew’ and ‘Israel’. It is concluded that, for Paul, Jews are Israel, and Israel, his own family, is the Jews. God, through Christ, at the end of the ages (mid-first century CE), was graciously calling all humanity into the redemption that he had promised to Israel long ago. Eschatological humanity thus remains two different people groups—Israel and the nations—embraced by a single salvation.

Keywords: Paul, Israel, Jews, Gentiles, pagans, ethnicity, nature, circumcision

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## 1. Paul the Post-Ethnic Apostle to the Gentiles

When Paul says ‘Israel’, what or whom does he have in mind? Christian theological tradition has long answered that by ‘Israel’, a universalist Paul means ethnically non-specific ‘Christians’. Related terms that cluster around Paul’s biblical ethnonym—‘Jews’; ‘circumcision’; ‘Law’—through careful exegesis, occasionally assisted by strategic translation, can oblige this reading. True, Paul might occasionally aver that Israel ‘according to the flesh’ means genealogical, ethnic Jews (Rom 9:3–4). Spiritual Israel, however, embodied in the *ekklēsia* (everywhere translated as ‘church’) is the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal 6:16). And genealogical, ethnic Jews in any case are not ‘true’ Jews. The ‘true’ Jew is the Jew *kata pneuma*, the (Gentile) Christ-follower, the one who has ‘spiritual’, inner, thus, ‘true’ circumcision (Rom 2:13–16 and 25–29; Phil 3:3) (such interpretations include Boyarin 1994: 94–95; Barclay 2015: 469; and, at length, Wright 2013: 1:384–455, 2:774–1042; but against them see Thiessen 2014; Novenson 2016: 137–141).

What, then, of that ancient behavioural and textual marker of ethnic Israel, Jewish law? Awkwardly, Paul does have some positive things to say about it, beyond its having a divine source, God himself (Rom 9:4). 'Is the Law sin? *Mē genoito!*' (7:7). 'The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good' (7:12). 'We know that the Law is spiritual' (7:14). On balance, however—according to these interpreters—the Law is actually a curse (Gal 3:10, 13). Paul condemns it as an enslaving cosmic power (Gal 4:3, 9). It is fleshly, whereas the 'law of Christ' is spiritual (Gal 6:2, cf. 1 Cor 9:21). Christ's appearance only compounds the Law's comparative inadequacies, whether for righteousness or for salvation. It is a dispensation of death (2 Cor 3:7). It renders no one righteous (Gal 2:16). Christ alone can remedy the frustrations that it inflicts (Rom 7:7–25). And in any case, the period of the Law, Paul knows, is over. It ended with God's revelation of the Law's *telos*, Christ (Rom 10:4) (see further Wright 2013: 2:1651: the law is a curse; Barclay 2015: 383: the law is dead currency).

According to this interpretation, Paul, in turning to Christ (and therefore to Christianity) from *Ioudaïsmos* (translated 'Judaism'; Gal 1:14–16), gained these insights. He accordingly ceased keeping Jewish ancestral custom. Indeed, he became 'dead to the Law' (Gal 2:19)—though occasionally, to evangelize fellow Jews, he might enact some of its practices in order to persuade them to join the new messianic movement (1 Cor 9:20–22). As a servant of the 'new covenant' (2 Cor 3:6), Paul understood, further, that the notional heart of the Jewish nation, Jerusalem's temple, was permanently displaced—indeed, it was relocated within the diaspora Gentile Christian communities, which were the new, spirit-filled temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19). But why then does Paul state that 'all Israel will be saved' (Rom 11:26)? 'Saved' Israel is Christian Israel, the new people of God, a universal, ethnically inclusive community of law-free, Christ-following Jews and Gentiles both (cf. Gal 3:28). Old Israel may indeed have been the Jews. The true, mixed-ethnic Israel, for whom neither circumcision nor foreskin matters—in short, the law-free Christian church—is God's 'new creation' (*kainē ktisis*, 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

Such post-ethnic understandings of a universalist Pauline 'Israel' may seem so familiar as to be obvious. This *vetus Israël—verus Israël* contrast has prevailed in forms of Gentile Christianity since the mid-second century, eventually becoming patristic boilerplate (see the classic analysis of Simon 1948; the early example of Justin, *Dial.* 123.7–9; and the rereading of Romans 9–11 in Augustine, *ep.* 149 to Paulinus of Nola). Re-weaponized by Reformation anti-Catholic rhetoric—the Catholics standing in as proxies for Paul's opponents, the works-righteous, legalistic Jews—it continues to dominate Pauline scholarship to this day (see Zoccali 2008). Such a theological interpretation affects not only how we read Paul, but also how we imagine his ancient social context. What happens if we think of Paul's 'Israel' not as a Christian theological category, but as an ancient ethnographic one?

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## 2. Peoples, Pantheons, and Constructions of Ethnicity

Did gods have human families? In antiquity, they did; and the Jewish god was no exception. His prolific pagan colleagues, usually through sexual congress (whether with other divinities or with humans), not only generated other gods, *daemones* or *daimonia* ('godlings'), and divine heroes; they also produced divine humans (especially rulers, like Alexander the Great, or Julius Caesar, thence Augustus) and entire people-groups (see Hesiod, *Theogony*; Jones 1999 on the political possibilities; and Fredriksen 2018 on the Jewish evidence). Ancient Mediterranean gods and humans were as genealogically entangled as were nineteenth-century European royal houses after Victoria. They formed family groups. Their kinship (*syngeneia*), imagined realistically, was articulated, expressed, and reaffirmed through inherited protocols of worship, 'ancestral custom'. To maintain good relations between heaven and earth, humans enacted these ethnic patrimonies with *pietas* (Latin) or *eusebeia* (Greek): correct deference or respect. Peoples related both to their gods and to the procedures that pleased them with *pistis* (Greek) or *fides* (Latin): not 'faith' or 'belief' so much as loyalty, faithfulness, trust (cf. the Hebrew *emunah*) (Morgan 2015).

