This point is made briefly but powerfully in 8:31–39: in a description of the final judgment where God’s justice prevails (cf. 3:5–6), Paul says, “[God] who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? . . . I am convinced that . . . [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This then becomes the theological position from which Paul tackles the difficult question of Israel’s disbelief in chaps. 9–11. As he works out there the “dynamic equilibrium between God’s impartiality and faithfulness,” two aspects of God’s righteousness, the mediating role of mercy and compassion wins the day (9:13–18; 10:12, 21; 11:28–32). Likewise, the exhortations of chaps. 12–13 focus on love for one another (12:9–21; 13:8–10), so that God’s self-disclosure in the atonement establishes a model for human behavior.

In Rom 3:21–26 Paul is concerned not simply to demonstrate how God’s justice is revealed by the atonement but also to show how God’s forbearance is actively promoted by it. As the argument of the letter evolves, this active promotion of forbearance is seen as the mark of God’s love. For those who are “in Christ,” love and forbearance will prevail at the final judgment, but not at the expense of righteousness. These qualities will also prevail in God’s response to Israel’s faithlessness, and a similar love and forbearance must prevail within the church itself.

V. CONCLUSION

Lincoln is surely right to insist that Paul’s rhetorical purposes have shaped his argument in Romans, but I am not as confident as he is that we can recover Paul’s purpose with enough certainty to rest an interpretation on it. Just as surely, though, the theological conceptions that Paul introduces in 1:18–4:25 had a shaping power of their own, and we are able to identify these concepts in the passage and show how they inform the argument of the letter. The concrete situation in Rome may recede somewhat from view, but the letter’s distinctive theological arguments come more clearly into focus.

8 THE STORY OF ISRAEL AND THE THEOLOGY OF ROMANS 5–8

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ONE OF THE CLASSIC PROBLEMS in the interpretation of Romans lies in deciding how the second major section of the letter is related to the rest of Paul’s argument. The problem is not that the great theme of righteousness is missing nor that there are insufficient logical links between this section and the others. The problem, simply stated, is that Israel and its scriptures seem to recede from view. Chapters 1–4 and 9–11 engage in vigorous dialogue with Israel: Paul speaks directly to “the Jew” or to “Israel” and quotes scripture fifty-three times. Chapters 5–8, however, never mention Israel; the term “Jew” never appears; the subject is Christ rather than God; and Paul’s biblical quotations shrink to two. The discontinuity seems less drastic if chap. 5 is placed with chaps. 1–4 and if chap. 7 is taken as a digression in defense of the

1 In chaps. 5–8 Paul uses “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) eight times, “justify” (δικαιοῦμαι) six times, “righteous” (δικαίος) and “righteous requirement” (δικαιοσύνη) three times each, and “acquittal” (δικαιοσύνῃ) once. At the beginning of the section, the connective “therefore” (διό, 5:1) as well as the reappearance of the concepts of boasting (5:2–3, 11), Christ’s death for the ungodly (5:6–8), justification by Christ’s blood (5:9a), and salvation from God’s wrath (5:9b) connect chaps. 5–8 with chaps. 1–4. At the other end, Paul’s question in 8:33, “Who will bring charges against the elect [people] of God?” points forward to the discussion in chaps. 9–11.


Mosaic Law and as therefore connected thematically with chaps. 1–5; but chaps. 6 and 8 still stand apart, and the thematic connections between 5:1–11 and 8:1–39 go unexplained.4

Suggestions about how to solve the problem are manifold. Prior to 1980, when chaps. 1–8 were widely thought to contain the theological substance of the letter, the problem appeared less acute. Those who believed Romans to be a theological compendium viewed Paul's argument in these chapters as a progression from justification in chaps. 1–4 (5) to sanctification in chaps. 5(6)–8. Far from posing a problem, Romans 5–8 contained a necessary exposition of an important step in the *ordo salutis*.5 The *religiösgeschichtliche Schule* responded to this interpretation with the claim that in chaps. 1–5 Paul was thinking primarily as a Jew since he was in dialogue with other Jews but that in chaps. 6–8 Paul's real position emerged, a position derived from Hellenistic concepts.6 Even Albert Schweitzer, who was uncomfortable with both interpretive trends, believed that Paul's initial line of reasoning in chaps. 3–5 only represented a rhetorically necessary concession to traditional ways of thinking and that it gave way in 6:1–8:1 to the real center of Paul's thought, "the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ."7 For virtually everyone the crucial evolution from justification to sanctification, from "fighting doctrine" to "Christian conception," or from "subsidiary" to "main crater" had already taken place by the end of the chapter. 8 In a rare moment of agreement among all parties, the embarrassment posed by Paul's return to Israel in chaps. 9–11 was considered a small price to pay for the organizational and evolutionary beauty of these diverse schemes.8

Most recent interpreters, however, believe that this way of reading Romans is artificial. Chapters 9–11, they claim, cannot be an appendix to Paul's argument, for the dialogue with Israel in chaps. 1–4 is incomplete without them. The question of how God can be righteous and yet define the covenant so that the Gentile condemns the Jew (2:27) reaches a certain urgency at the end of chap. 4 and is resolved only in chaps. 9–11.9 The problem posed by the interposition of chaps. 5–8 between 1–4 and 9–11, therefore, has become especially important in recent years.

Occasionally someone takes the dilemma by the horns and argues boldly that chaps. 5–8 are an independent composition, which either Paul or someone else dropped into the epistle at this point for reasons about which we can, at this distance, only speculate.10 Most recent interpreters, however, opt for less drastic measures. James D. G. Dunn believes that chaps. 1–4 state the gospel and that chaps. 6–8 and 9–11 apply the gospel in two different situations—chaps. 6–8 to the individual and chaps. 9–11 to national Israel.11 Chapter 5 serves as a bridge between the statement of the gospel in chaps. 1–4 and these two applications of the gospel in chaps. 6–8 and 9–11 respectively.12 Ulrich Wilckens, similarly, argues that two urgent issues have emerged from chaps. 1–5: whether Paul has destroyed the basis for ethics with his claim that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law and whether Paul has cast a shadow of doubt over God's faithfulness to Israel by his polemic against their confidence in the law. Chapters 6–8 are directed to the first issue, says Wilckens, and chaps. 9–11 to the second.13 For both interpreters, therefore, the reason Paul's dialogue with Israel recedes from view in chaps. 6–8 is that Paul has intentionally set it aside to deal

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4 For these thematic connections, which seem decisive in favor of placing all of chap. 5 with chaps. 6–8, see N. A. Dahl, "Two Notes on Romans 5," *ST* 5 (1952) 37–38.


10 Scrogg makes the classic case in "Paul as Rhetorician," 272–98.

11 James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38a; Dallas: Word, 1988) 242–44. Chapter 8, in Dunn's view, begins the transition from concern with the individual believer to concern with God's cosmic purposes when, in vv. 14–15, Paul refers to the eschatologically oriented concept of adoption (see pp. 243 and 458–59).

12 Ibid., *Romans* 1–8, 243.

13 Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer,* 2.3–5, 181–82.

