

“Circumcision is Nothing”: A Non-Reformation Reading of the Letters of Paul

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The fact that even the second generation does not know what to make of [Paul’s] teaching suggests the conjecture that he built his system upon a conviction which ruled only in the first generation. But what was it that disappeared out of the first Christian generation? What but the expectation of the immediate dawn of the messianic kingdom of Jesus?

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My *presupposition* in this paper is straightforward: When Paul says “Israel,” he means “Jews.” And by “Jews” Paul means his kinsmen *kata sarka*, those recipients of the divine gifts and privileges listed in Romans 9:4–5, categorized as “irrevocable” in Romans 11:29, and confirmed by Christ’s coming in Romans 15:8.

My *argument* in this paper may seem to contradict my presupposition. I will make the case here that by “circumcision” Paul sometimes refers to “Israel” and sometimes refers to “not-Israel.” That is, Paul will sometimes speak of a male from among the *ethnē* when he considers those who are thinking about becoming circumcised or those who, at some point prior to their contact with him, have already been circumcised.² Given that, often but not always, Paul combats other Christ-followers who think that male gentiles-in-Christ *should* be

1 William Montgomery, trans., *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 39.

2 Those thinking about receiving circumcision, e.g., Gal 6:13 (a present participle, περιτεμνόμενοι). Gentiles who have already been circumcised (that is, who have received proselyte circumcision) before their contact with Paul, I will argue, are represented in 1 Cor 7:18, in Rom 2:17–29 and in 7:5–25. Unless otherwise noted, translations from primary texts are my own.

circumcised, the referent of “circumcised” or of “circumcision” will depend on its immediate rhetorical context in Paul’s (frequently highly-charged) letters.

This argument – namely, that sometimes Paul refers to circumcised or circumcising *gentiles* when he says “circumcision” – represents a new reading of Paul, one that rests on the work of a growing group of New Testament scholars who see Paul as standing *within*, not against, Judaism. We begin from a foundational assumption, namely, that this apostle of the raised and returning Christ always continued in his *pistis* toward his native Judaism’s convictions, commitments, and *practices*. Such a reading runs counter to traditions of interpretation spanning centuries, from the New Testament’s deutero-Pauline epistles through the church fathers to Luther, and thence to the prevailing scholarly consensus of our own day. This essay challenges that consensus by presenting Paul within, not against, his *paradoseis patrikai* (Sections 1–3) and concludes, nodding to Schweitzer (Section 4), with a diagnosis of Post-Reformation Pauline Studies’ root reason for resisting seeing Paul as a Jew. Sections 1 through 3, in brief, rereads Paul in imagined innocence of the Reformation.

Some preliminary points of orientation. First, I see Paul as articulating a particular and peculiar type of Late Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, *temporally* conceived. Paul and the rest of his contemporary Christ-followers, no matter how variously they proposed to cope with the issue of integrating ex-pagan gentiles into the Christ movement some two decades after Jesus’ crucifixion, all expected the Kingdom to come within their own lifetimes. I use “apocalyptic eschatology,” in other words, to mean “expecting the End soon.”³ This looming end to history put pressures on the new movement; but it also induced and supported considerable social latitude as well.

3 “Apocalyptic,” some NT scholars urge, is best understood as referring strictly to “revelation,” with no timetable implied. “Eschatology,” similarly, can be taken to indicate “last things,” again with no proximate End in view. Douglas A. Campbell’s *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) exemplifies such a position. For smaller samplings of these modern positions, which stretch from Ernst Käsemann to N.T. Wright and beyond, see (some of) the essays collected in Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston, eds., *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016); also (concentrating on the work of Beker, Martyn, Campbell, and Gaventa), J.P. Davies, *Paul Among the Apocalypses? An Evaluation of the ‘Apocalyptic Paul’ in the Context of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature*, LNTS 562 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016). Examples could be endlessly multiplied. For a concise history of the variety of definitions surrounding this term, John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–42. For my arguments against these views, Paula Fredriksen, *Paul. The Pagans’ Apostle* (New Haven: Yale, 2017), for Paul himself; on this temporal commitment as providing the propulsion of the post-crucifixion message out into the Diaspora, eadem, *When Christians Were Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 74–107.

Second, I will not address the question whether Paul himself, after his call to become an apostle, continued to observe his native ancestral practices. I assume that he did so, as I think that virtually all of the Jews within the first generation of this movement did. For the argument, though, I refer the reader to earlier publications.⁴

Third, I do not think that Paul advocated two ways of redemption, Torah for Jews and Christ for ex-pagan gentiles. The *telos* of the Law for Israel, per Romans 10:4, is their recognition that Jesus is the eschatological Davidic messiah. Their redemption, which Paul assumes (Rom 11:26), will be mediated through and accomplished by *pneuma*, itself mediated through Christ. The Davidic messiah, according to Paul, redeems the entire cosmos, both super-human (e.g., Phil 2:10; Rom 8:23) and human (Rom 11:25–26; 15:8–12). The redemption of Israel is quite precisely the object of Christ's first coming *and* his second, culminating, triumphant one (Rom 15:8).

Fourth, I will not go beyond the core of the seven undisputed letters when building my case. In my view, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals are all demonstrably later literary productions that appeal to Paul's authority to establish their own post-Pauline teachings.⁵

Fifth, there were no religiously neutral ethnicities in antiquity. Gods and humans came bundled together in family groups; ethnicity, *syngeneia*, linked heaven and earth. Accordingly, while I will sometimes translate *ethnē* as "gentiles" or as "nations," I will also sometimes translate it as "pagans." The point is that non-Jews were born into their relationships with and obligations to their gods, as indeed Jews were to theirs. While "gentile" sounds "religion-neutral," "pagan" does not. Thus, despite its intrinsic anachronism (it is a fourth-century Christian term of derogation), "pagan" usefully reminds us that Paul had to deal with the social agency of lower cosmic powers (*daimonia*) as a consequence of turning the *ethnē* of his assemblies from their gods to his god.

Sixth, and importantly: "soteriology" does not exhaust the category of ancient "religion," which is itself a problematic term and concept for antiquity.⁶ Divine-human *syngeneia*, connected peoples and pantheons;⁷ thus, what we

4 Besides the two books mentioned immediately above, see Paula Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission Mean a 'Law-Free' Apostle?" *JBL* 134 (2015): 637–50.

5 Fredriksen, *Paul*, 169.

6 On which see esp. Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); also idem, "The Concept of Religion and the Study of the Apostle Paul," *JMJS* 2 (2015): 1–26, especially his critique of the deployment of "salvation" in academic discussions of Paul.

7 Pagan gods often took human partners, and ancient peoples generated lineages tracing descent from a god. Jews, too, saw their god as their "father" (a biblical commonplace, cf.

think of as “religion” was conceptualized as an ethnic inheritance, constituted of protocols passed down from one generation to the next. These defined people groups: τὰ πατρία ἦθη, παράδοσις τῶν πατέρων, *mos maiorum*. Words that we frequently translate as “belief” (*pistis, fides*) and as “piety” (*eusebeia, pietas*) in their ancient context meant “loyalty” or “faithfulness to” or “confidence in” these ancestral customs, which for all ethno-religious groups choreographed a broad range of observances, food ways, cult acts, calendars, purifications and domestic rituals. In short, “ancestral custom” coordinated relations between heaven and earth, as well as relations between human family members living and dead: *pietas* described and defined this deference. These patrimonies shaped and defined how one lived. “Salvation” was a very specialized concern, often for philosophers or for adepts of mystery cults: it was not a standing issue, much less a dominating one, of *patria ethē*.⁸

Seventh, and finally, and in keeping with the work of Benjamin Isaac on ancient ethnography, and more specifically with the work of Caroline Johnson Hodge and of Matthew Thiessen on Paul’s own ethnic reasoning, I construe Paul as an ancient ethnic essentialist.⁹ For Paul, Jews are Jews “by nature,” *physei*; and gentile sinners are gentile sinners *physei* (e.g., Gal 2:15). I will unpack this idea in the course of my presentation. Matthew Thiessen, further, has recently emphasized the importance of specifically eighth-day circumcision for Paul (cf., on this point, Phil 3:5 and Rom 3:1). By receiving (proselyte) circumcision as adults, well past their eighth day of life, Thiessen urges, male gentiles would accordingly violate the “law of circumcision” precisely when and because they receive it (thus, Paul’s statement in Gal 6:13). In this latter interpretation, Paul objected to proselyte circumcision not because he thought that gentiles *should* not “become” Jews, but because he thought that gentiles *could* not become Jews. Whether for this reason, or because of innate pagan *physis*

Rom 9:4) and the people of Israel as his “sons,” though this connection was not genealogical, as it could be with Greek and Roman gods (hence Paul’s use of *huiiothesia* of Israel’s sonship). See further Paula Fredriksen, “How Jewish is God? Divine Ethnicity in Paul’s Theology” *JBL* 139 (2018): 193–212, at 194–99.