Though the Jewish god took no human sexual partners, he, too, had a human family. He was the divine father of the people Israel and, eventually and especially, the father of the anointed kings of David's line (Psalm 2; 2 Sam 7:12-14). God's parental relationship with Israel's twelve tribes, unlike Heracles's with the Spartans, or Venus's through Aeneas with Romans, was not genealogical. God became Israel's father by choice. Their relationship began with Abraham, through whom, God promises, all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:1-3, 'all families' referring to the seventy post-diluvian nations with their respective *mishpachot* listed just before, in Genesis 10; cited by Paul at Gal 3:8). God promises to Abraham progeny as numberless as the stars (15:5), a promise in which Abraham trusts (15:6). Predicting slavery for Abraham's offspring, God also affirms their ultimate entrance into the promised land (15:12-21). And, finally, before Isaac's birth, God establishes a covenant between himself and Abraham's house, to be sealed and signified by male circumcision (17:10-14).<sup>1</sup>

God's relationship with this *goy gadol*, the 'great nation' descended from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob and thence the twelve tribes, is narrated in Exodus through Numbers, and reiterated in Deuteronomy. Sometimes Jewish texts describe it using the language of human generation. ('Israel is my firstborn son', Exod 4:22; 'Ephraim is my firstborn son', Jer 31:9; Davidic kings are 'begotten' when anointed into office, Ps 2:7.) More often, however, God as Israel's father speaks of their family relationship with the language of affect and of mutual agreements ('covenants'). God chooses Israel because he 'loves' them.<sup>2</sup> He gives them his teaching (Heb *torah*; Gk *nomos*) and binds them to him by specifying behaviours intended precisely to distinguish them from other peoples, setting them apart for himself (e.g., Exod 19:4-6; Lev 22.24; Num 23.9; Deut 7.6). Of his instructions, premier place goes to Sinai's Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17), the first

two of which demand that the individual Israelite worship God alone and eschew the worship of images. Commandments 5–10 regulate human interactions; further directives fill the remainder of Moses's five books. Leviticus 19, an internal commentary on and reprise of the Ten Commandments, further specifies that loving the neighbour fulfils the law (Lev 19:18).

Because of the accidents of history, this biblical story is more familiar than those numberless others that shaped ancient cultures, lumped together by scholarly convention as 'paganism'. The point here, however, is their similarities. Gods and humans formed family groups. Ethnicity corresponded to cult, and cult to ethnicity. There were no religion-neutral ethnicities in Paul's lifetime—one of the reasons that his biblical term for non-Jews, *ta ethnē*, is better translated with the religion-specific term 'pagans' than with the seemingly religion-neutral 'gentiles'. Inherited protocols of worship articulated 'peoplehood', a patrilineal identity embedded in a *syngeneia* ('kinship') that spanned heaven and earth. These ethnically specific traditions of worship and of social behaviours—*ta patria, ta patria ethnē, mos maiorum, nomima tōn paterōn* or, in Paul's phrasing, the *paradoseis patrikai*, his 'paternal traditions' (Gal 1:14)—bound people-groups together, across space and time: with their gods, with their rulers, with their dead (another generation of the family), and with each other.

But in an age of empire, all of these different groups, human and divine, encountered each other at close quarters (see Parker 2017 on the gods abroad, who retained their native ethnicities even as their devotees wandered). Empire expanded borders, incorporating other peoples through diplomacy and conquest. It facilitated internal immigration and recreational travel: safety on the roads and on the seas was a benefit of Rome's unhesitating response to disruption with coercive force. This freedom of movement, presaged by the Hellenistic kingdoms post-Alexander, meant that foreign gods and their humans—including the Jewish god and his humans—had more opportunities to observe one another, to become acquainted with one another, and to socialize with one another.

How was ethno-religious difference negotiated, lived with, and understood? For some, it promoted high-culture theorizing, the classification of 'others' according to their putative intellectual, social, and moral behaviours. These behaviours were envisaged as innate and in-the-blood, the unchanging and unchangeable—indeed, defining—characteristics of an *ethnos* or *genos* or *natio*, even of social class or gender. People were as they were because of their *physis*, their very 'nature'. Ethnic *physis* was determined by a people's environment, both terrestrial (climate; topography; politics) and celestial (the alignment of stars and planets over certain territories affecting the innate characteristics of the peoples living there). Such factors controlled and explained the ways that peoples looked, acted, worshipped, and behaved both towards each other and towards outsiders (see Isaac 2004, cataloguing ancient theories of the natures of particular people groups).

Mediterranean mixing, in short, gave classical ethnographers a field day. Because of their very 'nature', explained the intellectuals, Egyptians were untrustworthy and lazy; Phoenicians, dishonest; Germans, physically strong but mentally weak; Persian men, effeminate

(if you were Greek); Greek men, effeminate (if you were Roman). Finding a Greek or Latin writer with a kind word to say about ethnic others—Celts, Jews, Syrians, etc.—can be a challenge. Jews returned the favour. For all their admiration of Greek culture (especially philosophy, on which see Gruen 1998 and 2002), Jewish writers, too, negatively stereotyped pagan behaviours with *brio*.<sup>3</sup>

Thinking with ‘others’ was an indirect way of expressing claims about one’s own group. ‘Our gods’, beautiful and good, brought out the best in one’s people; ‘their gods’ were just weird. (Egyptian zoolatry unnerved just about everybody; the Jews’ god was famously anti-social; bad gods demanded human sacrifice and infanticide, and so on.) Ethnic others, claimed the ethnographers, were vicious in war, untrustworthy in peace. They lied and they cheated. Extravagantly promiscuous sexually, they also murdered people and, occasionally, ate them. In the world of ancient ethnic stereotyping, as one historian has observed, even the stereotypes were stereotyped (Bohak 2003: 43; on Greek and Roman stereotypes about Jews, see the primary texts in Stern 1974–1984; and the analyses by Feldman 1993: 107–176; Schäfer 1997; Rives 1995; van der Horst 2014). Ethnic others made one’s own people look good: in fact, negative stereotypes of other ethnic groups expressed *à l’inverse* what one valued and idealized in one’s own. And appeals to biologically based *physis* also explained and justified social structure. Slaves were slavish by their very nature; women, by nature, inferior—less strong, less intelligent, less rational, less hot and dry (more cold and wet) than men (on slaves and women, e.g., famously, Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1252b).