Nearly all of these explanations of the structure of Romans make valid points. Paul’s argument \textit{does} advance from a discussion, in Cranfield’s terms, of “the revelation of the righteousness which is from God by faith alone” to an examination of “the life promised for those who are righteous by faith.”\footnote{See Cranfield’s outline of chaps. 5–8 in \textit{Romans}, 1. xi.}\footnote{See Scroggs, “Paul as Rhetorician,” 281.} Paul’s language \textit{does} take on a tone appropriate to the individual in chaps. 5–8, as the predominance of first person verbs indicates. Paul’s concept of dying and rising with Christ is difficult to explain in biblical and Jewish terms, unlike his sacrificial language in 3:21–26. Nevertheless, many interpreters of Romans have too readily assumed that the content of chaps. 5–8 has little to do with the history of Israel.\footnote{According to Berger and Luckmann, a society’s stories form part of its assumed or “pre-theoretical” knowledge and therefore play an important role in shaping its view of reality (\textit{Social Construction of Reality,} 65). Members of the Pauline Theology Group have tacitly confirmed this insight when they have found narrative useful in describing Paul’s theology. Richard B. Hays argues that a story beginning with Abraham’s obedient faith and ending with Jesus’ παρουσία (“appearance”) is the map on which Paul plots and directs the progress of his communities (“Crucified with Christ: A Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, and Galatians,” in \textit{Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers} [ed. David J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988] 318–35). N. T. Wright believes that the place Paul assigns the Messiah in the story of Israel is critical for understanding Paul’s theology (\textit{The climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology} [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991]).} It is true that Paul’s explicit citations of the Bible grind nearly to a halt; that Paul shifts from the third person to the first in 4:24; and that “the history of Israel,” so prominent in the discussion in chaps. 1–4, is less obvious to readers removed by twenty centuries from Paul’s context. But the biblical story of Israel is still present, guiding the discussion and defining its terms. We do not see it as clearly as we do not appreciate how important the story of Israel was within the “symbolic universe” of first-century Jews.

\section{I. THE STORY OF ISRAEL AND THE SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE OF FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISM}

In their book \textit{The Social Construction of Reality}, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue that societies overcome the dark, marginal experiences that threaten their existence by recourse to a “symbolic universe.” This collection of symbols explains terrifying occurrences by asserting a theory of reality that interprets these experiences in familiar terms and therefore renders them harmless to the society’s cohesiveness. Dreams, for example, might cause members of a technologically oriented society to wonder whether the dream world or the world of wakefulness is “real.” In response, the scientific community explains dreams by means of sophisticated psychological theories. These theories pull the marginal, and sometimes disquieting, experience of dreaming into the ambit of a wider view of reality by explaining dreams in the language of waking reality. Science assures the dreaming person that “reality” resides in the world one experiences during waking hours, not in the dream world one experiences when asleep, and so forestalls a threat to the way the technological society perceives reality. In other similar ways the symbolic universe of science prevents both threatening experiences in everyday life and unusual catastrophes from paralyzed the society it serves.\footnote{Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, \textit{The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge} (New York: Doubleday, 1966) 92–104. A society’s “symbolic universe,” as Berger and Luckmann define it, bears some similarity to N. T. Wright’s description of a society’s “worldview” and to Howard Clark Kee’s reference to a society’s “life-world.” See N. T. Wright, \textit{The New Testament and the People of God} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 123 n. 5; and Howard Clark Kee, \textit{Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 105.}

The most significant “marginal” experience of Jews during Paul’s time was the Roman domination of Judea and the scattering of the people of God throughout the world to live under the rule of various foreign powers. This experience seemed to threaten Israel’s very election, the most important of the various convictions that held the nation together. As a result, most people looked to the “symbolic universe” which the biblical history of Israel supplied to pull this disturbing enigma into the boundaries of the society’s view of reality. In the midst of this ongoing national crisis, the Bible’s account of Israel’s history provided assurance that, in allowing Israel to suffer, God was only acting within the stipulations of the Sinai covenant. The biblical story of Israel also gave Jews confidence that in spite of Israel’s present suffering, their election was still certain and their future bright.\footnote{According to Berger and Luckmann, a society’s stories form part of its assumed or “pre-theoretical” knowledge and therefore play an important role in shaping its view of reality (\textit{Social Construction of Reality,} 65). Members of the Pauline Theology Group have tacitly confirmed this insight when they have found narrative useful in describing Paul’s theology. Richard B. Hays argues that a story beginning with Abraham’s obedient faith and ending with Jesus’ παρουσία (“appearance”) is the map on which Paul plots and directs the progress of his communities (“Crucified with Christ: A Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, and Galatians,” in \textit{Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers} [ed. David J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988] 318–35). N. T. Wright believes that the place Paul assigns the Messiah in the story of Israel is critical for understanding Paul’s theology (\textit{The climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology} [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991]).}
The elements of the story are simple and appear frequently in the scriptures, especially in the so-called Deuteronomic History and in the prophets. God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai which required them to obey his commands (Exod 19:1–24:18; Deut 4:13; 5:1–30:20). The covenant stipulated that blessing would come to Israel if they obeyed and detailed various curses if they disobeyed (Lev 26:3–46; Deut 28:1–30:20; cf. Isa 1:19–20). Although Israel's history had, with a few exceptions, been marked by disobedience and curse rather than obedience and blessing, God remained faithful to the relationship he had established with his people and promised that one day he would give them obedient hearts and restore their fortunes.19

This interpretation of Israel's history, moreover, was widespread within the Judaism of antiquity. At least from the composition of Deuteronomy, and particularly during the centuries surrounding Paul, ancient Jews appealed to this account of Israel's story in order to explain their suffering. The story is such an important part of the thinking of the author of Tobit, for example, that his tale not only assumes its truth on the national level but raises and answers an important question about it at the individual level: What happens to pious individuals who seem to suffer rather than experience blessing because of their piety?20 The author of Judith, likewise, registers horror at the thought that


20 Tob 3:3–5 laments Israel's sin and its consequent exile in terms which show that the biblical story of Israel forms part of the author's symbolic universe. The tale itself, moreover, focuses on two Israelites who, although careful to observe the law, suffer severe hardship. With this complication the author seems to be posing the question of how God can be just and allow the righteous to suffer, in seeming violation of the promises in Deuteronomy. The problem is neatly solved by the story's end, however, when both protagonists recover health and happiness through the intervention of God's messenger. G. W. E. Nickelsburg comments that Tobit's outlook is close to Job's, with one major difference: "Whereas the book of Job confines its treatment to an individual, the fate of the nation is of great concern to the author of Tobit" (Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah [London: SCM, 1981] 33).

God's people might once again compromise with Gentile ways and suffer the covenant's curses (Jdt 5:17–21; 8:18–19). Jason of Cyrene's epitomizer tells the story of Israel's oppression and rescue from the Seleucids in order to show that those who keep God's law are victorious and those who break it inevitably suffer defeat.21 The confessions in Dan 9:4–19; Neh 9:6–37; Bar 1:15–3:8; and Pr Azr 3–22, since they were probably used liturgically, demonstrate that this understanding of Israel's history was common not simply among the sophisticated and literate but among all who recited the synagogue's liturgy.22

The best illustration of the importance of this motif during Paul's era, however, comes from Josephus. In the Jewish War Josephus appeals to the biblical story of Israel again and again to make sense of his people's suffering during and after the great war with Rome. Just as God had used Nebuchadnezzar to punish his people for their sins, he claims, so God is now using Vespasian and Titus to chasten his people for their sins once again (4.370; 5.368; 6.215, 411; cf. Ant. 10.139). The destruction of Herod's temple, therefore, stands in parallel to the destruction of Solomon's temple, a correlation strikingly confirmed for Josephus by his belief that the dates on which the two temples burned corresponded exactly (6.250, 268).23 The history of sin against God's law which had culminated in the burning of the first temple had continued in Josephus's time with the excesses of the Jewish insurrectionists and had once again culminated in the temple's destruction.