- 8 On the distortions done to ancient Judaism by construing it, like Christianity, as a “religion of salvation,” see too Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 25–29.
- 9 Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), a magisterial investigation of ancient ethnic essentialism; Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

more generally, Paul was convinced that proselyte circumcision cannot turn a non-Jewish male into a Law-fulfilling Jew.¹⁰

One last prefatory remark. My title is not meant to single out the Protestant Reformation as some sort of straw man. As my opening quotation from Schweitzer suggests, the reading of Paul's "Israel" as indicating the church, a mixed body of Jews and gentiles saved through Christ, begins with the loss of the Christ-movement's first generation – which had been convinced that it would be history's *last* generation. Already, Ephesians collapses the distinction between Israel and the nations, a distinction upon which, I will argue, Paul's whole theology rested (Eph 2:11–16). Already, the author of Colossians disarmed those cosmic "principalities and powers" whose defeat, Paul had admonished the Corinthians, was still, and necessarily, awaited (Col 2:15; cf. 1 Cor 15). The "all Israel" that "will be saved," for the centuries of patristic writers surveyed by Marcel Simon, meant always and only the Christian church.¹¹ Finally, you do not have to be a church father, or a Protestant, or even a Christian, to hold this view: you simply have to be oriented in the materials by the broad lines of Protestant Pauline scholarship.¹² Paul the post-Jewish, universalist apostle of a blended, generic humanity is the product of this scholarship.

Nineteen and a half centuries is a long hermeneutical lifetime. Permit me to suggest an alternative.

1 *Physis and Pneuma*

"We are Jews *physei*," Paul said to Peter in Antioch, "and not gentile sinners" (Gal 2:15).¹³ The NRSV translates *physei* as "by birth." What it means, though, is "by nature," *physis*. *Physis* is an essentialist category of ancient anthropology. (Slaves, too, for example, were servile *physei*; women, by their very nature, were inferior to men.) Paul further states here that non-Jews, the *ethnē*, are sinners "by nature." This is in part because non-Jews did not worship the Jewish god,

10 See Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 54–101. As I will argue further on, Paul states as much in Rom 2:17–29, and dramatizes this gentile's lament in Rom 7.

11 Marcel Simon, *Verus Israël: Études sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'empire romain (135–425)* (Paris: E. de Boccard 1948). For a consideration of the interpretive theological issues, John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 418–22.

12 Thus, e.g., Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert. The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 387.

13 Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἀμαρτωλοί.

and they compounded this problem by sacrificing before cult statues of their own gods. In the language of Jewish anti-pagan polemics, gentiles made offerings to idols. They thereby partnered with *daimonia* (1 Cor 10:20). From this, a cascade of ethical sequelae tumbled.¹⁴

What did it mean for Paul, to be a *Ioudaios physei*? What, in other words, did all Jews as such have in common? Here, a prime text is Romans 9:4–5. Israelites, Paul’s “kinsmen by flesh,” his “brothers,” enjoy *huiiothesia*: God had long ago made Israel his sons. (Note that, according to Paul, and unlike ex-pagan Christological *huiiothesia*, Jewish sonship was established quite apart from, and antecedent to, any involvement with or relationship to Christ.) Jews enjoy a particular intimacy with God, whose glorious presence resided in Jerusalem’s sanctuary (*doxa*). Jews know God’s will thanks to the covenants and the Law and the ancestral cult of sacrifices, *latreia* (also another reference to Jerusalem’s altar). They have God’s promises. They have the patriarchs. And they have *syngeneia kata sarka* with the messiah.¹⁵ “Circumcision” is so much a part of this religious and cultural cluster that, in Galatians 2:7, Paul can use it as a metonymy for “Jews,” as “foreskin” functions for *ethnē*: Peter will go to the circumcision, Paul to the foreskin.

God has given Israel special privileges. As Paul said a little earlier in Romans, Jews have advantages. Covenantal circumcision is one of them, as is having been entrusted with God’s *logia* (Rom 3:1–2; cf. Phil 3:5).¹⁶ As Paul will say a little later in this letter, all of these privileges and promises are the irrevocable gifts and calling of God (11:29). Indeed, he urges in conclusion, God sent Christ precisely in order to show his own truthfulness and to confirm the promises made earlier to the patriarchs (15:8).

This is not to say that Israel is “sinless.” All humanity “both Jews and Greeks are under sin” (Rom 3:9). But for Paul, sin – as so much else – is also ethnically inflected: Jews sin in *their* ways, and “gentiles”/ “pagans” in theirs.¹⁷ All suffer the effects of life – thus, of sin and of death – after Adam (1 Cor 15:22;

14 This idea that worshipping the wrong gods, or worshipping in the wrong way, leads to wrong behaviors is another ancient polemical commonplace. On this point, and its place in second-century intra-Christian polemics, Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 80–88.

15 Paul speaks ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα. 9:4 οἵτινες εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται ὧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι; 9:5 ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα.

16 Τί οὖν τὸ περισσὸν τοῦ Ἰουδαίου, ἢ τίς ἡ ὠφέλεια τῆς περιτομῆς; 2 πολὺ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον. πρῶτον μὲν ἵνα γάρ ὅτι ἐπιστεύθησαν τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ.

17 Stephen L. Young investigates Paul’s views on specifically Jewish sin in “Ethnic Ethics: Paul’s Eschatological Myth of Jewish Sin” *NTS* (forthcoming 2022). I warmly thank Dr Young for sharing his pre-publication essay with me.

Rom 5:12). However, since he writes to gentiles and about gentiles, Paul spends relatively little time on “Jewish” sins. He does lament that his genealogical brothers (unlike his “adopted” *adelphoi*, the gentiles-in-Christ) are zealous for *nomos*, but in an unenlightened way: most of them seem not to have realized that Christ is Law’s *telos*, the “righteousing” culmination to which *nomos* leads (Rom 10:4). In short, the Jews’ prime sin is that they do not recognize Jesus as (or “trust” that he is: *pisteuo*) the eschatological messiah. This circumstance is so extraordinary that Paul has to mobilize divine fiat to explain it.¹⁸

In what ways, then, do pagans sin? What did Paul intend, when he held that these ethnic others were sinners “by nature,” *physei*? What does it imply, even once they are “in Christ,” that these peoples are engrafted into the eschatological olive tree still *para physin*, “against [their] nature” (Rom 11:24)? On this topic Paul dilates frequently, stereotyping pagan behaviours with conviction. Because they worship idols, he holds, the *ethnē* inevitably live lives mired in wrongdoing: bad habits, bad sex, bad cult, distempered societies, dysfunctional families. “They not only do such things [as lie, cheat, and steal], but they consent to those doing them!” (Rom 1:18–32, a re-mix of themes from the Wisdom of Solomon).¹⁹ The pagan Corinthians, before Paul reached them, were adulterers, idolaters, sexual miscreants, thieves, drunks and robbers (1 Cor 6:9–11).²⁰ Those who indulge in immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery,

18 Rom 11:25, God disenables Israel from receiving the gospel; cf. 9.6–18, where Paul narrates those times in Israel’s foundational past when God had similarly exercised sovereign control over events.