And yet. Ancient peoples socialized together, mixing and mingling, adapting and adopting foreign customs both religious and cultural (categories separate only in our view, not in theirs). Such cross-ethnic behaviours were common enough to have left their mark in the vernacular. Greek verbed ethnonyms, adding an infinitive ending to a people-group’s name. Non-Greeks could ‘Hellenize’. Non-Jews could ‘Judaize’. Greeks could ‘Persianize’. Jews could ‘Hellenize’ or ‘foreignize’ (on this ethnic verbing see Cohen 1999; Mason 2007; Nongbri 2013: 46–50).<sup>4</sup> Despite the ethnic essentialism implied by such language (what does a Greek or a Persian intrinsically ‘act’ like?), it also attests to a range or sliding scale of cross-ethnic behaviours. For the current chapter, the two most pertinent are pagan ‘Judaizing’ and Jewish ‘Hellenizing’.

Pagans Judaized variously. They might serve local Jewish communities as donors and as patrons. They contributed to synagogue fund-raisers. They participated in Jewish activities. (Philo mentions an ‘interfaith’ picnic of pagans and Jews that annually celebrated the translation of Jewish Scriptures into Greek; *vita Mos.* 2.41–42.) And some pagans became fellow travellers (‘god-fearers’), continuing to honour their own gods while voluntarily assuming some Jewish customs and practices that honoured Israel’s god as well. They might travel to Jerusalem’s famous temple or send it votive offerings. They might begin to avoid pork, or to listen to Jewish traditions read aloud in Greek one day out of seven. Some pagan males Judaized so extremely that they ceased being pagan, ritually ‘changing’ ethnicities, divinities, and ancestors by receiving circumcision, thus becoming a Jew of a special sort, an ‘in-comer’ or proselyte (in our language, a ‘convert’). Offended Ro-

man patriots complained about this extreme form of cultural/ethnic ‘treason’ (Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96–106; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5,4). But extremes are, by definition, not the norm (see further Fredriksen 2016; Fredriksen 2017: 49–60; Goodman 1994; Thiessen 2011).

And Jews Hellenized. A most momentous Hellenization occurred in the third century BCE, in Alexandria, when God began to speak Greek: Jewish sacred writings transitioned from Hebrew (and some Aramaic) into this international vernacular (Rajak 2009; Rajak 2017; Law 2013). Jews might get good gymnasium educations, where their efforts were supervised by and dedicated to Heracles (brawn) and Hermes (brain). They could join the urban ephebate as citizens-in-training. They could serve in foreign armies or on town councils; they could become actors or athletes. They certainly participated in city-wide events—rhetorical competitions; foot races; theatre—or otherwise enjoyed them as spectators. All of these activities were dedicated to the city’s presiding gods. Going to an extreme, some Jewish males might ‘make foreskins’, undergoing a cosmetic surgical procedure known as ‘epispasm’. The writer of 1 Maccabees saw this as tantamount to ‘abandoning the holy covenant’ (1.15); other Jews thought otherwise. But extremes are, by definition, not the norm (on Jews in pagan places, see Fredriksen 2017: 32–49).

In sum, to use the distinction famously introduced in A. D. Nock’s *Conversion* (Nock 1933): (most) Jewish participants in Graeco-Roman urban life were ‘adherents’ (not ‘converts’) to paganism; and (most) pagan participants within the diaspora synagogue were ‘adherents’ (not ‘converts’) to Judaism. We need also to infer from this embedded cross-socializing another datum: notwithstanding their own tradition’s condemnation of idols and the warnings against foreign worship, most Jews most of the time seem to have made their peace with their pagan neighbours both human and divine. Put another way: for most Jews most of the time, paganism and pagans were *normal*. The non-Jewish nations were, after all, the vast majority of humankind.

### 3. Paul on Jews and Pagans: *Physis*

Paganism was definitely *not* normal, however, for a particular kind of Jewish sensibility: apocalyptic eschatology (Fredriksen 2018: 203–205). This term is a heuristic scholarly shorthand for a wide and uncoordinated assortment of expectations, prophecies, predictions, resentments, compensatory visions, and hopes—among which, a battle between the forces of good and evil; the resurrection of the dead, or perhaps only of the righteous; the punishment of the wicked (pagans, sinners, other Jews whose commitments differ from those of the text’s author); the ingathering of all Israel; the turning of the nations to Israel’s god; the destruction of idols; sometimes, the coming of a messiah or perhaps (as in the Scrolls) of two messiahs; the (re)building of Jerusalem’s temple, and so on. The early Jesus movement, both pre- and post-crucifixion, was one of a number of late Second Temple expressions of this sensibility. It put the End time on fast-forward, from ‘on that day’ to ‘soon’ to ‘now’. God’s kingdom was at hand (e.g., Mark 1:15; cf. 1 Thess 4:15–17; Phil 3:20, 4:5; 1 Cor 7:29–31; 15:51–52; Rom 13:11–12) (see Schweitzer 1953: 52; Allison 2010: 31).