In his later work, The Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus elevated the principle of divine retribution, so clearly articulated in the biblical story of Israel, to a description of the way God deals with all people. The principal lesson that the reader of his work should learn, says Josephus, is that

people who conform to the will of God, and do not venture to transgress laws that have been excellently laid down, prosper in all things beyond

21 The law-abiding Judas and his army succeed against great odds (2 Macc 8:24–36), whereas hellenizers (4:16–17), Hellenists (4:16–17), Hellenists (4:16–17), Hellenists (4:16–17), Hellenists (4:16–17), and errant high priests (13:7–8) suffer and die because of their sins. In addition, the righteous acknowledge that when they have suffered in the past, God has been mercifully chastening them only so that they will not sin more seriously and receive worse punishment (6:12–17; 7:18; 32–33; cf. 10:4).

22 On the prayer in Nehemiah, see Leon J. Lieberman, "The Impact of Nehemiah 9:5–37 on the Liturgy of the Synagogue," HUCA 32 (1961) 227–37. Bar 1:15–3:8 occurs within a liturgical setting and was probably used liturgically after the composition of Baruch. It is modeled on the prayer in Daniel. The popularity of the story of Israel as it is told in Deuteronomy 28–32 among average diaspora Jews of the third century CE is clear from the grave inscriptions that Paul R. Trebilco cites in Jewish Communities in Asia Minor (SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 60–69.

23 In his famous speech before the walls of Jerusalem, Josephus takes the correspondence between these two events in Israel's history even further when he compares himself to Jeremiah. See J.W. 5.391–94.
II. THE FUNCTION OF THE STORY OF ISRAEL IN THE ARGUMENT OF ROMANS 5–8

Most interpreters of Romans agree that, whatever the exact boundary of the letter’s second major section, the purpose of that section is to describe the new, eschatological era of life to which those justified by faith have obtained access. It is seldom recognized, however, that Paul draws the language and

belief, and for their reward are offered by God felicity; whereas, in proportion as they depart from the strict observance of these laws, things (else) practicable become impracticable, and whatever imaginary good thing they strive to do ends in irretrievable disasters. (1.14)"  

Although the work runs to twenty volumes in length, Josephus never loses sight of this purpose. From the account of the flood in Genesis (Ant. 1.72) to the burning of the temple during the war with Rome (20.166), Josephus points out at every opportunity that God blesses those, whether individuals or nations, who keep his laws and punishes all who stray from them. As we might expect, the theme is especially prominent in Josephus’s paraphrase of Deuteronomy and the historical books, but he often makes it more explicit than it appears in scripture and on occasion plants it in his sources when he finds it missing from them.

The Deuteronomic interpretation of Israel’s story, then, was an important element in the symbolic universe of ancient Judaism and was especially important during Israel’s two tragic centuries on either side of Paul’s career. If we attempt to enter this symbolic universe and read Romans 5–8 in light of it, not only does the connection between these chapters and Romans 1–4 and 9–11 become clear, but the interpreter assumes a better position for resolving some of the classic exegetical difficulties within these chapters as well.

the theological symbols he uses to accomplish this purpose in large measure from the biblical story of Israel’s disobedience to the law given at Sinai, Israel’s punishment in the exile for that disobedience, and Israel’s eschatological restoration. The deliberateness with which Paul recalls this story in chaps. 5–8 appears most clearly in the first and last chapters of the section, but allusions to it are probably present in the middle two chapters as well.

The Story of Israel in Romans 5 and 8

Nils A. Dahl demonstrated the close thematic relationship between 5:1–11 and 8:1–39. Justification, hope, eschatological glory, patience in suffering, the love of God, the Spirit of God, and the death of Christ all appear in these two sections. The similarity is so striking that Dahl could describe chaps. 6 and 7 as digressions that Paul used to anticipate misunderstandings of his negative statement about the law in 5:20. In 8:1, says Dahl, Paul “finds his way back to the general themes of 5:1–11.” Although Dahl did not say so, one of those themes is that the people of God, newly defined on the basis of faith, are the recipients of God’s promises through the prophets to restore Israel’s fortunes and make a new covenant with them.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 consists of two parts, the first of which (vv. 1–11) is commonly recognized as both transitional and introductory. It both sums up the themes of 1:18–4:25 and introduces the new emphases of 5:12–8:39. The second part of chap. 5 (vv. 12–21) lays the foundation for 6:1–8:39 by exploring the theological significance of the concepts of “life” and “death.” These two concepts, as carefully defined in 5:12–21, become the chief subject of the chapters

24 This is a slightly altered version of the translation of H. St. J. Thackeray, Josephus (9 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926–65) 4. 9.

25 See, e.g., Josephus’s retelling of Israel’s encounter with the Midianite women in Num 25:1–9 (Ant. 4.131–55) and his paraphrase of Judas’s short speech to his troops prior to battle with Gorgias in 1 Macc 3:58–60 (Ant. 12.302–4).


27 Dahl argues persuasively that the new section begins with 5:1 (“Two Notes on Romans 5,” 37–40). Ernst Käsemann has reservations about Dahl’s analysis but nevertheless believes that

28 Dunn’s commentary is an exception. It consistently points out the biblical and covenantal significance of Paul’s language.

29 Dahl, “Two Notes on Romans 5,” 37–42.

30 Ibid., 41.
that follow. This much is commonly observed. Less frequently recognized, however, is the role the biblical story of Israel plays in both parts of chap. 5, and especially in Paul's efforts in 5:12–21 to define the principal terms of his subsequent argument.

5:1–11. Paul begins 5:1–11 by describing the new era which believers have entered as a period of righteousness (5:1, 9), peace (5:1), the outpouring of God's love into believers' hearts through the Holy Spirit (5:5), and reconciliation (5:10–11). Paul's use of these terms together and his use of them to characterize the eschatological hope of God's people recall the biblical hope that God's wrath toward a disobedient Israel would one day cease and that the people of God would receive the covenantal promises of blessing. Paul's concern to echo this biblical motif becomes clear when his language and the context in which it occurs are compared to prophetic descriptions of the restored Israel.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel frequently speak of the period of Israel's restoration as a time of peace characterized by the presence of a new spirit, the remaking of Israel's heart, and the reign of righteousness. Isaiah and Jeremiah depict the period of Israel's disobedience to the covenant as a time when "peace" is absent from Israel (Isa 59:8; Jer 8:11, 15). Not surprisingly, then, in Isaiah and Ezekiel, during the time of restoration God will establish a "covenant of peace" with his people (Isa 54:10; Ezek 34:25; 37:26), and, according to Isaiah, peace will reign during that time because of the presence of righteousness (Isa 32:17–18; 60:17). During this period, God will pour out his spirit on the anointed king (Isa 11:1), on the servant who proclaims the good news of Israel's restoration (Isa 61:1), and on the whole people (Ezek 37:1–14; 39:29). This new spirit, moreover, will re-create Israel's heart to make it "new" (Ezek 11:19; 18:31; 36:26).

Nowhere does the similarity between Paul's language in 5:1–11 and the biblical interpretation of Israel's history appear stronger, however, than in Isa 32:15–17. Here the prophet says that Israel's punishment will continue until a spirit from on high is poured out (πνευματι; LXX ἐνεχύρωσιν) upon us and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness (κρίνων; LXX τό ἐργα τῆς δικαιοσύνης) will be peace (θέαμα; LXX εἰρήνην) and the result of righteousness (κρίνων; LXX δικαιοσύνην) quietness and trust forever (NRSV).

The outpouring of God's spirit, the presence of righteousness, and the combination of righteousness with peace are used to describe the eschatological period of hope in much the way that Paul uses these concepts to describe the same period in Rom 5:1–5. Although the resemblance is not so close that we can speak of direct dependence, it is close enough to show that Paul conceived of the eschatological period to which believers now had access as the final chapter in the biblical story of Israel.