19 Rom 1:18–32: Ἀποκαλύπτεται γὰρ ὀργὴ θεοῦ ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν ἀνθρώπων τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων, 19 διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς, ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐφανερώσεν. 20 τὰ γὰρ ἀόρατα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου τοῖς ποιήμασιν νοούμενα καθοράται, ἢ τε ἀίτιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀναπολόγητους, 21 διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ ἠυχάριστησαν, ἀλλὰ ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία ... etc.; cf. *Wisdom of Solomon* 13:10–14.28, behavioral wrongs explicitly linked, as in Romans, to idolatry. Despite Paul’s emphasis in this passage on idol worship and its deleterious effects, John Barclay argues that Rom 1:18–32 addresses the problem of *universal* sin, thus that these verses indict both Jews and gentiles, *Paul and the Gift*, 463–66. Thiessen, by contrast, brings examples of ancient Christian commentators who took Paul’s indictment as targeting pagans solely and specifically and, pointing to various pagan authors aware of Judaism’s aniconism, Thiessen argues that even ancient *gentile* hearers (like those whom Paul addresses!) would recognize in Paul’s opening salvo a critique of specifically pagan practices and ethics, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 43–52. Cf. too Krister Stendahl’s conclusion: “The issue at hand in Romans is the justification of Paul’s Gentile converts, not of sinners in general,” *Final Account: Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 76.

20 1 Cor 6:9–11: Ἡ οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; μὴ πλανᾶσθε οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλολάτραι οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενικοῖται 10 οὔτε κλέπται οὔτε πλεονέκται, Ἦ οὐ μέθυσι, οὐ λοῖδοροι, οὐχ ἄρπαγες βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσουσιν. 11 καὶ

enmity, drunkenness, and so on (and on), he reminds his Galatian assemblies, will not inherit God's kingdom (Gal 5:19–21).²¹ Left to their own devices, this, *physei* ("by [their] nature"), is how *ethnē* behave.

Now that the "ends of the ages have come" upon Paul and his generation (1 Cor 10:11), now that the messiah has come once, been crucified and raised and is *therefore* about to come back, transforming the quick and the dead, how can a gentile prepare? How, in Paul's view, can a pagan become an *ex-pagan*, altering his very *physis*, thereby ceasing to sin? Can there even *be* such a thing as an *ex-pagan* pagan, given Paul's ethnic essentialism? To answer this question, I would like to consider, briefly, the ancient concept of acting like a member of a different people group – an idea which itself essentializes ethnicity.

Ethnic verbing in antiquity: To Hellenize. To Persianize. To Egyptianize. To Judaize. All of these terms indicated an outsider's assumption of behaviours and customs belonging to a different ethnic (thus religious) group. Like everything else, such voluntary affiliations were on a gradient. A Jew, for example, might "Hellenize" by assuming a Greek name. He might gain a good Greek education. He might become an athlete or an actor or a citizen of his diaspora city. He might, like Philo's nephew, forsake his ancestral *ēthē* (Josephus, *AJ* 20.100). Or he could even (and most radically), by undergoing epispasm, "make himself a foreskin" in the language of 1 Maccabees 1.15 (καὶ ἐποίησαν ἑαυτοῖς ἀκροβυστίας). And traffic might also run in the other direction: non-Jews might "Judaize." Such voluntary behaviours could stretch from contributing, as an affiliated pagan, to a synagogue fund drive, to sending votive offerings to the Jerusalem temple, to participating in Jewish fasts or feasts; or even, for men, to receiving proselyte circumcision and thereby becoming a Jew of a special sort, that is, an "incomer," a *proselytos* or "convert."²²

ταυτά τινες ἦτε· ἀλλὰ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλὰ ἡγιάσθητε, ἀλλὰ ἐδικαιώθητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

21 Gal 5:19–21: φανερά δέ ἐστιν τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, ἅτινά γ' ἐστὶν πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια, 20 εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία, ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζήλος, θυμοί, ἐριθείαι, διχοστασῖαι, αἰρέσεις, 21 ἠφθόνοι, μέθαι, κῶμοι, καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις, ἃ προλέγω ὑμῖν ἵνα καθὼς προεῖπον ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες βασιλείαν θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν.

22 Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, HCS 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Steve Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History" *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512, both explore the semantic as well as the social range of this ethnic verbing. On the ways that this "outsider" adaptation and adoption of Jewish *ethē* complicates translation and understanding of the term *Ioudaïsmos*, Matthew V. Novenson, "Paul's Former Occupation in *Ioudaïsmos*," In *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letters*, ed. M.W. Elliott et al., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 24–39. *Ioudaïsmos*, Novenson argues there, relates not to transethnic behaviors but to a

Paul himself, his rhetoric in Galatians notwithstanding, demanded a radical degree of Judaizing from his assemblies of ex-pagans. Paul absolutely insisted that his gentiles-in-Christ assume the two uniquely Jewish behaviours that were the most socially conspicuous in a diaspora setting. His people were to make an *exclusive* commitment to the Jewish god; and they were to desist, absolutely, from making offerings before images of their native gods. This last, I will point out, is a *ritual*, not an “ethical” demand; and it went far beyond anything that diaspora synagogues ever demanded of sympathetic pagan adherents. Paul’s ex-pagan pagans, in short, were to commit to the first of Sinai’s ten commandments: No other gods, and no cult images.²³

But. But Paul also insisted that his gentiles were not to receive circumcision, though he expected them to start Judaizing, that is, to start acting more-or-less like (his idealized vision of) Jews. The only reason that his ex-pagans were able to act in the way Paul demanded, said Paul, was because they had received “spirit.” Absent spirit, as we shall see, the circumcised gentile might “call himself a Jew” (Rom 2:17) but he still could not act like one, and he could never “be” one: indeed, he would still be mired in “gentile” sin. (Rom 2:21–23 mentions theft, adultery, and sacrilege, “stereotypically gentile sins,” as Matthew Thiessen notes.²⁴ This person’s frustrated inability is narrated in 7:4–25; cf. 13:13–14, a reprise of the sins lavishly listed in 1.18–32.)

Though Paul himself might no longer “preach circumcision” (Gal 5:11),²⁵ he nonetheless, as Christ’s apostle to the *ethnē*, surely insisted that these gentiles

political program of internal intensification practiced on and advocated *by Jews for Jews*. See too Fredriksen, *Paul*, 181 n. 3; further on the range of pagan affiliation with diaspora Jewish communities, *ibid.*, 49–60; also eadem, “If It Looks like a Duck, and It Quacks like a Duck ...: On Not Giving Up the Godfearers.” In *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. S.A. Harvey et al., (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 25–34. Cf. Thiessen, *Gentile Problem*, 37–41, who interprets the word to indicate active cross-ethnic outreach (a.k.a. missionary activity).

23 Paula Fredriksen, “Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul’s Gospel,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 232–252. This division between “ceremonial” or “ritual” or “symbolic” aspects of Jewish law (irrelevant to gentiles), and “moral” or “ethical” law (still binding) goes back to the patristic period, e.g., Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.17–19; Augustine, *Faust.* 6.2. This is not a distinction native to Second Temple Judaism, nor did it occur to Paul.

24 Matthew Thiessen, “Paul’s So-Called Jew and Lawless Law-keeping,” in *The So-Called Jew in Paul’s Letter to the Romans* ed. R. Rodriguez, M. Thiessen, and R. Thorsteinsson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 59–83, esp. 76–79; *idem*, *Gentile Problem*, 47–52, making the point that even a gentile hearer would associate this list of vices with gentiles.