Pagans and their gods became an acute practical problem once this movement spread outside of Jewish territories. In the wider world, Greek-speaking synagogue communities had long been settled within those ubiquitous pagan religious institutions, Graeco-Roman cities. When Judean and Galilean apostles entered diaspora synagogues, they found Judaizing pagans there as well. What did the rapid approach of the Jewish god's kingdom mean for non-Jews? For *these particular* non-Jews? For that matter, what did it mean for Jews, both those within the movement and those outside? It was within the context of these conditions, convictions, and commitments that Paul communicated his (Jewish) message to his (mostly Gentile) assemblies. As the Jewish apostle to *ta ethnē*, the pagan nations, Paul had to deal front and centre with issues of identity, ethnicity, and cult.

What then, for Paul, was a Jew? We can begin with his own self-description. In three different letters, Paul pronounces his ethnic, thus religious, identity. (Again, the distinction between these categories for this period is anachronistic.) Paul is an Israelite (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5; 2 Cor 11:22). He is a Hebrew born to Hebrew parents, circumcised on the eighth day after his birth (Phil 3:5; Gen 17:12, 14; Lev 12:3). He is from the seed of Abraham (Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22), and from the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5). Paul's deployments of these archaizing, scriptural-sounding identifiers serve an immediate purpose (Eyl 2017). They legitimate his authority as Christ's apostle to non-Jews. They reinforce the arguments of his letters. They validate his interpretations of ancient Jewish sacred texts. His claims, further, display how Paul defines ethnic identity in terms of genealogical descent (Hutchinson and Smith 1996). He shares these ethnic identifiers with his 'brothers' and 'kinsmen' *kata sarka*, fellow Israelites (Rom 9:3-4), and names himself as an exemplary member of that group, 'God's people' (*laos*, 11.1-2).

But Paul, like his contemporaries, also held that ethnic genealogy indicated more than biological lineage. The cult and character of a people were also hard-wired by *physis* (e.g., Plato, *Menexemus* 245D; Plutarch, *Sertorius* 11.3; and the discussions by Isaac 2004; Matlock 2012). In yet another letter, narrating a confrontation with the apostle Peter for the benefit of his Gentile assemblies in Galatia, Paul declares, 'We are Jews *physei* and not gentile sinners'—who, his contrast implies, are sinners *physei* (Gal 2:14). Modern translations usually soften *physei* by rendering it as 'by birth' (so NRSV and ESV). The KJV more accurately captures the Greek: Jews are Jews by and because of their *physis*, their very 'nature', and Gentiles are sinners because of *their* nature. Paul, in brief—and again like his contemporaries—was an ethnic essentialist, believing that indigenous identity and moral/religious character were rooted in ethnic *physis* transmitted through biological descent.

How does Paul view Jewish *physis*? What moral, religious, and cultural legacies and behaviours 'by nature'—through genealogical lineage—do all Jews share? In Romans 9:3-5 he lists these at length. There Paul asserts, first, his people's *syngeneia*, their biological family connection: Israelites are Paul's blood-brothers. They have God-given privileges—what Paul will shortly characterize as God's irrevocable 'gifts and promises' (11:29). God has bestowed upon Israel 'the glory' (*doxa*) and 'the worship' (*latreia*). 'Glory' is scriptural synecdoche for God's own glorious presence, conceptualized pre-70 CE as abiding par-

ticularly in Jerusalem's temple (cf. Matt 23:21). Given the nature of their family relationship, in other words, Jews have divinely granted access to the presence of God. *Latreia*, the bland 'worship', is not prayer service but, specifically, cult: that is, the directives detailed in Moses' five books for how to offer (especially animal) sacrifice at the altar, before God's presence. Paul also lists the covenants (note the plural: more than the covenant with Abraham is in view) and the giving of the Law, as well as God's promises (again, plural) to Israel (9:4)—presumably those same ones that God, in order to confirm, had recently sent Christ (15:8). The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) are Paul's kinsmen, as is the messiah 'according to flesh', that is, by family lineage (9:5).

But in this same passage Paul mentions yet another defining privilege: God had conferred on Paul's people *huiiothesia*, 'sonship'. Paul's ex-pagan Gentile auditors were accustomed to gods generating human *ethnē*, so Paul chooses his words scrupulously here. *Huiiothesia* is legal, thus covenantal 'sonship': 'adoption' as opposed to biological begetting. He will use this same word, *huiiothesia*, when describing the way that ex-pagan Gentiles are adopted into the family. Gentile adoption was accomplished by Christ's spirit or through holy spirit, so that these non-Jews, as adopted 'brothers' (*adelphoi*), share a connection to Abraham (Gal 3:16, 26; Rom 4:16–17). They, like (the then still uncircumcised) Abraham, 'trust' (*pisteuō*) in God's promise that they, too, will be blessed (Gal 3.8; Gen 12.3). They thereby through their own trust (*pistis*) mimetically share in Abraham's 'righteousness' (Rom 4:9; Gen 15:6). They, too, like Jews, can now address the Jewish god as 'Father' (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

Gentiles are obviously of different ethnic groups from Jews. Their status as God's new sons, in these final days, had come *not* through flesh (neither biological descent, obviously; nor by fleshly circumcision, according to Paul) but through spirit. It had been established through Christ (Gal 3:26; 4:4–7). But Jewish *huiiothesia*, Paul states in Romans 9:4, is independent of Christ. Israelite sonship had been established and covenanted long ago, and directly, by God himself. In this way, Israelites—made, not begotten—are God's sons *physei*.