5:12–21. Paul has briefly mentioned the key terms "life" and "death" already in 5:1–11 (v. 10; cf. vv. 6–8), but in 5:12–21 he explores the theological significance of these terms at length in order to define them carefully for the subsequent argument. He does this through referring to the role that death and life play in three interlocking stories—the story of Adam, the story of Christ, and the story of Israel. The first two stories claim most of the scholarly attention given to this passage, but the story of Israel is as important for Paul's purposes in 5:12–21 as the other two. Both rhetorical and theological considerations demonstrate this.

Israel's story first appears in 5:13–14, where Paul interrupts his comparison of Adam and Christ with the statement that although sin is only "reigned" in the presence of law, death nevertheless reigned over those who had not sinned against a specific command. The rhetorical usefulness of placing this statement at this position in the argument is not entirely clear. Paul's point, after all, is simply that even people who did not violate a specific command of...
God, as Adam had, nevertheless sinned and so were subject to death. All Paul needed to say in order to make this point was that “death reigned . . . even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the transgression of Adam” (5:14). But Paul is determined, even at the cost of clouding his immediate argument, to point out the similarity between what happened in Adam’s case and what happened in Israel’s: “For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law; nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses” (5:13–14a). Paul’s discourse, therefore, runs ahead of his argument to reveal an important basic assumption: Israel had violated the covenant that God established with them at Sinai and so had received the penalty of death, which, according to that covenant, all such violators would suffer. Although mention of the law of Moses obfuscated Paul’s argument by delaying the conclusion to his statement in 5:12 until 5:18b, the story of Israel’s violation of the covenant at Sinai was so close to the surface of Paul’s thinking at this point in his discourse that, almost in the manner of a Freudian slip, it broke through.

In 5:20–21 the story of Israel’s violation of the covenant with God at Sinai again comes to the surface, but, unlike its appearance in 5:13–14, here it is well integrated into the flow of Paul’s discourse. After drawing his comparison between Adam and Christ to a close in 5:19, Paul moves to another stage of salvation history, the period of the law’s intrusion, to draw a similar comparison between what happened when the law was given to Israel at Sinai and what happened in Christ. At first Paul’s reference to the giving of the law looks like a relatively unimportant appendix to an argument he had made previously and more impressively in 5:12–19 by reference to Adam. Much of 5:12–19, however, is devoted to a series of caveats and clarifications designed to prevent the reader from taking the similarity between Adam and Christ too far (5:13–18a). Once these are removed, Paul’s statements about the parallels between Adam and Christ in 5:12, 18b–19 turn out to be nearly as simple as the comparison between Israel and Christ in 5:20–21. In 5:12 and 18b–19 Paul says that the disobedience of Adam sent many on a downward spiral toward death and that the obedience of Christ has, in a similar but opposite way, rectified this situation. In 5:20–21 Paul says that the law given to Israel increased sin by defining it more specifically and that in a similar but opposite way God caused grace to increase “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The fundamental point of Paul’s discussion in 5:12–21, then, is that Christ is God’s answer to the disasters created by Adam’s sin and Israel’s violation of the covenant, and the story of Israel’s failure to keep the terms of the covenant is parallel to, and on an equal footing with, the story of Adam’s failure in this argument.

The conclusion to which these rhetorical observations have led is confirmed by an examination of the theological function of Israel’s story in 5:12–21. The theme that holds Romans 5–8 together as a discrete section of Paul’s total argument is how God has brought life out of death “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” It cannot be denied that this movement from death to life is described in terms that take much of their meaning from the story of Adam’s fall, with its result of death for all, and the story of Christ’s death and resurrection, with its result of life for all. Paul’s language of death and life in 5:12–21 and therefore his use of these concepts elsewhere in the section, however, are also indebted to the story of Israel. Paul uses this third story in 5:12–21 to emphasize the depth of the human plight: Adam began the process of disobedience (5:12a); all humanity followed his lead (5:12b, 18a, 19a); and the situation grew worse with the coming of the law and Israel’s disobedience to it (5:20). The result has been “death” for all (5:21a), a result that is remedied by the gift of life “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21b).

Paul can assume a connection between violation of the law in Israel and death in 5:20–21, however, only because he shares with his readers a symbolic universe that includes the biblical story of Israel. A prominent part of the story as it is preserved both in the scriptures and in the literature of Paul’s day is Israel’s toil under the penalty of death, which Israel received for violating the covenant. In Deut 30:15–20 (LXX) Moses places life (ζωὴ) and death (θανάτος) before Israel: life if they obey the commandments that Moses has spelled out, and death if they change their heart (καρδία) and worship other gods. “Life” is used figuratively to refer to numerous descendants and length of days in the land of promise (30:15, 20; cf. Deut 4:1; 32:47); “death” conversely means destruction and exile (28:15–29:29). Ezekiel picks up this

36 Cranfield, Romans, 1, 282.
37 For the translation of ἀλλὰ as “nevertheless” in 5:14, see BAGD, s.v., 2.
38 J. Paul Sampley comments insightfully that in certain passages Paul opens a window onto his theology by revealing his “primary assumptions.” These, Sampley says, are important moments in Paul’s letters, for they reveal the basic terms of his theological thinking. See “From Text to Thought World: The Route to Paul’s Ways,” in Pauline Theology I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon (ed. Jouette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 12. See also Kee, Knowing the Truth, 103.
39 Thû Kasemann regards 5:20–21 as a “digression” which “unexpectedly . . . returns to the question put in v. 13” (Romans, 158).
40 The adverb “where” (ὀτι) of 5:20b probably refers to Israel as the place where sin increased; see Cranfield, Romans, 1, 293; and Wright, Climax of the Covenant, 39–40, 196. Wright believes that “where” also refers to Christ, who, as the Messiah, represented Israel. Sin was concentrated not only onto Israel, therefore, but onto their Messiah, who was then able to “condemn sin in the flesh” (8:3).
theme in his effort to persuade the exilic community that their present suffering is a result of their violation of the Sinaitic covenant (18:1–32; 20:11, 21, 25; 33:10–20) and is designed to lead to their repentance, cleansing, and restoration (20:40–49; 33:29). The prayer of confession in Nehemiah 9 similarly laments Israel’s repeated disobedience to God’s “ordinances, by the observance of which a person shall live” (9:29).

The reason why the story of Adam, the story of Christ, and the story of Israel are linked together in 5:12–21 now becomes clear. All three protagonists experienced death at the hands of sin, but only two of the three—Israel and Christ—experience life at the hands of God: Christ by means of the resurrection and Israel by means of their eschatological restoration. Israel, then, is the middle term between Adam and Christ, the two great representatives of death and life. God’s people form the historical stage on which the consequences of the actions of these two metahistorical figures are played out: like Adam, postexilic Israel had experienced “death” as the penalty for violating God’s commandments, and, like Christ, the eschatological people of God would experience the covenant’s blessing of life. The stories of Adam and Christ give theological depth to the critical terms “death” and “life,” and the story of Israel contributes to the definition of these terms as well. Wherever these two terms appear in chaps. 5–8, therefore, part of their meaning comes from the story of Israel’s death in the exile and God’s promise to restore his people to life.