25 At what point and to what end had Paul promoted proselyte circumcision? Thiessen, following Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 275–84 and, more recently *idem*, “Paul within Judaism: A Critical Evaluation from a ‘New Perspective’ Perspective,” in *Paul*

“act Jewishly” (which is the ancient definition of “Judaizing”).²⁶ He expected Christ-following gentiles to be uniquely enabled to act Jewishly, their *physis* notwithstanding, because they had been eschatologically altered by divine spirit through immersion into Christ’s death and resurrection (e.g., Rom 4:25, 5:6–11, 7:4). To nod again to Thiessen: proselyte circumcision was mere cosmetic surgery. Infusion by divine spirit was deep gene therapy.²⁷

2 Circumcision and New Creation

Spirit and spirit alone (so Paul) effected gentile adoption, *huiiothesia*. God’s new sons remained of a different biological lineage from Israel *kata sarka*. They were *not* descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the “fathers.” Nor, he insists, could they be made part of fleshly Israel *through* flesh, that is, through receiving proselyte circumcision. Pneumatic lineage is *not* fleshly – and that is the point. By undergoing *huiiothesia kata pneuma*, by establishing a specifically pneumatic lineage through Christ to Abraham (Gal 3:6–29; cf. Rom 4:1–12), these gentiles, too, could now be legitimate heirs, along with ethnic Israel,

Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle, ed. M.D. Nanos and M. Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 277–302, at 299n. 39), conjectures that Paul, prior to his contact with the Christ-apostles had promoted missions to non-Jewish males to turn them into Jews. Given the absence of evidence that such a missionary endeavor ever existed (other than that of Paul’s mid-first century competitors within the Christ movement), I proposed that Paul had encouraged male godfearers, already within a synagogue ambit, to commit fully to the Jewish god (as he would continue to do as an apostle of Christ), Fredriksen, *Paul*, 126, 164. More Recently, Joshua D. Garroway has accounted for Paul’s statement in Gal 5:11 by speculating that Paul advocated such Judaizing for almost a decade as part of his mission in Christ; then, undergoing a second “conversion experience,” Paul only began to promote a circumcision-free mission in Philippi, c.43 CE, see Joshua D. Garroway, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Paul, Philippi. and the Origins of Christianity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 6, 72–81, and passim. For an exhaustive review of the historiography on this question of Jewish missions to gentiles, see esp. Rainer Riesner, “A Pre-Christian Jewish Mission?” In *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. J. Ådna and H. Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 211–50.

26 John M.G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, WUNT 275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) states that my use of “Judaizing” in connection with Paul’s mission is “etic, not emic, i.e., dependent on *our* definitions of ‘Judaism’ and ‘Judaizing’, not those current in antiquity,” 18 n. 48. To the contrary: a non-Jew’s assumption of Jewish behaviors – such as, in the case of Paul’s message, making an exclusive commitment to the Jewish god – is precisely the ancient definition of “Judaizing”; see above, n. 22.

27 Thiessen’s nice analogy, *Gentile Problem*, 117.

Paul's kinsmen, to the promise of salvation granted to Abraham.²⁸ They, too, could inherit the Kingdom. Their changed status was manifest in the (brief) here-and-now, not ethnically, but *ethically*: new gentile *adelphoi*, enabled through spirit, and despite their old "nature" – the "outer man" (2 Cor 4:16)? – could now fulfil God's law (Gal 5:14; Rom 13:8).

With these as our interpretive plumb lines, let us consider in more detail what Paul says about circumcision, about sin, about law, and about Jews and, thus, Israel. We start with a passage that E.P. Sanders long ago characterized as one of the "most amazing" that Paul had ever dictated: 1 Corinthians 7:17–19:

Let each one lead the life that God has discerned and called him to. I command the same in all the assemblies. Was anyone circumcised when he was called? He should not seek epispasm. Was anyone called when in foreskin? He should not seek circumcision. Circumcision is nothing and foreskin is nothing; what matters is keeping God's commandments.²⁹

But one of God's commandments *was* circumcision. And elsewhere Paul says that (Jewish) circumcision is of great value ("much in every way," Rom 3:1; cf. Phil 3:5, on his own eighth-day circumcision). What, then, is he saying here? In this place, metonymy is not at work: Paul does not speak here about two different people groups, Jews on the one hand ("the circumcision") and gentiles on the other ("the foreskin"). Rather, and in keeping with the general emphasis on pagans/gentiles throughout the entire Corinthian correspondence, *Paul here distinguishes between two different kinds of gentiles*. Some had already received proselyte circumcision at some point before they had joined his Christ-assemblies; others had not. Both groups, as far as Paul is concerned, are gentiles. In other words, here as elsewhere – most especially in Galatians – Paul insists that *gentile* circumcision is nugatory with respect to the male gentile's being "in" Christ/having Christ's spirit "in" him; nugatory, thus, as well in terms

28 Gentiles do not descend *kata sarka* from Abraham (if they did, they would not be candidates for adoption); and for that reason, I find Richard Hays' proposed translation of Rom 4:1 attractive: "What then shall we say? Is Abraham found to be our forefather according to the flesh?" Τί οὖν; ἐροῦμεν εὐρηκέναι Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα; Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). See esp. 61–84 for his translation of Rom 4:1.

29 E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 103, on 1 Cor 7:19: Εἰ μὴ ἐκάστῳ ὡς ἠέμερισεν ὁ Ἰκύριος, ἕκαστον ὡς κέκληκεν ὁ Ἰθεός, οὕτως περιπατεῖτω· καὶ οὕτως ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις πάσαις διατάσσομαι. 18 περιτετμημένος τις ἐκλήθη; μὴ ἐπισπάσθω· ἐν ἀκροβυστία ἰκέκληται τις; μὴ περιτεμνέσθω. 19 ἡ περιτομή οὐδὲν ἐστίν, καὶ ἡ ἀκροβυστία οὐδὲν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ τήρησις ἐντολῶν θεοῦ.

of keeping the law. Only *pneuma* can make a pagan into an ex-pagan. Only *pneuma* reformats gentile *physis*, enabling him to keep God's commandments.

In his generation, "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor 10:11), Paul was a witness to and an agent of an eschatological transformation. Pagans were voluntarily turning from their native gods to his god. They were abandoning their idols. They were enabled to live according to the idealized ethics embodied in Jewish law, "unlike the *ethnē* who do not know god" (1 Thes 4:5). Spirit filled, thereby empowered with divinatory and charismatic gifts, they could call down the "spirit of Christ" into their assemblies until he came back definitively, publicly, in power, to defeat cosmic forces and to raise the dead. Paul, in other words, dedicated himself to building up communities of *eschatological* gentiles, the sort of non-pagan gentile prophesied by Isaiah long ago.³⁰ This is the person in 2 Corinthians 5:17 whom Paul names *kainē ktisis*, a "new creation."³¹

So similarly, I would urge, with Paul's finale in Galatians. Galatians 6:15–16 is also often misinterpreted as dismissing the importance of Jewish circumcision, while lumping Christ-following gentiles and Jews together into one eschatological body, "the church," God's new Israel. "For neither is circumcision anything, nor foreskin, but new creation. Peace and mercy upon all who walk by this rule, and on the Israel of God."³² But the whole of this letter is motivated by the question whether *gentiles* need to be circumcised. Paul never speaks in Galatians about Jewish circumcision here; only about, and against, *proselyte* circumcision. (Jewish, that is, covenantal eighth-day circumcision is irrelevant to Paul's topic, and to his auditors' circumstance.) As with the Corinthian correspondence, so also here: Paul again speaks about two different kinds of *gentile* Christ followers, those who have received *proselyte* circumcision (presumably at some prior point) and those who have not. All that matters, Paul

30 Fredriksen, *Paul*, 73–77, on eschatological gentiles.

31 2 Cor 5:17: ὡστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, *καινὴ κτίσις*: τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν ἡ *καινὰ*. Further on the significance of these gentiles' eschatological empowerment, Jennifer Eyl, *Signs, Wonders and Gifts. Divination in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), and Giovanni Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ: Spirit Possession and Exorcism in the Early Christian Groups* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020). In terms of charismatic empowerment, the verb used by Paul in 1 Cor 1:2 and quoted from Joel 3:5 LXX/Rom 10.12, *epikaloumai*, "call upon" in the middle voice, was also commonly used to summon various other Mediterranean deities; Fredriksen, *Paul*, 238 n. 15.