## 4. Paul on Jews and Gentiles: Sin

Does Paul see these degrees of adoption as a distinction with a difference? In terms of the entailments of sinful gentile *physis*, yes. 'All are under sin', he insists (Rom 3:9), Jew and non-Jew alike. But pagans sin pagan sins, while Jews sin Jewish sins (see Young forthcoming). Gentiles who do not know God are governed by impassioned desire (1 Thess 4:5). They are trapped in a death-spiral of idolatry and immorality (Rom 1:18–32, echoing Wisdom of Solomon 12–13; in especially full voice, Rom 1:29–31) (see Thiessen 2016: 43–52; and on the similar Eph 4:17–19, Thiessen 2018a; Harrill 2014). The pagan Corinthians, before Paul had reached them, says Paul, were adulterers, idolaters, sexual miscreants, thieves, drunks, and robbers (1 Cor 6:9–11). Those who indulge in immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, drunkenness, and so on (and on), he reminds his



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Galatian assemblies, will not inherit God's kingdom (Gal 5:19–21). Left to their own devices, this, *physei* ('by nature'), is how *ethnē* behave.

What about Jewish sins? On this issue, time past and time present construct a Pauline stereoscopy. In the biblical past, Israel had sinned that premier and defining 'gentile' sin, idolatry. Paul points to the time of Elijah, when some in Israel had also worshipped Baal (1 Kings 19; Rom 11:2–4). And in his lengthy discussion of the wilderness generation in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul narrates a series of cautionary tales. Though this generation of Israelites (presumably like the current ex-pagan Corinthians) had been 'baptized' and 'drank from Christ, God struck them down' (vv.1–5). Why? Bad behaviour. Immersion and drinking Christ, Paul warns, was clearly no guarantee unless good behaviour followed. Ancient Israel, having similarly immersed and imbibed, had nonetheless worshipped the golden calf, thus indulging in idolatry and its invariable accompaniment, sexual profligacy: in consequence God felled 23,000 of them in a single day (vv. 7–8; Num 25:9). Testing the Lord, some of this generation were destroyed by serpents (v. 9; Num 21:4–9). Constantly kvetching, they were destroyed by the destroyer (v. 10; cf. Exod 14:10–12, 16:2–3; Num 11:4–6, 14:22–35).

Yet, despite all their sins, Paul depicts neither this whole generation nor even the sinful 'some' among them as distinct from the people of God. He refers to them all as 'our fathers' (*hoi pateres hēmōn*, 10:1). Sinful Israelites in the wilderness, in other words, remained Israelites. They still belonged to God's people; they still are reckoned as ancestors.<sup>5</sup> Paul recounts their misadventures, however, in order to turn his auditors, the ex-pagan Corinthians, away from similar behaviours. 'These things happened to them *typikos*'—that is, to serve as a *typos*, a paradigmatic textual prophecy—'and *they were written down to instruct us*, upon whom the ends of the ages have come' (1 Cor 10:11). The deep past of Jewish biblical sin was preserved in God's book, Paul explains here, in order to warn End-time Gentiles-in-Christ against committing pagan sin. 'Therefore, beloved, flee the worship of idols' (v. 14).

So much for biblical Jews. What of Paul's Jewish contemporaries? These we must divide into three groups: (a) those Jews within the Christ movement with whom Paul agrees; (b) those Jews within the Christ movement with whom Paul disagrees; and (c) those Jews currently outside the movement altogether.

(a) Those Jews within that stream of the Christ movement who side with Paul on the issue of ex-pagan integration are his co-workers, his fellow apostles, and his colleagues (e.g., Rom 16:9, 21; 1 Cor 15:7; Phil 2:25). Whatever *frissons* of competitiveness complicate these relationships (1 Cor 1:12), these Christ-following Jews are basically on the same page. (Note: Paul mentions Cephas/Peter positively here, in 1 Corinthians, as opposed to his language in Galatians 2.)

Relationships with the Jewish community now gathered around James, whatever their problems back in Antioch years earlier had been (Gal 2:12), also seem relatively smooth: at least, Paul as late as the mid-50s is still collecting from his diaspora Gentile assemblies to support 'the poor' back in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15; Rom

15:14–32). These first Jewish Christ-followers, privileged to receive the earliest post-mortem Christophanies, serve also as guarantors of teachings about Christ's own resurrection (1 Cor 15:3–7). For now—that is, mid-first century—these Christ-following Jews are the 'remnant', chosen *chariti* ('as a gift'); they represent a down payment towards the redemption of the whole (Rom 11:5). This remnant language matters. Even if Paul had not stated plainly that 'all Israel will be saved' (Rom 11:26, 29), his mobilization of this idea of the remnant would have implied as much (Sanders 1985: 95; Wagner 2002: 106–117). In the present time, before Christ's imminent eschatological manifestation, Paul designates this Jewish population 'the Israel of God' (Gal 6:16; more on this above).

(b) What about those fellow Jewish Christ-followers with whom Paul disagrees? Diversity of interpretation and competition over pagan recruitment did not evoke the better angels of Paul's nature. While he does not call these fellow Christ-apostles 'sinners', Paul does condemn them as dogs, mutilators of the flesh, false brethren, so-called apostles, deceitful workers, super-apostles (Gal 2:4; Phil 3:2; 2 Cor 11:5). Why? Because, by mid-century, they urge male Gentiles in Christ to incorporate through proselyte circumcision—a 'policy' Paul derogates as *sarkikos*, 'fleshly' (Gal 3:1–5; 4:29). Paul's way, says Paul, by contrast is 'spiritual'—literally: it is mediated through *pneuma* (Eyl 2019; Bazzana 2020: 103–205).