Chapter 8

When we move from chap. 5 to chap. 8, we find that the story of Israel remains a prominent feature of Paul’s argument. Paul again uses the complex of terms so popular among the prophets in describing Israel’s restoration to refer to the eschatological era that believers have entered. “Spirit” reappears, as do “peace,” “righteousness,” “heart,” and, of course, “life.” Much more frequent in chap. 8 than in chap. 5, however, are references to the law. Having shown in chap. 7 that the law was good and should have been obeyed, Paul now advances the thesis that the eschatological era is one in which “the requirement of the law” is fulfilled in believers (8:4) who, because of the Spirit, are able to submit to it (8:7–9). “For the mind of the flesh is death,” he says, “but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind of the flesh is enmity with God, for it does not submit to God’s law, nor is it able to do so” (8:6–7). Paul alludes here to the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 to say that the time of warfare and death because of Israel’s disobedience to the covenant of life and peace (cf. Mal 2:5) is over, and that the time of God’s favor has come.

The allusions to those passages continue in Paul’s assertion that God has rescued believers from slavery and fear a few sentences later (8:15). Paul recalls the description of Israel’s exile in Deut 28:64–68, where Moses says that if Israel is disobedient to the law the Lord will scatter them among the nations (28:64), where they will have a “trembling heart, failing eyes, and languishing spirit” (28:65). There, we read, Israel will live lives of dread and will sell themselves into slavery (28:66–68). God has rescued the believing community from this plight, Paul tells the Romans, “for you have not received a spirit of slavery again with its consequence of fear but you have received a Spirit of adoption by which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’” (8:15; cf. v. 23). In light of γῆν (8:15) this rescue from the plight into which disobedience has plunged God’s people, Paul is able to call believers “children of God” (8:14), a term Deuteronomy uses of God’s covenant people (Deut 14:1) and Hosea of their eschatological restoration (Hos 1:10).22

He is also able, in light of this, to end the chapter and this whole section of his argument with a series of rhetorical denials that the kind of suffering the biblical story of Israel describes as punishment for violation of the law will be able to separate the believer from the love of God demonstrated eschatologically through the sacrifice of Christ (8:32, 35a). The description of this suffering in 8:35b is drawn largely from the portraits of the suffering of God’s disobedient people painted in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Deut 28:53, 55, and 57 link together “tribulation” (Θλίψις) and “distress” (στρευσίμως) to describe the terrors of famine which will come to Israel if they disobey the law.23 A few verses earlier Deut 28:48 links “nakedness” (γυμνότης) and “famine” (θλίψις) to describe the terrors of military defeat which will come to Israel as a result of disobedience. Lev 26:25 and 33 use “sword” (χείλεμα) in

22 James M. Scott has demonstrated that Jews of Paul’s era understood 2 Sam 7:14a as a reference to God’s “adoption” of his people in the period of eschatological restoration (Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ in the Pauline Corpus [WUNT 2/48; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1992] 96–117). This understanding of the term, Scott argues (pp. 221–66), informs Paul’s use of it in 8:15 and 23.

23 Dunn, Romans 1–8, 451. In 9:26 Paul will use the phrase “children of God” again but this time in a direct quotation of Hos 1:10, which refers specifically to Gentile believers as part of God’s eschatologically restored people. Believing Jews are also included according to the quotation of Isa 10:22 in 9:27. On this, see Richard B. Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 66–68.

24 Paul links these words together in 2:9 also. See Dunn, Romans 1–8, 88. In 2:9, as in Deuteronomy, the words indicate the punishment that comes “to every person who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek.” Even the idea that the curses of the law apply to Gentiles is anticipated in Deuteronomy. See, e.g., Deut 8:19–20. If the list of tribulations in 8:35 is indebted to Stoic ideas, as Lagrange believes (Romains, 218, following Rudolf Bultmann), Paul has nevertheless given it a biblical shape.
a similar way. The suffering that Paul and other believers experience as the people of God, therefore, is strangely analogous to the suffering that the disobedient and unrestored Israel experienced because of their sins. Paul can assert in a rhetorical question that suffering cannot separate the believing community from the love of Christ; but that it is present at all during the period of eschatological restoration is puzzling.

Perhaps this is why Paul chose in 8:35 to summarize his list of evils with a quotation from Psalm 44 (LXX 43). This Psalm is probably postexilic (43:12–15) and laments Israel’s defeat and suffering at the hands of its enemies during a period when many in the nation believed that they had learned the lesson of disobedience and had diligently tried to keep the law. The experience of suffering within this context, then, retains an enigmatic quality:

All these things have come upon us; but we have neither forgotten you nor dealt unrighteously with your covenant. Our hearts have not turned back to the former things and you have turned the paths of our lives from your way. (43:19–20 LXX)

The Psalm recognizes the tension that exists when a restored Israel, whose covenant relationship with God is unbroken, nevertheless suffers. It is precisely this kind of tension that Paul describes when he summarizes the puzzling suffering of the believing community in the words of this Psalm: “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (8:36; cf. Ps 43:23 LXX).

Summary

To those who shared Paul’s symbolic universe, therefore, the language that the apostle used to describe the movement of the believing community from death to life in Romans 5 and 8 would have resounded with echoes from the story of Israel’s disobedience to the law, subsequent suffering, and eventual restoration. In 5:12–21 Paul refers to the story explicitly and uses it as part of the theological foundation for his discussion of death and life. In 5:1–11 and 8:1–39 Paul uses many of the same terms that the Bible uses to describe Israel’s restoration, uses them in contexts similar to the biblical ones, and often links them together in ways reminiscent of their use in the prophets. He even explains the problem of a righteous but suffering community in the words of a Psalm whose subject is the tension that a restored Israel experienced when, despite their restoration to piety, they suffered. Neither Israel nor its scriptures, therefore, have receded from view in Romans 5 and 8. Although explicit references are rare, the story of Israel is still present, filling Paul’s language with theological significance and providing Paul’s symbols with a theological context.

The Story of Israel in Romans 6 and 7

Echoes of Israel’s story do not resound as loudly in chaps. 6 and 7, and investigation must proceed cautiously to avoid the exegetical disease that Samuel Sandmel has famously described as “parallelogramia.” There are, however, two encouraging indications that the attempt to find the story of Israel in these chapters is not a symptom of that plague. First, we have already seen that these chapters are bounded on either side by clear allusions to the story of Israel. Paul was thinking in these terms as he wrote chaps. 5–8, therefore, and so we may reasonably expect allusions to the story of Israel in chaps. 6 and 7. Second, if the story of Israel forms the context of Paul’s argument, then several difficult texts become easier to understand. We can safely assume that if parallels to Israel’s story help to explain problems as difficult as the meaning of 6:17, Paul’s abruptness at 7:1, and the antecedent of the “I” in 7:7–25, then we are in the presence not of parallelogramia but of its cure.

Chapter 6

To Jews steeped in the Deuteronomic perspective on Israel’s history and committed to the premise that what happened to God’s people happened through God’s foreordination, Paul’s claim that the law caused sin and its penalty of death to increase (5:20) may have been less shocking than interpreters commonly suppose. More shocking, perhaps, was Paul’s assertion that God’s wrath had been removed, peace had come, and reconciliation had taken place not when his chastened people were praying prayers such as the one in Nehemiah 9 but while they were still impious sinners (5:6–8, 20). Would this not mean that “we should remain in sin in order that grace might abound?”

Paul tackles this question first in 6:1–11 by speaking of the believer’s death with Christ and then in 6:12–23 by using the metaphor of slavery. Echoes of the story of Israel in 6:1–11 are attenuated at best, but in 6:12–23 they resound more clearly. They begin with Paul’s provocative statement that sin cannot rule over believers because they are “not under law but under grace” (6:14) and the repetition of the question at issue, “What therefore? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15). The phrase “under

44 “That extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction” (Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomata,” JBL 81 [1962] 1). The antidote may be found in Hays, Echoes, 29–32.