32 Gal 6:13–16: οὐδὲ γάρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν, ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτεμνεσθαι ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχῆσωνται. 14 ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο καυχᾶσθαι εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' οὗ ἐμοὶ κόσμος ἐσταύρωται ἡ *καὶ γὰρ* κόσμος. 15 ὅτε γὰρ περιτομὴ τί ἐστιν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία, ἀλλὰ *καινὴ κτίσις*. 16 καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.

insists, is their receiving spirit, thus being enabled to stop acting like pagans. That eschatological ability is what renders them a “new creation,” brought into being by Christ’s death, resurrection, and transformative in-spiriting.

Thus, in the conclusion of this letter, Paul once again speaks about two different kinds of *gentile* Christ followers, those who receive circumcision (as his rivals urge) and those who do not and have not. What matters, urges Paul, is their re-creation through reception of spirit, which enables them to stop acting like pagans. “Neither is circumcision anything nor is foreskin anything, but [again] *kainē ktisis*” (6:15) – the unprecedented and, therefore, *new* creation, worked by divine pneuma, of the eschatological gentile.

“Peace and mercy upon all who walk by this rule, *and upon the Israel of God*” (Gal 6:16). Whom does Paul intend by this phrase? The rsv drops Paul’s second *kai* but, as Stendahl noted, that *kai* makes all the difference.³³ Paul here blesses the Christ-following gentile, and he also blesses his own people group, those whom he elsewhere identifies as his “kinsmen by flesh” (Rom 9:3).³⁴ The “Israel of God” here, like the “remnant” of Romans 11:5, refers to those Jews currently within the Christ-movement (at least, those ones with whom Paul agrees). They represent an eschatological prolepsis, the down-payment toward the redemption of *all* Israel.³⁵ Paul’s god is not the kind of god who breaks his promises (Rom 11:29; 15:8).

3 Israel and the Nations

I conclude this exploration of Paul’s continuing concern with ethnic specificity by glancing, briefly, at Romans. Romans, of course, has served as the jewel in the crown of Reformation theology. The letter has been seen – and for many, still is seen – as Paul’s theological treatise par excellence, an expansive meditation on universal sinfulness; on the impossibility of anyone, whether gentile or Jew, achieving righteousness through the works of the law (taking Rom 7 as Paul’s description of his own failings and frustrations³⁶); on the gospel’s revolutionary message of justification not through works but *sola fide*; and on the

33 *Final Account*, 40; see more recently Susan Grove Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6:16 and Romans 9–11,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 367–95.

34 “Israel is always Israel for Paul,” Stendahl, *Final Account*, 5.

35 Thus too J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, NovTSup 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 106–17.

36 Which in turn, of course, makes Paul’s confident self-assessment of “blameless” law-observance in Phil 3:6 nothing short of baffling.

ethnic reformatting of “Israel,” the “people of God,” as the new mixed-ethnic community of the Christian church.³⁷

Various lines of research have challenged this paradigm. Kümmel, in 1929, argued definitively against interpreting Romans 7 as an autobiographical statement on Paul’s part.³⁸ In 1963, pushing this insight further, Krister Stendahl published his classic essay, “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West.” “The issue at hand in Romans,” Stendahl insisted, “is the justification of Paul’s gentile converts, not of sinners in general.”³⁹ Almost thirty years thereafter, Stanley Stowers’s *Rereading of Romans* (1994) attended closely to conventions of ancient epistolary rhetoric, especially diatribe. Stowers interpreted the “voices” in Paul’s letters as a kind of pedagogical ventriloquism, “speech in character” (*prosōpopiia*). And, like Stendahl, he stressed that the Roman audience of the letter was, quite specifically, Christ-following *gentiles* (Rom 1:5–6, cf. 1:13–14; 11:13; 15:16–19; 16:25–26). Paul directed his letter, said Stowers, toward the goal of enabling gentile self-control (*autarkia*).

Finally, in 2003, Runar Thorsteinsson published *Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2*.⁴⁰ Emphasizing techniques of ancient letter writing, Thorsteinsson importantly argued, first, that the function of Paul’s rhetorical interlocutor

37 A pristine and principled interpretation of the letter along these lines is Ernst Käsemann’s commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980). Similarly, while foregrounding his construal of Paul’s “theology of grace,” Barclay, *The Gift*, esp. 449–561. Since, in this construal, Christ-following Jews within this community no longer live according to Jewish ancestral practices (Torah now being understood as “dead currency,” 383), their practical Jewishness is erased. Matthew V. Novenson has recently argued (I think, demonstrated) that the principle of “justification by works of the Law” existed only within Paul’s own heated polemics: see chapter three of his forthcoming study, *The End of the Law: Jewishness and Time in the Letters of Paul*.

38 Werner Georg Kümmel, *Römer 7 und das Bild des Menschen im Neuen Testament. Zwei Studien*. Theologische Bücherei 53 (Munich: Kaiser, 1974), esp. 139–60; orig. pub. J.C. Hinrichs (1929). The autobiographical reading of this chapter of Paul’s epistle enters history only in the 420s, when Augustine weaponized Romans 7 against Pelagius: it stuck. For a review of the evolution of Augustine’s thought on this verse, Paula Fredriksen, “Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy. Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and Pelagians,” *Recherches augustiniennes* XXIII (1988): 87–114; also eadem, “Paul, Augustine, and Krister, on the Introspective Conscience of the West,” in *Krister Among the Jews and Gentiles*, ed. P. Fredriksen and J. Svartvik (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018), 146–62.

39 Originally published in *HTR* 56 (1963): 199–215, the essay was reprinted in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78–96. In *Paul*, Stendahl reviews his and Käsemann’s disagreements; cf. *Final Account*, 76, which provides a succinct summary of their debate in notes 10 and 11; cf. Käsemann’s prior response to Stendahl, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 59–78.

40 *Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography*, ConBNT 40 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2003). His argument is

was to represent the letter's ex-pagan gentile recipients; and, second, that this conjured persona – in the interests of aural and dramatic clarity – remained constant throughout the epistle's entirety (126–150). The meaning of Romans 2 accordingly shifted radically, as indeed did the interpretation of the whole letter. The person who “calls [himself] a Jew” at Romans 2:17 represented a *Judaizing gentile*, thus by Paul's lights *not a Jew*.⁴¹ The second half of this chapter, therefore, was not Paul's radical “reconstitution of Jewish identity,”⁴² but his description of the possibilities of gentile Judaizing: a baptized ex-pagan can “do the Law,” while a circumcised gentile, without “circumcision in *pneuma*,” only strives to look the part of a Jew, but cannot indeed act like one.