Paul's extreme antagonism towards his circumcising apostolic competitors, which particularly backlights his most intemperate letter, Galatians, provides the immediate context for Paul's polemics against (his rivals' interpretation of) Jewish law with reference to Gentiles (on the importance of the Gentile audience see Stendahl 1976: 67–77; Gaston 1987: 15–34; Gager 2000: 43–76; Thiessen 2016: 4–7; Fredriksen 2017: 122–130). Against them, insisted Paul, it was *Paul* whom God appointed as Christ's messenger to non-Jews (Gal 1:15–16, 'recognized' as such, Paul claims, by Peter, James, and John, 2:7, 9; cf: Rom 1:1–6). His Gentile assemblies must thus listen only to him, not to these other apostles. Even if an angel from heaven tells his Gentiles anything different from what Paul had said, let that angel—and anyone else—be accursed (Gal 1:8–9)! (Note: Paul does not deny that his competitors are, like himself, Israelites, Hebrews, descendants of Abraham, and ministers of Christ (2 Cor 11:22–23, though he hints that they are leagued with Satan, 11.13.) He does, often in a fury, insist that they have the gospel all wrong. But even they are Israel nevertheless.

(c) And, lastly, all those Jews outside the Christ movement: What of them? Unlike the textual Jews of scriptural tradition, whether of Elijah's generation or that of Moses, non-Christ-following Jews contemporary with Paul nowhere stand accused of committing 'gentile' sins. Rather, their singular error, ethnically inflected, is specifically 'Jewish' (see Stowers 1994; Thorsteinsson 2003; Thiessen 2016: 43–71). They are indeed privileged with circumcision and with God's books (*logia*; Rom 3:1–2), but they suffer from *apistia*: not 'faithlessness' but 'lack of trust' (that is, in that whole cluster of convictions that Paul identifies as his evangelion, 'good news'). They indeed read God's texts; but they read as through a veil, not perceiving their true meaning, which comes only via Christ (2 Cor 3:14–16). They are zealous for God's law (a good thing) but not in an enlightened way (a

bad thing), because they do not realize what Paul has realized: that the Law itself points ahead to Christ (Rom 10:4). *Apistia* ('lack of trust'), current Israel's fundamental sin, lay in not realizing that Paul was right—about the coming of the messiah; about his Davidic, eschatological identity (Thiessen 2018b); about the changing of pagan god-fearers into eschatological Gentiles (who are themselves now Abraham's sons); about the implications of the risen and returning Christ for the proximity of the kingdom's advent.

His kinsmen's misapprehension of the texts and the times is so extraordinary that Paul has to appeal to divine fiat to explain it. God, claims Paul, is the source of Jewish *apistia* in the gospel: it is all part of his surprising, mysterious eschatological plan, unpacked by Paul in Romans 9 through 11. After listing all the privileges enjoyed by all Jews *qua* Israelites (9:3–5), and affirming that God's *logos* cannot fail, Paul observes, 'Not all from Israel, are these Israel' (v. 6). The NRSV introduces 'truly' here ('Not all Israelites truly belong to Israel'). There is no warrant in the Greek, but this translation does reinforce the traditional supersessionist understanding that Paul redefines Israel to mean not ethnic Israel, but the mixed-ethnic church.

Unfortunately, such a translation collapses 9:3–5 into utter incoherence: Paul has just finished affirming that genealogical Israel *is* Israel; and, as he will reaffirm by chapter 11, their divine gifts and calling are irrevocable (11:29). Chapter 9, rather, begins a review of Jewish history by relating the interplay of genealogy, human control, and divine sovereignty: God gets to direct events, because he is God. Thus Ishmael, despite Abraham's paternity, is not Abraham's heir.<sup>6</sup> That role, as God promised, would go through Sarah to Isaac. And even having the same mother does not ensure the status as heir: Esau and Jacob are twins, but it is Jacob whom God loves. God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that God's name might be proclaimed in all the earth. For that same reason, now, God is deafening Israel to the gospel. In 11:1, Paul is still referring to Israel as 'God's people'—of whom currently only a remnant (with Paul as conspicuous exemplar) understand how God is executing his plan (vv.1, 5–6; 'the chosen', v. 7). God has tripped Israel in the footrace (11:11–12). God is temporarily disabling Israel from trusting in the message (11:7). He has temporarily pruned them from the eschatological olive tree (11:16–24).

With this last image, Paul's ancient ethnic essentialism comes once again to the fore. Even when pagans are ex-pagans-in-Christ, they are engrafted into the eschatological olive tree *para physin*, 'against [their] nature' (Rom 11:23). *Pneuma* may have helped them to reform their ethnic *physis*, but evidently that 'nature' is still there. When God re-grafts the Jews, it will be done *kata physin*, 'according to their *physis*'. However we decode Paul's image of the olive tree (see Johnson Hodge 2004; Gordon 2016), Jews belong to it and it to them *kata physin* ('by nature', Rom 11: 21, 24) because the tree is 'their own' (*tē idia elaiā*, 11:24). Evidently, in Paul's mind, even metaphorical olive trees share in Jewish ethnicity.

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## 5. Paul on Jews and Gentiles: Law and Circumcision

What is the status of Jewish law, now that Christ has come, for Jews? Was ‘righteousness through Law’ indeed ever possible? Should Jews not stop trying to do the impossible, and cease observing Jewish law? Philippians provides a partial answer to these questions. Philippians 3:4–6 features the apostle boasting of his own, ‘fleshly’ Jewish excellence. Besides his august genealogy (Israelite, Benjaminite, Hebrew born of Hebrews), Paul mentions his eighth day circumcision; his Pharisaic orientation with respect to the Law; his opposition to the assembly of Christ (*ekklēsia*, translated anachronistically as ‘church’); and finally, his excellence in Jewish Law-observance: ‘as to *dikaïosynē* (“justice” or “righteousness”) under the Law, I was blameless’. As far as Jewish accomplishments go, Paul says here, Paul was great.