45 Hays writes that if, inter alia, the proposed echo renders a reading of a passage that is consistent with other themes in Paul and makes sense within its immediate context, then it is probably not a product of the reader’s imagination (Echoes, 30–31).
law” in these two verses has been the subject of much debate, but the simplest explanation of it makes its meaning here consistent with the meaning of 5:13–14 and 5:20–21, the two passages in which Paul last referred to the law.46 There, as we have seen, he traces the history of sin into the period of Moses. During that time, sin became worse because Israel violated the now unambiguously expressed will of God and experienced the penalty of death as a result. If this reading is correct, then “under law” in 6:15 refers to existence under the penalty of death—the curse of the law—which according to the biblical interpretation of Israel’s history, came to Israel as a result of their disobedience.47 By claiming that believers are no longer “under law” Paul is simply saying that they no longer live in the era during which, according to the biblical account of Israel’s history, the law pronounced its curse of death upon the disobedient.48 This means in turn that Paul’s comparison of the believer to a slave in 6:15–23 may also be indebted to the story of Israel. Usually the metaphor is interpreted within the context of the common Greco-Roman institution of slavery, and that is probably the primary context from which Paul’s metaphor draws its power.49 We should not forget, however, that the biblical portrait of God as redeemer, a portrait which Paul reflects in this letter (3:24; 8:23), depends for its forcefulness on the assumption that Israel was enslaved either to foreign nations (Deut 7:8; 9:26; Isa 41:14; 43:1, 14; 52:3; 54:5) or to sin (Ps 130:7–8; Isa 44:22). The connection between Israel’s enslavement to foreign nations and its sin, moreover, was clear to postexilic biblical writers. The great prayers of confession in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9 both use the imagery of slavery to describe the suffering into which Israel’s violation of the law had led them. After confessing that from ancient days Israel had been handed over to captivity for their sins, Ezra comments:

But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slav-

46 On the connection between “under law” (ὑπὸ νόμου) in 6:14 and “the law slipped in so that the trespass might increase” (νόμος δὲ παρεσιμόθεν, ἵνα πλεονέχῃ τὸ παράπτωμα) in 5:20a, see Lagrange, Romans, 154; Nygren, Romans, 248; Dunn, Romans 1–8, 339; and Ziesler, Romans, 165.
47 See Cranfield, Romans, 1. 320.
48 Contra Dunn (Romans 1–8, 340), who believes that Paul refers to the “social function of the law” here, and Barrett (Romans, 129), who believes that the phrase refers to “the upward striving of human religion and morality.”

Nehemiah, similarly, summarizes the history of Israel’s disobedience to the law and then describes the result this way: “Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts” (Neh 9:36 RSV). Josephus’s paraphrase of Deuteronomy shows us, moreover, that this concept was still alive during Paul’s time. Josephus summarizes the message of Deuteronomy in a speech of Moses which emphasizes blessing for obedience to the law and suffering for neglect of it. Moses emphasizes the people that the wealth they are about to inherit by conquering Canaan should not lead them to neglect their covenant with God,

For, should ye be carried away by it into a contempt and disdain for virtue, ye will lose even that favor which ye have found of God; and, having made him your enemy, ye will forfeit that land, which ye are to win, beaten in arms and deprived of it by future generations with the grossest ignominy, and, dispersed throughout the habitable world, ye will fill every land and sea with your servitude (ἐμπλήσασε καὶ γῆν καὶ βαλάσαν τῆς αὐτῶν δουλείας, Ant. 4.190).50

If this imagery lies behind Paul’s use of the word here, then he is reminding his readers that they have been delivered from the bondage of “death” in which Israel labored because of their disobedience and subsequent punishment under the curse of the law (6:14–15) and have now become slaves of obedience with the result that they stand in a new covenant relationship with God (ἵππομεν εἰς δικαίωσιν, 6:16). They have entered the period of restoration, when, according to Isaiah, “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη; LXX δικαίωσιν) will be the “taskmaster” (τάγματος; LXX ἐπίσκοπος) of God’s people (6:17; cf. Rom 6:18–23).

The new covenant relationship, Paul next says, is marked by obedience from the heart to the type of teaching the Romans received. The controversy surrounding these words is notorious,51 but a measure of clarity can be

50 This is Thackray’s translation in Josephus 4.567.
indicate the kind of ritual impurity that every Israelite contracted but also to refer to the conduct of those who lived outside the law, whether Gentiles (1 Esdr 1:49; 2 Esdr 9:11) or disobedient Israelites. Ezekiel especially uses the term to describe the flagrant violation of the laws of sanctity which led Israel to experience the curses of the covenant and from which God would eventually deliver his people. If Paul’s use of the story of Israel in chaps. 5–8 is as prominent as we have argued above, then this word refers not simply to “immorality” but to immorality as a violation of the sanctity God requires of his people. The same can be said of ἁμαρτία, which, like ἁμαρτάνω, was frequently used simply to mean wickedness but which, by the Hasmonean period, had become a special term for both Gentiles and Jews, who, by their violation of the laws of Israel’s sanctity, had placed themselves outside Israel’s covenant.

Paul intends to say, however, that his readers have moved from outside to inside the circle of blessing created by God’s restoration of the covenant with his people. Now, he says, they must present their members as slaves to righteousness “for the purpose of sanctification” (ἐγκαθίστασιν). The word ἐγκαθίστασιν (“sanctification”) is used infrequently in the Septuagint and is not used to refer specifically to the people of God, but, when it is used, it refers to the special nature of that which is unique to the people of God, whether God himself (Sir 17:10; 2 Macc 14:36), the temple (3 Macc 2:18), or the sacrifices (Sir 7:31; 2 Macc 2:17). Far more importantly, it participates in the semantic field of the term ἡγίασσος (“holy”), which in the Septuagint is the adjective of choice for describing the distinctiveness of God’s people.

In 6:19, then, Paul wants to remind his readers that they have crossed the boundary of sanctity from “impurity” and “lawlessness” to “sanctification.” This change in status means that they are in a right covenant relationship with God (6:16, 18, 19) and that they have moved from existence under the curse of death (6:21, 23), which the law pronounces on all who are unclean, lawless, and unholy, to existence under the blessing of life (6:22–23), which the law promises to all those who live within the ambit of God’s covenant.

In summary, if we read Paul’s references to the law in 6:14–15 through the lens of his reference to it in 5:20, and if we then take 6:14–15 as a clue to the specialized” and that, when this happens, the significance of these words in one context may be transported to another. It is this kind of specialization that the words “impurity,” “lawlessness,” and “sanctification” possess.

57 See 1 Macc 3:5–6; 7:5; 9:23, 58, 69; 11:25; and the comments in Dunn, Romans 1–8, ixix–lx, 206, and 346–47.
58 See, e.g., Exod 19:6; Deut 7:6; 26:19; Jer 2:2–3; Leviticus 17–26; Isa 4:3; 1 Macc 10:39, 44, and Wis 18:9.

brought to Paul’s language by recognizing that here too Paul is using imagery drawn from the biblical story of Israel’s turbulent relationship with their God. The words “obedient from the heart” recall the language of Deut 30:14 (LXX), where the commandments are said to be easy to do (πονεῖτο) because they are in the Israelites’ heart, and 30:17, where the Israelites are warned not to change their hearts so that they do not obey (ἐξορθάσεται) the commandments. Paul’s choice of words in v. 17 also resembles the language of Jer 38:33–34 (LXX), which not only promises a new heart to the covenant people but indicates that the teaching of God will be so indelibly written on their hearts that they will not need to teach it to one another. Ezek 11:19–21 and 36:26–27 likewise speak of a time when God will give to Israel a new heart of flesh after plucking out their heart of stone, with the result that Israel will obey God’s precepts and commands. The story of Israel’s disobedience together with the hope that God would one day correct their disobedience, therefore, seems to be the context within nearest reach for understanding what Paul means in this otherwise enigmatic verse.