It is this so-called “Jew” who is represented by the conflicted “I” of Romans 7:5–25. It is *his* circumcision that, in terms of Paul's eschatological calculus, is “nothing.” And it is this so-called Jew, someone who “knows the law” (cf. 7:1), whose conflicts reach resolution only in and through Christ (7:25), and who achieves *huiiothesia* through spirit, in Christ (8:1–17). Only at that point, eschatologically adopted into the family, can such ex-pagan gentiles address the Jewish god by his Jewish family name in the Jewish tongue. “When we cry ‘*Abba!* Father!’ it is the Spirit ... testifying with our spirit that we are children (*tekna*) of God” (8:16; cf. Gal. 4:7).⁴³

But in Romans 9–11, turning from so-called “Jews” and from gentiles who want to act like Jews to actual, ethnic Jews, Paul finally describes ethnically specific Jewish sin. He also, abruptly and surprisingly, reconfigures eschatological family once again. Paul begins with a lament for his kinsmen who do not know what time it is on God's clock, thus who do not understand or accept

summarized nicely by Matthew V. Novenson, “The Self-Styled Jew of Romans 2 and the Actual Jews of Romans 9–11,” in *So-Called Jew*, 135–6.

41 *Paul's Interlocutor*, 126–150, this in contrast to Stowers, who suggested that the “voice” in Rom 2:17–27 was that of a Jewish teacher to and of gentiles, *Rereading*, 144–75. At the 2019 SBL in San Diego, on the panel celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Rereading's* original publication, Stowers endorsed Thorsteinsson's “better argument,” agreeing that the speaker in Rom 2:17ff. indeed represented a Judaizing gentile, perhaps a circumcised proselyte.

42 So Barclay, *The Gift*, 469, dismissing Thornsteinsson without argument in n. 51; but then, Barclay insists that Romans 1:18–32 is about universal sin, not “gentile” sins, 462–63. Boyarin reads Rom 2 similarly, *Radical Jew*, 94–95, as Paul's radical redefinition of “true” Jewishness. The RSV tendentiously introduces words that are not in the Greek: “true” circumcision and “real” circumcision are glosses. See on this passage esp. Matthew Thiessen, “Paul's Argument Against Gentile Circumcision in Romans 2:17–29,” *NovT* 56 (2014): 373–91; also Novenson, “Self-Styled Jew,” 137–41, and his proposed translation of Rom 2:17–29, on 139.

43 On the ethnic specificity of ancient divinity, language (“*Abba*”), cultic custom and people groups, Fredriksen, “How Jewish is God?”

what their god, through his messiah, is about to accomplish. Jewish sins are not gentile sins. Pagans stand accused of “passions, extreme moral failure, cognitive corruption, and idolatry”; the most of Israel, currently, is guilty rather of “disobedience,” lack of trust (*apistia*), and misunderstanding, all of which Paul ultimately attributes to God’s work in the current moment of history’s climax.⁴⁴ Accordingly, Paul constructs an idea of (a temporary and provisional) Israel-within-Israel, those who, through God’s sovereign will, express his purpose of election (9:6–26; Paul is himself, of course, a conspicuous member of this happy few, 11.1–2). These, *for the brief time being*, are “the remnant” (9:27; 11:5). God has caused (much of) Israel to stumble, but they have not fallen (11:11). They are still in the race, and God will (of course) ultimately make good on his promises. It is this “remnant chosen *chariti*, by grace at the present time” (Rom 11:5) that is the “Israel of God” upon whom Paul earlier had wished peace (Gal 6:16). In short: “Israel,” whether temporarily divinely hardened or currently divinely chosen, is always, for Paul, the Jews.

It is perhaps for this reason that Paul in chapter 11 moves from his prior, Roman, legal metaphor and mechanism of “son-making,” *huiiothesia*, in favour of a more traditionally Jewish, scriptural, genealogical metaphor. In 11:25–26, Christ-following gentiles acquire yet another biblical lineage, one tracing back not pneumatically to Abraham, but genealogically to Noah. “A toughening has come upon part of Israel, until the *plērōma tōn ethnōn* comes in, and so *pas Israēl* will be secured.”⁴⁵

These populations do not stand in for pleasant theological abstractions. They are envisaged in Jewish tradition as historical, discrete people groups. Paul’s language here echoes that of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, with its totalling of gentile nations, a global human census of seventy kinship groups individually distinguished by family, language, land, and nations/peoples.⁴⁶ From among the descendants of Shem, God chose (that is, separated out)

44 On these lists of pagan sins in Paul’s letters, above, nn. 19–21; on this “eschatological myth” of Israel’s sinfulness, Young (n. 17 above); also, on Israel’s *apistia*, Novenson, “So-called Jew,” 159–60; Matthew Thiessen, “Conjuring Paul and Judaism Forty Years after *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*,” *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting* 5 (2018): 7–20 (18–20).

45 Rom 11:25–26: Οὐ γὰρ θέλω ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο, ἵνα μὴ ᾔητε ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι, ὅτι πῶρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ, 26 καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται. Further on this verse, Fredriksen, *Paul*, 160–64.

46 Genesis 10, the Table of Nations, distinguishes the descendants of Noah according to their lands [עַרְבֵי / ἐν τῇ γῆ αὐτῶν], according to their tongues [לְשׁוֹנֵי / γλώσσα], after their families [מִשְׁפָּחֵי / φύλα], in their nations [עַמְּיָא / ἔθνη], totaling seventy ἔθνη. On this “eschatological arithmetic” and the significance of the 70 nations, see James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*. WUNT 84 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

Israel for himself. These other nations worship their own gods; Israel, beneficiary of revelation, worships the “true god” (cf. Deut 32:8–9).

“All Israel,” meanwhile, implies more than those Jews of Paul’s day. Paul looks to *Davidic* Israel, the one that David’s son the eschatological messiah – that is, Jesus Christ (Rom 1:4; 15:12) – will gather in. “All Israel” means all twelve tribes, itself an eschatological idea (cf. Matt. 19:28/Lk 22:20). In brief, just as Paul’s rejection of proselyte circumcision *reinscribes* difference *kata sarka* (though not *kata pneuma*) between Jews and ex-pagan gentiles within the *ekklēsia*, so here too, does his conjuring of this more scripturally traditional genealogy. Paul’s eschatological arithmetic in this passage, the seventy gentile nations plus Israel’s twelve tribes, precisely *preserves* ethnic distinctiveness, the post-diluvian kinship groups or “nations,” while simultaneously invoking the plenum of humanity, redeemed by the Jewish messiah about to manifest from Zion, under the sovereign Jewish god (11:26–27).

His closing cento of verses in Romans 15:9–12 repeats Paul’s vision of eschatological unity-in-diversity. The nations rejoice *with* Israel. The nations praise God *along with* Israel. But the nations do not *join* Israel: the Davidic messiah, rather, rules over them (*archein*, 15:12).⁴⁷ But Israel redeemed, in and at the End, like “the Israel of God” in what Paul was convinced would be the brief meanwhile, was for Paul always and only his genealogical “kin” (Rom 9:3), the Jews. And Paul’s “new creation,” in this brief meanwhile, was always and only the redeemed pagan nations, those “eschatological gentiles” who, through the gift of spirit, no longer act like pagans (Gal 6:15; Rom 11:24); those who, *against* their own ethnic *physis*, have been engrafted into the eschatological olive tree (Rom 11:13, 24); who, through shared *pneuma*, can now also call God “Αββα.”

Redemption, for Paul (as for those colleagues within the movement who agreed with him, and vice versa), worked through God’s or Christ’s *pneuma*. How eschatological Israel, living and dead, comes to receive this *pneuma* is a detail that Paul neglects to describe here. Is *pneuma* poured out on them at or as the End (cf. Joel 2:28)? Is there an eschatological immersion into Christ? Paul, his extant letters addressed chiefly or solely to gentiles, does not say. But God’s ancient election of Israel – his promises to their forefathers, his gifts, his calling – ensures their inclusion in the Kingdom, thus their final pneumatic

47 Rom 15:8–12: λέγω γὰρ Χριστὸν διάκονον γεγενῆσθαι περιτομῆς ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ εἰς τὸ βεβαιῶσαι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν πατέρων 15:9 τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν. καθὼς γέγραπται διὰ τοῦτο ἐξομολογήσομαί σοι ἐν ἔθνεσιν καὶ τῷ ὀνόματί σου ψαλῶ; 15:10 καὶ πάλιν λέγει εὐφράνθητε ἔθνη μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ; 15:11 καὶ πάλιν αἰνεῖτε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τὸν κύριον καὶ ἐπαινεσάτωσαν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ λαοί; 15:12 καὶ πάλιν Ἰησοῦς λέγει ἔσται ἡ ῥίζα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ὁ ἀνιστάμενος ἄρχειν ἐθνῶν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ ἔθνη ἔλπιουσιν.

transformation (Rom 11:29, 15:8; 9:4–5; cf. 1 Cor 15:22–28, 35–52, on the translation from flesh-body to spirit-body). They are its “natural” heirs.