However, he continues, he now views all this as so much *skubala*, ‘trash’, compared to ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my lord’ (Phil 3:7–11). Many interpreters have assumed this statement to imply that Paul as Christ-follower has ceased Jewish law-observance. But is he really saying, ‘Goodbye to all that’, here? Paul presents relativizing terms, not absolute ones. Has Paul, now knowing Christ, *ceased* being an Israelite? (Not according to Romans 9:4 and 11:1.) Has Paul, because of Christ, ceased being a Benjaminite? (Not according to Romans 11:1.) Has he ceased being oriented towards Jewish practice as a Pharisee? (Not according to Acts 23:6; and the historical Paul’s own emphasis on resurrection is characteristically Pharisaic.) Has Paul ceased being circumcised? (He disapproves of epispasm even for Gentiles, 1 Cor 7:18; and, again, he boasts of his own circumcision here.) Finally, has Paul ceased thinking of himself as ‘blameless’ with respect to the Jewish observance of Jewish ancestral custom? Given his own high view of himself, probably not. The real question is: Why assume that Paul has stopped living Jewishly at all? The *only* thing in this list that Paul has incontrovertibly ‘ceased’ doing is ‘persecuting the *ekklēsia*’. Everything else—*skubala* compared to now knowing Christ—seems still in place (Novenson 2020).

Paul *does* rant against circumcision and against ‘the Law’ in the context of competing missions of proselyte circumcision, particularly—noisily and notoriously—in Galatians. His invective, reinforced by its sixteenth-century Reformation reuse, has led generations of commentators to characterize Paul’s gospel as ‘Law-free’. But there *never* was a ‘Law-free gospel’, neither Paul’s nor anyone else’s (Fredriksen 2010). Paul insisted that his Gentiles (a) worship *his* god, the God of Israel, alone, and (b) that they absolutely abstain from making offerings before images of their own gods (‘idolatry’). In other words, he holds his Gentiles responsible to the first two of Sinai’s Ten Commandments. Through *pneuma*, Paul insists, his ex-pagan Gentiles can start acting like (an idealized version of) Jews. His exhortations range from urging the enactment of just, mutually supportive and internally regulated communities by quoting Leviticus 19:18 (‘loving the neighbour’, thus ‘fulfilling the Law’) to arguing that ex-pagan Christ assemblies support apostles by conjuring Deuteronomic oxen. (See, e.g., Gal 5:14; Rom 8:4 and 13:8–10; 1 Cor 9:9.) All of his theo-

logical building-blocks—about God, about Christ, about prophecy, about proper ritual and (therefore) sexual behaviour, about community structure—are quarried exclusively from ethnically specific *logia* and *nomoi* and *graphas* (e.g., Rom 3:2, 1 Cor 9:9, and 15:3): they are Jewish *paradoseis patrikai*.

Gentiles in Paul's assemblies had to enact a lot of Jewish law to be members in good standing. Circumcision? No; but much else. What about meat sacrificed to idols? It depends on the circumstance, Paul answers, probably conveying diaspora Jewish flexibility on the same issue (1 Cor 8:4–13, nicely reprised in Rom 14; also 1 Cor 10:14–30). Paul's Gentiles may not be 'under the Law' but, infused with holy *pneuma*, they are enabled to 'fulfil' much of the Law. Perhaps 'the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2) indicates those particular aspects of Jewish law—God's law—to which Paul holds baptized ex-pagans accountable (see Fisch 2020). Paul's male Gentiles do not have to 'become' Jews (as the circumcising apostles urged); nor are they obligated to the Law in the same ways that Jews, by covenanted agreements, are. But these Gentiles do have to act a lot like Jews. *Paul, in short, taught a radical form of messianic Judaizing to pagans.* His gospel was far from 'Law-free'.

Paul's vituperation is, to repeat, directed against proselyte circumcision of adult *Gentiles* (see Collman 2021). He nowhere in Galatians speaks of Jewish circumcision, performed on the eighth day of the infant's life: as such, Jewish covenantal circumcision is irrelevant to his topic. Gentile males-in-Christ are uninvolved in *Israel's* covenant: they participate in the promise to Abraham alone. It is therefore *for them* that neither fleshly circumcision nor fleshly foreskin matters: all that matters is that they have been enabled, through spirit, to keep 'the commandments of God' (1 Cor 7:18–19). In these last days, through Christ, despite their Gentile *physis*, non-Jews could now worship the right god (Israel's) in the right ways (Jewishly) and so fulfil (some) Jewish law. Unprecedented but long ago foreseen, these pneumatically reformatted, eschatological Gentiles were history's 'new creation' (*kainē ktisis*, 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) (see further Fredriksen forthcoming).

## 6. 'Rejoice *ethnē* with his *laos*' (Rom 15:10): Paul and Israel

So, does Paul the apostle of Christ distinguish between Jews and Gentiles? Between Israel and the nations? Galatians 3:28, often pressed into service, seems to suggest, 'No'. 'In Christ Jesus' all are 'one', erasing distinctions of ethnicity, gender, and social class. Yet elsewhere, Paul also insists on gender distinctions within his *ekklēsiai* (e.g., 1 Cor 11:1–16). He facilitates the return of a runaway slave (Philemon). And so firmly does Paul hold to ethnic distinctions that he rejects the possibility of a Gentile's ritually becoming a Jew.

For instance, in Galatians, Paul deploys the Abraham narrative, arguing that stories of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac are actually allegories about the eschatological incorporation of Gentiles (4:21–31). Those Gentiles who follow the gospel of Paul's rivals, who call for Gentiles to undergo circumcision, become like Ishmael—sons of a sort, but not like those heirs who are circumcised on the eighth day according to the covenant (Gen 17:12).