The same is true of v. 19. Here Paul uses a series of terms which recall the biblical language of sanctity prominent in both the law and the prophets. Paul tells his readers:

For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity (ἀκαθάρσεως) and lawlessness (ἁμαρτίας) for the purpose of lawlessness (εἰς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν), so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for the purpose of sanctification (εἰς τὴν ἁγιάσματι).

The terms “impurity” (ἀκαθάρσεως), “lawlessness” (ἁμαρτίας), and “sanctification” (ἁγιάσματι) recall one of the primary functions of Israel’s covenant with God—the separation of Israel from other peoples as a “priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). Ἀκαθάρσεως is used in the Septuagint not only to
conceptual world in which Paul is thinking as he constructs his argument in 6:12–23, enigmatic texts appear less strange and we begin to appreciate how deeply indebted the structure of Paul's theology is to the biblical story of Israel: Paul believed his Roman readers to be the purified and restored Israel for which Ezekiel and others had hoped.

Chapter 7

If this understanding of 6:12–23 is correct, then Paul's facile movement into the topic of the law in 7:1–6 should seem less surprising than it usually does to interpreters. Many believe that apart from his brief references to the law in 5:20 and 6:14–15, Paul has concentrated on other matters in chaps. 5 and 6. It then comes as a surprise that Paul introduces his lengthy discussion of the law in 7:1–25 with the phrase, "Or do you not know?" (διότι οὐ θύμην), a phrase which implies that

if the people addressed really know—the assumption is that they surely must—the truth which is about to be stated (in every case a 6τι [because] clause follows), then they ought to recognize the truth, or agree with the sentiment, expressed or implicit in something that has been said already (usually immediately before the formula is introduced). 59

Because of their belief that the law has not been central to Paul's argument in chaps. 5–6, however, most commentators are obligated to argue that in 7:1 Paul has not followed his usual custom but has instead used the phrase "Or do you not know?" to refer all the way back to his statement about the law in 6:14b. 60 If, on the other hand, the story of Israel's violation of the law, punishment, and restoration has defined the terms of Paul's discussion in 6:12–23, then 7:1 looks perfectly natural.

If Paul's mention of the law in 7:1 should occasion less surprise than it usually does, however, what he says about the law in 7:1–6, should probably occasion more. After hinting in 6:17 that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31(38):31–34 with its heart-inscribed law has been fulfilled in those who believe in Jesus Christ, Paul now says unequivocally that we "have no more to do with the law (7:2, 6; BAGD s.v. καταργεῖται). Like the husband in Paul's illustration, we "have died to the law through the body of Christ," and so, like the wife, we are free "to belong to another" (7:4). It is not easy to reconcile Paul's positive and negative statements about the law in this letter, but if the story of Israel's disobedience and restoration is as prominent in chaps. 5–6 as the argument above indicates, then at least here Paul seems to say in a more complete way what he has already said in 6:14–15—that the eschatological community of believers no longer labors under the curse of the Mosaic Law but is subject to a new "law," which Paul identifies with the new covenant of the Spirit and of peace about which the prophets so frequently speak. This seems to be Paul's meaning in 7:6 when he says that "we have been set free from the law, having died to that by which we used to be suppressed, so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

Such an interpretation of the prophetic passages about God's establishment of a new covenant was not, of course, the typically Jewish one. Jews, whether Christians or not, would probably have understood the prophets to be predicting a restoration of the eternally valid Mosaic covenant. In light of this, Paul must address the objection that he has, in a circuitous way, argued that the law is not good. Just as at the end of chap. 5 Paul had placed a new twist on the old story of Israel and had been compelled to warn against misunderstanding as a result, so here Paul faces a new misunderstanding and produces a lengthy argument against it. Using the same rhetorical signal that he used in 6:1 ("What, then, shall we say?") Paul in 7:7 addresses the question, Is the law sin?

Paul's basic answer to the question in 7:7–13 is clear enough: the law, far from being sin, is exonerated from blame because sin took advantage of the law to cause "me" to disobey God. The fault lies with sin, therefore, and not with the holy, righteous, and good law. The details of Paul's argument, however, particularly the identity of the infamous "I" and the period of time to which the secondary tenses in the passage point, are matters of hot dispute.

It has become increasingly popular for interpreters to see the story of Adam, already recounted in 5:12–21, behind the "I" and the past tenses of 7:7–12. Since W. G. Kümmel's revolutionary work, most interpreters have been willing to view the "I" in Romans 7 as figurative rather than as a straightforward reference to Paul himself, 62 and with the door open to a figurative interpretation, Adam has seemed to many to be the most likely candidate for the reality behind the figure. "I was once alive apart from the law" (7:9) appears to be a statement that only a figurative Adam could make, and a reference to Genesis 3 would certainly clarify more sharply than any other context the statement that "sin...deceived me" (7:11). Observations such as these eventually

59 Cranfield, Romans, 1. 332, my emphasis.
60 Lagrange (Romains, 160), Dodd (Romans, 119), and Cranfield (Romans, 1. 332) all comment on the abruptness with which Paul introduces the law into the discussion at 7:1.
61 Wright, perhaps correctly, does not speak of a "new law" in this context but of a new covenant, whose boundary-marker is Christ and Spirit and not Torah (Climax of the Covenant, 196–97, 203). We do not fundamentally disagree on this point. I am simply taking 8:2 as permission to use the term "law" of the new covenant.
62 W. G. Kümmel, Romer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus (UNT 17, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929).
led to Ernst Käsemann’s famous proclamation that “there is nothing in
the passage which does not fit Adam, and everything fits Adam alone.”

This statement is, however, more rhetorically effective than exegetically
sound. There are, after all, several aspects of the passage that do not fit Adam
alone and at least one that does not fit him at all. Paul’s fivefold use of the
words “command” (ἐντολή) and “law” (νόμος) and his quotation of the tenth
commandment (7:7) can hardly be described as fitting Adam alone, since the
Bible uses them not in connection with Adam but with Israel. Moreover, as
Douglas Moo points out, most interpreters of Romans agree that 7:7–12 is an
excursus in defense of the law, made necessary by Paul’s negative statements
law, however, is clearly distinguished in 5:13–14 from the commandment
given to Adam. Having distinguished between the period of Adam, an inter-
vening period in which there was no law, and the period after the law came,
Paul would now be veiling his argument with confusion if he suddenly used
the word “law” to refer to the period of Adam.

In addition to these considerations, one aspect of the passage seems inex-
pressibly inappropriate if the “I” refers exclusively to Adam: Paul says that the
commandment’s purpose was life (ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ εἰς Ἰωάννεν, 7:10), and yet the pur-
pose of the commandment given to Adam is nowhere connected with life.
The penalty for not obeying the commandment is, of course, death accord-
ing to Gen 3:19, but it would be faulty logic to say that the penalty expresses
the opposite of the commandment’s purpose. Gen 3:22 says that Adam had to
be expelled from the garden because he had gained divine knowledge and
might eat of the tree of life and live forever, but it is difficult to see how this
could express the purpose of the command not to eat of the first tree. The
most obvious context for the statement that the purpose of the command-
ment was life, then, is once again the story of Israel. At Israel’s initiation into
the covenant, God told his people that he intended the commandments to
bring “life” (Deut 6:24; 30:15–20; Lev 18:5), and this claim became Israel’s
settled conviction (Prov 6:23; Ezek 20:11, 21; Sir 17:11; 45:5; Bar 3:9).