Eschatological gentiles, through Christ and *pneuma*, are also, mercifully, included in this kingdom. But they are included *as* gentiles, not as part of covenanted Israel. Their *sarkikos* status – that is, whether they are circumcised or not – is irrelevant to this redemptive process: their *pneumatic* status is all that matters. It is in this regard that they constitute, at this moment of the movement – the ages’ turning – a “new creation.” *It is for these gentiles, then, and for them alone*, that “circumcision is nothing.”

4 Jewish Eschatology and Christian Anti-Judaism

Let me conclude by returning, briefly, to our opening quotation from Schweitzer. Once history continued to continue, once Paul’s framework of imminent eschatology ceded to the *force majeure* of time, most of the other components of his message had to shift as well. We have glanced at the ways that Ephesians and Colossians each inflects this adjustment, with a de-Judaized unified humanity (Eph 2:11–16)⁴⁸ and with a realized cosmic eschatology (Col 2:15; 3:10).

The second century, reframing Paul’s message, presided over a more general identity crisis for the god of Israel, for his son the Davidic messiah, and for his Israelite apostle to the nations. For these later gentile Christian communities, Christ’s divine father assumed the ethnic featurelessness of the high god of Middle Platonism. The messiah came to reveal the symbolic meanings of Jewish law, thereby nullifying its ethnically specific enactments. And the Jewish Paul’s arguments against circumcision, specifically and only for gentiles, became the Christian Paul’s arguments against Torah observance generally.⁴⁹ The second-century Paul, founder of gentile Christianity, rails less against paganism than he does “against Judaism” (*adversus Iudaismum*, commenting on Galatians, Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.2).

This interpretive position when reading Paul still prevails in much current New Testament scholarship as well. Why? And how? In part because these second-century theological positions were reinvested with powerful theological significance in the sixteenth century, when biblical criticism and modern historiography both were born. Modern New Testament scholarship is the child of the Protestant Reformation.

48 On which, see esp. J. Albert Harrill, “Ethnic Fluidity in Ephesians,” *NTS* 60 (2014): 379–402.
49 Briefly, Fredriksen, *Paul*, 167–74; more fully, eadem, *Augustine and the Jews*, 41–78.

Luther famously repurposed these ancient tropes that set God-Christ-Paul against Judaism. Those “Jews” available in traditional Christian readings of Galatians and Romans did double duty as proxies for Luther’s Catholic opponents.⁵⁰ “Justification by faith alone, and not by the works of the Law,” the Reformation’s battle cry against late Renaissance Roman sacramentalism, served and (as Käsemann’s great Romans commentary witnesses) serves still as the lodestone for much Protestant theology. But this sixteenth century lodestone exerts a tremendous magnetic pull within current “historical” readings as well. What Paul’s letters, for modern Protestant theology, *mean* merges unobtrusively into academic reconstructions of what Paul, the late Second Temple Jewish apostle of the returning Christ, must himself have *meant*.⁵¹

For scholars such as Käsemann, as Stendahl observed, “the Pauline key words have in them all the depth that later traditions found in them.”⁵² These later traditions still avail themselves of artificial and ahistorical constructions of first-century “Jews” and “Judaism” to bring into focus issues important for contemporary Christian identity. When the issue is Pauline “monotheism,” such “Jews” are deployed positively, as a bulwark against pagan “polytheism.”⁵³ But when the issue is Pauline teachings on “grace and not works” – (Protestant)

50 Real Jews were also caught in the crossfire. On the entanglement of anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic sentiment mobilized by Lutheran theologies of justification and grace, see Michael Bachman, “The anti-Judaic Moment in the ‘Pauline’ Doctrine of Justification,” in *The Message of Paul the Apostle within Second Temple Judaism*, ed. F. Abel (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 21–59. Bachman quotes the German historian Dietz Bering who, in his 2014 monograph *Was Luther Antisemit? opined that their focus on works-righteousness “closely linked the Jews with the systematic profiteer of this works ideology: the Pope,” translated and quoted by Bachman, ibid. 23. On the abiding Protestant-Catholic face-off when reading Paul’s letters “against” Judaism, see the following note to J.Z. Smith.*

51 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), notes the ways that “the question of Christian origins takes us back, persistently, to the same point: *Protestant anti-Catholic apologetics*,” 34 (emphasis original); on the persistent confusion of such identity-confirming apologetics with doing history, *ibid. 13, citing Mark Pattison.*

52 Stendahl, *Final Account*, 76 n. 11.

53 On the double (or “duplicitous”) function served by scholarly constructions of ancient Judaism vis-à-vis Christianity (Judaism is “good” when providing a “*cordon sanitaire*” between Christianity and paganism; “bad” when serving as a code for “Catholic”), Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 43, 83. For a sampling of imaginative constructions of Jewish “monotheism” that firewall Pauline Christology against ditheism, see, e.g., the work of Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); David Capes, *The Divine Christ: Paul, the Lord Jesus, and the Scriptures of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018); Carey Newman, *Paul’s Glory Christology*, NovTSup 69 (Leiden:

Christianity, in brief, as opposed to (Catholic) Judaism – such “Jews” represent the flawed and rightly opposed contrasting alternative to Paul’s gospel. And while Christian Europe’s mid-twentieth-century murders of millions of European Jews, where and if acknowledged, is usually regretted,⁵⁴ the scholarly rhetoric of theological derogation continues largely unabated, projected back onto and into the mid-first-century Jewish apostle’s letters.

Why is this still the case? Whatever its more general sociohistorical matrix, I think that we can name with some precision its modern intellectual taproot. The academic study of Christian origins still has not caught up with the implications of Schweitzer’s great insight into mid-first-century Jewish apocalyptic eschatology.⁵⁵ Paul’s theology continues to be, quite literally, timeless. Time, however, was the last thing that Paul thought he had lots of. He knew, by direct revelation, that history stood at the edge of its End.

Their experience of the resurrected Jesus’s continuing pneumatic presence alerted Paul and his apostolic colleagues that the general resurrection was rushing toward them – “nearer to us now,” Paul proclaimed, “than when we first became convinced. The night is far gone. The Day is at hand” (Rom 13:11–12). This generation thus framed their world within only two religious options: the right way (worship of Israel’s god, in Jewish ways, while awaiting that god’s eschatological champion, the returning victorious messiah) and the wrong way (everyone else’s way, a.k.a. “paganism”). There was no third way. “Christianity,” in the mid-first century, had yet to be invented.⁵⁶ Apostles might dispute among themselves the degree of Judaizing required of their expagan “eschatological gentiles”; but all of them, Paul emphatically included,

Brill, 1992), and the article “Glory” in the *NIDB*, ed. K.D. Sakenfield (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007) 1:576–80. This list could easily be expanded.

54 Though not by N.T. Wright, who laments instead those scholars who look at Paul’s texts through “tearful misted-up post-Holocaust” spectacles, accusing them of being “pro-Jewish,” *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 2:1413, cf. 1129, criticizing Stendahl specifically on this account. Wright’s Paul (like Wright’s Jesus) evinces principled problems with Jews, with Judaism, and evidently with Theodor Herzl. For my assessment of Wright’s efforts with Paul, my review in *CBQ* 77 (2015): 387–91.