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Those Gentiles who submit to Paul's circumcision-free gospel, he continues here, become like Isaac: sons, thus heirs, via *pneuma* and promise. And in Romans, Paul addresses a so-called Jew (2:17), an interlocutor who is a Gentile who has attempted to become a Jew via circumcision and law observance, but whose Jewishness Paul calls into question precisely because his circumcision is not in accordance with the law (Rom 2:25) (Thiessen 2016; Neutel 2016; Smit 2017).

And like those Scriptures whose authority he appeals to—especially Isaiah, especially in Romans—Paul distinguishes between Gentile and Jew even at the End, once both are 'in Christ'. We see this especially clearly in Romans 11:25, where the Gentiles' Jewish paternity suddenly shifts. Abraham is nowhere in sight. The primal patriarch is Noah, conjured by 'the fulness of the nations', a reference to the seventy peoples descended from Noah's sons and listed in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10). Israel, split off from the descendants of Shem long ago, singled out by God for God, remains its own distinct people group (Rom 11:26). The messiah will secure them, too, all twelve tribes of David's kingdom.

Seventy nations plus twelve tribes is Paul's eschatological arithmetic. It indicates the plenum of humanity. *How* Paul expects this to happen, he does not say: it is a *mystērion*.<sup>7</sup> Both all Gentile nations and all Israel will, somehow, receive Christ's *pneuma* (Rom 1:16–17; 10:11–13, taking all the *pistis* words as 'trust', not as 'belief'). So too at Romans 15:9–12: Gentiles-in-Christ rejoice *with* saved Israel, but they do not 'become' Israel. They join *with* Israel, but they do not 'join' Israel. Even eschatologically—that is, 'in Christ'—Jews and Gentiles, though now in one 'family', are not 'one'.

For Paul, consistently, Jews are Israel, and Israel, his own family, is the Jews (Eisenbaum 2009). God, through Christ, in these final days mid-first century, was graciously calling all humanity into the redemption that he had promised to Israel long ago. Eschatological humanity thus remains two different people groups—Israel, and the nations—embraced by a single salvation (Schweitzer 1953: 84; Munck 1959: 259; Dahl 1991: 22; Stendahl 1995: ix).

## Further Reading

For the history of the kind of interpretation of Paul and Israel offered here, see the classics **Schweitzer 1953**; **Munck 1959**; **Stendahl 1976**; **Stowers 1994**. On the historical Paul belonging firmly within Judaism as opposed to Christianity, see **Eisenbaum 2009**. On the particular problem with Gentiles, see **Thiessen 2016**. On apocalyptic eschatology as a context for Paul, see **Fredriksen 2017**.

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### Notes:

(1) God specifies eighth-day circumcision in 17:12 (and v. 14 according to LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch), a possibility for Isaac once he is born, 21:1–4. At the time that God gives this directive, however, Abraham is 99, Ishmael 13, and all the men of the household clearly of various ages.

(2) E.g., Deut 7:7–8, of the whole people; 10:14–16, specifically with reference to the ‘fathers’—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; perhaps as well Jacob’s twelve ‘sons’, the eponymous founders of the twelve tribes. Indexing this affection, Jub 2.17–20 highlights God’s sharing Sabbath observance uniquely with ‘Jacob’ (meaning Israel), cf. Gen 2:1–3.

(3) Jewish texts both Hebrew and Greek scorn foreign gods as ‘idols’, mere ‘dumb images’, and deplore the anti-social behaviors occasioned by such worship (child-sacrifice, murder, and hypersexuality). For an anti-pagan polemic closer to our period, Wisdom of Solomon 12–13, which will reappear in Romans 1:18–32.

(4) E.g., 2 Macc 4:13, where Jewish adoption of Greek customs is described as *hellēnismos* and *allophylismos*—Hellenization and foreignization, and 4 Macc 18:5, which depicts Jewish adoption of Greek customs via the verb *allophyleō*. Cf. Gal 2:14, where Jews can act ‘paganly’ and ex-pagans can act ‘Jewishly’ (*ethnikōs—ioudaïkōs*).

(5) Paul on this point seems less severe than Rabbi Akiva who, according to the sixth-century *b. Kallah Rabbati* 53a (3.20), maintained that the wilderness generation had no part in the world to come. This passage in 1 Cor 10 has implications for supersessionist translations and interpretations of Rom 9:6: see above.

(6) NRSV 9:7 introduces ‘true’ before *tekna*, ‘children’, where there is no such in the Greek. Besides, Ishmael truly is one of Abraham’s children. At issue is the question of inheritance and who is the covenantal seed (*sperma*), an issue raised long before Paul, in Gen 21:12.

(7) If the universal delivery of Christ’s *pneuma* is one mystery, the persistence of ethnicity after the universal transformation of humans from ‘soulful’ bodies of flesh and blood to *sōmata pneumatika* (1 Cor 15:42–44, 50) is no less of one. How do bodies of spirit register ethnic difference? Ancient stars and planets were made of the same fine stuff (material spirit), and yet they registered gender difference. (Venus was a ‘she’; Mars was a ‘he’.) Jewish angels are also made of the same stuff, yet they have gender too—hence, evidently, Paul’s instructions in 1 Cor 11:10. Some Jewish angels are even circumcised (Jub 15.27, the angels of the Presence and the angels of sanctification), others female (Ahuvia 2017; Ahuvia forthcoming).

**Matthew Thiessen**

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Matthew Thiessen is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at McMaster University. He is the author of *Contesting Conversion* (Oxford University Press, 2011), *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford University Press, 2016), and *Jesus and the Forces of Death* (Baker, 2020).

### **Paula Fredriksen**

Paula Fredriksen, the Aurelio Professor of Scripture emerita at Boston University, since 2009 has been Distinguished Visiting Professor of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, she is the author, most recently, of *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle* (Yale University Press, 2017), and *When Christians Were Jews* (Yale University Press, 2018).