Nevertheless, as we have seen, many Jews believed that Israel had not yet
attained life because they had disobeyed the covenant, and many awaited
the restoration of Israel when the life promised in the covenant would be theirs.

Some elements of 7:7–13, then, fit Adam and others fit Israel. The most
sensible explanation for this is that Paul has mingled elements of both stories
in this passage. We have already seen that in chap. 5 Paul viewed the story of
Israel as the existential outworking and heightening of the experience of the
primal Adam and that the two stories were theologically intertwined. Both
violated a specific precept (5:13–14), and Israel’s sin caused the sin that Adam
had initiated to increase (5:20). If this understanding of chap. 5 is correct,
then, it seems natural for Paul in chap. 7 to combine elements of both stories
in order to exonerate the command of God from blame for the plight of
humanity in general and of Israel in particular.

Beginning with 7:13, however, allusions to Adam seem to be replaced with
references to an individual’s struggle to keep the law, and discussion of the pas-
tage has tended to focus on who this individual is. Does Paul speak of him-
self, of unbelievers generally, or of believers? If of himself, does he speak as an
unbeliever or as a believer? In the tangle of attempts to sort out the best
answers to these questions, the correlation between what Paul says in 7:13 and
in 5:20 is seldom noticed. In 5:20 Paul has identified Israel as the place where
sin, because of the giving of the law, increased. In 7:13 Paul uses the first
person singular to make much the same statement: “sin, in order that it might be
revealed as sin, worked death in me through what was good, in order that
through the commandment sin might become exceedingly sinful.” Whoever
the “I” of 7:13–25 is, he or she functions in a way similar to Israel in Paul’s
previous argument.

The possibility that the story of Israel lies beneath the struggle of the “I”
in 7:13–25 is strengthened, moreover, by the broad similarity between this pas-
tage and the prayers of confession in Ezra 9:5–15; Neh 9:6–37; Dan 9:4–19;
and Bar 1:15–3:8. Just as Rom 7:13–25 is marked by an anguished awareness
of the individual’s tendency to disobey the Mosaic Law, so the primary char-
acteristic of these prayers is anguish over national Israel’s repeated disobedi-
cence to the law in spite of God’s continuing faithfulness to his people. Ezra
is grieved that after the great iniquity of his ancestors, and the great mercy of

63 Käsemann, Romans, 196. Others who see Adam in the passage include S. Lyonnets (“L’his-
toire du salut selon le chapitre vii de l’épitre aux Romains,” Bib 43 [1962] 117–51), Cranfield
(Romans, 1, 344), Dunn (Romans 1–8, 399–403), and Zieler (Romans, 182).
64 Josephus (Ant. 1.43) uses ἐντολὴ of God’s “command” to Adam, but the Bible does not use
the word in this way.
66 Contra Dunn, Romans 1–8, 384.
67 For several of these references I am indebted to Dunn, Romans 1–8, 384.
68 See also Wright, Climax of the Covenant, 227.
69 See ibid., 196.
70 The alternatives are presented and discussed by Cranfield with characteristic thoroughness
(Romans, 1, 344–47).
71 N. T. Wright is a prominent exception (Climax of the Covenant, 197–98; idem, “Romans
God in spite of that iniquity, once again he and his people have violated the Mosaic covenant and intermarried with the people of the land. He is so moved by this lack of concern for the covenant that he prays he not only weeps but throws himself on the ground before the temple (10:1). The prayer in Nehemiah focuses similarly on Israel's repeated violation of the law in spite of God's merciful patience in withholding punishment (9:16–17, 18, 26, 28–30). Daniel says that Israel has sinned, acted wickedly, turned aside from God's commandments, and refused to listen to God's prophets (9:4–5); and Baruch confesses that “from the day when the Lord led our fathers out of Egypt even until this day we have been disobedient to the Lord our God and careless to obey his voice” (1:19). Although all of these prayers are in the first person plural rather than the first person singular, Daniel and Baruch recognize the role of the individual in the sins they confess. Daniel describes his prayer as a confession of “my sin and the sin of my people Israel,” and Baruch twice attributes the sins of the nation to the evil intentions of each person’s heart (1:22; 2:8).72

The similarity between Rom 7:13–25 and these passages does not reach to the level of specific details; nor is there any biblical precedent for Paul’s bifurcation of the law and of the self in this passage. But the anguish of the confession and the origin of that anguish in continued disobedience to the law open the possibility that as he wrote Paul was thinking not simply of himself but of his people and of the biblical story of their disobedience.

III. CONCLUSIONS

If the story of Israel is as important to the argument of Romans 5–8 as this essay suggests, then the tension that many interpreters have found between these four chapters and chaps. 1–4 and 9–11 begins to relax.73 Because Paul argues in chaps. 5–8 that the believing community stands in continuity with the story of Israel as it appears in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, the historical books, and the prophets, these chapters are as important as chap. 4 for supporting Paul’s claim that faith establishes rather than nullifies the law (3:31). By his appropriation of the language that these writings use to describe the restoration of Israel, Paul implies that the believing community of Jews and Gentiles in Rome has become the protagonist in the last chapter of Israel’s story as it is told in the Bible.

This assumption, however, creates a theological tension that grows in intensity throughout Romans 5–8 until it reaches the boiling point at the end of the section in the rhetorical question “Who will bring charges against the elect of God?” (8:33). How could Paul claim that the ethnically mixed community of believers in Rome were God’s elect—the restored Israel—when so many circumcised Jews still lived, in the words of 2 Maccabees, “in the time of evil” (2 Macc 1:5)?74 Paul’s reply to this critical difficulty comes, of course, in chaps. 9–11. The presence of the story of Israel in chaps. 5–8 means, therefore, that Paul’s argument is neither complete at the end of chap. 8 as a previous generation of scholarship thought nor, as more recent treatments of Romans sometimes imply, that Israel divies beneath the text at 4:25 to resurface only at 9:1.

The presence of the story of Israel in Romans 5–8 also means that these chapters are as concerned with the people of God as they are with the individual. Although they certainly use the first person and therefore take on a more personal tone than chaps. 1–4 and 9–11, the interpreter should not reduce them only to a discussion of the implications of justification for the individual believer. By using biblical language for the restoration of God’s people, they constantly situate the individual within the wider community. This is true even of chap. 7, where, as we have seen, the first person singular reflects a corporate as well as an individual struggle.75

The biblical story of Israel, therefore, forms a pivotal part of the theology of Romans 5–8. Even in these chaps., where Israel never appears by name and Paul quotes scripture only rarely, Paul’s theology takes a biblical shape. All of this is substantial evidence that Paul’s symbolic universe was Israel’s symbolic universe and that any adequate description of Paul’s theology must understand the symbols of that universe as well.

72 Bar 1:22 says, “each of us has followed the intent of our own wicked hearts” (ἀρνήθηκα τὸν εὐαγγελίον τοῦ διασώστηρος κυρίου τῆς Ποιμνίδος), and 2:8, “and we have not entreated the face of the Lord in order to turn back, each one, from the intentions of our evil hearts” (καὶ οὐκ ἔδειξαν τὸν προσώπον κυρίου τοῦ ἀποστρέψας έκκοιτον ὑπὸ τῶν νομιμωτάτων τῆς κυρίας συνών τῆς Ποιμνίδος).

73 See also Wright, Climax of the Covenant, 194–95.