55 See above, n. 3, for some recent scholarly redefinitions of Paul’s eschatology. John Barclay, on the evidence both of his important monograph *Paul and the Gift*, and of his more recent essay *Paul: A Very Brief History* (London: SPCK 2017), simply does not consider Paul’s foreshortened timeframe to be an important factor when interpreting Paul’s thought: he treats it nowhere in *The Gift*, and mentions it only in passing, briefly indeed, in *Brief History*.

56 John W. Marshall, “Misunderstanding the New Paul: Marcion’s Transformation of the *Sonderzeit* Paul.” *JCS* 20 (2012) 1–29, esp. at 6.

advocated a socially radical, indeed an unprecedented, form of Judaizing: exclusive commitment to Israel's god. No other gods. No more idols.

Modern authorized translations of Paul's letters damp down this intense eschatological conviction, while insinuating the tropes of theological anti-Judaism into their English texts. The ubiquitous use of "church" as a translation of *ekklēsia*, for one example, anachronistically retrojects this later institution back into Paul's lifetime, while implying that he was establishing a new, third religion, other than and in many ways opposed to his native traditions.⁵⁷ So, too, does translating *Ioudaismos* in Gal 1:13 as "my former life in 'Judaism,'" so that Paul in the mid-30s CE implicitly conjures that other great, contrasting body of abstract doctrine, "Christianity." The RSV and NRSV's English of Romans 1:4 redirects attention away from Christ's imminent, signature, public (indeed, cosmic) eschatological act, the general "resurrection of the dead" (ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν) to Christ's own individual resurrection *from* the dead. This phrasing mistranslates Paul's Greek, but goes far toward accommodating how history actually worked out.⁵⁸

Translation choices leach Paul's continuing Jewishness from his texts. We have already seen how the English of Romans 2:27–29 introduces words (thus, concepts) not in the Greek: "physically" in v. 27; "true" in v. 28; "real" in v. 29. These additions turn the passage into an invidious comparison between "real" (that is, "Christian," "spiritual") Jewishness and false, fleshly, outward, traditionally "Jewish" Jewishness. In Romans 9:4, rendering *doxa* as (very vague) "glory" and *latreia* by rather bloodless "worship" completely effaces Paul's reference to Jerusalem's temple as the place where God's earthly presence dwells, and as the site for enacting his sacrificial cult; but it does oblige the (post-70 CE) Christian position that, for Paul, his gentile Christian churches replaced Jerusalem as the new, true "temple of the holy spirit" (1 Cor 6:19).⁵⁹ And right at the crescendo

57 See esp. Jennifer Eyl, "Semantic Voids, New Testament Translation, and Anachronism," *MTSR* 26 (2014): 315–39.

58 On reading Rom 1:4 not as Christ's *own* resurrection *from* the dead but as "the resurrection of the dead" (which is what the Greek happens to say), see Fredriksen, *Paul*, 141–45. I owe this observation to Augustine, *ep. ad Romanos expositio inchoata* 5.11. Cf. 1 Cor 15:12–21: (12) Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised *from* the dead [ἐκ νεκρῶν], how can some of you say that there is no resurrection *of* the dead [ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν]. (13) If there is no resurrection *of* the dead [ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν], then neither has Christ been raised.... (20) But now Christ has been raised *from* the dead [ἐκ νεκρῶν], the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep. (21) For since through a human being [came] death, so also through a human being [came? will come?] resurrection *of* the dead [ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν]. (RSV, modified).

59 Fredriksen, *Paul*, 152–54, on Paul's deployment of temple imagery for his *ekklēsiai* precisely because he esteemed Jerusalem's temple; also, eadem, "How Later Contexts Effect Pauline Content, or: Retrospect is the Mother of Anachronism," in *Jews and Christians in*

of Paul's hymn to all Israel's continuing election in Romans 11, where he asserts "while, with respect to the *evangelion*, they are hostiles on account of you [*ethnē*, cf. 11:13, 24, etc.], with respect to [divine] choice they are beloved, on account of the forefathers," the RSV/NRSV renders his meaning as, "as regards the gospel, they are enemies of God" (11:28). In no Greek manuscript does the phrase *tou theou*, "of God," even occur.⁶⁰

The failure to integrate meaningfully the first generation's vivid conviction that it was history's last generation continues to oblige much of the historicizing *salonfähig* anti-Judaism of New Testament scholarship. At the same time and for the same reason, this intellectual failure continues also to support the anachronistic quality of much academic New Testament historiography.

Paul's urgent eschatology can be muted, even avoided, by those motivated to do so. Paul claimed merely that Jesus was coming back – indeed, that Christ may return at any time – but he did not actually say *when*. The claim that Jesus may return "at any time" is indeed logically distinct from the claim that Jesus will return "soon." And that logical distinction has the virtue of leaving history with a lot more time on its hands, conforming, happily, to the way that things did indeed work out.

But this is not what Paul says. He uses the past perfect tense when he speaks of the ends of the ages. He says "we" and "us," "we the living," when he speaks of those who will witness Christ's martial *adventus*. The Thessalonians got their impression that no member of their assembly would die before the Parousia from someone, and that someone was Paul. He did not correct or qualify that impression so much as reassure them that things were, after all, on track.⁶¹ Paul measured time between "now" and "soon."

the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History, ed. P.J. Tomson and J. Schwartz, CRINT 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 17–51 (26–31).

60 κατά μὲν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἔχθροὶ δι' ὑμᾶς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἀγαπητοὶ διὰ τοὺς πατέρας·.

61 Some twenty years after receiving his call, Paul still proclaims the impending End to his assemblies: 1 Thess 4:15–18 ("For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that *we who are alive, who are left until the Parousia* of the Lord, will not precede those who have 'fallen asleep.' For the Lord himself will descend from heaven ... and then *we the living who remain* will be snatched up"); Phil 4.5 ("The Lord is *near*"); 1 Cor 7:29 ("The time *has been shortened* ... the form of *this world is passing away*"), 10:11 ("These things were written down for *us, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*"), 15:51–52 ("Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all 'sleep,' but we shall all be changed.... For the trumpet will sound, the dead will rise imperishable, *and we shall all be changed*"); 2 Cor 6:2 ("*Now* is the acceptable time; lo, *now* is the day of salvation"); Rom 13:11–12 ("You know what the hour is, how it is full time now for you to awake ... For *salvation is even nearer to us* than when we first

Schweitzer, in his quests both of the historical Jesus and of the historical Paul, faced this issue forthrightly. Following him, Stendahl in his Romans commentary put the issue in the plainest terms: "If the text says 'now' in year 56 of the Common Era, where does that leave you and me? It leaves us almost 2000 years later. No kerygmatic gamesmanship can overcome this simple fact."⁶² Stendahl issued a call to a new kind of scholarly dedication to the Reformation, an appeal to embrace the historical specificity of Christianity's primary sources with moral integrity and with theological courage.⁶³ And, for ethical reasons no less than for scholarly ones, he urged Christians to stop building their religious identities on the patristic-cum-Protestant polemical chimera of Jew-as-antitype.

The sooner the New Testament guild integrates, indeed embraces, Schweitzer's historical insights and Stendahl's ethical-theological summons, the sooner it will free biblical scholarship from its long-lived traditions of toxic anti-Judaism.

Acknowledgments

I owe warm thanks, first, to Professor Hindy Najman for her invitation to this conference; and, second, to the conference's participants, for pushing me to think harder. Most of all, I am indebted to Troels Engberg-Pedersen, who commented on several drafts of this paper; who refused to let me get away with facile interpretations (even those to which I was most attached); and who gave me the great benefit of critical engagement. Troels, I stand in your debt.

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became convinced. The night is far gone; *the day is at hand*"), 16:20 ("the god of peace will crush Satan under your feet soon").

62 Stendahl, *Final Account*, 23.

63 *Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1976), 72.

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